



On the Air with Rav Aviner - #115

From Ha-Rav's weekly radio program in Israel and more

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Friedfertig

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Learning Torah on "Nittel Nacht"

Q: Is it permissible to learn Torah on "Nittel Nacht" (Christmas Eve)?

A: There is a custom among some Chasidim not to learn Torah on "Nittel Nacht" in order not to give spiritual strength to the god of the Christians. The Lubavitcher Rebbe related in a talk in the name of his father-in-law, the Rebbe Rayatz, that the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Rebbe Rashab, played chess on "Nittel Nacht" (Parashat Vayeshev, 1st Night of Chanukah 5750). And this was indeed the custom of the Lubavitcher Rebbe until midnight of "Nittel Nacht". But our custom is that one needs to learn Torah on that night, just like every night. Some explain that the reason for not learning Torah of that night is that the Christians would become impassioned on their holiday, would go out and kill Jews. We therefore would need to stand guard instead of learning Torah. Baruch Hashem, Christians do not act this way today and we need to learn a lot of Torah.

By the way, it is told in the book "Siach Sarfei Kodesh" (p. 192) that when the last Lubavitcher Rebbe was sitting shiva, the Satmar Rebbe, Ha-Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, paid a shiva call and asked him: Why do we observe the night of "Nittel Nacht" according to

the non-Jewish calendar (which is forbidden) instead of according to the Jewish calendar? The Lubavitcher Rebbe answered that we do not learn on that night in order not to give spiritual strength to the god of the Christians and we therefore observe it on the night that they celebrate, which is according to their calendar. And – he added – we must therefore be aware when they celebrate this holiday in the place we are located. In most places, their holiday is on December 25th, but in other places it is on a different day (For example, January 6th). In such places, that is the night of "Nittel Nacht".

But as we said, our custom is to learn a lot of Torah on that night. And Ha-Rav Moshe Sternbuch wrote that this custom was unknown in Lithuania and it is only a custom among Chasidim (Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot 1:551). And Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef has written that no such custom exists among Sefardic Jews (Shut Yabia Omer vol. 7 Yoreh Deah #20).

Placing stones on graves

Q: Why do we place stones on graves when we visit?

A: To honor the deceased. When a person visits and places a stone, and then visits again and places another stone, and does so again and again, he shows that he is honoring the deceased. It is permissible to clean the grave and remove the stones if one so wishes.

SPECIAL SMS Q&A REGARDING REBBE NACHMAN OF BRESLOV

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah," "Olam Ha-Katan" and "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah." Here's a sample:

Q: Everyone agrees that Rebbe Nachman was a Tzadik and Torah scholar. Why then are so many opposed to Chasidut Breslov?

A: Those who are opposed are greater Tzadikim and Torah scholars and Rabbi Nachman does not have a monopoly on either.

Q: Ha-Rav wrote that Rebbe Nachman does not have a monopoly. Does Rav Kook?

A: No, Maran Ha-Rav Kook also does not have a monopoly. Only Moshe Rabbenu has a monopoly, in contrast to what Korach thought.

Q: But there is a spark of Moshe Rabbenu in every generation?

A: Yes, but in all of the Torah scholars, and they therefore have a monopoly together.

Q: Ha-Rav wrote that those opposed to Rebbe Nachman were greater Tzadikim and Torah scholars. Is it possible to compare Tzadikim and Torah scholars?

A: Yes. See Baba Metziah 84b and Shut Mahari Brona #190.

Q: How do we know that they were greater than him?

A: Because Rebbe Nachman wanted everyone to follow his way and that "All of the world be Breslov" (Chayei Mohara"n 339), but the reality is that the great Rabbis of Israel, including the great Chasidic Rabbis, did not become Breslov, and all of them together were certainly greater than him.

Q: Perhaps those who argued with him did not understand the true depth of his teachings?

A: It is also possible to say that he did not understand the true depth of those who argued with him.

Q: From where do we know that there were disputes with Rebbe Nachman?

A: It is mentioned numerous times in the books of his students. It reached the point that he was forced to wander around. His students also mention that he was excommunicated in various places.

Q: How can we say that people argued with him when today there are many Breslovers?

