

# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Next Year Will Be Different

By Yossi Katz

**THE SUMMER IS** quickly fading away. Days are getting shorter, nights are a lot cooler and the leaves have begun their beautiful transformation. Indeed, it's that time of year again – the “head” of the year is around the corner.

On Rosh HaShanah, not only is our annual income predetermined, but our very lives hang in the balance. We say in the stirring prayer *U'Netaneh Tokef*: “On Rosh Hashanah will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed – how many will pass from the earth and how many will be created, who will live and who will die...”

We conclude, “However, repentance, prayer and charity remove the evil of the decree!”

Yes, we do have the power to influence the head or foundation of the year for the better, through our own actions and charity. This opportunity sounds so obvious that one would think that only a knucklehead wouldn't take advantage. But let me tell you a familiar story. There was once a Rabbi who was reviewing the areas of his personality that needed some fixing. Incidentally, he came across his notes from the previous Rosh HaShanah. To his horror, the items on his new list matched his year-old list to a “T”

Year after year we make resolutions, invest our energy and our good wishes, and are still stuck on the same old stuff. Truthfully, we all strongly desire to do *teshuvah* (return to God), but we just can't seem to mend our ways.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the key to *teshuvah* is to hear one's own shame and remain silent (*Likutey Moharan* I, 6). There are many ways to experience this embarrassment or humiliation. Often it involves people sharing their cynical comments or poking fun at us. However, there is a much deeper shame that is experienced, regardless of whether it was brought

on by others or by ourselves. This is the shame that we experience when we internalize our own failures. Nothing destroys us more than when we realize we haven't reached our dreams and goals, we haven't accomplished what we so sincerely set out to do. If there's a reason we're stuck, it's because we have honestly tried but eventually experienced setbacks, and so we let our *teshuvah* efforts pass from our mind.

Rebbe Nachman is teaching us to remain silent – not to answer back to the inner voice of failure. The shame we experience is a stark reminder that we are seeking to serve God and not ourselves. We will not judge our success according to the human outcome, but rather, we will be joyful because of our deep, inner desire for Godliness. Seeing our own shortcomings and yet remaining silent and determined to continue trying is the best antidote to our greatest enemy – our ego.

The Hebrew word Rebbe Nachman uses for silence is *yiDOM*. This word has additional meaning, as King David says, “Be *DOM* before God, hope longingly for Him” (Psalms 37:7). Our silence need not be a silence of shame and failure, but of hope and longing to God. When we acknowledge our weak points, yet live with the incredible words of encouragement Rebbe Nachman gives us, we finally gain the inner-strength and fortitude necessary to make real changes.

Many people devalue their *teshuvah* because they think it's incomplete and they haven't yet become perfect. But *teshuvah* is about continually striving for God's honor and kingship, despite life's guaranteed ups and downs. If our Rabbis teach us that the World to Come can be achieved by doing *teshuvah* a moment before one's passing, certainly someone who engages in *teshuvah* his whole life is abundantly more worthy. The more *teshuvah* we do, the better, even if we aren't perfect.

As we stand before the King this Rosh HaShanah, may we merit to say to Him that this year will indeed be better. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shabbat 7*

## THE ROAD TO UMAN

# Keeping the Connection Every Day

By Dr. D.

**AFTER ALMOST THREE** years of being involved with Breslov, I finally considered taking the big step of traveling to Uman for Rosh HaShanah. I was nervous that I would find the people there worshiping Rebbe Nachman, God forbid, rather than the Almighty, and of course, I didn't want to have any part of that.

I made the trip and wasn't disappointed. I didn't find worship of Rebbe Nachman. Instead, I found inspirational prayer and true cleaving to God. I found incredible joy and a great sharing of spiritual and material nourishment.

Uman felt like a huge soup of the Jewish people, a cholent of every possible type of Jew. I never expected to see chassidim with long *peyot* and *shtreimels* rubbing shoulders with young men with ponytails and earrings. The mikvah scene was outrageous – all those tattoos!

Despite the differences, a tremendous love existed between the different groups. I had always thought that most Breslovers have long *peyot* and wear long coats. In Uman, I met an entire group of clean-shaven, English-speaking, professional Breslover chassidim and saw many people of all types – not religious, Modern Orthodox and traditional Jews – from many different countries.

*Tashlikh* was unforgettable. Picture it: 25,000 people surrounding a river, doing *teshuvah*, many of them singing and dancing. There was so much joy!

Before Rosh HaShanah, I took a day trip to Reb Nosen's grave in the town of Breslov. I spent time there in *hitbodedut*; it was an amazing experience. In addition, I went to the Sofiefka Park in Uman for *hitbodedut* three or four times. One of the English-speaking rabbis took us on a special *hitbodedut* expedition to the forest, where he gave us pointers on how best to communicate with God. It was very down-to-earth, yet uplifting at the same time.

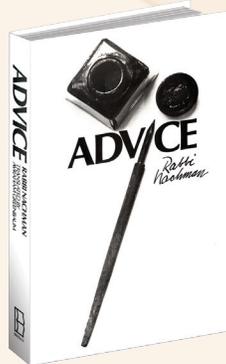
I hope to continue studying the Torah ideas of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov and make them part of my life. I hope to strengthen my commitment to follow the Rebbe's advice to spend time in *hitbodedut*, to immerse daily in the mikvah, and to follow all the other guidelines he gave us to be able to serve God and increase true, deep joy in our lives.

*From "Rebbe Nachman and the Knights of the Rosh HaShanah Table"*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**UNDERSTANDING.** 16. The way to develop the faculty of speech is by recounting the greatness of the Tzaddikim, their achievements, their levels, and so on. Praising the Tzaddikim enhances our power of understanding, and the faculty of speech then receives from this understanding. This is the comprehensive tikkun for the faculty of speech (*Likutey Moharan I, 29:2*).



17. There is no place devoid of God. He fills all worlds and transcends all worlds. A person whose business activities involve him in contacts with non-Jews cannot claim that it is impossible for him to serve God on account of his being constantly surrounded by gross materialism due to his business involvements. Godliness can be found everywhere — in all

material things, and even in the languages of the non-Jews. Without Godliness they would not be able to exist or endure at all. It is only that as the levels become lower Godliness is more "contracted" and veiled in many garments (*ibid. 32:2*).

18. This means that even if you are sunk in the very lair of the "husks" on the lowest of levels, you can still find Godliness even in the place you have sunk to. Even there you can attach yourself to Him and return to Him in perfect repentance. God is not far away even there. It is only that in the place where you are, the veils are thicker (*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.*