

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Beyond the Holiday Season

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 uplift of the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur ... then eight joyous days together with my family in the sukkah.

What comes next? Besides all the schlepping, like taking down the sukkah and cleaning up after Yom Tov, life has rapidly returned to “normal.” Kids are in school, mom and dad are back at work and the bills are all due. Was the holiday-packed month of Tishrei just a pleasant interlude, a kind of Jewish Oktoberfest to revel in before getting back to the business of daily living?

As difficult as it was to build our sukkahs, Noah's Ark was an awesome feat. For 120 years, the Tzaddik toiled at building this massive structure. Not only was the construction physically challenging, but the placement of the parts and the structure itself alluded to deep spiritual concepts that he was forced to perceive. In Hebrew, the word *teivah* (Ark) also means “word.” During the 120 years he spent on building the Ark, Noah would meditate and pray according to the deep mystical concepts alluded to in its structure. The *Zohar* (*Tikkun* #21, p. 54) compares building the Ark to the service of Yom Kippur. It appears that Noah's Yom Kippur was much longer than ours!

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, “Foolish shepherd! *Now* you say this?” But Noah worked so hard to bring the Ark, he was truly a great Tzaddik, what did he do wrong?

While he toiled for 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 was unable to relate to those who had fallen away from God and holiness. He felt the need to always be perfect and could exist only in a spiritual bubble. His constant spiritual existence was like that of standing in shul and fasting and praying on Yom Kippur.

During 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 sukkah, so too, we must leave behind the High Holidays season and rejoin “normal” life. But the sukkah taught us a tremendous lesson: Just like its *sechach*-roof, God is hovering over us always. His compassion is never-ending.

Moses was the one who brought this lesson home for us. Even after the Jewish People committed the colossal sin of the Golden Calf, Moses was able to arouse God's mercy and kindness. Now we know that no matter how low we may fall, we can always return to God and be forgiven. We can look for God, and reveal His presence, even when He is hidden. No matter how imperfect the situation we find ourselves in, we can still relate to Him and serve Him.

God's greatest desire is not for us to have a relationship with Him one month 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*

# “The Walls Have Ears”

By Gedaliah Fler

**IN THE EARLY 1960s** R' Gedaliah Fler attempted the impossible: to visit the *tziyun* (gravesite) of Rebbe Nachman in Uman. The city was sealed off to foreigners, while the Communist authorities harassed Russian Jews who made the annual Rosh Hashanah pilgrimage. Upon reaching Moscow on a tourist visa, R' Gedaliah contacted the one man who could help him get to Uman: R' Michel Dorfman.

At exactly 2:00, a man with a small beard, wearing a decorated Russian cap, knocked on my door. He was obviously frightened and asked if I was Gedaliah Fler. When I replied that I was, he walked in, removed a piece of paper from his pocket and wrote in Hebrew, “*The walls have ears.*” Then he turned the radio up to its highest volume and whispered in my ear, “What are you doing here?”

I explained in Yiddish that I was an American, that I had just arrived from Israel and that I brought him regards from his father-in-law. It took R' Michel a while to understand that I was a Breslover chassid and that I wanted him to take me to the *tziyun*. When he finally understood, he looked at me as though I was crazy.

To find out if I was telling the truth, he asked, “Did you ever study Breslover books?”

“Yes.”

“Who was Rebbe Nachman’s mother?”

“Feiga, the daughter of Adil, the daughter of the Baal Shem Tov.”

He asked me several other simple questions, which I had no difficulty answering. Every time I tried to raise my voice to be heard above the radio, he pointed to the piece of paper with the words “*The walls have ears.*” Finally he said, “It would be best to go for a walk outside.”

We walked to a bridge about a block away, and paced back and forth across it as we talked.

“I spent six years and seven months in prison,” R' Michel said. “The police keep my friends and me under constant surveillance. To take you to the *tziyun* would be extremely risky, and I don’t think that I can endanger myself like that. After all, I still have an unmarried daughter, and what will become of her if I end up in prison again? The only thing that I can do is give you explicit instructions how to find the *tziyun*, so listen well!”

*From “Against All Odds”*

## SIDEPATH

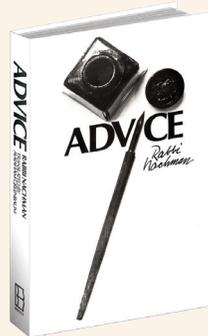
Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**LAND OF ISRAEL.** 12. The mitzvah of challah – separating the priestly portion of the dough – is also bound up with the Land of Israel, and the effect of the mitzvah is likewise to reveal the radiance of the Patriarchs and the holiness of the Land (*Likutey Moharan I*, 55:8, 10).

13. The motive for making the journey to the Land of Israel should be purely spiritual: to draw closer to God. A person who goes there with this as his aim will certainly benefit. Merely by stepping foot on the Land, he will become merged with it and transformed by its sacred character. That is why even “one who walks four cubits in the Land of Israel will assuredly inherit the World to Come” (*Ketuvot* 111).

On the other hand, if a person’s motive has nothing to do with devotion to God and cleansing himself of his evil, then what help will the Land be to him? The Land will vomit him out “as it vomited out the nation that was before you” (*Leviticus* 18:28) (*Likutey Moharan I*, 129).

14. Through the holiness of the Land of Israel, one can attain pure faith. This is the gateway to that long, deep, patient breath which is the remedy for anger and depression (*ibid.*, I, 155).



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PO Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

PO Box 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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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.*

*Dedicated in the Memory of (L’Ilui Nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon*