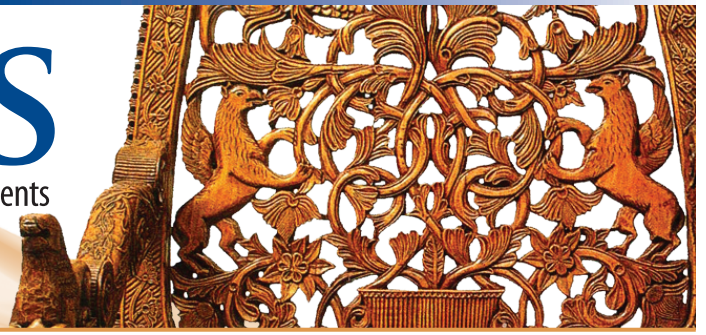


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Way Home

By Yossi Katz

**ZABLON SIMINTOV** is the last Jew in Afghanistan. He is also an example of so many of our brethren scattered throughout the diaspora. From Argentina to Alaska, from Sydney to Siberia, there is hardly a country devoid of a Jewish presence. Yet living at the ends of the earth is a far cry from living in the Holy Land. What is the purpose of exile? Surely God sees that it is so much more difficult for us to return to Him when we are so distant from our homeland, the place of our spiritual vitality.

Our great Rabbis reveal the answer to this mystery: “The Jews were exiled among the idol-worshippers only in order to collect the converts from among them” (*Pesachim* 87b). Besides actual converts, our Sages are hinting to the concept of fallen sparks of holiness. The Arizal teaches that throughout the world, many sparks of holiness have been hidden (the greater the spark, the harder it is to find). Through collecting these sparks, the Jewish people will be redeemed (*Pri Etz Chaim, Sha’ar Kriat Shema* 3). All this is part of God’s master plan.

When we lived as a nation in the Holy Land, we enjoyed an especially close and loving relationship with God. Our relationship was so special that we began to lose our appreciation for it, and slowly but surely drifted away from doing our part. God, in His lovingkindness, saw this problem and used it to our advantage. He sent us off to faraway places, lands devoid of the spiritual nature of the Land of Israel, locales filled with vile temptations. And precisely in those places is our simple loyalty and mitzvah performance so valuable to God. Precisely in those dirty “hiding spots” are we able to find the fallen sparks of holiness and return them as a

special gift to our loving Father in Heaven. This is not only true for the Jewish people, but for each and every one of us as well.

If, while we were on a spiritual high, we succumbed to our base temptations, God forbid, how can we now possibly repent if we feel so low and distant from God? We must remember that God’s entire purpose is only to draw us close to Him. The *raison d’être* of Creation was for us to receive our *tikkun* (spiritual fix) so we can enjoy a true relationship with our Creator. God will stop at nothing until this is achieved.

If we stumble to a very low place, we will be sent hints and opportunities from that place itself to return to God. Not only that, but by doing small and seemingly easy mitzvot in that place, we can give an even greater amount of pleasure to God than when we were on the higher level. Why? Because only when we get ourselves dirty are we able to find and reveal those precious hidden sparks. Even the great tzaddikim on their lofty level do not merit to accomplish this incredible task.

While recounting the desert journey of the Jews en route to the Land of Israel, the Torah states, “God led them in a roundabout way” (Exodus 13:18). This is our journey as well. We each want to leave our “spiritual desert” and arrive in the Promised Land, but sometimes (or oftentimes) God leads us in a roundabout way. However, we shouldn’t feel at all lost, for God possesses the most technologically advanced GPS and knows precisely where to take a pit stop. In actuality, this is our greatest challenge in these last generations. We have almost arrived and need only pick up a few last “items” along the way. We are almost home!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot Hoda’ah 4:45*

# The Hired Gun (Part 2)

By Yehudis Golshevsky

(Recap: Chaim Katzav, the intimidating kosher butcher of Kiblitsh, is dispatched to kill Reb Pinchas, the Breslov teacher — but is inspired to change his ways after hearing Reb Pinchas' encouraging words.)

**WITH BURGEONING HOPE** in his heart and tears in his eyes, Chaim Katzav approached Reb Pinchas.

“Can even I do *teshuvah* for my sins?” he asked. “I have sinned so terribly against you!”

“Ofcourse you can,” said Reb Pinchas. “*Teshuvah* (repentance) is always possible. If you follow Rebbe Nachman's path, you will certainly do *teshuvah* in his merit.”

“Promise me you are telling the truth!” said Chaim. “I have sinned so greatly – please forgive me!”

It was astounding to see this huge giant of a man prostrating himself before the thin, weakly tzaddik. “I want to do *teshuvah*!” he cried. “Please, please forgive me!”

Reb Pinchas and his students didn't understand exactly what Chaim meant. But then Chaim told them how some parents had hired him to kill Reb Pinchas, and how he had been inspired by Rebbe Nachman's teaching that there was hope for every single Jew. “I want to see the person who dares harm a hair of your head!” he concluded.

The next day, the townsfolk were amazed to see Chaim going to shul on time, his *talit* and *tefilin* under his arm. He wept through the entire service. Afterwards, he announced: “I am becoming a Breslover *chassid*, and I would like to see the person who dares lift a hand against Reb Pinchas or any other Breslover!”

Although there had been incidents in the past, they ceased from that day on. Breslovers who visited Reb Chaim decades after his astonishing about-face reported that it stayed fresh his entire life. Reb Chaim would cry copiously to God, begging Him to accept his *teshuvah*. His copy of *Likutey Tefilot* (Reb Noson's prayers) was tear-stained and well-used.

People would comment on the shining countenance of Reb Chaim, who spent his days helping others and learning Torah whenever he could. The butcher was never violent with anyone ever again. “Ever since I became a Breslover, I cannot lift my hand to my fellow,” he explained. “Even if I am insulted, I just can't do it!”

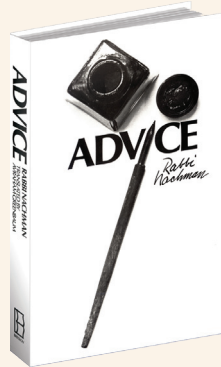
*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh V:213-214*

## SIDEPATH

**Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum**

**MARRIAGE.** 5. Immorality and abuse of the covenant make it hard for a person to find his true marriage partner. The tikkun is by following the spiritual path explained in the Kabbalistic writings about the themes of the month of Elul (*Likutey Moharan* II, 87).

6. When a person is unable to find his marriage partner, it can help if he goes to hear original Torah teachings from a man of deep wisdom (*ibid.* II, 89).



7. The reason for breaking a piece of earthenware at the marriage ceremony is to remind the groom of Gehinnom, in order to prevent him getting trapped by his desires. He must sanctify himself in the marriage relationship. It is also a hint to him that if his wife turns out to be a bad woman he should still not maltreat her or divorce her. Because of her, he will

never see hell. One should see to it that he never comes to the point of divorce (*ibid.* II, 90).

**MIDNIGHT PRAYER.** 1. How precious it is to rise at midnight in order to pray, meditate, and study Torah. Try to make it a regular practice. Then you will be worthy of succeeding in the task of separating the good from the evil in the world. You will also develop a good memory – which means always remembering your purpose in life and keeping in mind the enduring life you are destined for in the end (*ibid.* I, 54).



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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.*