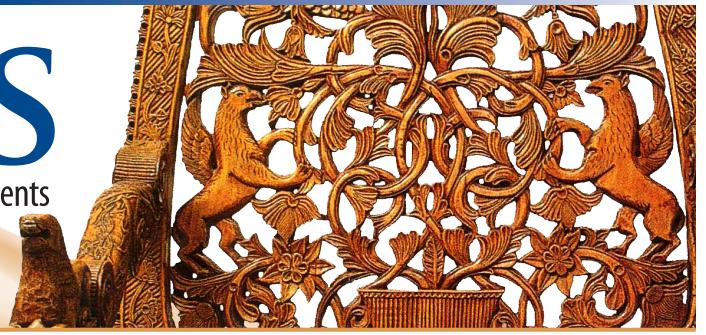


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Distance is an Illusion

By Yossi Katz

“**THE ESSENCE OF** God’s greatness is that the very person who is most distant from Him can and should serve Him... There is a common misconception among young people that this principle does not apply to them, for a person may think he has too deeply tainted himself and has done too much wrong. But the truth is just the opposite – this principle applies especially to him! A person’s main test in life, and the essence of the refining process he must undergo, is that through all the declines and falls and through all that he experiences, he should not allow himself to become distanced from God, from Torah or from prayer” (*Healing Leaves*, p. 65).

I know it’s not Sukkot season, but I have a related thought. You see, being handy is not one of my good qualities, and while I know others who appreciate the handyman qualities that building a sukkah tends to bring out, I personally get stressed by the experience. A few years ago, I invested in an expensive type of sukkah that was guaranteed to just “snap together,” no tools necessary! Well, all I can say is that I had a difficult time figuring out exactly where the tall and heavy boards were supposed to “snap together.”

Now consider how awkward it was for the Jews journeying for so many years in the desert to be lugging with them all the components of the Tabernacle, assembling and disassembling this structure at every stop. Surely it would have been easier to set up a permanent structure. What was the purpose of all the schlepping?

Additionally, when the Tabernacle was set up, there were very strict rules based on its sanctity regarding who could go where. Someone who violated these rules was liable for the death penalty. Yet after the Tabernacle was disassembled and moved, its previous

resting place retained zero sanctity. If we compare the Tabernacle with its permanent replacement, the Holy Temple, the difference is striking. Even today, the Temple Mount retains a level of sanctity that restricts Jews from entering its precincts. Why was the Tabernacle different?

By building the Golden Calf, the Jews stumbled in the cardinal sin of idol worship. God’s awesome revealed glory that they had just experienced at Mount Sinai during the Giving of the Torah became hidden from them. Because of this, the Land of Israel, the place where Godliness is openly revealed, was also inaccessible to them. Therefore they were forced to journey from place to place in a barren desert, so far removed from the Promised Land that lay just ahead.

But even in moments like these, God does not forsake us. Inasmuch as every place is filled with God’s glory, God chooses to reveal Himself openly only in places of sanctity. Yet even when we are so distant, if we choose to search for Him and call out to Him, there is a place above time and space where we can access the most awesome levels of Godliness, a place of no boundary.

Therefore God commanded us to take gold, silver and copper – the very same materials that were used to construct an idol – and build for Him a temporary home, the Tabernacle. The same materials that brought about so much evil now brought redemption. Despite their having been used for unholy purposes, and in general being materials used for mundane work and trade, God revealed to us that even they could become a transformative instrument. Precisely because the holiness revealed at the places where the Tabernacle stood was so great, this holiness could have no permanent setting.

God’s greatness is unfathomable. Let us always search for it.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Geviyat Chom MeYesomim 3*

# Simple Acts

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REBBE NACHMAN ALWAYS** taught his students that their main focus in prayer should be on the straightforward meaning of the words. Even those who studied Kabbalah were discouraged from veering from the plain meaning of the prayers during the act of prayer itself.

When asked by an advanced student what particular meditation he should have in mind when saying a particular Divine Name, Rebbe Nachman wondered aloud, “‘God’ is not enough for you?”

This was Rebbe Nachman’s approach to prayer, and also to mitzvot in general. To act with directness and simplicity, to pray and carry out mitzvot purely as a means of fulfilling God’s will.

When Rebbe Nachman was a young child and found himself gifted with a coin, he would hurry to change it into smaller coins, into pennies. He would then steal into the synagogue—sometimes even through the window—so that no one would see him. Quietly and stealthily, he would take out a *Shaarey Zion* prayerbook, which included all kinds of additional prayers and supplications for different times and events, and very sweetly recite the *LeShem Yichud* prayer that is said by some prior to performing a mitzvah. Making sure he was not being observed, he would then sidle over to the charity box and deposit one penny.

As soon as he had dropped the coin into the box, he immediately went back to his *Shaarey Zion* prayerbook, recited the *LeShem Yichud*, and went to give another penny to charity. He did this again and again, with no less enthusiasm each time, until every single coin had found its way into the charity box.

Young as he was, Rebbe Nachman knew the value of every mitzvah—act, and he took this outlook with him as he grew: to invest in the simple acts, and to do as many of them as possible.

Similarly, Rebbe Nachman encouraged his students to sing all of the Shabbat songs at the meals “like simple Jews do,” and not to feel that it was somehow a waste of time that could be better spent some other way. “Singing all of the Shabbat songs saves one’s children from following the path away from Yiddishkeit! We sing from the simple joy of being Jewish!”

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 115-117*

## SIDEPATH

*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l*

308 (continued). The wealthiest people in the world will tell you that the world is filled with worry and suffering. The rich suffer as much as everyone else. Thus, our Sages teach, “The more possessions, the more worry” (*Avot* 2:7).

The poor may not realize this. They may think that they would no longer have any problems if they were wealthy.

But they are sadly mistaken, as we can see with our own eyes. The truth is as our Sages have taught it. Whether you are rich or poor, you cannot avoid worries. The world is filled with pain and suffering, and there is no avenue of escape.

If you are a man, you worry about earning a livelihood. You are concerned about your wife and children. If you are a woman, you imagine that you are troubled by your husband. Then there is the real suffering and pain of those who have serious sickness and misfortune. Heaven help us.

There is no escape – except in the Torah.

If you desire the good of this world and want to live at ease without troubles, you will be constantly frustrated. The more you seek good, the more you will find the opposite. Everything you manage to grasp will be diluted with suffering. Look with truth and you will see this yourself.



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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.*