

Chayei Nefesh: An Inquiry into the Role of the Tzaddik

Rabbi Gedaliah Aharon Kenig

Translated by David Zeitlin and David Sears

Agudas Sha'arei Tzaddik

Tzefat, Israel

© 2005 The Breslov Center

This translation represents approximately one fourth of Rabbi Gedaliah Kenig's groundbreaking study that attempts to reconcile the Chassidim and the Misnagdim, and to present the core teachings from the Breslov literature and elsewhere on the concept of the tzaddik and *hiskashrus*, or the imperative to cleave to the tzaddikim. The online version is still unedited, and there are a number of questions we would like to present to the author's son, Rabbi Elazar Mordechai Kenig of Tzefat, *shlita*, concerning translation issues. The rest of the book still needs much work. Nevertheless, we hope to finish this project during the course of the coming year, with the help of Hashem. Anyone who would like to expedite this by buying a dedication may contact us through the Breslov Center: meoreiohr@aol.com. All contributions are tax deductible.

Chayei Nefesh, Part I

With God's help

Evening of the second day of the week corresponding to the Torah reading "L'yishuosichah Kivisi Hashem", seven days in the tenth month, which is the month of Teves, of the year 5724 (1964 c.e.), here in our city of holiness and beauty, Jerusalem, may it be speedily rebuilt and established, amen.

So shall the God fearing man be blessed,¹ who fears the word of God (*es d'var Hashem*).² The demonstrative "es" is interpreted by the Talmud to include the holy words of the authentic Torah scholars of every generation,³ which are uttered in truth and righteousness as from the mouth of Moses, and are received as from the mouth of the Almighty.

My beloved friend...

After inquiring about your well-being, as is proper, please know that the measure has already been filled, and I come today to commit to writing my response to the question that you asked some time ago, and which I answered verbally then. Now I will do so again, in writing and by letter, according to your just request that it may remain for the future. With God's help, it shall benefit those who truly fear Heaven, the Chassidim who remain, to whom God calls,⁴ "believers in God and Moses, His servant"⁵ – those who cling to the Tree of Life, which is the *tzaddik*,⁶ "with all their

¹ Psalms 128:4.

² Exodus 9:20.

³ *Pesachim* 22b citing Deuteronomy 6:13.

⁴ Joel 3:4.

⁵ Exodus 14:31.

⁶ *Tikkunei Zohar* 21a.

heart and all their soul and all their might."⁷ Indeed, this is what the Torah itself commands: that we attach ourselves to the Sages and their disciples, may God imbue them with life.⁸ Since I am compelled to speak somewhat at length in my letter "so that all nations of the earth may know that 'The Lord is God, there is nothing else,' "⁹ Who desires the peace of His trusted servant, therefore I have deemed it best to divide it into sections and to indicate them with the pure letters [of the Hebrew alphabet].

Alef/1. Your question was expressed as follows:

Someone challenged me concerning what is written in the holy book, *Nefesh HaChaim* of Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (Gate 3, Chapter 9), on the subject of *hiskashrus*: "Even to make oneself subservient and to attach oneself through any manner of service to the aspect of *ruach ha-kodesh* that is within any [authentic] Prophet or anyone else who possesses *ruach ha-kodesh* -- this, too, is called actual idolatry." In truth, the problem is not difficult for me at all and does not make any impression upon me, because I believe with complete faith that all the words of our Rebbe [Rabbi Nachman of Breslev] are true, and one cannot dispute even the least detail of his holy words. However, since I would like to know what to answer [the critics of Chassidism] I am referring this question to you in the hope that it may soon receive clarification.

Beis/2. May it be known to you my beloved friend, that this question did not arise of late, nor is it new, but it is quite old...(remainder unpublished)

⁷ Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁸ Rashi, Deuteronomy 11:22, quoting *Sifri*.

⁹ Liturgy, citing Deuteronomy 4:39.

Gimmel/3. (Unpublished)

Daled/4. However, we maintain that it is impossible that there could be any contradiction between [Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin's] holy words and the premises of Chassidism. For I have received a tradition from the house of my father and master [Rabbi Elazar Mordechai Kenig, after whom the present Rav of the Tzefat Breslev community, *shlita*, is named], as well as from the house of my teacher [Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz], that the issues in the dispute between the Chassidim and the scholars known as the *P'rushim*¹⁰ did not touch upon the principles and foundations of our religion. In fact, these principles and foundations of our holy faith are beyond dispute. All Jews share the same underlying faith in the absolute unity of the Creator, may He be blessed, in Divine Providence, in His holy Torah, and in his faithful servants, who are the Prophets and Sages, the true *tzaddikim* of every generation, and in their holy words that are spoken in truth. This is the very foundation of the entire Torah, both Written Torah and the Oral Torah. Since the words of *Nefesh HaChaim* mentioned above deal with fundamental and essential matters of our holy faith, then clearly it is impossible to conjecture that the Chassidim, may God protect and bless them, say or think otherwise, heaven forbid.

Similarly, we cannot maintain that the path of the Chassidim concerning their faith in and attachment to the true *tzaddikim* and Sages and their holy words could contradict the author of *Nefesh ha-Chaim* in a matter of such consequence as this. Therefore, it only remains for us to thoroughly consider the true word of God that is in his holy mouth and to strive with all our resources and intellect to discern the true meaning of his remarks. This is what our holy fathers, teachers and Sages did when they exerted themselves, bodily, spiritually and materially, in order to establish the books of Ezekiel, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs on a proper footing, that they should

¹⁰ Literally, "those who have separated themselves" (from impurity). The term usually refers to the Pharisees of the Talmudic period, but is also used to refer to the 18th-19th century school of non-Chassidic kabbalist-ascetics, the most prominent of whom was Rabbi Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon. His foremost disciple was Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin.

be understood as not contradicting the Torah, but rather as being in accord with it (as the Talmud explains in *Shabbos* 13b and 30b).

Hay/5. (Unpublished)

Vav/6. And now, I stand in supplication before God and ask Him to sustain and support me with His righteous right hand and grant me the merit to express the truthful resolution of this issue, eloquently, without any room for misunderstanding or any element of impropriety, Heaven forbid, contrary to the correct and desired intention of my heart in the depth of these basic matters.

May He be with my mouth when I expound and with my hands when I act, both the act of writing and the written work, concerning such subtle and spiritual matters which stand at the very heights of the universe,¹¹ in the merit of all the true *tzaddikim*, may their merits protect us, from whose mouths we live, here in this world and there in the Afterlife forever, who derive great pleasure and delight when we eagerly explore the ramifications of their holy words¹² to present them correctly and to bring forth the light of their righteousness and their truth for all eyes to see. In their merit, may the Master of Peace spread his Tabernacle of Peace upon us and upon the entire house of Israel, His holy people, and may our eyes behold, speedily in our days, that the vessel which holds blessing for the Jewish people be filled with the light of true supernal peace in actuality, *amen*.

