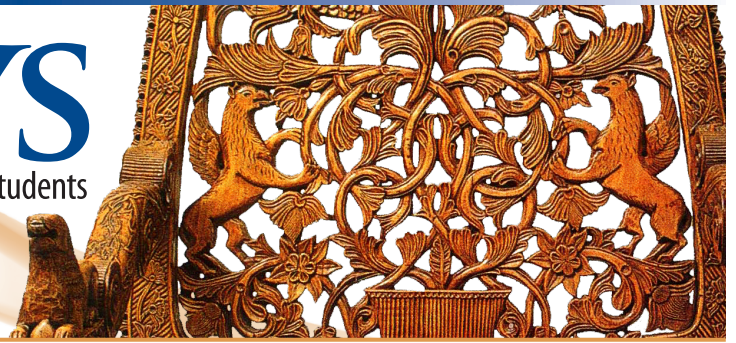


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT VAYEITZEI • 5778 • VOL. 8 NO. 7

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## You're Doing Something Right

By Yossi Katz

**HAVE YOU EVER** looked at an object and been unable to discern what it was, only to realize that it was upside-down and that you're quite familiar with it? Not only do such occurrences happen to us optically, there are spiritual experiences we constantly face that confuse us into perceiving ourselves in the completely opposite way.

Rebbe Nachman taught that when a person rises from one level to the next, he must pass through illusions in order to attain holiness. As soon as he ascends to a higher level, he must contend with the evil forces on that level. When these forces are aroused, they surround the person, challenging him with evil or negative thoughts and desires. In this way, he is confused into thinking that he has fallen and is not worthy of this higher level (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 25).

Remember how many times you invested tremendous energy, prayer and dedication into changing yourself for the better? Perhaps you decided you're finally going to really concentrate during prayer, or maybe that you'll purify your mind from thinking illicit thoughts, or looking at forbidden things. Soon enough, after an initial upward change, you appear to be more challenged than ever in these areas. Next you freak out and scream out of frustration and hopelessness, "What in the world is going on with me?!"

However, Rebbe Nachman says that you're looking at things upside-down. In the spiritual world, each person is lined up one beneath the other. Because we have risen, we also pushed up and away the previous person and their force of holiness that had subdued the forces of evil at their plateau. Now we must work to subdue these forces again on our new level. Our perceived fall is actually a sign of us growing. Instead of despairing, we should be tremendously encouraged by the challenges and temporary setbacks.

This is exactly what Jacob experienced in our *parashah*. "Jacob left Beersheba and went to Charan" (Genesis 28:10). According to Kabbalah, Be'er Sheva (literally, "Well of Seven") represents the level of the seven lower *sefirot*. A person's spiritual greatness is determined by how much bounty he receives from the seven *sefirot* at his level. Jacob was leaving his place to ascend to a place of higher bounty.

But in order to reach this place, Jacob had to face *ChaRaN* (which is similar to *ChaRoN af*, Divine anger), signifying the illusions one faces before reaching their goal. God's characteristic of anger or judgment challenges a person who wants more, to prove that he's worthy of it. Jacob understood this and strengthened himself with the knowledge that this is the path to holiness. The Torah therefore says, "He came upon the place" (ibid. 28:11). "The place" refers to God, who is called "the Place of the world." Jacob was now coming closer to God.

"He lodged there because the sun had set" (ibid.). The setting of the sun represents a loss of spiritual perception. The spiritual light that had lit up Jacob's life at his previous level was now gone. He then dreamed of a ladder with angels ascending and descending, hinting to man's mission in this world, to ascend from level to level and not allow obstacles to sidetrack him. Then Jacob awoke and said, "How awesome is this place! It must be the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven!" (ibid. 28:17). Although moments ago all had seemed dark and hopeless as the illusions tried to convince him that he had fallen, now he awoke to find that this place was actually the place of the Holy Temple!

May we, too, have the inner fortitude and boldness to see through the false illusions of our life and merit to come to the place of the Holy Temple very soon. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Matanah 4*

# A Master of Advice

By Ozer Bergman

**REB SHIMSHON BARSKI** (1873–1935) was a leader of the Breslover Chassidim in prewar Uman. His entire approach to Judaism was unpressured, unhurried, dignified and patient, as we would expect from a descendant of the Rebbe. Reb Shimshon didn't waste words, always speaking to the point. When he spoke, he spoke softly, but with directives that were consistent, clear, and left no room for uncertainty. Yet he didn't "tie the ropes of connection" so tightly that they choked the spirit of those who sought his advice.

Reb Shimshon had great influence on Breslovers near and far. His gentle ways attracted many to Rebbe Nachman's teachings. Because he behaved so wisely, he greatly influenced many who came to the Breslov synagogue in Uman, even the unlettered. He avoided controversy and advised others to do the same.

For example, when people wanted to remove someone from the synagogue because of his overenthusiastic praying, Reb Shimshon said, "Believe me, he disturbs me, too, with his clapping and shouting. But I'm afraid to say anything to him—maybe he's sincere."

He often said, "Anger accomplishes nothing. The truth does not become known through anger."

When people questioned a suggestion he gave them, he often commented, "I'm not spouting this from a book as others might. I'm telling you this from my personal experience. The only thing that kept me going through all I've suffered is Rebbe Nachman's advice."

Reb Shimshon encouraged those who wrote to him to tell him how their spiritual life was. He would ask each one if he had a partner for studying Rebbe Nachman's teachings and if he had a regular Torah-study program. Reb Shimshon showed special concern for the converts to Judaism who had become Breslovers.

After the Russian Revolution, the borders were closed and travel to Uman for Rosh HaShanah was impossible. The Breslover Chassidim in Poland arranged to pray together in Lublin. Reb Shimshon was asked for his opinion about the gathering.

He said, "The gathering in Poland is a good thing because it allows a person to pray carefully and enthusiastically. However, regarding the tikkun (rectification) of Rosh HaShanah, one must continue to long to be in Uman because Rebbe Nachman's Rosh HaShanah is only there, and nowhere else."

*From "A Bit More Advice"*

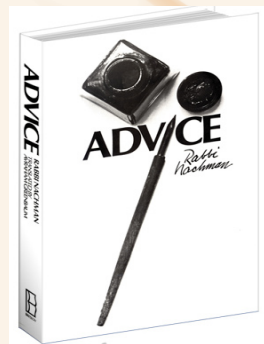
*Dedicated in the Memory (L'Ilui Nishmat) of Yehudis bat Shimon*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**UNDERSTANDING.** 35. Very tall people are usually foolish (*Likutey Moharan I*, 55:6).

36. Don't be over-sophisticated. Being clever, or even wise, is no good unless you act correctly in your practical life. To draw closer to God, the most important thing is a steadfast heart. The main source of the heart's strength lies in good deeds. ...



Worldlywisdom—as opposed to the wisdom of the Torah—is futile. The worst thing of all is philosophy. One should simply abandon all one's pretensions to wisdom and

defer to the men of truth who follow the path of truth as we know it by tradition from our Sages (*ibid.*).

37. There is nothing in the world that does not contain Godliness, however hidden it may be. There are two levels of concealment. When God is hidden with one concealment, it is indeed hard to find Him, but still, with great effort and searching, it is possible, because at least one knows that God is hidden from him. But at the time of the "concealment within the concealment," even the fact that God is hidden is itself concealed. The individual has no idea that God is concealed from him, and then it is indeed hard to find Him. The concealment of Godliness comes about through sin (*ibid.* I, 56:3).



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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.*