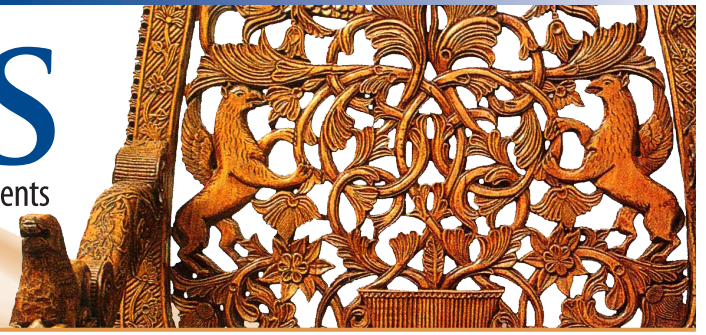


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Living in the Here & Now

By Yossi Katz

**IT WAS ONE** of the greatest challenges of all time, the greatest sacrifice ever asked of a man: to offer up his own son. We often explain the difficulty of Abraham's test according to the pain a loving father must endure in killing his beloved child; or because Abraham, being the worldwide leader of monotheistic religion, was being asked to do something that mimicked the lowliness of the pagan religions. But let us look deeper.

God Himself came to Abraham and asked him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham understood better than anyone else what God was all about. He knew that God is compassionate, and that everything He does is for our good. Abraham had already been tested many times, and each time he demonstrated his faith in God and subsequently experienced his personal salvation. So why was this challenge considered so much more difficult than the others he had already faced? Why is it so great that on Rosh HaShanah – the Day of Judgment – we read this story in defense of our very lives?

The answer is that Abraham's challenge had nothing to do with the actual slaughter of his son. He was absolutely ready to perform this faithfully. But God had just said that Isaac would be his progeny and his spiritual legacy. And now He was telling him to kill Isaac. Wouldn't anyone be confused by the conflicting messages he was receiving? But Abraham was made of greater stuff. He did not question God's ability to make one out of two seemingly conflicting things. He was able to rise to the level where faith in God became his personal reality, even when all his senses screamed out, "This is impossible!"

The Torah hints to Abraham's faith in the verse, "And he saw the place [of the future Temple] from afar ... And he called the name of that place *HaShem-Yireh*, as it is said to this day, 'In the mount where God is seen'" (Genesis 22:4-14). On his way to killing his son, Abraham saw the future site of the Temple. He understood that the Jewish people would be born and that God's Presence would one day rest there.

True, this was very "far" fetched, considering the task he was currently charged with; nevertheless, he strengthened his faith in God and behaved as though he saw God's very promise unfolding before him.

How did Abraham reach this level? By focusing on the "today" and the "now." The exact details of how things were going to work out mattered little to him. God asked him to do something, and he put all his concentration and devotion into fulfilling His request.

Elijah the prophet was asked, "When will you come [to usher in the Messianic era]?" He answered, "Today, if you will heed my voice" (*Sanhedrin* 98a). One may ask: Certainly there were many great Tzaddikim who completely fulfilled God's precepts; if so, why has Mashiach not yet arrived? Although it's impossible for us to grasp, these great Tzaddikim actually did bring the Mashiach. Yes, it is currently being withheld due to the actions of others, but the day will come when their actions will be recalled and we will see that, indeed, Mashiach did come.

Each of us has similar questions. Challenged by various tests, we often we feel we've given it our best, but we don't see our salvation. When will our personal "Mashiach" finally come? Like Abraham, we must be capable of lucidly envisioning our future redemption: yes, the day will come. More importantly, we have to live in the present. The "how" and "when" is in the hands of God, for God is capable of creating one even out of two opposites. But we are capable of focusing on what matters right now, and by living this way, we, too, can make peace out of all our conflicts. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halachot, Matanah 5*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



A person must take his burdens, his cares – in fact, everything that weighs on his heart and mind – and cast them all onto God. (Letter #64)

# Showdown in the Synagogue

By Yehudis Golshevsky

A **SECULAR JEW** worked as a scribe in the government office in Uman. He was known as “*der Deutschel*,” meaning, someone of German descent.

Somehow, one Shabbat he found himself in the *kloyz*, the Breslover synagogue in Uman, during *Mussaf*. They were just reciting the prayer that begins, “A crown will be given to You, Hashem our God.” This prayer is the climax of the service and is recited with fiery devotion, even a kind of ecstasy, in Breslov circles, and in many other communities even today.

*Several young men jumped up, determined to give him a thrashing and toss him out of the synagogue.*

As they intoned this special prayer, “*der Deutschel*” – notorious for his contempt of the religious community and also unafraid of public rebuke – raised his ink-stained hands for all to see. It was as if he were saying that displaying the visible sign of his profanation of Shabbat was the crown given to God, God forbid. This blatant mockery of one of the holiest prayers was clearly calculated to infuriate the Breslovers.

It did. Several young men jumped up, determined to give him a thrashing and toss him out of the synagogue for good. But Reb Noson realized their plan and motioned to them that they were to do no such thing.

He explained, “Why is this man, a self-proclaimed secular Jew, coming into our *kloyz*? He’s never set foot here before. It’s obvious that some part of him is considering returning to the Torah. He knows that no other house of worship will allow him into their sanctuary. We are his last resort. How can we bar his final opportunity to repent?”

The young men backed off and let the visitor be.

Reb Noson’s words proved prescient. The man slowly began to return to his roots until his Judaism became meaningful to him and he started keeping the Torah.

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh II:618*

## SIDEPATH

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

169. On the holy Shabbat, the Rebbe’s eyes would shine and his face would glow. His great holiness and fiery bond with God on Shabbat were really something to see. There was the way he said Kiddush on Friday night and his customs at the table. There was the awesome melody with which he sang “*Atkinu Seudata*” and “*Azamer BeShevachin*,” and the way he sang the other Shabbat table songs.



If all the seas were ink, it would still be impossible to describe even an inkling of the great beauty, awesome sanctity, intense awe, and sweet, pleasant, wonderful closeness to God that was there, with genuine humility.

170. I once asked the Rebbe why many devoted people struggled to serve God and still did not attain the level of the great tzaddikim. He answered simply, “They probably did not exert themselves that much. *Min ha-stam haben zei nit geharivet* – Presumably, they did not struggle. The main thing is effort: ‘Everything depends on one’s deeds’” (*Avot* 3:15).

171. The Rebbe once vaunted the fact that he was unique in completely overcoming all his desires. He said, “No one as young as me has ever overcome his desires so completely. Many tzaddikim have banished their desires, but not until they were at an advanced age. For a youth like me to break down all desires is something unheard of.” As we have mentioned, the Rebbe had vanquished his every worldly desire before the age of twenty.



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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.*