



THE WINGS OF THE SUN

Traditional Jewish Healing in Theory and Practice

By [Rabbi Avraham Greenbaum](#)

Chapter 19

Faith

During the two years from the time of giving the discourse "Sound the Shofar - Dominion" until his death in the fall of 1810, Rebbe Nachman further developed and expanded on many of its themes in his major teachings. In "Sound the Shofar - Dominion," Rebbe Nachman taught that we can only come to true prayer by bringing deeper knowledge and awareness of God - da'at - into our hearts. But even more basic is the foundation on which this knowledge and awareness necessarily rest: simple faith in God.

Not only is faith the cornerstone of the whole of Judaism. It is also the root of Rebbe Nachman's path of healing, because without faith, prayer is meaningless. Moreover, for Rebbe Nachman, the key to health and healing is simchah, joy, and as we have seen, the only way to develop a truly joyous outlook in a world where good and evil are mixed up is by cultivating strong faith that everything is under God's providence and that therefore, no matter what happens, ultimately everything must be for the very best.

The subject of faith pervades "Sound the Shofar - Dominion": flawed faith - "idolatry" - is one of the negative traits that destroys prayer, and must be countered by cultivating perfect faith in God (#10). During the last two years of his life, Rebbe Nachman put ever stronger emphasis on faith, and he made it the central theme of his longest teaching, "Sound the Shofar - Faith," (Likutey Moharan II, 5), given on Rosh Hashanah (September 11) 1809. The bulk of this discourse is devoted to a detailed exploration of all the tikkunim (rectifications) that have to be accomplished in order to bring about the complete restoration of faith within the Jewish People and indeed in the entire world (see above pp. 97ff.). But the first section of the discourse, a translation of which is provided below, explicitly discusses the relationship between faith (or the lack of it) on the one hand and illness and healing on the other.

Before turning to "Sound the Shofar - Faith," let us first consider what Rebbe Nachman actually means when he talks about "faith." One of the clearest expositions of the fundamentals of faith as taught by Rebbe Nachman is contained in a short work entitled "Seven Pillars of Faith" by R. Yitzchak Breiter

(1886-1943?). R. Yitzchak brought Breslover Chassidut to pre-war Poland and was the leader of the Breslover movement there until his death in Treblinka at the hands of the Nazi persecutors. The following is adapted from Seven Pillars of Faith.

Fundamentals of Faith

1. God controls everything

The first principle of faith is to know and understand that everything in the entire universe is under God's control. This includes everything that happens to you personally, both spiritually and materially, including what you yourself do, whether deliberately or unwittingly, wilfully or under compulsion: everything is from God.

Appearances may sometimes seem to suggest otherwise, yet faith is "blind" in the sense that the believer does not pay attention to the external appearance of this world but to the underlying reality. There may be many philosophical questions about faith, but most of them are unanswerable. If you are prepared to accept the Torah unconditionally, you will eventually see with your very own eyes the truth of what you believe in.

Sincerely following the Torah pathway enables us to experience a dimension of existence which is otherwise simply inaccessible. You may be surrounded by radio waves, but you need a receiver to convert them into something you can experience with your senses. Faith is the "receiver" through which you experience the Divine. The essence of faith is believing that the One God controls everything.

2. Freedom

What we ourselves do is ultimately controlled by God, but this is concealed from us by our own egos, which give us the sensation of being independent and separate from God. It is inherent in our make-up to think that our thoughts and actions are our own, and that it is "my power and the strength of my hand" (Deuteronomy 8:17) that makes things happen in our lives.

God created us like this in order to give us free will. Our task is to turn to God of our own free will, in order to discover the truth for ourselves and see that, in actual fact, God controls everything, including our thoughts, feelings and actions. In this world, we are given the freedom to make our own choices. Then, depending on the choices we make, God either reveals Himself to us or conceals Himself even more, according to a system of strict justice.

3. Action

Even though all things in both the spiritual and material realms are in God's hands, this does not mean that our role is passive, waiting for God to do everything. God arranged the universe in such a way as to give us freedom of action, whether in regard to carrying out the mitzvot, earning a living, finding a marriage partner, etc. We have to act - but always with the understanding that

our need to act in this world is a test, to see whether we will exercise our free will in accordance with the Torah or not.

