

Reb Noson: The Faithful Scribe in the Darkness of Exile

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In the coming week we will commemorate the fast of the Tenth of Tevet, which marks the beginning of the siege on Jerusalem. At the same time, we celebrate the life of Rebbe Nachman's primary student, Reb Noson of Breslov, who left this world on that day. What is the connection between these two events?

Prior to meeting Rebbe Nachman at the age of 22, Reb Noson was a first-rate Torah prodigy and had a career as the rabbinical leader of many communities set out before him. Once he met his Rebbe, he understood that he was the true tzaddik and wanted nothing else than to learn from his Torah and disseminate it to the world. Much to the dismay of his family, he gave up all

that was waiting for him and nullified himself completely to Rebbe Nachman. He strove to be a perfect reflection of Rebbe Nachman's teachings, just as the moon reflects the light of the sun. It is no wonder that final lesson taught by Reb Noson, which is found in Hilkhos Rosh Chodesh 7, deals with the perfection of the blemish of the moon.

Reb Noson's connection to Rebbe Nachman did not afford him an easy life. During Rebbe Nachman's lifetime he was ostracized by his family. After Rebbe Nachman's passing, he became the focus of the opposition to Rebbe Nachman's teachings which only grew stronger due to Rebbe Noson's persistence in continuing on his Rebbe's path. Rebbe Noson was mocked, threatened, slandered, attacked, imprisoned and barred from entering Uman, yet none of this stopped him. He knew what was right, and he knew the truth would prevail in the end.

He continued on his way until his very last breath, teaching Rebbe Nachman's Torah. In all of his travels, even in his arduous journey to Eretz Yisrael, he brought with him Rebbe Nachman's books. With each book he sold, he rejoiced that now this Torah can be found in Istanbul, in Alexandria, etc. He built and operated his own printing press in order to print the books more easily and accurately. When this was confiscated from him, he still did not give up, but looked for new ways to print and disseminate Rebbe Nachman's lessons. His entire life, as evidenced by his diary and his letters, was a true reflection of Rebbe Nachman's teaching "There is no despair at all".

This was one of the last lessons Rebbe Nachman taught, approximately two months prior to his passing. He taught this lesson from the depths of his illness, when he had no strength, and even told his students they had no reason to come to him since he has nothing to teach them. From this place, he taught his students how they can revive themselves when they feel empty of everything, and then he screamed out these words for which he is most well-known. Reb Noson notes

there in that lesson how deep were these words and that he understood that Rebbe Nachman was instructing his students for all generations that no matter what happens to them, no matter how far down they fall, there is always hope that they can still return to HaShem.

Reb Noson certainly lived this way, yet for us it is not always easy. We look at Reb Noson and think that despite his hard life, he did not really have reason to despair because he was a tzaddik, but what about me? How can I face the world, face Hashem, after all I have done? Reb Noson revealed to us a secret in his last moments on this earth. As he sat staring at the Shabbat candles which had been lit early in the afternoon, he was whispering the words from the Amidah, "*chanun hamarbeh lisloach*," the compassionate One, Who forgives very much. As our prophets stated again and again, HaShem does not want to punish us and distance us, but rather that we will return to Him and he will forgive us. Reb Noson, passing on his Rebbe's almost last words, knew it was essential for each of us to forgive ourselves, to retain hope and to strive to return to HaShem. He was the one who could teach us this lesson, as the words אֵלֹהֵינוּ רַחוּמֵינוּ רַחוּמֵינוּ have the gematriah of 500, the same as Noson (נֹסֹן).

As our enemies laid siege to Jerusalem, it seemed that all had been lost. It was the beginning of the end, with no hope for the future. Jeremiah's message that they can still do teshuvah fell mostly on deaf ears, and we know how it all ended. On this day, let us hear Reb Noson's whisper to forgive ourselves and start anew. Let us also remember that like Reb Noson, we all have a piece of the tzaddik inside of us that we can reflect to the world. When we find that piece inside of us and share it with others, we fulfill the prophet's vision that the fast of the tenth month will be for joy and happiness.