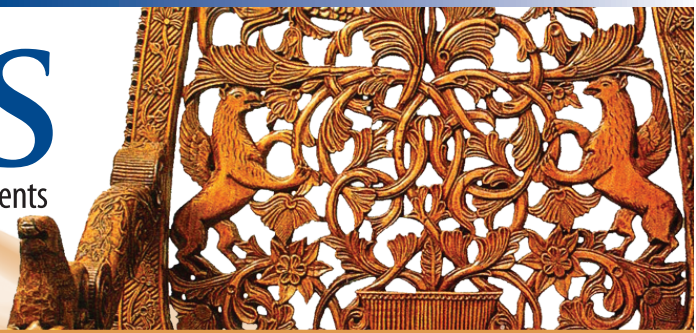


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Corona and Me

By Yossi Katz

“WHY CAN’T WE go outside and play?!” The fresh air, bright sun and spring weather beckon to our kids. They wonder why they can’t run around freely but instead have to be cooped up for what feels like an eternity. Likewise, us big kids (or adults) want to get back to “regular life.” We have done *teshuvah*, prayed earnestly for the sick and for better times, and listened to countless inspirational Torah lectures. Isn’t it time for the good life already? Why must we wait so long?

We’re not the first ones to feel this way. This week’s *parashah* discusses the *metzora*—a person who has spoken evil of his fellow man and is now stricken with a plague of the skin. Once confirmed by the Kohen, the *metzora* is put in quarantine until he is healed. He is later reexamined by the Kohen and, when deemed fully healed, a bird-blood and water mixture is sprinkled on him seven times. He must then wash his clothes, shave all his hair, bathe, and remain in quarantine for an additional seven days. Finally, on the seventh day, he once again washes his clothes, shaves his hair, and immerses in a *mikvah*. One would imagine that after all that he can finally be pronounced pure in order to return to society—but the Torah makes him wait until the eighth day when his sacrifice is brought: only then is he finally, fully pure. Why must the Torah subject him to such a long waiting time? Why couldn’t he immediately cleanse himself and atone?

In a similar vein, a Kohen who is exposed to impurity cannot partake of *terumah* until he has immersed in the *mikvah*, and only “after the sun sets, he will be ritually pure, and afterwards he can eat from the holy offerings, for it is his food” (Leviticus 22:7). This verse implies that though the Kohen has done an act of purification like going to the *mikvah*, time—represented by the setting of the sun and the beginning of a new day—is the final catalyst for change.

Inasmuch as we don’t understand why God has infected the world with coronavirus, for the first time in history the entire world is united in a common mission of social distancing. We have all been given a *metzora*-like opportunity to achieve everlasting change.

Spiritually, we cannot heal without time. Although we envision and desire a spiritual goal, the human experience does not allow us to immediately jump to this place. The longer we feel the restraints of time, the greater our capacity to develop the desire and ultimate will power to truly grow and become Godlike.

Each day (no matter how similar they may now seem) is an entirely new creation. We may feel like life is frozen and stale right now, but this couldn’t be further from the truth. Our every experience is tailor-made, and God constantly manipulates our every interaction so that we live in a constructive state of spiritual flux. If we put our trust in His process, each day provides a new opportunity to envision our goals and increase our longing and desire for them, so that we can become worthy receptacles of God’s blessing.

The seven weeks of counting the Omer are compared to the *niddah*, the woman who counts seven days until she becomes pure (*Zohar, Emor 97b*). Why can’t she immediately go to the *mikvah*, and why must we count seven weeks until we are worthy enough to receive the Torah? The answer is that for us to cleanse and become different, we must harness our will power and desire. Only then will God find us capable enough to reach and remain at our new state.

Instead of merely sitting in our homes and waiting impatiently, let us begin to count and recognize that each day is special and unique. This will increase our capacity to change, so that we can receive not only the Torah but also the ultimate salvation, the arrival of Mashiach shortly and in *our time*. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5*

# Patience!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REBBE NACHMAN'S TEACHINGS** shed light on so many different areas of our lives, it can be hard sometimes to distill exactly what his "main message" comes down to. One confused novice asked an experienced chassid to provide a single key that would help unlock the full spectrum of Rebbe Nachman's pathway for him. "What should I focus on, practically, that will serve as the frame into which everything I learn will fit?"

The chassid gave an interesting answer. "In one word? Patience. That is the essence of Rebbe Nachman's message and the key to all his teachings."

He went on, "The Talmud offers a parable to help us understand the patience needed for spiritual change. A person who wants to do *teshuvah* and grow closer to God can be compared to one who approaches an old-time grocer to ask for some balsam oil, one of the most priceless commodities in the ancient world. The scent of this oil was so strong that a woman needed to apply it only once in thirty days.

"In years past, when you bought dry or liquid goods, you brought your own container to be filled by the seller. Balsam oil was fabulously expensive and its aroma was intoxicating. When the customer comes in to fill his little flask, the seller says, 'Here, let me have that. I'll fill it for you.' That way, the seller gets to enjoy the fragrance, maybe even get some on his hands.

"Rebbe Nachman ties this to another teaching, that one who wishes to repent is assisted from on high (*Yoma* 38b; see *Likutey Moharan* I, 6:2). The seeker must be willing to 'wait at the counter' while the agent 'assists him' – he must wait patiently for God's help. While he waits, he should spend his time wisely, praying for assistance. If he prays, he'll get it. But he needs a lot of patience."

The Breslovers who ran businesses had a common practice. While waiting for deals to come through or merchandise to move, they would take advantage of the time and pray. "Please, let the business come ... but not on Friday if it will make me rush into Shabbat. And please send enough money so that I can have the time to serve You!"

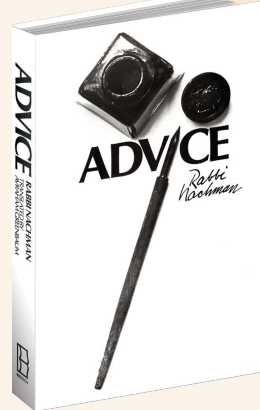
*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:470, V:469*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**CONTROVERSY AND STRIFE.** 27. Strife brings poverty. It also prevents people from being healed. Peace brings healing and prosperity to the world (*Likutey Moharan* I, 277).

28. When the world is afflicted with wars and bloodshed, it can cause the rains to be withheld and bring about high prices (*Ibid.* II, 60).



29. When men abuse the honor of God, it causes factionalism (*ibid.* II, 71).

30. The whole world is filled with quarreling. Nation disputes against nation. Every city has its factions. Each household is locked in arguments with the neighbors. Within the household the husband argues with his wife, with the children and the servants.

And so on and so on. No one thinks about what the ultimate goal of the world is. Every day man dies – because the day that has passed will never come back, and each day one draws closer to the day of his death. How can he waste his time on arguments? Anyone who has any sense should understand this and win long life for himself. Let him not waste his life on quarrels, big or small. He should control himself, hold his anger in check and live peacefully with everyone (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #77).



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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.*