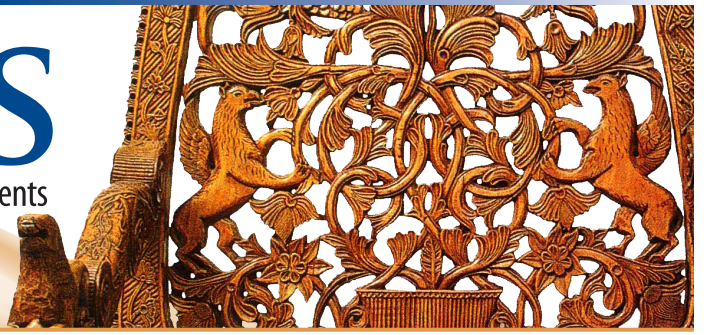


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Story of Our Lives

By Yossi Katz

**ARE YOU HAPPY** with your life? Can you say that you've always made the right choices and are proud of everything you've done? If you could turn back the clock, would you do everything the same way again? Don't you wish that life would just proceed in an orderly and successful way?

Preparing for Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment, involves a great deal of introspection. (If you haven't started yet, now may be a good time!) Naturally, as we think back and remember our deeds (or misdeeds), many of these questions nag at us and prey on our conscience. But this is similar to the process described in this week's *parashah*.

When the Holy Temple stood, farmers in Israel would make a special trip each year to Jerusalem. They would bring along their "first fruits," or *bikkurim*, which they placed in a basket to present to the Kohen. Each farmer would declare:

"An Aramean tried to destroy my father. He descended to Egypt and stayed there, few in number. There he became a large, powerful and populous nation. The Egyptians treated us cruelly and harmed us. ... God heard our voice and saw our pain, our toil and our oppression. He took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with great awe, with signs and with wonders. He brought us to this place and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Deuteronomy 26:5-9).

Declaring this, the farmer presenting his bounty reflected on the awesome place he had arrived at. He was living in his own country, the Holy Land, and was personally bringing his crops to the Holy Temple, the holiest place on earth. What a privilege! But he would also remember the many setbacks along the way. An Aramean named Laban had continually switched his ancestor Jacob's wages and tried to harm him. His people had been exiled in Egypt as slaves, cruelly oppressed and murdered. Yet despite all this, not only did Laban fail, but Jacob was able to marry both of Laban's precious daughters, who would later give birth to the "perfect offspring," the holy Twelve Tribes. Likewise, in

spite of the Egyptian exile, the Jews were redeemed as a great nation, populous and wealthy.

This is the story of our lives, too. The ploys of Laban or Pharaoh are the work of the forces of evil seeking to destroy our faith and trust in the Oneness of God and His perfect plan. We are bombarded by negative thoughts, questioning whether we are really "going anywhere" and if there is any purpose to our actions. Just as Jacob and Moses were victorious, so too, in the end, we will be victorious. But we must first remember that our ancestors did not arrive via a smooth path.

God knew that man was destined to err. Therefore He created *teshuvah* (repentance) before the creation of the world. Furthermore, the Midrash explains that the Torah begins with the word *Bereishit* ("In the beginning" or "At first") because the world was created for the purpose of *reishit* (beginnings). This is represented by the first or beginning fruit (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4).

The bringing of the first fruits teaches us how to live a life of ultimate purpose – a life of new beginnings and renewal. We remember that yes, yesterday might have been rough, but just as in the stories of the Torah, God will bring about our ultimate salvation.

Even if someone transgressed the entire Torah thousands of times, there is still hope! It is our job to strengthen our faith, start afresh, and wait for the time when we, too, will experience our redemption. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Basar BeChalav 4:13*

## HEALING LEAVES

FROM THE LETTERS OF REB NOSON OF BRESLOV

Compiled by Yitzchok Leib Bell



You should rejoice every day in Rebbe Nachman's teachings...The words are always flowing, and every single one of them is a well of fresh, cool water to a weary soul. (*Letter #185*)

# The Secret of His Success

By Yehudis Golshevsky

“**YOU NEED TO** be very obstinate in your Divine service!” Rebbe Nachman would say in later years. He could say it, because that kind of holy perseverance was a part of his nature that he cultivated from the earliest age. He was tenacious in his prayers, in his studies, in his mitzvah observance, and in his search for *deveikut* (attachment) with God.

It was said of Rebbe Nachman that from the age of two, he never cried like other children do. If he was hungry, hurt, lonely or exhausted, he would hold back his tears so as not to pain his parents.

But there were times when he was known to cry the most heartfelt tears, when he would weep with his entire soul. When it came time to pray, his tears would fall like rain. And when he couldn't understand his studies—which did happen, like it happens to all children now and then—his cries could melt the heart of any hearer. If the Torah wouldn't open its meaning to him, he would cry like a baby – even when he was no longer a baby. And when he grew up, he would say that those tears were what unlocked the gates of Torah for him, because he persevered in his search for God's word and contact with his Creator.

As the young Nachman grew to maturity, he began to set up a daily quota of prayer and study time for himself that was very demanding. He pushed himself to his limits, and even beyond them, because he knew that that was the path to growth. When a person sets challenges like that for himself, not only can it be difficult for him to accomplish his goals, but it can also wear him out just thinking about the burden that he's committed to. But Nachman hit upon a secret while he was still young, to which he attributed much of his later success.

He would say to himself, “Why should I think today about what I've resolved to do tomorrow, and the day after that? I'm only going to focus on today, on what I have to do in this moment—because that effort is something that I can manage right now. As for tomorrow? It will take care of itself when the time comes!”

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 48-51*

## SIDEPATH

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

273. The Rebbe said, “It is good to make a habit of inspiring yourself with a melody. Song is an elevated concept. It can arouse your heart and draw it towards God. Even if you cannot sing well, you can still inspire yourself with a melody sung to the best of your ability while alone or at home. The loftiness of melody is beyond all measure.”



274. It is very good to have a special room set aside for Torah study and prayer. Such a room is especially beneficial for *hitbodedut*, secluded meditation and conversation with God.

275. Even if you do not have a special room, you can still seclude yourself and converse with God. The Rebbe also said that you can create your own special room under your *tallit*. Just drape your *tallit* over your eyes and converse with God as you desire.

You can also seclude yourself with God in bed under the covers. This was the custom of King David, as it is written, “I converse every night upon my bed” (Psalms 6:7). You can also converse with God while sitting before an open book. Let others think that you are merely studying.

There are many other ways to accomplish this if you truly want to meditate and express your thoughts to God. But it is best to try and have a secluded room. *Hitbodedut* is the root and foundation of holiness and repentance.



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P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641  
P.O.B. 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.*