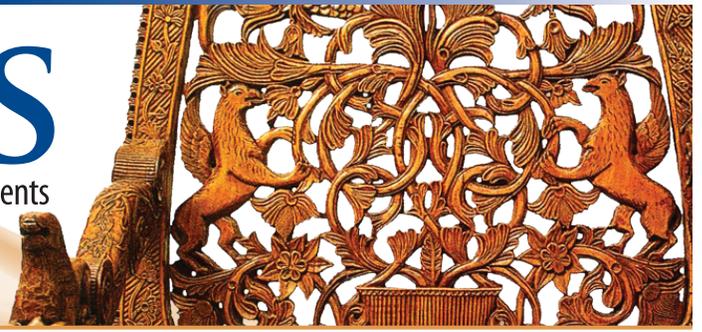


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Searching for Answers

By Yossi Katz

**WE ARE IN** pain. We are in sorrow. Tragedies are everywhere, both on a personal and global level. When will they end?

When describing this month of Tammuz, Rebbe Nachman teaches, “The first letters of *Zikhru Torat Moshe* (Remember Moshe’s Torah) (Malakhi 3:22) spell *TaMmuZ* without the *vav*. This is because in the month of Tammuz we must elicit mindfulness in order to rectify forgetfulness. For it was then that forgetfulness came into existence, as a result of the Tablets being broken in Tammuz. [The *vav* represents the Tablets, which are described as measuring 6 by 6 handbreadths.] As our Sages teach, ‘Had the First Tablets not been shattered, Torah would not have been forgotten from the Jews’” (*Eruvin* 54a; *Likutey Moharan* I, 217).

God Himself engraved the Ten Commandments – the Torah that was to be given in Tammuz was so exalted that it was to be engraved in our hearts and minds forever. Had we been able to wait just a little bit longer for Moshe to come down the mountain with the Tablets, we would have received a Torah that connected us to God in an unbreakable way. But instead, the Tablets were shattered and forgetfulness descended upon our nation.

Now we feel far, we feel distant. Things happen and we lack any sense of clarity in understanding them. This is all part of forgetfulness. True, we do have the Torah, but it doesn’t always speak to us; often we have a hard time finding the answers when we study it. So how do we connect? How do we deal with tragedy and pain?

In this week’s *parashah*, Bilam describes us as “a people that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the

nations” (Numbers 23:9). The word “alone” in Hebrew is *BaDaD*, as in *hitBoDeDut*. Bilam was revealing an essential method for our survival and eventual triumph: we must seclude ourselves in conversation with our Creator.

Although many great Tzaddikim spoke about the importance of *hitbodedut*, it was only Rebbe Nachman who recommended speaking to God as if He were a true, close friend. When a son speaks to his father, he always feels a certain level of reservation and awe of authority. Not so when one speaks to a good friend – then he is free to pour out his whole heart and express all his emotions and deepest thoughts.

The way we can not only survive life, but live life, is by fortifying ourselves in private conversation with God. Every bit of pain we feel, every lack, can be transformed into a prayer. Every experience can be used as an opportunity to come closer. True, there will still be many things that we might never understand in this world. But we can turn to God and share the burden with Him. We can better understand ourselves and reach clarity. And we can fill our lives with hope by praying for a better future.

If we try to find meaning and hope during difficult times, instead of using those times as an excuse to harm ourselves and our relationship with God and others, then, Bilam continues, “Who can count the dust of Jacob?” (*ibid.*, 23:10). Who can count and ascertain the preciousness of each Jew, for every step he takes will be toward serving God? Every step will effect incredible *tikkunim* and give immeasurable *nachas* to God. May we be mindful of the forgetfulness and sorrow of this month and, through our *hitbodedut*, build an everlasting relationship with God. Amen.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar 5:85*

# The Baal Shem Tov's Gan Eden

By Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld

ONCE THE BAAL SHEM TOV was approached by a woman who asked him to bless her with children. He replied that he had investigated in Heaven and found that she could not have any children, so there was no sense in her even asking for it. It was beyond his powers and beyond his faith that she would ever have children, because the stars just didn't call for it.

She insisted and she persisted. She kept returning, crying with so many tears that it was impossible to refuse her.

Eventually the Baal Shem Tov told her, "Regardless of what the fate shows, regardless of what your future is, I hereby promise you with all my power that you're going to have a child. My word, my life, is staked on it."

This caused a major uproar in Heaven. It was decided that because he had dared to do this, he staked his life on it—not his physical life, but his spiritual life. Therefore this woman would be blessed with a child but, at the same time, the Baal Shem Tov would lose all his Gan Eden.

His Gan Eden was, of course, immeasurable. Imagine all the mitzvos and the learning he had accumulated. His service of God was second to none. All that was completely obliterated. A voice from Heaven said, "The Baal Shem Tov has lost his Gan Eden. This is a final decision in Heaven; it is non-negotiable and irrevocable." The Baal Shem Tov heard this. For the moment, this was a sad blow.

Suddenly he was filled with deep happiness, the greatest degree of happiness he ever achieved in his lifetime. He jumped up and said, "I'm the happiest person in the world, because I can now finally, truly and sincerely serve God without any ulterior motives. Forget about reward, Gan Eden, who wants that? Now I can serve God just for the privilege of serving Him. While I'm here, I can serve God unselfishly."

He was so happy about this that a voice from Heaven said, "There's no way of changing the Heavenly decision. Your Gan Eden is lost and you cannot get it back. But this statement that was made now is so valuable that for this alone, you now have twice as much new Gan Eden than before!"

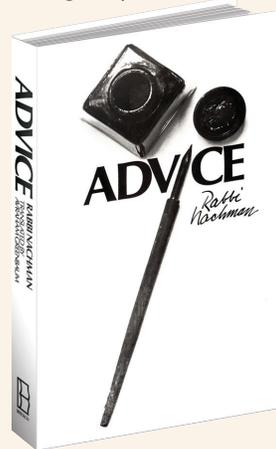
*From "Rebbe Nachman's Soul," Vol. 2*

## SIDEPATH

Advice (*Likutey Etzot*) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**ENCOURAGEMENT.** 18. The way to remain firm is by using the power of speech. Even if you fall, be resolute and speak words of truth – words of Torah and prayer, and the fear of Heaven. Talk to God. Talk to your friends also, and especially your teacher. Speech has a great power to remind a person of God's presence and give him strength even in situations which are very far removed from holiness (*Likutey Moharan I*, 78).

19. You should always be happy and serve God with joy. At times, you may fall from your level. If you do, you can give yourself encouragement by thinking about occasions in the past when you experienced a certain illumination. Use that experience as a source of inspiration now (*ibid. I*, 222).



20. A person who has to have contact with non-Jews for business purposes must be very careful to see that his sanctity as a Jew is not affected. It is dangerously easy to get caught in their net, God forbid. He should always be steadfast and

remind himself constantly of the holiness which is his heritage as a Jew. He should pray to God not to be influenced by their behavior (*ibid. I*, 244).



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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.*