

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Letting in the Light

By Yossi Katz

MAZEL TOV! As you hopefully noticed, we missed publishing Pathways *Bereishit* last week, the first week of the year. Although I was sad to have skipped a week, I do have a happy excuse: we were blessed with a baby girl. So, in honor of the new baby, we will attempt to make up for her “timely” arrival and connect *Parashat Bereishit*, the creation of the universe, and our *parashah* this week.

The Torah says that God created two great luminaries – the great luminary to rule the day (the sun) and the lesser one to rule the night (the moon) (Genesis 1:16). Noting the discrepancy between the beginning of the verse, where the luminaries are both called “great,” and the end of the verse, where the moon is called “lesser,” Rashi explains that they were created equal, but the moon was made smaller because it contended, “It is impossible for two kings to share the same crown.”

Although the sun and the moon both shine brightly, they are very different from one another. The sun shines its own light, whereas the moon simply reflects that light. The light of the sun is representative of the Divine. Just as truth is blinding, so does God’s light reflect the true reality of the universe. The final letters of the words in the Torah’s first verse, *barA ElokiM eT* (God created), spell *EMeT* (truth). The very purpose of Creation is for God and His true nature to become known even down on Earth.

The moon, which represents our planet, was supposed to be just as bright as the sun. However, were they to “share the same crown,” there would essentially be no difference between Heaven and Earth. God’s true reality would permeate Creation in a way that all would be one angel-like existence. Therefore the moon was made smaller; it would no longer shine as brightly as the sun, leaving room for darkness and for the human experience.

If often we feel distant, cold and disconnected from God, it’s because His light is hidden in this darkness.

For every wrong move we make, every misstep and bad judgment call, we are surrounded by even more forces of darkness grabbing hold of our spiritual receptors and jamming our connection even further. Have you ever found yourself in a downward spiral, wanting to get out and do something meaningful, but being badgered by distractions at every turn? Do you want to make that meaningful prayer and begin building a true relationship with God, but find yourself sidetracked whenever the opportunity presents itself? What is the key to opening our hearts and minds to the reality that we know exists?

This week’s *parashah* says, “You shall make a light for the ark” (ibid., 6:16). The word *teivah* (ark) also means “word.” By verbalizing words of prayer with truth and sincerity, we illuminate them and cause them to shine brightly. Commenting on the type of light described in the verse, Rashi says, “Some say it was a window, and some say it was a precious gem.” What’s the difference? The gem has its own light, but the window only reflects light that is already there. There are some great Tzaddikim who burn with such tremendous desire for the absolute truth that they dispel all darkness and can always speak directly to God. And then there are the rest of us.

True, we may often be surrounded by darkness, but there is never reason to despair. If we can utter but a few words of the honest truth, we can always create a window of opportunity, allowing in the light that reveals the pathways back to spirituality and Godliness. With but one word of truth, we can ultimately fulfill the purpose of Creation and return the moon to its original glory. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Dayanim 3;

Likutey Moharan I, 9

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Our principal concern is never to let the words of the Torah grow old for us ... The words of Torah should be absolutely new to us every day. (Letter #279)

Teach Me More!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WE'RE USED TO thinking of Rebbe Nachman as a fully-formed tzaddik, but he actually learned in school, in the traditional Eastern European *cheder*, together with other children.

Every class has its spectrum of students – some are sharper, some are weaker; for some, paying attention comes naturally, while others are distracted by every passing breeze. The small *cheder* of Rebbe Nachman's childhood in Mezhibuzh was a kind of one-room schoolhouse, and a single *melamed* (teacher) had to attend to the diverse needs and abilities of every boy in attendance.

Parents would pay a small sum to the *melamed* to educate their children. A *melamed* tended to be poor; with only a few children in a class, it was difficult to earn a decent living.

One day, little Nachman approached his *melamed* with an offer that was difficult to refuse.

"I want so badly to learn," he said. "If I pay you extra, will you spend more time with me? I would pay three big coins for every page of Talmud that you teach me!"

The *melamed* was taken aback. Since when had a student offered to pay him extra to spend more time at his studies? Usually, the children fled from him as soon as school was out!

The *melamed* bent down to Nachman and asked with a smile, "Where did you get money to pay me, my child? How did you become so wealthy?"

Little Nachman had a ready answer. "Oh, it was easy! Every once in a while, my mother gives me a few pennies to buy myself a treat—a fruit or a cookie from the baker. But I don't need sweets. I would much rather pay you to learn with me!"

Rebbe Nachman grew up in a home of tzaddikim, and his father, Reb Simcha, maintained an extensive library containing works of revealed and hidden Torah. With his love for learning, Nachman thrived in this environment, filling himself with Tanakh, works of Jewish law, and deeper sources. One, in particular, was a great favorite of his: the *Reishit Chokhmah*, which instills fear of Heaven. About it, Rebbe Nachman attested, "I learned the *Reishit Chokhmah* far more times that I can count!" His early studies built him into the tzaddik he would become.

Based on Ohr HaOrot I, pp. 52-55

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

279. The Rebbe once told me, "When things are very bad, make yourself into nothing."

I asked him, "How does one make himself into nothing?"

He replied, "You close your mouth and eyes, and you are like nothing!"



We can gain valuable insight from these words. Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed by the evil inclination. You are confused and disturbed by evil thoughts that are very difficult to overcome. You must then make yourself like nothing – you no longer exist, your eyes and mouth are closed.

Every thought is banished. Your mind ceases to exist. You have nullified yourself completely before God.

280. The Rebbe spoke about tzaddikim who always wander and move about. He said, "There are outcast souls that cannot be elevated except through the wandering of a tzaddik. Even if the tzaddik does not want to travel, he roams and wanders in his house. He paces back and forth, and this is also in the category of wandering and roaming."

281. The Rebbe strongly cautioned us to safeguard our money. He said, "A man takes time from Torah and prayer and struggles to earn some money to support his family. After he earns the money, he becomes a *schlimazelnik* (hapless individual) and does not take care of it at all. Honest Jewish money must be guarded like the eyes in your head."



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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.