

**SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT OF CLASS OF 2007
COMPLETED RABBINIC THESIS**

I, Ryan Bauer, hereby submit two (2) copies of my/our
(Please print)
completed thesis in final form, entitled

Cleaving to God: Differing Hasidic Views by The Baal Shem Tov & Rabbi
Nachman of Bratslav

Ryan Bauer 2/27/07

Student Signature / Date:

Additional Students, if applicable (please print, sign, and date)

"The author has my permission to submit this thesis in partial fulfillment for
requirement for ordination."

Name of Advisor: Lawrence Kushner

Signature of Advisor: _____

RECEIPT BY REGISTRAR

The above named thesis was received by the Registrar's Office
RECEIVED FEB 28 2007

Date

Carol Soyer
Registrar

by

CLEAVING TO GOD:

**Differing Hasidic Views Of
The Baal Shem Tov
and
Nachman of Bratslav**

Ryan Bauer

**Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion
Los Angeles, California**

Table of Contents

1. A Textual History of <i>Devekut</i> , or Cleaving to God	4
<i>Devekut</i> : Cleaving to God	5
Roots of <i>Devekut</i> in the Torah and the Talmud	7
Kabbalistic Sources in the Zohar	11
<i>Devekut</i> in Early Jewish Mysticism: Three Pathways	13
Kabbalistic vs. Hasidic Notions of Divine Presence	15
2. The Baal Shem Tov's View of <i>Devekut</i> : Essential Rules for the Common Man	19
The Baal Shem Tov's Guide: Tzva'at HaRivash	19
<i>Devekut</i> According to the Baal Shem Tov	20
The Benefit of Seeing God in Everything	25
Avoiding Pride	26
Appropriate Emotional States for Attaining <i>Devekut</i>	29
Pathways to Joy	33
Specific Guidelines on Prayer in Order to Attain <i>Devekut</i>	35
Making These Challenging Guidelines Accessible Today	39
Becoming Intoxicated with God	40
3. How Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav Advocated Access to God	42
The Role of Paradox, Doubt, and Conflict in Faith	43
Faith According to Rabbi Nachman	49
The Role of Faith When Intellect Fails	49
The Exalted Role of the Tzaddik	52
Rabbi Nachman Views Himself as a Tzaddik	57
Barriers to Faith	58

The Role of the Tzaddik for Today's Liberal Jewry	60
4. Blending the Teachings of the Two Masters	62
Standing on the Shoulders of his Great-Grandfather	62
Stringing The Pearls	66
5. Bibliography	67
6. Notes	68

C H A P T E R 1

A TEXTUAL HISTORY OF *DEVEKUT*

God—and feeling the presence of God—is at the core of Judaism. Peel back each layer of Jewish thought, explore every passage in the Torah, study thousands of pages of Talmud, and at the core of it all is God. God is the force that brought the Jewish people out of Egypt; God had the wind act upon the water to have the seas part; and God's direction led the Jewish people to receive the Torah at Sinai. The magnificent, and yet at times difficult-to-comprehend notion of the Divine imbues our faith.

While God is unchanging, our experience of the Divine and our understanding of God's presence in our lives, and in our world, has been in a state of change not only since the *TaNaKh*;, but also even within the *TaNaKh*: itself. God's form changes within the *TaNaKh*: A voice speaking the world into being; Smoke and fire over Sinai, to no longer physically appearing but speaking through the prophets. In the time of the Temple, we joined ourselves to God's presence through ritual offerings. In the time of the Talmud, Jews joined themselves to God's presence through study and performing mitzvot. In the time of Hasidism , Jews attempted to attain God's presence in every breath of their existence—from prayer to the conducting of daily activities such as buying food in the marketplace and paying one's bills. In the twentieth century, feeling God's presence ranged from hearing an organ at synagogue services, to marching for voter rights in Selma, Alabama, to going to the mikvah in the month of Elul. Though the specific experience of the Divine Presence has gone through myriad permutations in Judaism, the Divine's being central to Judaism and to the life of a religious Jew has not changed. This

centrality sometimes even takes the form of *not* feeling God's presence in one's life, and managing that confusion and struggle.

God is central to Judaism, though the ways that individuals cleave to God, or attain *devekut*, have changed. The very definition of *devekut* and the perception of its attainment have also evolved through time. In the 1700's the founder of Hasidism, Israel Ben Eliezer (1700 – 1760), known as the Baal Shem Tov or BESHT, gave prominence to the notion of *devekut*, stating that it was a central religious value attainable by the common man, and not just a scholar or a tzaddik. Yet this focus on man's direct ability to cleave to God would eventually diminish even within the Hasidic movement. The Baal Shem Tov's great-grandson, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1810), contended that the common man cannot cleave to God because God is too distant. Instead, Rabbi Nachman asserted that the common man can get closer to God only by cleaving to another source, the tzaddik, the righteous person. These two fundamentally differing Hasidic perspectives, which will be explored in this paper, reveal two distinct methods to drawing closer to the Divine. Further these methods, which might at first glance seem arcane and too exacting for modern liberal Jews, can nevertheless offer pathways for modern Jews to experience the Divine in their daily life.

DEVEKUT: CLEAVING TO GOD

Before addressing the differences in the two Hasidic Rabbis' teachings about cleaving to God, it is important to examine the definition and process of "cleaving" more closely. This chapter will explore this concept of cleaving, *devekut*, giving textual references from the Torah, the Talmud, and the Zohar, as well as Kabbalistic interpretations.

Devekut דבקות can be translated as “cleaving,” which comes from the root *devek*, דבק which means glue or adhesion. By its basic definition, this term clearly suggests closeness or seeking a form of almost physical connection. But *devekut* is not so easily defined in its more subjective meaning. Gershom Scholem, regarded as the modern founder of the academic study of Kabbalah, which was a major influence of Hasidism, explains in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (1971) that *devekut* historically referred to attachment or devoutness; yet in the 13th century, mystics reinterpreted the term as an intimate communion with God specifically. Scholem defines *devekut* as “a perpetual-being-with-God, an intimate unity and conformity of the human mind and the Divine will” (123).

The 13th-century mystics were not the only people who reinterpreted the notion of *devekut*. The concept of *devekut* continued to evolve in the next several centuries and in fact is debated to this day as its definition is revisited and its process for attainment revised. In *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (1988), Moshe Idel comments on this difficulty of establishing one definition for *devekut*. He describes *devekut* as a vague term with varied interpretations ranging from literally cleaving to God to completing pious deeds. Again, we find these differing interpretations supported in the literature. Immanuel Etkes in *The BESHT: Magician, Mystic, and Leader* (2005), defines *devekut* as “‘adherence’ or ‘merging’ of the soul with the Divinity” (114). And according to the noted contemporary Hasidic scholar, Yoram Jacobson, in *Hasidic Thought* (1998), *devekut* is defined as “true attachment to the Divine...and is the result of an intense spiritual effort to achieve an intimate connection and—if one may put it thus—unity with the Divine reality present in the world and within man” (58-59).¹

Just as one cannot find a consistent definition of *devekut*, there is of course no single prescribed method for attaining *devekut*. Still, we can gain a better understanding of *devekut* and why it became so central to Hasidism by briefly reviewing how the notion of *devekut* has historically been applied and interpreted. The remainder of this chapter will review how sources that predated the Hasidic period—specifically the Torah, the Talmud, and the Zohar—viewed *devekut*. This chapter will also address the Kabbalist's perspective of *devekut*, as Kabbalah served as a precursor to Hasidism.

ROOTS OF *DEVEKUT* IN THE TORAH AND THE TALMUD

The concept of *devekut* is first found in the Torah, where Moses is speaking to the people of Israel. In Deuteronomy 4:4 we see that those who cleaved to God did not perish.

Deuteronomy 4:4

וְאַתֶּם הַיּוֹמָיוֹם בְּיַהֲוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם:

^{TNK} **Deuteronomy 4:4** while you, who cleaved to the LORD your God, are all alive today.

In the passages below, *devekut* is associated with the central precepts of Judaism such as revering only the Lord and choosing life by loving God. By heeding these dictates and cleaving to God, the Jews' enemies will be banished and the Jews will be rewarded with the prosperous life the Lord promised.

Deuteronomy 10:20

אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ תִירָא אֹתוֹ תַעֲבֹד וְבוֹ תִדְבָּק וּבְשֵׁמוֹ תִשָּׁבַע:

^{TNK} **Deuteronomy 10:20** You must revere the LORD your God: only Him shall you worship, to Him shall you cleave, and by His name shall you swear.

Deuteronomy 11:22-23

כִּי אִם־שָׁמֹר תִּשְׁמְרוּן אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי

מִצִּיּוֹן אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשֹׂתָהּ לֹאֲהַבָּהּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לִלְכֹת
בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו וּלְדַבְּקָהּ־בּוֹ: וְהוֹרִישׁ יְהוָה אֶת־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם
הָאֵלֶּה מִלְּפָנֶיכֶם וִירְשָׁתֶם גּוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְעַצְמִים מִכֶּם:

^{TNK} **Deuteronomy 11:22-23** If, then, you faithfully keep all this Instruction that I command you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all His ways, and cleaving to Him, the LORD will dislodge before you all these nations: you will dispossess nations greater and more numerous than you.

Deuteronomy 13:5-6

אַחֲרֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ וְאִתּוֹ תִּירָאוּ
וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּבְקִלּוֹ
תִּשְׁמְעוּ וְאִתּוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּ וְבוֹ תִדְבְּקוּ: וְהִנֵּבִיא הָהוּא אִן
חֹלֶם הַחֲלוֹם הָהוּא יוֹמֵת כִּי דִבֶּר־סִרְיָה
עַל־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם
וְהַפְּדֶה מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים לְהַדְיָחָה מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִלְכֹת בָּהּ וּבָעֲרֹת הָרַע מִקֶּרְבְּךָ:

^{TNK} **Deuteronomy 13:5** Follow none but the LORD your God, and revere none but Him; observe His commandments alone, and heed only His orders; worship none but Him, and cleave to Him. As for that prophet or dream-diviner, he shall be put to death; for he urged disloyalty to the LORD your God -- who freed you from the land of Egypt and who redeemed you from the house of bondage -- to make you stray from the path that the LORD your God commanded you to follow. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20

הַעֲדֹתִי בְכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֶת נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה
וְהַקְלָלָה וּבַחֲרֹת בְּחַיִּים לְמַעַן תִּחְיֶה
אִתָּה וְזִרְעֶךָ: כִּי לֹאֲהַבָּהּ אֶת־יְהוָה
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמְעַע בְּקִלּוֹ וּלְדַבְּקָהּ־בּוֹ כִּי הוּא
חַיִּיד וְאַרְדּוֹ יָמִיד לְשִׁבֹת עַל־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁפַע
יְהוָה לְאַבְתִּיד לְאַבְרָתָם לִיצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב לְתֵת
לָהֶם:

^{TNK} **Deuteronomy 30:19-20** ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life -- if you and your offspring would live -- ²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and clinging to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the

LORD swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

While Deuteronomy repeatedly addresses the importance of *devekut* by using that very word and enumerating the benefits that will follow the Jewish people if they adhere to this precept, it does not address how one goes about attaining *devekut*. Below we see the Rabbis wrestling with the admittedly difficult task of defining "cleaving to God." They begin by addressing the apparent paradox of achieving *devekut*, given that in Deuteronomy 4:24 God is described as a consuming fire.

Deuteronomy 4:24

כִּי יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵשׁ אוֹכֶלֶת הָאֵל קָנָא:

^{TNK} Deuteronomy 4:24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, an impassioned God.

The Rabbis of the Talmud contended with this seeming contradiction by claiming that one cleaves to God through supporting the study of Scripture. Hence the fact that God is described as a consuming fire does not prevent a person from attaining *devekut*. In tractate Ketubot, we see that a man attained *devekut* by either marrying his daughter to a scholar or by financially supporting a scholar. Hence, according to the Talmud (tractate Ketubot), one does not directly attain *devekut*. Rather, one attains *devekut* via his pious actions toward another person, in this case through supporting a scholar.

כתובות דף קיא.ב

וכי אפשר לדבוקי

בשכינה? והכתיב: (דברים ד,) כי ה, אלהיך אש אוכלת! אלא' כל המשיא בתו לתלמיד חכם' והעושה פרקמטיא לתלמידי חכמים' והמהנה תלמידי חכמים מנכסיו' מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מדבק בשכינה. כיוצא בדבר אתה אומר: (דברים ל,) לאהבה את ה, אלהיך ולדבקה בו - וכי אפשר לאדם לידבק בשכינה? אלא' כל המשיא בתו לתלמיד חכם' והעושה פרקמטיא לתלמידי חכמים'

והמהנה תלמידי חכמים מנכסיו' מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו מדבק בשכינה.

Talmud - Mas. Ketubot 111b

Now is it possible to 'cleave' to the Divine presence concerning which it is written in Scripture, For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire? (Deut 4:4). But [the meaning is this:] Any man who marries his daughter to a scholar, or carries on a trade on behalf of scholars, or benefits scholars from his estate is regarded by Scripture as if he had cleaved to the Divine presence. Similarly you read in Scripture, To love the Lord thy God, [to hearken to His voice,] and to cleave unto Him (Deut. 30:20). Is it possible for a human being to 'cleave' unto the Divine presence? But [what was meant is this:] Any man who marries his daughter to a scholar, or carries on a trade for scholars, or benefits scholars from his estate is regarded by Scripture as if he had cleaved to the Divine presence.

Ketubot is not the only tractate where the Rabbis attempt to define and understand how one cleaves to God, and where God is viewed as an all-consuming fire. Tractate Sotah explains that one cleaves to God, described as a devouring fire, by emulating God's acts and performing mitzvot such as clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and comforting the mourners.

סוטה דף יד.א

וא"ר חמא ברבי חנינא: מפני מה נקבר משה אצל בית פעור? כדי לכפר על מעשה פעור. ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא' מאי דכתיב: (דברים יג) אחרי ה, אלהיכם תלכו ואתו תיראו ואת-מצותיו תשמרו ובקלו תשמעו ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקון? וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה? והלא כבר נאמר: (דברים ד) כי ה, אלהיך אש אוכלת הוא! אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה' מה הוא מלביש ערומים' דכתיב: (בראשית ג) ויעש ה, אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם' אף אתה הלבש ערומים' הקב"ה ביקר חולים' דכתיב: (בראשית יח) וירא אליו ה, באלוני ממרא' אף אתה בקר חולים' הקב"ה ניחם אבלים' דכתיב: (בראשית כה) ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו' אף אתה נחם אבלים' הקב"ה קבר מתים' דכתיב: (דברים לד) ויקבר אותו בגיא' אף אתה קבור מתים.

Talmud - Mas. Sotah 14a

R. Hama son of R. Hanina further said: What means the text: Ye shall walk after the Lord your God and revere none but Him; observe His commandments alone, and heed only His orders; worship none but Him, and cleave to Him? (Deut 13:5). Is it, then, possible for a human being to walk after the Shechinah; for has it not been said: For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire? (Deut. 4:24). But [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, for it is written: And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of skin, and clothed them (Gen. 3:21), so do thou also clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1), so do thou also visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, for it is written: And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son (Gen. 25:11), so do thou also comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, for it is written: And He buried him in the valley (Deut. 34:6), so do thou also bury the dead.

We see therefore that the book of Deuteronomy and the Talmud do not reveal one uniform path to attaining *deveikut*. Instead, these texts serve as starting points for a long meditation on the concept of *deveikut*. Although during this time period cleaving to God is not a *central* theme, we see that it is one of the acts one is commanded to fulfill. Later, in Hasidism, this notion of cleaving to God continues to evolve and becomes a more essential notion.

KABBALISTIC SOURCES IN THE ZOHAR

Beginning with Kabbalah in the 12th century, *deveikut* begins to assume a larger role in Jewish mysticism. Despite its greater role, a single, overarching definition or path to *deveikut* did not exist. In *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts* (2002), Isaiah Tishby, similar to Moshe Idel, explains that it is difficult to decipher the exact meaning of *deveikut* in the Zohar, the central Kabbalistic text, because that term is used frequently and

in varied contexts. The Kabbalists did agree, however, on certain matters regarding *devekut*. For example, they asserted that cleaving to God is not simple or readily attainable. In *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (1971), Gershom Scholem confirms that *devekut* is indeed challenging to attain. He describes it as “the last grade of ascent to God” and ultimately brief and transitory (203). The text below illustrates that in order to get to God, one must ascend through many stages so that one’s soul and the cosmos are unified with the Ein Sof, the ineffable, infinite part of God.

הזהר לספר שמות (ח"ב דף ריג ע"ב)
 עד הכא רמו לשמא קדישא (נ"א רזא דשמים
 קדישין) דקודשא ב"ה אקרי בשמהן. מכאן ולהלאה לית
 חכים בסכלתנו דיכיל למנדע ולאדבקה כלל. בר נהירו חד
 זעיר בלא קיומא (נ"א קיומא דכלא) לאתיישבא ביה. זכאה
 חולקיה מאן דעאל ונפק. וידע לאסתכלא ברזין דמאריה
 ולאדבקה ביה. ברזין אלן יכיל בר נש לאתדבקה במאריה
 למנדע שלימו דחכמה ברזא עלאה כד פלח למאריה בצלותא
 ברעותא בכון לבא אדבק רעותיה כנורא בגחלתא ליחדא אינון
 רקיעין תתאין דסטרא דקדושה לאעטרא לון בשמא חדא תתאה
 ומתמן ולהלאה ליחדא אינון רקיעין עלאין פנימאין למחוי כלהו
 חד בהחוא רקיעא עלאה (רלט א) דקיימא עלייהו. ובעוד
 דפומיה ושפוותיה מרחשן. לביה יכוון ורעותיה יסתלק
 לעילא לעילא ליחדא כלא ברזא דרזין דתמן תקיעו דכל
 רעותין ומחשבין ברזא דקיימא באין סוף ולכוונא בהאי
 בכל צלותא וצלותא בכל יומא ויומא לאעטרא כל יומי
 ברזא דיומין עלאין בפולחניה.

Zohar II, 213b

“Blessed is the portion of the man who enters and emerges and knows how to contemplate the secrets of his Creator and to cleave to Him. Through these secrets a man may cleave to his Creator, and thereby know the perfection of wisdom through the supernal mystery. When he worships his Master through prayer, with his whole desire, and with the concentration of the mind, he causes his will to cleave like fire to a burning coal, and he unifies the lower firmaments on the side of holiness, crowning them with the single lower name. Then he proceeds to unify the

upper, innermost firmaments, so that they all become one in the highest concentrates of his mind, and his will ascends higher and higher in order to unify all through the secret of secrets, where all desires and thoughts rest in the mystery that exists in Ein-Sof. And he concentrates upon this in every prayer day, in order to crown all his days with the mystery of the supernal days, through his worship.”

The Kabbalists assert that God’s being had two natures—the hidden and revealed. The hidden, unknowable, and infinite part of God is named the Ein Sof, translated as “without end.” This is in contrast to the personal, finite part of God, named Eser Sefirot. The ten Sefirot represent the holy aspects of God and ultimately serve as a connecting point between man and God. “The Sefirot are the bridge across the abyss, the connective tissue between the infinite God and the finite world. They are the link that makes it possible to preserve God’s absolute unity while preserving the relationship between God and man” (Ariel, 67). The last Sefira—the Shekhinah—represents the feminine aspects of God and is significant because it is the most accessible Sefira to humans. The Shekhinah, according to the Kabbalists, is the entry point to the other Sefirot and ultimately to God.

DEVEKUT IN EARLY JEWISH MYSTICISM: THREE PATHWAYS

Like Tishby, Yoram Jacobson in *Hasidic Thought* (1998) addresses the fact that there is not just one type of *devekut*. He lists three main types of *devekut* occurring in early roots of Jewish mysticism, each type varying in the extent that one engages in or separates from the material world.

The first and most extreme type of *devekut* existed during the first half of the 11th century. This *devekut* calls for man to completely withdraw from the world, for this is the only way he can separate from society’s values. According to Jacobson, this withdrawal

could simply consist of an "inner posture of alienation and disgust towards all things of this world" or it could literally entail man's living in isolation (127).

The second type of *devekut*, endorsed by Kabbalists in the 16th and 17th century, called for man to physically participate in the world but maintain his spiritual and emotional focus on God. In *BESHT: Magician, Mystic, and Leader* (2005), Immanuel Etkes provides a more extensive overview of the characteristics of Kabbalistic *devekut* during the 16th century in the city of Safed. The Kabbalists contended that one attained *devekut* through engaging in Torah study and specifically focusing on its secrets. This idea is based on the premise that "a person graced by the revelation of Torah secrets while studying bonds himself with the Torah and, through it, with God" (120). In addition, the Kabbalistic perspective states that one strives to cleave to the ten Sefirot, since one is not able to cleave to or reach the Ein Sof, the unknowable part of God. Finally, in seeking *devekut* one must constantly be combating corporeal values and instincts. Abstinence and fasting were common interventions employed to contend with societal influences that took one away from focus on the Divine.

The third type of *devekut*, which was endorsed by Hasidism and began to take hold in the 18th century, is significantly more active. Rather than separating from society, one attains *devekut* by actively engaging in the world—by elevating and sanctifying the material world and thereby making it holy. The Hasidim believe that man's sole purpose is to reveal God. Yoram Jacobson elaborates, noting that God, in fact, created the world so God would have such a venue for his presence. "It is within man alone, unique among all the creatures of the higher and lower realms, that the dynamic processes of the Divine life are revealed" (165). Jacobson further explains that in Hasidism, man's goal is to

worship God, to serve as a vessel for the Divine Nothing and find the Divine and the spiritual within the material world. Man has the ability to transform all acts into symbols of Divine service, so that he unites the Divine vitality that has been separated within the world. In *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic* (1995), Moshe Idel highlights this integration: "Hasidic thought and experience are characterized by a sustained effort to keep together the two extremes, the spiritual and the material, as part of both a religious and social system" (209).

In addition, instead of being accessible to a select few, *devekut* is attainable by all. According to Scholem, the first step to Hasidic *devekut* is simply adopting the Hasidic notion of Divine immanence—that God is omnipresent—and making the decision to cleave to God. Hasidic *devekut* "is no longer the last rung in the ladder of ascent, as in Kabbalism, but the first. Everything begins with man's decision to cleave to God. *Devekut* is a starting point and not the end" (208).

KABBALISTIC VS. HASIDIC NOTIONS OF DIVINE PRESENCE

In order to better understand the Hasidic perspective of *devekut*, it is important to consider the Hasidic view of Divine immanence. While both the Kabbalists and the Hasidim endorsed the notion of God's immanence, each group defined "immanent presence" differently. Endorsing a philosophy of cosmic hierarchy, the Kabbalists contended that the Divine essence flowed through all matter, but its presence gradually faded with distance from its source until it was eventually enveloped in complete darkness.

In contrast, the Hasidim asserted that the presence of God, His holy sparks, exist within everything, especially within man. Jacobson explains the Hasidic view of Divine immanence. It "is not only a radiance emanating from the Godhead which spreads about within the worlds and dwells within them, but the Godhead itself, in its substance and essence, which dwells within them and fills them without limit" (19-20). The Hasidic perspective on God is panentheistic, meaning that the only reality is God. Without God, nothing would exist, and hence everything can be brought back to God. In *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* (1988), David Ariel summarizes this idea: "The world is really a veil that, if removed, leaves only divinity" (176).

There is further specific evidence of the Hasidic perspective of Divine immanence in *Tzva'at HaRivash the Testament of the Baal Shem Tov*.

"Have in mind that everything in the world is filled with the Creator. Everything that comes about through the thoughts of man with various devices, even the most trivial thing happening in the worlds, it is all by his providence" (sect. 84).

פד 84

ויחשוב שכל דבר שיש בעולם הכל מלא מהבורא ית', וכל
דברים הנעשים מכח מחשבות ב"א בתחבולות ואפילו דבר
קל שבקלים שנעשה בעולם הכל הוא מהשגחתו ית'.

In addition to differing in their perspectives regarding the Divine presence, Kabbalists and Hasidim also had different audiences and fundamentally distinct purposes. Whereas the Kabbalists were concerned with theosophy, the Hasidim were focused on the personal and were specifically concerned about the redemption of man's individual soul. The Hasidim deciphered and revealed many of the complex Kabbalistic principles with the purpose of increasing the common man's awareness of God's presence, both within the world and within man. Man was encouraged to turn inward, raise up his soul,

and engage in a continual pursuit of the Divine presence. Therefore, despite actively engaging in the world, *devekut* in Hasidism is an inner, private, and contemplative process.

“God seeks man's continuous awakening and uninterrupted spiritual renewal. This renewal is the true miraculous event within man's soul. That miracle is not the outcome of Divine intervention, in which God breaks through from the depths of His transcendent reality, bursting into the world and changing its order. On the contrary, it represents the breakthrough of the Divine soul from its concealment within human existence, its ascent toward the Nothing and its manifestation—through means of a great spiritual effort of sanctification of the world—even within Being” (Jacobson 109).

Hence we see from studying various Jewish texts that the definition and method of attaining *devekut* has evolved over centuries into a deepening but still complicated understanding of God's presence and man's place in relation to God. For the sake of this paper I will apply Jacobson's definition of Hasidic *devekut*: “*Devekut* is unity with the Divine reality present in the world and within man” (59). However, I propose one modification. Rather than expressing this relationship as a “union,” I define Hasidic *devekut* as “*communion*.” This perspective of cleaving to the presence of God in the world, especially to God's image within people, reflects the Hasidic shift to focusing on *man* as well as the perspective of Divine immanence, the consciousness that God is everywhere and within all.

While this cleaving is an intimate communion with the Divine, I concur with Jacobson, Ariel, and Scholem that it is not actual union. As Scholem explains (v. footnote 1), the creator and creation are not one. They remain separate. This sense of separateness is important, for the implication that one is in union with God suggests that a state can

exist where there is no differentiation between humans and God. Though both the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav address the importance of negating one's sense of separateness, as will be addressed in the following chapters, neither appear to have endorsed the extreme perspective of complete union with God. Rather, they describe a desire to achieve communion and an intimate attachment to God.

The Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav provided radically distinct and compelling views on God's accessibility and ultimately one's ability to attain *deveikut*. By studying these differing views and modalities, and precisely by wrestling with their differing interpretations, contemporary liberal Jews can find an entry point, from which they can consider how to attain *deveikut*.

The next chapter will address the Baal Shem Tov's perspective and will include specific guidelines on how to achieve this state as presented in *Tzava'at HaRivash: the Testament of the Baal Shem Tov*.

C H A P T E R 2

THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S VIEW OF *DEVEKUT*: ESSENTIAL RULES FOR THE COMMON MAN

The Baal Shem Tov espoused the radical notion that the common Jew had the ability to cleave to the Divine. In *Hasidic Thought* (1998), Immanuel Etkes says that, "The opportunity for spiritual ascent and spiritual connection with the Divine exists for man in every time and in every place" (59). Etkes further explains how *devekut* metamorphosed in Hasidism, stating that *devekut* was liberated "from the narrow confines of the Kabbalists" (115). As we saw in Chapter 1, according to Jacobson, the Hasidic movement was fundamentally concerned about the individual's redemption. Therefore it is not surprising that in addition to contending that the common person can attain *devekut*, the Baal Shem Tov also provided a specific pathway for its attainment: ecstatic prayer. His guidelines for achieving this difficult but still individually accessible state for cleaving to God shall be reviewed by studying selected text from his book, *Tzava'at Harivash: The Testament of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov*.

THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S GUIDE: *TZAVA'AT HARIVASH*

Tzava'at Harivash essentially serves as a detailed how-to guide to attain *devekut*. When studying this book today, the liberal Jew may find these teachings foreign, but the rewards are definitely worth the effort.

The next portion of this chapter will begin with an explanation of *devekut* according to the Baal Shem Tov and will then focus on the techniques involved in attaining *devekut* through ecstatic prayer as documented in *Tzava'at Harivash*, the *Testament of the Baal Shem Tov*.

DEVEKUT ACCORDING TO THE BAAL SHEM TOV

According to Etkes, the Baal Shem Tov's teachings on *devekut* can be summarized in four primary ways: 1) *Devekut* can be achieved by the common man; 2) it is attained through ecstatic prayer; 3) like the Kabbalist's perspective, cleaving to God is a brief and transitory experience; 4) and, rather than addressing one's evil inclination through abstinence and fasting, one contends with the evil inclination through elevating one's thoughts.

The Baal Shem Tov's empowering notion that *devekut* is accessible to the common Jew is particularly pertinent to liberal Jews today. That is because regardless of one's Jewish education, any Jew can cleave to God. The Jew does not have to prove worthiness through study. Engaging in Judaic study can certainly increase a Jew's sense of knowledge about Scripture, liturgy, and paths to observance, but it is *not* a necessary step in order to cleave to God. A Jew can begin cleaving to God at any time.

According to the Baal Shem Tov, this *devekut* is achieved through prayer. Prayer is so powerful that the BeShT claimed he attained his knowledge and revelations precisely because of his fervent devotion in prayer, not because of his ardent study. In *Tzava'at Harivash* we read:

"The soul told the Rabbi [the Baal Shem Tov] that he did not merit his revelations of supernal matters because he learned so much Talmud and the codifiers, but because his prayers were always with great kavanah. By virtue thereof he merited to attain a high level" (sect. 41).

מא 41

הנשמה אמרה להרב שמה שזכה שנתגלו אליו הדברים
העליונים לא מפני שלימד הרבה מש"ס ופוסקים
הרבה, רק משום תפלה שהיה מתפלל תמיד בכוונה
גדולה, ומשם זכה למעלה עליונה:

Though prayer has always played a central role in Judaism, the Baal Shem Tov created a revolutionary shift in its importance through his assertion that *devekut* could be reached via prayer. In *Tzava'at Harivash*, we read that one unites with God through prayer.

"Utter the words, therefore with all your strength, because that will effect unity with [God], blessed be He. As your strength is in the letter[s], and the Holy One, blessed be He, dwells in the letter[s], you are united, therefore, with [God], blessed be He" (sect. 108).

קח 108

וידבר בכל כחו, כי בזה נעשה אחדות עמו ית', כי כחו
בהאות ובהאות שורה הקב"ה, נמצא הוא אחדות
עמו ית':

In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1961), Gershom Scholem addresses the far-reaching power of prayer, explaining that "prayer is likened to Jacob's ladder extended from the earth to the sky" (100). In *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* (1988), David Ariel also writes of the essential role that prayer plays in inducing *devekut*: "Through prayer the Hasid can achieve a state of adhesion (*devekut*) in which he transcends consciousness of his own existence and ultimately achieves consciousness of oneness with God" (178).

The Baal Shem Tov taught that one should strive to constantly attain *devekut*, though he, like the Kabbalists, acknowledged that *devekut* is a brief and transitory experience. *Devekut* cannot constantly be maintained because one has to exert a tremendous and ultimately unsustainable amount of spiritual energy in order to achieve it. Arthur Green writes in *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (2004) "The BeSHT spoke of the total expending of energy which takes place in the moment of ecstasy. If prayer is truly as it should be, he said, it is only by dint of miracle that people have the strength to go on living afterwards" (33).

"It is a great mercy of the Blessed Lord that a man survives after praying, for by rights he ought to perish from loss of strength...from the intensity of the vast kavanot that he inflects" (sect. 35).

לה. 35
זה חסד גדול מהשי"ת שאדם חי אחר התפלה,
שלפי דרך הטבע היה לו למות מחמת שמפסיד
כחו [בתפלה], כי נתן כחו בהתפלה כל כך מכח
הכוונות הגדולות שהוא מכין.

Since a person is where his thoughts are, if one is having unholy thoughts then one is not in a holy state and therefore not with God. Conversely if God is in one thoughts, one is with God.

"For a person is where his thought is" (sect. 69).

סט 69
שכמו שאדם מחשב שם הוא.

To make matters even more problematic, strange, alien or evil thoughts (*mach-shavot zarot*) do not negatively impact only the person who has them; they also strengthen the 'seven nations,' the corrupt group that was banished from Israel prior to the Jews' arrival and who now represent impurities.

Yet, if addressed appropriately, there can also be positive potential even to alien thoughts. It is important to remember the notion of Divine immanence. If all is providential and rooted in the Divine. So then, too, are alien thoughts. Therefore, rather than employing self mortification when having alien thoughts, the Baal Shem Tov indirectly acknowledged that these thoughts are normal by asserting that one should elevate his thoughts back to God. For example, if when seeing a pleasing object one finds himself focusing on the pleasure-inducing object instead of God, one should remember that the object exists *because* of God. The Divine force within each person or object is responsible for the creation of and the perception of its beauty. Hence it is ideal to attach to its origin—"the root and core of all worlds"—rather than to simply one or a few of God's manifestations (sect. 90).

צ 90
בשרשא ועקרא דכל

Tzava'at Harivash recommends how to contend with alien thoughts, especially if these thoughts play a role in provoking a depressed state. We read that when harboring an extraneous thought, one should consider its origin. Was the thought driven by one's yetzer hatov (good inclination) or one's yetzer hara (evil inclination)? When driven by the yetzer hara, one must incite the yetzer hatov to refocus the mind and return to God. This command might sound simplistic but it is actually quite helpful. In other words, if you will a thought to be good, it can be. In *Tzava'at Harivash*, there are numerous scripts to recite to oneself in order to return to an emotional and cognitive space of positive inclination. In the example below, one is warned not to give power to the yetzer hara, for this will only help maintain a depressed state. One is instead instructed to redirect his

thoughts to God's greatness or majesty, for then he is likely to return to an appropriate state where he can effectively serve God.

"Sometimes the yetzer hara deceives you by telling you that you committed a grave sin when there was really no sin at all or [at worst you violated] a mere stringency. His intent is that you should feel depressed as a result thereof, and thus be kept from serving the Creator, blessed be He, because of your depression. You must understand this trickery, and say to the yetzer hara: 'I will not pay attention to the stringency you referred to. You speak falsely, for your intent is but to keep me from His service, may He be blessed. Even if there really was a degree of sin, my Creator will be more gratified if I do not pay attention to the stringency that you pointed out [to me] to make me depressed in His worship. In fact, I will serve Him with joy! For it is a basic rule that I do not think the Divine service to be for my own sake but to bring gratification to God' " (sect. 44).

מד 44

לפעמים מטעה היצה"ר לאדם ואומר לו שעבר עבירה גדולה אע"פ שאינו אלא חומרא בעלמא, או שאינה עבירה כלל, וכוונתו שיהא האדם בעצבות מכח זה, ויבוטל בעצבותו מעבודת הבורא ית'.
וצריך האדם להבין הרמאות הזה, ויאמר להיצר איני משגיח על החומרא שאתה אומר, שכוונתך לבטלני מעבודתו יתב', ושקר אתה דובר. וגם אם הוא באמת קצת חטא, יתר יהיה נחת רוח לבוראי שלא אשגיח על חומרא שאתה אומר לי לגרום לי עצבות בעבודתו, אדרבא, אעבוד אותו בשמחה, כי זהו כלל כי אין כוונתי בעבודה לצורך עצמי, רק לעשות נחת רוח לפניו יתברך.

Jacobson describes alien thoughts as "hidden sparks, which seek their repair and redemption, to be uplifted and restored to holiness" (146). He reminds us that Hasidic *devekut* is concerned with the redemption of man's soul and contends that alien thoughts serve as a sign of man's desire for this redemption:

"The entire process occurs on the psychological plane: it is no longer the sorting out of sparks of Divinity which, according to the doctrine of Lurianic Kabbalah, are scattered about within the shells and in all

the realms of being . . . but rather the revelation of the Divine sparks within the hidden paths of man's soul so as to uncover his Divine Image, to abnegate his inner exile, and to reconstitute the harmonic structure of his spiritual being" (146).

Once the alien thought is appropriately elevated, one ultimately reaches a higher spiritual level and awakening than he would have attained had he not had the alien thought.

THE BENEFIT OF SEEING GOD IN EVERYTHING

The panentheistic, Hasidic notion that the only reality is God is in striking contrast to the old man on a throne in the Heavens of classical theism. For Hasidism God is not remote or removed from the world: God is everywhere. One simply needs to open one's eyes in order to find and feel God's presence. *Tzava'at Harivash* speaks to the importance of extending this relationship with the Divine further, to achieving *devekut*.

TEXTUAL HELP IN ACHIEVING *DEVEKUT*

Tzava'at Harivash has multiple sections that address the importance of attaining *devekut* through serving God. For example in *Tzava'at Harivash* we read:

"Always bear in mind to attach yourself to the Creator, blessed be He, with a complete love that is greater than that for anything else in the world; for every good thing in this world is rooted in Him, blessed be He. Think [to yourself]: 'I always wish to bring gratification unto [God], and to serve Him constantly.' Our thought should always be attached to the Supernal World, to [God]" (sect. 84).

84דפ

ויחשיבתמיד לדבק עצמו בבורא יתברך מאהבה גמורה,
שהוא יותר מכל דבר שבולם, שכל דבר טוב שיש בעולם

הכל מושרש בו יתברך:

In addition, the text tells us that when engaged in the mundane, one should also think of God. This repetitive focus on God will prevent a person from harboring stray thoughts, though, as already mentioned, alien thoughts can be elevated for beneficial effect. Ultimately the repetitive focus on God serves to help establish the routine of constantly focusing on God.

“An important principle: Attach yourself to the Creator, blessed be He, and in that state of attachment pray for some need of your household or do or say something though there is no need for that act or speech. Do so in order to train yourself to have your thought attached to the Creator, blessed be He, even when you are involved in actions or speech relating to material matters, to become accustomed our selves and not have any alien thoughts and then we are able to think that we are nothing and are able to attach and serve God (sect. 81).

פא 81

ידבק עצמו בבזרא יתברך ויבקש דבר מצרכי בית, או
שיעשה דבר או ידבר באותו הדביקות אע"פ שאינו צריך
לעשות ולדבר, כדי להרגיל עצמו אפילו כשיעשה וידבר
דברים גשמיים שתהיה מחשבתו דבוקה בו יתברך,
ושיהיה רגיל בדביקות באותה שעה, וזה כלל גדול:

As indicated in *Tzava'at Harivash*, in order to attain *devekut* via prayer one must heed specific guidelines. For example one must suppress pride and be in the appropriate emotional and cognitive state. One must balance feeling joy and fear of God, and must avoid depression. In addition, one must follow strict instruction when praying.

AVOIDING PRIDE

In order to achieve *devekut* one must avoid focusing on his unique separate self, his sense of "I," which manifests itself in pride. Pride is considered a sin that repels the Divine's light and prevents God from dwelling among man.

In *Hasidic Thoughts* (1998), Jacobson writes that pride "is no longer merely a sin between man and his fellow, but a sin of man towards his creator" (69). In focusing on one's own limited sense of self—focusing on one's psychological needs and concerns rather than turning direct attention to God—a person is prioritizing self and the values inherent in society *above* God. According to Hasidism, by doing this, one places trust in himself *rather* than God. Jacobson further explains that any act of considering one's own concerns demonstrates that one is not yet connected to God.

"Man must 'transcend the pain of his own self', his troubles and sufferings, because these are existential expressions of the individual existence. So long as this type of pain can be aroused within an individual, it is a sign that he is still connected to himself...preventing him from walking in the way of the spirit...for so long as he is engrossed in the 'pain of his own self', he can only think of himself and experience his own private existence, completely forgetting God" (85).

Therefore, in order to contemplate the Creator's greatness and reach *devekut*, a man must forgo a sense of autonomous self and the notion of an autonomous existence. Man should divest himself from this physical reality, his corporeal needs, and turn to God with complete trust. He should accept that he exists only to serve and please God and view himself as "nothing but a chisel in the hands of the stone mason" (Jacobson 90).

The Baal Shem Tov consistently taught that man's purpose in life is to be of service to God, to bring satisfaction to the Creator.

The purpose of man's creation in this world is service (sect. 62).

62 יד

כי עיקר בריאת אדם בעולם הזה לעבודה

Then, and only then, will man discover the root of his existence, the holy sparks concealed within him.

"Only when he arrives at recognition of his own negation and the nullification of his own consciousness can he ascend to the level of true *devekut* and enjoy the manifestation of the true unity, the unity of the Divine Nothing. At that time he will ascend in his negation to a higher level of existence, in which the Divine light will flow with infinite plenitude into him, and the Nothing will be revealed and reside within him" (Jacobson, 81).

In *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* (1988), Ariel further affirms this idea, stating that "the task of the Hasid is to achieve a new and enduring consciousness that God alone is being. The process begins with his recognizing that his physical self is an obstacle to true consciousness" (180). In order to get to this state, one should focus on God's majesty and acknowledge one's own insignificance.

We find further evidence of the importance of self-negation but not self-mortification in *Tzava'at Harivash* as well. Above all, one must remind oneself that only God is the true reality and therefore one's personal needs are irrelevant.

"Your motives are altogether for the sake of Heaven, and as for yourself nothing makes any difference" (*sect. 2*).

ב 2
וכל דבר שיארע לו יאמר הלא זה הוא מאתו יתברך,
ואם בעיניו הגון וכו', וכל כוונתו לשם שמים, אבל מצד
עצמו אין חילוק. וזה מדרגה גדולה מאד:

This conscious indifference should also apply to relations one has with another, for man should not be invested in personal relationships, except of course with God.

"Attach your thought to Above. Think that you belong to the Supernal World and all the people dwelling in this world should not be important to you...Be indifferent to others loving you or hating you, for their love or hatred means nothing" (sect. 6).

ו 6

ויחשוב שהוא מבני עולם העליון, ולא יהיו חשובין
בעיניו כל בני אדם הדרים בעוה"ז, כי כל העולם כולו
הוא כגרגיר חרדל נגד העולם העליון, ויהיה שוה
בעיניו אם יאהבוהו או ישנאוהו כי אהבתם ושנאתם
אין כלום.

The Baal Shem Tov is saying that, ultimately, man must forgo an autonomous sense of self and focus on God. In truth, to do so is to realize the benefit of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and to find a contemporary interpretation of the role that pride should or should not play in daily life. Because if one is solely or unduly absorbed in self, one can get lost in the minutiae of daily existence and in the potential trivialness of one's problems, missing the beauty and benefit of the Divine's presence. It is very powerful to consider oneself as part of something larger than simply the self; God is everywhere if you let God in. In so doing, one can bring light to the internal darkness. The ultimate good in life is to *reveal* the Divine to the world, and pride can prevent that from occurring.

APPROPRIATE EMOTIONAL STATES FOR ATTAINING *DEVEKUT*

This focus on God is not the only factor necessary in order to achieve *devekut*, for one must also be in an appropriate emotional state. Namely, one must be joyful. One must infuse joy into every act: be prayer, study, or engaging in mundane activities. Joy is vital because it serves as the foundation from which one begins to uplift the sparks and

discover God. It becomes the base for one's consistent spiritual renewal and awakening. Jacobson further emphasizes that even in the face of life's difficulties, one must strive to live joyfully:

"This joy is thus a joy of holiness... at every moment, even in the difficult moments of this world, and in every place, even in its dark byways. Man is commanded to constantly rejoice, and must constantly awaken and arouse his heart in the Divine service – that is, in an arousal of joy" (Jacobson, 102).

However, this emotion of joy alone does not suffice when striving to attain *devekut*; one must also feel fear. Both emotions, fear and joy, are necessary because each plays a vital role and one ultimately complements the another. By experiencing both, man is more likely to have an appropriate and more fully realized relationship with God. In *Tzava'at Harivash*, we read:

"You are to serve God with [both] fear and joy. These are 'two friends that do not separate [from each other].' Fear without joy is melancholy. It is inappropriate to feel anguished in considering how to serve God, but always be joyful" (sect. 110).

קי 110
לעבוד את השם ביראה ובשמחה, והן תרין ריעין
דלא מתפרשין, ויראה בלא שמחה היא מרה שחורה
ולא יאות לצער על עבודת ה' האיד לעבוד, רק
תמיד יהיה בשמחה,

It is important that one should experience fear, for this emotion can prevent one from committing a sin.

"Before falling asleep lie in dread and fear, agitated and trembling from 'the fear of the Creator, blessed be He. Thus you will not come to sin, as it is written, 'Be agitated and do no sin [reflect in you hearts on your beds]...' (Psalms 4:5)" (sect. 23).

כג 23

קודם השינה ישכב באימה וביראה, (וירגיש) [וירגוז]
וירעד מאימת הבורא ית', ולא יבא לידי חטא, כמ"ש
רגזו ועל תחטאו:

Finally, in addition to balancing joy and fear, one must be mindful to avoid being depressed, as this serves as a serious barrier to connecting with God (sect. 46).

מו 46

ועצבות היא מניעה גדולה לעבודת הבורא ית'.

The Baal Shem Tov spoke extensively about the dangers associated with being melancholy and hence the importance of avoiding this state. When one is sad, the soul's ability to connect with God is compromised. Jacobson further explains that when one is sad or depressed "the Divine power is then no longer revealed within man and the spiritual awakeness from the Divine spark, hidden in darkness of his soul, no longer bursts into flame" (99).

In addition to prescribing desired emotional states, the Baal Shem Tov also distinguished between appropriate vs. inappropriate expression of emotion. In the case of crying, for example, it is permissible that one cry during prayers of atonement, prayers of midnight vigil, or from extreme joy (such as *devekut*). But tears shed outside of this context, especially when originating from frustration or anger, are not acceptable (sect. 45).

מה 45

הבכיה הוא רעה מאד, שהאדם צריך לעבוד בשמחה.
רק אם הבכיה היא מחמת שמחה אז טובה היא מאד:

According to the Baal Shem Tov, one must be especially cautious in this regard because weeping can represent the ultimate insult, a lack of faith in God. But since weeping is a natural human response to a heightened emotional experience and is often cathartic and even pleasurable, this injunction against normal weeping can at first seem perplexing and, on deeper reflection, unhealthy. Still, the Baal Shem Tov's perceptive attention to overall mental health can be as applicable today as it was in the past, though with some modification and personal interpretation.

For instance, the state of one's mental health can profoundly compromise a person's over-all functioning in society—within the civic community, with friends and family, with oneself, and with the Divine. The Baal Shem Tov's warning about the debilitating nature of depression continues to be a present-day concern. As a very real illness that cannot be brushed away with a simple command to “snap out of it,” depression is responsible for a range of debilitating feelings such as lethargy, apathy, and irritability, in addition to profound sadness. Depression exacts a terrible price, ranging from an inability to do anything, even get out of bed, to a complete loss of hope, to the Divine within being quieted or veiled, to the ultimate tragic outcome of suicide.

Because Hasidism is focused unapologetically on one's deepest thoughts, it is vital that one's mind should have the fortitude and ability to engage in an inward reflection that is God-seeking as opposed to being plagued by mental illness. Mental illness does, of course, occur, but precisely because one's mental health status is the foundation of one's being, the Baal Shem Tov's attention to this topic in relation to attaining *devekut* can be helpful and uplifting. The Baal Shem Tov might not qualify as a

psychologist by contemporary standards, but, as indicated below, the Baal Shem Tov's instruction in how to treat depression can still resonates.

PATHWAYS TO JOY

Fortunately, since even the Baal Shem Tov knew that negative thoughts or veering toward the depressive were *not* uncommon, *Tzava'at Harivash* provides detailed guidelines on how to avoid or combat negative states and achieve a desired positive emotional and cognitive state. There are images that facilitate getting into a joyful space. For example, in the text below one is encouraged to access joy by imagining that he is literally standing with the Shekhinah in service to the Creator.

“Always be joyful. Think and believe with perfect faith that the Shechinah is at your side and watches over you. You look at the Creator, blessed be He, and the Creator, blessed be He, looks at you. The Creator, blessed be He, can do anything he desires. If He wills it, He can destroy all the worlds in a single instant and create them in a single instant. In Him, blessed be He, are rooted all the good things and the judgments in the world, for His effluence and vitality is in all things. Thus ‘I trust only in him, and fear Him alone, blessed be He’” (sect. 137).

קלז 137

ויהי תמיד בשמח, ויחשוב ויאמין באמונה שלימה שהשכינה
אצלו ושומרת אותו והוא מסתכל על הבורא ית' והבורא ית'
מסתכל בו, והבורא ית' תכול לעסות כל מה שהוא רוצה,
אם הוא רוצה מחריב כל העולמות ברגע אחד, ובו יתברך
מושרשים כל הטובות והדינים שישבעולם שבכל דבר יש
שפע וחיותו, ואין אני בוטח ומתירא רק ממנו ית'.

Tzava'at Harivash also includes scripts one can employ as well. For example, if one is having difficulty getting to an appropriate joyful mindset for prayer, one can

invoke the following metaphor and say to oneself: "I am preparing a garment for such a great King; thus it is only proper that I do so joyfully" (sect. 108).

קח 108
מלך גדול כזה אני עושה לו מלבוש, ראוי לי לעשות בשמחה

Though some of his instructions can sound overly didactic or commanding, the Baal Shem Tov's guidelines on how to get into an appropriately positive emotional state, in particular, can be effectively invoked today. Current research in the field of psychology supports the efficacy of good and healing imagery as well as adapting one's self-talk to an affirming tone in order to reduce stress and positively impact one's mood. In fact, many mental health therapists now apply a similar modality that the Baal Shem Tov espoused. There is a difference in the exact terminology that the Baal Shem Tov appropriated and that Cognitive Behavioral Therapists use with their clients, but their teachings are surprisingly similar. The Baal Shem Tov offered ways one should think and scripts one should employ to keep a person's thoughts holy (de facto positive), and therapists today offer scripts one can employ to help keep anxious or depressed thoughts at bay. The specific notion referred to in *Tzava'at Harivash* —i.e., "a person is where his thoughts are" (sect. 69)—is at the heart of the evidence-based treatment called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

As Dr. David Burns, a cognitive therapist explains in his book *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* (1992), "You *feel* the way you do right now because of the *thoughts you are thinking at this moment*" (12). For example, if a person is solely focused on his or her perceived failures and great misfortune, that person is likely to feel depressed. If a person thinks of his or her very real accomplishments and good fortune, that person is

likely to feel joyful or at least a whole lot better. In this vein, we can see that the Baal Shem Tov's lessons about a positive or joyful mindset are still relevant and can almost be viewed as a harbinger of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. At the very least, one can specifically turn to the Baal Shem Tov's scripts in order to find a focus on God, and this focus can go far toward making one feel happier.

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES ON PRAYER IN ORDER TO ATTAIN *DEVEKUT*

Tzava'at Harivash not only provides meticulous rules for one's emotional and cognitive states; it also includes scrupulous detail on how one should pray. The reader is provided with concrete structure: one is told what words to employ when praying, how to prepare to pray, when to pray with increased vigor, how to increase one's kavanah (intent), and what time of day to engage in prayer.

In *Tzava'at Harivash* we read that, when praying, one must recite the prayers exactly as indicated, word for word. The specific letters and words selected in prayer are not trivial. One attaches to God through these prayers because the letters and words are spiritual and individually connected to the Divinity, and when put together represent unity. Therefore, when praying one must pour one's soul into *each* letter and *each* word. Indeed prayer has profound potential. By paying meticulous and fervent attention during prayer, one can affect the supernal worlds.

"Every letter contains 'worlds, souls and Divinity.' These ascend and become bound up and united with one another, with Divinity. The letters then unite and become bound together to form a word [teivah], becoming truly unified in Divinity. Man, therefore, must include his

soul in each of these aspects. All worlds will then be unified as one and ascend" (sect. 75).

ע"ה 75

כי יש בכל אות עולמות ונשמות ואלהות, ועולים
ומתקשרים ומתיחדים זע"ז, עם אלהות, ואח"כ
מתיחדים ומתקשרים יחד האותיות ונעשה
התיבה, ומתיחדים יחודים אמתיים באלהות.
וצריך כל אדם לכלול נשמתו בכל
בחי' ובחי', ואז מתיחדים כל העולמות כאחד
ועולים ונעשה שמחה ותענוג גדול אין שיעור.

In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1961), Scholem writes of the Baal Shem

Tov's emphasis on employing the exact words in text and in prayer:

"The enormous concern shown for the use of the correct phrase in the traditional texts, and the excessive pedantry displayed in this regard reveals a totally new attitude towards the function of words. And this painstaking loyalty to the fixed term does indeed seem to go hand in hand with a renewed consciousness of the magic power inherent in words" (101).

Etkes in *The BESHT: Magician, Mystic and Leader* (2005) also concurs: "It is not the content of the words of the prayer that need to be at the focus of the attention of the person praying, but rather the divinity residing within the letters" (148).

But before engaging in this holy act of prayer, one should actively and consciously *prepare*. Before commencing, one must be certain to be in a state of Awe, of fear or reverence of God (sect. 66). Again, we find a script to employ in order to get into the desired mindset to connect with God.

"When you wish to pray, first bring yourself to a state of awe, for it is the gate to enter before God. Say in your heart: 'To whom do I wish to attach myself? To the One who created all worlds by His word, gives them existence and sustains them.' Contemplate His greatness and exaltedness, and then you will be able to enter the supernal worlds" (sect. 66).

סו 66

מתחלה כשרוצה להתפלל יהיה ביראה, שהוא השער
לכנום לפניו ית', ויאמר בלבו למי אני רוצה לדבק א"ע,
להבורא בדיבורו כל העולמות ומהווה אותם ומקיים
אותם, ויתבונן בגדולתו וברוממותו, ואח"כ יכול
להיות בעולמות העליונים.

In *Tzava'at Harivash* we are also cautioned that attaining *devekut* via prayer involves *kavanah*, vigor, and intensity. Therefore, one needs to be mindful not to tire quickly, especially before reciting the most important mandatory prayers: the Hymns of Praise, the Shema, and the Amidah. Hence, those who employ techniques to clear their mind for prayer, such as reciting Psalms, should weigh the benefits of adding this additional exercise. It is vital that one not tire prematurely, because fatigue can interfere with one's ability to say the mandatory prayers appropriately.

"Do not recite many Psalms before prayer so that you will not weaken your body. By exerting your strength before prayer with other things you will not be able to recite with *devekut* the main thing, i.e., the mandatory [prayers] of the day – the "Hymns of Praise," the Shema and the Amidah. Thus say first the main thing with *devekut*. Then, if God gives you additional strength, recite Psalms and the Song of Songs with *devekut*" (sect. 38).

לח 38

לא יאמר הרבה תהלים קודם התפלה שלא יחליש גופו
ולא יוכל אח"כ לומר העיקר, ר"ל חובות היום, היינו
זמירות וק"ש ותפלה, בדביקות גדול, מחמת שהפסיד
כחו קודם התפלה בשאר דברים. רק תחלה יאמר העיקר
בדביקות, אם יתן לו השי"ת עוד כח יאמר תהלים ושיר
השירים בדביקות:

The overall message is that one must pace oneself in prayer.

"When praying, advance in gradual stages. Do not exhaust all of your strength at the beginning of prayer. Commence with composure and in the midst of prayer attach yourself with great *devekut*...strengthen

yourself bit by bit until [God] will help you to pray with intense *devekut*" (sect. 32).

לב 32

צריך לילך ממדריגה למדריגה בתפלה, שלא יפסיד כל
כחו בתחלת התפלה, רק יתחיל במחון ובאמצע התפלה
ידבק בדביקות גדולה, אז יהיה יכול לומר אפילו במרוצה
התיבות של התפלה.

If despite preparation and pacing one still has not achieved *devekut*, one should continue praying to one's utmost capacity despite having less *kavanah*. This is appropriate until the end of Aleinu, when one must increase one's *kavanah* again.

"Consider that it is to your benefit when God helps you to have complete *kavanah* for half or most of your prayer. If, in the end, you feel weak and the *devekut* is lost, what can you do? Pray to the best of your ability with lesser *kavanah* until the end of Aleinu" (sect. 61).

סא 61

יחשוב שטוב לו שהשי"ת יעזור לו שיכוין כמו חצי התפלה
או רובו בכוונה גמורה, ולבסוף כשיחלוש ושיבטל הדביקות,
מה לעשות לו, יתפלל כפי יכולתו בכוונה קטנה עד סוף עלינו.

In maintaining *kavanah*, the Baal Shem Tov offers suggestions for the new and experienced Hasid. A novice can feel an increased sense of *kavanah* while praying by increasing the volume of his voice, praying out loud, swaying his body, and referring to his siddur. However, the more experienced Hasid should strive to pray on a distinct, elevated level that is almost silent and motionless. Eventually one should learn how to pray quietly and at times silently for "an outcry rooted in *devekut* is silent" (sect. 33).

לג 33

צריך האדם ללמוד ולהרגיל את עצמו שיתפלל אפילו
הזמירות בקול נמוך ויצעק בלחש. . והצעקה שתהיה
מחמת דביקות תהיה בלחש.

In addition, when praying on this higher level one should not use his siddur; rather one should close his eyes to decrease the likelihood of distraction.

“When attached to the Supernal World, however, it is better to close your eyes, so that the sight [of your eyes] will not distract you from being attached to the Supernal World” (sect. 40).

מ 40

אבל כשהוא דבוק בעולם העליון אז יותר טוב לסגור
עיניו כדי שלא יבטל אותו הראיה מלהיות דבוק
בעולם העליון.

The timing and thoroughness of prayers are so vital that one is encouraged to modify one's sleep cycle in order to stay awake during prayer. It can be equally helpful to pace or chant hymns if one is still having difficulty shaking his sleepiness (sect. 27).

כז 27

ויהפוך הלילות לימים, ויישן ביום כמה שעות כדי
שיספיק לו מעט שינה בלילה:

MAKING THESE CHALLENGING GUIDELINES ACCESSIBLE TODAY

The heart of the Baal Shem Tov's insights on prayer can offer Jews today, especially liberal Jews, the opportunity to address some of the more common barriers to fundamental Jewish practices and values that they might be experiencing. A person can begin with the obvious by studying the precepts of the Baal Shem Tov to explore one's innermost thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of prayer. There are also questions, inspired by the Baal Shem Tov, to ask oneself in terms of intentionality— specifically, how one structures one's own time, a crucially important issue, it seems, to every person and every Jew today. Where does communion with God fit in? We spend a lot of time

prioritizing how much of the day should be devoted to work and leisure, but do we prioritize time for our relationship with the Divine? Though time seems a more precious commodity than ever, this is all the more reason to make sure our days include what can be the most fulfilling work of all: experiencing the Divine in our lives.

We can use our time to communicate with and cleave to God, and prayer can serve as the modality for this profound and life-enriching experience. For the very reason that the Baal Shem Tov's instruction on prayer is strict, it provides the Jew with a definitive structure, a wonderful rubric, to follow in order to ensure that prayer and the intentionality to feel God's presence in everything plays a significant part *in* daily life. It seems that by the process of attempting to achieve *devekut*, one can.

BECOMING INTOXICATED WITH GOD

Cleaving to God can feel like an enormous, perhaps unattainable task. However, the Baal Shem Tov challenged this notion, asserting that the common person can achieve *devekut* and can feel much better as a result. These teachings of the Baal Shem Tov provide today's liberal Jew a detailed structure for attaining what appears to be unattainable. As Ariel states,

"The central teaching of the BESHT is that man is capable of detaching himself from this world through ecstatic prayer and transcendence of the material world and thereby achieving oneness with the Divine...Hasidism promoted a new human ideal, the Hasid, as opposed to the scholar, who is intoxicated with the presence of God and who becomes illuminated with God's presence through ecstatic prayer" (175-6).

There is nothing better than being intoxicated with God. Yet many liberal Jews admit that they feel discomfort with the “G” word, with the notion of God entirely and cannot identify with the concept of God as cited in the Torah or in a siddur. As an extension of this thought, it is no surprise that liberal Jews often express difficulty in knowing how to access, no less cleave to God. The Baal Shem Tov’s revolutionary teachings offer a meaningful and different perspective of God, as well as provide a detailed path to cleaving to God that can specifically help one with these challenging yet common struggles.

C H A P T E R 3

HOW RABBI NACHMAN OF BRATSLAV ADVOCATED ACCESS TO GOD

The Baal Shem Tov believed fervently that the common man could attain *devekut* via ecstatic prayer. However, not all Hasidic rabbis agreed. Specifically after the death in 1772 of Rabbi Dov Baer, Hasidic rabbis began introducing differing streams of thought. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, exemplifies a rabbi who radically changed Hasidism and who adamantly disagreed with the Baal Shem Tov's perspective on God's accessibility, the ability to attain *devekut*, and the pathway to God. According to Rabbi Nachman, *devekut* was *not* the central religious value, for he deemed cleaving to God unattainable for the common Jew.

In *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (2004), Arthur Green explains that *devekut* was a natural value for the Baal Shem Tov because he endorsed a panentheistic perspective of God, that the only reality is God. Rabbi Nachman, however, did not experience this close accessibility to God. For Rabbi Nachman, God was distant and therefore he did not endorse *devekut* as a realistic, achievable pursuit.

In addition, *devekut* was not considered to be a possibility for most individuals because, according to Rabbi Nachman, man's sin was a serious barrier to God.² Rather than considering *devekut* a Hasid's primary aspiration, Rabbi Nachman emphasized instead the repairing of one's sins, *tiqqun*. In order to address one's sins, one must seek guidance and attach to the tzaddik. In addition to mitigating one's transgressions, the tzaddik guides the Hasid in attaining what is necessary to be closer to God—faith. So

though Rabbi Nachman believed that *devekut* was unattainable, his teachings focus on attaching to the tzaddik so one can attain faith. Green writes of the role faith plays for Rabbi Nachman: "The tremendous emphasis Nachman places upon faith alone as the way to God and upon the need for absolute purity of faith is quite unique" (51).

This chapter will address Rabbi Nachman's perspective on how one can become closer to God through faith, as documented in his collected teachings *Likutey Moharan*. According to Rabbi Nachman, it is important to recognize that one's intellect is limited and that faith is paramount; faith in God is achieved through attaching to a tzaddik.

THE ROLE OF PARADOX, DOUBT, AND CONFLICT IN FAITH

Rabbi Nachman emphasized that one must turn to faith because one's intellect is limited and cannot comprehend all, especially paradox. When it comes to God, there are significant paradoxes that man's mind particularly cannot grasp:

"Godly influx is synonymous with the concept of makifin (encircling, transcendent). For this intellect is so very great that the mind is incapable of holding it. It does not enter the mind, but encircles [it from without]. In a similar sense, we see that there are a number of profound disciplines which the human mind is incapable of understanding clearly; such as the numerous paradoxes which perplex us..." (lesson 21:4).

סימן כ"א:ד 21:4
הינו רוח-הקדש הנ"ל, שפע אלקי הנ"ל,
הוא בחינת מקיפין, שהשכל הזה הוא גדול עד למאד,
עד שאין המוח יכול לסבלו ואין נכנס במח, אלא הוא
מקיף את הראש. כמו שאנו רואים כמה הכמות עמוקות,
שאינן יכולות במח האנושי להבין על בריו, כמו כמה וכמה
מבוכות שאנו נבוכים בהם

This idea of paradox is especially relevant when considering God's role in the creation of the world, and the notion of *tsimtsum*, God's withdrawal. The mystics contend that God is always present; God is everywhere. Yet when the world was created, God withdrew. God *had* to withdraw so a Vacated Space—an area void of the infinite Ein Sof—could exist and be available for human existence. If God had remained, the Ein Sof would have consumed the area and there would have been no room for man. Ironically, in the creation of the world, we unexpectedly find God's absence. In order for life to exist, God had to withdraw. In *Likutey Moharan*, we read:

“Yet when God wanted to create the world, there was no place in which to create it, since there was nothing but Ein Sof. He therefore contracted the Light to the sides, and through this contraction the Vacated Space was made, then, within this Vacated Space, all time and space came into existence—this being the creation of the world” (lesson 64:1).

סימן ס"ד:א 64:1
וכאשר רצה השם יתברך לברא את העולם,
לא היה מקום לבראו מחמת שהיה הכל אין
סוף. על-כן צמצם את האור לצדדיו, ועל ידי
הצמצום הזה נעשה חלל הפנוי. ובתוך החלל
הפנוי הזה, נתהוו כל הימים והמדות, שהם
בריאת העולם.

In *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow* (2003), Arthur Green also writes about the paradox inherent in the perception of God's withdrawal, in that the void itself is Divine because it is created by God, so therefore it is difficult to really perceive it as a void. (Note that the word “*tsimtsum*” below is translated as God's contraction or withdrawal of Ein Sof.)

"*Tsimtsum* is a profound and challenging idea, but it also raises as many questions as it answers. One of these questions goes to the very possibility of imagining anything truly outside of God. How does the withdrawal of divine energy take place? Is it not God who does it? In fact, God withdraws out of love, seeking to make room for the other to

exist. If so, the void itself is a divine creation, one that must contain God's presence just like anything else that God creates. But if the void is created by God and contains God's presence, it really is no void at all!" (26).

Of the Vacated Space, Rabbi Nachman asserts that indeed God was and continues to be present there as well, yet this disconnect simply cannot be grasped by man. "However the actual truth is that, even so, there is surely Godliness there as well. For there is surely nothing without His life-force" (lesson 64:1).

סימן ס"ד:א 64:1
אבל באמת לאמתו בודאי אף-על-פי-כן יש
שם גם כן אלקות, כי בודאי אין שום דבר
בלעדי חיותו.

With the very foundation of the world based in paradox and separation, it is not surprising that man should find paradox and the unknown throughout life. Yet Rabbi Nachman explained that doubt, separation, conflict and ultimately struggle are not bad. He argues instead that they are natural to and indigenous within anything that exists, He notes that the creation of the world was based on separation. In effect, conflict is necessary, for God created the world through separation. "Know, too, that dispute is the aspect of Creation" (lesson 64:4).

סימן ס"ד:ד 64:4
ודע, כי מחלקת היא בחינות בריאת העולם.

Rabbi Nachman also contended that controversy can be nourishing and in fact the very fundament of life:

"Controversy raises and elevates a person [with increased zeal in the service of God.] This is because 'man is the tree of the field' (Deuteronomy 20:19). Now a tree lying on the ground cannot possibly

raise itself up, except when flood waters come over it. Then, the water picks up and carries the tree. And controversy is called water, as is written (Psalms 88:18), 'they surrounded me like water all day long; together they encircled me'" (lesson 161:1).

סימן קס"א:161:1
 המחלקת מגביה ומרים את האדם, כי "האדם עץ
 השדה" (דברים כ),
 והנה עץ המנח על הארץ, אי אפשר לו להגביה את
 עצמו, כי-אם על ידי שבאין עליו מים שוטפין אזי
 המים מרימין ונושאים את העץ, והמחלקת נקרא
 מים כמו שכתוב (תהלים פ"ח), "סבוני כמים כל
 היום הקיפו עלי יחד":

In fact, Rabbi Nachman's lessons show us that conflict is especially beneficial. Through conflict and controversy one is likely to be inclined toward error, which creates an opportunity for both greater learning and repentance. Of Torah study, for example, Rabbi Nachman states the following: "'Let this stumbling block be under your hand' (Isaiah 3:6) - these are the words of the Torah. A man does not have a clear grasp on them unless he stumbled in them [first]" (lesson 22:11).

סימן כ"ב:22:11
 והמכשלה הזאת תחת ידיך -- אלו דברי - תורה,
 שאין אדם עומד עליהם אלא-אם-כן נכשל בהם.

Rabbi Nachman also asserted that at times one must face an obstacle or hardship in order to be rewarded. He contends that this was the case in receiving the Torah. Before receiving the Torah, the Jews experienced significant hardship: they were enslaved for hundreds of years, lived through the ten plagues, crossed the sea of Reeds, and had to contend with living in the wilderness.

"The principal is that before any Jew should have a revelation in Torah and divine service, the soul is tested and refined in the exile of

the seventy languages - i.e. in their desires....Therefore before the revelation, the soul is obligated to go into exile - i.e. into their traits - in order to break them and so afterwards come to a revelation" (lesson 36:1).

סימן ל"א 36:1
זוה כלל שכל נפש מישראל קדם שיש לה התגלות
בתורה ובעבודה, אזי מנסין ומצרפים את הנפש,
בגלות של שבעים לשון, הינו בתאוותיהן. . . לכן
קדם ההתגלות, מכרח הנפש לבוא בגלות, הינו
במדותיהם, כדי לשברם, ולבוא אחר-כך להתגלות:

Therefore with this normalization of paradox, conflict and doubt, it is not surprising that Rabbi Nachman acknowledged that in addition to having difficulty reconciling God's presence or absence when the world was created, many people struggle to find God's presence in their daily life. He acknowledged that this struggle even existed for a tzaddik, a righteous man. Concerning a tzaddik's own alternately knowing and humbled relationship with God, Rabbi Nachman remained honest and unperturbed:

"Likewise with regard to God, there must be the aspect of revealing and concealing etc. For [the tzaddik] must draw closer and cleave to God, as though God, as it were, reveals Himself and draws closer to him. Yet the closer he comes to God, the more he must distance himself - i.e., the closer he comes, [the more] he must know that he is very far from God.

If he thinks and imagines in his mind that he has already gotten close to God and has attained godly knowledge, this is a sign that he knows nothing. For if he would know a bit about God, he would know that he is very distant from Him. This is because the closer a person comes to God and the more he knows, [the more] he knows that he is very distant and that he knows nothing at all" (lesson 63:3).

סימן ס"ג 63:3
וכן אצל השם יתברך צריך להיות בחינת מגלה ומכסה
וכן, כי צריך לדבק ולקרב עצמו להשם יתברך, כאלו
כביכול השם יתברך נגלה ומתקרב אליו. אבל כל מה
שמתקרב יותר להשם יתברך, צריך להתרחק יותר. הינו
כל מה שמתקרב יותר, צריך לידע שהוא רחוק מאד

מהשם יתברך.
כ אם יחשב וידמה בדעתו שכבר נתקרב להשם יתברך,
וידע בידעות השם יתברך, זה סימן שאינו יודע כלום.
כי אם היה יודע קצת מהשם יתברך, היה יודע שהוא
רחוק מאד ממנו. כי כל מה שמתקרב יותר להשם יתברך,
וידע יותר, הוא יודע שהוא רחוק מאד, ואינו יודע כלל.

In *Hasidic Thought* (1998), Jacobson also confirms this perspective that God is distant. He writes that despite man's arduous attempt to understand God, "the path towards the Infinite is an infinite one" (103). And, finally, in *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (2004), Green states that since man cannot see God, it is not surprising that man doubts God's existence:

"The experience of the absence of God, or man's inability to experience God directly must be taken seriously. Man lives in a world where God cannot be 'seen'; given this reality, doubt is an inevitable part of the life of every religious human being, and the denial of God's very existence is something at which the faithful cannot afford to scoff" (291).

Rabbi Nachman, too, to find God's presence yet he also had considerable acceptance of his own conflict with this search. Green explains that ever since Rabbi Nachman was a young child, he was profoundly aware and disturbed by his sense of God's absence. He longed to find God and was known to compose prayers in his native Yiddish tongue, pleading to God that He reveal himself. Rabbi Nachman alternated between feeling unworthy because he did not feel the Divine's presence and feeling that he indeed was blessed with Divine inspiration and could feel God's presence profoundly. Despite his large and devoted following in his adult life, he continued to have episodes of despair in his search for God. Green states that unlike other Hasidic masters, Rabbi Nachman's intimate thoughts and struggles were obvious in his works. This should not be

surprising, given Rabbi Nachman's emphasis on and normalization of conflict and struggle. Perhaps this is also why his lessons ultimately emphasize the vital role of faith. But as we shall see, Rabbi Nachman does not apply the traditional meaning of faith.

FAITH ACCORDING TO RABBI NACHMAN

Green explains that during medieval times, faith referred to one's whole-hearted belief in and loyalty to the claims of tradition, regardless of any contradiction of thought. For Rabbi Nachman, the meaning of faith differed, for he asserted that the decision to have faith is not cognitive or academic; it is instinctual and exists in every man's heart and soul. Rabbi Nachman stated that attaining faith is not a passive act where one simply accepts doctrine. It is an active process. One must heed the impulse, the longing to return to God, and then actively challenge the evil philosopher within that attempts to sabotage its attainment. Rabbi Nachman was an anti-rationalist who stressed an undeniable opposition between faith and reason. In *Tormented Master: the Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (2004)*, Green explains, "Man is confronted with the soul and its longing on one side and the mind and its scoffing on the other; his task is to choose between them" (307). Rabbi Nachman recommends seeking faith within one's very experience of doubt.

THE ROLE OF FAITH WHEN INTELLECT FAILS

Despite man's doubt about being able to feel God's presence (and the naturalness of that feeling) and the limitations of man's mind, Rabbi Nachman states that when confronted with a situation that challenges God's existence and has no explanation, one should not spend time applying intellect. Ironically, a person is truly knowledgeable once he has recognized that despite his studies, he has been and will remain ignorant. "And know! This is the culmination of knowledge. For the culmination of all knowledge [of God] is when one realizes that one knows nothing" (lesson 24:8).

סימן כ"ד:ח 24:8
ודע, שזה תכלית הידיעה, כי תכלית הידיעה
דלא ידע.

Because of the intellect's limits, a person must ultimately find solace and take refuge in faith. "It is also necessary to draw faith into the blessing of intellect. For one should not rely solely upon the intellect, as is known." (lesson 24:6).

סימן כ"ד:ו 24:6
לתוך ברכת השכל, כי אין לסמך
על השכל בעצמו כידוע. וצריך להמשיך אמונה

Rabbi Nachman repeatedly speaks of faith's protective feature in *Likutey Moharan*. For example, he asserts that when one has faith, one does not experience fear, nor can a faithful person be harmed. Rather, faith encourages growth. In contrast, when a person lacks faith, the consequences can be monumental; one can become depressed, lazy, stunted in spiritual growth, and can "rot."

"When one has faith, which is the aspect of growing power and sprouting power, he is then not harmed by any [obstacle], and he is not afraid of anybody or anything... But when [he] lacks faith, he then does not have the power to grow and the power to sprout. In that case,

he literally rots...As a result, he experiences sadness, slothfulness, and sluggishness, and literally rots" (lesson 155:1).

סימן קנ"ה:א 155:1

ועל כן כשיש לו אמונה, שהיא בחינת כח הגודל
וכח הצומח, אזי אין מזיק לו שום דבר, ואינו ירא
משום אדם ושום דבר, ומתפלל בחיות כראוי, ונוסע
להצדיק, כי אינו מתירא ומתפחד משום ענין שבעולם.
אבל כשיש חסרון באמונה, אז אין לו כח הגודל וכח
הצומח, ואזי הוא נרקב ממש, כמו החטה הנ"ל,
ועל-כן יש לו עצבות ועצלות וכבודות, והוא נרקב ממש:

In addition, Rabbi Nachman contended that faith serves as the foundation of mitzvot; therefore when lacking faith, one's ability to fully engage in mitzvot is profoundly compromised. As written in *Likutey Moharan*, "Faith is the source of the blessing...perfection of knowledge, which is the Torah, and the perfection of galgalim, [sephirot] is only through faith" (lesson 31:2).

סימן ל"א:ב 31:2

ואמונה היא מקור הברכות . . . להורות שאין שלמות
להדעת שהוא התורה, ואין שלמות לגלגלים, אלא
על ידי אמונה:

It should not be surprising that prayer, too, is negatively impacted without faith. In order to pray effectively, one has to have somebody to whom one can confidently pray. In order to pray with true efficacy, "a person has to believe that there is a M'chadesh (an Originator) with the power to originate as He sees fit" (lesson 7:1).

סימן ז"א 7:1

שיאמין שיש מחדש ובידב לחדש חבר כרצונו.

Faith is so powerful and all-encompassing that one who attains it sees that which he believes. "That is, for the believer the thing is revealed; by virtue of the magnitude of his perfect faith, it is as though his eyes see that which he believes in" (lesson 62:5).

סימן ס"ב:ה 62:5
הינו שאצל המאמין הדבר גלוי, כאלו רואה
בעיניו את הדבר שהוא מאמין בו, מחמת
גדל אמונתו השלמה:

Taking refuge in faith is supremely important for, according to Rabbi Nachman, the consequence of lacking faith can be profound—exile from Israel. "Know! The essential reason for exile is nothing other than a lack of faith" (lesson 7:1).

סימן ז"א 7:1
דע, כי עקר הגלות אינו אלא בשביל חסרון אמונה

It is obvious, then, that one should pursue the attainment of faith. However, according to Rabbi Nachman, faith cannot be attained alone. One must seek guidance from and attach to a tzaddik for its achievement. Before examining the specific role of a tzaddik according to Rabbi Nachman, it is important to have a general understanding of the notion of tzaddik since this is another major contribution of the Hasidic movement.

THE EXALTED ROLE OF THE TZADDIK

The Baal Shem Tov's assertion that the common man can attain *devekut* deeply influenced Judaism, but this was not his sole contribution. Etkes explains that though the notion of a tzaddik as a Hasidic leader did not exist while the Baal Shem Tov was alive, the Baal Shem Tov's reputation as a magical leader who was concerned about the

community greatly influenced the image of a Hasidic tzaddik that would come later. Etkes explains: "The Besht believed that his mission in life was not confined to relieving the ailments of individuals, and that he was responsible also for the welfare of the Jewish people as a whole" (251). Therefore, in addition to separating itself from other movements within Judaism by asserting that the common man could achieve *devekut*, Hasidism eventually became known for its novel communal style of leadership: the tzaddik. A tzaddik is a righteous leader who, in addition to attaining spiritual perfection as an individual by cleaving to God, also meets the Hasidic community's spiritual and at times material needs.

The exact role of a tzaddik varied somewhat depending on the community. A tzaddik might primarily be considered a teacher, a parent, a spiritual guide, or a healer. But regardless of the specific way the tzaddik is perceived, he serves as a conduit, an intermediary between the Hasidim and God, between the lower world and the upper worlds. In *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism* (1999), Rachel Elior states that the tzaddik "brings the divine world into everyday life by acting as the channel through which the divine nothingness is transformed into material being—the good fortune, abundant sustenance, and loving-kindness bestowed upon the community" (129). Jacobson describes the tzaddik as "a ladder resting upon the ground whose head reaches to the Heavens" (184-5).

In the years following the Baal Shem Tov's death, the notion developed that rather than an *individual's* attempting to attain *devekut* with God, the Hasid could now turn to a tzaddik to help him achieve a connection with God. Rabbi Nachman concurred

with some of these viewpoints of a tzaddik. He certainly viewed the tzaddikim highly, as he referring to them as 'the teachers of God' (lesson 22:1).

סימן כ"ב:א 22:1
ומחמת שהם למודי ה'

In addition, he called the tzaddik the 'covenant of peace' (lesson 33:1).

סימן ל"ג:א 33:1
ועל-ידי צדיקים שנקראו גם כן ברית שלום.

In terms of the specific role of a tzaddik, Rabbi Nachman contended that the tzaddik's most important function was being a redeemer of sin, for, as we recall, Rabbi Nachman was consumed with concern about sin. He believed that after committing a sin, one should approach the tzaddik with charity and confess his sins. The tzaddik had the ability to rescue the Hasid from the dangers associated with sin; the tzaddik could mitigate the sins and rectify all.

Rabbi Nachman ultimately advocated that the Hasid be completely dependent upon the tzaddik, and that one's unique thoughts should be disregarded and subsumed under those of this righteous intervener. He believed one should completely rely on the tzaddik for guidance and should follow the tzaddik's advice, regardless of its meagerness or magnitude and its own contradicting opinions. One should turn to the tzaddik to attain the truth, he felt, for his advice is 'entirely true seed' (lesson 7:6).

סימן ז' 7:6
ועצת הצדיק הוא כלו זרע אמת.

The absoluteness of this attachment should not be underestimated, for it is essential, according to Nachman, to the very conducting of one's life.

"The essence and foundation on which everything depends is one's binding oneself to the tzaddik of the generation:

- a) accepting his word in whatever he says, 'this is how it is,' in matters small and great; not deviating, God forbid, from his word 'to the fight of the life' (Deuteronomy 17:11), as our Sages teach' even if he tells you that right is left
- b) casting off from oneself all pseudo-wisdoms
- c) and dismissing one's knowledge as if one had no intelligence other than what one receives from the tzaddik and *rav* of the generation, because as long as one retains some of one's own intellect, one lacks completion and is not bound to the tzaddik" (lesson 123:1).

סימן קכ"ג:א 123:1

העקר והיסוד שהכל תלוי בו, לקשר עצמו להצדיק
שבדור:

- ולקבאל דבריו על כל אשר יאמר כי הוא זה, דבר קטן ודבר גדול. ולבלי לנטות, חס ושלום, מדבריו ימין ושמאל, כמו שאמרו רבותינו, זכרונם לברכה: אפלו אומר לך על ימין שמאל' וכו'.
- ולהשליך מאתו כל החכמות,
- ולסלק דעתו כאלו אין לו שום שכל, בלעדי אשר יקבל מהצדיק והרב שבדור וכל זמן שנשאר אצלו שום שכל עצמו, אנו בשלמות, ואינו מקשר להצדיק.

In addition to following the tzaddik's counsel, a person should specifically request the tzaddik to pray on his behalf, for the tzaddik knows the appropriate method for effective prayer. Regardless of one's righteous acts (fasting, prayer, etc.), Rabbi Nachman believed that a person must know that he will never be as knowledgeable or insightful as a tzaddik. "And every person must bind his prayers to the tzaddik of the generation. [For the] tzaddik knows how to match the gates [to the prayers] and raise each and every prayer to its appropriate gate. For each and every tzaddik is an aspect of Moshe-Mashiach" (lesson 9:4).

סימן ט"ד: 9:4

וצריך כל אדם לקשר את תפלתו לצדיק הדור.

והצדיק יודע לכון השערים ולהעלות כל תפלה ותפלה
לשער השיך. כי כל צדיק וצדיק הוא בחינת משה-משיח.

And ultimately, according to Rabbi Nachman, God wants to hear prayers directly from the tzaddik and hence the tzaddik knows precisely which words to employ: “[f]or God desires the prayers of the tzaddikim. He sends a well-arranged prayer into [the tzaddik’s] mouth, so that He might derive pleasure from his prayer” (lesson 10:4).

סימן יד 10:4
כי 'הקדוש-ברוך-הוא מתאוה לתפלתן של
צדיקים' (חלין ס:) ומשגר תפלה סדורה בפיו,
כדי שיהנה מתפלתו.

In addition to turning to the tzaddik after committing a sin or being in need of guidance, the Hasid should also turn to the tzaddik when in crisis or lacking faith. As a result of attaching to the tzaddik, the Hasid will speak the truth, his evil side will be diminished, and his faith will be renewed.

“They admitted the truth. This happens when a person draws closer to the [tzaddik] in order to receive ruach from [him]. As a result, [the spirit of] haughtiness and idolatry are shattered. Then even those [distant from God] - who are from [the Other Side] - recognize the greatness of the Holy One” (lesson 10:9).

סימן יט 10:9
שהן מודין על האמת; כי כשמתקרב את עצמו
לצדיקים כדי לקבל מהם הרוח כנ"ל, ועל-ידי-זה
נשבר הגאווה והעבודה זרה, ואז מכירין אפלו
אלו שהם מסטרא דמותא את גדלת הבורא
יתברך שמו כנ"ל.

Rabbi Nachman wrote extensively about the bond between a Hasid and a tzaddik. The tzaddik is likened to the Hasid’s soul that emanates throughout the Hasid’s body, providing life, nurturance, and spirituality. The Hasid represents the physical matter, the

body for this soul. "The true sage—he being the soul of the nation, for they are below him—is synonymous with the essence. Vis-à-vis him the nation is synonymous with the flesh" (lesson 22:6).

סימן כ"ב: 22:6
הינו שהחכם האמת, שהוא בחינת הנשמה להעם,
שהם למטה ממנו, הוא בחינת עצם, והעם הם
נגדו בחינת בשר.

RABBI NACHMAN VIEWS HIMSELF AS A TZADDIK

Despite holding tzaddikim in the highest regard, Rabbi Nachman's view of the tzaddik was considerably different from the perspective in vogue when *he* became a Hasidic master. Unlike other descriptions of a tzaddik, Rabbi Nachman contended that 1) a tzaddik was not free of conflict or sin (the tzaddik did experience suffering, which he contended served as atonements for Israel); and 2) In a tzaddik could lack a complete trust in God. These two rather radical descriptors certainly reflect Rabbi Nachman's own concerns in his life and therefore it should be no surprise that Rabbi Nachman stated that *he was a tzaddik*. However, he did not consider himself just one of many tzaddikim. He assigned himself the grandiose title of *the* tzaddik—ha-dor, the tzaddik of the generation. A person no less than Moses was one of his predecessors. Therefore when Rabbi Nachman taught that the Hasid should attach to a tzaddik, he meant that the Hasid should attach to Rabbi Nachman himself. Green explains that the idea of self-proclaiming one's status as a tzaddik ha-dor was rare, and Rabbi Nachman was likely the only tzaddik to make this assertion in the thirty years that preceded him.

BARRIERS TO FAITH

Just as the Baal Shem Tov stated that there are barriers to ideal prayer, Rabbi Nachman explained there are barriers to attaining perfect faith. He describes a natural vacillation in one's faith that occurs daily, as one is impacted by the vicissitudes of daily life. He explains that throughout the day one has less faith resulting from the burden of the day's requirements. Yet fortunately, upon awakening, one's faith is strengthened again. In the following text, "she" refers to faith.

"'She comes out in the morning, and is covered during the day' (Zohar II, 95a)- This is because a person's faith renews itself each morning, the aspect of 'They are renewed each morning; [abundant is your faith]' (Lamentations 3:23). 'And is covered during the day' - due to burdens of daily existence, faith is covered over" (lesson 62:5).

סימן ס"ב:ה 62:5
נפקת בצפרא ומתכסיא ביממא, כי האמונה
מתחדשת אצל האדם בכל בקר, בחינת (איכה ג):
'חדשים לבקרים' וכו'. 'ומתכסיא ביממא',
מחמת טרדת עסקי עולם, נתכסה האמונה.

Rabbi Nachman does not appear to be particularly concerned with this vacillation of faith, though he does seem justifiably worried about another threat to faith, a false tzaddik. He states that false tzaddikim prevent man from attaching to the true tzaddik, and they expose man to heresy. He refers to these false leaders as serpents that engage in prohibited study—i.e. philosophy—and only know evil. In *Likutey Moharan* he cites Jeremiah 4:22 and Genesis 3:1 when describing false tzaddikim: " 'They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.' (Jeremiah 4:22) They are the aspect of the serpent, the aspect of 'now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild beasts' (Genesis 3:1)" (lesson 63:5).

סימן ס"ג:ה 63:5
 'חכמים המה להרע ולהטיב לא ידעו', שהם
 רק חכמים להרע, שאם ירצו להשתמש בחכמותם
 להיטיב לא יוכלו. והם בחינות הנחש, בחינות
 (בראשית ג): 'והנחש היה ערום מכל חיות השדה.'

Related to his warning against false tzaddikim, Rabbi Nachman spoke strongly against the dangers of pseudo-wisdoms—i.e., heresy that appears to be true—for the pseudo-wisdoms can lead one astray, away from God and toward a serious lack of faith. Green explains that Rabbi Nachman lived during the first decades of Haskalah, a period of intellectual enlightenment. Therefore it appears that Rabbi Nachman was acutely aware of, and concerned about, the possibility that Hasidim might pursue secular intellectualism over Judaic study. "This is why a person must surely be extremely wary of this second—heresy; to flee and escape from there without delving or looking into their words at all, because, God forbid, he will surely become submerged there. Of this it is written, 'None that go to her return...' " (lesson 64: 2).

סימן ס"ד:ב 64:2
 ועל-כן בודאי מזה האפיקורסית השנית, בודאי
 צריך לזהר יותר ויותר, לברח ולהמלט משם,
 לבלי לעין ולהביט בדבריהם כלל, כי, חס ושלום,
 בודאי ישקע שם, כי עליו נאמר: "כל באיה לא ישובו"

Rabbi Nachman also explained that if the Jews had continued endorsing pseudo-wisdoms in Sinai, they would not have received the Torah.

"Had Israel not cast off from themselves the pseudo-wisdoms, they would not have received the Torah"(Lesson 123:1).

סימן קכ"ג:א 123:1
 ולולי שהיו ישראל משליכין מעצמן החכמות,

לא היו מקבלים התורה.

THE ROLE OF THE TZADDIK FOR TODAY'S LIBERAL JEWRY

For a liberal Jew, Rabbi Nachman's recommendation to completely surrender to another individual might seem preposterous,. But just as a more supple and interpretive reading of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov can be fruitful, we can benefit from the general intention of Rabbi Nachman's insights. Liberal Jews can, instead, focus on the benefit of sharing some of our deepest religious doubts, especially those that provoke a feeling of shame, for if our spiritual thoughts are primarily focused on regret, we are not likely to be at peace with the Divine within ourselves or in the world.

We can also be uplifted by Rabbi Nachman's instruction to turn to another for guidance when experiencing a spiritual crossroad or personal crisis. The Baal Shem Tov asserted that one can independently and individually attain *devekut* via prayer. But the fact is that many people benefit from the guidance of another throughout life and specifically in times of great spiritual need. The benefit of seeking assistance when trying to attain *devekut* or when searching for God is of course no exception. Somewhat ironically, though Rabbi Nachman did not believe *devekut* was attainable, his very belief in the intimate relationship one develops with another can represent a form of *devekut* if a consequence of these interactions is that one accesses the Divine within self and the Divine within the other. In *Hasidic Thought* (1998), Jacobson agrees with this perspective, at least in regard to being attached to a tzaddik. He describes this attachment as an example of a lower level of *devekut*.

A careful and reflective study of the teachings of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav can show that his contributions to Judaism are profound. He made many innovative and personally helpful assertions about faith and he boldly addressed questions that many liberal Jews continue to ponder. Questions that in fact should be explored prior to considering how one can attain the holy state of *devekut*.

C H A P T E R 4

BLENDING THE TEACHINGS OF THE TWO MASTERS

The Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Nachman offer fundamentally different thought and counsel in regards to achieving a relationship with God—the former believed this path is accessible to the common man; the latter believed that due to one's sins and God distance, the intervention of a tzaddik is required. *Both* masters can provide wisdom and guidance to the liberal Jew seeking to establish a relationship with the Divine, or seeking ways to further enhance this soul-enriching connection. In this final chapter, I will briefly review some of the major themes that the two Hasidic rabbis address in their teachings (emphasizing similarities rather than differences) and conclude with a reflection on the role that the teachings of each rabbi can play in a Jew's relationship with the Divine.

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF HIS GREAT-GRANDFATHER

In initial study it may appear that there are few, if any, similarities between the Baal Shem Tov's lessons and those of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, but there are in fact many convergences between the two. As the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov and a Hasid himself, Rabbi Nachman espoused many of his great-grandfather's beliefs, especially about mental health, the power of prayer, and importance of self negation.

Similar to the Baal Shem Tov who believed that being depressed served as a serious barrier to connecting with God, Rabbi Nachman asserted that one must avoid depression. He stated that depression is evil and is responsible for one's not being able to

appropriately complete the mitzvot. As written in *Liqutey Moharan*, Nachman believed that “sadness is a very evil trait. Likewise, a person’s not praying [or studying Torah with inspiration and intensity] is due to sadness and slothfulness” (lesson 155:1).

סימן קנ"ה:א 155:1
עצבות הוא מדה רעה מאד. ומה שהאדם אינו נוסע
להצדיק, הוא מחמת עצבות וכבדות.

Again, like his great-grandfather who believed that one should recite scripts in order to elevate one’s state and return to a space of positive inclination, Rabbi Nachman emphasized that it is essential to find the redeeming parts within oneself as opposed to focusing solely on one’s imperfections or prior sins: “Likewise, a person must find [some good point] within himself. It is known that a person must take care to be happy always and to keep very far away from depression” (lesson 282:2).

סימן רפ"ב:ב 282:2
וכן צריך האדם למצא גם בעצמו, כי זה ידוע שצריך
האדם לזהר מאד להיות בשמחה תמיד, ולהרחיק
העצבות מאד מאד.

Although Rabbi Nachman did not contend that one can achieve *devekut* via prayer, as his great-grandfather believed, Nachman still spoke of prayer’s immense power and its ability to alter the future: “[prayer] corresponds to miracles, the supernatural. For prayer transcends nature; the natural course dictates a certain thing, but prayer changes nature’s course. This is a miracle” (lesson 7:1).

סימן ז"א 7:1
זוה בחינת נסים למעלה מהטבע, כי התפלה למעלה
מהטבע, כי הטבע מחיב כן, והתפלה משנה
הטבע, זוה דבר נס

And similar to the Baal Shem Tov who stated that one would likely experience alien thoughts, Rabbi Nachman normalized the fact that one had evil inclinations. In *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (2004), Green asserts that according to Rabbi Nachman, there is a heretic within every person. “The Evil One exists in the form of a philosopher, challenging faith and denying God, inside the heart of every would-be believer” (291). Yet as we have seen, unlike the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Nachman emphasized the profound power and negative impact of this sinner within.

Finally, Rabbi Nachman echoed the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov about man’s foregoing an autonomous self and focusing on God. Rabbi Nachman warned, too, about the importance of negating the self and stated that man should not concern himself with material needs: “And this is an aspect of stripping oneself of corporeality. For when a person wants to be encompassed in the will of Ein Sof, he must negate his material being” (lesson 4:9).

סימן ד:ט 4:9
וזה בחינת התפשטות הגשמיות. כי כשרוצה להכלל
ברצון אין סוף, צריך לבטל את הישות שלו,

We see, therefore, that despite the fact that Baal Shem Tov’s and Rabbi Nachman’s messages about the specific pathways and ability to achieve *devekut* differed, they shared certain similar beliefs. Ultimately the teachings of each of these Hasidic rabbis play an important role in the evolution of Jewish thought, especially in terms of considering the common man’s relationship with the Divine.

As alluded to in Chapter 2, the Baal Shem made a revolutionary assertion that one need not be of a certain stature to cleave to God. This empowering notion allows an independent Jew today to engage in the path toward cleaving to God, regardless of his or her Jewish education. In addition, the Baal Shem Tov's panentheistic view of God, that the only reality is God, shifted the notion of an inaccessible remote God to a God that is present within the world, even within man.

While affirming and powerful, the Baal Shem Tov's contention that the common Jew is capable of achieving *devekut* serves only as a starting point for considering a relationship with the Divine. This is precisely where some of Rabbi Nachman's personal truths about his relationship to God can be helpful to today's liberal Jew. The fact that a tzaddik, a righteous man who is *supposed* to easily feel God's presence, felt distant from God can ultimately be reassuring, as it normalizes the questions and doubts that many Jews, especially modern Jews, harbor. Rabbi Nachman's acknowledgment that conflict, doubt, and struggle are natural and even essential parts of knowing God validate the complex feelings that we as analytical thinkers may experience in our relationship with God. Finally, Rabbi Nachman's assertion that there are barriers to attaining faith, and that this fluctuation is natural, can bring comfort to a seeking Jew. Nachman unflinchingly addressed these struggles. In so doing, he delved into the truth that many Jews in the past and current day experience: the absence of God, or the difficulty in finding God. Ultimately, we learn from Rabbi Nachman that these thoughts do not signify that one does not have a strong relationship with God. Rather, we see that the struggle is an important and probably essential part of the process of establishing a relationship with the Divine.

STRINGING THE PEARLS

Study of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav may require extra patience today, but the profound insights of these two Hasidic masters can provide complementary guidance in helping the common Jew find God. Both the Baal Shem Tov and Rabbi Nachman attempted to address the need that lies at the core of many human souls, how one can establish a relationship with the Divine. By selecting, updating, and then integrating the various pearls that each rabbi offers—for example, the notion that everybody has the ability to cleave to God, that God is everywhere, that struggle and doubt are common in one's search for God, that regularly placing prayer in our lives is a wonderful discipline, and that one can make progress in establishing a relationship with the Divine by seeking assistance from another (rabbi, cantor, hevrotah, congregant)—we may indeed be more likely to find our soul's desire, the path to God.

Bibliography

Ariel, David. *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism*. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1988.

Burns, David D. *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. New York: Avon Books, 1992.

Elior, Rachel. *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism*. Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006

Etkes, Immanuel. *The BESHT: Magician, Mystic, and Leader*. Translated by Saadya Sternberg. Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2005.

Green, Arthur. *Ehyeh: A Kabbalah for Tomorrow*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, , 2003.

Green Arthur. *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav*. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing. 2004.

Idel, Moshe. *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Idel, Moshe. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988.

Jacobson, Yoram. *Hasidic Thought*. Translated by Jonathan Chipman. Tel Aviv, Israel: Mod Books, 1998.

Schochet, Immanuel J. *Tzava'at Harivash: The Testament of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov*. Brooklyn, New York: Kehot Publication Society, 1988.

Scholem, Gershom G. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1961.

Scholem, Gershom G. *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*. New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1971.

Tishby, Isaiah. *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*. Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002.

Notes

¹ Scholars debate *how* close one is to God when attaining devekut, specifically if one also achieves *unio mystica*, one's soul being united with God. While this "placement" is not a main focus of this paper, it is an important issue pertaining to devekut and therefore merits brief attention. According to Yoram Jacobson in *Hasidic Thought* (1998), devekut is not *unio mystica*. While Jacobson describes Hasidic devekut as "unity with the Divine reality present in the world and within man," he states that this union is *not* equivalent to *unio mystica*, for the Hasidim focus on finding the Divine *within* the concrete world, not above (59). David Ariel in *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* (1988) agrees with this perspective. He states that devekut differs from *unio mystica* because, with devekut, one does not merge into the Divine. One still maintains a separate identity.

In *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (1971), Gershom Scholem concurs that no documentation exists that states that the Baal Shem Tov believed devekut was equivalent to *unio mystica*. According to Scholem, there is evidence that the Baal Shem Tov maintained a panentheistic approach, "all Being *in* God, but not all Being God" (223). The Baal Shem Tov did not stress "a 'union' or 'unity' between God and man" (225). He did not assert that the creator and creation are one. Ultimately, his teachings contradict a notion of unity between God and man. Instead, Scholem asserts that devekut is as close to "union as a mystical interpretation of Judaism would allow" (203-4). Scholem defines devekut as communion.

In Kabbalah: New Perspectives (1988), Moshe Idel challenges Scholem's assertion that *devekut* is not *unio mystica* and highlights numerous Neoplatonic, Kabbalistic, and Hasidic texts that affirm this idea of unity between man and God. He asserts that the following text by R. Yehiel Mikhael of Zloczow, one of the Baal Shem Tov's major disciples, is evidence of *unio mystica* because the Jew's soul is lost in the Ein Sof, and no longer has a separate existence.

"The Jews 'made all their powers cleave to their thought [and] to the Creator, blessed be He, as they were wont to do in the past. Therefore, they are very great, for the branch arrives at its root, this [arrival] being a union with the root, and the root is the Ein Sof; thence the branch is also Ein Sof, as its existence was annihilated as in the simile of the single drop which has fallen into the great sea, and arrived at its root, and hence is one with the water of the sea, so that it is totally impossible to recognize it per se' " (68).

While Idel reviews texts from multiple rabbis, including R. Dov Baer, the Great Maggid, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady, and Rabbi Levi Issac of Berdichev, it is interesting to note that he does not cite text specifically from the Baal Shem Tov, unlike Scholem. Nevertheless, I agree with Scholem's stance that *devekut* is communion with God and not union with God. The act of cleaving to an *other*—in this case with the Divine—demonstrates that the person is adhering to something *other* than self. In attempting to adhere to an *other*, one is obviously separate and not in union.

2

Unlike the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Nachman focused extensively on man's sins and its negative effects. The Baal Shem Tov described sin as a potential barrier to attaining *devekut*, but contended that because all is rooted in the Divine, ultimately one was capable of uplifting one's thoughts and overcoming that barrier. Man's sins were not

a focus of the Baal Shem Tov. As Green states in *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav* (2004), the Baal Shem Tov's "optimism about the nature of man has been cast aside" (183) by his great-grandson. Green explains that Rabbi Nachman's focus on sin was not a common Hasidic perspective; rather, it reflected the thought of Lurianic Kabbalists.