

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Shining Light

By Yossi Katz

**IF I WERE** to ask someone if they were looking forward to Yom Tov, most likely they wouldn't think I was referring to Yom Kippur. Probably I meant Sukkos, in which case their answer would be a resounding "Yes!" Somehow, the holiest day of the year – itself a Yom Tov – is difficult for us to relate to. We understand and appreciate its significance, but its observance tends to feel more like an important obligation than a meaningful and exceptional opportunity.

In truth, God, in His outstanding compassion, has blessed us with an incredibly special day to recreate our relationship with Him. We need only understand a little bit of the mechanics behind this day to embrace this once-a-year opportunity.

In Hebrew, the word for "sin" is *chet*, which literally means "to miss," like someone who is off target. When we observe the Torah's commandments properly, we live a life of spiritual alignment and thus are blessed with plentiful spiritual and material bounty to enjoy our existence and closeness with God. However, when we fail to observe the Torah properly, we fall out of line and sink with the spiritual realities of this world.

Rebbe Nachman compares our veering off the path to a wild and crazed horse. Imagine a horse running around untamed, doing whatever it felt like in its "horse mind." Obviously, its owner would not be very pleased. So he decides to teach the horse to behave appropriately by pounding it with his fist. His friend, watching what's going on, laughs at the owner. "You're only going to hurt yourself by pounding your horse," he screams at him.

In His great love for us, God fashioned us in His image and gave each of us a Divine portion – our precious *neshamah* (soul). Although God can punish us to bring us back into line, by doing so He harms Himself

in the process. Since He has invested Himself in us, by diminishing us in any way He is also divesting from His own personification. Therefore it is written, "In all their pain is His own pain" (Isaiah 63:9). Much like the owner of the wild, crazed horse, God desires to restore His creations to their proper existence. Therefore He gave us the special day of Yom Kippur in order to atone for our misguided decisions, so that all punishments and harsh decrees can be annulled and cancelled.

God wants to be the shining light in our lives. He desires profound closeness with each of His creations. However, He also has given us the free will to choose what type of life we would like to live. When we make poor decisions, God hides Himself from us. Rebbe Nachman says that while God sits weeping, His tears extinguish His precious light and replace it with ashes.

The *Zohar* teaches that a captive cannot free himself from captivity. During Yom Kippur, God sits and waits for each of us to do just that. We do this not by praying in the merit of our good deeds, or by thinking that our repentance will truly justify our being forgiven. In actuality, we are not truly worthy. However, God has purposely invested Himself in each of us. He waits like a captive for us to redeem our relationship with Him. Through our crying, we are recognizing that He has shed tears because of us; He has hidden His benevolent light from us and this pains Him as it affects Him personally.

Therefore Rebbe Nachman teaches that we pray, for the sake of His great Name that He has proclaimed upon us, that God forgive us. God has purposely cast His lot with us and waits patiently for us. By humbling ourselves before Him, He will take the ashes (*AphaR*) and transform them into a beautiful future together (*Pe'ER*).

*Based on Likutey Moharan II, 66;  
Likutey Halakhot, Lulav VeEsrog 1*

*Gmar Chatimah Tovah!*

# The Yom Kippur Man

By Chaim Kramer

**REB NOSON ONCE** said, “The Rebbe’s main thing is Rosh HaShanah. My main thing is Yom Kippur” (*Siach Sarfey Kodesh I*, 662).

Reb Noson’s whole mission was to show that man can always return to God, regardless of anything he may have done, no matter how much he may have sinned. This was the mission Rebbe Nachman had held out to him a few days after their first meeting: to become the “lower point” of the *aleph*, to bring life, vitality and faith to all the lower levels. Even as he left this world, Reb Noson was mindful of his mission, repeating again and again, “*Chanun hamarbeh lislòach* – Gracious One Who forgives abundantly” (from the blessings of *Shemoneh Esrey*). There is hope for all: God will forgive! Always!

{ *There is hope for all:  
God will forgive! Always!* }

Repentance and forgiveness for all of Israel were the very essence of Reb Noson (*Yemey HaTlaos*, p. 133). The letters of the words *Chanun hamarbeh lislòach* have the numerical value of 500, the same as that of the letters of *NoSoN* (*Kochavey Or*, p.122).

Reb Noson passed away just before Shabbos on December 20, 1844. He was 64 years and 11 months old, and was totally attached to God until the very end.

Those were the days before the invention of the telegraph, and it was impossible to transmit news of his passing anywhere until after Shabbos. Even so, that Friday night, his friend Reb Naftali, who was in Uman, already knew that Reb Noson was no longer. When asked how he knew, Reb Naftali answered:

“I had a dream in which I saw Reb Noson running quickly. I said, ‘Reb Noson! Where are you running?’ ‘Me?’ he said. ‘Straight to the Rebbe!’” (*Siach Sarfey Kodesh I*, 655)

*From Through Fire and Water: The Life of Reb Noson of  
Breslov, pp. 546-547*

## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**LAND OF ISRAEL.** 5. It is impossible to come to the Land of Israel without difficulties and suffering. The root of all the difficulties and suffering lies in the slanderous image of the Land which is promulgated by the wicked. But the power of the Torah that we draw into ourselves enables us to overcome all the obstacles, difficulties and suffering. The more profound a person’s grasp of the Torah and the greater the *tikkun* he brings about through his attainment, the greater his victory over the obstacles, and he will succeed in reaching the Land of Israel (*Likutey Moharan I*, 6).

6. When someone attains the level of the Land of Israel, he is worthy of being called a “man of strength and valor.” Before he attains this level, “Let the one who girds his armor not boast like the one who takes it off” (I Kings 20:11). But when he has gone through the battle successfully, he is worthy of the name “man of war” (*Likutey Moharan I*, 10).

7. When people give charity to causes in the Land of Israel, they become merged in the air of the Land, which is holy breath untainted by sin (*Shabbat* 119b). Through this breath, the forces of severity and darkness are banished from the world. This is also how it is possible to escape from the distracting, alien thoughts that arise during prayer (*ibid.* I, 37:4).



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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.*