Zayin/7. I have realized that it would be beneficial to quote the words of *Nefesh ha-Chaim* somewhat at length, as relevant to our theme, and with this to clearly delineate what at first glance seems to be a strong question. Afterwards, I will attempt to clarify his holy words, as they must perforce be understood in their context, as God's beneficent hand rests upon us. Then I will explain the nature and concept of *hiskashrus* and cleaving to *tzaddikim* and the true Torah scholars of

¹¹ *Berachos* 6b.

¹² *Sanhedrin* 90b.

every generation in general, and particularly at the time of prayer.

The basis for our response will be the true sacred teachings of our holy master, the *Nachal Novea Mekor Chochmah* ["A flowing brook, the source of wisdom" (Proverbs, 18:4), the initial letters of which spell the name "NaChMaN" -- a reference to Rabbi Nachman of Breslev], as they are expounded in his holy writings. By these means, with God's help, all doubts will be dispelled, and peace will rest upon Israel.

It is written in *Nefesh ha-Chaim* (Gate 3, Chapter 9):

This is the meaning of the Scriptural verse "And you shall know today and impress upon your heart that God is the Lord." (Deuteronomy 4:39). That is, a person should not intend to serve or to cling by any form of worship to any power in general or in particular, in heaven or on earth below, but only to direct his entire intention to the essential and unique Divine Name Y-H-V-H, may His name be blessed, the all-inclusive Source from which all forces derive their existence. Even to make oneself subservient and to attach oneself through any manner of service to the aspect of *ruach ha-kodesh* within any [authentic] Prophet or anyone else who possesses *ruach ha-kodesh* -- this, too, is called actual idolatry.

We find that Nebuchadnezzar, when he prostrated himself before Daniel, did not consider Daniel to be the Deity and Creator of the universe, but only intended by means of his prostration to worship and cling to the *ruach ha-kodesh* within him. So it is written in the Book of Daniel (2:46-47): "Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and prostrated himself to Daniel, and with offerings and incense he wished to exalt him. The King exclaimed to Daniel, 'In truth, I know that your God is the God of Gods, Lord of Kings and the Revealer of Secrets, since you were able to reveal this secret...' [And it further states,] 'At last Daniel came before me . . . in whom is the spirit of the Holy Lord' " (Daniel 4:5). Our Rabbis explain (*Sanhedrin*

93a): "The reason that Daniel was not present during the ceremonial bowing down to the idol was that Daniel said, 'I will go away from here so there should not be fulfilled in me the Divine injunction, "The graven images of their gods shall be burned..." ' Nebuchadnezzar also said, 'Let Daniel go away from here so that it should not be said that I burned my god in fire.' " And see what is written in *Zohar Chadash* (Ruth 72b).

In *Bereishis Rabbah* 96:6 and *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi*, 3, it states: "Likewise, we find concerning Daniel [after he had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream]: 'And then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and prostrated himself to Daniel, and with offerings and incense he wished to exalt him.' However, Daniel did not accept his gifts. Why? Because just as punishment is meted out to idol-worshippers, so too, is punishment meted out to the object of idolatry itself."

[The *Midrash Tanchuma*] gives the same reason for Jacob's refusal to be buried in Egypt. Hence, we see that our Sages called this idolatry, even though the worship was meant to exalt the *ruach ha-kodesh* within the Prophet.

Accordingly, it could be said that the scriptural commandment, "Thou shalt not have other gods before My face," (Exodus 20:3), means not to address in any manner, heaven forbid, any particular force, even if that force should be an aspect of [God's] "Face" – that is, even the aspect of *ruach ha-kodesh* in any person or aspect of holiness within the loftiest spiritual force. As our Sages state, " 'You shall not make beside Me gods of silver or gods of gold...' (Exodus 20:20). Even the likeness of those who minister unto Me on high, such as the *Ophanim*, the *Seraphim*, the *Chayos Ha-kodesh* [and Ministering Angels] you shall not make." (*Rosh Hashanah* 24b).

Although the admonition concerning all forms of idolatry

applies primarily to the four cardinal acts of idolatry,¹³ the truth is that in these times, when the service of prayer with submissiveness of the heart takes the place of the sacrificial offerings, this admonition applies here as well. As it is written, 'He who sacrifices unto idols will be banished; only to God alone...' (Exodus 22:19), his intent should not be to serve any particular power derived from the spiritual forces that God has appointed, with any manner of worship or other service, Heaven forbid. Rather, one must only direct his prayers to the essential Divine Name Y-H-V-H, which is designated to Him alone, may He be blessed...

Ches/8. Your question was prompted by the apparent discrepancy between all this and the words of our holy Rebbe, may his merits protect us, who speaks at length in his holy books on the necessity of attachment, connection and cleaving to the true *tzaddikim* of the generation in general, and on the necessity of attachment to the true *tzaddikim* of the generation at the time of prayer in particular. This is clearly explained in *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 2, "*Emor El Hakohanim*," section 6; also in Lesson 9, "*Tehomos Yechasyumu*," section 4; and it further states explicitly in *Sichos ha-Ran*, section 296, that our Rebbe enjoined his followers to say prior to prayer, "I formally bind myself to all the *tzaddikim* of our generation..."

Tes/9. However, in truth, the matter is not problematic at all. For just as far as the heavens are from earth, and as the east is from the west, so is the content of the words of one [i.e., Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin] far removed and distant from the other [i.e., Rabbi Nachman of Breslev]. And they neither attack, nor challenge, nor impinge upon one another. There is no conflict between their words, Heaven forbid, and no difficulty, no rebuttal, no refutation, and no cause for wonder in the least.

On the contrary, the words of both are true, and all their words illuminate as the mid-day sun when it shines upon the earth and its fullness. They enlighten our

¹³ The Talmud enumerates four cardinal acts of idolatry: sacrificing, burning incense, pouring libations, and prostrating oneself (*Sanhedrin* 60b).

eyes and our minds with the light of truth in order to know and comprehend the principles and foundations of our holy, pure, and true faith. For that which one did not reveal, the other did, and "One master said one thing and one master said another, and they do not argue."¹⁴ Our teacher, Rabbi Chaim, may his merits protect us, instructs us in the above-mentioned chapter on the ways of guarding and cautioning oneself against whatever might threaten to corrupt Divine service and prayer. And our holy Rebbe, may his merits protect us, reveals and gives us to understand the ways to perfect and elevate prayer to its proper place, as we will attempt to make clear, with God's help.

Yud/10. A person who looks with a truthful eye at the holy words of our master, Rabbi Chaim, will clearly see that his intent is only to say that one should not make any power or entity in Heaven or on earth the object of any form of worship or prayer. This includes the worship of any aspect of *ruach ha-kodesh* within a prophet or divinely inspired person, as well as the aspect of holiness within any power, however lofty. Neither may one pray to any power or entity or aspect of holiness because he conceives it to be divine and an autonomous spiritual force, heaven forbid, as if it had within itself the ability to bestow good or evil, or independently to redeem the person who prays to it from distress. This applies even though he does not identify this object of his worship with the Lord, Creator of all that exists, but believes that above it, too, resides a Higher Power and Authority which created it – because any service or prayer in this manner is termed actual idolatry.

