

To Be Or Not To Be

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Within the past couple of years we have seen an unprecedented growth in the amount of people who are being exposed to Rebbe Nachman's teachings. More people than ever before are finding and being inspired by the Rebbe's sefarim, or modern-day books based on his teachings. The demand for teachers of Breslov has long outgrown the supply.

However, although so many people are finding the spiritual guidance which they haven't been able to find anywhere else, a lot of people are still left with a question. Of course, it's obvious that Rebbe Nachman offers unparalleled insight into our spiritual predicaments and practical advice on how everyone can keep on proceeding forward. But why should someone who benefits from his guidance decide to call himself a chassid of Rebbe Nachman? What is there to be gained by calling oneself a "Breslover Chassid"?

Rebbe Nachman himself understood that sometimes this is how it has to be. One of his followers once asked his permission to say over some of his teachings to his friends without mentioning the source. The Rebbe told him that of course he could, and he added, "What should I care if another Jew makes blessings with more concentration and he doesn't know that he was inspired by me?"

Seemingly, this makes a lot of sense. Once Rebbe Nachman opens up someone's eyes to the importance of a *Nekudah Tovah* or good point, why can't we internalize that idea and move on? After we understand from Rebbe Nachman the necessity of *Hisbodedus* / personal prayer, why do we need him or his Chassidim in order to make it part of my life?

First of all, it's important to realize that this question is in essence ignoring one of the core foundations of Chassidus as taught by the Baal Shem Tov.

One of the central ideas of Chassidus is the importance of being attached to a Tzaddik and a chaburah. It's important to understand that a Tzaddik is not a "Rabbi" or even a "Grand Rabbi". The role of the Tzaddik is not only to be a "leader" or a "spiritual guide". Fellow Chassidim are not just like-minded friends. It's not a material relationship with spiritual benefits.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that we should attach our very souls to the soul of the Tzaddik and to the souls of our fellow Chassidim. The Tzaddikim are soul-healers, and we have to nullify our own selves in order to allow their light to flow into us unhindered.

Rebbe Nachman touches on this idea in Likutei Moharan I 34. He explains that every Yid has a "Nekudah", a special point within himself which no one else has. Besides our job to reveal our own special Nekudah, we also have to connect with our friends and receive from them their Nekudah, as well as

the Nekudah of the Tzaddik. But this isn't just to learn something special from all our friends. The Rebbe teaches that by connecting to that special point, we receive special spiritual abilities to overcome materialist desires.

The Rebbe once said to one of his Chassidim who didn't visit him for a couple of years, "If all of these years you did not go in the ways of Hashem properly you certainly lost out on whatever you lost; but if you did serve Hashem properly, it would've been good if you would have shared your service of God and Judaism together with all of our beloved friends, and others would have been able to widen their horizons and success through your work." (Chayei Moharan 315)

In addition, we have to be careful not to make the mistake that the Rebbe was only giving us good advice. In Sichos Haran 185 we find that the Rebbe says, "Every practice which I have advised has a special power to it; it rectifies and helps a person for whatever he has done, for his future, and after his passing, for when Moshiach will come, by the Resurrection, and in the World to Come."

When the Rebbe gives us advice or enlightens us in whatever subject , he's not just sharing with us his original Torah insights or good advice – he's trying to connect us to something very lofty by having us follow his advice.

Throughout Likutei Moharan and Likutei Halachos we find that the Rebbe and Reb Nosson reveal how most of the advice and directives which the Rebbe taught are dependent upon the Tzaddik. We can't even start listing all of them since almost every Torah and Halachah somehow connects and depends on the Tzaddik.

An analogy which we can use to help us understand this would be Torah and Mitzvos. Every believing Jew understands that Mitzvos are just rules which Hashem wants us to follow. They are ways through which we can connect to Hashem, as the

sefarim teach us that the word 'Mitzvah' doesn't only mean commandment, but a connection. Hashem is infinite, and there would be no way for us material beings to connect with Him, so He has provided us with simple actions that we can do and rules to follow by which we can connect to His Infinity. The sefarim explain that each Mitzvah has in it a special ability and power to help a Jew connect to Hashem in a different way.

The same thing is in regard to the advice of the Rebbe and this is the proper outlook we should have regarding everything the Rebbe teaches us. The Rebbe has tremendous Tikkunim, spiritual rectifications which he wants to give us. But "You can't serve Hashem without me, but I also can't help you without you doing something." (Chayei Moharan 330) "You just have to bring stones and cement and I'll construct with them amazing buildings." (Chayei Moharan 293) Whatever lessons we learn from the Rebbe, whatever advice we follow, all we're doing is bringing the Rebbe building material for him to complete the wonderful things he wants to do.

Reb Yitzchak Breiter, one of the great teachers of Breslov in pre-Holocaust Poland, wrote a very moving letter entitled "Inspiration for Hisbodedus". The letter is written as if the Rebbe himself is addressing one of his Chassidim and exhorting him regarding Hisbodedus. Reb Yitzchak writes in that letter, that through Hisbodedus the Rebbe guarantees that we will receive all of his Tikkunim, spiritual rectifications.

In other words, Hisbodedus is not a good idea which makes a lot of sense. It's a tool through which the Rebbe uses to bring his Tikkunim to us.

We even find that Reb Noson emphasized this special power of the Tzaddik as being even more important than the actual Torah and guidance of Likutei Moharan:

"If we are now in these times when everyone endures what he does, as everyone knows by himself, Hashem has had mercy upon

us and 'prepared the remedy before the strike', by first sending us savior and true teacher to save us by revealing his original holy Torah, wonderful and awesome novel Torah etc. which are a spring of true salvation...

"And especially through Likutei Teffilos, which it's impossible to explain in writing or speech how far reaching is the good and the kindness of these Torah and Teffilos and stories and holy conversations, and the holiness of what the Rebbe has left in this world...

"And above all, the greatness of his holy power and strength etc., which is elevated above everything which he guaranteed us and exhorted us to rely on his strength." (Alim Le'Terufah 93)

"No matter what, anyone who is closer to the power of the Tzaddik who has the real strength, according to how close he is to the truth, so too the Tzaddik is close to him. Of course, there are many differences between people regarding how much assistance they receive from above, how much Hashem saves him every day from his Yetzer Hara which attempts overpowering him every day anew, because if Hashem helped everyone equally, then everyone should be Tzaddikim... **The more someone strengthens himself to rely upon the Tzaddik and to encourage oneself in this fact, through this a person receives more help from above...**" (Alim Le'Terufah 379)

We can now understand why besides the advice which we receive from the Rebbe, it's so important that we connect ourselves to the Tzaddik and his Chassidim as Reb Nosson writes:

"Baruch Hashem that He has helped us until now in His compassion that we should be called by his (the Rebbe's) great name, so too Hashem should continue with his kindness with us in this world and the next that we should become part of him and our souls should be included forever together with all the souls which are called by his name." (Alim Le'Terufah 473)