

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT PEKUDEY • 5776 • VOL. 6 NO. 21

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## Am I a Turkey?

By Yossi Katz

**ONE OF REBBE NACHMAN'S** most famous and amusing tales is "The Turkey Prince." It goes like this:

*A prince once became crazy and thought he was a turkey. He felt compelled to sit without clothing under the table, pecking at bones and pieces of bread like a turkey. All the royal physicians gave up hope of curing him of this madness. The king grieved tremendously.*

*A sage arrived and said, "I will undertake to cure him." The sage undressed and sat under the table, next to the prince, picking crumbs and bones. "Who are you?" asked the prince. "What are you doing here?" "And you?" replied the sage. "What are you doing here?"*

*"I am a turkey," said the prince.*

*"I'm also a turkey," answered the sage.*

*They sat together like this for some time, until they became good friends. One day, the sage signaled the king's servants to throw him shirts. He said to the prince, "What makes you think that a turkey can't wear a shirt? You can wear a shirt and still be a turkey." With that, the two of them put on shirts.*

*The sage continued in this manner until they were both completely dressed. Then he signaled for regular food from the table. The sage asked the prince, "What makes you think you will stop being a turkey if you eat good food? You can eat whatever you want and still be a turkey!" They both ate the food.*

*Finally the sage said, "What makes you think a turkey must sit under the table? Even a turkey can sit at the table." The sage continued in this manner until the prince was completely cured.*

This tale begs an obvious question. The sage was obviously very clever; couldn't he have just sat the prince down and explained to him logically that he wasn't a turkey?

The turkey is representative of our animalistic desires. The *Tanya* says that a book describing the evil nature of our animal soul would take some 500 years to complete! The overwhelming strength of our urges convinces us that we are nothing better than a turkey, pecking around at whatever exciting things we see and want. We feel trapped by our physical cravings and desires. How do we get out?

The prince represents our holy soul. Our soul is a portion of the Divine and our true identity. Describing its holy essence would take all of eternity! The sage teaches the prince that for him to realize his essence does not require tackling his ego and selfishness head-on. In fact, confronting with his urges might pull him even deeper into their lure. Rather, the proper approach is to realize that even though he may think he is an animal, and even if he may have behaved like an animal, he can still serve God and choose to do good. The more he sees he is capable of wanting to do good and acting in positive ways, the more the prince becomes convinced that though he was born with many unfulfilled lusts and thoughts, they are not him and he need not take them so seriously.

We descend into this world to travel through a spiritual desert of tests, challenges and pitfalls. Our *parashah* states, "These are the accounts of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle..." (Exodus 38:21). The word "Tabernacle" is repeated twice to teach us that it is as if there were two Tabernacles, one when it was assembled and one when it was disassembled and, later, buried. The Tabernacle is always holy and will always protect the Jewish People throughout our travels. By desiring to do good and to be close to God, even when we feel no better than a turkey, we can draw down God's Presence and protection so we can eventually emerge from this desert in a sane and whole way. Amen!

*Based on a lecture by R' Pinchas Bunker and Likutey Halakhot, Birckot HaShachar 5*

# Free of Sin

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**FROM THE VERY** beginning, Reb Shimon – Rebbe Nachman’s *shamash* and first follower – put into practice every word of guidance that he heard from the Rebbe. After years of intense Divine service, Rebbe Nachman said of him, “Shimon is just like his name. *ShiMON* can be rearranged as *MaSh AVoN* (free of sin).” Reb Noson said in later years that Rebbe Nachman attested that Reb Shimon had conquered all of his negative character traits – entirely through prayer and *hitbodedut*.

Even though Reb Shimon ran a business, he never allowed his work to get in the way of his Divine service. He spent a great deal of time out in the field in prayer, mainly at night, despite the summer heat or deep winter freezes. Because he treasured his hours of *hitbodedut* in the forests and fields, Reb Shimon established his home on the edge of the town, far from others. There that he devoted himself – privately, quietly – to his service of God.

Reb Shimon continued this lifestyle even after he moved to the Land of Israel near the end of his life. In the holy city of Tzefat, he again set up his residence at the very edge of town where it met the open fields; this was where the ARI and his students used to learn and pray hundreds of years earlier.

Once, when Reb Noson and Reb Shimon spoke words of Torah while traveling together, Reb Noson noticed that Reb Shimon was carrying a manuscript of *chiddushim* (original Torah insights). He managed to get it out of Reb Shimon’s hands and, after looking at it closely, he realized it was Reb Shimon’s own work.

“Why, these are wonderful ideas! You must publish them!” exclaimed Reb Noson. Reb Shimon only sat quietly and took back the papers as soon as he could.

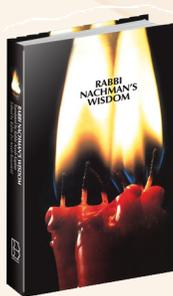
When they stopped at an inn, Reb Shimon took the first opportunity to approach the pot-bellied stove in the common room and throw in his own manuscript! He was willing to sacrifice years of hard work just to be sure that he never derived any personal benefit or honor from his Torah study!

*Based on Or HaOrot I, p. 126*

## SIDEPATH

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

308 (continued). The Torah is our life and the length of our days. If you flee the struggles of the world to toil in the Torah, you will be worthy of the World to Come, whose eternity reduces this entire world to the blink of an eye in comparison. But besides this, you will also have a good life in this world.



The best way to handle this world is through forbearance. This cannot be attained except through immersion in the Torah and its commandments. Open your eyes to the truth and you will see this.

Ridicule these words and you only ridicule yourself. We speak the truth and it is yours to accept. But if you wish to turn your back on it and remain stuck in the deep quicksand of this world, there is no one to prevent you.

“Let each man go his own way, but we will call out in God’s Name.”

Heed these words! You will find pleasure both in this world and the next.

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*Finished and completed is the book of “Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom,” with the help of the Blessed God.*



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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.*