The proof that Rabbi Chaim brings from Nebuchadnezzar supports this, inasmuch as Nebuchadnezzar prostrated himself to Daniel because of the holy divine spirit within him and sought to exalt him with offerings and incense. His intention was to worship Daniel himself, because he considered him to be a divine being, an independent spiritual power, due to the spirit of the Holy Lord which dwelled within him, even though he did not hold him to be the Lord, Creator of all that exists. This is implicit within the expression "and he wished to exalt him," meaning to exalt Daniel specifically. He took him to be a god and an independent

¹⁴ *Bava Metzia* 11a; *Chullin* 105a.

spiritual power, as the commentary of Rashi explains (ad loc.). Therefore, Daniel did not want to receive anything from him. This is because just as God exacts retribution from worshippers of idols, so does he exact retribution from the idols themselves. For this reason Jacob begged that he not be buried in Egypt, so that the Egyptians should not make him into an object of idolatry and worship him. Jacob recognized the unrestrained passion of the Egyptians for evil and the misapprehensions within which they were ensnared. Therefore he begged to be spared from this, as is explained in *Bereishis Rabbah* 96:6 and in the *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayechi*, section 3.

The *Midrash Rabbah* and *Midrash Tanchuma* go on to state:

Likewise, concerning Hiram: Since he made himself a deity, what was his end? It is written, "For your heart was proud, and you said 'I am a god'" (Ezekiel 28:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "Lo, you think you are wiser than Daniel – Nebuchadnezzar sought to sacrifice unto him, and Daniel did not desire this. Yet you make yourself a god!"

Thus, we see that these *midrashim* equate the mistake of Nebuchadnezzar, in that he prostrated himself to Daniel, with the mistake of Hiram, who deified himself. On this basis, you can also reckon the mistake of these two [idolrous rulers] as equivalent to that of the Egyptians [concerning Jacob], because they are related one to another in the *Midrash Rabbah* and *Midrash Tanchuma*. Similarly, it is further elucidated in *Yalkut Shimoni (Yechezkel, Remez 367)*, and likewise explained by the Rabbis in *Sanhedrin* (93a) and in the *Zohar Chadash (Ruth 72b)* why Daniel was not present when the royal command was given for everyone to bow down to the idol. Nebuchadnezzar had ordered Daniel to leave, so that it should not be said, "We cast the Deity into fire." Therefore, it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar considered him divine.

As for the [above-mentioned] interpretation in *Rosh Hashana* 24b, " 'You shall not make beside Me...' – Even the likeness of those who minister unto Me on

high, such as the *Ophanim*, *Seraphim* and the *Chayos ha-Kodesh...*" any careful consideration of this Talmudic statement must show that its purpose is actually to restrain those who make idols from worshipping them. This accords with what Ramban explains in his Commentary on the Torah (Exodus 20:3). However, our master, Rabbi Chaim, extends the literal implication of these words to prohibit directing any form of service whatsoever [to the heavenly beings enumerated above]. Certainly in this broader sense, the prohibition applies when one specifically intends to worship them, as the Talmud expressly concludes (ibid.).

Similarly, the Torah says, "Those who sacrifice unto other gods will be banished; only God alone..." (Exodus 22:19). Ramban explains this to mean that one should not put his faith in any of them, neither to take any of them upon himself as a deity, nor to say unto it, "You are my god" (op cit.).

Yud Alef/11. Thus, with the help of God, I have shown and given you to know that all the sources enumerated in the above-mentioned *Nefesh ha-Chaim*, which were brought to support his holy words, when seen in their proper contexts force one to conclude: the purpose of our Sages was to forbid one to submit himself in any manner of prayer or religious service to any power, spiritual entity or entities, or aspects of holiness, if one specifically intends to worship them. [However, attachment to *tzaddikim* is another matter entirely.]

Yud Beis/12. A teaching that fully accords with my words may be found in *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, where our master, Rabbi Yosef Albo, explains the error of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Hiram:

There is another group that errs after idolatrous practices, following a deeper rationale. They share the view of those philosophers who say, 'God has abandoned the universe.' And notwithstanding their belief in the existence of God and His Oneness, that He is neither a physical being nor merely identical with the life-force within the physical, they deny the reality of Divine Providence in this mundane world altogether. Their definition of God's loftiness dictates that He

does not concern Himself with humankind because man is inferior, despicable and contemptible in His eyes. This lack of divine involvement with any lowly matter they take to be a virtue and a necessary consequence of His exaltedness; for according to them, it is better to be ignorant of insignificant things than to be attentive to them. (That is, it would be far greater for God to ignore insignificant matters than to know about them, as is discussed in the commentary *Sherashim*, ad loc.).

Job was inclined toward that view. Therefore, he attributed the directorship of this lowly world to astrological forces. The [above-mentioned philosophers] declared that the events of this lowly world are determined by the constellations, and God has no knowledge of [this world] at all. They maintained that since God created stars, planets, constellations and angels to preside over the lower world and apportioned sovereignty over the nations to them, as it is written, "...which the Lord, your God, apportioned to the nations under Heaven" (Deuteronomy 4:19), and all sustenance comes through them, it is appropriate that we should prepare ourselves to receive sustenance from the heavenly spheres and that we should worship them, since they [determine our circumstances] and confer bounty on us.

This was the notion of the cursed women who addressed the Prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 44:15-19). Similarly they asserted that it is possible for man and woman to predicate the exact time of [biological conception] within a given astrological configuration, in order that a human being should be formed upon whom will rest a certain spiritual force from one of the heavenly bodies. This person would become a sorcerer or diviner of future events from the spiritual power of this heavenly body, until he might conceivably rise to the level of eliciting worship unto himself, as in other [idolatrous cults] of the ancients.

This was the error of Pharaoh and Hiram, King of Tzur, who deified themselves, and the mistake of Nebuchadnezzar, who made Daniel into an object of idolatry, as it is written, "And he prostrated himself to Daniel and sought to exalt him with offerings and libations" (Daniel 2:46). All this happened because they did not believe that God has any direct concern with humanity whatsoever... (*Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, Discourse 3, chapter 18).

Thus, we clearly see that the author of *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* also considers that the error of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Hiram consisted in their deification of themselves or others, and in taking them to be autonomous spiritual powers. [They worshipped human beings] because they considered them to be masters of fate, bearers of heavenly influence, and overseers of mankind and this lowly world in its entirety; and they negated God's concern with this world.

Certainly, this is called actual idolatry. "And like he who sacrifices to the lord of the mountain – whether one does so to the smallest worm of the sea, or even to the eminent archangel Michael, it is still considered 'slaughtering to the dead'" (*Chullin* 40a). See further in *Chiddushei Aggados* of the Maharsha, *Sanhedrin* 38b, beginning with the section "*Niflichu lo...*"

Yud Gimel/13. Now whoever examines the text of *Nefesh HaChaim* will see that it is written at the beginning of the section cited above (Gate 3, Chapter 9):

This is [the implication of the verse,] "You shall know this day and lay it upon your heart that God is the Lord..." (Deuteronomy 4:39). That is to say, one must neither intend to make oneself subservient, nor attach oneself by any manner of devotion, to any particular force or forces that exist in the heavens above or upon the earth below...

