

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## A Home for God

By Yossi Katz

**WHAT IF THE** Nine Days could be an exciting time of year? I don't mean a time of partying and celebration, but more along the lines of a meaningful time that we feel grateful for having experienced.

Not only does this opportunity exist, but this was certainly the intent of our Sages when they established the laws and customs of this period. Real Judaism is never about cultural or historical practices, and it's certainly not about imposing archaic, difficult and meaningless restrictions on us. This time period is no different, and in our fast-paced, ADD world, it behooves us to slow down and discover the many essential parts of lives that can be accessed only through the lessons of these more somber days.

Every person has his home or base where people get to know and experience him. For example, a boss has his office and a Rabbi has his study. Without limiting themselves to specific places, it wouldn't be possible to create the relationships they desire. Similarly, a husband and wife live together in their house or apartment; this is an environment where they get to know each other in the most intimate way.

The *Beit HaMikdash* (Holy Temple) literally means "the sanctified house." It was a house for God, the one place on earth where God's Presence would rest among us and create the optimal environment for spiritual development and experience on Earth.

But let's take a step back. The idea of God, the Infinite and most Awesome Being, constricting His Presence and clothing His Majesty in an earthly house is difficult to understand. He is so incredibly great; why would He limit, so to speak, His Presence to this one place?

A king can't exist without a people. In an incredible display of humbleness, God desired to bestow His Kingship upon us. In order to effectuate this act, He requires our acknowledgement and loyalty to Him.

He therefore constricted His Presence by clothing His majesty in the *Beit HaMikdash*, so that we may know Him and become His intimate People.

Unfortunately, as time went on, we lost our sense of appreciation for this unique opportunity. This can be seen by the misdeeds our Prophets and Sages spell out, one of which was that we did not make the blessings on the Torah before engaging in its study. It was not that we didn't study the Torah, but that we didn't first make the blessings on it. What's so bad about this that it caused the exile?

Reb Noson explains that in the blessing we say, "Who has chosen us from among the nations." We may indeed have studied, but the essence of Torah is its special nature that allows us to forge a relationship with God. If we did not recognize this relationship, we would no longer be deserving of it. Because of our lack of appreciation, God no longer concealed and constricted His majesty to this one place, and therefore it could no longer withstand His greatness and was subsequently destroyed.

As we reflect upon our enormous loss during these days, we should feel a renewed sense of hope. God has not changed His mind; had He wished to, He would have destroyed us rather than exile us. His greatest desire is to once again rest His Presence among us. Our spiritual exiles, whether national or personal, remind us that if we humble ourselves and lessen our egos, God will immediately reciprocate, lessening Himself by clothing His Presence once again in the *Beit HaMikdash* and in our personal lives.

Now is a time of great introspection. We can look at our lives and humble ourselves before God by admitting to our various deficiencies, whether in Torah study or prayer, or in our relationships with loved ones and friends. True, we may not immediately change, but by taking the first colossal step and honestly evaluating ourselves, we lessen our egos and make room for God within our hearts and lives.

Let's begin to rebuild.

*Based on Likutey Moharan I, 219*

# Steer Clear!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

WHEN BRESLOVER CHASSIDIM would find one of their number on the margins of a conflict or controversy, they would offer gentle rebuke to discourage the friend from getting involved. “Rebbe Nachman once said, ‘In the ultimate future, there will be kings and leaders of nations who will want to avoid fighting any wars. All they wish for is peace and tranquility. They will not be able to do this, however. They will be grabbed by the hairs of their head and forced to fight against their will!’”

The same holds true for every conflict. Even though many people prefer peace, each side feels the need to convince others to join the fray, arguing endlessly until they feel they have convinced the wretched person to endorse their side. They desperately want to rope even the most passive person into their disagreement. We all need to keep this in mind and avoid taking sides in any argument, ignoring whatever pressures we may have to bear.

The chassidim would continue, “You might wonder how to steer clear of dispute. The answer is to simply flee the scene of the conflict! If you can’t run away, be careful to never express an opinion that seems to take one side over the other. Doing so can cause endless, unnecessary slander and heartache. It is so easy to take sides and become part of a dispute which really has nothing to do with you!”

Breslover chassidim were no strangers to opposition, so it seems difficult to understand how they managed against their opponents without arguing. Earlier chassidim laid out a general plan for dealing with those times when one’s commitment to the Rebbe’s path is under attack: “Unless you are certain that your words will make a positive impression, it is better to remain silent in the face of adversity. Better to swallow your words and silently bear insult than to amplify your negative traits by engaging in a fight.”

Reb Aharon Kiblitchev said about an elderly man who had passed away, “Although he was persecuted by others, he never fought against anyone his entire life.” This is high praise for a human being: to have lived without conflict in a world that is fraught with fighting and hatred.

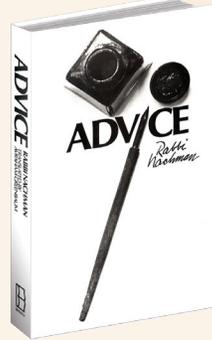
*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh IV:92, VII:147, VIII:117*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**PRIDE & HUMILITY.** 25. When a person is arrogant, it is a sign that he will end up in trouble. The opposite is also true: A person who is humble and lowly will come to great honor (*Likutey Moharan I*, 168).

26. The greater the humility of a ruler or leader, the more his power and dominion will spread (*ibid.* II, 16).



27. Most people have very mistaken ideas about what it is to be humble. You must be very careful not to fall into the trap of false modesty. Pray to God about this and ask to be worthy of true humility in accordance with His desire (*ibid.* II, 38).

28. The part of each person that will be restored to life during the Future Resurrection is the modest, humble part and that alone (*ibid.* II, 72).

29. At the root of every single Jew there exists an aspect of the humility and lowliness of Moses. However, these are hidden and concealed to the point that they are “dead,” as it were, and for this reason the average person does not consciously experience them at all, and is far from being humble and lowly in the way Moses was. But as a person draws closer to the Tzaddik ... he is able to develop a sense of genuine shame and achieve repentance. The humility and lowliness concealed in him will then come to life (*ibid.*).



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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.*