

The Tzaddik at My Side

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Jethro and Moses could not have been more different from one another.

There has never been a man as great as Moses. On three separate occasions, Moses ascended to Heaven for forty days and forty nights. He neither ate nor slept, and had no physical wants or needs to look after while he was there (Deuteronomy 9:9). Moses – a man of flesh and blood. Even the angels were jealous (*Shabbat* 88b). He was able to keep his physical form in Heaven because he had risen completely above its corporeality.

Jethro, on the other hand, was the priest of Midian, something akin to a pope. One of his names was Putiel, because he had fattened (*puti*) calves in preparation for idolatry (*Midrash Tanchuma, Pinchas* 2). In this week's *parashah*, Jethro says,

“Now I have known that God is greater than all the gods” (Exodus 18:11). But how did he know? Because “there was not an idol in the world that Jethro had overlooked, or chased after and worshipped” (*Kohelet Rabbah* 3:1).

Yet even before Jethro had converted, the Torah states, “Moses went out to greet his father-in-law, bowing and kissing him. They asked one man to his friend about each other’s welfare and went into the tent” (Exodus 18:7). “One man” certainly refers to Moses, who was the greatest of all men. It was specifically Moses who asked about Jethro’s welfare. This is remarkable! Moses, the great tzaddik, the angelic man, lowered himself to someone who had been king of the idols, someone with such a dirty and unholy past.

This is the way of the true tzaddik. The tzaddik does not stand on a pedestal and allow only those who are “truly worthy,” who have never done wrong, or who are of impeccable pedigree to approach him. Instead, the true tzaddik brings himself right next to every person who has any degree of desire to come close to spirituality and Godliness. He descends right next to them as a true friend, encouraging them and providing the necessary advice for them to improve their ways and live a good life.

There was once a chassid who went to visit a prominent figure, hoping to gain a life-changing experience. Unfortunately, after the meeting, he was neither inspired nor changed. The chassid felt very bad about this and blamed himself. While recounting this episode to Reb Noson, the latter corrected him, saying, “Had the tzaddik been even a greater tzaddik, he could have had the power to encourage you, too.”

Rebbe Nachman said, “*Gevalt!* Never give up hope! There is no such thing as despair.” No matter where we’re at or what we’ve done, the tzaddik is there for us. He wants to be our friend. He is concerned for our welfare. He will not turn us away. Our job is to open our hearts, learn his teachings and follow his

advice. By listening to his words and living by his dictums, our lives will change for the better.

In Breslov we have been blessed with two short but powerful classics. One is *Meshivat Nefesh* (Restore My Soul), which includes many of the Rebbe's incredible teachings of encouragement. The other is *Hishtapkhut HaNefesh* (Outpouring of the Soul), which teaches every Jew how to forge a relationship with God through his or her simple words. We have the tools! We can open our hearts to the wisdom contained in these short books and live life with the tzaddik standing together with us, holding our hand through every challenge and difficulty.

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Bekhor Beheimah Tehorah 4-22