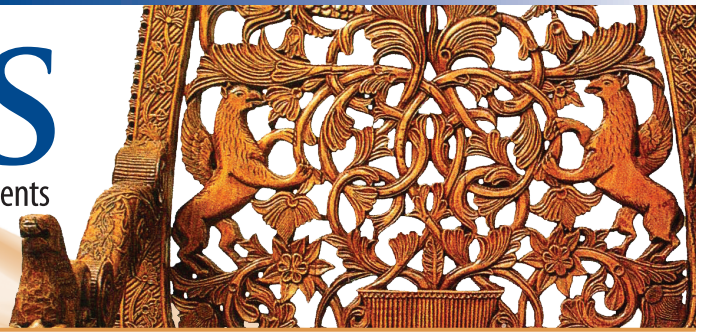


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Count Me In!

By Yossi Katz

**THE THREE MOST** frightening letters in the English language are I-R-S. It's "that time of the year" again. The tax-return strategy I've heard whispered about most often is: "Keep out of trouble, don't raise any red flags, and try to blend in."

What does this have to do with our *parashah*? Rashi explains that if the Jewish people need to be counted, the best way to go about it is to have each Jew donate a half-shekel, and tally up the coins. Counting the Jews directly can be calamitous, because singling out individual Jews risks subjugating them to the evil eye. God therefore commanded the Jews to be counted via the half-shekel (see Rashi on Exodus 30:12).

If we know that counting the Jews is a bad idea, why bother? If Jewish unity is such a great, protective force, why not stick together and keep out of trouble? The answer is that inasmuch as the Jewish people are one, every Jew is unique. Every Jew counts! We are all given individual tasks in this world. (These are often represented by the things we struggle with; we were brought to this world specifically to improve in these areas.)

This is why each of us has our own name. A Jewish name alludes to the areas in which we have the potential to excel. According to the Arizal, the name that parents give their child in this world is the name by which God in the upper worlds calls that child's soul (see *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, Introduction #23).

One of the greatest spiritual dangers we face is when we compare ourselves to others. Although we're taught to see the good in our friends, and to emulate their good behavior, we also have to realize that we're not them! It's great to be inspired by others, but that inspiration should be used to encourage us to deal with our own challenges, not to copy others.

At their source, all Jews are aflame in their desire for Godliness. The reason we struggle to connect to God is not

because of lack of interest, but because we want too much to connect. We often think, "If I can't achieve such and such a level, or do a mitzvah in a certain perfect kind of way, why bother?" Acknowledging that we each have a unique mission and purpose, and that this is specifically why we can't do things perfectly, we can finally begin to serve and connect to God.

In the Mishkan (and later, the Beit Hamikdash), it was possible for each Jew to gather together as one but to remain their unique selves. The Mishnah records a wondrous event that regularly took place in the Beit Hamikdash. Although the Jews stood tightly pressed together, they were able to bow down with ample space between them (*Avot* 5:5). Thus, each person could recite his own confession without his friend hearing it (*Vayikra Rabbah* 10:9).

This is why the Jews were commanded to count themselves using half-shekel coins, which were donated for the upkeep of the Mishkan. A "shekel" can be translated as a "measure." Yes, we stand together as one Jewish people, but our greatness can never be counted unless we each take full measure of our own unique qualities and mission.

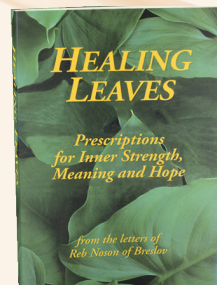
*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tefillat Minchah 7:14*

*A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



The purpose for which each of us was created is to know God. The main reason a person comes into this world is to overcome barriers and to come up against doors of bronze and bars of iron in his search for God. The only way to break through them is with will and longing and intense desire. (*Letter #110*)

# The Power of Yearning

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REBBE NACHMAN OFTEN SPOKE** about the great power of yearning. He taught that obstacles are sent by God in order to intensify our longing for a holy goal, because only the power of yearning can help a person achieve a level or objective that he otherwise might not be worthy of achieving.

*The more something is withheld from us, the stronger we long for it.*

In *Likutey Moharan* I, 56, the Rebbe explains that we are, in some sense, like little children: the more something is withheld from us, the stronger we long for it. When the goal is great, it must be reached by a commensurate force of desire. This is certainly true for one of the greatest goals of all: to ascend to live in Eretz Yisrael, which Rebbe Nachman described as the ideal place for a Jew to develop into an *ish chayil*, a warrior, in God's service.



Rebbe Nachman's daughter Udel married the son of the Rav of Chmelnik, while another daughter, Miriam, married the son of the Rav of Volochisk. A number of people mentioned to the Rav of Chmelnik that the Rav of Volochisk had been longing and yearning for the past forty years to merit to move to Eretz Yisrael.

When the Rav of Chmelnik heard this, he replied, "What is all this noise about longing and yearning for forty years to go to Eretz Yisrael? You get the money together, and you go!"

When someone told this exchange over to Rebbe Nachman, he responded, "The Rav of Volochisk, who is filled with longing for Eretz Yisrael, will eventually merit to get there. And the Rav of Chmelnik, who said that one can just 'get the money together and go,' will never get to Eretz Yisrael."

So it was. Not too long after this exchange took place, the Rav of Volochisk merited to move to Eretz Yisrael together with all of his family, and was privileged to live there for a number of years.

*Based on Siach Sarfei Kodesh II:122*

## SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l

97. Good tidings can allow you to say Psalms.

98. Saying Psalms is a remedy for a sick person, as it brings him to put his trust in God alone. This trust is a support and a staff. One leans on and depends on God just as one leans on a staff or cane.



King David said, "God has been my staff" (Psalms 18:19). He could lean on God as on a physical support. It is written, "If he gets up and walks about outside on his staff, he shall be cleared" (Exodus 21:19). One is healed through the staff of trust.

It is also written, "A staff shall come forth out of the stock of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1). This verse speaks of the Mashiach, who will emanate from David. (He will hold the healing staff of faith.) It is also written, "The breath of our nostrils, God's Mashiach" (Lamentations 4:20). (The staff of healing will arise through the holy breath that King David placed in the Psalms.)

Regarding the Messianic age, it is written, "There shall yet sit old men and women in the broad places of Jerusalem for many days, every man with his staff in his hand" (Zechariah 8:4). From this verse, the Talmud learns that tzaddikim will resurrect the dead in the Messianic age. The staff that they hold will be that of Elisha, which was used to resurrect the son of the Shunamite. Thus, it is written, "Place my staff on the boy's face" (II Kings 4:29).



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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.*