

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Path to Holiness

By Yossi Katz

**DO YOU OFTEN** find yourself taking a “spiritual nap” of sorts? Do you think it might be because you feel hurt by God? After all, how many times did we put our past behind us and start afresh with vigor and dedication, only to be let down once again? As soon as we seem to be making progress, things have a way of becoming hard all over again. We think, “Doesn’t God see my intentions and know what lies in my heart? Why is He allowing this to happen?”

Our individual journeys through life are reflected in Jacob’s journey: “And Jacob left Be’er Sheva and went to Charan” (Genesis 28:10). According to Kabbalah, Be’er Sheva (literally, “Well of Seven”) represents the level of the seven lower *sefirot*. Jacob was leaving this place to ascend to a higher level. Yet precisely here he faced *ChaRaN* (which is similar to *ChaRoN af*, Divine anger), signifying the obstacles he faced before reaching his goal.

Like Jacob, each time we attempt to rise to a higher level, we are met with daunting challenges. We mistakenly assume that we’ve made a wrong turn, or are simply unwanted. In fact, these obstacles are but the outer shell hiding the sweet fruit. Just as the shell or peel protects the fruit so that no “unfitting” element devours it, challenges come to test us to see if we unconditionally want to grow and are truly “ripe” for change.

Jacob understood that the obstacles were designed to confuse him, so he strengthened himself with the knowledge that this is precisely the path to holiness and not the one leading away from it. “He came upon the place” (ibid. 28:11). “The place” refers to God, who is called “the Place of the world.” God distances us only temporarily in order to ultimately draw us close.

“He lodged there because the sun had set” (ibid.). The setting of the sun represents a loss of spiritual perception. Jacob understood he would be faced with darkness and spiritual loneliness as a result of his spiritual ascent. He accepted this as a “necessary evil.” Therefore he ignored all his negative thoughts and imaginings, while fortifying himself with simple and pure faith in God’s goodness and love.

Our Rabbis say that the sun set supernaturally early on that day (*Chullin* 91b). Not only was God not ignoring him, but God caused this miracle to happen, because the “setting of the sun” and its associated temporary spiritual blindness was a necessary prerequisite for Jacob’s spiritual growth. God always desires our closeness. We are never pushed away because of a lack of interest. Every descent is a preparation for a future ascent.

If we feel distant from God, let us strengthen ourselves with the faith that this experience, too, will ultimately bring us near. If we can hold off just a bit longer by pushing ourselves to do any measure of goodness within our capabilities, we will soon merit to see the rising of the sun. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 11a-15*

SUNDAY  
11<sup>th</sup> of KISLEV  
22-11-15

8PM-ISRAEL TIME  
1PM-EASTERN TIME

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# The Melody of Life

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WHILE THE BAAL SHEM TOV didn't approve of the harsh penitential practices of earlier generations, we know that there were many tzaddikim who did use them as a path to serving God. Young Rebbe Nachman absorbed all of their influence and ideas, and set out to follow their example. His secret practices took many forms, one of which was fasting. His prolonged fasts remained a part of his personal Divine service for years.

His childhood friend, Reb Chaikel Chazan, knew about some of Rebbe Nachman's private practices. Once, after several days without food, Rebbe Nachman was visibly weak. Reb Chaikel was with him at the time, and decided that enough was enough. He must get Rebbe Nachman to eat something – he was clearly in danger!

Reb Chaikel begged and pleaded, but the Rebbe wouldn't bend. When Reb Chaikel saw that Rebbe Nachman wouldn't touch a morsel, he said forcefully, "If you don't eat something right now, I will tell people that you fast from Shabbat to Shabbat!" Hearing that, Rebbe Nachman told him to prepare some chicken soup.

Chaikel rushed to get a portion. But when he set it down before him, Rebbe Nachman still didn't move to eat. Instead, he said, "Chaikel, sing me the *frummer niggun*—that melody that the chassidim love." Reb Chaikel had a beautiful, stirring voice, and so he began to sing, hoping that the melody would revive Rebbe Nachman. It seemed to work. Rebbe Nachman grew more animated, he smiled, and color returned to his cheeks.

"Again, please!" Rebbe Nachman asked. So Reb Chaikel sang it again. And so they went on through the night, with the Rebbe gaining strength and Reb Chaikel in a state of joy, barely noticing the time passing.

Finally Rebbe Nachman said, "Look outside – it's already morning!" The time had come for him to break his fast... but not a moment before the hour that he had committed to beforehand.

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 88-91*

## SIDEPATH

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

290. The Rebbe said, "The words spoken by a great tzaddik contain all the words needed by the whole of Israel. They also include what is needed by every single Jew."



291. It is written, "Increase knowledge, increase pain" (Ecclesiastes 1:18). In every generation, new diseases come into existence. This is a result of the increase in knowledge. Each new discovery [based on philosophical and atheistic knowledge] results in some new pain. These are the new diseases that have come into existence. May God protect us!

292. A somewhat notable chassid came to see the Rebbe. He was an older man and was knowledgeable in the writings of the holy Ari. Wanting to attach himself to the Rebbe, he began to speak in the manner of important chassidim, saying, "Would the Rebbe teach us the path to serve God?"

The Rebbe looked at him with wonder and quoted the verse, "To know Your *path* in the earth?" (Psalms 67:3). The Rebbe meant that someone who was still "in the earth" – completely immersed in earthliness – wants to know the path to come close to God.

The Rebbe was provoked because the man spoke in a haughty manner, as if he had already perfected himself to the extent that he lacked nothing but to choose the appropriate path and walk up to God. The Rebbe saw through this and wanted him to speak to him honestly.



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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.*