

CONNECTING TO THE TZADDIK

The Tzaddik's entire purpose is to bring people closer to God. Because of his elevated spiritual level, the Tzaddik is able to pull us up through many levels of spiritual turbulence and put us back on the right track. By making a connection to the Tzaddik, a person's connection with God can be utterly transformed.

Tzaddikim have always been an integral part of Jewish life, from the beginning of our history. In today's world however, it can be a tremendous challenge to perceive a person of this caliber. Rebbe Nachman teaches that we have to plead with God a great deal in order to draw close to such a Tzaddik. Two thousand years of exile have numbed our spiritual sensitivities, as well as our ability to be led in a unified way. The *Yetzer HaRa* – the Evil Inclination – is working overtime to confuse the world, especially now, since we are very close to the end of our exile, and there exists a yearning for God like no other time (*Likutey Moharan Tinyana* 78).

The ability to identify an authentic Tzaddik – an individual so spiritually refined himself – largely depends on us and our level of character refinement. Without developing our own potential, we lack the ability to perceive another person at this level. In other words, the more like Tzaddikim we become, the better we are able to identify and relate to the Tzaddik. The advantage of a connection to someone with greater understanding than ourselves, is that we can receive proper guidance on both physical and spiritual levels. This will initiate a healing process, enabling us to become whole and balanced Jews. Ultimately, we will then be lifted to higher levels of perception, where we will understand how everything that happens to us is for our benefit.

What do you do when you think you may have found a real Tzaddik? It takes great effort to draw close to the Tzaddik. The obstacles can be obvious or very subtle – the subtle ones usually hold us back the most. In any case, a person needs boldness to overcome all obstacles to a holy goal.

Rebbe Nachman describes a practical three-step process that allows a person to connect with the Tzaddik (*Likutey Moharan* 4). He teaches that one who wants to travel on a holy path must break all of his negative character traits, which are rooted in the four fundamental classifications of life forms: mineral, vegetable,

animal and human. He must also recount his misdeeds before the Tzaddik in spoken confession. This process is not to be confused with the non-Jewish version; confession in and of itself does not absolve a person – it merely marks a starting point. The work has just begun! The Tzaddik will explain and clarify a path that corresponds to the root of the person's soul, and then the process of repairing what needs to be fixed begins.

The three stages of connecting to the Tzaddik are as follows:

- 1. Seeing the Tzaddik.** This stage nullifies the bad character traits originating from the mineral and vegetable elements, corresponding to sadness and evil desires, as well as their derivatives. These traits are nullified through gazing at the face of the Tzaddik.
- 2. Giving charity to the Tzaddik.** Through this, one is saved from bad traits rooted in the animal and human elements, which correspond to meaningless conversation and arrogance, as well as all other derivative traits.
- 3. Spoken confession in the presence of the Tzaddik.** The Tzaddik can then guide one on a straight path, which is in harmony with the root of the person's soul. Through spoken confession, one is saved from everything.

These steps are the guideline that Rebbe Nachman gives us and, in practice, there could be a large span of time between each step and they can take place in a variety of contexts. Furthermore, the above sequence can be done in any order (*HaRav Elazar M. Kenig*). Connecting to the Tzaddik is always beneficial. Striving to be more Tzaddik-like ourselves will help us to perceive the Tzaddik, who can then direct us back to God. 🌱