This was the basic idolatry of the early generations beginning in the time of Enosh, for then idol-worship began to spread through the world... They served the planetary forces... Not that they thought

that any particular star or planet was the Creator of the universe... but the fundamental error of the generation of Enosh consisted in that they conceived, according to their erroneous views, that "God is lofty, and His glory is above the heavens," and it is beneath His dignity to pay attention to the creatures of this lowly world.

Therefore, they assumed that the Creator, may He be blessed, removed His providence from them and gave it over to the heavenly forces and constellations, that they should direct this world according to their predilections... They considered it profane, audacious and absolutely forbidden before God to worship His glorious and awesome Name and to beseech Him for their mundane needs. For this reason, they made themselves subservient and addressed all of their forms of worship and supplication to the planetary forces... This was the view of the cursed women who said to Jeremiah, ["And from the time we stopped burning incense to the works of Heaven,¹⁵ and desisted from our libations, we have lacked everything..." (Jeremiah 44:18).]

Additionally, there were those who made themselves subservient, offered sacrifices, and burned incense to those human beings whose particular astrological configurations seemed to be powerful...

As we see, this chapter [of *Nefesh ha-Chaim*] begins by discussing the error of idolaters who go astray and declare that God removed His direct involvement with this world, and transferred it to the particular forces instrumental in the act of creation and to the heavenly host. Hence, they went astray and made gods of them, served them and prayed to them. [Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin] continues to develop this theme until later in the chapter he states, "Even to serve [or to attach oneself through any manner of service to the aspect of *ruach ha-kodesh* within any

¹⁵ Some translate this as "the Queen of Heaven"; see Radak, quoting *Targum Yonasan* on Jeremiah 44:17.

prophet or anyone else who possesses *ruach ha-kodesh* – this, too, is called actual idolatry]..." [Here, the author] speaks of Nebuchadnezzar who prostrated himself before Daniel, and the Egyptians who sought to deify Jacob, as we have quoted above at length (see Chapter 7). Likewise, their entire purpose was to remove Divine Providence from this world. They submitted themselves to serve particular forces or aspects of *ruach ha-kodesh*, regarding them as deities in their own right, possessing the power to benefit those who serve them or to do harm, according to their will. Each person chose for himself the form of idolatry that would enable him to follow the obduracy of his evil heart, whether for physical pleasures or for sorcery. All this is further explained in *Likkutei Torah* of the Ari [Rabbi Yitzchok Luria] concerning the Generation of Dispersion.

The attentive reader will note that all of [Rabbi Chaim's] words are taken from Ramban's Commentary on the Torah, on the scriptural injunction, "You shall not have any false gods before me..." (Exodus 20:3), as the author himself states [*Nefesh HaChaim*, Gate III, Chapter 9]. And they are identical with the previously mentioned remarks of the author of *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, whose purport greatly confirms our own words. With this, we have fulfilled our obligation to clarify his holy words according to the depth of their simple truth, with the help of God.

Yud Daled/14. After considering these words and this truth, no one's heart should mislead him to say that it is within the intent of the above-mentioned words of *Nefesh ha-Chaim* to sway the heart of Israel, the Holy Nation, heaven forbid, from faith in the true Sages and *tzaddikim*, which is the foundation of the entire Torah and its observance – or to negate and hinder, heaven forbid, the obligation of binding, attaching, and cleaving to them. Far be it from us to attribute such false and nonsensical words as these to the Torah giant of Israel and its holy one, our master, Rabbi Chaim – thoughts that never entered his heart.

How could we even entertain such a notion, God forbid, inasmuch as attachment and clinging to the Sages and their disciples with all forms of attachment is commonplace among the Jewish people? Hence, we find in *Sifri, Ekev*:

"And to cling to him" (Deuteronomy 11:22). Is it possible for a human

to ascend above and attach himself to fire? Has it not been stated that God is a "consuming fire"? (Deuteronomy 4:24) And in Daniel 7:9, it refers to "the Divine Throne made of sparks of fire; [its wheels were a blaze of fire.]" Rather, [the nature of the commandment is as if God said,] "Attach yourselves to the Sages and their disciples, and I will consider it as if you had ascended above."¹⁶

And Rashi in his commentary (Deuteronomy 11:22) concludes, "And I will consider it as if you had attached yourself to [Me]."

Thus, our Sages expounded in *Kesubos* 111b:

"And you who cleave unto the Lord, your God, all of you are alive this day" (Deuteronomy 4:4). Is it possible to attach oneself to the Divine Presence? Is it not written, "The Lord, your God, is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24)? However, whoever marries his daughter to a Torah scholar, or likewise does business with Torah scholars, or whoever gratifies Torah scholars with his possessions, Scripture considers it as if he attaches himself to the Divine Presence.

See further in the *Chiddushei Aggados* of *Maharsha* (ad loc.), who explains this according to [the Scriptural injunction], "*Es Hashem*, your God, you shall fear," (Deuteronomy 10:20):

The word "*es*" comes to include the Torah scholars. [Hence, the Torah] equated reverence of the scholar with reverence of God. The nature of this attachment may be explained in that the *nefesh* cleaves to the *ruach*, and the *ruach* to the *neshama*; and [the source of] the *neshama* is beneath the Throne of Glory, bound up in the

¹⁶ The translators were unable to locate the author's text. For an alternative version with minor differences, see Mosad HaRav Kook edition of *Sifri* with the commentary *Toldos Am*, section 49.

bundle of life unto the World to Come, as Scripture concludes, "You are all alive this day," following the explanation in tractate *Sanhedrin*, in the section known as "*Chelek*"... [The Talmud also states in *Kesubos* 111b] "Whoever marries his daughter to a Torah scholar... [Scripture regards as if he cleaved to the Divine Presence.]" Three things are enumerated: physical cleaving through giving one's daughter in marriage to a Torah scholar, monetary cleaving by giving him gratification through one's possessions, and mental cleaving, such as to support his business endeavors. And this [latter means] is not a monetary cleaving, because he does not give him any of his money, but rather it is an expression of his general desire to help the Torah scholar in every way possible.

It is clear from his words that one should cleave to Torah scholars in *nefesh*, *ruach* and in *neshamah*. And when one cleaves to Torah scholars, it is as if he cleaves to the Throne of Glory.

Additionally, the Rambam states in his *Mishnah Torah (Hilchos Deos*, chapter 6, *halachah* 1): "Therefore, a person must attach himself to *tzaddikim* and constantly sit near the Sages in order to learn from their deeds..." And he continues (*ibid. halachah* 2):

It is a biblical injunction to cleave unto the Sages and their disciples in order to learn from their deeds; as it is written, "And unto him you should cleave." (Deuteronomy 10:20). Is it possible for a person to attach himself to the Divine Presence? But the Sages say in their explanation of this commandment, "Cleave to the Sages and their disciples." Therefore, a person should strive to marry the daughter of a Torah scholar and also to give his daughter in marriage to a Torah scholar; to eat and drink in the company of Torah scholars; to support the business endeavors of the Torah scholar; and to attach oneself to them in every way, as it says,

"...and to cleave unto him" (Deuteronomy 11:22). Likewise, there is a rabbinical injunction to "sit at their feet in the dust and drink in their words thirstily" (*Avos* 1:4).

King David also states in Psalms 119:63: "I am a companion (*chaver ani*) to all those who fear You." [The expression "*chaver ani*" may also be rendered, "I am attached."] And see further *Sefer ha-Chinuch*, Commandment 434.

Tes Vov/15. This is the aspect of attachment to *tzaddikim* in general, as is discussed by the words of our Rebbe, may his merits protect us, in the discourse, "*Ki Ekach Moed*" (*Likkutei Moharan* I, 135):

The essence of attachment is love: to love the *tzaddik* with a complete love, as is written in *Genesis* 44:30, "And his soul was bound up with his soul" [in reference to Jacob's love for his son, Benjamin.] The *Targum* renders this, "He was beloved to him as his own soul." It is also written in I Samuel, 18:1, "The soul of Jonathan was bound up with the soul of David... [and Jonathan loved him as his own soul]." Moreover, one's love of the *tzaddik* should surpass the love of women, as it is written in II Samuel, 1:26, "Your love to me is more wondrous than the love of women..."

Similarly, it is further explained in *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 176:

By means of being attached to the true *tzaddik* -- attachment being the profound love with which he loves the *tzaddik* "*m'ode*", [literally, "very much," an internal reference that the author will soon clarify] – his heart is incorporated into the heart of the *tzaddik*.¹⁷

¹⁷ Author's note: See the *Rambam, Mishna Torah, Hilchos Melachim*, Chapter 3, *Halacha* 6, that "the King's heart is the heart of the Congregation of Israel – and the Rabbis are our kings." Even though, in truth, [every

As an aside, I would like to explain that the word "m'ode", as used above by our Rebbe [Rabbi Nachman of Breslev] alludes to his comment in Discourse 135 that "one's love of the *tzaddik* should surpass his love of women." He means to say that his love of the *tzaddik* must be a profound love in the aspect of "m'ode", which represents a love higher than nature and time. (This is dealt with clearly in *Likkutei Moharan* II, Lesson 7, "*Ki M'rachamam Y'nahagaim*", section 6.) This sort of love "surpasses the love of women," because the love of women is in the aspect of "forgetfulness," which is in the category of nature and time.¹⁸ (Also see *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 7, "*V'eileh HaMishpatim*", which speaks of faith; note what is written at the end in the editor's remarks.)

The ultimate purpose of our drawing close to the *tzaddikim* is in order to emulate their deeds. Like them, we must enter into the level of "remembrance", which is higher than nature and time (as is explained in the above-mentioned discourse, "*V'eileh Ha-mishpatim*,") and not fall into forgetfulness. That is, we must continually remember the World to Come, and it should not seem to us that there is only one world, heaven forbid (see *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 54, "*Viy'hi Mi-ketz/ Zicharon*", section 1). This itself dictates that we relate to *tzaddikim* [with a love that is] higher than nature and time, in order for us to become fit vessels to receive from them the light of remembrance, which is above nature and time.

The Rebbe was precise in his golden expression. He wrote "surpassing the love of women" because there is no passion which more surely causes forgetfulness than the passion for women (as is explained in *Likkutei Halachos*, op. cit.). It is also significant that the requirement for one's love for the *tzaddik* to surpass the love for women is stated specifically in context of the scriptural verse, "Your love to me was more wondrous than the love of women." These words were said after

Jew is automatically included within the heart of the *tzaddik*], nevertheless, it is more beneficial when the entire Congregation of Israel binds itself to him in speech and in thought, as is explained in *D'rashos ha-Ran*, *Drush* 8.

¹⁸ Author's note: This point is explained in *Likkutei Halachos*, *Choshen Mishpat*, *Hilchos Arev*, *Halacha* 4, Section 10.

Jonathan passed on to the life of the World to Come – because profound love for the *tzaddik* brings one to the level of remembrance, which is the aspect of the life of the World to Come, beyond nature and time. This is the deeper meaning of what our Sages say in the Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 33a): "And his teacher who taught him wisdom brings him to the life of the World to Come;" i.e., to the level of remembrance discussed above. [However,] this is not the place to dwell upon the subject at length.

Tes Zayin/16. (Unpublished)

Tes Vov Vais/17. It has been clearly demonstrated, with the help of God, that there is no basis whatsoever in the *Nefesh ha-Chaim* for the words [of those who reject the precept of attachment to *tzaddikim*]. Moreover, they are culpable like actual slanderers, and they harm themselves in speaking perversely against God and against His faithful servants, concerning whose honor the Creator is more exacting than His own. For the utterance of their words pierces like a sword, contrary to the imperative of our holy Torah and contrary to the words of our Sages, throughout the Talmud and all our holy books, which speak profusely about the power and benefit of the prayers of the *tzaddikim*, as well as of their advice and their merits.

That is why I said that it is not a time to be quiet, but a time to speak,¹⁹ and I will come with the scroll of a manuscript, reiterating a few of the writings which discuss the power and benefit of the prayers of the *tzaddikim* and their merit: from the Torah and the Prophets, from the Talmud and its commentaries and elsewhere. May you listen and intelligently understand each teaching according to its intention and its relevant context. I did not attempt to quote everything extant about this, lest I make it onerous for you; for it is possible to compile an entire volume on this subject and more, and this would be burdensome in the form of a letter. Rather, I decided only to bring examples from what I happen to remember. From that itself there is enough to firmly establish the truth, for us and for those like ourselves, according to His will, may His Name be blessed and exalted, and I will indicate them with sub-

¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:7

headings.

Yud Ches/18.

Alef/A. Scripture clearly states, "Return the married woman, because he is a prophet, and he will pray for your sake and you will live."²⁰ (Genesis 20:7). (Also note its explanation in *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 10, "*V'eileh ha-Mishpatim*," which discusses dancing and handclapping.)

Beis/B. [It is written of Rebecca, during her pregnancy,] "And she went to inquire of God." (Genesis 25:22). Rashi comments that she went to the study house of Shem. Likewise, the Rashbam explains, "...To the prophets who lived in those times;" and so comments the *Baal HaTurim* (ad loc.).

Gimel/C. [It is written of Jacob's sons, Simon and Levi, in connection with the destruction of Shechem,] "And they came unto the city with confidence." (Genesis 34:25). Rashi explains this according to the [words of] *Bereishis Rabbah* (*Parsha* 80), "They were confident in the power of the Elder," i.e., Jacob. You could also interpret it in reference to the prayer of Abraham, who prayed for them, according to *Sifsei Chachomim* (ad loc.).

Daled/D. It is written, "And the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned in that we have spoken ill of God and of you. Pray to God [that He should remove the (poisonous) serpents.]' And Moses prayed for the people" (Numbers 21:7). *Ohr ha-Chaim* comments (ad loc.) that they besought Moses to pray for their sakes, in order to be saved through the merit of Moses himself.

Hay/E. [The Torah states that Moses prayed for a successor] "...who will take them out and bring them in" (Numbers 27:17), on which Rashi comments, "in his own merits".

Vov/F. [In the Torah-portion dealing with the Cities of Refuge, it states,] "And [the representatives of] the Congregation shall save the man-slaughterer from the hand of the avenger, and [the representatives of] the Congregation shall return him to his City of Refuge, to which he had fled; and he shall dwell there until the death of the High Priest..." (Numbers 35:25). *Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel* explains, "He shall live

²⁰ A reference to Abraham, when his wife Sarah was held captive by Avimelech, King of the Philistines.

there until the High Priest's death. They had conferred high position upon him by anointing him with oil. However, he deserved to die within the year because he did not pray properly on *Yom Kippur* for the House of Israel, his people, that they should not become ensnared by the three cardinal sins of idolatry, forbidden sexual relations and murder. And it was in his power to nullify [the possible occurrence of these sins] with his prayers. Yet he did not do so..." Some of this is elaborated upon in Rashi's commentary, as well.

Perhaps this is also what the prophet Samuel meant when he said, "Far be it from me to sin unto God by refraining to pray for your sakes." (I Samuel 12:23). And see further in *Makkos* 11a.

Zayin/G. [The role of the prophet is presented in the same light]. It states in I Samuel 12:19-23: "And all the people said unto Samuel, 'Pray to the Lord, your God, for the sake of your servants ...' and Samuel said to the people... 'I, too, will fulfill my responsibility. Far be it from me to sin unto God by refraining to pray for your sake...'"

Ches/H. It is written of Saul, when he went to search for the stray donkeys which his father had lost: "And he said unto him, 'Lo, there is a man of God in this very city. Let us go there now.' And Saul said unto the lad, 'You have spoken well. Let us proceed...'" (I Samuel 9:6-10).

Similarly, we can see from what is written in the same context, "During former times in Israel, when a man went to search for the word of God, he would say thus, 'Let us go to the Seer.'" (ibid. 9:9). This gives us to understand that it was the custom of Israel -- which is also a part of Torah-law -- to habitually seek the advice of the Prophets in matters great and small.

Tes/I. It is also written (II Samuel 23:3): ["The God of Israel spoke to me, the Rock of Israel declared, 'Be a ruler of men,] a righteous [*tzaddik*] ruler, having fear of God.' " And our Sages comment in the Talmud:

Rabbi Avahu said, "This is [the meaning of the above-mentioned Scriptural verse]: The God of Israel spoke... 'I rule among mankind. Who rules over me? The *tzaddik*. For I decree an edict and he

cancels it..." (*Moed Katan* 16b).

On this Rashi comments, "The *tzaddik* rules over Me, and he cancels it." (*ibid.*) Likewise, Rabbeinu Chananel explains, "The *tzaddik* who rules with the fear of God rules with his speech -- because with his supplication he prevents harsh decrees of the Holy One, blessed be He, from coming upon His people, Israel."

And in the holy book *Sha'arei Orah* of our master, Rabbi Yosef Gikatillia, it is written:

"The *tzaddik* rules with the fear of God." (II Samuel 23:3). The Rabbis comment on this, "Who rules over Me? The *tzaddik*. For I decree an edict and he cancels it." How is this so? Know: When there is a *tzaddik* who can meditate in his prayer, and his meditation reaches the world of the Divine Will and Mercy -- even though the Heavenly Court may have formulated a decree, when that *tzaddik's* prayer ascends to the level of the Supernal Crown, the gates of the World of Mercy are opened. And when they are opened, all the harsh judgments that had been decreed are nullified, because the lights of Mercy become manifest, and all the *sefiros* are filled with mercy, *shefa*, and sublime emanation. There is no place within the *sefiros* at that time to contain the forces of Severity, and there is no measure which could hold wrathfulness or anger. Because the benevolent Deity stands in joy and goodwill, all expressions of wrath disappear and all agents of punishment become agents of mercy... All of this does not come from the side of strict justice but from the side of Divine Will and mercy. Even though the people of the world may not be worthy, since that *tzaddik* caused the Gates of Mercy to be opened [God conducts himself according to the aspect of mercy...] (*Sha'arei Orah*, Gate 10).

And in *Sha'arei Orah*, Gate 2 and in Gate 5, even more is said about the greatness

of *tzaddikim*.

Yud/J. Ahazia, King of Israel, was punished with death because he sought guidance from oracles and did not inquire of God's Prophets, as it is written, "And he said to him, 'Thus says the Lord . . . is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word [that you sent emissaries to inquire of *Baal Z'vuv*, the cult of Ekron?]' (II Kings, 1:16). *Metzudos Dovid* interprets this to mean, "Why did you not inquire of the prophets?"²¹

Yud Alef/K. It is written, "And Elisha saw [his teacher, Elijah, leave the world in a chariot of fire] and cried, 'My father, My father, the chariots of Israel and their riders...' (II Kings 2:12). Rashi renders this to mean, "My teacher, my teacher, who benefited Israel through his prayers more than chariots and riders," basing himself on *Targum Yonasan Ben Uzziel* (*ad loc.*).

Yud Beis/L. It is written, "Please recount for me the great things that Elisha did" (II Kings 8:4). The Rabbis state [concerning this]: "And Elisha accomplished whatever he accomplished with prayer" (*Megillah 27a*). Also see Maharsha's *Chiddushei Aggados*, where he writes that Elisha's prayers were as efficacious as those of many people praying together intensely in the synagogue (*ad loc.*).

Yud Gimel/M. Scripture denigrates Asah, King of Judah, by writing of him, "Even in his sickness he did not search for God [meaning the prophets, as is evident from the context of this verse]" (II Chronicles 16:12). See also the above-mentioned explanation of Ramban (*ibid.*).²²

Yud Daled/N. It is cited in *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Remez 855*):

"He turns to the prayer of the solitary person..." (*Psalms 102:18*).

Rabbi Shmuel Bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonasan:

This refers to Menasheh, who was devoid of good deeds, and David.

"And did not despise their prayers." This refers to David and

²¹ This comment of *Metzudos Dovid* actually applies to a similar Scriptural passage several lines earlier, II Kings 1:3.

²² The translators were unable to determine which comment of Ramban the author had in mind. Perhaps he meant to refer to the remark of Rashbam cited above (Chapter 18, sub-section *Beis/B.*)

Hezekiah.

Zayis Ranan comments: "Because of the merit of David, the prayer of Menasheh was accepted. Likewise with regard to Hezekiah, it is written, 'For the sake of David, my servant,' as can be found in tractate *Berachos*."

