

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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See You in Meron!

By Yossi Katz

BON VOYAGE! AS I write these words, I am preparing to leave my home in Lakewood, New Jersey, for the Holy Land. Why, you ask? Well, besides the privilege and mitzvah of walking *dalet amos* in Eretz Yisrael, I am traveling in order to join the pilgrimage to the gravesite of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron.

We know that the Jewish calendar is not a series of popular “holidays,” but a timeline for spiritual growth. Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the Omer counting (this coming Sunday), is the day that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, author of the Zohar, passed away. It is a day of great celebration with music and dancing, the lighting of bonfires, and the first haircut for many three-year-old boys.

Why is Rabbi Shimon’s *yahrtzeit* a cause for celebration? Shouldn’t we be mourning the death of a tzaddik? It’s true that on this day, Rabbi Akiva’s disciples stopped dying – but after the holiday, they continued to perish once again. What is the secret of this day?

Rabbi Shimon was once overheard criticizing the Roman governors of Israel. The Romans decided to punish him with death, so he fled and lived in a cave for 12 years with his son, Rabbi Elazar. During this period, the two did nothing but study Torah day and night. Finally, the caesar died and the decree was cancelled. But after being secluded with the Torah for so many years, the mundane world that they encountered upon their re-emergence from the cave seemed so vain.

When they saw men tending the earth, they asked, “Are these people crazy? They are trading Torah, which is eternal, for something of fleeting importance.” Anger blazed from their eyes and consumed the vanities of this world. A Heavenly voice called out, “Have you come to destroy my world? Go back to your cave!” They were forced to spend another 12 months in the cave before coming out again.

Now, as the sun was setting at the onset of Shabbat, they saw an old man running with two bundles of *hadasim*. They asked him why he needed them. He replied that he wanted their fragrance for the honor of Shabbat. But why two? they wondered. He explained that one was for the positive commandment of *zakhor* (remember the Shabbat) and the other for the negative commandment of *shamor* (guard the Shabbat). The simple actions of the old man taught Rabbi Shimon the essence of a Jew and his eternal love and connection to God and Torah.

The story of Rabbi Shimon alludes to his great mission. While he was able to probe the depths of the Torah and its secrets, he also learned not to judge the world negatively from his elevated level. His mission was to reveal that the most hidden and elevated Torah teaches that a Jew is always connected to God, no matter who he is and what he may have done.

Rabbi Akiva also mastered the secrets of the Torah, so much so that even Moses couldn’t understand why the Torah wasn’t given through him (see *Menachot* 29b). But Rabbi Akiva’s Torah remained in its lofty, remote state. It was for this reason that Rabbi Akiva’s students did not treat each other with the necessary degree of respect. Rabbi Shimon was the *tikkun* for this. He was able to reveal that the essence and source of Torah is the unity and bond between God and each Jew. The greatest secrets teach us that we can always connect and discover the Godliness within every place and every Jew. This is the essence of the *Zohar* and the life of Rabbi Shimon.

And this is why Jews travel from around the world to be with Rabbi Shimon on his *yahrtzeit*. On a *yahrtzeit*, the tzaddik ascends to an even higher place in Heaven – and, as Rabbi Shimon teaches, the tzaddik is now able to reveal more than ever that God is with us always, no matter where we may be.

*Based on Likutey Halakhot,
Geviyat Chov MeiHaYesomim 3*

The Silent Partner

By Chaim Kramer

REB CHAIM KRASSENSTEIN of Kharkhov (a city in eastern Ukraine) was a Breslover chassid who lived in Russia before the Communist Revolution. Reb Chaim was a successful manufacturer, and his business made him quite wealthy. In the beginning he tithed his income, but as his wealth grew, he began to give 20% to charity. He would either send it to Uman (where the largest Breslov community lived at that time), or he would bring it there himself when he joined the chassidim for the annual Rosh HaShanah gathering.

After a time, he declared, “I decided I want to be a 50% partner with Rebbe Nachman. Whatever I earn, I am going to consider Rebbe Nachman as my silent partner and divide the income in half – half for the Rebbe and half for myself and my family.”

He fulfilled his promise scrupulously, and to his good fortune, grew even wealthier. At one point, he had so much money that he was afraid to keep it in Kharkhov. He consulted with the chassidim in Uman, and they suggested that just as his “partner’s” money was shipped to Uman, why not keep his own money in Uman as well? After converting his income to gold, he shipped it to Uman, where it was hidden by his friends and held for him.

In 1917 the Communist Revolution changed the face of Russia. Following several years of war and repression, the regime began to nationalize all the factories under the pretense that capitalism took advantage of the workers and it was time to return the wealth to the people. When they came to Kharkhov, they investigated Reb Chaim’s books and, not surprisingly, concluded that he was making a lot of money on the backs of the common workers. The government ruled to strip him of all his assets and exile him from Kharkhov. He was ordered to leave the next day and was permitted to take with him only the clothes he was wearing.

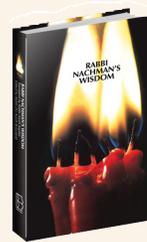
Reb Chaim traveled to Uman where he had a fortune of gold waiting for him, and was able to live comfortably for the rest of his life.

SIDEPATH

Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom translated by R. Aryeh Kaplan, zt”l

125. On Sukkot 5570/1809, the Rebbe spoke about the *etrog*. *Eetrogim* were impossible to find that year and the community had already resigned itself to do without one at all. There was not an *etrog* to be had in the entire land until just a day before Sukkot. Then, in His own miraculous ways, God made it that the needed *etrogim* reached several nearby towns. These fetched premium prices, and in some communities were sold for as much as 50 rubles and more.

Here in Breslov, the Rebbe was able to obtain a particularly beautiful *etrog*. He was so overjoyed that he asked us to bring musical instruments and play for him, making it an occasion of celebration. His joy was so great that it literally revived his health.



126. On Saturday night, right after Shabbat *Shuvah* 5570/1809, the Rebbe spoke about the Mashiach.

It is a well-known fact that many people were saying that the Mashiach would come that year. But the Rebbe did not agree with this. The Rebbe said, “When the Mashiach is ready to come, more than one person will cry out about faith. Many tzaddikim will raise their voices, just as I do today. They will scream until they tear out their throats, and it will not help.”

At that time, there will be many spurious religious leaders. A group such as ours, in which people gather together thirsting for God’s word, certainly will no longer exist. There will remain some truly religious individuals, but they will be very widely scattered.



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P.O. Box 5370 • Jerusalem, Israel • 972.2.582.4641

P.O.B. 587 • Monsey, NY 10952 • 1.800.33.BRESLOV

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The photo on the front is a close-up of Rebbe Nachman’s chair, which is displayed in the main Breslov synagogue in Jerusalem.