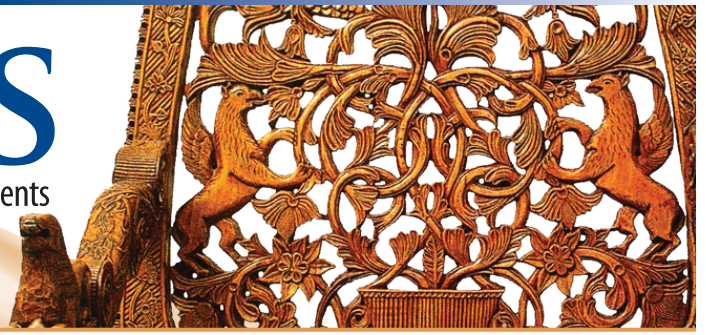


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Way Home

By Yossi Katz

**FROM AUSTRALIA TO ARGENTINA**, from Sweden to South Africa, there's hardly a country devoid of a Jewish presence. Yet living at the ends of the earth is a far cry from living in the Land of Israel. What is the purpose of exile? Surely God sees that it's much more difficult for us to return to Him when we're so distant from our homeland, the place of our spiritual vitality.

Our Sages 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 at the concept of the fallen sparks of holiness. The Arizal teaches that throughout the world, many sparks of holiness have been hidden (like diamonds, the most precious are hidden deep underground). Through collecting these sparks, the Jewish people will be redeemed (*Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar 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. As often happens, when a relationship is so intimate, it's only too easy for one party to take it for granted. Slowly but surely, we drifted away from doing our part of constantly growing and striving for more. God, in His compassion, 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 murky "hiding spots" are we able to find the fallen sparks of holiness and return them as a precious gift to our loving Father in Heaven. This is true not only for the Jewish people, but for each and every one of us as well.

One may think, "If, while I was on a spiritual high, I succumbed to my base temptations, now that I feel so lowly and distant, how is it even possible for me to return and serve God?"

But we must remember that God's entire purpose is only to draw us close to Him. The *raison d'être* of Creation is for us to receive our *tikkun* and enjoy a true relationship with our Creator. God will stop at nothing until this is achieved.

Therefore, even if we stumble to a very low place, God will send us hints and opportunities radiating from the hidden holiness of that place to return to Him. If, while we were on a great spiritual level, we were expected to do great things, now by doing small and seemingly easy *mitzvot* in that place can we give an even greater amount of pleasure to God. 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 important task. By descending to these lowly places, not feeling pride but still bravely serving God and uplifting the many sparks through our simple deeds, we make up for the lack of passion we had when we felt close to God.

In recounting the desert journey of the Jewish people en route to the Land of Israel, the Torah states, "God led the people 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 God leads us in a roundabout way. Yet we shouldn't feel at all lost, for God possesses the most technologically advanced GPS and knows precisely where we need to take a pit stop. In these last generations, this is our great final challenge. We have almost arrived and need only pick up a few last valuable "items" along the way. We're almost home!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkat Hodaah 4:45*

# Three Signs

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**AT THREE POINTS** during Rebbe Nachman's young life, he asked his Creator to show him a sign. While asking God for a sign is not usually considered a positive thing, there were tzaddikim who did so and were answered because the sign would have a broad and powerful effect that would be felt by many other people. In Rebbe Nachman's case, he hoped to experience the supernatural potential of prayer in order to strengthen his own faith. Ironclad assurance in the power of prayer became the cornerstone of Rebbe Nachman's teaching and path, and we are the beneficiaries of these three signs.

The first sign unfolded as follows. The young Rebbe Nachman used to engage in *hitbodedut* (secluded prayer with God) in a certain clearing in the forest. On the way he had to pass a church, outside of which stood an icon. Passing there every day caused him a great deal of distress. He would be walking in a state of attachment to his Creator, and then the icon would rise up before him like a trap. He begged God to perform a miracle and remove the obstacle. Not long afterward, a storm came up and the wind knocked over the heavy statue and destroyed it.

The second sign came about when Rebbe Nachman was on one of his rambles along the riverbank, seeking privacy for prayer. "Master of the universe!" he cried. "I know that You can do anything at all. Please, show me Your greatness – send the fish to me where I stand, without me catching them in a net!" Within moments, what appeared to be every fish along the river swarmed up along the bank where he stood, offering themselves up to be caught by hand.

The third sign was far more serious. Soon after his marriage, Rebbe Nachman locked himself in his room in the home of his in-laws and begged God to show him the soul of a dead man. A shrouded form appeared before him. Immobilized with terror, the Rebbe shouted aloud. The family tried to break into the room but couldn't. It was only after they climbed through the window and surrounded him that he returned to himself.

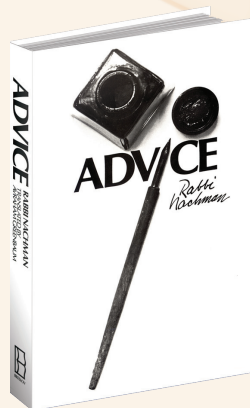
Years later, Rebbe Nachman said, "I wasn't terrified because the man was dead. It was because he had been wicked."

*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 107-109*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**THOUGHTS AND FANTASIES.** 16. A person's thoughts are in his power completely. He can turn them in whatever direction he wants. It may be that at times your thoughts run wild and fly to areas you ought to keep away from. It is still within your power to take them in hand, even against their will, and direct your thoughts to the true path. Thought is just like a horse



that turns aside from the road and tries to go in the wrong direction. The rider controls the horse with the bridle and forces it to go in the right direction. As soon as you see your thoughts pulling in the wrong direction, take them in hand and bring them back to the right direction (*Likutey Moharan II, 50*).

17. It is impossible to form any conception of the preciousness of good thoughts – thoughts of Torah and devotion. Out of thoughts such as these there are formed perfect objects that will exist for all time. From this alone you can understand the true evil of unholy thoughts, God forbid (*ibid. II, 53*).

18. You should aim for the level of "Mah – What?" This means binding yourself and your thoughts to God at all times in order to draw Godliness over yourself. If you do this, all the battles and difficulties in your life will melt away and everything will go your way (*ibid. II, 45*).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.*