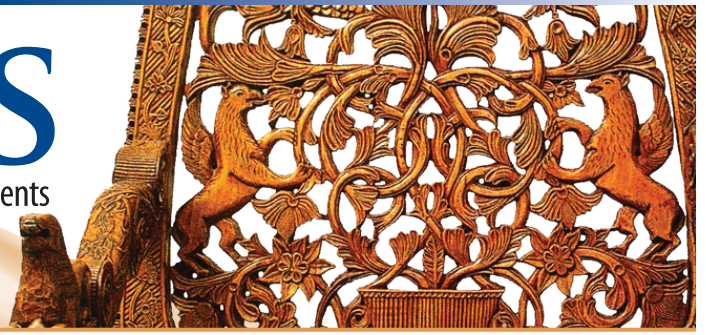


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Get a Life!

By Yossi Katz

**WHAT IS LIFE?** Most of us would probably say life means living day after day. But is that true? Aren't there unfortunate souls attached to life-support machines who, while being technically alive (and hoping to be healed), cannot at the present time be considered to have serious quality of life? What about those who, while "living" an existence dictated by their daily schedule and usual habits, don't have the presence of mind to realize joy or meaning in any of it?

King Solomon, the wisest of all men, declared, "Wisdom gives life" (Ecclesiastes 7:12). Though life in this world is limited to one who is blessed with physical health, a person who has no purpose in life cannot truly be called "living." The Torah gives meaning and significance to everything we experience. Only the person who knows how to access this deep wisdom can truly enjoy and live life to the fullest.

One of the major vehicles that deliver this life-giving wisdom is tefillin. Every morning, when a man dons his tefillin, his spiritual conscience is endowed with this wisdom. Like antennae, tefillin receive spiritual awareness and knowledge from Above. Our *parashah* hints at the connection between living a life of spiritual awareness and tefillin in this verse: "Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years, the years of Sarah's life" (Genesis 23:1). The word "years" appears four times in this verse, alluding to the four compartments in the box of the tefillin. It is through the power of the tefillin that one lives a true life.

We praise God every morning with the words "He who in His great kindness renews the Act of Creation." Every single day is an entirely new creation, not at all comparable to any other. Not only this, but every hour

is also created independently. Why does God create the world this way? Because when a person is properly attuned, every minute is a new opportunity to come close to God. It doesn't matter what someone has done until now; God has created this brand-new moment for him to connect to Him in an entirely new and fresh way.

Although we might feel like we already "know" God, we should realize that there is still so much more to learn, and be willing to look at life with new eyes. On the other hand, even when we feel like we've failed too many times and are too old to try again, we must realize that this moment is independent from all those previous experiences. To live a good life, begin again, as if you were born today.

This is what Rashi hints at in his explanation of the above verse enumerating the years of Sarah's life: "The word *years* was written after every number to tell you that every number is to be explained individually. When she was one hundred years old, she was like a twenty-year-old..." Sarah was constantly renewing her life by living each day as if she were born right then. Thus, it was as if she never grew old. Rashi concludes, "the years of Sarah's life' – they were all equally good."

Rebbe Nachman once said, "It is not good to be 'old,' whether an 'old' chassid or an 'old' tzaddik" (*Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom* #51). As long as we are alive, no matter how "old" we may feel, we can strengthen ourselves with the knowledge that God recreates the world at all times. Accordingly, we can also recreate ourselves, knowing that this moment was created specifically for us to be able to start again. Right now, I can begin again and again to live a new life of meaning and joy, so that all the years of "my life" will be equally good. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Tefillin 5*

# The Fur Peltz

ONCE THERE WAS a poor chassid who stood in the open marketplace all day long, selling salted fish from a barrel. Naturally, during the long, bitterly cold Ukrainian winters, he needed a warm overcoat. But all he owned was an old fur peltz so tattered and worn that it was virtually useless. Without a winter coat, he would not be able to earn even his customary, meager living. He approached one of the elder chassidim for advice.

“Go to the village of Terhovitz,” the equally impoverished sage told him, “and look for a Breslover chassid named Reb Sender. He will help you.”

The man found a ride to the nearby village and met Reb Sender. A cloth merchant in his youth, Reb Sender had been introduced to Rebbe Nachman’s teachings through several of Reb Noson’s followers while visiting Uman on business many years earlier. Now he was the Rav of the Breslov shul in Terhovitz.

After warmly receiving his guest, Reb Sender asked what had prompted his visit. With great emotion, the unhappy fellow poured forth his plight. “Don’t worry,” Reb Sender said encouragingly. “Everything will be taken care of tonight.”

In the early evening, the Breslov shul filled with men who regularly studied together before reciting the evening prayer. They prayed with the same intensity that one might expect only on Yom Kippur. And the dance that followed lifted its participants far beyond all earthly concerns as their voices joined together in song.

Reb Sender and his fellow chassidim had a most unusual custom. Before the dance, they would put their wallets on the table in the middle of the room. Reb Sender, who was in charge of the congregation’s charity fund, would take whatever was needed for any holy cause that might have been brought to his attention.

This time, Reb Sender took enough money to buy their needy guest a new winter coat and a pair of boots, plus enough cash to help him to invest in a more profitable line of merchandise.

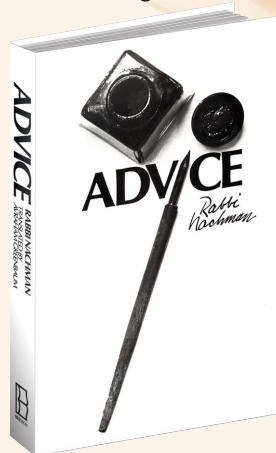
After the grateful chassid had returned home, Reb Sender remarked: “A fur coat has thousands of hairs. But if only one hair from this fellow’s peltz accompanies me when I stand before the Heavenly court, my entire life on earth will have been worthwhile!”

*Based on a story preserved by R’ Yaakov Dov,  
Oneg Shabbat, appendix*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**MONEY AND LIVELIHOOD.** 27. Anger can be very harmful to a person’s livelihood. You should know that when the evil inclination starts tempting you to get angry, at that very moment a flow of blessing is descending from above with a certain sum of money intended for you. The evil inclination wants to thwart this blessing with the anger it tries to provoke in you.



This is because anger is so damaging to the flow of blessing. Even a person who already possesses money can lose it if he becomes angry (*Likutey Moharan* I, 68).

28. The prohibition against robbery is very serious because a person who robs another robs him of his very children. Even if the victim does not have any children as yet, the robber can bring it about that he never will have. And if he does have children, the robber can cause him such damage that the children will die, God forbid, as a result of his having robbed him of his money (*ibid.* I, 69).

29. One who robs another will end up having all kinds of sexual temptations (*ibid.*).

30. At times the thief himself can end up losing his wife because of his crime, and at times he can cause the victim to lose his wife (*ibid.*).



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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.*