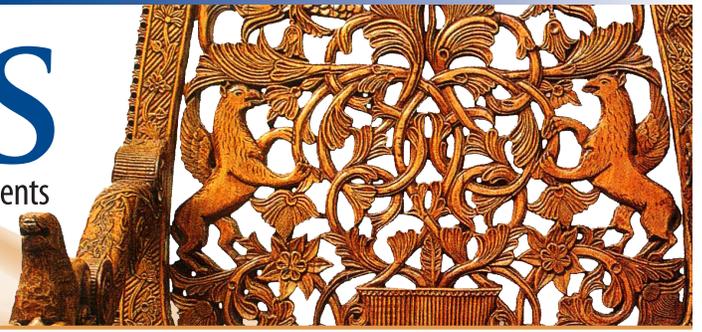


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Psychological Warfare

By Yossi Katz

The human mind is incredibly powerful. Mentally, one can imagine touring exotic places, solve difficult mathematical problems, or vividly recall memories of years long past. In our minds, we are not limited by our physical realities but are free to explore the universe and soar to awesome spiritual dimensions. Yet what if we have become prisoners of our own thoughts?

We all desire to live an emotionally healthy and positive lifestyle. We would like to see the good in our spouses and friends, to count our blessings with gratitude every day, and to appreciate the novelty and unique qualities of everything we experience. But sometimes we get stuck and can't seem to pull our thoughts out of the mud. We start seeing everything in a negative light; we're insulted by whatever is said to us; and perhaps our imagination leads us to inappropriate and sinful places. We have lost control of our own minds and our sanity!

If we take a step back and analyze how we got to this point, we will discover the trap of Laban. Laban, whose name literally means "white," is the master of negative thinking. Ever so slowly, he psychologically leads us astray by whitewashing our thoughts until we begin to entertain thoughts that are just a little bit out of line – and before we know it, we are far gone.

"Jacob stole the heart of Laban by not telling him he was fleeing" (Genesis 31:20). Jacob did not stand idly by while this was happening; he made a run for it. The greatest mistake one can make is to try and reason with a wily con artist; in the end, the person will be deceived once again. When tempted by bad thoughts, the best advice is to ignore those thoughts completely. Instead, contemplate positive thoughts and mitzvahs. By doing this, you will have "stolen away" the evil thoughts from Laban. Rebbe Nachman teaches that a person has the ability to concentrate on only one thought at a time – a fact that can work in our favor.

But what if it's too difficult to readjust your focus and you can't seem to pull your head out of the gutter? The answer

is to run away even further, by doing something completely absurd! Our evil desires do not have a permanent grip on us; rather, they threaten us from time to time. By doing something silly and totally out of the ordinary, we can actually deflect them long enough to get some breathing space.

After Laban finally caught up with Jacob, Jacob gathered stones and built a monument and a mound to represent the peace treaty achieved between the two sides (ibid. 31:45-46). Our psychological battles are a constant struggle; the tug of war between positive and negative thoughts can leave us discouraged by the seeming lack of progress. We begin to perceive our negativity as reality. But this not so! Every effort we make to bring our thoughts to holiness is valued and appreciated on high.

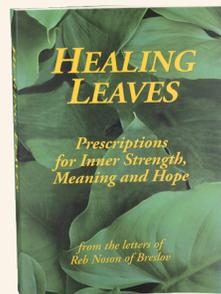
These, then, are the little stones that Jacob gathered. As we gather our efforts and positive thoughts one by one, they combine to become a large, protective mound. It is only at this point that Jacob is able to say to Laban, "This mound will give testimony" (ibid. 31:48). Hanging on this mound are pictures of all of our good points, of all the times we tried when it was difficult. We need only glance at these pictures to be reminded of our true essence.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tefilin 6:35
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



There is no other advice for anyone in the world except to have faith and to trust God. The most effective way to build this trust is to strengthen oneself in Torah study and prayer each day. For the world is a passing shadow and, no matter what, our days are going to pass. (Letter #222)

Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

“He came to the place and slept there, for the sun had set” (Genesis 28:11).

Vayifga (he came) refers to prayer. Jacob established the Evening Prayer (*Berakhot* 26b).

Jacob passed by the place and then returned to it. Why didn't Heaven stop him when he first passed by? If he didn't think of stopping, why should they? (see *Chullin* 91b).

* * *

Foreseeing the long night of exile facing his children, Jacob established the Evening Prayer. Through this, he taught us that even in absolute darkness, one can find hope by turning to God (*Likutey Halakhot* II, p. 446).

The fact that Jacob initially passed by the place indicates that at first he didn't think of praying during the dark exile.

*Even in absolute darkness, one
can find hope by turning to God.*

But he realized he was wrong—a person must arouse himself to God, even in the darkest moments. Therefore he returned to the place and established the Evening Prayer.

As he retraced his steps, the Temple Mount came to greet him (Rashi on Genesis 28:17), since his “arousal from below” caused an “arousal from Above.” He gathered the stones from the place and put them under his head, implying that all the sparks of holiness to be found there could be rectified when placed “under his head”—under the control of a mind free from evil thoughts.

Then Jacob dreamed of a ladder with angels ascending and descending, alluding to the arousal from Above and the arousal from below.

It was at that time that Jacob grasped the greatness of the place. He realized that with an “arousal from below,” one can evoke great sanctity and inspire all Israel to return to God even in the darkest night. By establishing the Evening Prayer, Jacob established the ability to make an “arousal from below” (*Likutey Halakhot* II, p. 224a-448-450).

SIDEPATH

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

76. We heard that the Rebbe once said he studied all four sections of the *Shulchan Arukh* three times. The first time, he understood its simple meaning. The second time, he was able to trace the Talmudic source of each law. The third time, he understood the Kabbalistic significance of each law and its relationship to the transcendental worlds.

From the way it was told, we understood that the Rebbe did this in his youth. We knew that he later reviewed the *Shulchan Arukh* many times.



The Rebbe always studied quickly. In a single hour, he could go through several pages of the *Shulchan Arukh*, including all its major commentaries. He once told us that in the morning, between the time the congregation began to assemble and the time they began worshipping, he would go through at least four pages of the *Shulchan Arukh*.

This was true of everything the Rebbe studied. Whether it was the Talmud or the codes, the Rebbe literally flew through the pages.

Many times, the Rebbe told us that it is best to study a subject rapidly and not to spend time on each detail. Study with speed and simplicity. Understand each thing in its own context, and do not confuse yourself with its relation to other subjects. If you do not understand a concept, do not spend too much time on it. Go further, and in most cases, you will eventually comprehend the first thing as well.



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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.