

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Reality Check

By Yossi Katz

What is reality? Most of us are convinced that what we see with our very own eyes is absolutely real and genuine.

But is this really so?

We are now a few weeks removed from the spiritual heights of the year – Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Simchat Torah. We have made resolutions; we have promised ourselves that “this year will certainly be different.” And we have even started off the new year by implementing these changes and trying to live a more spiritual and fulfilling life.

But we are stuck. We thought that we could rise above our bad character defects and crude physical temptations, but they seem to be cycling back at us at full force. What have we done wrong? Are we powerless? Has God abandoned us?

“He (Abraham) was *yoshev* (sitting) at the entrance to the tent during the hottest part of the day” (Genesis 18:1).

Reb Noson interprets the word *yoshev* to mean that Abraham was not just physically sitting – he was waiting and waiting for a spiritual entranceway. “During the hottest part of the day” – his physical desires were burning in him as he waited and waited to be allowed in to new spiritual dimensions (*Alim LiTerufah*, Letter #25).

Rebbe Nachman explains, “For such is the way of the Other Side. When it sees that a person is close, really close, to the gates of holiness and is about to enter, it mounts a very, very powerful assault against him, may the Merciful One spare us. Accordingly, one needs great encouragement to counter it” (*Likutey Moharan* II, 48:2).

First, we need to understand that Rebbe Nachman teaches that this process happens to even tremendous tzaddikim. Therefore we shouldn't view ourselves in a negative light for having to withstand thoughts and desires that we thought we had previously purged ourselves from. Second, we need to realize that we are standing at the gates of a new spiritual existence; if we can hold off just a bit longer,

we will have gained eternally. But if we let go, we will end up so far from holiness.

Yet what if while we are waiting, we feel that we are being deficient in our service of God, or even sinning? How then can we still hold on?

Rebbe Nachman explains that if you take a sphere and mark off a starting-point, and then mark off another point even a hairsbreadth away, if you then draw lines from these two points, the further they extend from the point, the further apart from each other they get (see “The Melancholy Saint,” *Rabbi Nachman's Stories* #16).

To us, if we detach ourselves just a bit from materialism, it may look like we have accomplished nothing at all. But in the upper worlds, a small shift is equivalent to a passage through thousands of universes and thousands of miles, which is great and precious indeed. Can you see straight?

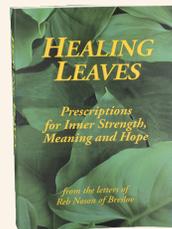
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

May God help you understand the hints contained in everything in the world; may He show you how, through them, you can draw closer to Him each and every day. For everything that happens in the world, be it life or death, rising prices or falling prices, poverty or wealth, or any other occurrence or incident that takes place in the world – globally, nationally, locally, or to an individual – all happens only in order to remind us of God specifically through this. He, in His wisdom and mercy, is the Cause of everything. Everything that happens is for our eternal good, in order that through every thing we should come to know Him, each and every day. For God is indeed working His will at this very moment, and will continue to work His will. (*Letter* #47)



Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

Parashat Vayeira speaks of the miraculous birth of Isaac and the superhuman test God gave Abraham, to sacrifice his beloved son.

“Sarah said, ‘God has made me rejoice. Whoever hears will laugh for me’” (Genesis 21:6).

Isaac was the first child to be born Jewish. He was called *Yitzchak* (literally, “he will laugh”) because the holiness of the Jewish nation depends on their joy when doing mitzvot and in their service of God (*Likutey Halakhot* II, p. 146a).

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YitZChaK (Isaac) is like *tZChoK* (laughter and joy). What is this joy? That from a seemingly mundane act, a union between a man and a woman, a holy tzaddik can be born. Why do we rejoice at a wedding? Because from this couple can come forth great tzaddikim who will rectify the world (*ibid.* III, p. 52).

“Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and put him on the altar atop the wood” (Genesis 22:9).

This was the most difficult of all of Abraham's ten tests (*Sanhedrin* 89b). Judging by Abraham's righteousness, the Binding of Isaac does not really constitute a test. Even a simple person would be able to withstand such a test if God appeared to him. Abraham's real test was not to question God at all, though the messages he had received from Him seemed contradictory. First God had promised that the Jewish people would be born through Isaac. Now He was calling for the sacrifice of Isaac. Yet Abraham did not dwell on this contradiction. He knew that God's ways are not man's ways; God transcends all and therefore can do opposing things that are incomprehensible to man.

Thus, Abraham named the mountain “The Mountain That God Sees” (Genesis 22:14). Though man cannot see or understand God's ways, “God sees.” In fact, the very mountaintop upon which Isaac was to be sacrificed was the Temple Mount, where Abraham's descendants would ultimately serve God (*Likutey Halakhot* VIII, p. 34b-35a).

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In the end, Abraham did not sacrifice Isaac. But the two of them gained tremendous merit from their immense desire to perform God's will. This great desire for self-sacrifice for God was implanted in the Jewish nation, which explains why we see so many, many Jews throughout the generations who have willingly sacrificed themselves for God (*ibid.* VIII, p. 163b).

SIDEPATH

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

71. The *Zohar* (I, 188a, 219b) states that repentance does not help for immorality, and particularly for one who spills his seed for naught. The Rebbe said that this is not true, for repentance helps for all sins. He also said that he was the only one who truly understood that saying in the *Zohar*. For repentance truly helps, no matter how much a person has sinned. True repentance involves never repeating the sin, as discussed in the Rebbe's works. You must go through the same situation in which you sinned, but now have pity on yourself and not repeat the sin. Then you will have broken the evil inclination and have repented.



72. You may be influenced by false motives and distracted by many outside thoughts when you pray. Ignore them completely. The Rebbe also said that these disturbing thoughts actually benefit our prayers. Without distracting thoughts, prayer would be impossible. Tremendous powers are always at work, attempting to denounce proper prayers. But distracting thoughts serve to disguise our prayers so that they are ignored by the outside forces. Then these forces do not denounce the prayers, and they are allowed to enter on high. God knows the real truth. We may have improper motives or be distracted, but in the very depths of our hearts, our sole intent is to God. God knows this. When we pray, our innermost thoughts are always directed towards God. God sees this innermost desire. He sees through the outer thoughts and accepts the prayer in love.



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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.