

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT KORACH • 5774 VOL. 4 NO. 36

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## Yes, We Can!

By Yossi Katz

**THE OTHER DAY** I was introduced to a successful businessman who was interested in studying Breslov Chassidut together. In order to get know each other, we shared our backgrounds, and he said something that has stuck in my mind ever since.

My newfound *chavruta* explained that although his wife and children were making headway in their spiritual journeys, his growth was stunted and even retarded because he enjoyed the pleasures that his wealth provided. Was this a valid excuse?

Logic is something that we value as being supreme. Unfortunately, it is oftentimes the preferred vehicle of the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). This is because logic is a byproduct of the mind, but the mind is limited by its mental capacity and perceived reality.

Korach is the ultimate example of this flaw. Korach himself was a brilliant Tzaddik and leader, yet his logic led him to be swallowed up alive. He made the following argument: The Torah calls for one string of *techeilet* (sky-blue wool) to be added to the three white *tzitzit* strings on each corner of a garment. (Today, in the absence of *techeilet*, we put four white *tzitzit*-strings on each corner.) If one string of *techeilet* permits the wearing of a four-cornered garment, then surely a garment made completely of *techeilet* would not require *tzitzit*! Similarly, if one tiny white blemish renders a person a *metzora* (see Leviticus 13:10-11), how can someone covered from head to toe with a white blemish be considered pure? (ibid., 13:13).

Spiritually, his arguments are profound. Every day we recite the blessing on the *tallit*: “who has sanctified us and commanded us to wrap ourselves with *tzitzit*.” We don’t say “to wrap ourselves with a *tallit*” because the spiritual power of the *techeilet/tzitzit* is so great that they upgrade the entire *tallit* garment to their level of sanctity. Korach therefore argued that an entire garment made of *techeilet* should certainly have awesome holiness and not require anything further. His reasoning was based on viewing the entire Jewish people as equal – after all, hadn’t everyone experienced prophecy? What more is there? We are all

like the superior garment made entirely of *techeilet*; why should Moses be the lone *techeilet* string? As Korach said to Moses and Aaron, “The entire assembly is holy...why do you raise yourselves above us?” (Numbers 16:3).

But Korach made a terrible mistake. For even if, logically, a garment made of *techeilet* is superior, there is no such thing as a “perfect” garment. Even the greatest of Tzaddikim must always grow and improve. No one can ever say, “I made it.” Every Jew, from Moses to Moe, has his own unique challenges that he can overcome only through the Torah and *mitzvot* – through the strings of *techeilet/tzitzit* that God has commanded us.

Korach erred the other way around, too. If a little blemish causes a person to become a *metzora*, certainly becoming white all over means you’re eternally doomed – all hope must be lost! Was he right? Like my *chavruta*, if one feels so far, if he is entirely absorbed with the frivolities and pleasures of life, can he ever change?

Yes, he can!

No matter where a Jew has fallen, there is always hope. As long as we call out to God, hold on to our faith, and do what we can, we can transform even the lowest descent to the greatest ascent. As the Torah teaches, someone who is completely covered by a white blemish can be pronounced pure! Korach’s logic was flawed because he couldn’t grasp the kindness of God. No matter how high or low we find ourselves, the Torah is our means to reach a greater closeness with God. As long as we aren’t fooled by false logic and follow the counsel of the true Tzaddikim, every one of us can always come closer. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shiluach HaKen 4*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



View everything in a positive way: for joy and not for sadness, to bring you closer to God and not to distance you. For God’s kindness is never-ending, and His compassion never ceases. (Letter #272)

# Fanning the Flame

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONCE A MAN who was indifferent about serving God attended one of the Maggid of Dubno's fiery sermons. Despite the Maggid's inspiring words, this man still felt completely unmoved. Boldly, in front of a crowd of enthusiastic listeners, he challenged the Maggid to explain why he couldn't reach him, too.

Characteristically, the Maggid answered with an original parable:

*There was once a villager who visited the big city for the first time. As he was taking in its wonders, he saw a blacksmith using a bellows to fan his fire. In his simplicity, the villager figured that the bellows was actually generating the flame, and resolved to buy it from the blacksmith at any price. "How wonderful it would be to never have to struggle to build a fire again!" he rejoiced.*

*When he arrived home, he called all of the villagers together for a demonstration. To his chagrin, after wearing himself out pumping the bellows, all he got out of it was air. Although he protested that it really could produce a flame, he was a laughingstock in the eyes of all his neighbors.*

*He returned to the city and angrily confronted the blacksmith. "Why did you trick me? I tried to use this to make a fire and it was useless!"*

*The blacksmith was perplexed. "You mean that the bellows didn't set your live coal aflame?"*

*The simple villager gaped. "What live coal?"*

*"You fool!" the blacksmith roared. "If there is no spark, how did you expect the bellows to fan it into fire? You need a spark to work with!"*

The Maggid explained, "The same is true regarding my sermon. Like a bellows, I fan the Jewish spark into a roaring flame. But one who has no spark will not be moved by my words in the slightest. It is only possible to fan a flame where there is a spark!"

But when this story was told to Reb Noson, he explained that this is not the Breslov approach. "This is not true at all. Every Jew has a spark, no matter what he thinks or feels. But one must understand how to discover that hidden spark and blow it into a flame!"

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh V:85*

## SIDEPATH

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

132. In paragraph four of *Likutey Moharan* I, 14, the Rebbe explains the Talmudic saying "Why do sages not have children who are equally learned? Because they do not begin with a blessing for the Torah" (*Nedarim* 81a). At the time he spoke the lesson, the Rebbe mentioned an additional explanation.



When a child is conceived, his conception depends on the food previously eaten by his parents. They must sanctify and bless this "beginning" – namely, the things that precede conception, such as eating. Only when this is accomplished can a child be conceived in purity and holiness.

But there are sages "who do not begin with a blessing for the Torah." The "beginning," preceding conception, is not sanctified with the blessing of the Torah. To have children who are sages, this "beginning" of conception must also be blessed with the Torah.

133. In *Likutey Moharan* I, 69, the Rebbe speaks of the great sin of stealing or coveting, even in thought. In this lesson, the Rebbe explains the Talmudic teaching "One who steals even a penny from another must pursue him even to Media to return it" (*Bava Kama* 103a). The Rebbe asks why, of all nations, Media is mentioned. He answers that the word *LeMaDai* (to Media) can also be spelled *LiMuDei* (taught of). Therefore it refers to those "taught of God" (Isaiah 54:13) – namely, children. Theft can even pursue one's children.

I heard from the Rebbe's own lips that this is how this Talmudic lesson was taught on high.



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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.*

*Dedicated in the Memory (L'Ilui Nishmat) of Yehudis bat Shimon*