

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Are We There Yet?

By Yossi Katz

Would you be willing to sacrifice your own flesh and blood?

Abraham, the Jewish “Pope,” the one who taught ethics and monotheism to the entire world, was summoned to the ultimate challenge.

At age 100, he experienced a fantastic miracle: his 90-year-old wife, Sarah, gave birth to a son, Isaac. God promised Abraham that the Jewish people would descend from this special child. When Isaac turned two, the great leaders of the time gathered in honor of this amazing celebration. Sarah even nursed the local newborn babies, proving that she truly was the mother of this wonder child. The family was the talk of the town.

But then God summoned Abraham for an incredible challenge. He commanded him to offer his son as a sacrifice. Had Abraham been just a regular guy, it would have been difficult enough to slaughter his own child. But Abraham was far from regular: he was respected by even the greatest monarchs as being the leader of the monotheistic world, the one who spoke out against the strange pagan rituals of his time. How could he now stand up in front of the world and slaughter his own child? What would the media say?

Nevertheless, Abraham didn’t concern himself with his own thoughts and doubts. Without delay, he hastened to fulfill God’s command and bound Isaac to be slaughtered on the altar. As he grasped the knife to sacrifice his dear son, he relents only when an angel interjects.

Abraham could have thought at that point, “I made it! I’ve reached the top of the mountain; there is nowhere else for me to go. Haven’t I experienced enough difficulty in my life? Haven’t I proven myself? Surely, I will live out the rest of my days in a calm and tranquil way.”

Abraham returned home from his latest and greatest victory only to find out that his righteous wife has passed away. He now needs to bury her, but he doesn’t own any real estate. He is forced into negotiations with a money-hungry local named Ephron. After settling on a very large payment,

Abraham is finally able to lay his wife to rest. But now he must find a wife for his son ...

This is the story of each of our lives. We all experience our own individual tests and challenges, and sometimes we feel like we’ve emerged triumphant. We expect things to be good from now on because we’ve made it – we are now truly close to God. But soon enough, we confront new problems and trials. We begin to doubt whether we were truly close to God, whether we really accomplished anything.

Reb Noson tells us that this is the ultimate paradox. On the one hand, it is absolutely true that we were blessed with the opportunity to achieve a new closeness with God, and this is an everlasting triumph. But on the other hand, God’s greatness is infinite and we are very far away. We must still journey on; we still have much to achieve. But if we understand that this is God’s plan – we will eventually arrive.

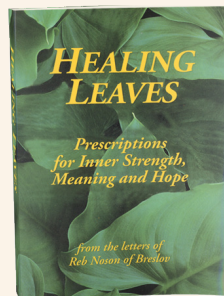
Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shiluach HaKen 5

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

I have some news for you: you should know that there is indeed a God controlling the world, reigning in the heavens above and on the earth below. He lives and endures forever; may His Name be praised for all eternity. (Letter #3)



We all have free choice, and the primary way by which we can draw close to God is the one that the Rebbe introduced to the world: to yearn intensely with strong, positive desires for God every day, to strive to articulate them in detail, and to express ourselves [in our own words and language] before God. (Letter #273)

Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

Ephron might have thought he hoodwinked Abraham, but Abraham knew exactly what he was paying for.

“Abraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he had mentioned in the hearing of the children of Heth—four hundred silver shekels in negotiable currency” (Genesis 23:16).

For something as holy as the Cave of Makhpeilah, which is the portal to the Garden of Eden and the gateway through which all souls pass after death, Abraham was willing to pay top dollar rather than receive it as a gift. This is because Jewish money that is used for the performance of *mitzvot* and Torah study is itself very holy, and has the power to subdue the *kelipot*. By purchasing the cave, Abraham indicated that he was willing to give of his wealth to subdue the *kelipot* that would surround this holy place.

The Holy Land cannot be conquered unless we “break the beast” within us.

In this way, he revealed the spirituality and Godliness that lay within (*Likutey Halakhot* VIII, p. 10b).

* * *

The word *KeSeF* (silver) is related to *KiSuFin* (yearning). The 400 silver shekels represent the 400 worlds of yearning that the tzaddikim will attain in the World to Come (*Zohar* I, 123b).

The greater a person's spiritual thirst, the greater his pleasure when he quenches it. The reward of the tzaddikim in the World to Come will be the quenching of their great thirst for God (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #259).

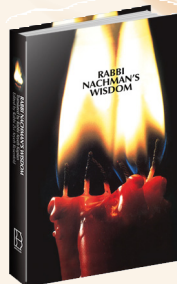
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The purchase of the Cave of Makhpeilah constituted the beginning of the conquest of the Holy Land. Abraham bought it from the children of Heth, the first of the seven nations. *CheT* (Heth) represents *ChaYaT* (wild beast) (Psalms 68:31). The Holy Land cannot be conquered unless we “break the beast” within us (*Likutey Halakhot* II, p. 94).

SIDEPATH

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

73. There are tzaddikim who reveal what they see immediately. Other tzaddikim possess souls from a higher level. They are from a spacious realm, and have room to keep their vision to themselves.



74. Sometimes your prayers may be devoid of enthusiasm. At such times, you must compel your emotions and make your heart burn with the words.

Sometimes a person rouses himself and actually makes himself angry. As people say, “*Er schnitzt sich ein roigez*” – He creates his own anger.” You must

do the same during prayer. Be like the man who makes himself angry. Work yourself up and bring heat and a flaming heart into your prayers. The enthusiasm may be forced at first, but eventually it will become real. Your heart will burst aflame with God's praise, and you will be worthy of praying with passion.

You can make yourself happy in the same way, particularly during your prayers. Pray with great joy, even if this happiness is forced. Happiness is always a virtue, but it is especially so during prayer.

If you are disturbed and unhappy, you can at least put on a happy front. Deep down, you may be depressed, but if you act happy, you will eventually be worthy of true joy. This is true of every holy thing. If you have no enthusiasm, put on a front. Act enthusiastic and the feeling will eventually become genuine. Understand this well.



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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.