Whether in carrying out the mitzvot or in acting in the material world to make a living and attend to our other needs, we have to understand that, although it is up to us to take the initiative and act as if everything is up to us, ultimately everything depends on God. No matter what we feel we ought to do, whether in our spiritual or material lives, our first step should always be to ask God to guide us in what we do and to bless our efforts with success.

4. Reverses

When things appear to turn out badly for us, we have to accept that this is God's will and that whatever happens is for the best. Even when things go wrong because of something we ourselves may have thought, said or done, we have to accept that this was also brought about by God. While we should feel contrite about our sins and make every effort to do better in the future, it is pointless to live with regrets about the past, because ultimately whatever happened came about through the will of God. Even when you observe the mitzvot and pray but feel that God is not responding, you must have faith that God is paying attention to everything you do, and that "if you get no answer, this is also an answer."

Other people are also free agents, yet, paradoxical as it may seem, everything they do is ultimately controlled by God. Therefore you should understand that if someone insults you or harms you in some way, this has been sent to you from God. If you respond by getting upset and venting your anger, it is a sign that you do not have complete faith in God's control over every detail of the Creation. When people insult you, it is God's way of cleansing you of your sins. If you respond with anger, it is as if you are refusing to accept His reprimand.

If things go against you, be patient. Take a deep breath and accept this as God's will. If somebody hurts you in some way and you keep silent, accepting it as atonement for your sins, this causes the outer veil of concealment to be removed, and God's control over the entire Creation becomes manifest.

5. Personal growth

Your spiritual development is also under God's control. You may feel a desire to grow in a specific area and accomplish something holy, but as long as you are not ready to achieve what you want, things will be arranged in such a way as to hold you back - either by external obstacles or through some idea that becomes implanted in your own mind to prevent you from reaching your goal. This does not mean that God is rejecting you, but He knows that, in the long run, this will be the best way to bring you to the ultimate good. The purpose of holding you back is to prompt you to cry out to God to help you rise from your current level and to bring you nearer your true goal.

Even when you experience a breakthrough in your spiritual growth, do not imagine that from now on you will always be able to maintain your new level. Anything you may have achieved until now came about only through the love and help of God, and the only way you will be able to stand up to future

challenges is also through His help.

While you must always try to do your part to develop and deepen your observance of the mitzvot, the central focus of your efforts should be your prayers to God for His help. Prayer reveals that everything is in God's power and that "it is in His hand to cause all things to grow and become strong" (I Chronicles 1, 29:2). Ask God that no matter what may happen to you, you should always remember that the main thing is to pray.

6. Revelation and guidance:

Since God is everywhere and in all things, everything we experience is actually a communication from God. This includes our inner thoughts and feelings. Even negative thoughts and feelings - heaviness, lack of enthusiasm, depression and the like - are from God. Whatever you hear, see, or experience in life, whether from people you know or from complete strangers - everything is a call to you from God. Through these communications everything you need in order to grow and attain spiritual perfection is sent to you.

We often find ourselves faced with unclear or even contradictory messages. These are also sent to us with a purpose: to give us free will and thereby to test us. The way to sort out which messages to follow and which to ignore is through evaluating everything in the light of Torah teaching. The more you familiarize yourself with the Torah outlook on life, and especially the Halakhah, which gives clear guidance about what is right and what is wrong, the more you will be able to interpret the various messages.

7. The Wise Man-Tzaddik:

Faith in God includes faith in the tzaddikim whom God sends into the world to teach us how to transcend our lowly state and fulfil our spiritual destiny. It is not enough to accept that God gave the Torah to Moses on Sinai. The Torah tells us that in every generation we can resolve our doubts and questions about what is the right path to choose only by turning "to the judge who lives in those days" (Deuteronomy 17:9).

God sends Wise Men in every age to lift Jewish souls out of our exile. "You must do according to what they tell you... take care to act in accordance with everything they teach you... Do not turn aside from what they tell you either right or left" (ibid. 10-11).

The main thing is faith

"Sound the Shofar - Faith" is far too long and complex to be translated here in its entirety. The subject of healing is addressed directly mainly in the first two sections of the discourse, which make up about one seventh of the teaching as a whole. These two sections are presented here in full.

In the opening section Rebbe Nachman tells us that the collapse of faith causes terrible afflictions to come into the world, and he gives a careful analysis of why, in the absence of faith, neither medicine, prayer, ancestral merit or even the

cries and groans of the invalid are of any avail. This analysis is important for the light it throws upon Rebbe Nachman's understanding of the causes of illness: the idea of disharmony among the four bodily elements of air, fire, water and earth is discussed here more fully than anywhere else in his writings.

