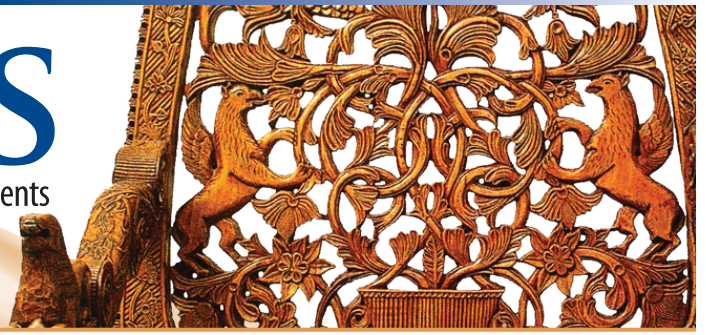


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Searching for Answers

By Yossi Katz

**WE ARE IN PAIN.** We are in sorrow. Tragedies are everywhere, both on a personal and global level. When will they end?

When describing this month of Tamuz, Rebbe Nachman teaches, “The first letters of *Zikhru Torat Moshe* (Remember Moshe’s Torah) (Malakhi 3:22) spell *TaMuZ* without the *vav*. This is because in the month of Tamuz we must elicit mindfulness in order to rectify forgetfulness. For it was then that forgetfulness came into existence, as a result of the Tablets being broken in Tamuz. [The *vav* represents the Tablets, which are described as measuring 6 by 6 handbreadths.] As our Sages teach, ‘Had the First Tablets not been shattered, Torah would not have been forgotten from the Jews’” (*Eruvin* 54a; *Likutey Moharan* I, 217).

God Himself engraved the Ten Commandments – the Torah that was to be given in Tamuz was so exalted that it was to be engraved in our hearts and minds forever. Had we been able to wait just a little bit longer for Moshe to come down the mountain with the Tablets, we would have received a Torah that connected us to God in an unbreakable way. But instead, the Tablets were shattered and forgetfulness descended upon our nation.

Now we feel far, we feel distant. Things happen and we lack any sense of clarity in understanding them. This is all part of forgetfulness. True, we do have the Torah, but it doesn’t always speak to us; often we have a hard time finding the answers when we study it. So how do we connect? How do we deal with tragedy and pain?

In this week’s *parashah*, Balaam describes us as “a people that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the

nations” (Numbers 23:9). The word “alone” in Hebrew is *BaDaD*, as in *hitBoDeDut*. Balaam was revealing an essential method for our survival and eventual triumph: we must seclude ourselves in conversation with our Creator.

Although many great tzaddikim spoke about the importance of *hitbodedut*, it was only Rebbe Nachman who recommended speaking to God as if He were a true, close friend. When a son speaks to his father, he always feels a certain level of reservation and awe of authority. Not so when one speaks to a good friend: then he is free to pour out his whole heart and express all his emotions and deepest thoughts.

The way we can not only survive life, but live life, is by fortifying ourselves in private conversation with God. Every bit of pain we feel, every lack, can be transformed into a prayer. Every experience can be used as an opportunity to come closer. True, there will still be many things that we might never understand in this world. But we can turn to God and share the burden with Him. We can better understand ourselves and reach clarity. And we can fill our lives with hope by praying for a better future.

If we try to find meaning and hope during difficult times, instead of using those times as an excuse to harm ourselves and our relationship with God and others, then, Balaam continues, “Who can count the dust of Jacob?” (*ibid.*, 23:10). Who can count and ascertain the preciousness of each Jew, for every step he takes will be toward serving God? Every step will effect incredible *tikkunim* and give immeasurable *nachas* to God. May we be mindful of the forgetfulness and sorrow of this month and, through our *hitbodedut*, build an everlasting relationship with God. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5:85*

# The Baal Shem Tov's Remedy (Part 2)

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REBBE NACHMAN BEGAN** his tale:

There is a certain spot among the fields in the city of Ostrov about which the locals only whisper mysteries. Down through the generations, people have passed the story of a supernatural event that took place there.

During the tenure of the Maharsha as chief rabbi of that city in the early seventeenth century, Ostrov was home to a massive church that abutted the Jewish cemetery. It was impossible to get to the cemetery without passing by the church, and a thick miasma of impurity surrounded the place. Whenever the Jewish community had to conduct a funeral, it was in great danger. Just as the funeral procession would pass the church, the priests would ring the bells and begin to sing stirring songs that could literally pull those who were weak into the arms of the church.

The Maharsha knew of the evil effects that the church had had on some members of the Jewish community. Before his passing, he devised a plan to remove the source of danger altogether. In his will, the Maharsha instructed the burial society to make sure to carry his bier past the church, and to lay a copy of his magnum opus, *Chiddushei Aggadot*, on top of his body for his final journey.

At his funeral, the entire community gathered to pay their last respects. They accompanied the bier out to the cemetery, and just as the Maharsha's body passed the church, he sat up and began to rifle through the pages of his *Chiddushei Aggadot*. As if struck by thunder, the entire procession stopped ... and saw the church slowly but inexorably sink into the ground. The entire building, with everyone inside, sank lower and lower until the earth closed over it. The only sign in the now-empty field was a depression marking where the church had once stood...

\* \* \*

After Rebbe Nachman finished his wondrous tale, his daughter Sarah stood up from her sickbed, whole and healthy.

In later years, Sarah had the custom of telling this story to the ill as a means of bringing them healing, and Reb Nachman Tulchin, the student of Reb Noson, would do the same.

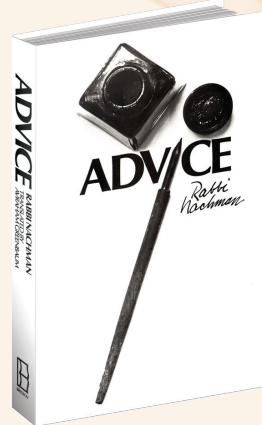
*Based on Or HaOrot I, pp. 197-200*

*Dedicated for the speedy and complete recovery of Reb Chaim Menachem ben Leah*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**SHABBAT.** 6. How precious and holy is the act of eating on Shabbat! It is completely suffused with Godliness without the slightest hint of impurity. The forces of the Other Side have no share at all in Shabbat eating. Anger is conquered and the force of wild passion is uprooted and cast aside. Love and peace reign supreme (*Likutey Moharan I, 57:5-6*).



7. It is also necessary to give generously to charity. Then you will find a profound peace. The experience of the joy of Shabbat eating, together with acts of charity, brings about peace that "has a mouth." There is one kind of peace that "has no mouth." That is the state of peace existing between people who are nevertheless unable to speak to each other. But peace that "has a mouth" is

the state of perfect peace where men talk to one another. For the lips are invested with a wonderful illumination when we eat on Shabbat (*ibid. I, 57:7*).

8. On Shabbat, the double portion of bread (*lechem MiShNeH*) that the tzaddik enjoys is a double portion of Torah (*MiShNeH Torah*). Shabbat is a favored time for developing original Torah ideas—"two for every one." Shabbat spreads its influence over all the worlds and sends the light of its radiance to every level, bringing healing to the soul and to the body (*ibid. I, 58:5*).



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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.*