

Is the Tzaddik an Intermediary? An Essay.

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Bi'ur ha-Likkutim 10:17

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Dedicated to the memory of Debbie Morgenstern

Dobra bas Sholom Yehoshua, a"h

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This excerpt from a classic Breslov commentary on Likutey Moharan clarifies the way in which the tzaddik serves as an intermediary in supplicating Hashem on behalf of the Jewish people and indeed, the entire world— but in truth, the tzaddik is NOT an intermediary, as this teaching will explain.

The author, Rabbi Avraham b'Reb Nachman (Chazan) (1848-1917), was one of the leading Breslov teachers after Reb Noson and his immediate circle of talmidim. (Significantly, his father, Rabbi Nachman of Tulchin, was raised by Reb Noson and almost single-handedly kept the Breslov movement going after Reb Noson's passing. Thus Reb Avraham knew Reb Noson's closest talmidim, and was steeped in the teachings and oral traditions

of Breslov from birth.) After Reb Avraham's passing, Rabbi Shmuel Horowitz (1903-1973) collected whatever writings survived of his insights and chiddushim on Likutey Moharan, whether from Reb Avraham's notebooks or from his talmidim; he then edited and eventually published this material as "Bi'ur ha-Likkutim" in 1935. This precious work has since been republished many times.

In this translation, I have left the sections in brackets [] and parentheses () as they are found in the original printed version. From the language used, it seems that the bracketed sections are the author's words, while the sources in parenthesis were probably provided by the editor, Rabbi Shmuel Horowitz—himself a profound Torah scholar and kabbalist. There are also a few interpolations of my own, which I have distinguished from the others by using braces { } or by adding them as separate paragraphs in italics.

After Reb Noson's writings, the works of Reb Avraham b'Reb Nachman and those of his older contemporary, Rabbi Nachman Goldstein, better known as the Tcheriner Rov,[1] are probably the most authoritative works in the Breslov literature.

This excerpt from Bi'ur ha-Likkutim isn't "light reading." But it is extremely important for anyone who wants to understand Breslov Chasidus correctly, and therefore deserves careful study.

Concerning the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, it seems clear that this reflects the elevation of the holy qualities of excellence and greatness {which are qualities} of the Blessed One Himself [for he,[2] in his greatness and regency, sits upon the very "Divine Throne," so to speak,[3] as discussed elsewhere[4]].

As an aside, it seems to my limited understanding that it is necessary to write something about this in connection with the words of the RaMBaM {when he states} that it is forbidden to

ask any other person to pray for him—for this is comparable to {establishing} an intermediary {between man and G-d} and *avodah zarah* {idolatry},[5] G-d forbid.

One may find {the RaMBaM's words} surprising and astonishing, given the many biblical verses and teachings of Chazal from which it is apparent that Jewish people asked Moshe Rabbeinu and Shmuel ha-Navi and other {tzaddikim} to pray for them. [Particularly, see the glosses of the BaCH on tractate *Sotah* (14a) regarding the burial place of Moshe ... that Moshe would pray for us, etc.]

That is, Moshe's burial place was hidden, so that the Jewish people could not pray there. Otherwise, they would arouse the soul of Moshe to intervene on their behalf before the Divine Throne, thus hastening the Final Redemption.[6]

Regarding this, it seems clear that all of the words of Chazal about the prohibition mentioned above {in the name of the RaMBaM} apply when one intends to make an intermediary, G-d forbid, of whomever one supplicates. However, if one's intention is otherwise, as in the matter of communal prayer, where the worshippers arouse one another to pray together about their troubles, collectively and individually [there is nothing forbidden in this]. For each person is obliged to participate in the plight of his friend [and also the Torah sage and tzaddik himself is compelled to request those who depend upon him to pray for him (see *Alim le-Terufah*, the first letter of Rebbe Nachman)—even though it is with him alone that prayer attains perfection, as I have explained elsewhere from his holy words.[7]]

The editor refers to the letter that the Rebbe wrote to his followers during the early stages of his terminal illness: "Tell my good friend, Rabbi Noson of Nemirov, as well as all of our brotherhood, that they should pray that G-d send me a complete healing... I only ask you to pray for me in each of the daily prayers, and not forget all of the good I have done

for every one of you until now. It is possible that G-d will give me [a complete healing], and you will be able to receive more good from me. My beloved brothers and friends, I beseech you to pray for my anguished soul. Pray with intense concentration, from the heart..." [8]

For all Jewish souls are considered to be "portions of the Shekhinah"[9] ["those carried from birth" (Isaiah 46:3), as is known (see *Pardes Rimonim*, Gate 23, chap. 14, *Erkhey ha-Kinuyim*, *Erekh*: "Nefesh")][10]—they are an "intermediary," so to speak, between all of the "worlds" and the Blessed One Himself, so to speak, as found in the words of the Arizal.

In a deeper sense, this is what empowers the Jewish People to serve as a "light unto the nations" (Isaiah 42:6, 60:3), to bring about the universal recognition and perception of G-d.[11]

If I were not afraid to say it, I would explain, according to the ideas mentioned above, the astounding statement of Chazal that the Children of Noah {i.e., non-Jews} are not commanded at all regarding *shituf* [i.e., worship of other, secondary powers in addition to the Creator].[12] This is utterly astonishing, to our way of thinking. However, concerning all of this, it may be understood from afar that the souls of Israel are commanded and warned not to create any additional power or intermediary between themselves and the Blessed One, because in truth, **there is no intermediary whatsoever between them. For they themselves are the "intermediary" and the Shekhinah**,[13] **so to speak**—except from the standpoint of the advantage and benefit that is found between them, among themselves, that each member has in relation to the other, because no two people are alike, as is known (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 25:3).

