

Pathways – Vayishlach (The Rebbe's Letter)

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The Rebbe's Letter

Every week, a few Breslov friends and I get together to discuss life in the light of Rebbe Nachman's teachings. Recently, while schmoozing, one friend asked the following question: “Which Breslov teaching would you choose to share with a close friend who has yet to taste from the wellsprings of Rebbe Nachman's Torah?” There seemed to be an almost unanimous agreement, something odd for a group of Chassidim who are each so unique. The answer: the lesson nicknamed “The Rebbe's Letter.”

Unlike the majority of Rebbe Nachman's lessons, this teaching is reminiscent of a letter written to a friend. Here are some

selections from this most inspiring text:

When a person begins serving God, he is shown rejection. It seems to him that he is being pushed away from on high ... In reality, all distancing is nothing but being brought near. And so one needs very, very great encouragement to keep from dejection, God forbid, when he sees the passing of many, many days and years, and despite his great exertion in serving God, he is still very distant and has not in the least begun to enter the gates of holiness.

He sees that he is still riddled with crudeness and materialism, and with powerful, confusing thoughts. And whatever holy matter he wants to accomplish in the service of God, they thwart him. It seems to him as though God is completely ignoring him and has no desire whatsoever for his service, because he sees that he repeatedly screams and begs and pleads for God to assist him in his devotions, and despite this, he is still very, very distant ...

A person has to encourage himself very, very much and pay no attention whatsoever to all this, for in truth, all distancing is nothing but being brought near. And all the aforementioned happened to all the tzaddikim, as we heard explicitly from their mouths (Likutey Moharan II, 48).

Our individual journeys through life, constantly seeking to arrive at greater spiritual heights, are reflected in Jacob's journey: "And Jacob left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan" (Genesis 28:10). According to Kabbalah, Be'er Sheva (literally, "well of seven") represents the level of the seven lower *sefirot*. Jacob was leaving this place to ascend to a higher level. Yet precisely here, he faced *ChaRaN* (which is similar to *ChaRoN af* [Divine anger]), signifying the obstacles he faced before reaching his goal. Each time we attempt to rise to a higher level, we are met with daunting challenges. Often we mistakenly assume that we have made a wrong turn, or are simply unwanted.

Jacob understood that these obstacles were a tool of the Side of Evil, and held his ground. He strengthened himself with the knowledge that this is precisely the path to holiness. "He came upon the place" (ibid., 28:11). "The place" refers to God, who is called "the Place of the world." Through Jacob's knowledge that all distancing is nothing but being brought near, he was able to approach God.

"He lodged there because the sun had set" (ibid.). The setting of the sun represents a loss of intellect or spiritual perception. Jacob understood that he would be faced with darkness and spiritual loneliness because he wanted to ascend ever higher. However, he accepted this faithfully as a necessary "evil."

Our Rabbis say that the sun set supernaturally early on that day (*Chullin* 91b). This anomaly teaches that Jacob's loss of spiritual perception wasn't because he deserved it, but only because it was a necessary prerequisite for spiritual growth. God always desires our closeness and never pushes us away because of a lack of interest. If we feel distance, we must strengthen ourselves with the faith that this experience, too, will ultimately bring us near. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 11a-15b