

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Getting the Message

By Yossi Katz

NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ARE extremely powerful and often completely debilitating. In fact, nothing has the ability to stunt our spiritual growth and life satisfaction like negativity. It's essential for us to take the initiative to learn about ourselves and evaluate our reactions when dealing with such emotions. With Rebbe Nachman's guidance, we can transform these emotions into great tools.

Let's deal with fear. Like everything else in the world, fear is not some unfortunate feeling, but a creation of God. The opening word of the Torah, *BeReiShYT* (In the beginning) (Genesis 1:1) is an acronym for *YaREi BoSheT* (fear-humility). The purpose of Creation, says the *Zohar*, is for man to humble himself and appreciate God's greatness by means of fear.

Perhaps fear of God conjures up a vision of sinister angels smacking the living daylights out of you for doing something wrong. That idea is simply misplaced. True, there is punishment in store for our misdeeds; however, the punishment itself is a cleansing process for the soul and truly for our eternal benefit.

Fear of sin is actually destructive when we view it negatively. In that case, it's a tool used by the *yetzer hara* to bring us to anxiety and to feeling that God is utterly distant from our lives. Basic fear of God reminds us that He is always present, especially when we're at a moment of weakness and are most vulnerable. Wouldn't you wish for your mother to appear waving her finger before you made some really dumb choice? Positive fear creates awareness that God is before us always, available to us and cautioning us to avoid the painful pitfalls of life. When we gain this God-awareness and humble ourselves, we can also begin to develop the deeper levels of grasping His greatness and awesomeness. This is the essential purpose of Creation – to get to know God.

The fears and anxiety we experience from suffering or worrisome situations are really wake-up calls from our

loving Father in Heaven. They are reminders that He misses us and that we've become distracted from our real purpose down here on earth. By remembering Him and the purpose of Creation, we elevate fear back to its true, positive source, thereby dispelling the negative version of fear that we live with.

This can all be seen in our *parashah*. All the miracles and wonders that God performed in Egypt were meant to demonstrate to the world that He is in charge. Pharaoh, however, refused to recognize God. God responded to this by saying, "But regarding you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear God" (Exodus 9:30). God sent the Egyptians plague after plague, but they refused to get the message. Finally they allowed the Jewish people to leave, but then pursued them to the Sea of Reeds, where they met their untimely end. The Jewish people witnessed these same awesome plagues and had a completely different reaction: "And Israel saw the great work that God did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared God" (ibid., 14:31).

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the whole world is a very narrow bridge – but the main thing is not to cause oneself to fear at all. We all experience rough times in life and, more often than not, live with much fear and anxiety. Yet each of us has the ability, with the help of God, to elevate these negative feelings to a place of faith and recognition of God's sovereignty. When we live with the constant recognition that God is in charge and that whatever He does is for our best, we are able to elevate our fears, transforming them into a positive life of purpose and meaning. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Bekhor Beheimah
Tehorah 4:3*

HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



You can accomplish anything through desire and yearning. Accustom yourself to yearn and to ache with longing for God at all times, and to bring these desires to your lips. (Letter #64)

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 G-d'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!"

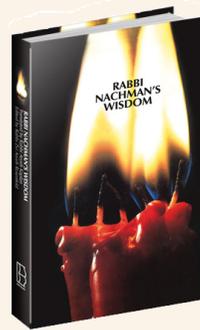
Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:470, V:469

SIDEPATH

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

190. Rebbe Nachman said, "Many times, I imagined what it would be like to die. I did this to such an extent that I literally sensed the taste of death. It was as if I had actually died."

Another time, he told me, "As a youth, I would think what it would be like to die. I imagined how people would cry over me ... I would imagine every aspect of my death. To do this well is a very difficult task."



191. The Rebbe once came inside and said, "What do you do when a great mountain of fire stands before you? A very great treasure lies on the other side. The treasure cannot be reached without passing through this fiery mountain. And you have no choice but to reach the precious treasure ..."

After several days, the Rebbe spoke about this again. He said, "It has already been revealed to me what must be done in such a case."

192. I was once speaking with the Rebbe and mentioned the fact that people find it difficult to believe that tzaddikim today can be as great as those in the past. The Rebbe replied, "If they believe in God, then they must also believe that there are tzaddikim. Tzaddikim exist in every generation, just as God Himself always exists." Understand this 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.