One of the striking features of the concept of faith as Rebbe Nachman presents it is that not only does faith or the lack of it affect the life and outlook of the individual. More than this, it has a profound influence on the workings of the physical world. Thus in discussing the healing powers of medicinal plants and herbs, Rebbe Nachman tells us that not only do the rains necessary for plant growth fall in the merit of faith, but that even the strength of the healing powers of plants as governed by the seasons and the locations in which they grow also depends upon faith. Moreover, faith is the key to maintaining harmony among the four bodily elements, and in the absence of faith, no medicine has the power to restore harmony among them so as to bring true healing.

Since faith is the vital element in all healing, the only remedy is to "dig down for the waters that nurture faith": these are the "waters of counsel" - the spiritual pathways that enable us to deepen our faith. "Like deep waters, so is counsel in the heart of man, but a man of understanding will draw it up" (Proverbs 20:5). Many of the later sections of "Sound the Shofar - Faith" are concerned with this "man of understanding" who offers wise counsel: this is the Tzaddik, whose Torah teachings guide us in building and deepening our faith. But when the crisis of faith is very deep, the first step towards reclaiming and restoring our shattered faith must be to cry and scream from the heart alone without words. Rebbe Nachman's evocative teaching about the wordless "cry from the heart" strikes home very powerfully in our own confused times, when words seem so inadequate to express the pain in the hearts of so many. (For excerpts from Reb Noson's prayer in Likutey Tefilot based on this discourse, see p. 423ff.)

Sound the Shofar - Faith

Likutey Moharan II, 5

#1. The main thing is faith. Every person must search within himself and strengthen himself in faith. For there are people suffering from the most terrible afflictions, and the only reason they are ill is because of the collapse of faith. It is written: "God will send you wondrous plagues, great and faithful plagues and great and faithful sicknesses" (Deuteronomy 28:59). The plagues and sicknesses are called "faithful," because they come on account of a lack of faith. The collapse of faith causes "wondrous" plagues, for which neither medicine nor prayer nor the merit of the fathers are of any avail.

For Rebbe Nachman, medicine, prayer and ancestral merit all have the power to bring healing. But in his careful analysis in the following paragraphs, he shows that each of them depends upon faith, which is why, with the collapse of faith, there can be no cure for the "wondrous" plagues he speaks of.

Medicines

In the next two paragraphs Rebbe Nachman gives two reasons why medicines

have no power in the absence of faith. For one thing, our faith and our prayers to God are preconditions for the orderly rainfall needed for the growth of medicinal plants. Secondly, their medicinal powers depend upon the seasons in which they mature (time) and the locations in which they grow (space), and for Rebbe Nachman, the temporal and spatial order of the plant kingdom depends on faith. Further on ("And it is because of this very fact itself...") Rebbe Nachman adds a third reason for the ineffectiveness of medicines when faith is lacking: this is that the harmonious balance of the four bodily elements depends upon faith (see also [Likutey Moharan I, 57:1](#)).

For all medicines are based on herbs and plants, and these grow only through faith, as our Rabbis said (Ta'anit 8a): "The rains come down only in the merit of faith, as it is written (Psalms 85:12), ' Truth sprouts forth from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven'" [i.e. when there is truth and faith in the world below, God responds with righteousness and sends the rains]. When there is faith, the rains come down and the plants grow and then there are medicines. But through the collapse of faith there are no rains, and then there are no medicines.

In addition, the healing powers of the various herbs and plants depend on factors relating to the natural order of the plant kingdom, in particular the places and seasons in which the different herbs and plants grow. There are plants whose healing powers are present only when the plants are harvested before they reach a third of their full growth: after this their potency leaves them and they have no power to heal. Other herbs possess healing powers only when they mature and fall by themselves. Each plant develops according to its own unique timetable as laid down by the natural order. Similarly, plant life is governed by location. One place is suitable for one kind of plant while another place favors different plants. The curative powers of herbs and plants depend entirely on the order of the plant kingdom as governed by factors of time and space. And the order of the plant kingdom depends upon faith. This we see from the saying of the Rabbis: "' Faith' (Isaiah 33:6) - this is the Order of Seeds" (Shabbat 31a, where each of the six concepts mentioned in Isaiah 33:6 is associated with one of the six Orders of the Mishnah). Faith maintains the temporal and spatial order of the plant kingdom, thereby giving plants their powers to heal. Therefore, because of the collapse of faith, medicines are of no avail.

