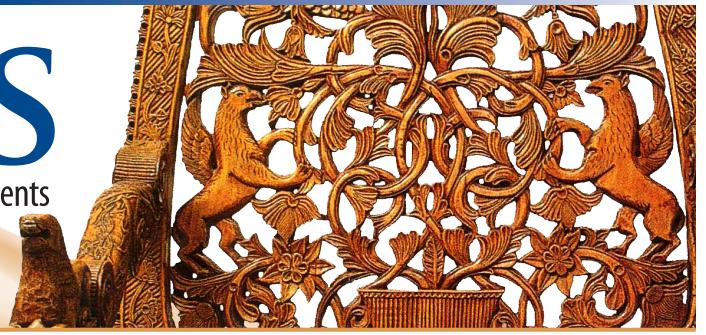


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Light Your Own Flame

By Yossi Katz

A FEW YEARS ago I met someone who told me the most amazing story. It seems that although he had been born into a Chassidic family, one after the other his siblings left the fold. Out of desperation, his parents sent him to Jerusalem to stay with a Yerushalmi Breslov cousin of theirs. Their hope was that the deeply religious environment would protect him from outside negative influences. Unfortunately, the plan did not work. Avi still managed to meet up with the wrong group of friends and before long was following the path of his siblings.

One Shabbat, when he was sure no one was looking, he flicked on the light switch. Suddenly he heard someone moving around right behind him. It was his Yerushalmi cousin. Startled, he expected the usual verbal reproof he had received from his concerned parents. But instead this cousin shared a few simple words of encouragement that would change his attitude and eventually his course of life: “Avi, just know that God still loves you.”

Avi began to understand that deep down, he really did crave a meaningful relationship with God. It was just that the experiences of his upbringing had convinced him that God was somehow out to get him. Now that a deeply religious man had demonstrated to him that, despite his issues, God loved him and was waiting for him, he was able to open up his heart and begin building his own personal connection to Him.

The Hebrew word for soul, *nefesh*, also means to want and to desire. Every pure Jewish soul craves spirituality and is passionately aflame with a desire for closeness to God. This is why, in Judaism, we always associate a candle with the soul; for example, we light a candle on a *yahrtzeit*. Like a flame, the untainted Jewish soul constantly leaps for Godliness. However, life

has a knack for pushing us around and disconnecting ourselves with our spark.

The Kabbalah teaches that there are seven root character traits: Lovingkindness, Discipline, Harmony, Dominance, Splendor, Foundation and Kingship. As human beings, we have the ability to elevate and perfect these traits, or fall prey to them. Therefore we are frequently tested in each of these seven areas. According to our success, there are seven levels of Heaven or seven levels of Hell. It is for this reason that life is so hectic and unpredictable. Our life experiences are our opportunities to grow and thrive in all of these seven areas. The sheer amount of trials almost guarantees that most of us won't always live up to every challenge, that we will sometimes (or often) be routed. So what do we do?

King Solomon teaches, “A righteous man will fall seven times, and rise” (Proverbs 24:16). Even the tzaddik, at his lofty level, falters to an extent, and certainly we do. This is all part of living a virtuous life. Our *parashah* commands us to “kindle the *ner tamid* (eternal light)” (Exodus 27:20). The *ner tamid* resides within each of us: it is our pure soul. No matter what life throws at us, we can kindle the *ner tamid* by remembering our essence, by remembering that God loves us and by burning brightly for closeness with Him.

The essence of every relationship is the passionate desire that each party shares with the other. Our main challenge is to see that even if we fall short in one or all seven areas, we maintain our desire for Godliness. Holding strong, even when things don't seem to go our way, proves our commitment to God! Through our steadfast dedication of trying afresh again and again, we will eventually be able to grab hold of the *ner tamid* and light all the seven blazing lights of the Menorah even in the darkest night. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halahot, Birkhot HaShachar 5*

# The Rebbe's Wedding Day

By Yehudis Golshevsky

IN REBBE NACHMAN'S time, it wasn't uncommon for children to be married off in their early teens. The Rebbe himself was married soon after his bar mitzvah on Rosh Chodesh Nisan 5545 (March 11, 1785), and on his wedding day, he acquired his first chassid.

At the Rebbe's bar mitzvah, his uncle Rabbi Ephraim of Sudilkov, author of *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*, pulled him aside.

"Know that today you receive a fresh gift of spiritual vitality, just like you did on the day you were born," Rabbi Ephraim told him. "The well-known verse in Psalms, 'Behold, I have borne you today,' refers to right now." Rabbi Ephraim continued at length, encouraging his nephew to embark on his path to adulthood with renewed energy and passion.

Soon after, Rebbe Nachman married Sashia, the daughter of Rabbi Ephraim of Ossatin. On the day of the wedding, prominent guests gathered in Medvedevka to celebrate the marriage of a great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov.

The young groom appeared to be deeply immersed in thought and prayer the whole day, taking full advantage of this fresh start—the full forgiveness for all sin—that a bride and groom attain on their wedding day.

At a certain point, close to the time of the chuppah, Rebbe Nachman approached a group of young men who lived in the town. He began to speak with them, to test their mettle – were they serious about serving God, or were they engrossed in the fleeting desires of this world? One of the young men, Reb Shimon b'Reb Ber, caught his attention. Rebbe Nachman took him aside and started to speak with him personally, trying to see where his heart really lay. When Reb Shimon made it clear that his only desire was in the simple service of God, Rebbe Nachman grabbed hold of him.

"Finally, someone who can hear me!" he exclaimed. He then began to speak passionately of Divine service, igniting the heart of Reb Shimon, who was much older than he.

As the Rebbe was called to the chuppah, Reb Shimon said with certainty, "I can see that you are going to be a great tzaddik. When you come into your own, please, let me be your *shamash* (personal assistant)!"

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 119-123*

## SIDEPATH

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

308 (*continued*). The only way to be at ease in this world is to be willing to subsist on an absolute minimum. Firmly resolve to follow the dictum of the Mishnah, "Bread with salt you shall eat ... a life of privation you shall live." Accept upon yourself a life of deprivation and hardship in order to involve yourself in the Torah – "in the Torah you shall toil." Only then will you have life, even in this world. "If you do so, 'You will be happy' ... in this world."



No longer will you suffer from worldly troubles. You have already accepted them upon yourself for the sake of the Torah. All your life – all your good – is the true good. Thus, your life is a true life. Happy are you – even in this world.

The person who wants to live at ease in this world and enjoy its delights will find only bitterness. "Even the slightest breeze will upset him" (*Sotah* 5a). The smallest thing that happens contrary to his wishes will cause him to suffer greatly.

You may be immensely rich and powerful. You may be a lord or a king. It is still impossible for everything to be as you want, in a world filled with suffering. The only way to escape this suffering is in the Torah. Accept the way of the Torah, eating bread with salt... Then you will be happy and it will be good for you. Happy – even in this world.



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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.*