

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT VAYISHLACH • 5776 • VOL. 6 NO. 8

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## Room to Breathe

By Yossi Katz

**WHEN IT RAINS**, it pours. It often happens this way: first we have one problem, then another comes up, then a third... Before we know it, we feel completely overburdened, and find it difficult to even breathe. We imagine all of the world's issues being lumped together and heaped on our shoulders.

Our gut reaction to feeling overwhelmed is to hibernate in a state of utter disconnect. We cut ourselves off from friends, from our true selves, and especially from God. We feel hopeless and despondent, unable to cry out to our Father in Heaven, the only One who can bring about our salvation. This vicious cycle is summed up by the golden rule: "The more attention yielded to anguish and problems, the more anguish and problems will pursue you."

In order to pacify the anger of his brother Esau, who was upset with him for stealing his father's blessing, Jacob sent a handsome tribute. Jacob did everything with great wisdom. He told Esau, "I have acquired an ox and a donkey" (Genesis 32:6). Then he separated the different species included in his tribute, as he told his servants, "Leave a space between one group and the next" (ibid. 32:17).

According to Kabbalah, the "ox" refers to Esau (see Isaiah 34:5-7) and the "donkey" to Ishmael (Ishmael is called a "wild donkey of a man" in Genesis 16:12). These two adversaries and their attendant nations were to be the rulers and oppressors of the Jewish people in exile. They represent the exile and all of its bitter problems. Whether through physical oppression or by their negative spiritual influence, their ultimate goal is to bring us to the point of utter despair and hopelessness.

Jacob understood that it is precisely when all of our troubles are lumped together at once that we become overwhelmingly despondent, truly exiled from God. He therefore taught us the secret of separating our problems into "groups" and looking for the "spaces" of relief.

Our first survival tactic is to recall our past. How many

times were we in similar, seemingly hopeless predicaments and not only survived but perhaps even prospered from our situation? When we remember our past salvations and express our gratitude to God for taking care of us until now, we reinforce our sense of faith and trust, thereby cultivating the inner-fortitude that we each process.

But it doesn't end there. While our troubles are not at all easy to deal with and we are truly in pain, Rebbe Nachman teaches that every problem and trouble we face is packaged together with a silver lining. As difficult and as bitter as life can be, God's kindness and love for us is present in every situation. The benefit may not always be obvious – in fact, it may only be our realization that our situation could be much worse. Our job is to find those seemingly hidden threads of relief and, rather than disconnect, use these opportunities to express our gratitude and thanks to God for the little bit of good we have discovered.

When life gets bumpy and we find ourselves becoming emotionally overcome by our constant problems, we can give ourselves breathing room by finding the little specks of good and salvation that exist in-between the troubles. By discovering those spaces of relief, we defuse the united front of our enemies and are free to rediscover our greatest weapons: hope, faith and prayer. By wielding this powerful arsenal, we can successfully navigate even the greatest challenge.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhot Kilay Beheimah 4:8*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Trust God that everything is for your ultimate good, that you will soon be rescued... In the meantime, forget all the worry and frustration that can be so troubling and distracting. Just cast your burden on God. (Letter #23)

# The Rebbe's Gift

**R' ABBA SHOCHET** and his son R' Shmuel set out from Tcherin to spend Rosh HaShanah with Rebbe Nachman in Breslov. R' Abba had purchased a very beautiful silver goblet as a gift for the Rebbe.

On the way, they were caught in an abnormally heavy downpour and couldn't find a wagon driver willing to travel in such weather. They soon realized they were in danger of not reaching Breslov in time for the holiday. Finally they found one driver who was willing to take them, but only if R' Abba agreed to his price. The price was exorbitant, but R' Abba agreed. How could he not be with the Rebbe for Rosh HaShanah?!

Much to the disappointment of the two chassidim, the roads were muddy and travel was very difficult. It was already noontime of the day before Rosh HaShanah when they reached Heisin, about 18 miles (30 km) from Breslov. R' Abba pressed the wagon driver, a simple Jew, to drive faster. After cracking his whip once or twice, the driver called to his horses, "*Nu, kinderlakh. Tzum Rebbe!*" Suddenly the horses began traveling faster and faster, and R' Abba and his son arrived in Breslov during the afternoon prayers. They had no time to greet Rebbe Nachman before the holiday.

Later that evening, with all the chassidim gathered around the Rebbe for the *tish* (meal), Rebbe Nachman said to R' Abba, "Abba! Tell us about your journey." R' Abba related the difficulties he and his son had encountered on the way, and admitted he had had no choice but to pay the wagon driver with the silver goblet he had bought for the Rebbe.

"How can I praise you for this journey?" Rebbe Nachman said to R' Abba. "For the goblet, I will knock out the eyes and teeth of Satan. As for you, Abba, there is no reward great enough in this world. And you, R' Shmuel, you get the soup!"

Shortly after Rosh HaShanah, R' Abba passed away. His son, R' Shmuel, turned his hand to business and soon became extremely wealthy. Everyone then understood the greatness of the gift that R' Abba had brought for the Rebbe, and the rewards of such charity!

*Based on Avaneha Barzel, p. 48, #76;  
Siach Sarfey Kodesh 1-198*

## SIDEPATH

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

293. The Rebbe once spoke to one of his followers about praying with devotion: "Voice arouses feeling. The opposite is also true, for feeling can also arouse the voice. Pray with feeling. Bring every thought and emotion into each word. Your voice will automatically be awakened and you will pray out loud."



294. It is customary to recite the *Tikkuney Zohar*, as well as many prayers and petitions, after the regular services during the month of Elul. It is also a custom to stay in the synagogue and study hall later than usual. The Rebbe said, "The melody of the *Tikkuney Zohar* and the fatigue resulting from staying so late in the study hall are all taken on

high and made into great and lofty things."

295. Prayer is like an incense-offering. The Torah requires that the incense contain *chelbanah* (galbanum) (Exodus 30:34), even though it has a vile odor by itself.

If I consider myself a sinner, then I am an essential ingredient of every prayer service. No prayer is perfect without me. I, the sinner, must strengthen myself even more to pray to God and trust that in His mercy, He will accept my prayer. I am the perfection of the prayer – the *chelbanah* in the incense.

Just like the vile-smelling *chelbanah* is an essential ingredient of the sweet incense, so my tainted prayer is a vital ingredient of the prayers of all Israel. Without it, prayer is deficient, like incense without the *chelbanah*.



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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.*