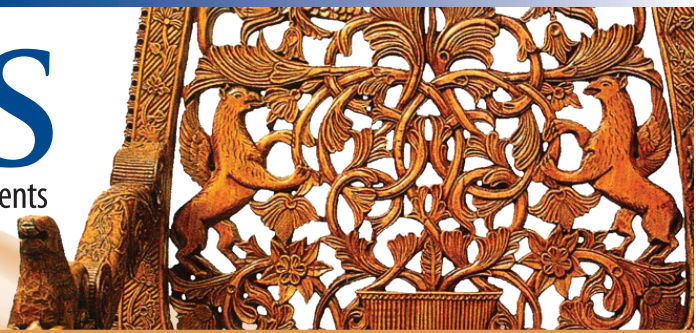


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Best Kind of Criticism

By Yossi Katz

**HAVE YOU RECENTLY** been criticized or rebuked? Did you find those words to be helpful? Did they initiate any positive change in your behavior?

For most people, criticism makes them feel hurt and put down. And when we rebuke others, we often don't see any change and, even more likely, a spiteful reaction.

Although there is a great mitzvah to rebuke (see Leviticus 19:17), most people are not capable of fulfilling this mitzvah properly. Even Rabbi Akiva, who lived in a generation of tremendous Torah scholarship, said, "I would be astounded if there is anyone capable of rebuking in this generation" (*Erkhein* 16b). In this week's *parashah*, Moses delivers words of rebuke to the Jewish people in the subtlest of ways, by naming the places where they sinned but not the sins themselves (see Rashi on Deuteronomy 1:1). We see from this the tremendous sensitivity required before reproaching another Jew.

Rebbe Nachman explains why it's so important to know how to rebuke properly. He teaches that our souls receive their sustenance from "scent," as we find regarding Adam, "and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life" (Genesis 2:7; *Likutey Moharan* II, 8).

Imagine that something foul-smelling is lying around. As long as it lies undisturbed, its odor is minimal. But if the item is picked up and carried about, its smell grows far worse. The same is true of ourselves. Our shortcomings omit "foul odors," but as long as these imperfections are left at bay, their bad influence has a minimal effect on our souls. However, if they're stirred up through incorrect criticism, these shortcomings begin to release a terrible odor which, in effect, cuts off our souls from

their spiritual lifeline. Imagine how much damage can be done!

The professors in the area of rebuke are our great Tzaddikim. They are the only ones capable of looking into our souls and extracting our essential pure and pleasant fragrance. Rather than causing spiritual disconnect, they plug us back into the Source. Rebbe Nachman teaches us the way to emulate their work and properly fulfill the Torah's commandment.

When we look at ourselves and others, we usually notice shortcomings and imperfections. While these observations may be true, our highlighting them only exacerbates those issues. If, instead, we look beyond them toward the inherent goodness that we and others possess, we are able to "release" the soul's pure and pleasant fragrance. True, the bad is still there, but it's only external. True rebuke extracts the soul's true goodness, letting the foul-smelling parts fall away automatically.

This is why Moses mentioned only the names of the various encampments and not the sins that were done there. At each juncture, the Jewish people faced enormously difficult challenges. The same way that the desert is a place of extreme danger to the body, it is also a spiritual wasteland to the soul. We fell short not because we were evil and rebellious, but because of the negative spiritual environment. It took someone of Moses' caliber to recognize this and reconnect us to God by reminding us of our true nature.

Only the way of the Tzaddikim can lead us from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Holy Land. May we all follow their lead by revealing the true greatness of each and every Jew. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tzitzit 5:7; ibid., Orlah 4:17*

# We Can Bring Mashiach!

**ONCE SOMEONE ASKED** Reb Noson: Seeing that the Mashiach hasn't yet come, despite all the efforts of all the very great Tzaddikim in all the previous generations, how will he come in these few remaining and much weaker generations?

Reb Noson answered with a parable:

There was once a city that was well-fortified. It was enclosed by a thick stone wall, thought to be impenetrable. A wise king decided to conquer this fortified city. After inspecting the fortifications, he sent his mightiest soldiers to bring down the wall and attack the city.

These soldiers fell.

He then sent a second wave of less mighty soldiers, and these soldiers also fell. He followed this with a third wave, a fourth wave, and so on. Before long, he had depleted his entire army, and the wall had not come down.

But the king did not give up.

Once again he circled the city, inspecting its walls. "How can you expect to capture this city if all your mighty soldiers are gone?" he was asked. The wise king smiled.

"If you look closely, you will see that though the soldiers could not breach the wall, they did succeed in cracking it," he replied. "It is no longer strong and impenetrable. Now, with even the weak and wounded, I can bring down the wall."

The king then sent his few remaining and weakest soldiers into battle and conquered the city.

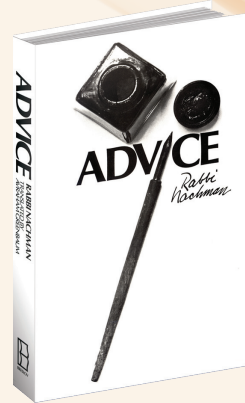
Reb Noson explains that though they did not succeed in bringing the Mashiach, all the great Tzaddikim of the previous generations did succeed in cracking all of the obstacles that stood in the way. Now, though we are weak and don't have the strength or the power, if we would but make a concerted effort, we *could* bring the wall down and bring the Mashiach.

May we welcome him soon, in our days!

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**MOCKERY.** 4. One of the biggest obstacles in the search for truth is other people, especially those who make fun of religion with "sophisticated" jokes. They are under the spell of philosophical speculation and other current ideas. The damage they cause is quite obvious. They have the power to corrupt people completely, God forbid.



Even more insidious is the sharp wit of people who give the appearance of being respectable and well-meaning, but who have a way of turning all kinds of religious matters into a joke. Many people are deterred from true religion because of this. At least where the blatant mockery of the philosophers is concerned, most people have the sense

to be wary and keep away, knowing as they do that philosophy has the power to deprive you of both worlds, this one and the next, and to throw you down into the lowest pit of hell, God forbid. But the "wit and wisdom" of those who give the impression of being decent and religious can be more dangerous because their words possess a certain aura of truth.

Travel the path of purity and you will walk in trust. Keep well away from this crowd and pay no attention to their humor and wise ideas. Walk with simplicity and purity along the ancient path of our forefathers (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #81).



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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.*