

# Breslov Repair Kit–Self Esteem

written by Chaya Rivka Zwolinski

November 18, 2011



*Self-esteem is the experience of being capable of meeting life's challenges and being worthy of happiness. [We also believe in] personal responsibility and accountability. –The National Association for Self-Esteem (NASE)*

*“You may have faith, but you have no faith in yourself”*

*“...It is written (Sech. 4:10), ‘Who has despised the day of small things.’ The Talmud comments on this saying, ‘Why are the tables of the Tzadikim despised in the Future World? Because of their own smallness.’ That is, because they do not believe in themselves.”*

*“The main lesson here is that you must have faith in yourself. Believe that even you are dear in the eyes of G-d.” –Shevachay Ha’Ran, 140*

*The Rebbe once spoke to one of us about his attainments. He seemed to boast of his high level and deep perception just like one taunts another tries to make him jealous of some mundane achievement. The other replied to the Rebbe, “How can I achieve this? Who is worthy of attaining such a high level? Surely only one with a lofty soul like yours!”*

*The Rebbe seemed very irritated and answered, "This is the trouble. You think that Tzadikim attain greatness merely because they have a very great soul. This is absolutely wrong! Any person can attain my levels and become just like me. All that it takes is true devotion and effort."*

–Shevachay Ha’Ran, 165

Although the importance of self-esteem has been widely touted by the experts, the actual definition of self-esteem morphs depending on whom you ask. Some experts say self-esteem is mostly self-confidence—believing that you can achieve *anything* you set your mind to. Others say self-esteem requires feelings of self-worth, a sense that you *deserve* to be happy, which in the Western world means satisfying desires, even whims. More mature definitions tack on an additional ingredient, personal accountability or compassion, presumably because the fatuousness of the previous definitions rankles.

But a vital ingredient of authentic self-esteem is always missing: G-d.

For a variety of reasons, many children and many, many adults (including religious ones), simply don’t believe that they are loved by G-d and are important to Him. Sure, they’ve read here and there in various sources that G-d loves each and every one of us, but they don’t really connect with this reality. It’s hard because for us humans, love is for the most part conditional. Plus, even with unconditional love relationships, such as a parent for a child, love generally takes work.

Rebbe Nachman’s offers us two simple, but essential insights into what the psychologists and educators are grasping for in their partial definitions. (Of course the Rebbe doesn’t use the term “self-esteem,” since it was coined in 1892 by psychologist William James).

The Rebbe tells us that we must have faith in ourselves and the way to develop that faith is to believe that *even* we are

cherished by G-d. We humbly acknowledge our limitations with that “even”, but still accept that we are loved.

The Rebbe also tells us that each of us can attain spiritual greatness if we commit ourselves to doing the work it takes to get there.

This, to me, is perhaps the most astonishing concept I’ve learned so far in Breslov—you might not be gifted with a particularly lofty soul, but if you push yourself spiritually, you might achieve spiritual greatness. To work effectively on spiritual goals you must correctly assess where “you’re at”. That’s why the pushing itself, if done right, endows you with a healthy, yet humble, self-esteem.

Of course, there are tremendous spiritual achievements that are obvious to others, but most spiritual achievements (perhaps especially for women), are invisible and usually occur in the realm of the silent or private.

Maybe you got up a bit earlier to daven more fully, controlled your temper and depersonalized even real provocation, lengthened your hisbodedus by three minutes a day, schlepped hot soup to a sick neighbor even though you yourself had a cold, ignored a cutting remark and skipped over the pain in your heart, learned a very challenging Torah and broke it down for a beginning student, or simply prepared a hot, kosher breakfast for your husband. These and the deeper, quieter things we do though incremental, are spiritual achievements.

Reflecting honestly on them brings you to a place of healthy, whole self-esteem.