

## Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and his students

### THE REAL MCCOY

By Ozer Bergman

**“The people said to Aharon, ‘Make us a god who will lead us because this man Moses, who took us up from Egypt—we don’t know what happened to him’” (Exodus 32:1).**

I’m often asked about the importance of having a rebbe. I’m also asked what *is* a rebbe. What does it mean to have one? How does one go about looking for a rebbe, and how does one know when he’s found *his* rebbe? (I’m asked a lot of questions!) Let’s try to begin to answer these questions, but please remember this is only a beginning. The subject is a profound one, touching as it does (a) on the heart of one’s life and destiny, and (b) on the entire premise of the existence of the Jewish people. Important note: In Breslov literature, the words *rebbe* and *tzaddik* are often synonymous.

What is a rebbe? A rebbe functions as teacher, guide, mentor, counselor and more. We wrote last week what it means to have and be attached to a rebbe. One looks for a rebbe by doing any or all of the following (if possible): reading or listening to a “candidate’s” teachings; observing his behavior and that of his most advanced chassidim/students/followers;\* speaking with him; praying *a lot* to God that you find one! You know you’ve found your rebbe—or, at least, a temporary rebbe—when your connection with him causes an inner-shift that moves you to any or all of the following: stronger Jewish faith, greater and more honest desire to behave Jewishly, study Torah, *daven* (pray) well, and be more charitable and do more kindness.

The importance of having a rebbe cannot be overstated. Although we Jews have had *emunat chakhamim* (faith in Jewish sages) from at least as early as when we were still slaves in Egypt, before Moshe Rabbeinu arrived there on his mission to take us out, one of the primary tenets of *chassidut* is that each person, not only a community, needs a rebbe. Just as we never would have been freed from the bondage of Egypt without Moshe Rabbeinu, none of us can be freed from his personal bondage without a rebbe.

Reb Noson puts it this way:

“One who hasn’t yet found his rebbe needs to crawl on his hands and knees his entire life, from one end of the earth to the other, to seek and hunt for him with all his strength, so that maybe, maybe, a day or an hour before he dies,

he will discover the teacher who will help him find eternal life.”

Ah, you’re saying to yourself. I’m one of the lucky ones. I already found the tzaddik/rebbe. I know who he is. Reb Noson continues:

“If you imagine that you’ve already found your rebbe, you have to search much, much more. Because even if you’re sitting right next to your rebbe, you may not be getting all you can from him. You might not fully appreciate the richness of the truth of his advice. Because of that, you are still far from your *tikkun* (rectification).”

Sometimes I wonder why the Israelites were so culpable for having made the Golden Calf when they thought Moses had died. It was the first time a rebbe had died! Their error was three-fold. First, they should have realized that even if Moshe’s body died, his *da’at* (knowledge of God) did not. It was still accessible. Second, they should have realized that they were still so lacking that *da’at* that they needed to cry out to God, “I’ve strayed, like a lost sheep. Seek Your servant!” (Psalms 119:176). Third, they slacked off in their pursuit of Moshe’s *da’at*. Instead of seeking out the closest of Moshe’s students who had that *da’at*, they took the easy way out: They gave up, saying, “Moshe is dead. There’s no more hope of growth.”

Giving up hope, Rebbe Nachman says, is the worst of all. It is spiritual suicide, draining *da’at* from the *neshamah* (soul). Giving up also implies that the tzaddik’s teachings are, God forbid, ineffective or untrue. Finally, giving up says that God’s compassion is limited: “He cannot help me or take me back.”

If Purim teaches us nothing else, it teaches that when we follow a tzaddik like Mordechai, no situation is hopeless and no effort to better Jewishness is unrewarded. Remember that next time your “Moshe Rabbeinu” disappears on you, and you won’t make a “Golden Calf.”

\*The least advanced are often crude in thinking and/or behavior because they have not sufficiently absorbed their rebbe’s lessons.

*a gutn Shabbos!  
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin 5*

### SIDEPATH

Reb Noson recognized our need for finding *hitchazkut* (support and encouragement). Yet whenever he talks about the support we can draw from others, he inevitably shifts over to the support we must draw from ourselves. In the final analysis, no matter how much encouragement we get from others (the tzaddik, our family, friends, etc.), it comes down to how much we care about ourselves. Therefore Reb Noson writes: After all, if you don’t take pity on yourself, who will? (*Likutey Halakhot, Netilat Yadayim li’Seudah 6:37*).

### PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

**30:12 When you count the head of the Jewish people**

**When Three “Heads” Come Together**

The “head” of the Jewish people is the tzaddik. The “head” of the year is Rosh HaShanah. And every individual possesses his own head, his mind. When there is a confluence of these three—that is to say, when a Jew spends Rosh HaShanah with a tzaddik—great rectifications take place (LM II, 94).

**30:13 A half-shekel**

**Our Half-shekel Also Draws Holiness**

Every year before Purim, as we give a symbolic half-shekel to charity in remembrance of the half-shekel that was given in the days of the Tabernacle, we draw upon ourselves the sanctity of the Tabernacle (LH II, p. 203a).

