

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Tzaddik At My Side

By Yossi Katz

**YITRO AND MOSHE** could not have been more different from one another.

There has never been a man as great as Moshe. On three separate occasions, Moshe ascended to Heaven for forty days and forty nights. He neither ate nor slept, and had no physical wants or needs to look after while he was there (Deuteronomy 9:9). Moshe – a man of flesh and blood. Even the angels were jealous (*Shabbat* 88b). He was able to keep his physical form in Heaven because he had risen completely above its corporeality.

Yitro, on the other hand, was the Priest of Midian, something akin to a pope. One of his names was Putiel, because he had fattened (*puti*) calves in preparation for idolatry (Midrash Tanchuma, Pinchas 2). In this week's *parashah*, Yitro says, "Now I have known that God is greater than all the gods" (Exodus 18:11). But how did he know? Because "there was not an idol in the world that Yitro had overlooked, or chased after and worshipped" (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 3:1).

Yet before Yitro had even converted, the Torah states, "Moses went out to greet his father-in-law, bowing and kissing him. They asked one man to his friend about each other's welfare and went into the tent" (Exodus 18:7). "One man" certainly refers to Moshe, who was the greatest of all men. It was specifically Moshe who asked about Yitro's welfare. This is remarkable! Moshe, the great Tzaddik, the angelic man, lowered himself to someone who had been king of the idols, someone with such a dirty and unholy past.

This is the way of the true Tzaddik. The Tzaddik does not stand on a pedestal and allow only those who are

"truly worthy," who have never done wrong, or who are of impeccable pedigree to approach him. Instead, the true Tzaddik brings himself right next to every person who has any degree of desire to come close to spirituality and Godliness. He descends right next to them as a true friend, encouraging them and providing the necessary advice for them to improve their ways and live a good life.

There was once a chassid who went to visit a prominent figure, hoping to gain a life-changing experience. Unfortunately, after the meeting, he was neither inspired nor changed. The chassid felt very bad about this and blamed himself. While recounting this episode to Reb Noson, the latter corrected him, saying, "Had the Tzaddik been even a greater Tzaddik, he could have had the power to encourage you, too."

Rebbe Nachman said, "*Gevalt!* Never give up hope! There is no such thing as despair." No matter where we're at or what we've done, the Tzaddik is there for us. He wants to be our friend. He is concerned for our welfare. He will not turn us away. Our job is to open our hearts, learn his teachings and follow his advice. By listening to his words and living by his dictums, our lives will change for the better.

In Breslov we have been blessed with two short but powerful classics. One is *Meshivat Nefesh* (Restore My Soul), which includes many of the Rebbe's incredible teachings of encouragement. The other is *Hishtapkhut HaNefesh* (Outpouring of the Soul), which teaches every Jew how to forge a relationship with God through his or her simple words. We have the tools! We can open our hearts to the wisdom contained in these short books and live life with the Tzaddik standing together with us, holding our hand through every challenge and difficulty.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Bekhor Beheimah Tehorah 4-22*

# This Is Prayer!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

ONCE, AFTER FINISHING his evening prayers, Rebbe Nachman went with a number of his students to break bread. The Rebbe's beloved disciple, Reb Noson, was among their number, but unlike them he hadn't yet prayed the evening service. As the group walked, Reb Noson veered off in the direction of the synagogue. As soon as Rebbe Nachman realized that Reb Noson was no longer with them, he asked, "Why has Reb Noson left us?"

The student explained that Reb Noson hadn't yet prayed that evening, but that he would certainly come to join them after he had finished.

Rebbe Nachman seemed lost in thought for a moment. Then he asked with great simplicity, "How are we to wait for him to return after his prayers? Who can say what will happen to him during prayer? Prayer requires genuine self-sacrifice. How can we know for certain that he will return to us at all?!"

\* \* \*

One Shabbat, at the hour of the third meal—that high point of yearning within the holy day—Rebbe Nachman's chassidim were gathered in the main room, waiting for him to come and conduct the meal. Rebbe Nachman was taking far longer than usual. Usually by that hour the Rebbe would already be sitting at the head of the table while his students imbibed his precious teachings.

At a certain point the Rebbe's close disciple, Reb Shimon, decided to go into the Rebbe's private room to see if anything was wrong. What could possibly be delaying him?

Reb Shimon stood outside the door, suddenly abashed at interrupting Rebbe Nachman. His hands and legs began to tremble—did he really have the nerve to enter the room unbidden? He was beset with doubts; was it really permitted for him to bother the Rebbe even when a crowd of students anxiously awaited him at the table?

But the sun had nearly set, so Reb Shimon entered.

He saw an amazing sight. Rebbe Nachman was lying face down on the floor, prostrate in prayer, crying like a baby. His lips were streaming with impassioned prayers, and a puddle of tears had formed around his head.

All Reb Shimon could think was, "So this is prayer!"

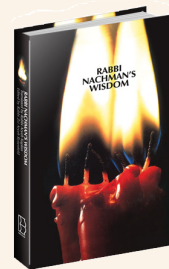
*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 111-113*

## SIDEPATH

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

308 (continued). It is written, "What was, that is what will be ... there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9).

Life was difficult even in the "good old days." How many years ago did King Solomon write of man, "For all his days are painful and vexatious"? How many years ago did the Book of Job say, "Man is born to struggle – of few days and full of trouble"? (Job 14:1). Scripture wrote about this long ago.



Even then, many people thought that times were troublesome (Daniel 9:25) and that one must worry only about his livelihood. These people lost their days and departed from this world without joy or pleasure (II Chronicles 21:20).

But each generation also had God-fearing men and tzaddikim. They paid no attention to these concerns and escaped the struggles of the world to toil in Torah and devotion. They achieved for themselves and for their children. Happy are they.

Even today, you have free will. You have the power to escape from these painful discussions and from worries. You can flee from them and trust in God, abandoning the struggles of this bitter world and involving yourself in the work of Torah. God will certainly sustain you. Does He not sustain the entire world, now as always? And now God directs the world better than ever before.



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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.*

*Dedicated in the Memory of (L'Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon*