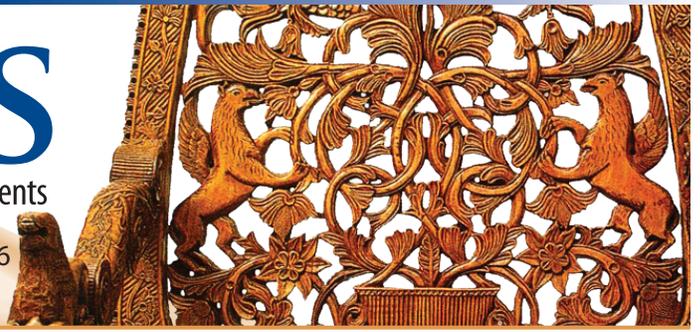


# PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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## Doing Our Part

By Yossi Katz

**KING DAVID SAID**, “Unless God builds a house, its builders have toiled on it in vain” (Psalms 127:1). This verse is difficult to understand. It seems to state that if it were not for God building the house, the workers could never succeed. But if God is, in fact, building the house, who needs workers at all?

“Building the house” alludes to man completing his mission in life. Since the time of Adam’s sin, sparks of goodness have been scattered and hidden throughout the world. Each person must discover and redeem the sparks associated with his or her soul. But this effort cannot be done by man alone, for there are two methods of refinement necessary in order to retrieve the sparks.

The first type of refinement takes place when we channel our energy into doing *mitzvot* and good deeds. Then our human actions are uplifted and transformed from the material to the spiritual, and we bring an influx of goodness into the world. But God also plays a part in this process. Chazal state that God also wears *tefillin* (*Berakhot* 6a). While this cannot be taken in a literal sense, we can understand it in a figurative sense. As we begin to refine this world by using material items to fulfill the mitzvah of *tefillin*, God furthers and completes this process by involving Himself in our mitzvah. Additionally, He helps us and provides the inspiration for us to be able to fulfill all the *mitzvot*.

This relationship creates a paradox. Without God’s intervention, nothing can be accomplished, yet we retain freedom of choice to do our part. How can both be true? Though we can’t fathom the logistics of this arrangement, King David assures us that God truly does operate in this manner.

Jewish sources describe the terrible destruction that is wrought when a Jew sins, ravaging spiritual limbs and worlds. If this is so, how can *teshuvah* (repentance) ever fix the horrible damage that one caused? Precisely because God’s involvement is so great, if a Jew shows a genuine interest in mending his ways, God will manipulate creation so that his very sin will become a springboard for holiness. We see this in the story of Pharaoh: although he set out to persecute and destroy the Jewish people, the Egyptian experience actually forged our emergence as a nation. *Teshuvah* was created before this world; it was built into the fabric of Creation.

On Rosh HaShanah, we dip an apple in honey. Honey is the ultimate paradox in kosher food. Bees are non-kosher, but their byproduct is completely kosher. On Rosh HaShanah, we pray that God will reveal His kingship and usher in the era of Mashiach. It will be Mashiach’s role to teach the Jewish people the power of *teshuvah* and thereby assist God in completing the purpose of His creation and rectifying the world. This is the idea of honey, that it is possible to transform even something completely forbidden – sin – into something sweet and pure.

As we contemplate the greatness of God, we become ever motivated to engage in *teshuvah*. God will then see our willingness to return to Him, and all our misdeeds and mistakes will be transformed into something as exquisite as honey.

May we all merit a happy and sweet new year!

Based on *Likutey Halakhot*,  
*Bekhor Beheimah Tehorah* 4

The Road to Uman

# The Gift of Uman

By Shimon Gross

**SHIMON GROSS (A PSEUDONYM)** is a Chassidic businessman residing in London. He traveled to Uman for the first time in the winter of 2000.

I was invited to join a group of chassidim touring the gravesites of the tzaddikim in the Ukraine. We arrived in Uman late Thursday night. Friday morning, we got up before dawn to pray with the sunrise.

I remember walking down the streets of Uman at that time of the morning. Everything was still dark, it was freezing cold and there was snow everywhere. Before praying, we immersed in the *mikveh* opposite the *tziyun* (Rebbe Nachman's grave). I was the last one to leave the building.

*Uman gives each person the opportunity to connect to God, no matter his or her level of observance.*

Upon leaving the *mikveh*, I heard music in the stillness. The music grew louder as I approached the *tziyun*. I realized that it was coming from the room of the Kohanim, a detached room near the *tziyun* where the Kohanim could pray. I looked in through the window and saw a guy who looked like a hippie sitting in front of an open book of Psalms, strumming his guitar and singing the words of King David at the top of his voice. He seemed to be so immersed in his prayer that he was oblivious to the world.

At that moment, I understood the gift of Uman. Uman gives each person the opportunity to connect to God, no matter his or her level of observance. That morning, I prayed differently than I had ever prayed before.

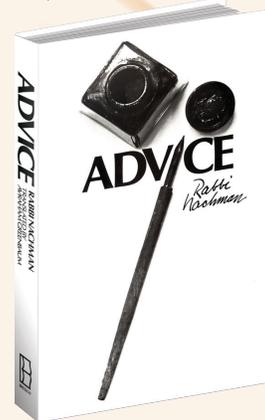
I'm not a Breslover chassid, but since then, I've traveled to Uman several times, including Rosh HaShanah. It's not easy to leave my family behind, but Rosh HaShanah in Uman is an experience that will remain with me forever.

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

## SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

**ROSH HASHANAH.** 11. During the Days of Awe it is a good thing when you can weep profusely like a child. Throw aside all your sophistication. Just cry before God – cry for the diseases of the heart, for the pains and sores



you feel in your soul. Cry like a child before his father. Then you will be worthy of a beautiful *etrog*. The more profusely you weep, the more beautiful the *etrog* you will have for Sukkot (Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom #87).

12. On Rosh HaShanah you must be wise. This means that you should be careful to think only good thoughts. Then God will be good to us

and give us a good year. On Rosh HaShanah you must be joyous, and yet on Rosh HaShanah you must weep (ibid. #21).

13. On the first day of Rosh HaShanah, one should be very careful to speak as little as possible. The greater the person, the more careful he must be (ibid.).

14. The day before Rosh HaShanah is a good time to present a *pidyon* (redemption) (ibid. #214).

**YOM KIPPUR.** 1. Yom Kippur contains all days and gives life to all days. On this day the heart is subdued. Our desire is for God alone. All kinds of disputes, spiritual or material, are resolved. Peace comes, bringing happiness and joy (Likutey Moharan I, 179).



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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.*