

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Pattern of Our Lives

By Yossi Katz

**DO YOU OFTEN** wonder when you will finally be able to catch your breath? Do you ever say to yourself, “I thought I was finally done with these issues”? Well, life isn’t so easy after all. But this is also nothing new; in fact, Abraham had some very difficult life issues of his own.

**Famine:** There is a famine in Canaan. Abraham is forced to leave his land and go down to Egypt where his beautiful wife, Sarah, is abducted by Pharaoh himself. In the end, they return to Canaan, unharmed and enriched from Pharaoh’s coffers.

**Infertility:** Abraham is forced to wait many, many years until his righteous wife Sarah, at age 90, miraculously gives birth. Abraham is promised that that his spiritual legacy will be brought to fruition through this newborn – Isaac.

**Child sacrifice:** Abraham is asked to sacrifice his long awaited, precious son, Isaac. At the last moment, a ram takes the place of Isaac. Abraham immediately begins to think about Isaac’s future and finding a soul mate for him. He receives news that Rebecca has just been born, but Isaac is 37 years old!

**Wife’s death:** Abraham returns home from the challenge of his life. He and Isaac are both “in one piece,” but Sarah has just passed away. While in mourning, Abraham is forced to negotiate for the special burial place of the Cave of Machpelah from a very evil person named Ephron HaChiti. After paying a tremendously exaggerated asking price, he successfully buries his wife.

**Shidduchim:** Now Abraham must arrange this fitting match for his prized son. He sends his trusted servant Eliezer on mission impossible across the civilized world to get Rebecca away from the hands of her evil and conniving brother, Laban.

Do you see a pattern here? Every time Abraham felt his salvation had come, he was again tested with a different, unique challenge. He was never given “time off” and never arrived at some kind of spiritual finish line.

Webster’s Dictionary defines life as “the ability to grow, change, etc., that separates plants and animals from things like water or rocks.” The Talmud states that sleep is one-sixtieth of death (*Berakhot* 57b). Sleep means a lack of spiritual consciousness or awareness – this lack is akin to death. In order to LIVE life, we mustn’t be sleeping like a rock; rather, every challenge gives us the opportunity to grow and experience true change.

The pattern of Abraham’s life is our pattern as well. Whether in our personal growth or in more mundane matters, we each confront difficult moments and issues. When we begin to see our salvation, we thank God that we are free or that we have been successful. Although certainly we have experienced God’s kindness and should express our gratitude, we should also know that we aren’t done just yet. Yes, we have grown, we have experienced true closeness and deliverance from our Creator – but we are still very distant from the ultimate salvation.

God’s greatness is unfathomable (Psalms 145:3). Every single day is unique and special; every day is blessed with kindness and deliverance. At every moment, in His great wisdom, God seeks to bring us closer to our ultimate potential. His desire is for us to be spiritually compatible with Him. As we experience the difficulties of life, we can keep our cool by having realistic expectations. While we must reinforce our strength and our vision of success by appreciating our triumphs, at the same time, we need to take a step back and realize that we are in this for the long run. There are no easy answers, but there is an awesome Master plan.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Shiluach HaKen 5*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



Take heart and be strong! This world is utter vanity and nothing remains of a person except the Torah, prayer and good deeds he has accumulated. (*Letter #211*)

# The Dust of Mitzvot

By Gedaliah Fleer

**REBBE NACHMAN SAID** that a poor person is closer to God because he recognizes how much he has to rely on God for his every need. In fact, it would be a good thing if his followers were not wealthy. “Still,” Rebbe Nachman continued, “in each generation there will be a few of my people who will be wealthy enough to help others.”

R’ Moshe Yuroslovski was such a man. He distributed enormous sums to charity, as well as to the printing of Rebbe Nachman’s books. He would arrive in Uman quite a while before Rosh HaShanah, rent an enormous hall, and prepare a large amount of food.

He would then announce that anyone who wished to spend the month of Elul in Uman, preparing himself spiritually for Rosh HaShanah by praying at the Rebbe’s grave and in the Breslover *kloyz* (synagogue), could be his guest and eat his food. Hundreds of people came to Uman in Elul, and R’ Moshe also arranged places for them to sleep.

Once there wasn’t enough flour in Uman to prepare challahs for Rosh HaShanah. R’ Moshe traveled to a nearby city to obtain flour. He bought two sacks, and on the eve of the holiday found himself at the train station, waiting for the last train back to Uman.

At the station, R’ Moshe noticed other Breslover chassidim who were also on their way to Uman. He asked them to help carry the heavy sacks on to the train, but the chassidim were afraid they would miss the crowded train, and refused.

R’ Moshe told the chassidim that this was for the Rebbe’s Rosh HaShanah. “And if you don’t want to help me,” he added, “then let me tell you that, God willing, I will make it to Uman, but you will not.”

That is exactly what happened.

The train was completely filled with passengers, but since everyone was afraid of getting dirty from the sacks of flour that R’ Moshe was carrying, they moved aside to make room for him to enter. The others, however, couldn’t get in.

This story shows that when a person wants to do a mitzvah with his whole heart and is willing to act with self-sacrifice, God helps him accomplish his goal.

## SIDEPATH

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

172. Rebbe Nachman once gave his old *tallit* to one of his esteemed followers. He said, “Be very careful with this *tallit*. I shed a tear for as many threads that are in this *tallit*, until I understood the true meaning of a *tallit*.”

173. Something happened in Medvedevka that caused the Rebbe to become upset with R’ Shimon (his first disciple). The Rebbe said, “I am banishing you to the other side of the Don River.” A short time later, R’ Shimon traveled to the vicinity of the Don River, intending to remain for a short while, but was forced to remain there for several years.



While R’ Shimon was away, the Rebbe moved from Zlatipolia and settled in Breslov. By the time R’ Shimon returned, the Rebbe had

already lived here for two or three years. The Rebbe told R’ Shimon, “I have advanced as much between the time you left and today, as I advanced between the day I was born and the time you left.”

174. Shortly before the Rebbe moved from Breslov, which was towards the end of the Rebbe’s life, he told R’ Shimon, “Look at me today. You know how much I struggled and toiled to achieve what I did until now. I can now accomplish this much in a single day.”

At a later time, the Rebbe told him that he could accomplish that much in a single hour. Still later, he said that he could do it all in a single moment.



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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.*