

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Back to “Normal”

By Yossi Katz

**HOW WAS YOUR** Yom Tov? Mine was wonderful. First I experienced the awesome spiritual heights of being in Uman for Rosh HaShanah, then the solemn upliftedness of the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, and then eight joyous days together with my family in the sukkah.

But the Sunday after was very difficult. Besides all the schlepping, like taking down the sukkah and cleaning up after Yom Tov, life was rapidly returning to “normal.” Granted, I am fortunate enough to work for BRI and spend my time doing my best to share the Rebbe’s Torah with the masses; nevertheless, my job is as pressured and stressful as any other. I have deadlines to make, financial obligations to keep, and a multitude of issues always certain to spring up. This got me wondering: Is Tishrei (the current month of festivals) a kind of once-a-year Jewish Oktoberfest, or does its placement at the start of the year indicate its crucial relevance and influence?

As difficult as it is to build a sukkah, Noah’s Ark was a far greater feat. For 120 years, Noah toiled at building this massive structure. Why was he asked to build something for so long? Picture your neighbor working around the clock, erecting a giant tower. Would your curiosity not overcome you to ask, “What in the world are you doing?” God gave Noah a massive building project in order to make headlines. This would guarantee that he be swamped with interviews and have ample opportunity to encourage mankind to do *teshuvah*.

The *Zohar* (*Hashmatot*, *Bereishit* 254b) teaches that after the flood, Noah witnessed the destruction of the world and began to cry. He said, “Master of the

world, You are called compassionate. Why were You not compassionate for Your creation?” God rebuked him, “You foolish shepherd! *Now* you say this?”

For even after toiling 120 years, Noah was not able to bring even one Jew back to God. It wasn’t that Noah was lacking in piety. Quite the opposite – he was a tremendous Tzaddik. But he was lacking in his ability to perceive God’s absolute compassion. It was therefore most fitting that he be saved by being sealed in a box. Noah could not have remained on earth, for he was unable to relate to those who had fallen away from God and holiness. He could exist only in an artificial spiritual environment. The *Zohar* (*Tikkun* #21, p. 54) thus compares the Ark to Yom Kippur, and points out that the Ark came to rest during the seventh month – Tishrei!

Over the past Tishrei, we were blessed to be engaged in one spiritual endeavor after another. Hopefully, we became more aware of our connection to God and the existence and abilities of our special *neshamot* (souls). However, just as we left our Jewish homes, the pinnacle of holiness, for the outdoorsy-ness of the sukkah, so too, we must leave behind the High Holidays season and rejoin “normal” life. Yet the sukkah taught us a tremendous lesson: Just like its *sechach*-roof, God is hovering over us always. His compassion is never-ending.

We have proven that we can ascend to great heights, and that we are active members of God’s great nation, but can we also go beyond Noah? Can we serve God when He is hidden? When we begin to grasp His true greatness and compassion, we can begin to truly serve Him in whatever situation we find ourselves. God’s greatest desire is not for us to have a relationship for a month or two a year, but to get to know Him every day, in every facet of our lives. This is the challenge and greatness of every Jew. May we all merit a joyous year of true closeness with God. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhos Shabbat 7*

# Patience!

By Yehudis Golshevsky

**REBBE NACHMAN'S TEACHINGS** shed light on so many different areas of our lives, it can be hard sometimes to distill exactly what his "main message" comes down to. One confused novice asked an experienced chassid to provide a single key that would help unlock the full spectrum of Rebbe Nachman's pathway for him. "What should I focus on, practically, that will serve as the frame into which everything I learn will fit?"

The chassid gave an interesting answer. "In one word? Patience. That is the essence of Rebbe Nachman's message and the key to all his teachings."

He went on, "The Talmud offers a parable to help us understand the patience needed for spiritual change. A person who wants to do *teshuvah* and grow closer to God can be compared to one who approaches an old-time grocer to ask for some balsam oil, one of the most priceless commodities in the ancient world. The scent of this oil was so strong that a woman needed to apply it only once in thirty days.

"In years past, when you bought dry or liquid goods, you brought your own container to be filled by the seller. Balsam oil was fabulously expensive and its aroma was intoxicating. When the customer comes in to fill his little flask, the seller says, 'Here, let me have that. I'll fill it for you.' That way, the seller gets to enjoy the fragrance, maybe even get some on his hands.

"Rebbe Nachman ties this to another teaching, that one who wishes to repent is assisted from on high (*Yoma* 38b; see *Likutey Moharan* I, 6:2). The seeker must be willing to 'wait at the counter' while the agent 'assists him' – he must wait patiently for God's help. While he waits, he should spend his time wisely, praying for assistance. If he prays, he'll get it. But he needs a lot of patience."

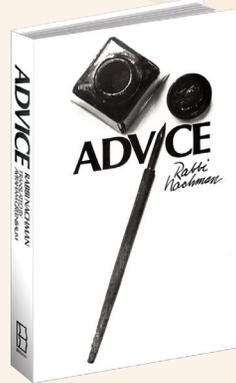
The Breslovers who ran businesses had a common practice. While waiting for deals to come through or merchandise to move, they would take advantage of the time and pray. "Please, let the business come ... but not on Friday if it will make me rush into Shabbat. And please send enough money so that I can have the time to serve You!"

*Based on Siach Sarfey Kodesh VI:470, V:469*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**UNDERSTANDING.** 22. Wisdom is the root of all things. This is why one must guard his mind from all extraneous ideologies. True wisdom has as its goal the pursuit of perfection. The wisdom that is necessary for this is the holy wisdom of the Torah, which is concerned with Godliness. All other idea-systems are futile – they cannot really be called wisdom at all (*Likutey Moharan* I, 35:1).



23. From the time a person is born, his understanding is in a state of contraction. It only starts to grow when he begins to use it to think about how to serve God. But when a person admits alien thoughts and ideologies into his mind, the holiness of his mind and soul is diminished in direct proportion to the space occupied by the

alien ideas. All kinds of negative character traits develop from this alien mentality and cluster around it (*ibid.*).

24. This is why one must be so careful to protect one's mind and not allow alien thoughts and ideologies to enter. The way to achieve true repentance and make amends for all one's sins is to make a determined effort to expel all alien thoughts from one's mind. The mind is the manifestation of the soul. When a person sanctifies his mind – and therefore his soul – everything becomes elevated and restored to its source. This is the essence of repentance (*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.*