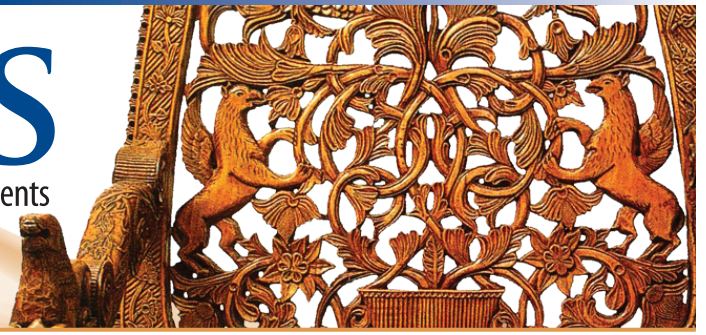


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Rising High

By Yossi Katz

**THIS WORLD IS** like a giant blank screen, perfectly aligned to reflect the powerful light projected onto it. God, wanting to reveal His glory in a way that humans could appreciate, concealed Himself in the creations of this world so that we would remain independent of Him and yet see His greatness in everything around us. Had God's greatness been shown in a more obvious way, creation could not have remained independent of Him. The prophet Isaiah therefore proclaims, "The whole world is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

But what happens when a person falls spiritually so that he feels distant and can no longer appreciate his life as being a projection of God's honor? What happens when someone doubts God's existence and His greatness?

"The world was created with ten utterances" (*Avot* 5:1). This means that ten times in Genesis, it says, "And God said..." But if you count them, there are actually only nine utterances. Rebbe Nachman explains that when the Torah states, "In the beginning God created Heaven and earth," this is actually the tenth, "hidden" utterance. Through the nine revealed utterances, God created everything in this world that would reveal His glory—but what about places of impurity, like temples of idol worship or schools of atheism? Can anything in the world exist if not for the will of God? In truth, nothing can exist without God. But God sustains these places from an even higher spiritual source, a place hidden from our world where His unity is very much pronounced. This place gives life to the nine other utterances – the place of the Hidden Utterance.

When we feel that God is completely hidden from our lives, we should still search for Him and cry out,

"Where is the place of His glory?" (*Kedushah*). This way, we nullify ourselves from our present stuck place and ascend to the place of the Hidden Utterance, the true source of creation.

In order for us to rise to new spiritual heights, we must receive a measure of higher-level soul. This requires us to first experience a spiritual descent. When we feel God's utter distance from us and yet continually long and search for Him, we nullify ourselves to rise to the place of the Hidden Utterance and are then reborn with a higher-level soul. Our descent actually prepares the way for the future ascent. This is just like when we want to discover new Torah insights. We must first enter a state of utter confusion and be forced to let go of our previous notions before reaching greater knowledge. Only through doubt and endless searching can we rise to the higher level.

During the Counting of the Omer, we count down day after day until the time of the greatest revelation: the Giving of the Torah. Our count begins from the time of the bringing of the barley offering. Barley is a food eaten by animals; it represents the times one feels like he has no intellect and is no better than an animal. If a person is in this state and yet continues to count day after day, continually longing to gain spiritual knowledge and connection to God, he will ultimately reach the highest place, the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot and the place of the Hidden Utterance.

After the Exodus from Egypt, there were certain Jews that could not partake in the Pesach offering because they were spiritually impure. Feeling left out, they beseeched Moshe and God, "Why should we lose out?" Incredibly, God agreed and gave them a second chance. The Torah therefore states that if one was impure or in a distant place – a place of being lost in life, not finding

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# Rising High

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one's way – he can still bring the Pesach offering a month later, on 14 Iyar. Through the desperate yearning of our ancestors, we merited the revelation of Pesach Sheini, a second chance.

Lag B'Omer is the continuation of this story. Rabbi Akiva and his students were so great that they were constantly trying to rise to the level of the Hidden Utterance. The Talmud relates that even Moshe was perplexed by Rabbi Akiva's ability to reveal the deep meaning of the crowns (tagim) that adorn the letters of the Torah. Moshe asked God, "Why was the Torah given through me?" (Menachot 29b). But because Rabbi Akiva's students were engaged in pursuing the level of the Hidden Utterance, they lost focus on reveling God's glory in this world and also became lax in honoring one another. This was problematic because every Jew has a soul, and therefore honoring another Jew is like honoring God and revealing God's honor in this world. Our purpose of existence is not just to search for God and reach Him on the highest level, but to then reveal His glory in the world. Because Rabbi Akiva's students didn't carry continue through this process, they were judged very harshly and passed away.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Rabbi Akiva's student, came to correct this. Therefore he said, "It [the Torah] will never be forgotten from its offspring." This position was arguable. How did he know this to be a fact?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai understood that even when someone forgets, and even when someone doesn't see God's honor, if he continues to search and believe that God exists and that there is purpose, he is able to reach the place of the Hidden Utterance to reveal great Torah insights. Torah can never be forgotten because forgetting itself has the ability to bring about the revelation of greater Torah knowledge and closeness to God. As we sing and dance on this great holiday, we remember that our every descent is only preparing ourselves for an ever greater experience with God.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geviyas Chov MeYesomim 3*

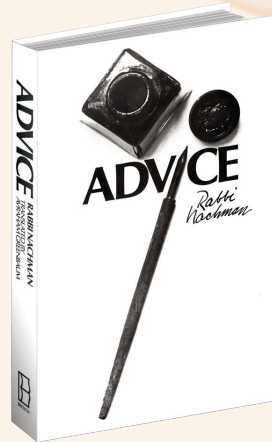
## SIDEPATH

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

**ENCOURAGEMENT.** 1. To return to God, one must be expert in the law, the *halakhah*, which literally means "going." A person must be skilled in traveling the necessary path so that nothing in the world will discourage him or make him feel rebuffed. Whether he makes progress or not, even if he feels himself sliding back, regardless of what he may go through, he should always be firm and follow the teaching of King David in the Book of Psalms (139:8):

"If I ascend to Heaven, You are there, and if I make Hell my bed, behold, there You are." For even in the lowest pit of Hell it is possible to draw oneself closer to God, because He is to be found there, too. "If I make Hell my bed, behold, there You are." (Likutey Moharan I, 6:4).

2. The greatest revelation of God's greatness comes when those who were very far from Him draw closer. His blessed Name is then glorified and exalted in the worlds above and the worlds below. What this implies is that no one should ever despair of coming closer to God, even if he feels very far from Him because of his sins. It may be that he has committed great wrongs. But if so, then it is precisely through his returning to God that God's glory will be exalted and magnified (ibid. I, 10:1).



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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.*