

Q&A: The View of Tzadik In Breslov

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Q: I was wondering if you know of any journal articles or books that compare and/or contrast the thought of Breslov and Przysucha, namely how Rebbe Nachman and Reb Simcha Bunim address the concept of the tzaddik and his role. As you're probably aware, Przysucha sees the tzaddik solely as a guide for every individual and not as a plastic saint to whom each person must strive to mimic superficially.

On the surface, Breslov would appear to take the opposite stance, given all the talk about clinging to the tzaddikm, etc. But, when you start to really peer into Breslov Torah you begin to see something a bit different – you start to see something that resembles Przysucha's view in a way.

Do you know of any sources in Breslov literature that concretely address the issue of how a person is really supposed to relate to the tzaddik as an individual?

In your article where you answered a question about Rabbeinu's tzitzis tying minhag you mentioned that Rebbe Nachman was particular about concealing his minhagim so as not to entice his followers to blindly follow customs. Do you know the source for that?

A:

My married son Yonah has a copy of an intellectual bio of Reb Simcha Bunim:

Rabbi Dr. Michael Rosen. Quest for Authenticity – The thought of Reb Simhah Bunim, Jerusalem, Urim Publications, 2008.

I read much of it one Shabbos afternoon while visiting, and was greatly impressed.

Yes, the views between Rebbe Nachman and Reb Simcha Bunim on the inyan of tzaddik seems at loggerheads. Hiskashrus to the tzaddikim amitiyim pervades Likutey Moharan, and Reb Noson's Likutey Halakhos, too. But we have to understand their shittos in their larger contexts. Reb Simcha Bunim was part of a widening reaction against "tzaddik-ism" that advocated a "back-to-basics" approach to the inner avodah that is essential to Chassidus.

The Rebbe, too, was critical of false leaders ("mefursamim shel sheker") and darshaned that "rebbe" can stand for either "rosh bnei Yisrael" or "ra be-eynei Hashem." And he, too, stressed inner avodah and the extremely individualistic "side path" of hisbodedus and cheshbon ha-nefesh.

Moreover, as in the Rebbe's mashal of the poor man who dreams about a treasure under a bridge in a distant city and in the end finds it under his own kitchen stove (printed in Kokhvey Ohr) – the purpose of the tzaddik-as-rebbe is to enable us to discover that nekudas ha-tzaddik within ourselves. Thus the Rebbe says that Moshe, who personifies da'as, is within each of us, and each of us, in turn, exists within Moshe. At the same time, he also states that each individual possesses a uniqueness shared by no one else.

So there is definitely much in common between these two great Chassidic masters.

As for that remark about the Rebbe “concealing” his minhagim, etc., I apologize, but I don’t remember writing this, at least not in these words. Please send me a link to whatever you’re quoting. However, we see that he did not emphasize his personal minhagim, but only gave his followers a few minhagim and hanhagos tovos that he wished them to observe. (See sidebar of <http://breslovcenter.blogspot.com/>)

Hope this helps!

Kol tuv

Dovid Sears