

Ask A Breslover: Individualism & Breslov

written by An Aspiring Breslover
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An Aspiring Breslover asks:

Do you feel that Breslov is a more individualistic path than others? Does the community or “*chaburah*” (group) loom as large in Breslov Chassidus as elsewhere in the Chassidic world?

Rabbi Dovid Sears answers:

First, I think there is no way for anyone to follow a spiritual path except as an individual. As the old folk song goes, “You got to walk that lonesome valley by yourself.” This point is brought out very powerfully by the Rebbe’s story of the “Lost Princess.” The Viceroy first sets off with an attendant, but eventually must set off all alone into the

great desert (where he finally encounters the three giants).

But you're right, there is something different about Breslov. I don't know if any Chassidic group stresses the inner path as much as Rebbe Nachman does. You can belong to Bobov or Klausenberg or Satmar or Chabad without being overly concerned about introspection or *deveykus*. But that's not true of Breslov. In Breslov these concerns are essential.

And the opposite side of the coin is also true. Belonging to a *kehillah* or a *chaburah* is what defines most Chassidim. But in Breslov, it isn't really the main thing. If a person walks into a Breslov shul and it becomes obvious that he learns the Rebbe's *seforim* and considers himself a Breslover, nobody would question his "credentials," even if he doesn't dress like a chassid or speak Yiddish, etc. That wouldn't be the case anywhere else that I can think of. At least, not the traditional places. In this sense, Breslov is a very "portable" Chassidus.

An Aspiring Breslover asks:

Doesn't Reb Noson praise the "*beis ha-midrash nikra al shemo*," synagogues associated with Rebbe Nachman and his followers? It seems that this was one of Reb Noson's great tasks during his later years, building the Breslover Kloyz in Uman. Wouldn't that point toward the importance of the group as such?

Rabbi Dovid Sears answers:

Yes, on both scores. It isn't an "either/or" situation. There is definitely much value in creating communities and *chaburos*, which most of us need, to one degree or another. Through them, we can give *chizuk* to each other, grow in our understanding of the Rebbe's teachings and Torah in general, *daven* together the way Breslover Chassidim like to *daven*, slowly and intensely, and help one another even *bi-gashmiyus*. I just mean to say that these things are more secondary in Breslov. "*Im ein ani li, mi li*," as *Pirkey Avos* says. A person must encounter

himself and work on himself. These are at the top of the list in Breslov. So much of the Rebbe's *sefer* focuses on the inner work we all must do, especially through *hisbodedus*.

If we get our priorities reversed, we may still be called Breslover Chassidim, but will we be true Breslover Chassidim? The Gemara states that the internal and external qualities of a Torah scholar are supposed to be the same, "*tokho ki-baro*" (*Yoma* 72b). Rabbi Chaim Kramer once told me in the name of his Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Elyah Chaim Rosen, *zal*: "What is a *mefursam shel sheker*, a 'false leader'? A Breslover Chassid who doesn't practice *hisbodedus*." To follow the Rebbe's *derekh*, a person must go into himself. That's the only way to find the Lost Princess.