

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Shalom Between Us

By Ozer Bergman

Rebbe Nachman teaches: “It is a great mitzvah to sharpen the mind.”

The *geulah* (redemption) that we longingly await can come about only if there is shalom among the Jewish people. When shalom is lacking, we cannot talk honestly with one another and can’t help each other get rid of false faiths. For the *geulah* to come, we have to perfect our faith. In order to progress toward faith, we have to bring an end to *machloket* (dissension, argument, strife). How do we go about this?

Rebbe Nachman tells us that to uproot *machloket*, we must learn *halakhah* (Jewish law). The study of *halakhah* is a clarification process. Is some thing (or some act) permitted or forbidden? Kosher or not kosher? Ritually impure or pure? (BTW: Kosher in its *halakhic* sense may mean valid or fit, and is not used to describe the status of a food. A food

{ *How can knowledge of ritual law positively impact on interpersonal behavior?* }

is permitted or forbidden.) This suggestion is surprising in two ways. First, how can knowledge of ritual law positively impact on interpersonal behavior? Second, the study of *halakhah* itself involves *machloket*, from the Tannaim right on down to contemporary Torah scholars! How does the study of their disagreements get rid of *machloket*?!

*Machloket* comes from misunderstanding. Sometimes, because we merely misunderstand what was said or meant, we draw all sorts of mistaken conclusions and end up having unwarranted feelings and taking unwarranted action. The results can be disastrous: witness the infamous incident of Kamtza and bar Kamtza, one of the catalysts of the Second Temple’s destruction (*Gittin* 55b).

A second type of misunderstanding involves weighing competing claims. We know there are “two sides to every story.” But which is correct? On occasion, both claims may be true, but we don’t know which should be applied. This is often complicated when one of the claims is presented by

someone *else*, someone we may not be prepared to defer to. Within our own selves, we often have to choose between two competing claims of correctness, that of the *yetzer tov* (good inclination) and that of the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Which one is which?! This confusion, this blurring of intellectual vision, is a result of Adam’s sin of having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

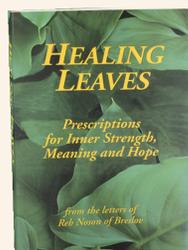
Both these types of misunderstanding fall in the realm of what Rebbe Nachman calls “questions whose answers can be understood.” When it comes to dealing with such questions, “It is a great mitzvah to sharpen the mind.” To the extent that we engage in study of *halakhah*, we come “to know what to answer the heretic” (*Avot* 2:14). This, says the Rebbe, is referring not only to the heretic “out there,” but to the heretic in our heart, the *yetzer hara*, who is not an enemy that we have to destroy, but an energy we have to harness. When we harness that energy via a *halakhic* decision, we achieve peace of mind. This peace carries over to our relationships with others as well.

*Based on Likutey Moharan I, 62 and  
Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Yibum 3:5  
A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!  
This is a reprint*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



I have studied the ways of the world: it is clear to me that if a person wants to focus on what is lacking, he will always lack very much. For even the richest and most powerful people still feel they lack a great many things they believe are necessities. On the other hand, if a person remembers that all he has is a gift he has not earned...and everything he has is his only because of God’s great kindness, then he can be truly happy with his lot. (*Letter* #117)

# Rebbe Nachman's Torah

Compiled by Chaim Kramer

*The start of Parashat Matot highlights the difference between Moses and all the other prophets. Rebbe Nachman explains that this comparison has added lessons for us.*

**Moses spoke to the heads of the Israelite tribes, saying, "This is the word that God has commanded"** (Numbers 30:2).

All the other prophets prefaced their messages with the phrase "So said God," indicating a general understanding, the perception of something from a distance. But Moses achieved even more than they, for he also prophesied, "This is the word," indicating great specificity and clarity (Rashi).

Rebbe Nachman teaches that these two levels of prophecy are comparable to the two ways one can perform mitzvot.

First there is the person who performs mitzvot with the knowledge that he will receive a reward in the World to Come. He has no enjoyment from the mitzvah itself, and if he would not be given the World to Come as a reward, he would not do it. Just like the regular prophet who sees something from a distance, he performs the mitzvot for the reward they will bring him at a distant time, after this world.

Then there is the person who performs the mitzvot with such great joy that he has no desire for any reward in the World to Come. Instead, his only desire is that God provide him with the opportunity to do another mitzvah as a reward for the first mitzvah. Just like the clear and immediate prophecy of Moses, such a person reaps his reward in the here and now (*Likutey Moharan I*, 5:2).

\*

The Tcheriner Rav, Rabbi Nachman Goldstein, asks: Why did Rashi wait until this point in the Torah to explain the difference between Moses and the other prophets? We find that Moses said earlier in the Torah, "This is what God said" (see Exodus 35:4; Leviticus 8:5; *ibid.*, 17:2).

The answer is that God gave us the Torah and mitzvot in order to reward us. As such, we cannot know if the person who performs a mitzvah is doing it for the future reward, as in "So said God," or for the sake of God Himself. But when a person takes a vow to serve God in a certain manner, we see that he is going beyond the standard to serve God. This puts him in the category of "This is what God said," the level of Moses! (*Zimrat HaAretz I*, 5).

## SIDEPATH

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

**45.** After brokenheartedness comes joy. This later joy is a true sign of a broken heart.

**46.** The higher a faculty, the further it can reach. You can kick something with your foot, but throw it higher with your hand. You can reach still further with your voice, calling to a person very far away. Hearing reaches yet further, for you can hear sounds like gunfire from a great distance. Your sight reaches even further, seeing things in the sky.



The higher the faculty, the further it can reach. Highest of all is the mind, which can penetrate the loftiest heights. Therefore you must safeguard your mind very well.

**47.** You must be very worthy to be able to meditate for a given time each day and regret what you must.

Not everyone merits such mental tranquility each day. The day may pass and go without time to reflect. A person's whole life may pass without him ever once having time to really think.

Therefore you must make sure to set aside a specific time each day to calmly review your life. Consider what you are doing and ponder whether it is worthy that you devote your days to it.

Although a person may be able to concentrate at times, he cannot do so for any length of time. His power of concentration remains weak and cannot be maintained, and so he does not appreciate the foolishness of this world. But one who has a relaxed and penetrating mind can see that it is all vanity.



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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.*