

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Understanding the Pattern

By Yossi Katz

**LAST WEEK WE** discussed making real change, its slow progress, and the challenge of staring down our emotions even when they indicate that we are moving in the wrong direction.

In *Likutey Moharan II*, 48, a lesson known as “The Letter,” Rebbe Nachman lays out this spiritual law:

*A person needs tremendous determination to be strong and courageous, to hold on and maintain his position even if they cause him to fall time and again, God forbid. For there are times when they cause a person to fall from the service of God, as is known.*

*Nevertheless, it is incumbent on him to do his, to do whatever he can in the service of God, and not allow himself to fall entirely, God forbid. This is because one must surely experience all these falls, descents, confusions, and so on before entering the gates of holiness. And the true tzaddikim, too, underwent all this.*

*And know! An individual can already be at the entrance to holiness, yet turn back on account of the aforementioned confusions. Alternatively, when he gets close to the entrance, then the Other Side overwhelms him with very, very great and awesome power, may the Merciful One spare us, and does not allow him through the entrance.*

The Rebbe then concludes with a great assurance:

*Give yourself much encouragement, and do what you can in serving God. Then, with the accrument of the days and years, with God’s help, you will surely enter into the gates of holiness.*

Using the Rebbe’s guiding advice, we can successfully deal with our doubts about personal growth and hang in there. But there is still another great pitfall. What happens when we have battled and emerged victorious, only to find ourselves a short time later faced with new and even more daunting challenges? This can be especially difficult to handle. We may start thinking,

“Haven’t I mastered overcoming this issue already? How could I possibly be challenged all over again? Maybe it was all for naught?”

Let’s consider the pattern of our patriarch Abraham’s life. First, Abraham is faced with a famine and forced to descend to the lewd country of Egypt. In Egypt, his wife Sarah is abducted. He prays, and in the end Sarah is unharmed and they return home very prosperous. Challenge overcome. But Abraham has no son; his lifelong mission cannot be passed on. After much prayer, at age 90 Sarah miraculously gives birth to Isaac. *Mazel tov!*

But now Abraham is told to sacrifice him. At the last moment, an angel intercedes and explains that Isaac should be switched for an animal sacrifice. *Phew!* They return home, only to find that Sarah has passed away. Abraham now successfully deals with a “funeral-home crook” named Ephron. Next, he realizes the need to see that his precious son is married off to a woman who is properly fitting. There is a great candidate (Rebecca), but she is only three years old! Abraham is forced to send his servant Eliezer, who has his own daughter of marriageable age, to retrieve her from afar...

This narrative continues through the life of Jacob and his descendants, who are enslaved in Egypt, and continues through our own lives as well. As much as God blesses us with successes and achievements, new challenges and obstacles confront us at every turn.

What’s going on here? In reality, the things we look at as challenges are not roadblocks, but stepping stones. They push us to improve ourselves so we can grow closer to God and, ultimately, more compatible with Him in order to experience His spiritual bliss. But since God’s greatness is unfathomable, the challenges also seem never-ending. Like our forefathers, we must hold on to our faith and know that we will constantly be challenged, until we reach the ultimate goal.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot Shiluach HaKen 5*

# The Light of Shabbat

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**THE HOLY SHABBAT...**when it spreads its wings over us, a lofty light fills the world. Great tzaddikim are able to see this light with the eyes of the spirit; for them, it's an experience as real as any earthly sensation. When Rebbe Nachman was a little boy, he heard the tzaddikim who traveled to Mezhibuzh, and his own holy parents, speak about the great light of Shabbat. Naturally, he longed to experience it as they did.

Hours before Shabbat, little Nachman ran to the *mikvah* to immerse in honor of the holy day. Then he put on his Shabbat clothes with joy and raced to the synagogue. There he walked back and forth in the waning afternoon, thinking about the light of the extra soul of Shabbat, seeking, wishing and hoping that he, too, would get to see it with his own eyes. With the purity and intensity of a child focused on his heart's desire, Nachman stood and yearned to see the light of Shabbat...for hours.

Eventually people arrived for the afternoon prayers. When they began to recite *Shir HaShirim*, the Song of Songs, Nachman was filled with an overpowering longing. He sat down at one of the benches. In front of him stood an old-fashioned *shtender* (lectern) with a space for books beneath its pitched top. Little Nachman was so overwhelmed with emotion, he stuck his head into the space and began to weep. "When will I see the light of Shabbat?" he cried and begged.

Like children who get worked up with emotion, Nachman cried himself to sleep. While his head lay inside the dark space of the *shtender*, the congregation readied itself to accept the Shabbat. The *shamash* moved from one suspended oil lamp to the next, lighting them in honor of the holy day, and the congregation began to pray the service welcoming the Shabbat.

Soon enough, little Nachman woke up, teary and bleary-eyed, with his head inside a dark and quiet space. When he extracted his head from the *shtender*, his eyes were unused to the light and the small flames of the oil lamps appeared to be surrounded by haloes. They looked like holy visions, like angels, like stars to his young eyes. With perfect simplicity, he sighed with pleasure. "Finally, I've seen the holy light of Shabbat!"

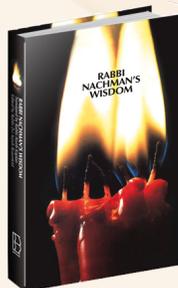
*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 63-65*

## SIDEPATH

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

286. The Rebbe once said to me, "You do speak with people. You can ask them, 'What?'"

He emphasized the word *what*, stressing it in a loud voice from the depths of his heart. What?



It is fitting to ask this question of people who do not think about their purpose in life. What?

After all the arguments, confusions and obstacles, the vain and foolish complaints and excuses: What?

You say that you have reason to be far from God. What?

What will become of you? What will you do in the end? What will you answer the One Who sent you? What are you thinking? What are you on earth if not a stranger? What is your life if not vanity and emptiness (Isaiah 30:7), a passing shadow, a scattered cloud? (Psalms 144:4).

You know this well. So what do you have to say?

Place these words well on your heart. Bring them into the depths of your being. Do not ignore them. Turn them over and over (*Avot* 5:22), and you will save your soul (*Jeremiah* 21:9, 38:2, 39:18).

287. The Rebbe said, "What does a person have to do in this world? *Me bedarf mer nit nar davenin uhn lehrnen uhn davenin* – All that is needed is to pray and study and pray."



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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*