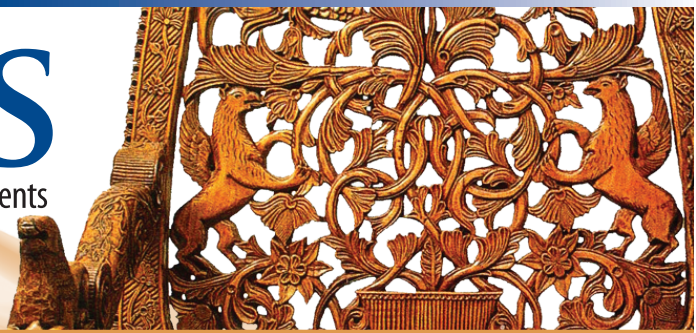


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

PARASHAT VAYECHI • 5779 • VOL. 9 NO. 13

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## What Are We Waiting For?

By Yossi Katz

**AS A YOUNGSTER**, I remember asking my teacher a question that was really bothering me: “How can the Mashiach come if there are so few Jews in the world who are connected to the Torah and *mitzvot*?”

At the time, I was a good student at an elitist Jewish institution. My teacher replied, “Forget about those other Jews. If students such as yourself and others in similar institutions live up to their goals, Mashiach will immediately arrive!” Apparently, he should have checked out his answer with our forefather Jacob first.

Jacob accomplished what no one before him did: he merited to have completely righteous children. Before his passing, he brought together all of his holy offspring, the twelve tribes. At this opportune time, with this gathering of holy tzaddikim, Jacob thought he would merit to reveal the great secret of the time of the Final Redemption. His intention is hinted at by his use of the word *hei'asfu* (come together) (Genesis 49:1). “Come together” is said when one wants to call over people who are close by. Jacob was, in the spiritual sense, addressing like-minded individuals – the holy twelve tribes. But just as he began, the Divine Presence departed – signaling that something was missing, something was still not complete.

What could possibly have been lacking? If Jacob, whom the Torah calls “the perfect one,” did not merit to have offspring righteous enough to bring the Mashiach, how could we ever be so righteous?

The answer is that God’s greatest pleasure is when souls who were previously distant come closer to Him. Because of this, God is ever patient with us. He specifically doesn’t bring the Mashiach so that we won’t be left behind, and so we actually have time to return to Him.

Realizing this, Jacob switches and says, “Gather yourselves and listen, sons of Jacob” (ibid., 49:2). In contrast to “come together,” “gather” refers to assembling a group from afar. The name *Yaakov* (Jacob) comes from the Hebrew word *eikev* (heel) (ibid., 25:26), symbolizing the low spiritual state of a Jew. Jacob is speaking to us, saying that it is specifically because we are far from God that God has not yet brought the Mashiach! We think that because we’ve made mistakes and haven’t lived up to our potential, God doesn’t want our service. In actuality, God is holding back the coming of the Mashiach for our sake!

After Jacob fought with Esau’s angel and won, the angel gave him the name *Yisrael* (Israel) (ibid., 32:19). This is a name that connotes victory. *YiSRAeL* is also a Hebrew acronym for *Yesh Shishim Ribo Otiot LaTorah* (There are 600,000 letters in the Torah). The 600,000 letters in the Torah correspond to the 600,000 root-souls of Yisrael. Every Jew who will ever be born has a piece of one of those 600,000 root-souls. Only when all 600,000 letters – in other words, every Jew – are gathered together in spiritual unity are we collectively called “Yisrael.”

This should serve as a reminder of how much we need each other and how much God wants and waits for each and every one of us personally. When we are unified, we will be victorious over our enemies, both spiritual and physical, and merit the Final Redemption, may it come speedily and in our days. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhoh Piryah ve'Riviyah 5; ibid., Ishut 4*

# Three Lions of Breslov

By Gedaliah Fleer

**RABBI ZVI ARYEH ROSENFELD** visited Israel every summer. One time, he took along his student Gedaliah Fleer to meet some of the prominent Breslover chassidim in Jerusalem.

The first person we visited was Reb Moshe Burstein, a true servant of God. Although he worked a full day in the Ministry of Religion, he devoted many hours to prayer and Torah study and slept only about three hours a night.

Reb Moshe invited me to accompany him to Meron for a Shabbat. In those days, the trip from Jerusalem to Meron took close to five hours. I spent the entire trip asking him questions about Rebbe Nachman and his teachings. Reb Moshe pretended not to understand my questions. Although he had studied the entire Talmud with Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz, he was not interested in publicizing the extent of his knowledge. He preferred to stay out of the limelight and serve God with simplicity and joy.

I also met Reb Gedaliah Koenig, who was renowned for his deep and encyclopedic knowledge of the Chassidut and Kabbalah. The moment we were seated in his house, he and Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh began discussing some difficult points in the *Likutey Moharan*. I realized there was much more to Rebbe Nachman's teachings than I had assumed.

The third leader was Reb Yitzchak Gelbach, who also had a deep, encyclopedic knowledge of the entire Talmud. He worked in the central post office and was very down to earth. When I tried to ask him some of my questions about Breslover Chassidut, he answered me in a surprising way. "Those are good questions. Are you sure you want to know the answers?"

"Why, of course," I stammered.

"You have to understand what I mean. You see, you're asking questions that most people your age don't even think about. You must know that every piece of information you learn, especially in the area of Kabbalah, obligates you to act on it. Here's what I suggest. I'll answer one of your questions, and if you can come back to me and tell me how you used what I told you to become a better Jew, you can ask me another question."

I smiled. "It's a deal."

I met with these three individuals almost every week throughout that summer. By the time Rosh HaShanah came around, I considered myself a Breslover chassid.

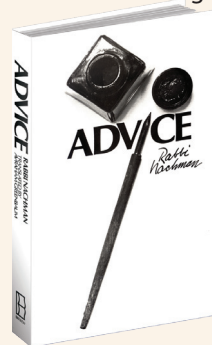
*From "Against All Odds"*

*Dedicated in the Memory of (L'ilui nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**ALIEN PHILOSOPHIES AND IDEOLOGIES.** 7. Within the bounds God has set for man's intelligence, it is a great mitzvah, a positive duty, to sharpen the mind and understand as clearly as possible whatever the human mind is capable of grasping. However, there are certain questions to which the answers are beyond the capacity of the human mind to understand. Only in time to come will the answers be revealed. (An example is the paradox of free will.) On no account should one delve into these questions. Of those who try, relying on their own intelligence and speculation, it is said, "None



that go unto her return" (Proverbs 2:19). It is impossible to solve these questions through reason. We must have pure faith (*Likutey Moharan* I, 62:2).

8. There are certain questions which stem from the *chahal hapanui*, the empty void, to which it is impossible to find any answer. In time to come the answers will be revealed. But in this world it is impossible to put these questions to rest merely with thought and ingenuity. Whole philosophical systems have been built up around them. ... But God is not to be found in these philosophies.

Israel believes in God and His Holy Torah without needing philosophical justifications. They have pure faith. The Hebrew word for "beyond" is *EVer*, and the Jews are called *IVRim*, Hebrews, precisely because they are beyond all this speculation (*ibid.* I, 64:2).



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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.*