Tes Vov/O. In *Berachos* 5b, we find that several *tzaddikim* healed the sick by extending their arms to them, as it states, "[Rabbi Chiya Bar Abba] gave [Rabbi Yochanan] his hand and [Rabbi Yochanan] raised him up." (See the explanation of this in *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 57, "*Sha'alu Talmidav Es Rabbi Yosi Ben Kisma*.")

Tes Zayin/P. Further, it states in *Berachos* 17b: "Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, 'Every day a Heavenly voice comes out from Mount Horeb [i.e. Mount Sinai] and cries, 'The whole world receives its sustenance because of Chanina, My son. And as for Chanina, My son, a *kav* of carobs suffices from one *erev Shabbos* to the next!'"

Yud Zayin/Q. In *Berachos* 34b, it relates how Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa used to pray for the sick. When Rabban Gamliel's son became ill, he sent two Torah scholars to Rabbi Chanina so that he might pray for divine mercy on his son's behalf. Similarly, it is written of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, that when his son became ill, he told him, "Chanina, my son, beseech mercy for my child."

Yud Ches/R. It states in *Yuma* 75b: "Because of [the merit of] Rabba, his disciples had food to eat."

Yud Tes/S. Similarly, for every affliction (may they never come upon us) both physical and spiritual, [the Jewish people] used to approach the sage and *tzaddik* of the generation to beg him to pray and to awaken mercy for them, as stated in tractate *Ta'anis*, Chapter 3. There you will find many awesome tales about the greatness of the powers and prayers of the *tzaddikim*. (Also, see what is written on this subject in *Likkutei Moharan* II, Lesson 2, "*Yemei Chanukah*," section 2).

Chof/T. It states in *Bava Basra* 116a: "Rabbi Pinchas Bar Chama remarked, 'Whoever has a sick person in his house should go to a sage and ask him to pray.' " The *Nimukei Yosef* wrote that the custom in France was that whoever had a sick person in his house would ask the rabbi in charge of the local *yeshiva* to bless him.

Chof Alef/U. In the holy *Zohar* (*hashmatos* related to the first section, page 15b, quoting *Sefer ha-Bahir*) it states:

The Holy One, blessed be He, has one *tzaddik* in the world, and he is beloved to Him because [his merit] causes the entire world to endure. And he [i.e. the *tzaddik*] is its foundation, and he is its provider, causing it to grow, raising it to maturity, and causing it to rejoice... He is the foundation of all souls.

Chof Beis/V. In *D'rashos HaRaN, Drush 8*, it is written:

Furthermore, it seems to me . . . that it is certainly proper to believe that [the Holy Temple and the Prophets and Sages are comparable to one another]. When the Holy Temple existed, it was designated for the influx of prophecy and wisdom. Indeed, through the very medium of that place, [prophecy and wisdom] was poured forth upon all the Jewish people. Likewise, it is appropriate that the prophets and sages be fit to receive wisdom and prophecy so that by means of them this influx will be brought to bear upon the worthy individuals of their generation, even if they are not directly involved with [those prophets and sages]. By virtue of living in the same generation, others receive from them, since [the prophets and sages] themselves are comparable to the divinely-sanctified Holy Temple.

Ramban wrote in [his commentary at] the end of the Torah-portion *V'hoyo ekev*, "It befits people of this stature that their souls be 'bound up in the bundle of life'²³ even while in their mortal state" – for they themselves are a dwelling place for the Divine Presence, as the

²³ I *Samuel*, 25:29

author of *Sefer ha-Kuzari* also indicates.²⁴

Perhaps [Ramban] also meant this [i.e. that every generation receives wisdom and prophecy from the *tzaddikim*]. Therefore, whenever wise and pious men exist, an influx of Godliness flows upon them; and through them it is possible for this influx to reach all worthy people of the generation, especially those who draw close to them and are actively involved with them.

Chaf Gimel/W. In *Pardes Rimonim (Shaar ha-Kavanah, Gate 32, Section 1)* Rabbi Moses Cordovero, states:

[The *tzaddik*] will be a dwelling place for the Divine Presence, since beneficial influences come through him. Thus, the *tzaddik* comprises the great channel that is the foundation of the world. Therefore, it is appropriate that the Divine Presence should cleave to him, and that he be called the "Companion of the King." Fortunate is he and fortunate is his lot, because he is meritorious and causes others to be meritorious, and for his sake the entire world is judged favorably. Similarly, we find that when there is a *tzaddik* and *chassid* in the world, all the world derives sustenance through him, as our Sages taught, "All the world derives sustenance because of Chanina, My son..."²⁵

Chof Daled/X. Our master, Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, in his commentary *Yosef Tehillos* on the Book of *Psalms*, writes the following on the verse, "Fortunate is the one whom You choose and bring near to dwell in Your courts' (*Psalms* 65:5): "For it is known that the *tzaddik* acts as a channel through which Heavenly influence descends in his merit -- and from him, it flows to the entire world."

²⁴ R. Yehudah Halevi, *Kuzari* III, 1

²⁵ *Berachos* 17b.

And this is what our Rebbe said in *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 240:

All heavenly influence and all things come only from the true *tzaddik*. That is why when one is close to the true *tzaddik*, he is able to receive whatever he needs easily, whether wealth or children. However, when one is far from the *tzaddik*, these things come with great difficulty. For every person receives wealth or children according to his *mazal*; and one's *mazal* receives its influence from the *tzaddik*, because from thence issue forth all Heavenly influences. Therefore, when one is distant from the *tzaddik*, his *mazal* must give him great strength to receive heavenly influence from the *tzaddik*, since he is far from him. Hence, many variations may be found in these matters...

And now, my beloved friend, consider for yourself: if there were any question, God forbid, of even the least trace of idolatry in going to *tzaddikim* to ask them to pray for us, how could Moses and Samuel have taken it upon themselves to pray for those who came to them? Would they not have said, 'What is the matter with you, children of the Living God, that you rebel against the Creator and add transgression upon transgression, by entreating us to pray for your sakes? Are such things not like idol worship, which is an abomination unto God? You are making me an intermediary between yourselves and your Maker! Go and pray and beseech for yourselves from the Lord, our God, and He Who is merciful will forgive you.'

Moreover, how could all of these wise men, great sages and leaders of the Jewish people, go or send representatives to the loftiest individual among themselves, in order for him to pray for their physical and spiritual needs? How could these individuals have accepted their charge from the ones who designated them to pray for their sakes?

Rather, it is apparent from all this that it is surely God's will for one to go to the true *tzaddik* at any time of need to entreat him and ask him to pray to God on our behalf, that He should be gracious unto us in all that we require. For the Torah

was not afraid, and our Prophets were not afraid, and our holy Sages were not afraid that if we were to attach ourselves and cleave to Torah scholars and believe in their words, or ask them to pray for us, it might lead us to misconstrue them to be intermediaries between ourselves and our Lord, heaven forbid.

