THE EXALTED REBBE
הצדיק הנשגב

YESHUA IN LIGHT OF THE CHASSIDIC CONCEPTS OF DEVEKUT AND TZADDIKISM
הקדמה לرزוי הדבקות בחסידות
וייסו למשיחיות ישוע

The Bram Center
MESSIANIC JEWISH LEARNING
THE EXALTED REBBE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF DEVEKUT AND TZADDIKISM IN CHASIDIC THOUGHT

TOBY JANICKI

Jewish critics of Messianic Judaism and the New Testament will often raise the argument that the Hebrew Scriptures do not set a precedent for the concept of an intercessor who stands between God and man. In other words, the idea that we need Messiah Yeshua to be the one to lead us to the Father and intercede on our behalf is not biblical. These critics state that we can approach God on our own faith and merit with no need for anyone to be a go-between. In their minds such an idea is idolatrous and completely foreign to Judaism.

However, the talmudic sages of Israel developed the idea of the need for an intercessor in the concept of the tzaddik (“righteous one”). They, along with the later Chasidic movement, found proof for the need for an intermediary in the Torah and the rest of the Scriptures. By examining the tzaddik within Judaism we can not only defend our faith in the Master but we can also better understand His role from a Torah perspective.

THE TZADDIK

The word tzaddik (צדק) is derived from the Hebrew word for “righteousness” (tzedek, צדק). A true tzaddik is a sinless person. Tzaddik has the sense of “one whose conduct is found to be beyond reproach by the divine Judge.” According to the New Testament, there is no such person, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” the only exception being Yeshua of Nazareth, who was “tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” From apostolic reckoning and the perspective of Messianic faith, Yeshua is the only true tzaddik. However, Chasidic Judaism (which operates without the benefit of the New Testament Scriptures) supposes that there might be several such individuals who have completely subjugated their evil inclinations and live their lives as pure vessels for HaShem.

In Chasidic thought, the tzaddik is a miracle-worker. He is an intermediary between man and God. When he suffers, his suffering atones for the sins of his generation. He is a prophet and visionary who can give answers directly from heaven. He is a shepherd for his followers, and he cares for each individual Jew. He is a priest of sorts in that his prayers do not go unanswered: “The effective prayer of a righteous man (tzaddik) can accomplish much.” The tzaddik is therefore seen as an intercessor. The tzaddik is the foundation of the world. He “draws everything to him, for the true Tzaddik is the foundation of the world and everything derives from him. All the other Tzaddikim are only branches of the true Tzaddik.”

The tzaddik is treated as a king in that his word is absolute and must be obeyed without hesitation or question. He draws disciples around him which form a spiritual type of royal court, and his children often follow in the tzaddik path, thereby establishing dynastic houses of tzaddikim.

Attachment to such a tzaddik elevates one’s spiritual status and is the only means for attachment to HaShem Himself. The way to reach HaShem is through connection and devotion to a tzaddik. A Chasid is the disciple of a tzaddik. However, the concept of attachment to a tzaddik did not begin with the Chasidic movement. Instead, it is a concept which reaches all the way back to the Talmudic era, and perhaps even to the Apostolic Era.
ATTACHMENT TO HASHEM

Tzaddikism begins with a Torah command: the commandment of devekut (דבקות). Devekut is a Hebrew word that means “attachment,” and it comes from the root word davak (דבק), which means “to cling, cleave, keep close.” Yet the concept of devekut is not so much a physical action as it is a state of being. The commandment is found in the book of Deuteronomy:

You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him and cling [davak] to Him, and you shall swear by His name. (Deuteronomy 10:20)

The sages saw that Deuteronomy 10:20 commands us to “cling,” “hold fast,” and “bind ourselves” to HaShem. The Torah even says that it was devekut that preserved the Israelites in the wilderness. While on the surface it seems plausible that this command can be carried out, there is a problem with clinging to HaShem. Deuteronomy 4:24 says, “The LORD your God is a consuming fire.” To the rabbis, the idea of literally clinging to the Holy One did not seem feasible. Human beings are unholy. Just seeing God means death. Literally approaching and laying hold of HaShem is impossible.

Therefore, the sages reasoned, the commandment of clinging to HaShem can only be fulfilled by clinging to a worthy representative of HaShem. They reinterpreted the commandment to mean that one must cling to a worthy sage or to his disciples, and this clinging would in turn be counted as clinging to the Almighty. Maimonides codifies the commandment of devekut this way in his Book of the Commandments:

By this injunction we are commanded to mix and associate with wise men, to be always in their company, and to join with them in every possible manner of fellowship: in eating, drinking, and business affairs, to the end that we may succeed in becoming like them in respect of their actions and in acquiring true opinions from their words. (Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvot)

In Hebrew thought, the closer a person is connected to HaShem’s agent, whether that agent be a prophet, a sage, or a rabbi, the closer the person is connected with HaShem. A prototype of this can be seen in the life of Moses, who received the commandments and mediated between HaShem and Israel:

I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain. (Deuteronomy 5:5)

The more carefully Israel clung to Moses and his teaching, the better they were clinging to HaShem. Thus a tzaddik becomes a shevil (“pathway”) and a tzinor (“pipeline”) to God.

ATTACHMENT TO THE MASTER

The same model applies to the apostolic understanding of our relationship with Yeshua. The concept of devekut sheds light on the “oneness” passages in the Gospel of John. For example:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him. (John 14:6–7)

Read with the concept of devekut in mind, these words call us to communion with the Father through means of clinging to the Master. In a way similar to the rabbinic concept explained above, the Master reveals the Father to us, and the more we know Yeshua, the more we will know HaShem. From the Torah’s perspective of clinging to HaShem, our intimate relationship and connection with Yeshua takes on the level of a mitzvah. By clinging to Him, we are fulfilling the commandment of Deuteronomy 10:20 “to cling” to God.
CLINGING TO THE TZADDIK

Devekut is understood as clinging to a righteous man (tzaddik) in order to cleave to God. The term tzaddik is used many times throughout the Scriptures and is even applied to several individuals in the Gospels: Joseph (the father of Yeshua), Zechariah and Elizabeth, John the Immerser, Simeon the Priest, and Joseph of Aramathea. In church literature it is recorded that James the brother of Yeshua was called James the Righteous and described as “the most just of men” (i.e., a tzaddik) by his contemporaries. It is a term that is used sparingly and given only to people who lived their lives with utmost piety and dedication to the Torah. In these cases, however, the term is used in the figurative sense, not in the absolute theological sense. The New Testament does not mean to imply that these individuals were completely without sin.

In rabbinic literature, the tzaddik is sinless and, in many ways, superhuman. In the Talmud, HaShem is reputed to declare, “Who rules Me? It is the righteous.” According to this talmudic passage, the tzaddik—much like Moses in the story of the Golden Calf—is said to have the ability to annul God’s decrees of judgment. The Talmud goes on to suggest that it is the righteous who are destined to resurrect the dead. For Judaism to suggest that HaShem would allow the tzaddik to partner with Him in resurrecting the dead elevates the righteous to a very high level. In fact, seeing a tzaddik was to behold the “very face of the Shechinah.” The tzaddik is said to be a mini-temple, a dwelling place for God’s presence here on earth:

The house of study of Rabbi Eliezer was shaped like an arena, and there was in it a stone, which was reserved for him to sit on. Once Rabbi Joshua came in and began kissing the stone and saying, “This stone is like Mount Sinai, and he who sat on it is like the Ark of the Covenant.” (Song of Songs Rabbah 1:20)

In the eighteenth century, devout Chasidic Jews traveled to visit their teachers, men they believed to be tzaddikim, at the pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Shavu’ot, and Sukkot. They made the pilgrimages to fulfill the Torah’s command that the Israelites were to go up to the Temple for those festivals. The Chasidic world believed that the tzaddik revealed God’s presence here on earth just as the Temple once had. The Chasidim taught that the tzaddik was able to do this through the process of bittul (“annulment”), in which he completely divested himself of his own interests so that his entire essence might be emptied and he might become a vessel for HaShem alone. The last Chabad Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, taught that through this process the tzaddik becomes “the essence and being of God placed in a body.” Commenting on Schneerson’s words Rabbi Avraham Pevzner believed:

“The essence and being of God placed in a body” means that a supremely righteous man literally annuls his own identity so that his entire essence becomes God.

Chasidic thought regards the righteous as HaShem’s lightning rods throughout the earth, ready to conduct His presence and draw it to the earth. Consider the words of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov:

No matter what a person needs or is lacking in life—whether in livelihood, health or anything else—it can only be provided through the help of the true Tzaddik and Teacher he is attached to … The source of the spirit of life is the Torah, and therefore it can be received only from the Tzaddik, who is totally bound to the Torah … The Tzaddik hears the sighs of all who are attached to him, for he is the source of life for each one of them.

The tzaddik is the fountainhead of Torah and godliness for his disciples. Rebbe Schneerson said of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe known as the Rebbe Rayatz:

Each and every one of us [must] know—i.e., must think deeply and affix his thought on this—that he is indeed the Nasi (prince of the generation) and the head; from him and by him are [directed] all the material and spiritual [Divine] influences in the world; and by being bound to him (and he
already directed us in his letters how and in what way to bind ourselves (to him) we are bound and united with the spiritual root, with the ultimate Supernal spiritual root. (Igrot HaKodesh, 3 Tammuz 5710, 3:331, 635)27

Rebbe Nachman believed that all service to HaShem was worthless unless done through attachment to a true tzaddik:

If a person is not bound to a true Tzaddik, all his devotions are nothing but twisting and turning and pretending to be something he isn’t—as if an ape were pretending to be a man. Service of God is nothing without the True Tzaddik. 28

Rebbe Nachman also spoke of three levels of discipleship: “One in whose heart I am engraved, another who comes to hear my lessons, and third who comes to eat my left-overs.”29

Chasidic teaching suggests that a tzaddik will often be rejected by his generation, particularly by the “scholars and leaders.”30 The Baal Shem Tov said that “the world does not recognize that they are great tzaddikim, and therefore maligns them.”31 At the same time, it is taught that the true tzaddik will not contest his critics.

This all sounds surprisingly similar to apostolic concepts about Yeshua.

ONENESS

In Chasidic Judaism, a tzaddik is typically known as a rebbe over a school of disciples. “Rebbe” is the affectionate Yiddish term for Rabbi. The relationship between a rebbe and his disciples was expressed in several different metaphors such as master and slave, teacher and pupil, king and subject, and even husband and wife.32

You should love the Tzaddik with a perfect love until your soul is bound up with his and your love for him will replace the love for women: “Wonderful was thy love to me, passing the love of women” (2 Samuel 1:26).33

In Chasidic thought the ultimate goal of the disciple of such a rebbe is to attain the status of yechidut (יחד), which means “oneness.” This oneness takes place when the yechidah (“singular soul,” ייחודה) of the disciple connects with the yechidah of his rebbe:

The word yechidah refers to the highest rung of the soul, the innermost core, which is at one with G-d in constant and consummate unity. A yechidus with his Rebbe—a one-to-one encounter between the yechidah of the [disciple] and the yechidah of the Rebbe—charges the [disciple’s] yechidah with dynamism, so that it vitalizes his day-to-day conduct.34

A spiritual union has taken place that is much like that of a marriage. The disciple would be so inspired by this intimate relationship with the tzaddik and so connected to him that the rebbe’s being would permeate his entire life. The disciple’s devotion to his tzaddik-rebbe was manifested through continual devotion and a willingness to lay down his entire life for the sake of his teacher.

The connection between the rebbe and his followers is felt so deeply that the devoted disciples believe they cannot pray without being “infused with the concept that the Rebbe is the one who is the ‘connecting intermediary.’”35 The tzaddik gives his disciple the connection to His Creator. In a sense, after this connection takes place one could say that his soul is born again.

The tzaddik thus becomes a head to a body and his disciples the limbs:

Every tzaddik in every generation can be seen in terms of Moses, in terms of Shabbat—able to assemble and to join and to gather all of those who draw near to him, so that they are close to him like limbs to a body, and to connect them in the sense of the construction of the Tabernacle.
Then they are made a complete edifice and a tabernacle and a dwelling place for the inspiration of holiness.\textsuperscript{36}

The matter is like this: The Rebbe with his chassidim are a “koma shlema, (lit. “one measure,” קומה שלמה, ) a complete body. The Rebbe is the brain, the mind, and the chassidim are the limbs, which draw their life force from the brain, every limb according to its level and its ability. And just like in the body there are limbs of various kinds—some limbs are pure, comely, and exposed, like the eyes, face, and hands, and some limbs are private, covered, and unsightly—in the same way there are chassidim of various kinds. There are chassidim who are pure, comely, and exposed, and there are, at times, those who are unsight and covered.\textsuperscript{37}

\section*{BEYOND DEATH}

The disciples’ relationship with their rebbe is so strong that it actually transcends the death of the tzaddik. Rabbi Schneerson makes this point while commenting on a Talmudic story in which a dying rabbi makes a request for his sons [to be understood as his disciples] to draw near:

\begin{quote}
It would have been reasonable to assume that he would no longer have any connection with us [after his death]. In order to forestall such an assumption, at the moment of his passing Rebbe said: “I need my sons.” As if to say: “Even though I am now ascending to divine service of a transcendent order, I nevertheless remember you, and I shall remember you wherever I shall be. Moreover, in whatever lofty levels of ascent I may find myself, your divine service matters to me—‘I need my sons.’”\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

The disciples of a rebbe believed that nothing could break the bond of devekut, not even death.

In fact, the day of a tzaddik’s death is known as his Yom Hillula (יום הילולא), “a day of celebration.” The term originally referred to a wedding day but was adapted by Chasidim to describe the return of the tzaddik’s soul to HaShem, i.e., a “mystical marriage.”\textsuperscript{39} Rebbe Schneerson writes:

\begin{quote}
In one of his letters, his honorable holiness, my teacher and father-in-law, the Admor Rayatz expounds on the greatness of the practice of observing the yom hillula of a tzaddik through study and a farbrengen. In that letter he recounts the events of the yom hillula of the 9th of Kislev … At the farbrengen that took place then, his Honorable Holiness the Admor, may his soul rest in Eden, said the following: “The observance of a yom hillula through studying the teachings of the tzaddik who passed away on that day and through prolonging the farbrengen constitutes a pidyon nefesh that one gives to that tzaddik.”\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

The anniversary of the death of a tzaddik is not a time of mourning but of connection with his disciples. The Chasidim celebrate the return of the rebbe to HaShem:

\begin{quote}
A Tzaddik is like a son of G-d. There is still a barrier separating him from his Father. G-d has a great longing for the Tzaddik, just as the Tzaddik yearns to return and come close to G-d.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

The presence of one’s rebbe is said to be even stronger in his death than before it:

\begin{quote}
Therefore we have learnt that the tzaddik, even when he departs from this world, does not really disappear from any world, since he is to be found in all of them more than in his lifetime. (Zohar III, 71b)
\end{quote}

Commenting on this the Tanya states, “He is to be found more even in this world of action (“this day to do them [Deuteronomy 7:11]”), because the action keeps growing.”\textsuperscript{42} That is to say that after the tzaddik dies, his actions and influence are increased and become even greater than when he was alive.\textsuperscript{43} Hence, it can be said that a tzaddik can always be said to be “living.”\textsuperscript{44}
Additionally, it is taught that once a tzaddik dies, his ruach (spirit, רוח) is freed from the earthly soul (nefesh, נפש) and can now be freely received much more abundantly by his students:

[Because the ruach has been freed of the limitations of the nefesh,] each one of [the tzaddik’s] students and all those who are close to him can receive a portion of his ruach which is in Gan Eden. For it is no longer material, nor is it contained within a vessel … In contrast, during the lifetime of the tzaddik when his ruach is enclothed in his soul, and his soul attached to his body, his students and the Jewish people as a whole can receive [his influence] through his holy words and thoughts. When, however, the ruach is separated from the nefesh, [the ruach] can shine forth to every one of his students according to the individual level … It can be understood that any one of [the tzaddik’s] students can receive their portion and their teachings from the ruach of their master in any place.45

DEAD CHASIDIM

Ordinarily, after the passing of a rebbe, a new rebbe rises up to take his place at the head of the Chasidic community. In a few Chasidic sects, however, the disciples’ connection to their rebbe, even after his death, is so strong that no replacement is possible. The Chasids of the dead rebbe remain devoted to their deceased leader’s teachings and refuse to accept a new rebbe in his place. For example, although Chabad elected a succession of six consecutive rabbis after the death of their founder Schneur Zalman of Liadi, they have not found a successor for the seventh and late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Though he died in 1994, no replacement is being sought. Schneerson’s charisma and connection to his followers was at such an exalted level that it would be too difficult for anyone to take his place.

The most famous example of a Chasidic sect clinging to a deceased rebbe is the Breslover Chasidim; the sect was founded by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. Rabbi Nachman died in 1810, but to this day, the Bresolver Chasidim have never elected anyone to take headship over their sect. Rebbe Nachman told his followers, “My fire will burn until Mashiach comes.”46 Other Chasidic schools refer to the Breslovers as the Toytn Chasidim (“Dead Chasidim,” חסידים טויטן i.e., they serve a rebbe who is no longer alive in the physical sense. Many Breslovers make a declaration of connection (hitkashrut, התחשות) before beginning a prayer time or performing certain mitzvot:

I hereby bind myself in my every thought, word and action all through the day to … the True Tzaddik, the “flowing brook, the source of wisdom …” Rabbi Nachman the son of Feige, may his merit protect us.47

In this way Breslov Chasidim see themselves still attached in spiritual fellowship with Rabbi Nachman, even generations after his passing.

INTERCESSION

Another important part of the tzaddik/devekut equation is intercession. The tzaddik makes intercession for his followers, petitioning God on their behalf. In some cases, the tzaddik is imagined continuing to do so even after his death. The precedent of intercession is biblical and is derived, once again, from the life of Moses. Moses was unique, the man in whom God found favor (chen, חן)—that is, “grace:”

The LORD said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor [chen] in My sight and I have known you by name.” (Exodus 33:17)

Because of his favor in God’s eyes and the intimacy he had with God, Moses’ prayers of intercession on behalf of the people are heard by God, often even reversing God’s own judgment on the people. For example we find in Numbers 11:22 that when a fire broke out, “the people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD and the fire died out.”
The Talmud states, “Whosoever has a sick person in his house should go to a sage who will invoke [heavenly] mercy for him.”68 James also alludes to the concept when he says that “the effective prayer of a righteous man [tzaddik] can accomplish much” (James 5:16).

Joel Marcus writes about Rebbe Schneerson:

Those who encountered [the Rebbe] often remarked on the way in which his piercing but compassionate gaze seemed to uncover their hidden needs and desires. The Gospels, similarly, stress what A. Ambrozic has called Jesus’ ‘possessive gaze,’ a glance by means of which he looks into and takes hold of the life of the follower.49

The tzaddik is said to have the power to nullify evil decrees and even transform the wicked. The Lubavitcher Rebbe writes:

We must add that especially at the time of chevlei mashiach [“birth pains of Messiah”] and harsh decrees, God forbid (b. Sanhedrin 97b), it must be the case that the “Holy One, blessed be He, enacts and decrees, and the tzaddik annuls it.” He accomplishes this by his causing a sinner to become a penitent.50

Even when the tzaddik himself is not present to pray on behalf of someone, praying in the tzaddik’s name is believed to recall his righteousness, merit, and favor before God. The prayer offered in the name of a tzaddik will be answered on his merit. An example is seen in the Breslov prayer quoted above where it says, “May his merit protect us.” In other words, “As we bind ourselves to him, hear our prayers based on his merit and favor.” Rebbe Nachman taught:

Every person must bind his prayers to the tzaddikim 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. (Likutey Moharan 2, 9:4 [Mycoff])51

Moreover, he added that “the true tzaddikim atone for sins”52 and that he himself was “a river which cleanses from all stains.”53 Rebbe Nachman stated that, even after his death, he himself “will still intercede for anyone who comes to my grave,” where he will pull “him by his Peyos out of Gehinnom!”54 It is for this reason that every year his most devout followers still make the difficult pilgrimage to his grave in Uman on Rosh HaShanah, the day of judgement.55 When they travel to him on this auspicious day it is thought that “all severe judgements are mitigated.”56

Yeshua the Tzaddik

The parallels between Chasidic thought and the New Testament are astounding. Yeshua too was declared a tzaddik on many occasions. His disciple John tells us, “we have an Advocate with the Father, Yeshua the Messiah the righteous [tzaddik].”57

Yeshua is the ultimate tzaddik, the only truly sinless person to walk the face of the earth. The concepts of devekut, tzaddikism, and yechidut can teach us a great deal about our relationship to Yeshua.

In the Master we have yechidut (“oneness”) where we are brought into a type of marriage relationship with Him. The Apostle Paul draws on this theme frequently in his epistles:

So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Messiah also does the church, because we are members of His body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Messiah and the church. (Ephesians 5:28–32)

In Ephesians 5, Paul transitions back and forth seamlessly between a literal marriage and Messiah’s relationship to His disciples. Much like the mystical musings of the Chasidic concept of yechidut, Paul
calls this a great mystery. The marriage relationship between Yeshua and His disciples is taken so seriously that Paul calls a breach of it adultery:

> Shall I then take away the members of Messiah and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, "The two shall become one flesh." But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. (1 Corinthians 6:15–17)

Marriage is a form of devekut. The man is commanded to "join [davak] to his wife." Paul brings in this imagery to illustrate his point. The language here is also very reminiscent of yechidut. Our spirit is joined with Messiah's, and we have become one. To break from this relationship is paramount to marital unfaithfulness.

The Master Himself prays "that they may be one, just as We are one." His desire is to draw us to the Father in perfect unity. Just as He is united with HaShem, so we will be united with Yeshua. The perfect unity is summed up by Rebbe Schneerson:

> Just as "Israel and the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are all one"—i.e., not only is Israel connected to the Torah and the Torah is connected to G-d, but they are all absolutely one—so, too, in the bond between [disciples] and their Rebbe, these are not like two entities which unite, but they become absolutely "all one." And the Rebbe is not an intermediary who intercepts, but an intermediary who connects. Accordingly, for the [disciple], he and the Rebbe and the Holy One, blessed be He, are all one.

Paul tells us that Messiah, as with the exalted tzaddik, is the head "from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God" (Colossians 2:19). It is through our head, Yeshua, that we receive life from the Father.

The imagery continues with the picture of a tree, its roots, and its branches. Rebbe Schneerson also points out:

> Chasidus [Chasidic teaching] and Chasidim are a "tree of life." In a tree, there is a root, which is connected to the ko'ach ha'tzome'ach (power/vitality in plants, ה功率 בצמחים) the body, and the branches. Through the root and the body of the tree, the branches receive abundant life and, therefore, bring forth various fruit.

> In the Chasidic tree of life, the rebbes represent the root. The body of the tree is Chasidus, and the Chasidim are the branches.

> Every Chasid is a branch from the "tree of life." Through the root and body of the tree, do the Chasidim (which are the branches) receive eternal life in order to bring forth fruit. "What is the fruit? Mitzvot"—performing mitzvot with an eternal life.

