

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Know Where You Stand

By Yossi Katz

**HAVE YOU HEARD** about the great “celebration” that takes place this month? You are probably dreadfully eyeing Sunday’s fast and the start of the Three Weeks of mourning, and wondering what in the world I am referring to. While describing this month of Tamuz, Rebbe Nachman teaches:

“The first letters of ‘*Zikhru Torat Moshe* (Remember the Torah of Moses)’ (Malakhi 3:22) spell *TaMuZ* without the *vav*. This is because in the month of Tamuz, we must elicit mindfulness in order to rectify forgetfulness. For it was then that forgetfulness came into existence, as a result of the Tablets being broken in Tamuz. [The *vav*, which has the numerical value of 6, represents the Tablets, which measured 6 by 6 handbreadths.] As our Sages teach, ‘Had the First Tablets not been shattered, Torah would not have been forgotten from the Jews’” (*Eruvin* 54a; *Likutey Moharan* I, 217).

Imagine, God Himself engraved the First Tablets! The Torah was so exalted that it was to be permanently engraved on our hearts and minds. Had we waited just a bit longer for Moshe to come down the mountain with the Tablets, we would have received a Torah that connected us to God in an unbreakable way. Instead, the Tablets were shattered and forgetfulness descended upon our nation.

Now we feel far, we feel distant, we feel utterly disconnected. Things happen and we lack any sense of clarity. This is all part of forgetfulness. True, we do have the Torah, but it doesn’t always speak to us; often we have a hard time finding the answers when we study it. So how do we connect? How do we deal with tragedy and pain, with difficult times and hard decisions?

In this week’s *parashah*, Bilam describes us as “a people that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among

the nations” (Numbers 23:9). The word *BaDaD* (alone) has the same root as *hitBoDeDut*. This is our defining quality, the key to our eternal survival and eventual success: *A Jew will stand alone with His Creator*. Even though it often seems as if the entire world is battling us and our beliefs, every Jew can courageously stand against the tide by turning to God. No practice better conveys this idea and generates the fortitude to act this way than secluding oneself in conversation with God.

Rebbe Nachman stressed the importance of speaking to God as if He were a true, close friend. When one speaks to a good friend, he feels free to pour out his whole heart and express all his emotions and deepest thoughts. Only by building a strong relationship with God can we develop ourselves to the extent that we realize that He is the only reality. Only then can we gain the strength to stand against the tide.

Every bit of pain we feel, every lack, can be transformed into a prayer. Every experience can be used as an opportunity to come closer. True, there will still be many things that we might never understand in this world. But we can turn to God and cast our burden on Him. We can better understand ourselves and reach clarity. And we can fill our lives with hope by praying for a better future.

God thanked Moses for breaking the Tablets. Why? Don’t we feel at a loss precisely because of it? Had the Jewish People worshiped the idol in the presence of the Tablets, the dichotomy of our actions before God would have been too great to bear. The resulting forgetfulness was the greatest of blessings: It gave us room to face God and build on whatever we lacked, rather than run away from Him and ourselves. By conversing about our forgetfulness and disconnect, we come to remember the Torah that was lost and while not feeling ashamed to stand before God.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5:85*

# Perfect Hospitality

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**BEFORE HIS DAUGHTER** Sarah's wedding, Rebbe Nachman devoted time to teaching her concepts that he hoped would help her throughout her life. He spent much time explaining the greatness of the mitzvah of opening her home to guests. Rebbe Nachman wanted his daughter to have special enthusiasm and love for this mitzvah in particular, knowing full well the spiritual rectifications that take place throughout the worlds when proper care is taken of the guests that God sends us.

After all of her father's impassioned teaching, Sarah grasped the importance of the mitzvah, but now had a new question. Since the mitzvah is so great—it's considered even greater than receiving the Divine Presence—how would it be possible for her to ever carry it out properly, in the best way? It seemed too much for someone like her to be able to perform the mitzvah as it really should be done.

So she brought her question to her father, and Rebbe Nachman answered with classic simplicity, "A guest? It's the simplest thing in the world—another slice of bread, and another space at the table!"

The loftiness of the mitzvah shouldn't make us think that it's beyond us our capacity to fulfill. There's no contradiction between a mitzvah being profound, and at the same time profoundly simple to carry out with good intentions. True, one could exert oneself endlessly to carry out this mitzvah, but if we make it into something grandiose, we'll never do it at all!

\* \* \*

Once Rebbe Nachman visited Sarah after her marriage and found her in a terrible mood. The serving girl who helped her at home had fallen short in her duties and she was frustrated that the girl would not follow her instructions.

Rebbe Nachman said, "You should have prayed for this under your chuppah too, on your wedding day, that your household help won't get you upset!"

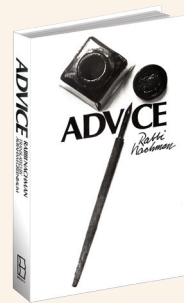
He meant to teach her that the wedding day itself has great power. It's possible to accomplish everything on that day through prayer. The potential of the day should be exploited to the greatest extent. Nothing is too small to pray about on a day when all the Heavenly gates are open!

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 205-206*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**SIGHING.** 3. How precious it is when you sigh out of longing for something holy. The sigh you let out because you are far from holiness breaks the bond of impurity that was trapping you. Now you can bind yourself with the cord of holiness. But the opposite is true when you sigh with desire for something wrongful, God forbid (*Likutey Moharan I*, 109).



4. One sigh of regret for your sins, and the distance that separates you from God is worth more than many fasts and other forms of self-mortification. The sighs you let out when you want something holy can actually break the force of your bodily instincts. Then the soul can draw nearer to the body and communicate to it something of

her own perception of God (*ibid.*)

**EATING.** 1. If the food a person eats is pure in accordance with the dietary laws and he eats it with dignity, without swallowing it hurriedly, the powers of his mind will be restored and grow and his foolishness will be subdued. But if he eats like a glutton, then he will be overwhelmed by foolishness. He will lose his intelligence and the light of the Tzaddik will be concealed from him. He will no longer be able to learn the love and fear of God from the Tzaddik (*Likutey Moharan I*, 17:2-3).



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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.*