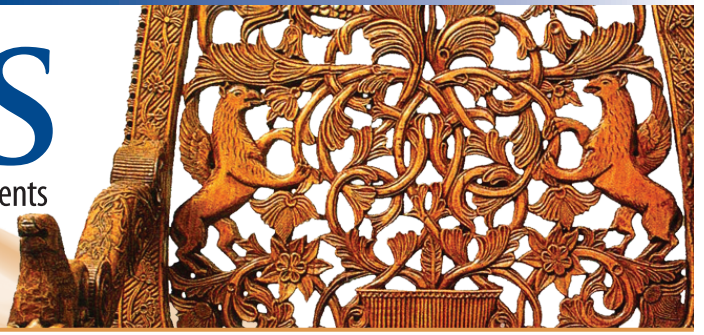


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Do It With Mirrors

By Yossi Katz

**REBBE NACHMAN TOLD** the story of a king who built a palace and asked two men to decorate it. The king divided the palace into two parts and assigned one part to each of them. He also fixed a time limit to complete their work. The first man toiled to teach himself the art of painting and plastering and was able to paint his part of the palace with the most beautiful and unusual murals. But the second man paid no attention to the assignment and did nothing about it whatsoever. As the deadline approached, he realized he had little time left. So he plastered his entire portion with a black substance called *pakist*, a kind of shiny pitch. The *pakist* acted like a mirror, reflecting everything around it.

The king came and admired the first man's part, with its wondrous and beautiful paintings executed with extraordinary skill. The second part was covered with a curtain. When the king approached, the second man stood up and drew aside the curtain. The sun was shining, and all the remarkable paintings appeared in his section in their entirety because of the *pakist*, which reflected everything like a mirror. This found favor in the eyes of the king. (See full story in *Tzaddik* #224.)

Although the second man in this story seemed to come up with a clever solution, wasn't he really just cheating? Why was the king happy with his work?

We find a similar idea in our *parashah*. Moshe was commanded to construct the Menorah out of a single piece of gold. From the upper flower ornaments until its base, the entire Menorah was to be chiseled out of a single piece of gold. The expertise necessary for this eluded Moshe. So he took a large piece of gold, tossed it into a fire, and the fire produced the Menorah all on its

own (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:4). Yet if this is the story of the construction of the Menorah, what does the Torah say, "According to the form that God showed Moshe, so did he construct the Menorah" (Numbers 8:4)? Seemingly, the fire had more to do with creating the Menorah than Moshe!

"For a candle is a mitzvah, and Torah is light" (Proverbs 6:23). The light of the Menorah symbolizes Torah and spiritual growth. While we have the option to make spiritually positive choices so we can grow and better ourselves, it's extremely difficult to do so because of the awesome power of our *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Our Sages thus explain, "Were it not that God personally intervenes to help, we would succumb" (*Kiddushin* 30b).

The paradox of Moshe's commandment to personally construct the Menorah out of a single piece of gold is the challenge of our lives. In truth, we do not have the strength to motivate ourselves and completely overcome our *yetzer hara*. But at the same time, just as Moshe did what he could by throwing the gold into the fire and praying to God, we are also required to put in our efforts and turn to God for help.

Our generation is the final one preceding the arrival of Mashiach. The last of the seven *sefirot* is Malkhut (kingship) and its color is black. Just as in Rebbe Nachman's story, our power is weak and we feel lazy. However, we do have recourse: we can create a black mirror and reflect the strength that preceded us. By praying to God and emulating the right path by putting in the effort we are capable of, we can reflect the vision of all the true Tzaddikim who preceded us. And the real King will have much *nachas*. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Krias Shema 5*

# Don't Think That You're Praying

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REB GERSHON, GRANDSON** of the famous Maggid of Terhovitz, was among Rebbe Nachman's inner circle. The main focus of his devotion was in investing maximal energy into his prayers, and he spent years in this pursuit.

Before he would begin to pray, Reb Gershon spent time in meditation, preparing his heart and body for the deep work of prayer. And when he did reach a stage of readiness, his prayers were so passionate and fervent, it was as though sparks flew off of him. He would cry out, his arms would gesture wildly, and he would become saturated with perspiration from his energetic movements and shouting. By the time he would finish praying, Reb Gershon always felt completely wrung out—his body exhausted, his voice in tatters.

Once Rebbe Nachman saw Reb Gershon during his intense prayers and, for some reason, the Rebbe appeared displeased. Afterward Rebbe Nachman spoke sharply to his student, making clear to him that his prayers were improper.

Reb Gershon's heart quailed within him. Could it really be so? After expending so much energy and working so hard on investing all of his physical and mental force into his prayers, could it be that he was doing something wrong? His Rebbe's words struck him like thunder, and Reb Gershon felt completely at a loss.

Rebbe Nachman sensed just how confounded Reb Gershon was, and explained, "Not to pray...and to think that you're praying!"

Now Reb Gershon was completely confused. What could Rebbe Nachman possibly mean? But soon afterward, Reb Gershon had an opportunity to experience just what Rebbe Nachman intended.

As the prayer service was about to begin, Reb Gershon focused his eyes on Rebbe Nachman. What did he see? No wild motions, no exaggerated movements, no loud cries. All he saw was Rebbe Nachman's face shining, as lit from within with a holy fire. Eyes closed in deep concentration, Reb Gershon saw that Rebbe Nachman stood as if he was entirely alone in the world, as if had completely forgotten not only the world around him but even himself, and was purely bound up in a state of attachment to God.

This, then, was the prayer of praying...and not thinking that you're praying!

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 110-111*

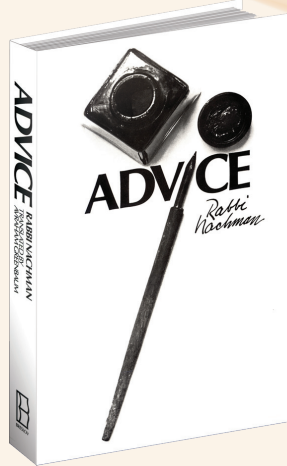
## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**ENCOURAGEMENT. 7.** In this situation, it helps to give charity to those who are worthy. When the recipient of the charity is himself worthy, the act of charity reveals the greatness of the Creator. This revelation helps the individual break the husks confronting him on every level (*Likutey Moharan I, 25:4*).

8. Another way to face this situation is to make yourself happy with the thought of the good point that is within you. You are of the seed of Israel, and you have succeeded in drawing closer to the men of truth who are leading you and guiding you along the path of truth. Regardless of your situation, you still have hope of attaining the ultimate good. The joy these thoughts will arouse will help you break the husks that confront you at every level (*ibid. I, 25:5*).

9. When a person succeeds in breaking through the barriers and rises from level to level, this also benefits his fellow Jew who was previously standing on the level he himself has now attained. For it means that the other Jew was obliged to rise to the next level, since it is impossible for two people to be on the same level at the same time. This is how one Jew can help raise up another (*ibid.*).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

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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.*