A: There were very few during his time. During the year of his death, there were only sixty visitors to his grave on Rosh Hashanah, and it was the same for many generations. Only recently have the numbers increased, especially among Ba'alei Teshuvah (the newly observant).

Q: Ha-Rav wrote about the greatness of those who argued with Rebbe Nachman, but they were not Torah scholars, such as the "Shpoler Zeide" (Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Shpola) who Rebbe Nachman called the Zeide of impurity and the Zeide of Satan.

A: This does not make sense to me since Rabbi Aryeh of Shpola was a Torah scholar and a Tzadik. He performed acts of kindness his entire life for the Nation of Israel and gave all of his money to Tzedakah.

Q: Rebbe Nachman said that this Tzedakah given by the father of impurity was to nullify the Tzedakah given by the Nation of Israel.

A: I also do not understand this.

Q: Rebbe Nachman was certainly the greatest of all the Torah scholars, and he said that he wanted to write a book about how to act according to each halachah, but after he wrote Likutei Mohara"n there was no need since everyone would understand how to rule in every halachah.

A: Likutei Mohara"n is certainly very important but I do not understand how anyone could rule from it and I have never seen anyone do so.

Q: Only dry rationalists do not follow the path of Rebbe Nachman.

A: Not all of the other great Rabbis of his generation were dry rationalists.

Q: I am sure that Ha-Rav is saying these things because you learned "Moreh Nevuchim" and Rebbe Nachman warned against learning this book.

A: The Rama who appears in the Shulchan Aruch begins with a quote from "Moreh Nevuchim."

Q: Isn't saying that there were greater Torah scholars and Tzadikim in his generation shaming him?

A: No, just as your statement that he was the greatest Tzadik and Torah scholar in his generation is not meant to shame others.

Q: But Rebbe Nachman said that all of the other Rabbis are like garlic skins compared to him (Chayei Mohara"n 190)?

A: It is not understandable.

Q: Why does Ha-Rav say that he does not have a monopoly when Rebbe Nachman himself said: "Today, when my book is already know and widespread, everyone is obligated to only learn my book" (Chayei Mohara"n 391)?

A: All of the other Torah scholars did not agree. For example, Chabad.

Q: Which great Rabbis opposed Rebbe Nachman besides the "Shpoler Zeide"?

A: Rebbe Nachman wanted everyone wanted to be Breslov but none of the great Rabbis followed his path.

Q: Based on the opposition, shouldn't we wage war on Breslov?

A: Even someone who is not Breslov should respect Rebbe Nachman since he was a great and holy person, and Hashem, in general, does not like wars.

Q: I learn in a Hesder Yeshiva and every night I learn Likutei Moharan for a half hour. Should I stop? I also say the Tikun Klali and it gives me a good feeling.

A: You should ask your Rosh Yeshiva. Each yeshiva has its own path and we should respect it. If you learn in a Yeshiva, you should trust the Rosh Yeshiva.

Q: Why does Ha-Rav say that he does not understand when Rebbe Nachman says something difficult?

A: Because Rebbe Nachman was a great and holy person and we must guard his honor and humbly admit that we do not understand. Even someone else who is not Breslov must respect him.

Q: I have much difficulty with Rebbe Nachman. What should I think?

A: He was a great Torah scholar but others do not agree with him.

Q: If he was a great Torah scholar how could he rule not to learn Moreh Nevuchim? And how could he say: "I am the only leader and there is no leader like me"?

A: I do not understand. We don't understand everything.

Q: I heard that Rav Kook greatly respected Rebbe Nachman. Is this correct?

A: It is correct. He learned much of his Torah but was not Breslover Chasid. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, also greatly respected him (Le-Netivot Yisrael vol. 1, pp. 214-215), but was also not a Breslover Chasid.

Q: I heard that our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, wanted to learn Rebbe Nachman's Torah in his youth, but Maran Ha-Rav stopped him. Is this correct?

A: Correct. He said that one first needs a healthy heart and soul before learning Rebbe Nachman, i.e. he much learn other works first (Likutei Ha-Re'eyah vol. 2, p. 262 and in my book Tzvi Kodesh p. 20).

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528

www.ateret.org.il To subscribe, send e-mail to: mororly@bezeqint.net