Prayer and the merit of the fathers

Prayer is also a matter of faith, as it is written, "And his hands were faith" (Exodus 17:12), which the Aramaic Targum translates to mean "he spread them forth in prayer."

Even when a person has little or no merit in his own right, the merits of his ancestors may stand in his favor to mitigate the divine judgment against him and bring him healing.

The merit of the fathers is also revealed only through faith, as it is written, "The flowers appear in the earth" (Song of Songs 2:12). "The flowers" are the patriarchs (Zohar, Introduction 1b) and they appear and are revealed "in the earth," which symbolizes faith, as it is written, "Dwell in the land and feed off faith" (Psalms

37:3). For faith corresponds to the earth element, and "earth is the vessel for all [of the other three elements, viz. water, fire and air, which correspond to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob]" (Tikkuney Zohar #70, 120b).

Rebbe Nachman now summarizes the main point, which is that none of the three factors discussed so far can effect a cure when faith is lacking.

We therefore see that through the collapse of faith neither medicine nor prayer nor ancestral merit can avail the sick person, because all of them depend on faith.

Cries and groans

Rebbe Nachman now adds a new point: without faith, the sick person cannot be helped by cries and groans. This is because, as we will see below (#2, penultimate paragraph), the voice is made up of the three higher elements of fire, water and air [the voice is air, and when it comes out of the mouth it is warm (= fire) and moist(= water)]. But these can only be revealed in all their power through the earth element, which is faith. Without faith, cries and groans have no power to heal.

Neither can the sick person be helped by cries and groans. Sometimes such cries can help a sick person by arousing pity for him [in Heaven]. But because of the collapse of faith this too is of no avail, since these groans and cries are a voice without words. The voice is in the category of the patriarchs, because the voice is made up of fire, water and air (Tikkun 69) which are the three fathers. But they are revealed only through faith, the earth element, which is the vessel of all of them. Because of the collapse of faith these cries also cannot help.

The four elements

In the following section Rebbe Nachman adds a further point: faith, the earth element, is necessary to maintain harmony among the three higher elements of air, fire and water. Illness is the result of disharmony among the elements, but although medicines have the power to strengthen or weaken one or other of them and thereby influence the balance between them, lasting harmony depends upon faith, and without it, medicines are of no avail.

And it is because of this very fact itself [that the earth element is the vessel of the three higher elements] that medicines cannot help. For basically a person is healed through bringing harmony among the elements. There are four elements: fire, water, air and earth. It needs a great expert who understands through his medical expertise how to balance the elements contained in each of the different herbs in order to produce the remedy needed by this particular invalid given the particular element which is weak and damaged in his case. (The harmony of the elements is also involved in projecting the voice properly.) When faith is lacking, the balance of the four elements is undermined, since all of them are revealed through the earth element, which is "the vessel of all of them," and therefore there is no cure for him.

The waters of counsel

Having diagnosed the essential problem, which is the collapse of faith, Rebbe Nachman now begins his explanation of the remedy, which is to rebuild and restore it. The key is to discover the "waters of counsel" that nurture faith. The world needs the guidance of an outstanding Sage in order to return to faith. The whole of the remainder of this discourse is devoted to an elaborate, detailed examination of all the steps that are necessary in order to restore faith among the Jewish People and in the world as a whole. But to initiate the whole process and find the "waters of counsel," it is necessary to cry out silently to God from the very depths of our hearts.

#2. The remedy is to dig down until we find the waters which nurture faith. These are the waters of counsel - the spiritual pathways which enable us to deepen our faith, as it is written, "I will acknowledge Your Name, for You have done wonders, [sending] counsels from afar, nurturing faith" (Isaiah 25:1). True spiritual counsel nurtures faith, enabling it to grow.

True counsel springs from the depths of the heart. When the crisis of faith is so great that even cries without words cannot help, one has to cry from the heart alone: "Their heart cried out to God" (Lamentations 2:18). The heart alone cries without our letting out a sound. "From the depths I call out to God" (Psalms 130:1) - from the depths of the heart. And from the depths of the heart comes guidance, for "like deep waters, so is counsel in the heart of man" (Proverbs 20:5). When shouts and screams no longer help because faith has collapsed, one must cry from the depths of the heart without letting out a sound. This is how true counsel is revealed, for "like deep waters, so is counsel in the heart of man."