**30:23 Pure myrrh**

**Attachment To The Tzaddik Releases Us From Material Burdens**

One of the ingredients in the oil of holy anointing was *MaR-Dror* (pure myrrh) which was free of impurities. Targum Onkelos translates this phrase as *MeiRa DaKhYa*, which is similar in sound to *MoRDeKhaiY*, the tzaddik who figures prominently in the Purim story. One who attaches himself to the tzaddik and his teachings—a man “free of

impurities"—gains freedom from his materialistic burdens (LM I, 10:8).

### **31:17 On the Seventh Day, He ceased and rested**

#### ***A Tzaddik Places His Soul Into Shabbat***

A tzaddik "places his soul" into Shabbat. Rebbe Nachman combines the two verses speaking of God resting on Shabbat—"Ki vo shavat—For on it He ceased" (Genesis 2:3), and "*Shavat vayinafash—He ceased and rested*" (Exodus 31:17)—into one statement: "*Ki vo shavat vayinafash—For on it, He ceased and rested.*" This phrase may also be read as referring to the tzaddik: "For *in it* he rested his soul."

Because the tzaddik encompasses his soul in Shabbat, he attains the "double portion" of Shabbat, and he can then share his teachings with others (LM I, 58:6).

### **31:18 Tablets of stone**

#### ***Torah Is A Staff That Can Drive Out The Evil Inclination***

The Tablets measured six handbreadths long by six handbreadths wide (*Bava Batra* 14a).

The Tablets correspond to the letter *vav* (ו), which has the numerical value of 6 and which is shaped like a staff. The Torah that a person studies is like a staff that he can use to beat his evil inclination and drive it away (LM I, 1:7).

### **32:11 Moses pleaded**

#### ***Moses Stands Between Destruction And Divine Favor***

Because of the Jews' sin of idolatry, God wanted to destroy them. Moses prayed to God, and in this way, transformed God's anger into Divine Favor.

In numerical terms, Moses stands between destruction and Divine Favor. The word *ShMaD* (שׂמָד, destruction) has the numerical value of 344; the name *MoSheH* (מֹשֶׁה, Moses) has the numerical value of 345; and the word *RatZON* (רָצוֹן, Divine Favor) has the numerical value of 346 (LM I, 215).

We, too, can turn destruction into Divine Favor when we do away with our evil and idolatrous desires. This serves to neutralize idolatry, bring people close to true faith, and make converts (LM I, 215).

### **32:19 He threw down the Tablets from his hands and shattered them**

#### ***We Are Able To Break From The Past***

Were the Tablets not broken, the Torah would never be forgotten (*Eruvin* 54a).

The breaking of the Tablets signifies forgetting the past and getting on with our lives. Were we to remember every bad thing that we did or that happened to us, we would never be able to move forward. Since the Tablets were broken, we are able to forget and go on with our lives (LH I, p.486).

### **34:6 God! God! Compassionate and Gracious God, Slow to Anger, Great in Kindness and Truth**

#### ***We Can Always Seek God's Compassion***

God revealed the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion only after the Jews made the Golden Calf. This teaches us that even if we were pure (as the Jews were at Mount Sinai) and afterwards descended to the point where we committed terrible deeds, there is always a level of God's compassion that we can seek and draw upon us. And as there are untold levels of descent, there are, correspondingly, ever greater levels of compassion! (*Parparaot LeChokhmah* I, 22).

#### ***Great in Kindness***

*RaV CheSeD* (רַב חֶסֶד, Great in Kindness) has the same numerical value as *MoRDeKhal* (מֹרְדֵכַי). Only a Mordekhai—a true and exalted tzaddik—can reveal great kindness, which is conceptually the Hidden Torah. When this *chesed* is revealed, everyone can receive and experience Godliness (LH VIII, p. 6a).

## ***KITZUR L" M WEEKLY***

### **10 — "And these are the laws" (Exodus 21:1) (continued)**

6. The best advice for nullifying pride—which is likened to idolatry, as it is written, "All the high-hearted are an abomination to God" (Proverbs 16:5)—is by drawing close to the tzaddikim.

7. By drawing close to the tzaddikim, a person nullifies his pride, which is likened to idolatry. He also merits perfect faith, his atheism is nullified, and he attains the holy spirit of prophecy. In turn, he attains great

joy, to the point that he comes to handclapping and holy dancing. This, then, effects a mitigation of harsh judgments, and he merits wisdom, life, longevity and an understanding of the Torah on both its revealed and hidden levels.

8. Rejoicing on Purim with handclapping and dancing causes the Torah to be received and accepted on both its revealed and hidden levels—which is the awesome light of Mordekhai and Esther. [This kind of rejoicing on Purim also] enables a person to properly perform the mitzvah of Counting the Omer, which subjugates the impure force of Haman-Amalek, may their names be obliterated. Then pride, idolatry and atheism are nullified; great faith, holy wisdom, life and longevity are elicited; and all the harsh judgments and decrees are mitigated and nullified from the Jewish people. Amen, may it be His will.



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