

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Music of Our Souls

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF REBBE NACHMAN'S most beautiful teachings is that King David merited possessing incredible *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration). When David expressed himself through the prayers that make up the Book of Psalms, not only did his words include his own pleas and problems, they included everything that each and every one of us was destined to face. Therefore we can find ourselves in every Psalm. Rebbe Nachman explains that we can even relate to King David's wars because we each wage our own battles against our bad desires and thoughts. By envisioning these personal conflicts while we recite the words of Psalms, we connect to God on an awesome level.

Once a chassid pressed the Rebbe, "But what about the verses that describe the greatness of King David, like, 'Protect my soul, for I am devout' (Psalms 86:2)? King David was truly devout and righteous, but how can I say that about myself, a simple Jew?" The Rebbe answered that this verse, too, applies to us, for each of us has a good point, and in this good point we are considered devout (see *Likutey Moharan* II, 101).

Our *parashah* states, "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know of Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). How could that be? Didn't everyone know about the Jewish viceroy who had rescued Egypt from famine?

King Solomon explains that our promiscuous desires and urges can be compared to an "old and foolish king" (Ecclesiastes 4:13). They are "old" because we are born with them intact, and "foolish" because their temporary pleasure leads us astray from true goodness. Joseph, on the other hand, is called Joseph the Tzaddik. He represents the good points that are found in each of us. Our evil king's strategy is to make us forget about our true essence and its Divine origin. Our soul is a part of God, and therefore we have many points of good

within us. If we are made to forget about them, it is only too easy for us to feel low and vulnerable.

The *parashah* continues, "So the Egyptians enslaved the children of Israel with backbreaking labor" (Exodus 1:13). Because we forget how special we truly are, we see little purpose in life's difficulties. Things become overwhelming and exhausting; we become slaves to our perceived fate. Often this happens when we start looking at others whom we feel are greater than we and compare ourselves to them. Observing how special and talented they are, we question our own virtue. We forget the Joseph within us.

Last Shabbat I heard a beautiful story that explains why this attitude is so wrong.

A writer was preparing a biography about the legendary symphony conductor Arturo Toscanini. At some point, the biographer called Toscanini and asked for an interview. Toscanini replied that he was unable to comply because he already had plans to listen to the radio broadcast of a concert he had previously conducted. However, he agreed to meet after the broadcast.

When they met, the biographer said of the concert, "Wasn't that magnificent?" Toscanini answered negatively, "There were supposed to be 120 musicians, among them 15 violinists, but only 14 were present." The writer could not believe that Toscanini could possibly know this, but the next day he checked with the symphony director, who confirmed that one violinist had called in sick. Contacted once more, Toscanini explained, "Being the conductor, I knew some notes were missing and immediately identified one missing violinist."

God is the conductor of the universe. He expects each of us to play the beautiful note that only we can produce. Just as Shifra and Puah beautified and cooed to the newborn Jewish children, so too, we must encourage ourselves and learn to see the beauty in our infant souls so desperately waiting to grow and prosper.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilchot Arvei Techumim 6*

# Three Signs

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**AT THREE POINTS** during Rebbe Nachman's young life, he asked his Creator to show him a sign. While asking God for a sign is not usually considered a positive thing, there were tzaddikim who did so and were answered because the sign would have a broad and powerful effect that would be felt by many other people. In Rebbe Nachman's case, he hoped to experience the supernatural potential of prayer in order to strengthen his own faith. Ironclad assurance in the power of prayer became the cornerstone of Rebbe Nachman's teaching and path, and we are the beneficiaries of these three signs.

The first sign unfolded as follows. The young Rebbe Nachman used to engage in *hitbodedut* (secluded prayer with God) in a certain clearing in the forest. On the way he had to pass a church, outside of which stood an icon. Passing there every day caused him a great deal of distress. He would be walking in a state of attachment to his Creator, and then the icon would rise up before him like a trap. He begged God to perform a miracle and remove the obstacle. Not long afterward, a storm came up and the wind knocked over the heavy statue and destroyed it.

The second sign came about when Rebbe Nachman was on one of his rambles along the riverbank, seeking privacy for prayer. "Master of the universe!" he cried. "I know that You can do anything at all. Please, show me Your greatness—send the fish to me where I stand, without me catching them in a net!" Within moments, what appeared to be every fish along the river swarmed up along the bank where he stood, offering themselves up to be caught by hand.

The third sign was far more serious. Soon after his marriage, Rebbe Nachman locked himself in his room in the home of his in-laws and begged God to show him the soul of a dead man. A shrouded form appeared before him. Immobilized with terror, the Rebbe shouted aloud. The family tried to break into the room but couldn't. It was only after they climbed through the window and surrounded him that he returned to himself.

Years later, Rebbe Nachman said, "I wasn't terrified because the man was dead. It was because he had been wicked..."

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 107-109*

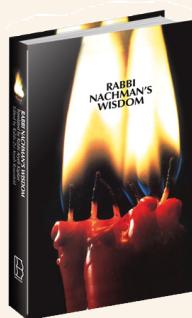
## SIDEPATH

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

305. Many times, the Rebbe said, "*Me hat gar nit tzu tahn* – We have nothing at all to do." The Rebbe said this in relation to his conversations.

We find in the Talmud that the disciples of Rabbi Ishmael taught, "The words of the Torah should not be viewed as an obligation, but one is not permitted to exempt himself from them" (*Menachot* 99b).

This explains the Rebbe's statement and is wonderful advice to he who understands it even a little.



306. The Rebbe said, "Every human likeness is included in the word *adam* (man) as mentioned in the Torah. God said, 'Let us make man (*adam*) in our image' (Genesis 1:26). As soon as He said the word *adam*, He included every human likeness

in that word. The same is true of such words as *beheimah* (animal) and *chayah* (beast) used in the account of Creation. These words include the forms of every animal and beast. The same is true of everything else created."

The Rebbe spoke at length on this topic. He then said, "There are categories of wisdom, even in this world, that can sustain a person without any other nourishment. There are such awesomely wonderful categories of wisdom even in this world. A person can live without eating or drinking with such wisdom alone."



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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.*