

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Land of Desire

By Yossi Katz

**WHY ARE THINGS** so difficult? Why can't life just be "easy-breezy"? These are normal and essential questions to ask. If we want to be a little more sophisticated, we could add, "if God only wants to make my life better, shouldn't the things I want and desire be so much easier to come by?" Instead, it seems that whenever we want to do the right thing or improve in a certain area, everything is thrown against us at that precise moment.

Before taking us out of Egypt, we were promised that we would be redeemed and brought to the Promised Land, a land "flowing with milk and honey." Gathered near the border of the Land of Israel, moments away from realizing the culmination of our incredible redemptive process, we sent scouts to study the nature of the land and its dwellers.

Initially, they reported back very positive news: "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit." But then things took a turn for the ugly: "However, the people who inhabit the land are mighty, and the cities are extremely huge and fortified, and we even saw the offspring of the giant" (Numbers 13:27-28).

Essentially, they were reporting the truth. On the one hand, the land was exactly as promised; they even brought a large fruit to demonstrate this. But they were also very troubled: If this was the land we were destined to receive, why in the world would God place such tremendous obstacles in our way? For Heaven's sake, there are giants dwelling in the land! How can we ever hope to conquer it? While the scout's face-value observations were on target, they completely misunderstood the true essence of the Land of Israel.

We refer to Israel as *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, but why? We don't say the Land of America or the Land of

Japan. There is a good reason for this. The Hebrew word for "land," *eReTz*, comes from the same root as *RaTzon* (desire or will). *Eretz Yisrael* is a source for accessing personal will, desire and passion in life. Both *eReTz* and *RaTzon* come from the root *RaTz* (run). When one merits to attach himself to *Eretz Yisrael*, his personal willpower can run wild. The sweet fruit of the land that the Torah so praises represents the spiritual love and desire that can be absorbed in this place. However, God first places great obstacles in the way.

The reason for the obstacles is simple. They challenge us to dig deep within ourselves to discover our inner willpower. They force us to realize just how much we want that end goal. Just like a wife who desires that her husband display a vibrant interest in her, God desires an intimate relationship with us. Therefore He gives us various opportunities to demonstrate our profound desire for Him. By cultivating our innermost desire for Him, we nullify ourselves and unite with His Oneness, to the place of the *Raava d'Raavin*, the Will of Wills. Once there, we are naturally infused with an even greater desire for Him.

The Jews stood gazing at the land in the near distance. This was the moment when they could express their deepest yearning to finally realize their dream. The obstacles were meant to push them to turn to God with an awesome, burning hope and desire, so they would become unified with His Will. The land of desire would become the most desired, its spiritual potential fully realized and experienced. But the scouts did not understand this, and were instead overcome by the obstacles.

As we read about this tragedy once again, may we merit to see our own obstacles for what they truly are and express our great yearning that we all return home, to the place of His true desire. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaRei'ach 5*

# Giving Also Means Getting

By Chaim Kramer

*Our Sages teach that charity does much more for the giver than the recipient. Rebbe Nachman explains just how much: the giver earns unlimited blessings, an easy livelihood, a rectification for sin, and the joy of having all his or her prayers answered. These stories from Breslov tradition show us givers who truly understood the value of their charity.*

\* \* \*

R' Shabtai Breslover (d. circa 1920) would ride in his wagon in order to collect food and money for the poor. His son, R' Chaim, once said to him, "I am very embarrassed by your behavior. People might think you're collecting for yourself, and say about me that I don't take care of you!"

R' Shabtai replied, "But that's the truth! Who else am I collecting for, if not myself? This is my mitzvah, and I am collecting it for my future!" (*Siach Sarfey Kodesh* 4:576).

\* \* \*

Rebbe Nachman had a follower, R' Dov of Tcherin, who was very wealthy. Rebbe Nachman suggested to him that he give a *chomesh* (one-fifth) of his income to charity. Before he passed away, R' Dov said, "With my *chomesh*, I have nothing to fear from the Heavenly tribunal!" (*Kokhavey Or*, p. 24, #19).

\* \* \*

R' Aharon Leib Tziengelmann of Poland (d. circa 1943) worked ceaselessly to collect the funds necessary for printing Rebbe Nachman's and Reb Noson's teachings. He was wont to say: "*HaDFaSaH* (the printing of books) has the same *gematria* (numerical value) as *OLaM HaBA* ([the reward of] the World to Come)!"

\* \* \*

Reb Noson was married for eight years without being blessed with children; his wife miscarried several times. Having just met Rebbe Nachman, he spoke to him about their suffering. The Rebbe said to him, "For that you have to give a *pidyon* (redemption)." Reb Noson commissioned someone to make six chairs for the Rebbe, a gift that was well-received.

Afterward, Reb Noson had six children, five sons and a daughter. He later said, "Had I known that the number of children depended on the number of chairs, I would have commissioned twelve chairs for the Rebbe!" (*Tovot Zikhronot*, p. 111; Breslov oral tradition).

*From "More Blessed to Give: Rebbe Nachman on Charity"*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

44. When you take such joy in Torah and mitzvot that you literally dance for joy, it will strengthen your faith (*Likutey Moharan* II, 81).

45. When a person is in a state of "constricted consciousness" and weak in his faith, this is the time for difficult devotions such as fasting. But someone with total faith can serve God with all things, because

"God does not act like a despot over His creatures" (*Avodah Zarah* 3a; *Likutey Moharan* II, 86).

46. Faith is accounted as charity (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #44).

47. The power of faith is very great. Through faith and simplicity alone, with no sophistication whatsoever, you can reach the level of Desire, which is beyond even that of Wisdom. Your desire for God will be so strong that you simply do not know what to do because of the great longing. You cry out with yearning (*ibid.* #32).

48. There are certain cases in which people are riddled with doubts about their faith because they were not conceived in holiness. Added to this is the effect of their own misdeeds, because there are certain sins that cause people to lose their faith. A person who finds these thoughts entering his mind should be ashamed and brokenhearted, and he should cast them out of his mind completely (*ibid.*).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.*