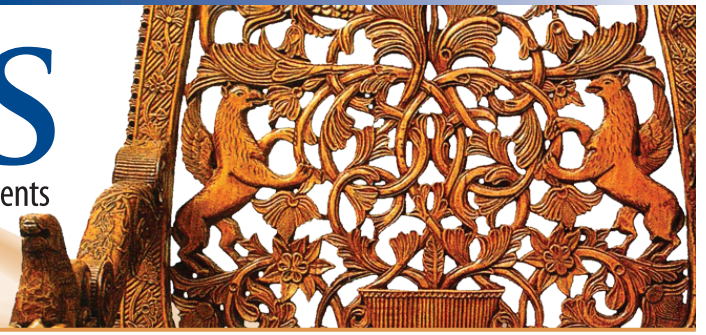


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Who Goes First?

By Yossi Katz

**HAVE YOU EVER** heard someone say, “Nobody goes to that restaurant; it’s too crowded.” Or, “Don’t go near the water till you’ve learned how to swim.” While these may be cute sound bites, what would you say after comparing the following two verses?

God says, “Return to me, and I will return to you” (Malakhi 3:7). We say back, “Return to us, and we will return to you” (Lamentations 5:21). There seems to be a misunderstanding about who goes first. This may even be problematic, considering that we want to be reunited with our Creator.

This is not just a theological problem. It’s actually our constant experience, and something that if we can’t make peace with it, it will forever stunt our spiritual growth. Similarly, our *parashah* describes the creation and lighting of the Menorah. God tells Moses that the Menorah should be “hammered work of gold, from its base to its flower” (Numbers 8:4). This meant that the form of the Menorah had to be carved out of a single piece of gold. This whole process was very perplexing to Moses, so he turned to God. God said, “Throw the gold into the fire and the Menorah will emerge” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 15:4).

When it came time to light the Menorah in the Holy Temple, the western light would still be miraculously aflame since the previous night. The Kohanim would use the western light to kindle the other lamps, and only then would they extinguish and rekindle the western light (*Menachot* 86b).

The entire episode of the Menorah is very difficult to understand. God asks that it be constructed in a

superhuman way and Moses is basically forced to ask God to create it. Next, the Menorah is kindled in a miraculous way. So why was God involving us in the first place? Why didn’t He just create and light the Menorah miraculously?

We have the same question about life itself. We want to serve God, we want to create a strong relationship with Him, but we have issues and are stuck in many ways. We want to scream out, “If everything is from You anyhow, then please take me out of here!” But God answers back, “Return to me, and I will return to you.” Yet we are stuck. We need His help. We can’t do it without Him, so what does He expect of us?

He expects us to grab the western light that He lit, and use it to light the other lamps. He wants us to throw the gold into a fire and watch a Menorah emerge. True, He is standing behind creation and our every experience, but He endowed us with the mission of grabbing the flame and spreading the light, of grabbing our innermost desires and expressing the words to convey that every aspect of our life is a manifestation of His desire.

There is no contradiction between these verses. Much like the western light, it is always God who begins and God who ends. We lack the inner strength and power to do anything on our own or to truly get out of our troubles, but that is not what God expects. His sole desire is for us to realize our shortcomings, problems and issues, and connect those to Him. To live with the consciousness that everything we experience is an opportunity to turn to Him and share our deepest yearning for Him. And as we return to Him, we become conscious of Him, so that He simultaneously returns to us. We have returned in unity to our Creator. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhot Kriat Shema 5*

# The Best Career of All

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**ONE OF RABBI** Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld's Talmud Torah students, whom we'll call "Kohn," lived next-door to the Rosenfeld family. One Friday night, Reb Zvi Aryeh's four-year-old son opened his bedroom window before going to sleep and heard Kohn singing *zemirot*.

He went to tell his father. Reb Zvi Aryeh came into the room, sat on his son's bed, and listened intently. He bent forward, straining to catch every note. After about half an hour, Kohn finished singing. Reb Zvi Aryeh wished his son a "*Gut Shabbos*" and left the room.

Reb Zvi Aryeh had been concerned about Kohn's religious observance and was afraid that he might even remove his yarmulke. That evening, when he heard Kohn singing *zemirot* with such *kavanah* (devotion), a small hope burgeoned within him that Kohn would be all right. But shortly afterward, Kohn did remove his yarmulke and stopped observing mitzvot.

Reb Zvi Aryeh was terribly hurt when Kohn and another of his promising students stopped keeping mitzvot. He wrote to Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz in Israel and told him that he was considering leaving the field of *kiruv* (outreach).

This happened in 1953. When he visited Jerusalem that summer, Reb Zvi Aryeh entered the Breslov synagogue in Katamon after *Maariv* when the Chassidim were in the midst of their traditional *rikud*, a short dance after prayers. Rabbi Sternhartz danced past Reb Zvi Aryeh without acknowledging him. Reb Zvi Aryeh thought that Rabbi Sternhartz was angry with him for planning to leave *kiruv*. The truth was that the Breslov elder had simply failed to notice him.

The second time Rabbi Sternhartz danced past Reb Zvi Aryeh, he noticed him and raised his arms as if to embrace him from afar. Reb Zvi Aryeh cut through the line of men to speak with him directly. "I feel so out of place here," he told him. "I'm clean-shaven, wearing a suit, and living outside the Land of Israel."

Rabbi Sternhartz replied, "Having a beard is great! Wearing Chassidic clothes is great! Living in the Land of Israel is great! But *nothing* compares to bringing one soul back to Torah!"

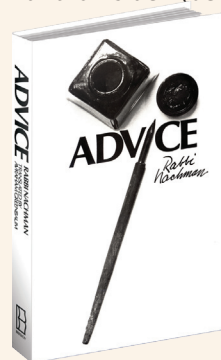
Reb Zvi Aryeh had his answer. He remained in the United States, continued working in *kiruv*, and did not grow a beard. And he never looked back.

## SIDEPATH

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

**HONOR.** 11. When rabbis lacking in integrity are ordained and given authority, it weakens the influence of the holy writings of the Jews, and the writings of the nations of the world become invested with power. Decrees are passed that accord honor and authority to these writings alone, and not to our writings, and force Jews to learn their literature.

In the end, decrees of expulsion are passed against the Jewish people, and they are forced to move from places where they have dwelled by long tradition to places they have never been. This is a form of "exile from the Land of Israel" (because places where Jews have lived



for a long time become sanctified with the holiness of the Land of Israel). As a result, it becomes impossible for great souls to be born and brought into the world, and because of this, the secret of astronomical calculation is taken from us and put into their hands instead, God forbid (Likutey Moharan I, 61:2).

12. But when a sage of true integrity is ordained and accorded the title of rabbi, our scriptures are again invested with radiance and strength, and even the nations of the world submit to the authority of the writings of the Jews in governing their own affairs. Then the air is sanctified with the holiness of the air of the Land of Israel, and relief comes from the troubles brought about through the ordination of unworthy rabbis (*ibid.*).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

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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.*