

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Back to the Source

By Yossi Katz

**THEY HAD EVERYTHING** they could ever dream of. Living in the choicest part of globe with unlimited food and on a permanent sabbatical, they found the Garden of Eden a true paradise. Yet there was still “something else” that glittered as it hung from a tree. The forbidden fruit somehow lured Adam and Eve into losing everything and caused catastrophic spiritual damage to the world.

On Rosh HaShanah the world was created. Unlike our current existence, everything was originally created to function in an orderly system – “maintenance free.” In fact, things would sprout fully developed and ready for consumption. The only exception was the one thing that was off-limits: the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve were commanded not to partake of its fruits. But the snake ensnared them, “You see that you rule over the world. Everyone hates their competitor. The reason God told you not to eat from the tree is because if you eat from it, you will become the master ruler just like Him!” This was the challenge of Adam and Eve. Would they take the multitudes of blessing that they were granted, appreciate their Source and serve God using them, or would they act selfishly and think that they were great because of them and forget God altogether?

Since Creation, things haven’t changed much. We are each endowed with special blessings and capabilities of both material and spiritual nature. It is our duty to recognize the purpose of being granted these blessings. When we see them for what they are, we can appreciate them and use them properly by connecting with the Ultimate Source through them. By doing this, we rise above the materialism of this world and connect to God in the most beautiful and meaningful way.

But so often we see people who are blessed with things like earthly riches. Despite the fact that God is the Source of all goodness, this newfound wealth actually causes them to forget Him and serve themselves and their own selfish ideas. But isn’t this counter-intuitive? Shouldn’t we feel humbled and recognize the obvious source of our success? Just like Adam and Eve, it is human nature to revert back to our selfish tendencies.

As we approach the month of Tishrei and the New Year, we are once again presented with an awesome second chance. The word *TiShReY* symbolizes being “out of order,” as the letters appear in the reverse order of the Hebrew alphabet. Similarly, the name *ChaVaH* (Eve), who convinced Adam to eat from the forbidden fruit, is spelled in reverse order vis a vis the alphabet. Rebbe Nachman explains that God causes topsy-turvy events to disrupt our perceived lifestyles and schedules to remind us that He is the Source and the purpose of all.

Everything in creation was created for our sake because God is a loving and kind Creator. But we can only maximize our benefit when we use His blessings to connect to the everlasting spiritual reality of creation. Even material things were created only for spiritual purposes. When we forgot all this, we are sent these reminders. Things around us seem to spiral out of our control and we begin to see that we aren’t in charge.

This is the purpose of Rosh HaShanah and Creation. When we ask God to renew our lives for another year with great blessing and opportunity, we are asking Him to invest in our ability to recognize Him. By seeing the signs He sends us and accepting them with love, we humble ourselves and draw ourselves and the world back into alignment with His rulership. *Teshuvah* means returning everything to God. By humbling ourselves, we trade the chaos of a selfish life for a faithful life of paradise and tranquility.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Netilat Yadayim 3*

# Rosh HaShanah in Uman

**EREV ROSH HASHANAH** in Uman was amazing. Imagine tens of thousands of people standing together to recite *Tikkun HaKlali*. It's a powerful experience and very, very serious. Everyone's praying wholeheartedly, begging God to end our troubles and bring the *Mashiach*.

When we finished reciting *Tikkun HaKlali*, I expected everyone to run to the *tziyun*, to cry out to God and beg for consolation. Instead, much to my astonishment, there was a tremendous outburst of joy. People started playing drums and guitars, and everyone spontaneously began singing and dancing. When I saw that, I realized that our generation needs joy. Joy is our generation's path in *avodat Hashem*.

— Menachem Herman

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My parents had instilled within me an understanding and appreciation of the seriousness of Rosh HaShanah. But it was in Uman, inspired by the people around me, that I experienced for the first time the ability to really, almost effortlessly, pray with *kavanah* (concentration and feeling). While you are there, you have nothing to do except the things that you are supposed to be doing on Rosh HaShanah — to pray, to think, to be meditative, to look back and reflect on what you've done the past year and consider how you want to change.

— Danny Goldschmidt

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I traveled to Uman for the first official Rosh HaShanah gathering in 1989. It was relatively small, only around 1,000 people. But we considered it huge! One of the chassidim there told me, "There will come a time when we'll say, 'I remember when there were only 2,000 people in Uman for Rosh HaShanah.'" We laughed.

— Ozer Bergman

*From "Rebbe Nachman and the Knights of the Rosh HaShanah Table"*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**LAND OF ISRAEL.** 1. With true faith, prayer comes into its own. Attaining this level of faith is possible only in the Land of Israel, for it is there that prayer ascends to the worlds above. With faith such as this one can accomplish with one's prayer whatever is necessary: one can work real miracles and wonders in the world (*Likutey Moharan I*, 7:1).

2. The Land of Israel as a spiritual concept is bound up with faith and prayer. If we abuse the Land of Israel, we go into exile. Prayer goes into its own exile, and then it is impossible to pray and bring about miracles (*ibid.*).

3. To be a true member of the Jewish people is to always move to higher and higher levels. Every upward movement that we make toward holiness can be accomplished only through the Land of Israel. The same is true of prayer. The ascent of prayer comes about only in the Land of Israel (*ibid.* I, 20).

4. Through the power of the Torah that we draw into ourselves, we can attain the level of the Land of Israel. Likewise, when we are present at the time that the Tzaddik draws Torah into the world and teaches in public, we have a share in the Torah that is then revealed. This gives us the strength to come to the Land of Israel (*ibid.* I, 6).



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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.*