

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Building for Eternity

By Yossi Katz

EVERY FOUR YEARS, in honor of the Olympic Games, tens of billions of dollars are expended and a virtual city is constructed – only to be abandoned a few weeks later. Thousands of years ago, our Jewish ancestors recognized what a waste of *gelt* this was (not to mention the excessive physical labor) and came up with a much more efficient plan: Why not build a portable, collapsible structure? Thus the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was born.

Of course, it was not pure economics that influenced their decision-making, but a direct command from God. Our *parashah* states, “These are the accounts of the Mishkan, the Mishkan...” (Exodus 38:21). The Torah repeats the word “Mishkan” in order to teach us that the Tabernacle’s sacred status remained the same whether it was assembled or disassembled. Thus, our Sages state that even when the Mishkan is in pieces, it still protects the Jewish people (*Shemot Rabbah* 31:9). The Jews would travel through the desert carrying with them the various pieces of the Mishkan to demonstrate to future generations that although the Mishkan may no longer be assembled, it still protects the Jewish people even today.

The Jews received the command to construct the Mishkan after the sin of the golden calf. It was then, in a state of abject lowliness, that Moshe was able to peer into us and reveal our intrinsic goodness. Only because of Moshe’s revelation were the Jews able to donate all kinds of precious stones and materials towards the construction of the Mishkan. These materials are a reflection of the multitude of good points in every single Jew, no matter how low he has sunk.

Just as the Jews traveled from place to place through a desolate and dangerous wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, so do each of us travel through life’s ups and downs on our way to our ultimate goal. And just as they had Moshe to reveal their true essence and good points so they could construct the Mishkan, we have the Tzaddikim, who reveal our good points and help us build the spiritual essence of the Tabernacle.

Someone once asked Reb Noson, “Who is greater? One who performs great devotions, or one who behaves more simply yet follows the Tzaddik?” Reb Noson replied, “Look at the building of the Mishkan. No matter what the person contributed, if he did not bring it to Moses first, it had no value or place in the Tabernacle. Yet if the simplest Jew made the most insignificant item and brought it to Moses, it was assured its place in the Tabernacle!” (*Aveneha Barzel* #62).

No matter where we go or what we go through, we are always able to connect ourselves directly to God with the help of the Tzaddikim. Living according to their counsel and with faith in their abilities, we can transform even a spiritual desert into a virtual Sanctuary. For the Tzaddik reveals our true good nature and spiritual capacity. And even if all we can contribute is a small act of goodness or a seemingly “simple” mitzvah, this, too, the Tzaddik will include in the construction of the spiritual Mishkan and the resultant manifestation of God’s Presence in the world and in our individual lives.

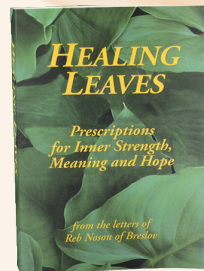
*Based on Likutey Moharan I, 292 &
Likutey Halachot 1, p. 260
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

All the thoughts that periodically arise to distract a person during the day return to him just at the time he is praying. The key to defeating these thoughts is simply to do nothing. Neither address them nor consider them at all. Just think about the words of the prayers coming out of your mouth, and the other thoughts will vanish. (*Letter #6*)



Waiting for Change

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REBBE NACHMAN TAUGHT his followers that they shouldn't offer rebuke or criticism, no matter how well-intentioned, unless it was clear that it would really help. Often, a mistimed or poorly-executed attempt to get another person back on the straight and narrow causes far more harm than good. Knowing when to leave a person space to develop at his own pace can sometimes be the greatest means of drawing him closer to God.

In Uman there was a man known as Aharon the Butcher, who rented the local bakery. For a time, this man would attend the Breslov synagogue in Uman, but his decorum there left something to be desired. He often conversed loudly during the services, disturbing everyone around him.

Naturally, many of the chassidim objected; they figured that the man would only change if he was thrown out of the shul as a warning, and be allowed to return only if he changed his ways. When they asked Reb Avraham B'Rav Nachman, one of the Breslov leaders at that time, what he thought of their plan, he voiced clear opposition.

“Listen, you can see yourselves that he is not, strictly speaking, a Breslover,” he said. “Why, then, does he bother coming to pray with us? What draws him? Since he chooses to pray with us, it's clear that our responsibility is to welcome him so that he can absorb the unique atmosphere of our *tefillah* (prayer). Clearly, he comes here because he senses the joy and focus that infuse our prayers. If we are patient with him, we can hope that he will eventually improve greatly.”

Aharon the Butcher eventually moved to America. Although in those years most Jews who immigrated fell away from Judaism, this man did not. His daughter wrote letters to their family in Uman saying how proud she was of her father's growing *yirat Shamayim* (fear of Heaven) despite – or perhaps because of – the new challenges.

“Father even railed in the synagogue about their inattention to the prayers,” she reported. “He said, ‘You call this a proper prayer? I'll have you know that I used to pray with the Breslovers in Uman. *They* know what *tefillah* is!’”

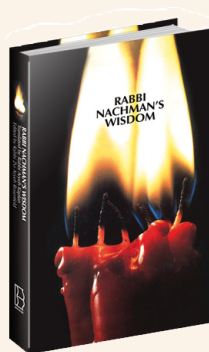
Based on Siach Sarfei Kodesh VII, 182

SIDEPATH

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

101. Many times, the Rebbe said that no sophistication is needed in serving God. All that is required is simplicity, sincerity and faith. The Rebbe said that simplicity is the highest possible thing. God is certainly higher than all else. And God is ultimately Simple.

102. The Rebbe said that the secularists have no life, even in this world. As soon as things go against them, they are left with nothing. They think everything is determined by nature and have no place to turn. When trouble strikes, they are left without any source of hope.



A man of faith believes in God and has a very good life. He trusts in God and knows that everything is for the best. If he must suffer, he realizes that it will atone for his sins, or that it will ultimately bring a much greater benefit. No matter

what happens, he realizes that God does only good. Therefore the man of faith always has a good life, both in this world and the next.

This world never goes exactly the way a person wants. He will constantly encounter trouble and anxiety, and through it all, will have nothing to console him. If, however, you believe in the truth and look forward to the World to Come, you have a very good life. Even your suffering is for the best – either to remind you to repent or to atone for your sins in order to attain the everlasting good of the World to Come.



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P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641
P.O.B. 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.