

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT SHOFTIM • 5776 • VOL. 6 NO. 46

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## How Can We Change?

By Yossi Katz

“**BE TAMIM** (wholesome or simple) before HaShem your God.”

On this verse, Rashi explains that one should conduct himself before God with simplicity, looking to Him dependently. One should accept whatever happens with utter simplicity. Rashi ends with a golden guarantee: “Then you will be together with Him and a part of His portion.”

As we count down the days to Rosh HaShanah, our entire focus and desire is to be reckoned as a part of God’s portion in the New Year for a year of good health, livelihood and *nachas*. We strive and wish to amend our ways and to perfect our actions. But often the entire process leaves us stressed out. Our need for perfection is overwhelming and we may feel our life is nothing but a blown opportunity. We want this year to be different, we want our lives to be different. What can we do?

We hope and pray every day that we witness the “complete redemption.” What is the difference between the complete redemption and the redemption from Egypt? When we were redeemed from Egypt, we reached incredible spiritual heights, culminating in the receiving of the Torah. But afterward we transgressed what was written in the Torah. From where can we now take strength? Even if a person tries to motivate himself and pick himself up, our Rabbis teach that one who is greater than his friend also possesses a greater *yetzer hara* (evil urge). Now that he is at a higher level, he possesses an even more difficult challenge than before!

The difference between those who succeed in *teshuvah* (repentance) and those who fall away is actually the difference between the redemption from Egypt and the complete redemption. Just as there are Five Books of the Torah, so too did Mashiach’s ancestor King David write

five parallel books of Psalms. Rebbe Nachman reveals that the Mashiach will conquer the world through the ultimate weapon: prayer. If the first redemption was one of Torah, the final redemption of David will be one of prayer.

God is to be found everywhere and in every situation. We don’t have to recreate ourselves in a perfect mold or set up the perfect situation in order to begin to do *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* means looking within ourselves and discovering God right here and right now. Even if we feel as if we have been written out of the Torah, through words of prayer and supplication we can reach out and attach ourselves to God. Our feeling of distance can even be used to create the sweetest prayers in the world.

King David therefore says, “Instead of my love, they prosecute me – but I am prayer!” (Psalms 109:4). The more David sought to motivate himself and draw himself closer to God, the higher the level he reached and the more the *yetzer hara* prosecuted him. But because he personified prayer, he ultimately succeeded in writing the five books of Psalms. David’s Psalms are the revelation that no matter how badly he was persecuted and shunned, through simple faith and prayer he could always find God and hopefulness. Only through this special, intimate connection can we, too, return to God and rekindle a life of Torah and mitzvot.

This is the prescription for living a life of simplicity and faith. If we want to succeed at *teshuvah*, we need not turn our lives upside down and stress out about living an altogether different life. Rather, we should learn to look for God in our lives right now, to talk and relate everything to Him, with the firm hope of betterment. By attaching ourselves directly to God, ultimately nothing can stand in our way and we can rise above life’s daily grind to live a life of meaning and joy. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Onaah 3*

# Learning from a Master

By Gedaliah Fleer

**IN PREPARATION FOR** his third attempt to reach Uman, this time to spend Rosh HaShanah by the *tziyun* (grave) of Rebbe Nachman together with other Russian Breslovers, Reb Gedaliah Fleer raised money for his trip both in New York and Jerusalem ... and also picked up a new skill.

The Russian government refused to issue any more visas to Uman. Yet during my next visit to Israel the following summer, Reb Hirsch Leib Lippel urged me to return to Russia and spend Rosh HaShanah in Uman. He succeeded in convincing me, and I decided to travel there in another year's time, for Rosh HaShanah 1965.

After Pesach 1965, I started asking people if they would be willing to help finance my expedition. I offered to recite the *Tikkun HaKlali* at the *tziyun* for anyone who gave me a \$100 donation. Within a short time, I had sufficient funds to cover my plane fare to Israel and Russia. But I still did not have enough money to cover my expenses in Russia.

As I began to prepare myself spiritually for this trip, Reb Hirsch Leib Lippel gave me a practical piece of advice: "Rebbe Nachman said that it makes no difference whether you pray or don't pray, eat or don't eat, sleep or don't sleep, as long as you are with him for Rosh HaShanah. But he never said, 'shofar or no shofar.' You must take a shofar with you, and in addition, you must learn how to blow it!" (The main mitzvah of Rosh HaShanah is listening to the shofar.)

Reb Hirsch Leib found a shofar for me. After I finished studying all the pertinent laws related to shofar-blowing, I went to speak with Yaakov Gedaliah Tefilinsky's uncle, Rabbi Yaakov Meir Shechter, who blew the shofar for the annual Rosh HaShanah *kibutz* in Jerusalem. At the time, Rabbi Yaakov Meir was teaching in the kollel located in the Breslover shul in Katamon. I approached him and asked him for a \$100 donation in exchange for reciting the *Tikkun HaKlali* in Uman.

He regarded me kindly. "Although I would like to help you, I do not have the financial means to do so right now," he replied.

"Then perhaps you would be willing to teach me how to blow the shofar instead?" I suggested. To my delight, Rabbi Yaakov Meir agreed.

*From "Against All Odds"*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

18. Every Jew, even the greatest Tzaddik, necessarily undergoes a certain measure of pain and suffering every day. The deeper his understanding and attachment to God, the greater the pain he must endure. But eating in holiness and with the fear of Heaven can help sweeten this pain somewhat and prevent it from becoming overpowering (*Likutey Moharan* II, 77).



19. One who eats in holiness and with the fear of Heaven is worthy of the status of Adam (man), the pinnacle of Creation. His mouth is the mouth of Adam. The *Shekhinah* (Divine Presence) Herself speaks from his lips. But when a person eats without holiness, God forbid, his mouth is the mouth of a mere animal (*ibid.*).

20. The time when we are eating is especially suited to working on ourselves to develop the fear of Heaven (*ibid.*).

21. Never eat a fruit before it has become fully ripe on the tree. So long as the fruit still needs to grow it has the power to draw to itself the life force it requires. If someone eats it before it is ripe, it will suck the vitality it requires from him. By making the blessing over fruit with intense concentration and with a sense of true fear of Heaven, you can avoid the dangers of unripe fruit (*ibid.*, II, 88).



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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.*