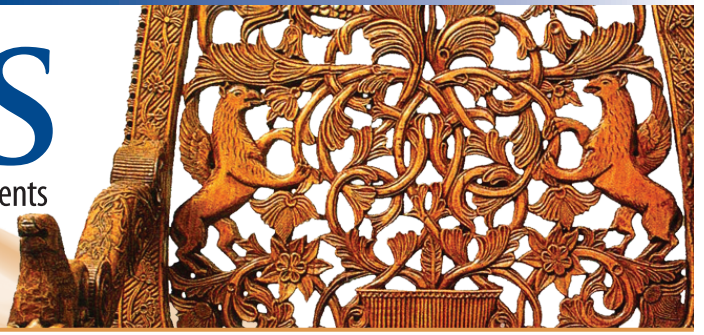


PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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The Story of Our Lives

By Yossi Katz

ARE YOU HAPPY with your life?

Can you say that you've always made the right choices and are proud of everything you've done? If you could turn back the clock, would you do everything the same way again? Don't you wish that life would just proceed in an orderly and successful way?

Preparing for Rosh HaShanah, the Day of Judgment, involves a great deal of introspection. (If you haven't started yet, now may be a good time!) Naturally, as we think back and remember our deeds (or misdeeds), many of these questions nag at us and prey on our conscience. But this is similar to the process described in this week's *parashah*.

When the Holy Temple stood, farmers in Israel would make a special trip each year to Jerusalem. They would bring along their *bikkurim*, or "first fruits," which they placed in a basket to present to the Kohen. Each farmer would declare:

"An Aramean tried to destroy my father. He descended to Egypt and stayed there, few in number. There he became a large, powerful and populous nation. The Egyptians treated us cruelly and harmed us. ... God heard our voice and saw our pain, our toil and our oppression. He took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with great awe, with signs and with wonders. He brought us to this place and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." (Deuteronomy 26:5-9).

Declaring this, the farmer presenting his bounty reflected on the awesome place he had arrived at. He was living in his own country, the Holy Land, and was personally bringing his crops to the Holy Temple, the holiest place on earth. What a privilege! But he would also remember the many setbacks along the way. An Aramean named

Laban had continually switched his ancestor Jacob's wages and tried to harm him. His people had been exiled in Egypt as slaves, cruelly oppressed and murdered. Yet despite all this, not only did Laban fail, but Jacob was able to marry both of Laban's precious daughters, who would later give birth to the "perfect offspring," the holy Twelve Tribes. Likewise, in spite of the Egyptian exile, the Jews were redeemed as a great nation, populous and wealthy.

This is the story of our lives, too.

The ploys of Laban or Pharaoh are the work of the forces of evil seeking to destroy our faith and trust in the Oneness of God and His perfect plan. We are bombarded by negative thoughts, questioning whether we are really "going anywhere" and if there is any purpose to our actions. Just as Jacob and Moses were victorious, so too, in the end, we will be victorious.

But we must first remember that our ancestors did not arrive via a smooth path.

God knew that man was destined to err. Therefore He created *teshuvah* (repentance) before the creation of the world. Furthermore, the Midrash explains that the Torah begins with the word *Bereishit* ("In the beginning" or "At first") because the world was created for the purpose of *reishit* (beginnings). This is represented by the first or beginning fruit (*Bereishit Rabbah* 1:4).

The bringing of the first fruits teaches us how to live a life of ultimate purpose – a life of new beginnings and renewal. We remember that yes, yesterday might have been rough, but just as in the stories of the Torah, God will bring about our ultimate salvation.

Even if someone transgressed the entire Torah thousands of times, there is still hope! It is our job to strengthen our faith, start afresh, and wait for the time when we, too, will experience our redemption. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Basar BeChalav 4:13

The Courage to Grow

By Danny Goldschmidt

MY PARENTS HAD instilled within me an understanding and appreciation of the seriousness of Rosh HaShanah. But it was in Uman, inspired by the people around me, that I experienced for the first time the ability to really, almost effortlessly, pray with *kavanah* (concentration and feeling).

While you are there, you have nothing to do except the things that you are supposed to be doing on Rosh HaShanah—to pray, to think, to be meditative, to look back and reflect on what you've done the past year and consider how you want to change.

During those few days of uninterrupted time with friends and fellow pilgrims, we enjoyed the opportunity for extended conversations on these life issues, something that I would never have had the time, let alone the mental space, to do elsewhere.

I also found that because there were no filters or distractions, I was able to open myself to experiencing emotion during the *davening*. In my regular shul, because of the presence of all my friends from the community that is part of my daily life and all of its concerns, it's easy to get distracted from the central purpose of Rosh HaShanah. But in Uman, it's easy to stay focused.

The people around you are praying, too. It's obvious that they are really communicating with God and making their feelings and desires known to Him. People sing, shout out loud, scream, cry! It's not artificial; it's real. I dislike *davening* with people who think that they have to put on a show or act in a particular way to simulate emotions that they are not really experiencing. But in Uman, people *are* experiencing and in sync with their feelings. That had a great impact on me. It's something that I still aspire to in my daily life.

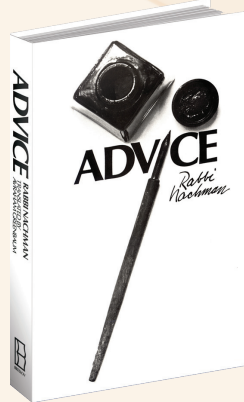
Traveling to Uman helped me bring out the best in myself and experience ridding myself of things that aren't important. It helped me to clarify my priorities and strengthen my positive and constructive tendencies, which had until then been obscured by unnecessarily focusing on details rather than looking at the broad view of things.

From "Rebbe Nachman and the Knights of the Rosh HaShanah Table"

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

MONEY AND LIVELIHOOD. 14. Realize that it is nothing but a "fool's game" when people make money dishonestly or refuse to give any of their money to charity. It is a "fool's game" because the money plays with them as one amuses a little child with coins. And in the end, the money itself kills them. ... The way to escape the allure of wealth is through the purity of



the covenant and by drawing closer to the tzaddik, who is the embodiment of purity. The tzaddik possesses true wisdom and understanding, and knows how to escape this trap. ...

There is no limit to the bitterness of this world. As the holy *Zohar* says, "Were it not for salt, the world could not endure the bitterness" (*Zohar* I, 241b). Were it not for the strength of the tzaddikim, who

observe the covenant with absolute purity and who are called the "eternal covenant of salt" (Numbers 18:19), the world would not be able to endure at all because of the terrible bitterness caused by the desire for wealth. The closer a person comes to the tzaddik, the more he can sweeten this bitterness. But those who are far from the tzaddikim and from personal purity, and especially those who are actually opposed to the tzaddikim, will be the victims of the full force of this bitterness. How many are sunk in this! Pay heed to these words and perhaps you will escape (*Likutey Moharan* I, 23:5).



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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.