

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Time to Rebuild

By Yossi Katz

**IF SOMEONE WERE** to curse and totally demean you, wouldn't it seem strange if he told you moments later how great he is going to make you? Well then, take a look at what's going on:

First, the prophet Amos informs us that God compares the Jews to Cushites, saying, "Are you not like the children of the Cushites to me, O children of Israel?" (Amos 9:7).

Comparing us to Cushites wasn't exactly a compliment. The Cushites were the descendants of Cush, the son of Ham. After Ham either castrated or sodomized his father Noah, he was cursed by God with slavery and lowliness. "So shall the king of Assyria lead the captivity of Egypt and the exile of Cush, youths and old men, naked and barefoot, with bare buttocks" (Isaiah 20:4).

But immediately, Amos continues, "But I will not destroy the house of Jacob, says the Lord... On that day, I will raise up the fallen Tabernacle of David... And I will return the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall rebuild desolate cities and inhabit [them], and they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their produce... And I will plant them on their land, and they shall no longer be uprooted from upon their land that I have given them, said the Lord your God" (Amos 7:8-15).

So where exactly do we stand?

We just finished the mourning period of the Three Weeks. At the climax of this period, Tisha B'Av, we commemorated the destruction of both Temples.

But just a few hours after Tisha B'Av, we blasted our boom boxes and everything is permitted once again. Wouldn't it seem more appropriate if after three weeks of preparation and then the destruction of the Temple,

we had at least a few days of actual mourning? Instead, we are all preparing for a very special Shabbat: *Shabbat Nachamu*, the Sabbath of Consolation.

There was once a chassid who truly desired closeness with God but would constantly experience setbacks. He truly wanted to amend his ways, but many years passed and he was still unable to escape his issues. Still, he never gave up, and always tried again and again. However, he was extremely bitter about this. Rebbe Nachman, with great wisdom, told the chassid in a very simple way, "How can I speak with you, you are completely evil." The chassid immediately retorted, "Yes, but isn't it also true that I never gave up and still try to push myself?"

The Holy Temple was called *Tiferet Yisrael*, the Pride of Israel. It was at the Temple that the holiness of our mitzvot would be gathered up. This was the landmark that glorified our special relationship with God. When it was destroyed because of our sins, it was as if our pride were thrown down and shattered. It was as if our special status were cancelled. This is also why, on Tisha B'Av morning, we don't don our *tefillin* – *tefillin* are our crowns that exemplify our status as God's special people. However, this is all for our own good.

As soon as we are compared with the other nations, our special characteristics and many mitzvot shine through! It's immediately obvious that yes, we are different. So, too, regarding our spiritual growth. When we look to compare ourselves with great Tzaddikim, or with very lofty goals, we are almost always dismayed and fall away. However, by first realizing that we are human beings born with a *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), and then searching for the good, we can rebuild ourselves. Now, after Tisha B'Av and after we have swallowed our pride and realized our faults, we can start to rebuild and become the People we truly are.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Reishit HaGez 4*

# Lighting Up the World

By Chaim Kramer

**AFTER REBBE NACHMAN'S** passing, his main disciple, Reb Noson, busied himself with raising funds to publish the Rebbe's writings and encouraging the chassidim to join the new Rosh HaShanah *kibutz* in Uman. Though he did not think of himself as a dynamic leader like the Rebbe, Reb Noson also began sharing Rebbe Nachman's teachings with others. He wrote:

"At that time I was simply unconscious of the fact that even now it would still be possible to enlighten Jewish souls and inspire them to true service of God the way I had learned from the Rebbe. But although 'I was asleep, my heart was awake ... the voice of my beloved was knocking' within me (Song of Songs 5:2). The Rebbe's holy words were imprinted on my heart, they were hot as burning coals, a fire blazing in my bones ... I could not keep it inside me."

In the first year after the Rebbe's passing, Reb Noson took every opportunity to speak to the young men in the town of Breslov about the purpose of this world and serving God, explaining the depth and greatness of Rebbe Nachman's teachings. For much of that year, however, he did not see any great fruits from his efforts. Some of the young men improved in their studies, but not in a way that gave him any sense of achievement. One young man in particular was regarded by the community as exceptionally diligent, but Reb Noson saw that he was hardly learning at all. Nevertheless, he spoke to that young man more than the others.

By the summer, Reb Noson's entire year of effort began to take effect, and this young man threw himself into his studies with all his strength. He kept it up for six straight years, finishing the entire *Shulchan Arukh*. Other disciples also attached themselves to Reb Noson, and Reb Noson realized that with persistence and dedication, he could continue the Rebbe's path into the future. He concluded:

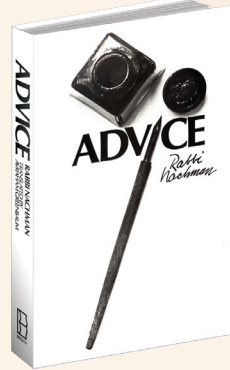
"Every soul that came a little closer helped me see that my words were making an impression. Every little improvement I saw gave me added encouragement, and I remembered how the Rebbe had said that we would have the merit to light up the entire world!"

*From "Through Fire and Water: The Life of Reb Noson"*

## SIDEPATH

**Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum**

**UNDERSTANDING.** 2. If people feel they have problems and difficulties in life, or that they are lacking certain things they need, be it sufficient income, children, physical health or whatever, the reason for their feeling is that they lack true understanding. When understanding is perfect, nothing is lacking (*Likutey Moharan I*, 21:11).



3. In order to attain understanding, you must sanctify your lips, your nostrils, your eyes and your ears. Guard your lips from all falsehood. Sanctify your nostrils with the fear of Heaven. Use your ears to listen to the words of the Sages and have faith in what they say. Lower your eyes and avert them from evil. Then you will attain perfect understanding, and through this your heart will burn with passion for God.

It is through the activity of the mind that passion is born in the heart. The more one thinks about Torah and devotion, the more one's heart becomes fired for God. The deeper one's understanding, the more one's passion burns. This passion purifies the heart and prevents it from being inflamed with evil desires, which merely pollute it. When a person's heart is pure, he will never be at a loss for words when he speaks to God. He will always find new words and new approaches (*ibid.* I, 2; see also I, 156).



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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.*