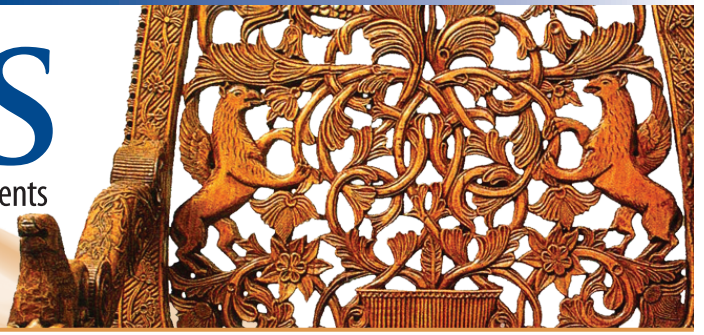


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Land of Desire

By Yossi Katz

**WHY ARE THINGS** so difficult? Why can't life just be "easy-breezy"? These are normal and essential questions to ask. If we want to be a little more sophisticated, we could add, "if God only wants to make my life better, shouldn't the things I want and desire be so much easier to come by?" Instead, it seems that whenever we want to do the right thing or improve in a certain area, everything is thrown against us at that precise moment.

Before taking us out of Egypt, we were promised that we would be redeemed and brought to the Promised Land, a land "flowing with milk and honey." Gathered near the border of the Land of Israel, moments away from realizing the culmination of our incredible redemptive process, we sent scouts to study the nature of the land and its dwellers.

Initially, they reported back very positive news: "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit." But then things took a turn for the ugly: "However, the people who inhabit the land are mighty, and the cities are extremely huge and fortified, and we even saw the offspring of the giant" (Numbers 13:27-28).

Essentially, they were reporting the truth. On the one hand, the land was exactly as promised; they even brought a large fruit to demonstrate this. But they were also very troubled: If this was the land we were destined to receive, why in the world would God place such tremendous obstacles in our way? For Heaven's sake, there are giants dwelling in the land! How can we ever hope to conquer it? While the scouts' face-value observations were on target, they completely misunderstood the true essence of the Land of Israel.

We refer to Israel as *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel, but why? We don't say the Land of America or the Land of

Japan. There is a good reason for this. The Hebrew word *eReTz* (land) comes from the same root as *RaTzon* (desire or will). *Eretz Yisrael* is a source for accessing personal will, desire and passion in life. Both *eReTz* and *RaTzon* come from the root *RaTz* (run). When one merits to attach himself to *Eretz Yisrael*, his personal willpower can run wild. The sweet fruit of the land that the Torah so praises represents the spiritual love and desire that can be absorbed in this place. However, God first places great obstacles in the way.

The reason for the obstacles is simple. They challenge us to dig deep within ourselves to discover our inner willpower. They force us to realize just how much we want that end goal. Like a wife who desires that her husband display a vibrant interest in her, God desires an intimate relationship with us. Therefore He gives us various opportunities to demonstrate our profound desire for Him. By cultivating our innermost desire for Him, we nullify ourselves and unite with His Oneness, to the place of the *Raava d'Raavin*, the Will of Wills. Once there, we are naturally infused with an even greater desire for Him.

The Jews stood gazing at the land in the near distance. This was the moment they could express their deepest yearning to finally realize their dream. The obstacles were meant to push them to turn to God with an awesome, burning hope and desire, so they would become unified with His Will. The land of desire would become the most desired, its spiritual potential fully realized and experienced. But the scouts did not understand this, and were instead overcome by the obstacles.

As we read about this tragedy once more, may we merit to see our own obstacles for what they truly are and express our great yearning that we all return home, to the place of His true desire. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaRei'ach 5*

# The Voice of Prayer

By Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld

**REB NAFTALI** WAS the regular *ba'al tefillah* (prayer leader) during Rebbe Nachman's time. Once Reb Naftali was away and it was necessary to choose a replacement on the spot. Everyone trembled at the thought that he would have to be the *ba'al tefillah* in the presence of the Rebbe. The awe of the Rebbe's presence was so great – who could dare display and demonstrate his voice in front of him?

Rebbe Nachman selected one person who was known not to have such a sweet voice. This person could not carry a tune so well, but he was ordered, "Go to the *amud* and *daven* (pray)."

This man went to the *amud* and started to *daven* with feeling, out loud. He gave forth his power of prayer very loudly with a broken heart, a broken voice.

The entire service, they could hardly make out the words he was saying. All they heard was a crying voice, crying out words. The people felt this might be embarrassing because it could have incurred Rebbe Nachman's displeasure.

After the prayers were over, Rebbe Nachman walked over to this man and said to him, "*Yeyasher kochakha*, your *davening* was a pleasure." This means that it penetrated through the upper heavens.

This is what you call a *ba'al tefillah*.

It's not about how sweet the melody is, nor is it about how well you carry a tune, or how you inject musical notes into it. It's the feeling that's put into the *davening* that counts.

Therefore, when a person is called to the *amud*, he should put feeling and power into it. Don't stand there praying with a very low voice and let the others carry you. A *chazzan* is supposed to give of his voice, and he's supposed to give of himself when called upon.

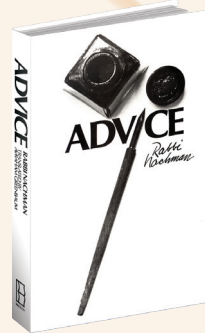
When you are summoned to be the *ba'al tefillah*, don't hesitate. Of course, it's polite to wait an additional moment. Don't rush to it, don't get too anxious, but you're not supposed to allow yourself to be begged for too long a period of time.

*From "Rebbe Nachman's Soul," Vol. 2, Sichah 66*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**MIKVAH.** 3. Immersing in a mikvah is not in the least bit harmful. Any doctor who says it is, is no doctor at all. As long as the water is not excessively cold, immersing in a mikvah is actually very beneficial to the body since it opens the sweat glands, as is known by medical experts (*Likutey Moharan II*, 123).



### FESTIVALS AND SEASONS

**SHABBAT.** 1. The custom of washing in hot water in preparation for Shabbat is the concept of restoring the covenant. The same concept applies to the practice of reading the weekly Torah portion

twice in the Hebrew and once in the Aramaic Targum (*Likutey Moharan I*, 19:5).

2. Shabbat observance is the foundation of genuine faith. All the acts of charity and other good deeds that we do are invested with radiance and perfection solely by virtue of the Shabbat, because Shabbat is the very embodiment of faith. Charity has the power to bring an abundance of blessings and holy influences into the world, but these become manifested in actuality only because of the Shabbat. As the embodiment of faith, Shabbat is the fountain of blessings. Shabbat brings everything in the world to its ultimate perfection. Without Shabbat and the faith it brings with it, all things are lacking. This also applies to the understanding we have of Godliness and our knowledge of Torah. True wisdom and the understanding of Torah can blossom only through the influence of Shabbat and of faith (*ibid. I*, 31:2).



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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.*