

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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I'm Not a Robot!

By Yossi Katz

LAST NIGHT I read a news report so upsetting, it weighed heavily on my mind the entire night. People have opposing opinions regarding current events, and it's probably better for me to leave the story out, but suffice it to say that we live at a time when good and evil are confused and compassion is often abused in the cruelest ways. This is not only true on the international stage and in the political arena, but applies equally in our everyday lives and experiences.

Take, for example, society's glorification of the pursuit of money and personal wealth. Nowadays, accumulating wealth is often seen as a religious obligation. "Heaven forbid" if someone chooses to live a simple, minimalistic lifestyle – he must be either a hippie or a loser. I once traveled upstate to visit a friend whose chairs and cups were all unmatched. There was a beauty in the simplicity of his lifestyle and his valuing something for its practical use rather than aesthetic appeal.

By spending even a little time browsing the web, one is bombarded with advertisements and media exploiting physical beauty, food and so many other things that are sacred and meant to be earned and cherished. It is if we are being programmed that our every bodily desire is to be respected and sanctified. Society seems to be transforming into one big race for physical gratification.

As good Jews, we should be revolted by this perversion of truth, decency and human dignity. But our frequent exposure to these lies slowly dulls our conscience. Nevertheless, every so often we witness something so shocking that even we are awakened and begin to contemplate the ultimate truth. Perhaps such an experience is the news of the current barbaric murders in Israel, and the media's false representation of self-defense and basic survival. So, what are we to do? How can truth and spirituality prosper in such a vile and corrupt society?

Many years ago, there lived a different corrupt society. Born less than 300 years after the Flood, Abraham's

generation was already challenging the very existence of God. Yet Abraham, who had grown up in the house of the chief idolater and idol salesman, was able to shake off the influence of the entire world and grow spiritually, becoming the first patriarch of God's People. How did he do it?

God commanded Abraham, "*Lekh lekha* – Go to yourself" (Genesis 12:1). Abraham was taught to focus on only one place: the Divine spark within himself. Eternal truth lies within. No matter what society may profess, we must learn to seek the truth within ourselves and discover our unique identity.

The verse goes on to list the influences that Abraham had to overcome to realize his individuality. "From your land" – this includes society's false attitudes and opinions. "From your birthplace" – this includes the problematic character traits and tendencies that we are born with. "From your father's house" – this includes the negative education and attitudes we may have picked up at home.

We each possess a unique soul; however, we cannot unlock its potential until we first separate ourselves and seek our individual truth, good qualities and spiritual path. Copying others, even religious and pious individuals, is detrimental to this process. Yes, we can appreciate them and all of the goodness around us, but ultimately we must seek the truth from within. We can begin by conversing with God and sharing words of sincere honesty wherever we find ourselves. By accustoming ourselves to constantly seek the truth – no matter how crude and uncharming it may seem, we can discover who we truly are and ultimately reach incredible spiritual greatness.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geneivah 5, 7-8

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



This is the key: We must eradicate and banish all the questions, confusions and convoluted calculations from our hearts and just do what we can to seize all the good we can, be it little or much. (*Letter #233*)

A-to-Z Guide to Life

By Yehudis Golshevsky

AS A CHILD, Rebbe Nachman was powerfully motivated to study Torah. He had access to his father's library, which covered the full spectrum of Jewish teachings from the most revealed to the most concealed. Fired by love and desire to connect with his Creator, young Nachman would spend hours studying his father's books.

The product of this early entry into the broad sea of Torah was his work *Sefer HaMidot* (The *Aleph-Bet Book*). Its straightforward aphorisms and concepts are phrased simply and without any pretension, making them accessible to even the simplest of Jews. Yet the greatest scholars have marveled at the encyclopedic knowledge of classic Torah sources that it evidences. It's really a guide to life, literally from A to Z.

The teachings in *Sefer HaMidot* are practical guidelines to the qualities that a Jew needs to foster, and those that he should avoid. They are all rooted in the full range of rabbinic sources – both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, the Midrash, and the *Zohar*. And to think that Rebbe Nachman wrote *Sefer HaMidot* before his bar mitzvah!

Rebbe Nachman did not provide actual sources for the aphorisms. For that, we have to thank the great Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, who invested precious time and energy in adding numerous sources into his marginalia. It's said that when a visitor saw Rabbi Tzadok poring over the small volume and asked to borrow it so he could see what gripped the great sage to such an extent, the Chassidic giant answered, "How on earth can I loan away the source of my vitality?!"

Once Rebbe Nachman was traveling with his student, Reb Naftali, by coach. When he saw the copy of *Sefer HaMidot* that Reb Naftali held in his hand, the Rebbe exclaimed, "My dear brother and friend! That book is what made me into a Jew!"

It's known that even though the book was completed when Rebbe Nachman was very young, he held onto the small treasure for years. He waited until the time was ripe for its publication, and in the end, Providence arranged for it to make its appearance in the world through the most wondrous of events...

Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 55-57

SIDEPATH

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

282. The Rebbe said: Separating oneself from a tzaddik is like committing idolatry. The only difference between the letters *Dalet* and *Resh* is a small protrusion. It is written in the holy *Zohar* that this protrusion is the tzaddik (*Tikkuney Zohar* #21, 55b, 58b). Separating oneself from a tzaddik separates the protrusion from the *Dalet*, making it into a *Resh*.



Faith in God comes through the true tzaddikim, who are the protrusion of the *Dalet* that expresses God's Unity. In many places, the Rebbe says that the root of faith can be attained only through closeness to the tzaddikim.

283. The Rebbe once spoke about young married men who find their prayers greatly disturbed by the fact that they have not sanctified themselves properly in their marital relations. They feel tainted and find prayer very difficult.

The Rebbe constantly warned us not to become discouraged because of this. He said, "What happened, happened. When you pray, you must forget everything else. No matter what happened, strengthen yourself and pray properly."

He said this is the meaning of Abba Benjamin's saying, "I am concerned...that my prayer should be close to my bed" (*Berakhot* 5b). The "bed" is marital relations (*Ketubot* 10b). "My prayer should be close to my bed" – I should be able to pray immediately after leaving my "bed" and not be disturbed at all.



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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.