

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT SHEMOT • 5775 • VOL. 5 NO. 12

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## We're Good to Go

By Yossi Katz

**DO I DESERVE** to be redeemed? Do I deserve to be saved by God?

We often ask ourselves this question, whether consciously or subconsciously. Consider: The average person has 60,000 thoughts a day. Shockingly, 95 percent of them are repeated daily and 80 percent of those thoughts are negative. We tend to judge ourselves overwhelmingly negatively, and that's why we can question whether we are worthy of God's attention and ultimate salvation.

This doesn't mean that our actions make us worthy of all the goodness that God bestows on us. We can never begin to pay back our debt for the blessing of life and all the other blessings He gives us. But where we go wrong is in understanding God's true nature, and missing the ultimate reality.

This week's *parashah* repeats itself: "And God said, 'See, I have *seen* the affliction of my people who are in Egypt'" (Exodus 3:7). What is this double vision?

Moses had a prolonged argument with God. He adamantly refused to accept the role of redeemer of Israel. Why? Moses had seen the true deficiencies of the Jewish people; he couldn't fathom accepting the most difficult job of looking beyond their grave issues and seeing their true goodness and ultimate potential. As far as he was concerned, he was unable to justify their redemption.

But God disagreed: "I have seen how their idol worship will lead them to worship the Golden Calf – but I nevertheless see how they will stand at Sinai and accept the Torah" (*Midrash Rabbah, Ki Sisa* 41). God sees only the good. From His point of view, the Jews were worthy of redemption.

God then commanded Moses to throw down his staff and the staff became a snake. This showed Moses that he had spoken ill of the Jewish people, just as the snake in the

Garden of Eden spoke slander against God (Rashi, *ibid.*, 4:3). He then commanded Moses to pick up the snake by its tail, and the snake turned back into a staff. Why the tail? God was showing Moses that even if the Jewish people were so low that the evil venom of the snake was spiritually dominating them, still, the Tzaddik must grab hold of some shabby end-piece of remaining good, and thereby bring the people back to their Source.

Yes, we all are a mixture of good and bad. Sometimes we build golden calves, and sometimes we're ready to stand at Sinai and accept the Torah as if it were being given today. But we must learn from God and look only at the good. This goes beyond seeing the goodness in ourselves – it also applies to dealing with our shortcomings.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that if we are so negative about ourselves, it must be that we know that, at our source, we are essentially good. If we feel so badly when we speak negatively against our friend, it must be that we truly see the good in others and are bothered that we slipped. By acknowledging our intrinsic goodness, we strengthen ourselves to deal with our deficiencies constructively. Enough with the negativity! Let's learn how to see like God does. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Tanchumin 6*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

I remember not long ago, in my youth, that they sent me engagement gifts, but my youth has passed as in the blink of an eye – so too, all the events of my life. In the same way, everyone's time in this world will pass like the blink of an eye. Nothing will remain, except that which he grasped of the eternal goal. (*Letter #259*)



# New Realities

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**EIGHT YEARS AFTER** Rebbe Nachman passed away, Reb Noson lost all his money. He had been raised with means and had married into a prominent, well-to-do family. The transition from a life of abundance to a life of poverty in the Ukraine was difficult to bear. Every time his family needed money, he sold another cherished object. Eventually he had to sell off his set of metal silverware – a valuable commodity in those years – and replace it with a simple wooden set.

Reb Noson recounted how hard it was for him to adjust to his new reality of eating off coarse wooden cutlery like the meanest of peasants. “At first I literally did not taste my food due to the new, strange texture of the utensils. It took me a few weeks until I adjusted and could savor food the way I always had.”

Yet despite his challenges, Reb Noson was just as diligent in his Divine service as he had always been.

\* \* \*

R' Mordechai Kanelsky of Kremenchug was a fairly unusual phenomenon among the circle of Breslover Chassidim – he was a very wealthy man. R' Motyeh, as he was known, donated generously to the many poor Breslovers in Uman and its environs. He would provide certain serious spiritual seekers with wood and a sack of flour, enough for their minimal needs for the entire winter.

Once when R' Motyeh was in Uman, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Bender noticed that the usually effusive man seemed upset. “What’s the matter?” he asked.

“Every time I visited Uman in the past, I gave wood and flour to as many worthy people as I could,” R' Motyeh told him. “Unfortunately, I recently lost all my assets and now I can’t afford to give more than a minuscule amount of assistance.”

“Don’t be disturbed,” Rabbi Levi Yitzchok comforted him. “God gave you the famously difficult test of affluence and you did very well. Now He is testing you with poverty. He wants to see if you will strengthen yourself and be happy despite your changed circumstances, or if you will fall into depression and sadness. Here is your chance to shine in your new reality!”

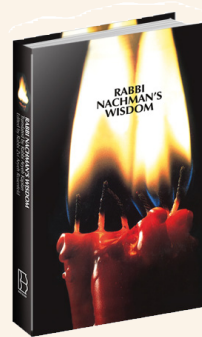
R' Motyeh later recalled how comforted these words made him feel.

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh I:268, IV:597*

## SIDEPATH

*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l*

188. The Rebbe said, “People bring money to someone as a *pidyon* and ask that he intercede for them on high. They tell him their illness and suffering and other problems. It is a wonder to me that the man accepting the *pidyon* does not suffer as much as the sick person himself...” From this, we can understand that the Rebbe actually felt the pain and suffering of the sick people for whom he prayed.



The Rebbe said, “When I first began, I asked God to let me feel the pain and suffering of others. Sometimes a person would come to me and tell me his troubles, but I would feel absolutely nothing. But I prayed to God that I should feel this Jewish suffering. Now I can feel the suffering of another even more than he himself can. Another man can forget his own suffering by thinking of other

things. But I concentrate on it very deeply, until I literally bleed because of his pain.”

189. The Rebbe’s granddaughter was once stricken with smallpox. He spoke to me of the great anguish this caused him. He said, “I would prefer that I myself be stricken instead of the child. I can feel each one of the child’s groans deep in my heart. But this is for my benefit. A stranger may have an ill child and bring me a *pidyon* or ask that I pray for him. I will then be able to feel his suffering as much as I do now.”

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*The photo on the front is a close-up of Rebbe Nachman’s chair, which is displayed in the main Breslov synagogue in Jerusalem.*

*Dedicated in the Memory of (L’Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon*