

A Brief Letter Regarding Breslev Hasiduth

HaRav David Bar-Hayim

Shalom.....

You wrote:

I am a halakhic Rambamist. However, I have realized upon studying Likuttei Moharan and other teachings of Rabi Nahhman, that there is no one else who has tied together so many aspects of Torah together in such profound ways.

Perhaps it is your inability to believe in spirituality which conflicts with the ability to plainly see the intense depth of Rabi Nahhman's Torah. A denial of the pnimiuth haTorah is indeed a denial of Torah. To dismiss any of Rabi Nahhman's teachings is only done out of complete lack of understanding of who this ssadiq is, combined with a lack of acceptance and understanding of the spiritual aspects of Torah. This is very sad, and in fact, no one can be completely dedicated to HaShem through this denial.

Sometimes, deep Torah cannot be understood merely by intellect. Intellect is not the be-all end-all. Some wisdom can only be attained spiritually, and it is important that a Jew hone both his physical intellect and his spiritual perception.

1. [The article to which you refer](#) recognizes that Rabi Nahman was a great spiritual teacher. I have said this on many occasions and believe it most sincerely. Rabi Nahman achieved many profound insights and imbued many Jews with an enthusiasm for HASHEM and Tora. His abilities as a darshan, weaving ideas and sources into a cohesive teaching, are probably unsurpassed.

2. This does not mean, however, that when Rabi Nahman speaks of things that are simply untrue – such as a discussion of the non-existent galgalim (Likutte MoHaRan 61) – that we must deny what we know and obediently nod our heads. As you must know Rambam too discusses these non-existent galgalim (because that was the scientific position of his day); rejecting some of Rambam's conceptions is not to disrespect Rambam or denigrate his other teachings. So it is with Rabi Nahman.

3. On the other hand, one needs to be blind not to recognize the negative impact of Breslev teachings on many people's lives: a wide-spread anti-rationalism leading to an inability to deal intelligently with the real world; men who cannot afford to feed their families spending large sums to fly to Uman; widespread sexual repression (which is a very real malaise infecting certain parts of the Jewish world); a sanction for escapism

(and what is going to Uman if not escapism?); establishing a new centre for connecting with Hashem outside Eress Yisrael (Uman), etc. etc. Do you honestly believe that these attitudes and behaviours are compatible with authentic Tora? (It is well known that many serious, old-school Breslevs oppose the Uman pilgrimage. It has, however, become a tremendous source of income for some, and is therefore not likely to disappear any time soon.)

4. I do not believe that Rambam, usually labelled a rationalist, was any less spiritually inclined than Rabi Nahman or any m'qubal you care to mention. It behooves all of us to recognize that the Tora does not define a specific form of spiritualism to which all Jews must subscribe. Pnimityuth HaTora comes in many flavours. Rambam considered his Mor'e HaN'vukhim to be Pnimityuth HaTora. There is great depth to be found in the teachings of Rabi Nahman, and the same is true for the teachings of R. Y'hudha HaLewi, R. Yisshaq Abarbanel, the Gr'a and Rav Kook – and yet they are all very different from one another. Further, one can take issue with a given aspect of each one's teachings without suffering from an "inability to believe in spirituality". It is absolutely disastrous to renounce one's faculty of critical thought.

5. Of course Tora involves both intellect as well as something beyond intelligence; a type of intuition. The Jewish people have a unique gift which allows them to understand the Tora's message and how to implement it in the real world. This is the essence of Tora She Ba'al Pe.

6. Some people seem to feel that great Tora sages are not human and do not, therefore, have personalities; in other words they are beyond human. This is an immature and mistaken approach which leads to intellectual paralysis. Regarding Rabi Nahman's personal inner life, see Avraham Yisshaq (Arthur) Green's work *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav*. You may or may not appreciate his analysis of R. Nahman's personality, but it is a serious work which needs to be read before being criticized.

Shalom Rav

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