

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Let Pesach Set You Free

By Yossi Katz

**OF ALL THE** Jewish holidays, Pesach resonates especially well in America and other democratic societies. These societies can identify with the Jewish people in Egypt, enslaved and oppressed by a dominant race, who overcame their persecutors to live as a free nation. President Obama himself expressed this sentiment a few years ago during his weekly address at Passover time: “In America, the Passover story has always had special meaning. We come from different places and diverse backgrounds, but we are bound together by a journey from bondage to liberty, enshrined in our founding documents and continued in each generation.”

This Shabbat, Shabbat HaGadol, it is customary to read through most of the Haggadah. This is done because the miracle of redemption had already begun at this time in Egypt. Additionally, this reading gets us ready for Seder night. Although we will stop short of reading this part of the Haggadah this Shabbat, our Sages summed up the purpose of the Seder by quoting the passage: “In each generation, each person is obligated to see himself as though he personally went out of Egypt.”

Pesach is more than a historical remembrance — it’s a reenactment. The proper observance of Pesach isn’t just a matter of reading certain words and doing certain things, but of tasting and experiencing personal freedom. The observance of Pesach and its customs should serve as a catalyst that spiritually elevates us above the physical limitations of this world and all its worries, anxieties and issues.

And yet, so many kvetch about all the cleaning and shopping and prep work it takes to get ready for Pesach and the Seder. Isn’t this process supposed to be liberating? Where are we going wrong?

Reb Noson writes: “The Rebbe cautions us not to be overly stringent in any observance. The Rebbe quotes the

Talmudic maxims, “God does not rule over His creatures with tyranny” (*Avodah Zarah* 3a), and, “The Torah was not given to the ministering angels” (*Berakhot* 25b) ...

“The Rebbe was also very much against all the special stringencies that are observed on Pesach. Many people go so far in observing many fine points of custom that they are literally depressed by the holiday. He spoke about this at length. One of his followers once asked the Rebbe exactly how to act with regard to an ultra-stringent observance. The Rebbe made a joke of it.

“The Rebbe spoke about this quite often. He said that these ultra-strict practices are nothing more than confused foolishness. He told us that he had also been caught up in this and would waste much time thinking up all sorts of unnecessary restrictions ...

“When the Rebbe spoke about this, he continued, ‘True devotion consists mainly of simplicity and sincerity. Pray much, study much Torah, do many good deeds. Do not worry yourself with unnecessary restrictions’ ... He concluded, ‘There is nothing that you absolutely must do and if not ... If you can, fine, but if not, ‘God exempts a person under duress’ (*Bava Kama* 28b).”

Our problem is that we tend to get caught up in the minutia of Pesach. When it is finally time to begin thinking about why we are doing all of this effort in the first place, we are so emotionally and physically zapped that we can’t be bothered. To paraphrase Reb Noson: “People ask, ‘How am I going to make Pesach?’ One way or another, Pesach will be. But what is going to be with Pesach itself? What is going to be with the essence of Pesach?”

Rebbe Nachman gives us profound and simple advice. It’s not up to us to worry about stringencies and extras. Our job is to keep the basic laws without getting stressed. A competent Rabbi is able to help with this. However, our focus should be on appreciating the holiday and its deeper meaning. Then our observance will bring us to the feeling of personal freedom that Pesach demands of us. Amen!

*Based on Rebbe Nachman’s Wisdom #235*

# We Can Bring Mashiach

**AT THE PESACH SEDER**, we recall our miraculous redemption from Egypt and also look forward to the future redemption, when we will be redeemed from our present exile. The Haggadah contains many hints to this future redemption, including the words of Hallel, the singing of “Next Year in Jerusalem” at the end of the Seder, and the allusions in the songs found in the back of the Haggadah.

Once someone asked Reb Noson: Seeing that the Mashiach hasn't yet come, despite all the efforts of all the very great Tzaddikim in all the previous generations, how will he come in these few remaining and much weaker generations?

Reb Noson answered with a parable:

There was once a city that was well fortified. It was enclosed by a thick stone wall, thought to be impenetrable. A wise king decided to conquer this fortified city. After inspecting the fortifications, he sent his mightiest soldiers to bring down the wall and attack the city. These soldiers fell.

He next sent a second wave of less mighty soldiers, then a third wave, and so on. Before long he had depleted his entire army, and the wall had not come down. But the king did not give up. Once again he circled the city, inspecting its walls. “How can you expect to capture this city if all your mighty soldiers are gone?” he was asked. The wise king smiled.

“If you look closely, you will see that though the soldiers could not breach the wall, they did succeed in cracking it,” he replied. “It is no longer strong and impenetrable. Now, with even the weak and wounded, I can bring down the wall.” The king then sent his few remaining and weakest soldiers into battle and conquered the city.

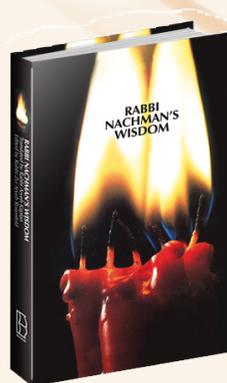
Reb Noson explains that though they did not succeed in bringing the Mashiach, all the great Tzaddikim of the previous generations did succeed in cracking all of the obstacles that stood in the way. Now, though we are weak and don't have the strength or the power, if we would but make a concerted effort, we *could* bring the wall down and bring the Mashiach.

*From The Breslov Haggadah*

## SIDEPATH

*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt"l*

217. It is written, “You should know this day and take it to your heart that God is the Lord” (Deuteronomy 4:39). Some philosophers try to use this verse to prove that one must know God philosophically. The Rebbe said that this is absolutely false. Faith is the only path to knowledge and perception of God's true greatness. Thus it is written, “And I will betroth you to Me with faith, and you will know God” (Hosea 2:22).



Many verses tell us to know God. It is written, “You should know this day and take it to your heart that God is the Lord” (Deuteronomy 4:39). “Know the God of your father” (I Chronicles 28:9). “Know that

God is the Lord” (Psalms 100:3). None of these verses have anything to do with philosophy. Their lesson is that we should constantly know that God is there and not forget Him for an instant.

Great kings remind their subjects constantly to know that they have a ruler. This is especially true of their soldiers. They are continuously trained to know who is their lord and king. A king's subjects are constantly told, “Know that you have a lord and master.” They are not told to philosophize about it, but to keep it in mind and not forget it. They are told to always think of the king and not do anything against his will. The same is true of the Kingdom of Heaven.



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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.*