

Who Was Rabbi Rosenfeld?

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Thanks to Reb Tzvi Aryeh Rosenfeld, we are all here today. He was the one who introduced Breslov Chassidut to America and made Rebbe Nachman's teachings relevant for English-speakers. He was also the influence for the establishment of the Breslov Research Institute, founded by his son-in-law, Chaim Kramer, which has made Rebbe Nachman's works accessible to English-speakers, Spanish-speakers, French-speakers and Russian-speakers. The translation of all of Rebbe Nachman's writings and many of Reb Noson's works ... a library of over 100 Breslov titles ... and the monumental accomplishment that we are celebrating tonight – the translation and annotation of the entire Likutey Moharan – can all be traced to Reb Tzvi Aryeh's dedication and foresight. Let us meet the man, and see the power of an individual to change history.

Reb Tzvi Aryeh was born in the town of Gdynia, Poland, in 1922. His father, Reb Yisrael Abba Rosenfeld, was a great-grandson of Rabbi Aharon, whom Rebbe Nachman had brought to the town of Breslov to serve as Rav. This was the same Rabbi Aharon who, together with Reb Naftali of Nemirov, was a witness to Rebbe Nachman's famous vow:

"When my days are over and I leave this world, I will intercede for anyone who comes to my grave, says the Ten Psalms of the Tikkun HaKlali, and gives a coin to charity. No

matter how great his sins, I will do everything in my power, spanning the length and breadth of creation, to save him and rectify him. By his peyot, I will pull him out of Gehinnom!"

At the age of six months, Reb Tzvi Aryeh was struck with diphtheria, a deadly childhood disease. His father took him to the great Polish sage, the Chofetz Chaim, who blessed him with long life and added another name: Benzion. Reb Tzvi Aryeh Benzion lived ... and the world became a better place because of it.

The following year, the Rosenfeld family, once prosperous but leveled low by pogroms and communist nationalization of property, immigrated to New York City. At that time, Breslov Chassidut was virtually unheard-of in America. Reb Tzvi Aryeh attended Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, Torah Voda'as and Beis Yosef Novardok, distinguishing himself as a brilliant student. He began working as a congregational rabbi at the Young Israel of Coney Island and taught at the Yeshiva of Brighton Beach. Here he found his calling as an educator of youth, a position he would use to spread Breslov teachings in New York City and beyond.

When his father passed away in 1947, Reb Tzvi Aryeh assumed his father's charity activities, which included the support of the fledgling Breslov community in Israel. He began corresponding with Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz, leader of that community, and visited him in 1949. When Reb Tzvi Aryeh expressed his desire to immigrate to Israel and live among the Breslover chassidim, Rabbi Avraham told him, "You must remain in the United States. Although it is holy to live in the Land of Israel, bringing young American Jews back to their heritage is the Holy of Holies."

Reb Tzvi Aryeh accepted these words as his life's mission. He returned to New York City and began teaching the basics of Judaism to boys and girls in Flatbush. He fired their imaginations with stories about a place called Gan Eden (the

Garden of Eden) ... and a place called Uman. His encyclopedic Torah knowledge, flawless English, sense of humor, and ability to relate to young people and make Judaism interesting, inspired many to transfer from public school to yeshiva and Bais Yaakov.

His task wasn't easy. In those years of rampant assimilation and pursuit of the American dream, parents accused him of brainwashing their children with old-fashioned values. Some even called the police, charging him with kidnapping. Parents' complaints forced school administrators to fire him time and again. But the youth flourished under his care. Reb Tzvi Aryeh taught them how to keep Shabbat, how to give tzedakah, how to understand the Talmud. He helped them obtain tefilin for their bar mitzvahs and find a suitable marriage partner. His door was always open for advice and counsel. Much more than a teacher, Reb Tzvi Aryeh was a guide and friend for life.

Many of today's English-speaking teachers of Breslov were students of Reb Tzvi Aryeh. These include the late Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, a prolific author whose works are regarded as a significant factor in the growth of the ba'al teshuvah movement. At Reb Tzvi Aryeh's behest, Rabbi Kaplan produced the first English translations of Sichot HaRan (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom) as well as the Sippurey Ma'asiyot (Rabbi Nachman's Stories), along with the definitive biography of Rebbe Nachman, Until the Mashiach and Outpouring of the Soul, about hitbodedut. Other students include Chaim Kramer, founder and director of the Breslov Research Institute; Rabbi Noson Maimon, director of the Breslov World Center in Jerusalem; and Rabbi Gedaliah Fleer, a popular Breslov speaker in America and Israel and the adventurer in BRI's Against All Odds.

The first Westerners to penetrate the Iron Curtain and pray at Rebbe Nachman's grave in Uman in the early 1960s were also Reb Tzvi Aryeh's students. In the mid-60s, he himself began escorting groups of students to pray at the Rebbe's grave. The Soviets often thwarted him with impossible rules and

regulations, but with determination and faith, Reb Tzvi Aryeh managed to bring group after group. Because of his persistent “knocking on the door,” the Soviet barriers eventually fell and Uman became accessible to all. Mr. Stan Kopel, another student of Reb Tzvi Aryeh, sponsored a major part of the rebuilding of the Rebbe’s gravesite in his teacher’s memory. Yet another close student, Mr. David Assoulin, currently heads the Uman committee, which oversees all activities in Uman, and is its major supporter.

In a little-known sidelight, Reb Tzvi Aryeh planted the seeds for the religious renaissance of Brooklyn’s Syrian Jewish community. In the 1950s, Syrian Jewish youth were deeply entrenched in non-Jewish American culture. Reb Tzvi Aryeh taught Sephardic law and custom to young and old alike, inspiring whole families to keep Shabbat and begin practicing mitzvahs. According to one estimate, two-thirds of the Orthodox Judaism that we see in today’s New York Syrian Jewish community— its families, its yeshivas and its institutions – is a direct result of Reb Tzvi Aryeh’s influence and input from way back in the 1950s.

Reb Tzvi Aryeh also raised millions of dollars for the Breslov community in Israel, including a significant chunk of the funds for the Breslov yeshiva and synagogue in Me’ah Shearim.

Though he passed away in 1978, Reb Tzvi Aryeh’s spirit continues to shape our world. His words, as clear and captivating as the day they were spoken, can still be heard in the many classes he tape-recorded on all aspects of Breslov thought. And when we see the ever-growing interest in Rebbe Nachman in the United States, Canada, South America, Europe, Asia and Australia, we stand in awe of the man who single-handedly brought Breslov teachings to new continents and new generations. Thanks to Reb Tzvi Aryeh Rosenfeld, we are all here today.