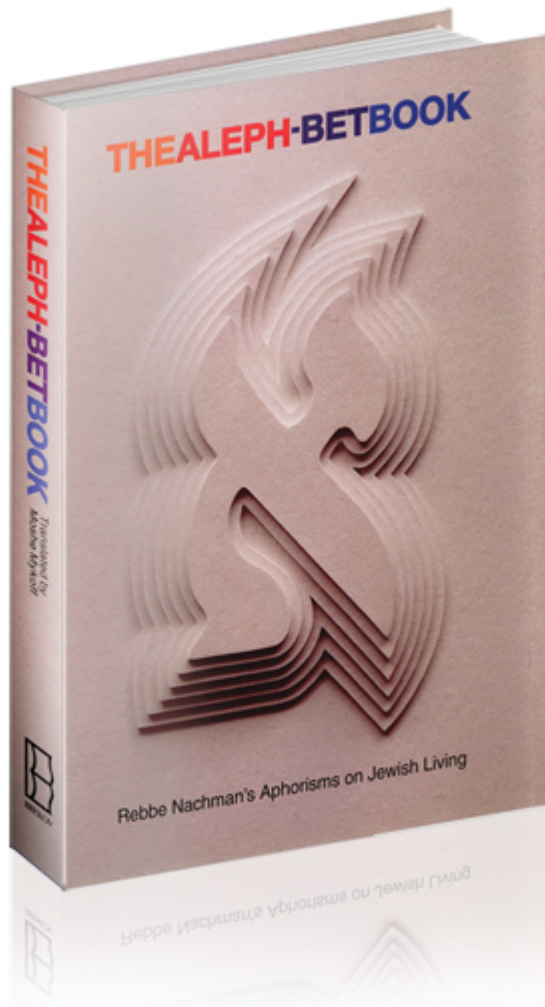


Rebbe Nachman's First Book

written by Yehudis Golshevsky
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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 HaArot I, pp. 55-57