And through the true guidance and counsel that are revealed in the world (i.e. each person knows in his own heart what he has to do) faith is able to grow, as it is written, "Counsels from afar, nurturing faith." Then everything discussed above can be put right. For true counsel is a "wonder" - "I will acknowledge Your Name, for You have done wonders, counsels from afar...." This makes it possible to heal the "wondrous plagues" sent by God. Prayer also brings about "wonders," as it is written, "Awesome in praises [i.e. prayer], doing wonders" (Exodus 15:11). The same is true of ancestral merit: "In front of their fathers He performed wonders" (Psalms 78:12).

All these ideas are expressed in the verse, "And I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them" (Hosea 11:3). "And I taught Ephraim to walk (, tiR'GaLti)": this is the concept of counsel, as in "the people that follow in your footsteps (, beRaG'Lecha)" (Exodus 11:8) - i.e. those who follow your counsel (see Rashi ad loc.). "Taking them by the arms" is an allusion to the merits of the fathers, for the patriarchs are called the "arms of the universe" (Deuteronomy 33:27). "But they did not know that I healed them" - for in truth, all this brings healing.

Dark night and the light of day

The following passage depicts dawning faith as the light of day that dispels the darkness of night. Many people who have suffered illness know only too well the agonizing trials and torments suffered during long nights. Yet it is precisely

during the darkness of "night" - the night of exile, personal and national - that we must strive to deepen our faith in God. The light of the dawning day is the light of divine redemption and the revelation that God is in complete control of the entire creation on every level.

The search for guidance is like the creation of the world, at first dark and then light. The absence of guidance is "darkness," as it is written, "Who is this who darkens counsel with words?" (Job 38:2). But afterwards, when guidance and counsel, "deep waters," are revealed, God "reveals deep things out of the darkness" (ibid. 12:22). The greater the light of guidance and counsel, and the more that darkness, doubt and confusion are put to flight, the stronger faith becomes. It is written, "and Your faith in the nights" (Psalms 92:3). It is "in the nights" that faith grows. That is to say, the more the night advances and the closer we come to the light of day, the stronger faith becomes. As the night continues to advance and we come closer and closer to the light of day, so faith keeps growing little by little, until with the light of day, faith is complete, as it is written, "New in the mornings, great is Your faith" (Lamentations 3:23).

And with the light of day comes healing, as it is written, "Then your light will break forth as the morning, and your healing will spring forth speedily" (Isaiah 58:8). In short, as true guidance and counsel are revealed and the "light" shines forth out of the "darkness," faith grows and matures, bringing healing: "Then will your light break forth as the morning, and your healing will spring forth speedily."

This explains the meaning of the saying of the Rabbis: "What is the reason why the goats walk at the head of the flock and only afterwards come the sheep? It is like the creation of the world: at first darkness, and then light" (Shabbat 77b). The idea of the "goats" (, IZim) is an allusion to faith, as it is written, "God is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength (, OZ)" (Psalms 93:1), and "righteousness will be the girdle of his loins, and faith the girdle of his reins" (Isaiah 11:5). "And afterwards the sheep": the word for "sheep" (, IMRi) is an allusion to healing: " , AMaR - God said, and I will heal him" (Isaiah 57:19). The three letters of the word ' ' , AMaR, are the initial letters of ' (Esh), ' (Mayim) and ' (Ruach), "fire, water and air," from which healing comes.

In other words, on a deeper level, the question about the goats and the sheep is one about why healing essentially depends upon faith: why it is first necessary to develop one's faith, and only then does healing come? The answer the Rabbis give is, "Like the creation of the world: at first there was darkness, and then light." That is, the concept with which the question is answered is that of the creation of the world, where first there was darkness and then the light was revealed. Similarly, true counsel and guidance are revealed out of the darkness: "uncovering deep things out of the darkness." It is through counsel and guidance that faith grows strong. Only with the "light of day" is faith perfect. This is why healing can come only through faith, because healing comes only with the light of day: "Then will your light break forth as the morning, and your healing will spring forth speedily."

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[BACK TO WINGS OF THE SUN HOMEPAGE](#)

[AZAMRA HOMEPAGE](#)

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