

# On the River

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Near the town of Medvedevka in Ukraine was a village called Husyatin, surrounded by the green fields and grazing flocks that characterized the region. Nearby, the river Zbruch flowed, bounded by forests and farmsteads. In that small village, the newly-married Rebbe Nachman (who was then barely into his teens, and hardly a Rebbe) lived with his equally young wife in the home of his in-laws, studying Torah while his wife's family supported the new couple.

During that time, the young Nachman continued to practice secrecy in his personal devotions, preferring that his in-laws and other members of the community think him to be a young man like all others, and maybe even more frivolous than that. He would go for solitary walks along the riverbank, among the cattails and reeds, and spend hours in private communion with G-d. Nachman would often take a small boat out onto the water and allow it to drift into the growth along the bank, so that he could be hidden under its canopy of branches and leaves while he poured his heart out before his Creator.

Sometimes, when the wind and the current were high, Nachman's small craft would be in danger of capsizing—a running river can be just as dangerous as the open sea when the circumstances turn against the sailor. In later years, Rebbe Nachman would use those images to help his students understand what it means to pray with all your heart:

*“When you stand before G-d to pray for your needs, to be saved from your lower nature which always lies in ambush, you should feel as though you're like a man alone in a tiny boat on the open sea, with the abyss right below you, ready to swallow you down... When your prayer emerges from that sense of imminent danger, the crying out is completely different—it bursts out of the heart with heat and honesty...”*

*“And the truth is that this is the nature of our situation as human beings here in this world, always hovering between heaven and earth, like a craft tossed up and down upon a*

*stormy sea. We are suspended over the abyss, and the wind is high...the danger is great...and our only hope is to cry out, and cry out to G-d for help!"*