The Torah fathomed the mind of the Children of Israel, the Holy Nation, unto the last generation. And it foresaw that they would not stumble into any sin through this, heaven forbid, neither sin nor a trace of sin. Therefore, on the contrary, the Torah and our prophets and our holy Sages enjoined us to attach ourselves and to cleave to Torah scholars and their disciples with every sort of attachment and cleaving. For God knows, and He let it be known, and He revealed His secret to His servants, the prophets and Sages, that when the Jewish people attach themselves and cleave to the Sages and their disciples and believe in their words, expressly by these means do they come to the observance of His holy Torah and performance of His commandments. They follow in His ways, and all their deeds work out successfully, according to the will of our Father in Heaven.

The opposite also holds true, God forbid. When they do not cleave to the *tzaddikim*, then each person turns to his own evil path, and they forget the Torah and neglect the performance of Her holy commandments, and they come, God forbid, to denial of the Creator, to heresy and idolatry. [Therefore, Moses reprimanded the people,] "Because I know that after my passing away, you will surely do harm and turn from the path of which I have commanded you..." (Deuteronomy 31:29). It is also written, "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the Elders . . . and when the Lord established Judges for them, and the Lord was with the Judges, He would save them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the Judge. And it came to pass when the Judge died that they retrogressed and acted destructively [in contradiction to] their fathers, to go after other gods in order to serve them..." (Judges 2:7-19). Likewise, it is written, "And the entire House of Israel was drawn after God..." (I Samuel 7:2). Upon this verse Rashi comments, "[This was accomplished] by means of [the Prophet] Samuel, who made his rounds from city to city, judging and reproofing them..." And note what is written in the commentary *Yosef Tehillos* concerning the verse "...to see

if any man of wisdom was searching for God." (Psalms 53:3).

Similarly, the Torah and our prophets and our holy Sages commanded that in a time of suffering and distress one should go to the true *tzaddik* to seek his favor, that he should pray to God for us, for thus is God's will. Our Sages state in *Yevamos* 64a and in *Chullin* 60b that the Holy One, blessed be He, desires the prayers of the *tzaddikim*. This is why He inspires them with a fluent prayer, so that He may derive pleasure from their words and awaken the flow of blessing to enter this world, fulfilling the wishes of all hearts for the good. All this is thoroughly explained in the words of our master, Rabbi Nachman of Breslev, in *Likkutei Moharan* I, Lesson 10, "*V'eileh Ha-mishpatim*", section 4.

Yud Tes/19. And now my beloved, blessed of the Lord, "wait a bit for me and I will tell you;"²⁶ may your eyes look straight ahead and your eyelids be composed before you, for they will see many sayings of our Sages, shining like sapphires, adjuring us adamantly concerning the honor befitting Torah scholars, to love them, to revere them and to hold them dear in every way.

Thus it states in *Pesachim* 22b:

Shimon ha-'Amsuni – and some say Nechemiah ha-'Amsuni – would homiletically interpret every usage of the word "es" in the Torah. When he came to "*es Hashem, your God, you shall fear,*" (Deuteronomy 10:20), he desisted... [Then] Rabbi Akiva came and interpreted it to include Torah scholars.

Rashi in turn comments on this: "May the fear of your teacher be as the fear of Heaven." (op cit.). In addition, note the remark of Maharsha in his *Chiddushei Aggados* (op cit.) that Shimon ha-'Amsuni did not decline to offer an interpretation when he reached the phrase, "And you shall love *es Hashem, your God,*" which preceded [the Scriptural passage quoted above by the Talmud], because even for

²⁶ Job 36:2

him it was obvious to equate the love of Torah scholars with the love of God.

Consider, as well, the interpretation of our Sages in *Kesubos* 103b:

"And (es) those who fear God he honors." (Psalms 15:4). This refers to Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, who, whenever he saw a Torah scholar, would rise from his throne and embrace him and kiss him and exclaim, "My teacher, my teacher! My master, my master!"

Rambam (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Malachim* 2:5) determined this to be the *halachah* [i.e., that a king of Israel must defer to the honor of Torah scholars]. The Talmud explains that Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, only did so privately and not openly in order to maintain respect for his office as king (*ibid.*). But this does not apply to an ordinary person, who must also conduct himself in this manner publicly, as it is written, "If only you would be like a little brother to me, nursing at my mother's breasts – if I found you outside, I would kiss you, and no one could scorn me" (Song of Songs 8:1). See further in the *Gilyon ha-Shas* of Rabbi Akiva Eiger [*Kesubos* 103b], quoting the *Yalkut* (II Kings 1:224), which in turn quotes the *Tanna De-Vei Eliyahu*: "Why did Elijah merit the ability to raise the dead? Because . . . when he saw people who were *tzaddikim*, he would embrace them and hug them and kiss them."

Joshua bin Nun, too, merited kingship because he ministered unto Moses and showed him great honor. He would rise early and retire late to be present in Moses' Tent of Meeting, where he arranged the benches and spread out the mats for those who would come to hear Torah from [Moses'] mouth, as the *Midrash* explains. (See *Bamidbar Rabbah, Pinchas*, 21:15; this is also cited in *Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas, Remez* 776).

My own eyes have seen eminent *tzaddikim*, outstanding scholars of the generation, who showed their love in all these ways to students and benefactors of Torah. See, too, in the *Midrash Rabbah* on *Song of Songs* (*Parsha* 1:20):

The study house of Rabbi Eliezer was made like a sort of stadium, and there was a certain stone in it designated as his seat. Once, Rabbi Yehoshua entered and began to kiss that stone saying, "This stone is comparable to Mount Sinai, and the one who sat on it is comparable to the Ark of the Covenant."

It is forbidden to do any of these acts for idolatrous purposes, as the Talmud specifies in *Sanhedrin* 60b (in the *Mishnah*) and as Rambam rules (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos 'AKuM vi-Chukosayhem*, 3:6). However, certain individuals – wise in their own eyes -- attempt to deter not only themselves but others, as well, from going to *tzaddikim* to enlist their prayers due to a suspicion of a trace of idolatry, heaven forbid. If there were any basis for their suspicion, why did our Sages not deem it proper to enact preventative measures and caution us against all this, lest one come to a trace of idolatry, and ultimately take the *tzaddikim* to be intermediaries, God forbid, or make some similar error? Certainly, the matter is not as they say; for in truth there is no reason to fear that any one could stumble through honoring and loving Torah scholars, God forbid, who occupy themselves with Torah and prayer, by night and by day. On the contrary, this only results in great benefit to those who do so in reverence to God, Who is glorified and awesome. Know that the mouths [of these adversaries of those who espouse true faith in the *tzaddikim*] utter emptiness, and a disturbed spirit was poured into them; they only know how to do harm and do not know how to do good, for their hearts have been insulated from perception. May God in His mercy save us, our offspring, all of our descendants and the descendants of entire House of Israel, the Holy Nation, from them, from their followers, from their confusion,²⁷ and from their deceitful mouths.

²⁷ Paraphrase of Ezekiel 7:11.