In particular, {regarding} the soul of the tzaddik, as mentioned above, they are greatly compelled to bind themselves (*lehishaber*) to him when engaging in prayer, **together with**

the entirety of the congregation (*tzibbur*)—and *in particular*, with the soul of the *tzaddik* and Torah sage *among them*.

Thus, the tzaddik is one with the tzibbur. However, if the tzaddik would be of another order above and beyond the tzibbur, this would constitute an actual intermediary, G-d forbid.

And also, nevertheless, they are all compelled to combine their prayers with those of the sinners and those among them who are distant {from holiness}.^[14] For this too is a necessary matter; as “when Yisro came...” as we have explained above.

That is, as the Zohar (II, 69a) states, “When Yisro came and declared, ‘Now I know that Hashem is great...’ then the Exalted Divine Name was esteemed and elevated.”^[15] With this, all the forms of idolatry that Yisro had formerly served and all of his theological errors were corrected, elevated and transformed to holiness.

The following was taken from [The Breslov Center](#). For another essay from Reb Noson in *Likutey Halachos*, [click here](#).

[1] Particularly the latter’s commentary, *Parpara’os le-Chokhmah* on *Likutey Moharan*.

[2] That is, Moshe Rabbeinu, or the “*tzaddik* who is an aspect of Moshe,” as the *Tikuney Zohar* (*Tikkun* 69) states: “There is an extension of [the spirit of] Moshe to every generation and every *tzaddik*.”

[3] Reb Avraham b’Reb Nachman uses the term *kivayakhol* (“so to speak”) repeatedly. The reason for this is that he is discussing subtle spiritual concepts that might easily be misunderstood. For example, in this context, there is no one who “sits,” and there is no “Divine Throne” to sit upon. These

are symbolic terms for sublime spiritual realities that the Prophets and Sages were forced to depict and discuss in the language of mundane realities.

[4] The editor refers the reader to *Likutey Moharan* I, 6:6 (end) and *ibid.* II, 1:14 (end). In the first source, Rebbe Nachman expounds on one of the wondrous stories of Rabba Bar Chanah found in the Gemara. Referencing the Zohar which states that “the Holy One, blessed be He, and Israel are entirely one,” Rebbe Nachman interprets the man seated on the Divine Throne in Ezekiel’s vision as representing Israel, and in particular the tzaddik who is an aspect of Moshe (corresponding the “upper point of the letter *alef*”; see there at length). In the second source, Rebbe Nachman states that only Hashem can judge the world on Rosh Hashanah, because He is the “Place of the World,” and He alone knows the “place” and situation of each creature. However, when the tzaddik who is an aspect of Moshe “takes hold of the Divine Throne” (as in the Gemara’s story of Moshe’s heavenly ascent and his denunciation by the angels in *Chagigah* 15b), which is “the source of all souls,” he is empowered to participate in the mystery of divine judgment and cause that judgment to be tempered with mercy.

[5] That is, as an intermediary. The editor references the RaMBaM’s *Perush al ha-Mishnayos, Sanhedrin* 10:1, Principle 5; he also refers the reader to *Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim*, no. 166.

[6] This and many similar sources are listed by Rabbi Gedaliah Kenig in his *Chayei Nefesh*. An unedited digital version of the first half of this book in English translation is available [here](#).

[7] The editor adds parenthetically: This matter is discussed in many sources: see Lessons 2 and 30 in the first section of *Likutey Moharan*, and Torah 8 in the second section.

[8] *Alim le-Terufah: Mi-Kisvey Admo"r Moharan, zy"a*: Letter 1, dated 5567 / 1807.

[9] "G-d's portion is His people" (Deut. 32:9)–or alternatively, "A portion of the Divine [HaVaYaH] is His people." The kabbalistic understanding of this verse is that the souls of Israel pre-exist within Hashem, and thus the *neshamah* is considered a "portion of G-d Above"; see *Shefa Tal*, Introduction. The Rebbe mentions this concept in *Likutey Moharan* I, 260. He also cites the verse from Isaiah above. Cf. *Tanya*, chap. 2, which uses the same phrase as Rebbe Nachman, "an actual portion of G-d Above (*chelek Eloka mi-ma'al mamash*)," both sources adding the word "*mamash* (actual)."

[10] There, the RaMaK relates the term "*nefesh*" to the *sefirah* of Malkhus. Since the souls of Israel are an aspect of Malkhus and the Shekhinah too is identified with Malkhus, the two are part and parcel of one another. At least, this is my understanding of the source reference.

[11] Rebbe Nachman discusses this role of the Jewish People in the same lesson on which the *Bi'ur ha-Likkutim* elaborates here: *Likutey Moharan* I, 10, particularly sections 2-3.

[12] The editor directs the reader to the RaN, end of chap. 1 of tractate *Avodah Zarah*, and Tosefos on tractate *Bekhoros* 2b, both which are cited by the ReMA in *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim* 156:1.

[13] That is, in their essence, the souls of Israel are "actual portions of the Shekhinah," as cited above in note 9.

[14] There is a well-known saying that appears in many holy books that the word "*tzibbur*" (the root letters of which are *tzaddi-beis-resh*) stands for three types of people: *tzaddikim* (letter *tzaddi*), *beinonim* (those who are neither *tzaddikim* nor wicked) (letter *beis*); and *resha'im* (wicked) (letter *resh*). This is consistent with

the teaching of Chazal that the Four Species used on Sukkos represent four categories of Jews, one of which is the willow branch, which represents those who have “neither a pleasant taste or fragrance,” corresponding to Torah and mitzvos (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30:12). Similarly, one of the Four Sons in the Pesach Haggadah is the “Ben Rashah,” the Evil Son.

[15] See *Likutey Moharan* I, 10:2, 14:2, 59:1, et al.