

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Battle Strategy

By Yossi Katz

WALKING THE STREETS of Israel, one of the most common expressions you'll hear is "B'seder." This is generally equivalent to the way we would say, "OK." However, in Israel, this expression has taken on a panoply of different meanings.

"Would you like to meet for coffee at 10?" "B'seder."

"How are you feeling today?" "B'seder."

"You cut my place in line – that's NOT b'seder."

Sometimes someone will even say, "B'seder gamur," which means something along the lines of "Very OK."

Literally, the translation of *b'seder* is closer to "in order," as in, things are anticipated to proceed according to plan or the expected result. Which brings us to our *parashah*, which begins, "When you go out to war against your enemy..." (Deuteronomy 21:20).

Each of us goes out to war every day. Wars are fought when two parties each have their own idea or desire regarding how a particular issue should proceed or be resolved. We experience this kind of confrontation in our dealings with others, and also with ourselves.

For example, we plan our day around working through a spiritual or business issue and resolving it a certain way, and then against our will, issues come up. "Dad – the bus never came." *Oy, vey!* The result is that we experience inner turmoil, a mental war of sorts.

What's the solution? How can I make peace with my situation? The verse continues, "...and God your Lord delivers them into your hands..." When is this? When "...you take them captive" (ibid.).

Baseball players often say, "I have no arm." This is because a limb, even if it's still whole and attached to the body, is considered missing if it no longer receives proper vitality from the rest of the body. So too, human beings often feel like things just aren't going their way. This is because they are lacking their life-force and vitality.

Our life-force and vitality are derived from the intellect, just as a brain-dead body is no longer considered to be alive. The Hebrew word for intellect is *ChoKhMaH*, which can be further broken down to *KoaCh MaH* (the power of "What"). This alludes to something we ask every day at the beginning of the Morning Prayers as we humble ourselves before our Creator: "*MeH chayeinu* – What is our life? *MaH kocheinu* – What is our strength?"

We get into trouble by thinking that we're the ones in control. We become like that limb that, while still physically whole, is essentially dead. The ultimate source of intellect and vitality is God alone. When we humble ourselves and our minds in submission to Him, saying, "What is my strength?" we receive the ultimate wisdom and vitality that makes our lives complete and worth living.

King Solomon said, "The King, bound in *ReHaTim* (chains)" (Song of Songs 7:6). The Zohar explains that these are the *RaHeTei* (rafters) of our minds (*Tikkuney Zohar* #6). By binding His Godliness in our thoughts, we take God captive, so to speak, and bring about absolute unity.

As we engage in *teshuvah* (returning to God) during Elul, every day is another war consisting of many battles. We set out to change our lives and plan accordingly, but things always seem to take place against our will. Don't despair! By humbling ourselves and following God's script, we can win the war and merit living a full life with ultimate connection to God.

Based on Likutey Moharan I, 82

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



We all have free choice, and the primary way by which we can draw close to God is the one that the Rebbe introduced to the world: to yearn intensely with strong, positive desires for God every day, to strive to articulate them in detail, and to express ourselves [in our own words and language] before God. (*Letter #273*)

The Right Way To Rebuke

By Yehudis Golshevsky

REB MICHEL ZLOTCHOVER arrived in Koretz to give a rousing lecture to inspire the local Jews to improve their ways. But his powerful discourse and sharp words hit the simple folk hard. They saw how far they were from genuine closeness to God and fell into a kind of collective despair.

Reb Pinchas of Koretz was present during the speech. When Reb Michel finished, Reb Pinchas took the visitor to task. “Why do you rebuke them so harshly? Look at these poor Jews. They are destitute—they don’t even own proper clothes and shoes—yet they are here. Do you see the weather outside? It’s freezing, yet with their patched, broken shoes and thin clothes they brave the snow every day, and arrive for prayers exactly on time.

“Instead of admonishing them, you should go to the holy ark, open it, and cry to God. Tell Him to behold His precious, downtrodden children, and bring Mashiach to redeem them! Why should you reprove them?”

* * *

Rebbe Nachman also spoke of the importance of offering rebuke in just the right way. Reb Levi Yitzchok Bender said, “Many people joined Rebbe Nachman for his last Rosh HaShanah. Two and a half weeks before he departed this world, he gave his last discourse. Breslover chassidim called this lesson Rebbe Nachman’s ‘last will and testament,’ and learned crucial practical lessons about how to interact with others.

“We should be very vigilant to love our fellows, never insulting another human being. Even if we see people doing wrong, we should make sure that we never rebuke them in a manner that pushes them down so that it’s harder to improve. Instead, we have to speak in a way that uplifts them and shows that they are above such behavior.”

“But how can one learn when and how to rebuke properly?” someone wondered aloud.

Reb Levi Yitzchak gave a characteristically clear reply. “The simple yet complex answer is: pray. Ask God for assistance to understand when to rebuke and when to remain silent. Even when it is clear to you that you must reprove your fellow, beg the Almighty to show you the right time and manner to say your words, so they will really be constructive criticism.”

Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh III:61, 71, and VI, 285

SIDEPATH

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

155. The Rebbe taught us to be in a joyous mood on Shabbat. He said that we should do everything possible to bring ourselves to such joy. He also said we should buy delicacies for Shabbat. He then said to me, “Now you have something to be depressed about.” He meant that he had just lectured us to be joyous on Shabbat and I had not been worthy of such happiness. This made me even more depressed.



I answered, “I have a very great desire to be filled with joy on Shabbat.” The Rebbe called to those around him, “Did you hear what he said? He spoke well!”

156. The Rebbe’s lodgings in Uman overlooked the old cemetery and he could hear the people who customarily came to cry and pray at their parents’ graves. Once he heard a woman standing by her father’s grave and crying bitterly, “Father! Father!” The Rebbe said to his daughter, “This woman is crying, ‘Father! Father!’ with the best of intentions, but her father is not there at all.”

He explained, “When you visit your parents’ graves, it is best to ask those who are buried nearby to inform your parents that you are there. [Though most souls depart to their destiny,] not all souls ascend to their intended place and many remain near their graves. Therefore it is best to tell these other souls to inform your parents. But when you visit a tzaddik, you need not worry that he is not there. For the death of a tzaddik is like going from one room to another.”



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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.