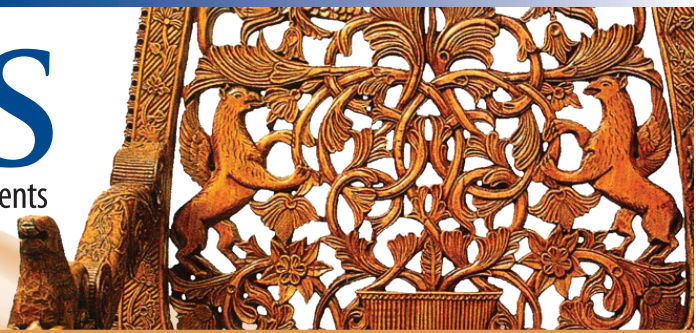


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Getting the Message

By Yossi Katz

**NEGATIVE EMOTIONS ARE** extremely powerful and often completely debilitating. In fact, nothing has the ability to stunt our spiritual growth and life satisfaction like negativity. It's essential for us to take the initiative to learn about ourselves and evaluate our reactions when dealing with such emotions. With Rebbe Nachman's guidance, we can transform these emotions into great tools.

Let's deal with fear. Like everything else in the world, fear is not some unfortunate feeling, but a creation of God. The opening word of the Torah, *BeReiShYT* (In the beginning) (Genesis 1:1) is an acronym for *YaREi BoSheT* (fear-humility). The purpose of Creation, says the *Zohar*, is for man to humble himself and appreciate God's greatness by means of fear.

Perhaps fear of God conjures up a vision of sinister angels smacking the living daylights out of you for doing something wrong. That idea is simply misplaced. True, there is punishment in store for our misdeeds; however, the punishment itself is a cleansing process for the soul and truly for our eternal benefit.

Fear of sin is actually destructive when we view it negatively. In that case, it's a tool used by the *yetzer hara* to bring us to anxiety and to feeling that God is utterly distant from our lives. Basic fear of God reminds us that He is always present, especially when we're at a moment of weakness and are most vulnerable. Wouldn't you wish for your mother to appear waving her finger before you made some really dumb choice? Positive fear creates awareness that God is before us always, available to us and cautioning us to avoid the painful pitfalls of life. When we gain this God-awareness and humble ourselves, we can also begin to develop the deeper levels of grasping His greatness and awesomeness. This is the essential purpose of Creation — to get to know God.

The fears and anxiety we experience from suffering or worrisome situations are really wake-up calls from our loving Father in Heaven. They are reminders that He misses us and that we've become distracted from our real purpose down here on earth. By remembering Him and the purpose of Creation, we elevate fear back to its true, positive source, thereby dispelling the negative version of fear that we live with.

This can all be seen in our *parashah*. All the miracles and wonders that God performed in Egypt were meant to demonstrate to the world that He is in charge. Pharaoh, however, refused to recognize God. God responded to this by saying, "But regarding you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear God" (Exodus 9:30). God sent the Egyptians plague after plague, but they refused to get the message. Finally they allowed the Jewish people to leave, but then pursued them to the Sea of Reeds, where they met their untimely end. The Jewish people witnessed these same awesome plagues and had a completely different reaction: "And Israel saw the great work that God did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared God" (ibid., 14:31).

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the whole world is a very narrow bridge — but the main thing is not to cause oneself to fear at all. We all experience rough times in life and, more often than not, live with much fear and anxiety. Yet each of us has the ability, with the help of God, to elevate these negative feelings to a place of faith and recognition of God's sovereignty. When we live with the constant recognition that God is in charge and that whatever He does is for our best, we are able to elevate our fears, transforming them into a positive life of purpose and meaning. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Bekhor Beheimah  
Tehorah 4:3*

# Enveloped in Prayer

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REBBE NACHMAN** ONCE took one of his close students with him for an early-morning prayer session out in the field. When they reached the entry point to an old volcanic cavern half-hidden among the brush, he gestured that they should enter and do their *hitbodedut* within the deep chamber.

As soon as they squeezed into the space, Rebbe Nachman sat down on the ground and took out his small *Shaarey Tzion* prayer book, which was very dear to him. It was filled with numerous additional prayers for all kinds of events and situations, which he loved to return to again and again. Rebbe Nachman began to weep over the holy words, and his student could occasionally hear his master's sighs and moans.

The disciple was rooted to the spot; Rebbe Nachman's prayers were filled with deep emotion, and it was clear that he was so absorbed in his prayer that he had forgotten about the other man's presence entirely. Hour followed hour, and Rebbe Nachman continued his devotions as though the world outside had ceased to exist. The student sat quietly to the side, enraptured.

The day had flown by when Rebbe Nachman suddenly looked up and said, "Please go outside to check the time." He thought it must be time to pray the afternoon service. To the student's surprise, the sun hadn't merely passed high noon – it was about to set! The shadows of twilight were already gathering across the fields. An entire day had passed, and neither had felt the time at all. Such was the nature of Rebbe Nachman's prayer.

\* \* \*

Rebbe Nachman once made a gift of one of his old *talleitim* to a dear student of his. As he handed the folded fabric to his disciple, Rebbe Nachman said, "May sure to take good care of this *tallit* that I'm giving you—I hope that you'll value it in accordance with its true worth. Because I tell you truly that I shed more tears begging God that I'll be worthy of grasping the essence and meaning of a *tallit* than there are threads in it!"

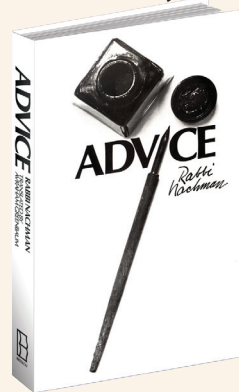
This anecdote confirms another statement that Rebbe Nachman made about himself: that every spiritual accomplishment he achieved came to fruition only after he poured out endless tears and prayers to God for help.

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 103-104*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**ALIEN PHILOSOPHIES AND IDEOLOGIES.** 12. Acts of charity and kindness have the power to break the force of the Serpent, which is the root of materialistic ideology. ... However, even after you have crushed them, these wild animals are soon back again, placing fresh doubts in your mind about whether the world is governed only by the will of God. If this happens, you must make fresh efforts at charity and kindness. Charity has the power to subdue the ideology of materialism and reveal that everything is governed only by the will of God (*Likutey Moharan I*, 4:9).



13. All speculative philosophy contains the stumbling block of Amalek, which is calculated to make people fall. In one moment they can lose whole worlds. There is no greater evil. Even the books written by Jews discussing speculative philosophy should be left well alone, because they can harm the holy faith which is the root of everything. Thank God, we

have today many holy books filled with sound guidance and the fear of God, which are free of all speculation derived from the so-called "wisdom" of the Greeks. They are firmly founded on the holy words of the Sages of the Talmud and the Midrash. In particular, there are the books based on the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Explore them, and go through them again and again (*ibid.* I, 19).



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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.*