

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## No Looking Back!

By Yossi Katz

**RONEN GREW UP** as a typical secular Israeli kid. After completing army service, he went off to explore the “magic” of India and everything it offered. While touring the country, he became friendly with some of the lesser elements of society and kept up with them after returning home.

Back in Israel, a former party-mate became Torah-observant and inspired Ronen to follow him in his new path. Soon enough, Ronen found himself a newly observant wife and settled down to raise a family. Unfortunately, as the burden of supporting his family and lifestyle weighed down on him, Ronen was compelled to reach out to some of his old friends and do a little business trafficking Indian dope to Switzerland. To his great regret, he was caught with the goods in his suitcase and was locked up in a notoriously dangerous Indian jail.

Stuck between a corrupt and inefficient court system and a jail cell occupied by jihadi terrorists, Ronen decided he must escape. But try as he might, every time he was about to implement one of his expert escape plans, something went wrong and he was forced to desist. Ronen finally gave up on his plans and sincerely turned to God as his only hope. He poured out his heart to God and placed his trust in Him alone.

One day, feeling ill, Ronen was taken to a prison hospital. He decided to fiddle around with the bathroom window and it unexpectedly shattered all over the floor. Ronen realized that no matter what happened, he was going to be accused of attempting escape. With no choice, he leaped out the window and ran. There was no turning back! (To find out the rest

of Ronen’s true escape story, read the incredible *Escape from India*.)

Not only is this Ronen’s story, but it is the story of the Jews enslaved in Egypt, and the story of our own personal enslavement and redemption.

After hundreds of years of slavery, in the blink of an eye, a savior named Moses comes and, through incredible miracles, redeems the Jewish People. Our *parashah* tells us that when they went out of Egypt, “and also provisions, they did not procure” (Exodus 12:39). Imagine, for 210 bitter years the Jewish People lived in Egypt and had no collective memory of life anywhere else. Yet in an instant, the redemption arrives and they must hurry out without any time to take along some supplies.

Why? Couldn’t God have given them enough time to properly prepare? I can’t possibly imagine going on a day trip with my family in which my wife doesn’t bring along enough supplies to last for a week!

The answer is that when a person has a slave mentality – whether he is physically enslaved, or spiritually enslaved to negative influences, or emotionally attached to an undesirable frame of mind – he can’t think clearly. His plans and provisions will surely be influenced by his compromised state of mind, and before he knows it, he will find himself locked up all over again.

Much like Ronen’s story, we must often wait for what seems like an eternity for our salvation to arrive and yet remain hopeful. But in addition to being patient, it is vital for us to also be ready. When God sends us the inspiration to change and move forward, we must be aware of His sign and willingly take the plunge. Yes, certainly in the long run we need a lasting plan, but now is not the time for contemplation. Now is the time to jump to freedom and not get caught looking back.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Giluach #3*

# 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!

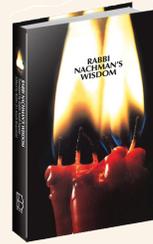
*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 110-111*

## SIDEPATH

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

308 (continued). What use is it to always cry that the past was better? The wise King Solomon refuted this idea long ago when he said, "Do not say that the former times were better than these, for it is not out of wisdom that you ask this" (Ecclesiastes 7:10).

King Solomon was the wisest of all men and spoke with Divine inspiration. He said that it is great foolishness to say, "The former times were better than these." In every generation, there have been people who say this. But if you look closely into the matter, you will see that the world is constantly becoming more prosperous. People continually live better and spend more than in the past.



What difference does it really make? If the world were really poorer now than before, that would be all the more reason to flee to God and involve yourself in Torah and devotion. If there is suffering and trouble in the world, the only place to escape is to God and His Torah.

It is written, "Man is born to struggle" (Job 5:7). The Midrash comments, "'Man is born to struggle' — Fortunate is he who struggles with the Torah" (cf. *Sanhedrin* 99b).

Whether you are rich or poor, your life will be filled with toil and frustration. Man's lot is suffering and pain, as it is written, "For all his days are painful and vexatious" (Ecclesiastes 2:23).



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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.*