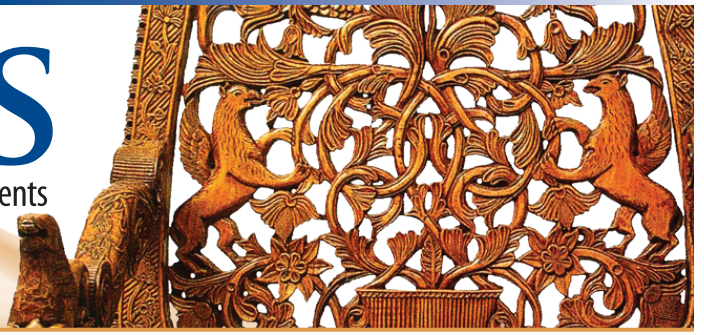


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## In the Know

By Yossi Katz

**KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, EDUCATION** ... these are the cornerstones of a typical Jewish upbringing. Almost as soon as a Jewish baby is born, his or her parents have already established a college fund. This reminds me of a joke: A Jewish mother is walking down the street with her two little boys. A passerby sees the children and remarks, “What adorable children you have. How old are they?” The proud mother replies, “The doctor is seven and the lawyer is five.”

But is knowledge truly everything? And should measuring our lives based on “what we know” be the guiding principle for our children and ourselves?

To answer this question, we turn to our *parashah*. Over the past few weeks, the Torah has recounted numerous incredible miracles. First we read about the Ten Plagues devastating mighty Egypt and bringing about the release of the Jewish People. Now free, the Jews must travel through the Sinai desert on their way to the Holy Land. God leads them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. The battered Egyptians decide to give it one more shot and pursue the Jews into the sea. The sea supernaturally splits and the Jews cross on dry land. The Egyptians, in hot pursuit, meet the sea-wall as it comes crashing down on them.

The Talmud testifies to the awesome level of the Jewish People at this time: “What a maidservant at the sea saw, Yechezkel ben Buzi [the prophet Ezekiel] did not see in all his days” (*Mekhilta*, Rashi 15:2). Let’s ponder the depth of this statement. Ezekiel was a very great prophet; his most famous vision was that of God’s “Chariot” (Ezekiel 1). This vision was so great that our Rabbis warned, “The Act of Creation can be taught to just one student at a time, but the Chariot cannot be

taught at all. It must be studied alone, and then only if the student is wise and understands on his own” (*Chagigah* 11b). Despite Ezekiel’s lofty vision, he did not reach the exalted level of the simple maidservant at the sea!

After all these miracles, and considering the incredibly elevated level of the Jewish People, the Torah states, “And Israel saw the great hand which the Lord had used upon the Egyptians ... and they *believed* in God and Moses His servant” (Exodus 14:31). At this point, wouldn’t just “believing” be preposterous? Moreover, the verse seems to imply that their knowledge led to their faith. Doesn’t belief apply only to something that you can’t experience for yourself?

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the essence of knowledge is to know that you know nothing at all. Yes, the Jews had seen the “hand of God” – but the more they saw, the more they appreciated God’s greatness and acknowledged the limitations of personal knowledge. Knowledge and education are important as a means, not an end. The purpose of expanding our knowledge is to strengthen our faith in God. After all is said and done, all roads lead to faith and the existence of the ever-present Creator. Therefore the greatest thing we can do is to fortify ourselves with simple faith in God and his true Tzaddikim.

Living with faith means living a God-centered life. It means living with the awareness that everything we experience is being orchestrated by God Himself. And it means perceiving that we must always have faith, because no matter how much we know about God, we realize our insignificance vis-à-vis His greatness and rulership.

Rebbe Nachman said, “The world considers faith a minor thing. But I consider it an extremely great thing” (*Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom* #33).

*Based on Otzar HaYirah, Emunah 82*

# To Set Foot in the Holy Land!

By Chaim Kramer

**REBBE NACHMAN MADE** his adventure-filled journey to the Holy Land in 1798-99. Reb Noson embarked on his own pilgrimage in 1822.

In the winter of 1822 Reb Noson met a man who had recently arrived from the Holy Land. With the Mediterranean in the grip of the Greek-Turkish war, his journey to Odessa had taken five grueling months, and he painted a gloomy picture of the dangers of traveling to Eretz Yisrael at that time.

But then Reb Noson met a Breslover chassid who told him: When Rebbe Nachman started planning his trip to Eretz Yisrael, a wealthy follower pleaded with him to take him along. The Rebbe said, "If you want to go to Eretz Yisrael, why don't you just go? The man said, "If you take me, I'll go." "What reason do you have for wanting to go to the Holy Land?" the Rebbe asked him. "Turks and Arabs also travel there!" Suddenly the Rebbe became full of passion and said to the people who were there, "When someone wants to go to Eretz Yisrael, he says, 'If you'll take me, I'll go'?! Someone who wants to go to Eretz Yisrael should be willing to go on foot! God said to Abraham, 'Go walk ... to the Land'" (Genesis 12:1).

Reb Noson and his traveling companion, Reb Yehudah Eliezer did go, enduring many travails on land and by sea. When they arrived in Safed, the chassidic community was amazed that anyone would risk coming at such a time – and just for the merit of walking on the soil of the Holy Land!

On the voyage home, their ship was captured by Turks who demanded ransom money from all the passengers. It was just as Rebbe Nachman related in his story of "The Burgher and the Pauper": Sometimes the difficulties one encounters and the conclusion of a mitzvah are as great, if not greater, than those one confronts while actually performing the mitzvah itself.

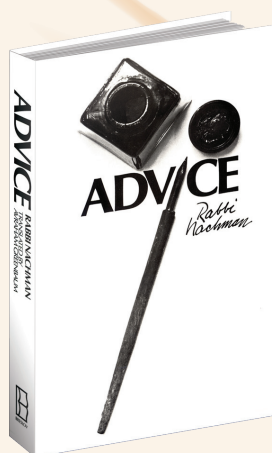
Reb Noson was someone who valued every minute and would not let a single moment go to waste. Yet for the love of Eretz Yisrael, nothing was too minor for him to attend to in person – negotiating for tickets, arranging travel papers, even selling books to make ends meet – all in order to set foot in the Holy Land.

*From "Through Fire and Water:  
The Life of Reb Noson of Breslov"*

## SIDEPATH

**Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum**

**SPEECH.** 9. Talking in a derogatory way about other people reinforces the power of fantasy and illusion within us. When people use bad language and speak derogatorily about others, their understanding is taken



from them and they fall from the love of God into animalistic passions and desires. The source of these passions and desires is in the faculty of fantasy and imagination, which is part of man's animal nature. It feeds upon falsehood and slander. It is directly opposed to the faculty of memory, through which we keep the true facts of our situation and our eternal destiny in the forefront of our minds.

Those who abuse language fall instead into "forgetfulness," which is "death to the heart" because their heart dies within them and they never remember that the true goal of life in this world is the eternal life of the World to Come. People like this are dead even in their lifetime, because they have no conception of their true goal and purpose (*Likutey Moharan I*, 54:5).

10. Excessive greed for food and drink causes speech to go into "exile." The words become trapped in the constriction of the throat. One who is a glutton is unable to say a single word before God. The remedy for this is fasting (*ibid. I*, 62:5).



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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.*