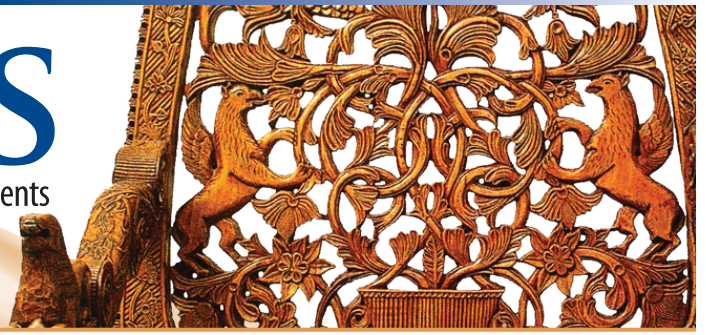


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Silver Lining

By Yossi Katz

**WHEN IT RAINS**, it pours. It often happens this way: first you have one problem, then another comes up, then a third... Before you know it, you feel completely overburdened, as if you can't even breathe. You imagine all of the world's issues being lumped together and heaped on your shoulders. But it gets even worse.

Our typical reaction to feeling overwhelmed is to hibernate in a state of utter disconnect. We cut ourselves off from friends, from our true selves, and especially from God. We feel hopeless and despondent, unable to cry out to our Father in Heaven, the only One who can bring about our salvation. This vicious cycle is summed up by the golden rule, "The more attention you yield to anguish and problems, the more anguish and problems will pursue you."

In order to pacify the anger of his brother Esau, who was upset with him for stealing their father's blessing, Jacob sent a handsome tribute. Everything that Jacob did was with great wisdom. He told Esau, "I have acquired an ox and a donkey" (Genesis 32:6). Then he separated the different species included in his tribute, as he told his servants, "Leave a space between one group and the next" (ibid., 32:17).

According to Kabbalah, the "ox" refers to Esau (see Isaiah 34:5-7) and the "donkey" to Ishmael (Ishmael is called a "wild donkey of a man"; Genesis 16:12). These two adversaries and their attendant nations were to be the rulers and oppressors of the Jewish people in exile. They represent the exile and all of its bitter problems. Whether through physical oppression or by their negative spiritual influence, their ultimate goal is to bring the Jewish nation to the point of utter despair and hopelessness.

Jacob understood that it is precisely when all of our troubles are lumped together at once that we become overwhelmingly despondent, truly exiled from God. He therefore taught us the secret of separating our problems into "groups" and looking for the "spaces" of relief.

Our first survival tactic is to recall our past. How many times were we in similar, seemingly hopeless predicaments, and somehow not only survived but perhaps even prospered from our situation? When we remember our past salvations and express our gratitude to God for taking care of us until now, we reinforce our sense of faith and trust, thereby cultivating the inner-fortitude that we each process.

But it doesn't end there. While our troubles are not at all easy to deal with and we are truly in pain, Rebbe Nachman teaches that every problem and trouble we face is packaged together with a silver lining. As difficult and as bitter as life can be, God's kindness and love for us is present in every situation. The benefit may not always be obvious – in fact, it may be only our realization that our situation could be much worse. Our job is to find those seemingly hidden threads of relief and, rather than disconnect, use these opportunities to express our gratitude and thanks to God for the little bit of good we have discovered.

When life gets bumpy and we find ourselves emotionally overcome by our constant problems, we can give ourselves breathing room by finding the little specks of good and salvation that exist in between the troubles. By discovering those spaces of relief, we defuse the united front of our enemies and are free to rediscover our greatest weapons: hope, faith and prayer. By wielding this powerful arsenal, we can successfully navigate even the greatest challenge.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Kil'ay Beheimah 4:8*

# Planning for the Future

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**ONCE THERE WAS** a simple tailor. He purchased a burial plot in the local cemetery and spent time there every day, reciting the entire Book of Psalms. Naturally, he said the words with great fervor, since he was in the place most suited to remind him that this world is only a temporary stop on the long journey.

Reb Yaakov Yosef of Polonoye, one of the Baal Shem Tov's greatest students, once passed by the cemetery, close to the tailor's future gravesite. He thought to himself, "I detect a distinct aroma of *Gan Eden* here." He approached the burial society of the town to purchase the plot from which the special aura radiated. "I'm sorry," said the official, "but that plot was already bought years ago by Shmerel the tailor."

"Please summon him to me right away," insisted the great sage. Reb Yaakov Yosef asked the tailor if he would sell the plot to him, but the man refused. "I have spent the last ten years preparing it to be my final resting place. You can't restore my time to me."

When Reb Yaakov Yosef heard how much energy and how many tears the tailor had poured into his future resting place, he was astounded. "If that's the case, then I want to be buried right next to you!" he declared. He immediately purchased the neighboring plot for himself.

Ten years later, Reb Leib, the Maggid of Polonoye, passed by the tailor's plot. "I detect the scent of *Gan Eden* here," he thought. He summoned the tailor and asked him to sell it to him. "I will give any price you ask," he promised.

But the tailor refused. "I'm sorry, but I have spent twenty years preparing this place for my eternal rest. Every day I recited the entire Book of Psalms there. How can I possibly sell that?"

The Maggid was astonished. "If so, I want to be buried next to you!" He purchased the plot on the other side of the "simple" tailor.

The tailor continued his daily practice for another eight years. Then he passed away and was buried in his plot, surrounded by the two great men who had already passed on.

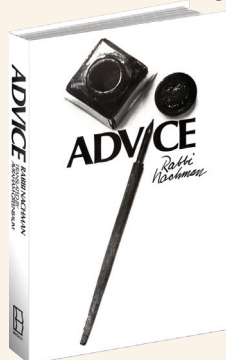
*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh III:613*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**MEMORY.** 8. You must also take care not to talk in a bad way. Talking maliciously and derogatorily about other people is very damaging to one's memory. If you work on yourself and even force yourself to be happy, it will help to develop a good memory (*Likutey Moharan I, 54:5*).

9. Forgetfulness does have its advantages. Anything that distracts you from serving God you should forget about completely, especially the distractions that come when you are praying. Usually they consist of worrying about the past and wondering if you did this or that right. As soon as something is over and done with, you should simply put it out of your mind completely. Make this a habit. Just ignore it completely and don't even start to think about it.



The same applies to all your worries about past transgressions and other mistakes. Just put them out of your mind completely and forget about them, especially during your prayers and devotions. In fact, there is nothing much to be gained from thinking about them any time of the day except in the special time you set aside for meditation. This is the

time to be heartbroken and to express all your thoughts before God. You should think about everything you did wrong. But for the rest of the day you should forget about these things completely. Simply serve God with joy, especially during your prayers (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom #26*).



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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.*