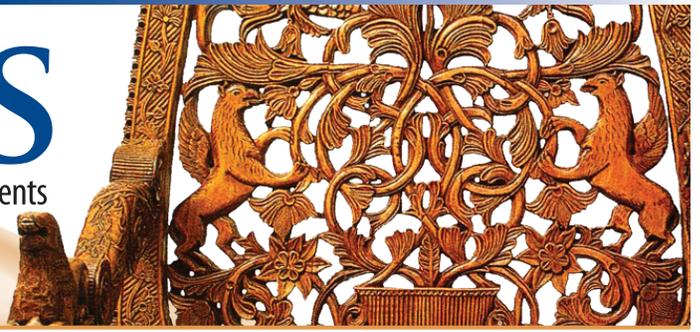


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## The Great Fall of a Great Man

By Yossi Katz

“**How could he** be wrong? Isn’t he a Rabbi?” There are various versions of the same question, usually revolving around the greatness of the individual and the disparity between his status and his actions. We assume that since someone has achieved a measure of prominence, his actions should reflect his outstanding level. However, the biblical figure Korach completely invalidates this argument.

Korach was no ordinary fellow. He was the leading Levite, a close relative of Moses, a tremendously clever fellow, and enormously wealthy. He was so great that he was followed by 250 members of the Sanhedrin. Yet Korach openly rebelled against Moses, who was doing nothing other than following the directive of God. How could Korach fall so low? How could a Rabbi be so wrong?

Spiritual growth is like arm-wrestling. The more you press forward, the greater the resistance you encounter. In order to rise from one spiritual level to the next, the *dinim* associated with the new level must first be mitigated. *Dinim* are harsh judgments; they are the protective forces maintaining the balance of good and evil. These forces challenge you to prove that you are sufficiently worthy of this new level. If you want to claim it, you must prove your resilience.

The Jewish people had achieved universal prophecy at Mount Sinai. Each person heard God speak to them directly. Korach therefore claimed, “The entire congregation is holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God’s community?” (Numbers 16:3). Korach was arguing, “Haven’t we all made it?”

Korach’s line of reasoning was that the mitzvot are a rational device. They are building blocks that can be used in a logical way to attain what one wants to achieve

spiritually. In his mind, Korach had mastered the Torah just like Moses, and his greatness was a *fait accompli*. Because Korach truly was at a mighty level, the *dinim* at that level were enormous. They espoused his greatness, and his ego ultimately got the best of him. He did not manage to conquer them.

Korach challenged, “If a *tallit* is made completely out of *tekheilet* threads, does it require *tzitzit*? Since a single strand of *tekheilet* on the *tzitzit* is sufficient for the mitzvah, shouldn’t an entire garment made of *tekheilet* be exempt from *tzitzit*?” (Rashi on Numbers 16:1). The answer is a resounding no! The mitzvot are not logical devices; we cannot put human limitations on them. When we are privileged to fulfill a mitzvah, we are connecting with the highest place. Just as God is infinite, so are His Torah and mitzvot. There are immeasurable levels to reach, and yet God is completely connected to us at each level.

If we have achieved a certain spiritual goal, such as praying with intensity, we shouldn’t be deceived into thinking we have mastered the skill. As we continue to grow in the art of prayer, we will be challenged at every level. We have to be ready for this and push onwards. We have to display utter humility and sincerity. Yes, we connected with God at our new level, but there are many higher levels of connection.

Korach continued, “The minimum area of a leprous mark to be deemed impure is about one square centimeter. However, if the leprous mark spreads to the entire body, it is a sign of purity. How can this be?” (*Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 10:3). Again, his argument was incorrect. Just as we connected to God at the higher level, so does He exist at the lowest level. Sometimes, only when we hit rock bottom can we reconnect and move ahead. Mitzvot are beyond our comprehension; they are one with God. It is our job to humbly and respectfully seek God from wherever we are. In this way, we will eventually reach our goal. Amen!

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shiluach HaKen 4*

# Azamra!

**HOW OFTEN DO** we look down on others, thinking they are not behaving the way they should? And how many times do we look down on ourselves, feeling that we'll never overcome our bad habits and self-defeating behaviors?

Rebbe Nachman gave us a powerful tool to counteract these thoughts: "*Azamra!* (I will sing!)" (*Likutey Moharan* I, 282). In this lesson, he explains that all we need to do is search for the good points. Everyone has at least one good point; even the most hardened criminal once held the door open for his mother, or gave a coin to charity. When you find one good point, look for another, and another. Thus you elevate yourself and others to the side of merit, enabling everyone to return to God.

Reb Noson writes:

The Rebbe told me he had been speaking with someone who was complaining bitterly about how terrible his behavior was. This man wanted very much to draw closer to God and change his behavior for the better. But each time he tried, the temptations grew stronger and stronger. The days had turned into years and he had still not managed to extricate himself from his bad ways. But each time he would try even harder to control himself, and he was always struggling to get closer to God.

As the man complained how terribly he behaved, the Rebbe answered with great wisdom, saying in a tone of sincerity and simplicity, "Then I have no one to speak to, because everything is totally bad."

At this the man got excited and said to the Rebbe, "But I do try to fight back at times and get closer to what I should be as a Jew."

"Only the slightest bit," answered the Rebbe. He then told the man to make it a practice to go with the teaching of *Azamra!*

I understood the Rebbe to mean that this was precisely how he revived this man. He had already fallen so low in his own estimation that it was not possible to revive him with anything. It was only when the Rebbe told him that he was totally bad that he was startled and became excited. Then he started feeling a little of the holiness of the good points still inside him. Then the Rebbe told him to go with the lesson of *Azamra!*

*Based on Tzaddik #569*

*Dedicated in the Memory of (L'ilui nishmat) Yehudis bat Shimon*

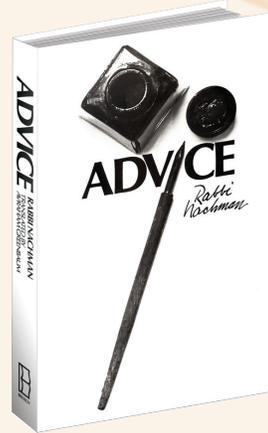
## SIDEPATH

*Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum*

**ENCOURAGEMENT.** 12. There are many different aspects to the evil inclination. Most people have a very crude and materialistic evil inclination—literally the "spirit of madness." But one whose understanding is somewhat developed and who can begin to form some slight conception in his heart of the greatness of the Creator will realize that an evil inclination like this is mere foolishness. For him, even sexual temptation is mere folly requiring no special exertion to fight it. His own evil inclination is on a far higher level (*Likutey Moharan* I, 72).

13. On a higher level still are those whose evil inclination is a "fine shell." This is sent only against one who has outstanding spiritual strength. But this is still not the evil inclination of the Tzaddikim. Theirs is truly a holy angel (*ibid.*).

14. Even the desire one experiences to return to God may have its source in the evil inclination. This is the case when one has too much enthusiasm without the proper limits. Thus, before the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, God told Moses to warn the people, "Let them not break through to come up to the Lord" (Exodus 19:24). You must beg God to take pity and save you from this kind of excess (*Likutey Moharan* I, 72).



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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.*