

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## A Second Chance

By Yossi Katz

**DO YOU EVER** find yourself saying, “I really messed up! I blew it! What a missed opportunity!” Those negative emotions plant themselves in our brains and nag at us constantly, especially at this time of year.

We’ve just finished observing Pesach and rediscovering that we are a Godly People. We realized that we’re not really enslaved to our lusts and deficiencies, and that we can achieve true freedom from everything that weighs us down. In order to actualize these revelations, God gave us a 49-day period during which, by counting each day and taking advantage of its special spiritual potential, we receive the necessary “soul correction.” We rise one level each day, moving from the 49th level of impurity to the 49th level of holiness and beyond.

You may wonder if this process is just a fairy tale; after all, you’ve never felt yourself either physically or spiritually leave the servitude of Egypt or advance towards the towering spiritual heights of Mt. Sinai. Because of the physical nature of our identities, it’s extremely difficult to perceive the levels we achieve in our souls. Most of what we attain comes through having faith in the processes prescribed by our great Rabbis. Only after we’ve left this physical world do we truly experience and appreciate how much every single good action or thought is worth! But sometimes, if we’re very sensitive to our growth and can identify the small, positive changes, we can glimpse the very real changes that take place in our souls.

But what if I messed up? What if I didn’t take advantage of Pesach, the Counting of the Omer, or any other opportunity for connection with God?

Next Wednesday is *Pesach Sheini*, the Second Pesach, perhaps the most unique holiday on the Jewish calendar. For most people, it just means that we eat some more matzah (as if we haven’t eaten enough already) on a regular weekday. But for those of us seeking a second chance, it’s an eye-opener.

The Torah recounts that when it was time to bring the first Pesach offering in the desert, some Jews weren’t able

to participate because their “souls were impure” (Numbers 9:7). Simply understood, they had come in contact with a corpse. But these Jews were not satisfied with being exempt. They complained to Moses, “Why should we be left out?” (ibid.). Moses relayed their request to God, and lo and behold, a new mitzvah was added to the Torah. From then on, “any man whose soul is impure or who is on a distant path” (ibid., 9:10) could bring the offering on the Second Pesach.

This proves that there’s no such thing as despair! As Rebbe Nachman taught, if you believe that you can damage, believe that you can fix. Even if someone missed out on Pesach because he was sunken in impurity or imperfection, he can still eat matzah on a regular Wednesday! A Jew should never feel that he’s too distant; his negative feelings should only prompt him to cry out to God, “Where are You? I don’t want to be left out!”

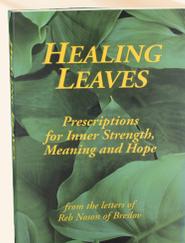
Even more, our descent can become the means to reveal God’s presence. Even in the distant places of our depression and sadness, even if a Jew has sunken to the lowest spiritual places, God is right there with him! This revelation is a new Torah insight of the highest caliber. Just as those Jews in the desert had a new mitzvah revealed because of their fortitude, we, too, can persevere and transform our descents into the greatest Torah revelations, as we merit an amazing second chance.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geviyat Chov M’HaYesomim 3*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



A person must pay careful attention to every thought, word and event that comes his way every day, because God places Himself within them, as it were, sending each person different messages, appropriate to the time and place. (Letter #37)

# Focused Prayer

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**THE CRUSH OF PEOPLE** who converge on Meron during Lag BaOmer is unbelievable. One needs a lot of “holy chutzpah” to withstand the crowds and get into the cave where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar are buried. Getting near the tombs is even harder.

Rabbi Yaakov Meir Schechter recounts a fascinating experience he had that taught him what a regular practice of *hitbodedut* and cultivation of the quality of selflessness can do for a person.

Rabbi Avraham Sternhertz (1862-1955), a leading Breslov figure in Uman and Israel, was Reb Yaakov Meir’s mentor. During one Lag BaOmer in Meron, Reb Yaakov Meir noticed Reb Avraham standing to the side of the place that marks the grave of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. It was packed as it always is on Lag BaOmer, and Reb Yaakov Meir was afraid that Reb Avraham, who was over 90 years old, would be squeezed by the crowd, since he had no way to defend himself.

Reb Yaakov Meir made his way over to his mentor and fended off the crowd. But his actions went completely unnoticed by Reb Avraham, who was deeply involved in petitioning God with personal prayer.

Reb Yaakov Meir heard Reb Avraham beseech God in all sorts of ways to assist him in his old age. “I am already elderly and have no idea how long I will yet live. Please help me, in the merit of the great tzaddik interred here. Grant that I remain healthy until my time comes. Please protect me from illness that could burden my family or make me trouble other people, Heaven forbid. I know that this is very common, but still, I beg You to protect me from this end...”

He stood there for a long time, begging God to help him, with great tranquility of mind. Throughout his life, he had always had mental clarity. Now, despite his advanced age, he was able to beseech God for a very long time.

His prayers were answered. He lived until 93 and was of sound mind and body until his final day.

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:124*

## SIDEPATH

*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l*

124. The Rebbe once asked us, “Have you ever heard me lecture you about religion?” He said, “I cannot lecture people in this manner. *Etlichs vort fun Mussar is bei mir favashin mit trehrin* – Every word of such moralizing is immersed and washed in tears. Because of this, I cannot lecture people about religion.”



At first, it was very difficult for us to understand what the Rebbe meant. It seemed to us that his every word was a religious lesson, literally burning with fire. It was true that he did not sermonize us like many preachers do, yet his every conversation dealt with devotion to God. All his words were literally like

burning coals, and whoever was worthy of hearing them was literally filled with fiery inspiration.

Even his most casual conversations were filled with holiness and purity. And when he presented a lesson or spoke about devotion, his every word would scintillate and sparkle. It would blaze like flames, flashing like a roaring fire.

You would only have to listen carefully and sincerely heed his words. Then every word would literally fly into you like a bolt of fire. You would feel yourself being drawn to God and bound up with Him in a wondrous, fiery bond.

Even today you can become involved in the Rebbe’s published works. If you study them sincerely and probe their depth, your heart will certainly be drawn to God by the Rebbe’s holy words. For all his words are like burning coals.



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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.*