

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Keep to the Right

By Yossi Katz

OUR PARASHAH BEGINS by God commanding Abraham, “Go to you” (Genesis 12:1). This seems very strange. You can be told to go to a different place or to a different person, but what does it mean to go to oneself? Yet what if one’s own reality were skewed; if someone was totally removed from their true essence, would it not be necessary for them to find themselves?

Abraham’s journey to the Promised Land is the precursor to our own individual journeys to holiness and spiritual growth. Not only was Abraham not born on giant’s shoulders, he grew up in a toxic environment of idol worship and falsity. In order for him to reach his destination, he had to embark on a path of self-discovery by ridding himself of all the external evils and influences that surrounded him.

The *parashah* therefore states, “Go from your land and from your birthplace and from your father’s house” (ibid.). Go from your land – and the many blinding false attitudes and beliefs prevalent in society. Go from your birthplace – and the spiritual deficiencies and bad nature you were created with as a result of your origins. Go from your father’s house – and your family’s pride and mistaken beliefs that nurtured you. Only by leaving everything behind and fully connecting with his true essence – his own holy *neshamah* (soul) – could Abraham reach the Promised Land.

As we embark on our own spiritual journeys and attempt to connect to God, we are also surrounded by many layers of darkness and confusion. We desperately seek change and want to experience more from life, but this often seems like an impossible task. This is expressed in the interplay between Abraham and Lot. As Abraham obeyed and left behind the many falsehoods that were

holding him back, the Torah says, “And Lot went with him” (ibid. 12:4). The name *LoT* hints to *LiTusa* (cursed) (*Zohar, Lekh Lekha*, 78). Just as the conniving Serpent lied to Eve and was cursed, so too, Lot’s goal was to surround and confuse Abraham and prevent him from reaching his true destination.

How did Abraham react? “Let there not be a conflict between us or between our shepherds ... Depart from me. If you go left, I will go right. If you go right, I will go left” (ibid. 13:8-9). In other words, “You choose which part you would like, and I will take the other option.”

But the Midrash explains it this way: “Rabbi Chanina Bar Yitzchok explained that Abraham didn’t say ‘*v’esmola*’ (I will go left), but rather ‘*v’asmila*’ (I will ‘left him’) – in all events, I will make that man [Lot] go to the left” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 13). Whereas the left represents falsehood, the right represents truth. According to the Midrash, Abraham wanted to make sure that he was always on the right side – the side of truth.

We each have our own version of “Lot” following us around. Society’s opinions and baggage from our past seek to hold us back. Nevertheless, we have the ability to stand firm by remaining focused on the truth with utter simplicity. If we always remind ourselves of God’s constant reality in our lives, “Lot” cannot dislodge us from our true place. At the same time, sometimes he appears to be on our right. He disguises himself and makes it seem as if it is a *mitzvah* to listen to him. For example, he may convince us to copy a righteous individual, but this person may have an entirely different mission! The Midrash teaches that in this case, too, Lot is a distraction. Although he appears to be on our right, he is really on our left.

We must always seek our true essence so that we may connect to God’s truth, no matter where we may seem to stand.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Geneivah 5

Down With Negativity!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

At times Rebbe Nachman reminisced about the challenges he faced in his spiritual growth in his youth. He would speak about the obstacles he had faced, the times he felt he wasn't progressing despite his strong desire to learn and connect with God. Even so, he always encouraged himself and refused to give up. Early in his life, he developed the habit of always making a fresh start.

That kind of thinking is rare in young people – both because it doesn't come naturally to them, and because the adults around them don't encourage them to think that way. Even with Rebbe Nachman's mature way of thinking, he felt that an outside source of support would have helped him immeasurably in his youth. As he put it, "If only I had had someone to encourage me not to give in, telling me to make every effort, no matter what ... I would have accomplished in a day what took me a year!"

Negative thinking is so pervasive. It's all too easy to sap ourselves of vital energy as we focus on our faults and failings. Hyper-focusing on what's broken gets in the way of making the repairs. Rebbe Nachman strongly advised against wallowing in that kind of self-censure. "Don't let your smallness get in the way of your greatness!" he would cry.

If someone really is trapped in negative behaviors, from where should he draw the encouragement to shake them off? Rebbe Nachman taught that even such a person should never give up. Instead, he should delve into the ideas that the Rebbe shared in the lesson *Azamra!* (I Will Sing!) (*Likutey Moharan I*, 282). Rebbe Nachman enjoined his followers to live by this teaching.

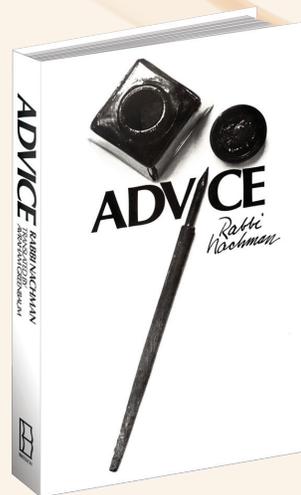
Once, one of Rebbe Nachman's students appealed to him for help in changing his negative attitudes and actions. "How am I ever going to get out of the mess that I'm in?" he asked. Rebbe Nachman replied, "You need to do whatever good you can. As long as you persist in doing whatever good you can – as long as you're diligent at it – the bad will eventually fall away and only the good will remain."

Based on Shivtey HaRan #6; Siach Sarfey Kodesh II:34

SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

UNDERSTANDING. 25. It is not sufficient merely to guard yourself from alien ideas. You must always try to bring new vitality into your mind, and in this way your soul will be revived and refreshed. For the mind is the manifestation of the soul (*Likutey Moharan I*, 35:2).



26. None are more prone to the attacks of the evil inclination, the "Primordial Serpent," than those who study the Torah. Because of their deeper understanding and the higher level of their souls, the evil inclination makes redoubled efforts to insinuate itself within them and make them sin. It is therefore essential for them to guard their minds from evil thoughts, because these are the

basis on which the evil inclination builds (*ibid. I*, 35:1).

27. The mind — and therefore the soul — is renewed through sleep. When the mind is tired from exertion, sleep refreshes it. While one is asleep, the mind — that is, the soul — enters into the category of faith. This is expressed in the verse "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness" (*Lamentations 3:22-23; Likutey Moharan I*, 35:3).



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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.