

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT VAYEIRA • 5776 • VOL. 6 NO. 4

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## The Real Master Key

By Yossi Katz

A **GLANCE AT** the new-release shelf tells us everything we need to know about the latest book crazes and popular styles. Titles like *7 Steps to Success* or *5 Master Keys to a Meaningful Relationship* have become the standard format for marketing a bestseller. This is for good reason: our lives are so very hectic that we crave a concrete road map for achieving whatever skill we find necessary right now. Nothing appeals more than a step-by-step guide by which we can track our progress in real time.

But while a quick fix sounds great, it is also precisely the simplicity and easy premise of these books and approaches that eventually hampers the results. We begin enthusiastically with the few quick and easy steps, only to soon discover life's many challenges and complications. When success does not come soon enough, we gradually lose interest. Other times, we find quick results, but those "five keys" end up being "five keys too many" to consistently keep up with. Again, we lose our resolve and start looking for the next quick fix.

A therapist friend once told me after completing an expensive training course that he was now ready to teach others his new skill set. I asked him, "Surely you will get some experience first?" He jokingly replied that the idea was to learn the course and then enthusiastically encourage new students to sign up; actually practicing the therapy wasn't as lucrative or easy.

This week's *parashah* tells us that God appeared to Abraham while "he was sitting (*yoshev*) at the entrance to his tent during the hottest part of the day" (Genesis 18:1). The word *yoSheV* implies waiting a very long time, as in "You dwelled (*veteiShVu*) in Kadesh many days" (Deuteronomy 1:46). Abraham was not just physically sitting – he was waiting and waiting for a spiritual success, he was waiting to make a lasting change. "During the hottest part of the day" – all the while, his physical desires were burning passionately within him, but he didn't

care. He stayed resolute despite his physicality screaming contradictory messages.

The key to real change is being able to consistently yearn, desire and dream about becoming a different person, despite feeling opposing and contradictory passions, desires and temptations. Just because our actions imply that we are no closer to the goal doesn't mean we aren't closer to the goal! The closer we get to the "entrance of the tent" – to real, internal change – the greater are the counter-forces seeking to deter us. We may be mere inches from the finish line, but sadly turn back at the very last moment.

I remember once being challenged in a certain way and struggling with something for many years. I finally accepted that no matter if I faltered again and again, I wanted to change and would not be put down by those temporary roadblocks, no matter how long they lasted. I would continue to hope and pray for change and take pride in this decision, knowing that God appreciated every drop of effort I invested into this endeavor. It was precisely at that point that I felt the power to finally accomplish what had always eluded me. Shortly after, I was finally successful.

If we are willing take the few moments to contemplate what is really important and missing in our lives, we can resolve to become different and happier people. We have nothing to fear and there is no place for guilt feelings. All we need is a good measure of holy *chutzpah* and a stubborn attitude. May we muster up this courage and hang in there until we merit experiencing "And God appeared to him." Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Ishut 4, 10-19*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



A person can always direct his thoughts as he chooses, since it is impossible to think two thoughts at once. (*Letter #284*)

# The Shining Letters

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**IN 1802 REBBE NACHMAN** moved to Breslov. R' Dovid Chayale's, who had served as the Rav of Ladizin until that time, followed him. Rebbe Nachman loved to hear R' Dovid share his stories and Torah insights. One of his stories in particular led to the publication of Rebbe Nachman's *Sefer HaMidot*:

*Once there was a famous Torah scholar who was blessed with a virtuous daughter. When she came of age, he began to seek a match for her. Eventually he chose one of his own students, and a betrothal agreement was drawn up.*

*After the wedding, the young man developed in Torah to such an extent that a *maggid* (heavenly messenger) began to visit him every night to teach him. The young man decided to keep the matter to himself, but one important fact escaped him. This heavenly agent did not originate in holiness. It was the fallout of a certain sin he had committed.*

*The *maggid* began pressuring him to commit a grievous sin, explaining that it would bring about many wondrous spiritual rectifications. His logic was so persuasive that the young man didn't know what to do. After a long period of doubt, he finally confided in his wife, who was truly God-fearing. She immediately ran to her father to ask for help.*

*The scholar tried to convince his son-in-law to refuse further contact with the *maggid*, but the young man was unsure of the advice—he had learned so much Torah from his visitor! So the scholar said that it was possible to check the worthiness of the messenger.*

*“Every angel has glowing letters of the Divine Name inscribed on its forehead. Messengers that are not rooted in holiness, however, don't shine with the Name; upon them, it is dark. Tonight I will give you amulets to protect you, but check for yourself. Then you will have no doubt.”*

*The son-in-law followed his instructions, and it was only by virtue of the amulets that he escaped with his life from the encounter.*

After hearing the story, Rebbe Nachman declared, “But we have our own shining aleph-bet letters, which are rooted in holiness!” And he took out his manuscript of the *Sefer Hamidot* (*The Aleph-Bet Book*), and declared that it was time to share it with the world.

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 57-61; Sefer HaMidot 2*

## SIDEPATH

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

284. There were many youths in the community who prayed with great feeling and enthusiasm. Others would disturb them and irritate them. When the youths complained, their detractors answered, “If you have true feeling and are really bound up in your prayers, you should not hear any disturbance. Your devotion should be enough to block out everything else.”



The Rebbe said, “The truth is that this is no argument. A great tzaddik may pray with great strength and attachment to God, but he can still be disturbed. No matter how great his enthusiasm, no matter how deeply he is bound up in prayer, he can still be greatly disturbed by one who makes fun of him and disturbs him.”

285. The Rebbe was once speaking of the awesome greatness of the Torah and its wondrous secrets. He said, “The entire *Tikkuney Zohar* [a work of seventy chapters] is but a commentary on the one word *Bereshit* (‘In the beginning’), the first word of the Torah. Thousands of volumes would not suffice to explain all the secrets found in the *Tikkuney Zohar*.”

“Take the next word, *bara* (‘He created’). A volume equal to the *Tikkuney Zohar* could also be written on it. It would contain an equal number of mysteries. Now understand the depth of our holy Torah. A *Tikkuney Zohar* could be written on each and every word. The Torah's greatness is beyond the ability of language to describe.”



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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.*