

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Plan B

By Yossi Katz

**WALKING THE STREETS** of Israel, one of the most common expressions you'll hear is "B'seder." This is generally equivalent to the way we would say, "OK." However, in Israel, this expression has taken on a panoply of different meanings.

"Would you like to meet for coffee at 10?" "B'seder."

"How are you feeling today?" "B'seder."

"You cut my place in line – that's NOT b'seder."

Sometimes someone will even say, "B'seder gamur," which means something along the lines of "Very OK."

Literally, the translation of *b'seder* is closer to "in order," as in things are anticipated to proceed according to plan or the expected result. Which brings us to our *parashah*, which begins, "When you go out to war against your enemy" (Deuteronomy 21:10).

Each of us goes out to war every day. Wars are fought because there is a conflict between two parties regarding how a particular issue should proceed or be resolved. We experience conflicts in our dealings with others, but more importantly, we experience a war of sorts within ourselves.

For example, we plan our day around working through a spiritual or business issue and resolving it a certain way, and then against our will, issues come up. "Dad – the bus never came." *Oy vey!* The result is that we experience inner turmoil, a mental war of sorts. We feel abandoned and sometimes even hurt, as if things "just weren't meant to be."

What's the solution? How can I succeed despite my situation? The verse continues, "and God your Lord delivers them into your hands..." but only when "...you take them captive" (ibid.).

Baseball players often say, "I have no arm." This is because a limb, even if it's still whole and attached to the body, is considered missing if it no longer receives proper vitality from the rest of the body. We call this dead weight. So too,

human beings often feel like things just aren't going their way. This is because their life force and vitality is cut off.

Just as a brain-dead body is no longer considered to be alive, our life force and vitality are derived from our intellect. The Hebrew word for intellect is *ChoKhMaH*, which can be divided into two words, *KoaCh MaH* (the power of what). This alludes to something we ask every day at the beginning of the Morning Prayers, as we humble ourselves before our Creator: "What is our life? What is our strength?"

We get into trouble by thinking that we're the ones in control. We become like that limb that, while still physically whole, is essentially dead. Real intellect and the subsequent meaning and vitality that we receive are from God alone. When we humble ourselves and our minds in submission to Him, saying, "What is my strength?" we receive from God the ultimate wisdom and clarity that make our lives complete and worth living.

King Solomon said, "The King, bound in *ReHaTim* (chains)" (Song of Songs 7:6). The *Zohar* compares this to the *RaHeTei* (rafters) of our minds (*Tikkuney Zohar* #6). By binding our thoughts to the "King of Kings," we can take God captive, so to speak, and bring our life into proper alignment with the ultimate purpose of things.

When we engage in *teshuvah* (returning to God) during Elul, our days may often seem like a war consisting of many battles. We set out to change our lives and plan accordingly, but things always seem to take place against our will. Don't despair! By humbling ourselves and following God's script, we can win the war and merit living a full life with ultimate connection to God.

*Based on Likutey Moharan I, 82*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



At any time and in every place, a person can remember God and can bring himself near to Him. (*Letter #340*)

# Stubborn...For the Right Reasons

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONCE AGAIN, A group of venerable tzaddikim gathered at the home of the righteous parents of young Nachman, sharing teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and praying at his holy gravesite. As the five-year-old Nachman looked on, they then sat down to plan their journey.

One of the earliest students of the Baal Shem Tov and the first one to publish his teachings, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye, also known as “the Toldos,” was already well advanced in years. Though he had been blessed with a long life by his master, the next generation of tzaddikim knew that they only had so much time left to sit at the sage’s feet.

Overhearing the visitors’ plans to visit the Toldos, young Nachman begged them to take him with them. “Please, take me to see the Toldos too! I so much want to see his shining face and hear his holy words!”

With great regret, the group of elderly tzaddikim had to refuse the child. “You’re too young to take such a hard journey,” they said. “The way is difficult and long.”

But Nachman wouldn’t give up. He was determined to get to Polonoye, no matter what. The visitors soon broke up their meeting and went out into the village of Mezhibuzh to organize their provisions and transport. Before long, they had packed and taken their places in the wagon. But when the driver raised his whip to spur on the horses, a bystander called out, “Stop!”

Down below, little Nachman had wrapped his arms and legs around the spokes of one of the wagon’s large wheels. “You’re not going to go anywhere without me!” he cried.

The tzaddikim were at a loss; what should they do now? At that moment, Rabbi Chaim of Krasni, one of their number, got up and said, “Leave him be! I’ll be responsible for him! He’ll sit with me, and I will make sure that he returns home safely.”

Throughout his life, Rebbe Nachman was always grateful to Rabbi Chaim of Krasni for enabling him to meet the Toldos once in his life.

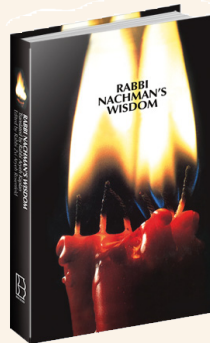
And Rabbi Chaim of Krasni would say in later years, “I saw for myself just how stubborn Rebbe Nachman could be in his service of God even when he was just a little boy!”

*Based on Or HaOros I, pp. 46-47*

## SIDEPATH

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

271. The Rebbe said, “A storekeeper will sell to you on credit, to be paid at a later date. Why not do the same with spiritual goods? Do a few good deeds, or say a few Psalms or words of Torah, so that they can be put aside and ready when you need them. You will then be able to call on this merit and be like the storekeeper who sells on credit.”



272. An irreligious man came to the Rebbe in a certain city and boasted that he was an expert in languages. He had recently been in a government office and was able to interpret a word that even their scribes did not know. He was very conceited because of this knowledge. When the man left, the Rebbe ridiculed him for such foolish conceit.

One of the Rebbe’s disciples, an extraordinary, God-fearing scholar, was sitting there. He said to the Rebbe, “Maybe it is better to be conceited because of something foolish than to be conceited, Heaven forbid, because of one’s knowledge of Torah.”

The Rebbe replied, “No. The opposite is true. The Talmud tells us that when Rabbi Akiva was in prison, Papus said to him, “Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, for you were imprisoned for the sake of the Torah. Woe is to Papus, for I was imprisoned for mere foolishness” (*Berakhot* 61b).



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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.*

*Dedicated in the Memory of (L’Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon*