

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Every Day Counts

By Yossi Katz

**IF YOU'VE EVER** davened (prayed) in a Breslov shul during these days of counting the Omer, then you've witnessed the incredible intensity and devotion that Breslov Chassidim invest in their Omer counting. The whole service, perhaps one page long, can take up to an hour for them to recite. Obviously, this practice must be very meaningful and tremendously important. (If you have a chance, go to a Breslov shul and experience it for yourself!)

What exactly is the Omer offering? The offering is barley; on the second day of Pesach, an Omer (a measure equal to approximately 2 quarts) of barley was waved in the six directions (north, south, east, west, up and down). Barley is traditionally considered animal food. What kind of offering is this, anyway?

Moreover, the 49 days of the Omer correspond to the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot. These days are considered preparatory days, when we ascend from the 49 levels of impurity in Egypt and rise to the 50th level of holiness on Shavuot, becoming fit to receive the Torah. What is the connection between counting the Omer and building our personal capacity for receiving the Torah?

Part of the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt was not just the destruction of our enemies, but also our spiritual rescue — a spiritually despondent nation became elevated to incredible new heights. When we tasted our awesome potential, not only were our bodies redeemed, but so were our spirits. However, this presented a problem. Since we didn't initiate this process, we weren't capable of permanently maintaining our new connection with God. Just as it's unhealthy for a nutritionally destitute person to immediately overload on nutritionally dense food, so too, we are incapable of maintaining this new, elevated level. We have to take a few steps back and begin to build strong enough vessels to hold the awesome light. These are the 49 days.

We need animal food in order to build our spiritual muscles. We must become strong enough to lift even the lowest,

most challenging encounter and wave it in all six directions, symbolizing that God is everywhere and in everything.

Life is not just about experiencing miraculous revelations of Godliness, but about seeing Him and connecting to Him even when the worst perceived “garbage” is thrown at us. There are only seven days in a week. The Kabbalah explains that each day can be subdivided further to include all seven days within it. These 49 days are therefore a microcosm of every conceivable type of day that's possible to experience. In order to rise to the level of being able to receive the Torah, we must first learn to appreciate each and every day as being a unique and worthy vessel with which to experience Godliness. During the Omer-counting, we are correcting our “free ride” out of Egypt and engaging in the process necessary to build a true connection with our Creator.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky was once abducted by the Soviet authorities and taken in the middle of the night to Siberia. After his release, he met a great rabbi who asked him, “How did you manage to keep going during this most difficult time?”

Rabbi Abramsky answered that he was sent to the Gulag with no *Talit*, *Tefilin* or even an overcoat; all he had was the shirt on his back. When he woke up in the morning, he found it difficult to say *Modeh Ani* — thanking HaShem for His many kindnesses. What was there to be thankful for? But when he reached the words, *rabba emunasecha* — great is your faith — he thought, “I still have my faith!” He realized that that most precious and powerful thing in the world remained with him yet.

The great rabbi replied, “It was worth you experiencing this entire horrible ordeal in order to obtain this level of faith.”

The laws of the Omer-counting stress that one should not miss counting even a single day. This is the law of life itself. Each person has awesome spiritual potential; each of us can reach the 50th level of holiness — the level of personally receiving the Torah at Sinai. But first, we must learn to count today. Have you counted yet?

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Pikadon 4*

# A Fiery Law

**REBBE NACHMAN NAMED** his oldest daughter Odel after his grandmother, the righteous daughter of the Baal Shem Tov. The holy Baal Shem Tov himself created the name Odel as an acronym of the Hebrew initials of the verse: “A fiery law to His right-hand side.” The original Odel was a kind of “right hand” to the Baal Shem Tov — in many ways more like a disciple than a daughter.

Rebbe Nachman’s relationship with his daughter Odel was also special. He would often confide in his oldest daughter, sharing teachings and insights with her that he sometimes withheld from even his close students.

Once, Rebbe Nachman told her: “There once was a famous tzaddik who spent a long time praying before a cat...” When she expressed her surprise, he went on:

“When this famous tzaddik would pray in his private chamber, he sensed that the door was being pressed upon from the outside. So he thought to himself, ‘It must be that my *chassidim* want to see how I pray!’ And he would whip himself into greater heights of fervor. He just was unaware of one important fact. It wasn’t his disciples behind the door; it was the cat, who was sharpening her claws on the other side of the doorframe. How terrible...” Rebbe Nachman concluded, “All that...just for the cat!” Odel was astute enough to grasp Rebbe Nachman’s intention — that Divine service should focus on G-d alone, and not the opinions of others.

Odel was intimately familiar with the ways of her father’s followers, and could often be relied upon for a definitive opinion about what should be done when others were unsure. Once, the chassidim were conducting a gathering where Torah thoughts and inspiration were shared, and the women in the next room didn’t know if the men had already started the grace after meals.

Odel smiled and said, “When my father’s students *bentsch*, you know it!” A moment later, the women heard the men begin the bircat hamazon with voices raised in passionate prayer...just like she had said.

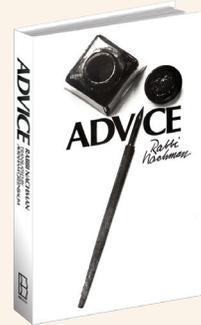
And when Reb Nosson first became a disciple, Rebbe Nachman shared his impression of the young man with his beloved daughter: “Do you want to know how sharp he is? When he is in the synagogue, he can lift up his eyes and, with one glance, tell you exactly how many square meters the place contains!”

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**TRUTH AND FAITH.** 22. Falsehood is evil and corrupt. A person who is false casts God’s protective care from himself. But a person who is truthful will enjoy God’s care and protection in all ways (*Likutey Moharan I, 47*).

23. There is only one truth but a multitude of lies. You can say only one truth about any given object — just what it is and nothing else. Silver is silver and only silver. Gold is gold and only gold. But lies can be multiplied without end. Silver can be called copper or tin or lead or any other name. This is why the truth will come out in the end and all the current opposition to the true Tzaddikim will disappear. The basic cause of this opposition is the terrible spread of falsehood everywhere. Where the truth is acknowledged to be only one, there is no place for opposition (*ibid.*).



24. Your goal should be to merge with the One and to connect “after Creation” with “before Creation” to make a unity that is all good and all holy. To join “after Creation” with “before Creation” means to constantly connect the created world in which we live with the transcendent realm that gives this world its meaning. Guard yourself from falsehood and speak only the truth – then you will become merged with the One, because the truth is one (*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.*