

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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A Matter of Survival

By Yossi Katz

DESERT ISLANDS ARE a popular backdrop for jokes. Once a Jew was discovered on a desert island. The fellow who finds the Jew surviving on tropical fruit and living in a bamboo hut notices that he has also built two other huts. “Those are synagogues,” the Jew explains. “But why do you need two of them?” the fellow wonders. The Jew answers, “This one is the synagogue I pray in, and that one is the synagogue I *don’t* pray in!”



People often don’t appreciate the cardinal importance of finding the ultimate spiritual master. They assume that anyone who knows a fair amount more than they do will suffice. “If I am a humble layman,” they rationalize, “shouldn’t a simple rabbi be enough?”

This couldn’t be further from the truth. Rebbe Nachman observes that the sicker a patient is, the greater a doctor he needs. If someone suffering from a potentially terminal illness chooses to be treated by his family doctor, is he not considered insane? The GP might even do more harm than good, and be considered extremely negligent!

If this is true of our physical, finite life, how much more true is it of our eternal, spiritual health and our ultimate *tikkun*? For that, you need a doctor of the spirit, a Tzaddik.

But here’s where it gets complicated. You set out to discover the Tzaddik who can guide you, only to encounter conflicting opinions and arguments about the various Tzaddikim out there. You may conclude, “You can’t believe in anyone. After all, I understand and agree with the arguments of this side, and I also understand and agree with the arguments of the other side. So I will agree with both of them, and not believe in anyone!” Especially today, due to the proliferation of online media, this pessimistic attitude has become very dominant.

However, the true answer to this problem is alluded to in the words of our *parashah*: “The seventh day will be holy for you; it is a Shabbat of complete rest to God” (Exodus 35:2).

Shabbat is like a desert island. It’s a day when we disconnect from the illusion that we are the ones in charge and recognize God’s kingship and the true spiritual reality of our existence. And the Tzaddik is the one who teaches us how to manage our everyday involvement with this physical world and transform every action into something spiritual. Therefore the Tzaddik and Shabbat are interlinked.

Our Sages present the scenario of someone traveling in a desert who loses track of the days of the week. How should he observe Shabbat when he’s not sure when it is? Our Sages teach that he should treat every day as if it may be Shabbat, and limit the *melakhah* (creative work) he does to actions that are needed for survival. He should also count six days from the time he lost track of the days, and observe Shabbat on the seventh day, making Kiddush and Havdalah and refraining from *melakhah* (*Shabbat* 69b).

This teaching can also be applied to the Tzaddik. If we’re not sure who the true Tzaddik is, we should believe in all Tzaddikim! And as much as possible, we should limit our involvement with material concerns to “matters of survival” only. However, we must also “make Kiddush and Havdalah” – we must also proclaim the seventh day holy and separate. Each person should designate one Tzaddik as being holy and special to him, and follow his teachings and guidance to attain his personal *tikkun*.

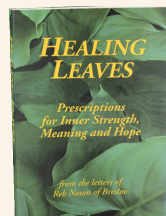
*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shabbat 4:13
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

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*)



Tapping into Joy

Compiled by Yehudis Golshevsky

REBBE NACHMAN IS well-known for his statement, “It’s a great mitzvah to be happy always!”

Happiness figures prominently in many of the Rebbe’s lessons because the more joy a person feels, the more empowered he is to work on coming closer to God. If he lacks joy, he won’t have the strength and vitality he needs to grow spiritually.

Someone once asked Reb Noson how he could be happy when he had so many problems and difficulties. Reb Noson answered, “Borrow the happiness!” (*Siach Sarfey Kodesh* 1, 736). When it comes to money, we rarely hesitate to borrow against future earnings. Well, sadness makes a person feel he’s missing something. The thing to do, as Reb Noson

Happiness gives us the strength and vitality to grow spiritually.

advises, is to borrow from whatever you can think of that makes you happy. Besides, there’s a big difference between owing money and owing happiness. When money is paid back, it hurts a little. But with happiness, when we pay it back, we have happiness again. Forcing joy and happiness actually pays fantastic dividends!

Rebbe Nachman’s daughter, Sarah, had a terrible toothache. When she shared her pain with her father, he said, “You should feel joyous.”

“Even though it hurts me?” she asked.

“Act as if you are happy,” he advised. “There will come a time when you will feel so happy because of this that you will dance. When this happens, you will be healed.”

She listened to his advice and worked on feeling happy despite her pain. Eventually she mustered enough joy and closed her window shades so passersby would not see her, and danced. And she was healed, exactly as the Rebbe had predicted (*ibid.*, I, 347-348).

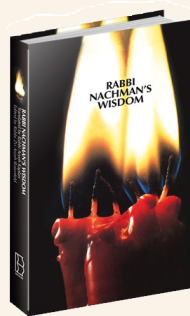
Reb Avraham Chazan, a Breslov leader in Uman and Israel in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, commented, “If Rebbe Nachman taught that it’s a great mitzvah to be happy always, then we must believe that there is what to be happy about!”

SIDEPATH

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

99. Sometimes when you speak to a friend about fear of God, he may not receive from your words. Still, you can receive from him, as you can be motivated by your own words. The light of your words literally bounces off your friend and is reflected back to you.

These same words may have had no effect had you spoken them to yourself. But when you speak them to your friend and he is not inspired, they are reflected back to you. Thus, you are inspired by them.



100. When Joseph refused Potiphar’s wife, it is written, “She grabbed him by his garment” (Genesis 39:12).

The forces of the Other Side and the evil inclination grab a person by his garment. The necessity of obtaining garments and clothing can disturb a person greatly and

hinder him from serving God. Therefore “she grabbed him by his garment.”

If you are a master of your soul and have strong confidence in God, you will pay no attention to this. You may have no clothing to wear, but it will not disturb you, since you do not allow yourself to be distracted by such things.

It is written, “He left his garment with her and fled” (*ibid.*). You must leave your concern about garments and clothing behind and escape the forces of evil. Pay no attention to what you lack. Do what God requires of you and serve Him to the best of your ability.



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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.