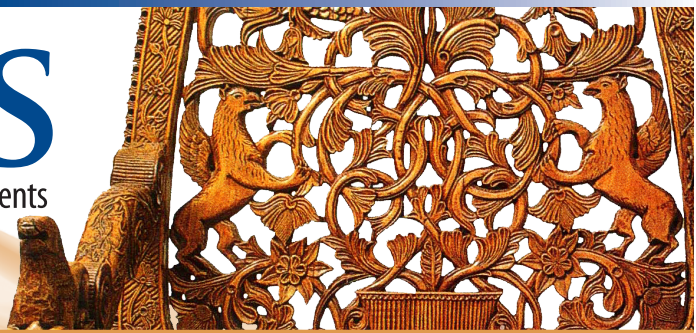


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Best Kind of Criticism

By Yossi Katz

**HAVE YOU RECENTLY** been criticized or rebuked? Did you find those words to be helpful? Did they initiate any positive change in your behavior?

For most people, criticism makes them feel hurt and put down. And when we rebuke others, we often don't see any change and, even more likely, a spiteful reaction.

Although there is a great mitzvah to rebuke (see Leviticus 19:17), most people are not capable of fulfilling this mitzvah properly. Even Rabbi Akiva, who lived in a generation of tremendous Torah scholarship, said, "I would be astounded if there is anyone capable of rebuking in this generation" (*Erkhein* 16b). In this week's *parashah*, Moshe delivers words of rebuke to the Jewish people in the subtlest of ways, by naming the places where they sinned but not the sins themselves (see Rashi on Deuteronomy 1:1). We see from this the tremendous sensitivity required before reproaching another Jew.

Rebbe Nachman explains why it's so important to know how to rebuke properly. He teaches that our souls receive their sustenance from "scent," as we find regarding Adam, "and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life" (Genesis 2:7; *Likutey Moharan* II:8).

Imagine that something foul-smelling is lying around. As long as it lies undisturbed, its odor is minimal. But if the item is picked up and carried about, its smell grows far worse. The same is true of ourselves. Our shortcomings omit "foul odors," but as long as these imperfections are left at bay, their bad influence has a minimal effect on our souls. However, if they're stirred up through incorrect criticism, these shortcomings begin to release a terrible odor which, in effect, cuts off our souls from their spiritual lifeline. Imagine how much damage can be done!

The professors in the area of rebuke are our great Tzaddikim. They are the only ones capable of looking into our souls and extracting our essential pure and pleasant fragrance. Rather than causing spiritual disconnect, they plug us back into the Source. Rebbe Nachman teaches

us the way to emulate their work and properly fulfill the Torah's commandment.

When we look at ourselves and others, we usually notice shortcomings and imperfections. While these observations may be true, our highlighting them only exacerbates those issues. If, instead, we look beyond them toward the inherent goodness that we and others possess, we are able to "release" the soul's pure and pleasant fragrance. True, the bad is still there, but it's only external. True rebuke extracts the soul's true goodness, letting the foul-smelling parts fall away automatically.

This is why Moshe mentioned only the names of the various encampments and not the sins that were done there. At each juncture, the Jewish people faced enormously difficult challenges. The same way the desert is a place of extreme danger to the body, it is also a spiritual wasteland to the soul. We fell short not because we were evil and rebellious, but because of the negative spiritual environment. It took someone of Moshe's caliber to recognize this and reconnect us to God by reminding us of our true nature.

Only the way of the Tzaddikim can lead us from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Holy Land. May we all follow their lead by revealing the true greatness of each and every Jew. Amen!

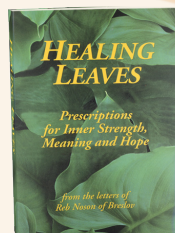
*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tzitzit 5:7; ibid., Orlah 4:17*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell

Sadness, depression, anxieties and doubts are highly damaging and are more destructive, God forbid, than one's wrongdoing. Listen to me, my dear son, because these are the words of our holy and awesome Rebbe. Fortify yourself again and again; begin anew every day. Do not dwell on any doubts or depression – pay them no attention at all. Do not give in! (Letter #9)



# Klap Freilich!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**WEDDING ARE SUCH** joyous affairs. Yet today's weddings are fairly tame compared to the way they used to be. In prewar Europe, the average Jewish wedding was an all-night event. Musicians were hired to play a full program of lively tunes and people would dance happily for many hours. The joyous atmosphere was infectious. Reb Noson once attended the wedding of a very distant relative, although he usually didn't attend the affairs of distant relations. When asked why, he explained that he went to attain joy.

During the wedding season, musicians worked extremely long hours, night after night. When there were several consecutive weddings, it became quite a challenge to keep up the pace. Not surprisingly, the parents of the bride and groom kept a sharp eye out for a musician who was slacking off. As far as they were concerned, they were paying for his time and were determined to get their money's worth.

Yankele the drummer was extremely exhausted. He had played many nights in a row and hadn't gotten much rest. From the start of the wedding it was clear that he was tired, but he just kept going. He worked to keep up his usual tempo, and for many hours he somehow managed. But then he dozed off.

It took a few moments for the father of the bride to notice something was amiss. The moment he realized the drum had stopped playing, he strode up to the drummer and administered a stinging slap across his face. "Yankele!" he cried. "*Klap freilich* – Beat [your drum] with joy!"

The smack jerked Yankele out of his slumber. He was so shocked and exhausted that he cried a little, but he immediately resumed beating his drum to the tune in a lively manner.

Rebbe Nachman was at that wedding and witnessed this harsh rebuke. He commented, "Even when we get a *klap*—a slap from on high—we have to keep on being *freilich*!"

Reb Noson added, "This is a lesson for our service of God. Even though a person feels as if he's been flung away from God, sustaining many 'slaps,' still, he must pick himself up and hit back against the forces of negativity with joy!"

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh II:543*

## SIDEPATH

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

142. When you have doubts about your faith in God, say out loud, "I believe with perfect faith that God is One – first, last and always."



It is written, "Of Your strength they shall speak" (Psalms 145:11). Speech derives from holy Strength. Therefore, when you say, "I believe," as above, you awaken the Strength of Holiness. This will offset your doubts, which come from the Strength of the *Kelipot*.

143. There are two ways that one can eat like an animal. Some eat human food with an animal's appetite. Others eat like humans, but their food is fit only for a beast. Sparks of holiness reside in food. If these sparks have not been sufficiently purified, the food is fit only for a beast and not a man.

144. After the Rebbe returned from Lemberg, he was still very sick with tuberculosis. He would often ride to the outskirts of the city and take walks in the fields. On one such occasion, we had taken the coach out of the city and stopped to walk in a field. It was time for the afternoon *Minchah* prayer, and we were about to begin the service in the field.

The Rebbe said that when one prays in the field, every blade of grass enters into his prayers. He later remarked that just as we stood around him [and he sees us], he himself sees all the vegetation, each plant pushing itself towards each person who was there in order to rise and become part of his prayer (see *Likutey Moharan* II, 11).



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P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

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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.*