Rebbe Schneerson's metaphor is strikingly similar to the Master's words in John 15:5: "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." We connect to the vitality of HaShem through Messiah; He is the trunk and the roots connecting us to the life-giving soil. In Him we produce good fruit, i.e., good deeds.

According to the Gospels and the Epistles, connection and unity in Messiah should permeate the entire scope of our behavior day to day. It is not just about mystical philosophies, but rather about personal transformation. Connection and intimacy with the Master should inspire us to live a life dedicated to Torah as He draws us closer to the Father. A true one-on-one encounter with Yeshua is life-changing.
Like the interceding tzaddik, the Master makes intercession on our behalf, “since He always lives to make intercession for [us].” Yechezkel Lichtenstein points out that when the Master tells us to pray in His name (John 14:14) that it means to pray “in His merit.”

The Chasidic background can also be applied to the Master’s parting words: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The bond that we have with Him is eternal and transcends even the grave. Though He is not here with us now physically, He is alive and ever present in our lives. Like the rebbe of the Breslov Chasidim, our Master is no longer with us in the bodily sense, yet we experience a spiritual connection with Him that transcends physical parameters. He remains as the connection between us and the Father. We even hear a genuine Chasidic ring in the Evangelical quip, “Yeshua is in my heart.”

CONCLUSION

We are a frail and sinful people. We need a mediator between ourselves and the Father. We are in need of a savior. The ancient sages, as well as the modern Chasidic movement, realized the need for an intermediary. They understood that without one, man cannot hope to cling to HaShem. The same ideas form the central teachings of the New Testament.

The Gospels’ ideas of the divine nature of Messiah, His oneness with the Father, His intermediary role between man and HaShem, and the concept of having a personal relationship with Him, should not be considered foreign to Judaism. Instead concepts like these are central to Chasidic Judaism’s philosophy and theology.

ENDNOTES

2 Romans 3:23.
3 Hebrews 4:15.
4 In Chasidic thought there are different types of tzaddikim. Two special levels are the tzaddik hador (“the righteous one of the generation,” תדיק הודור, who is the special tzaddik for a specific generation, and the tzaddik yesod olam (“the righteous one who is the foundation of the world,” תדיק יסוד עולם), who is the ultimate tzaddik.
5 James 5:16.
6 Proverbs 10:25.
7 Rabbi Nachman, The Essential Rabbi Nachman (trans. Avraham Greenbaum; Jerusalem, Israel: Azamra Institute, 2006), 280.
9 This commandment is found in Deuteronomy 11:22, 13:4, and is considered "positive commandment six" according to Rambam.
10 Deuteronomy 4:4.
11 b.Ketubot 111b.
13 Also Exodus 14:31 and Numbers 21:5. The Mechilta on Exodus 14:31 expounds on these passages as proof that faith in Moses was a demonstration of faith in HaShem. Another example of an intermediary in Torah is the priests and the Urim and Thummim in Exodus 28:30. Additionally, it was the issue of the need for an intermediary with which Korah and his followers challenged Moses (Numbers 16:3).
14 Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 2:23. Additionally we find Simon Peter labeled as a tzaddik by Rabbi Yehudah in Sefer Chassidim 191 (see Avraham Yaakov Finkel, Sefer Chassidim: The Book of the Pious [Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997], 85).
16 Commenting on Genesis 12:2, “And so you shall be a blessing” Rashi writes, “The blessings are put into your hands.” Chasidus uses this to show proof for the power a tzaddik’s prayers and blessings. See Majeski, A Tzaddik and His Students (Brooklyn, NY: Sichos in English, 2008), 108–109.
Pesachim

Whispers between Worlds, audiotape lectures (Brooklyn, NY: 47 Yitzchok Breiter, 46 Rabbi Nathan, 45 Schneerson, 44...

See also b.

42

41 Rabbi Nathan, 40


33 Rabbi Shloma Majeski, 32 Schochet, 30 Schochet, 29 Rabbi Nathan, 28 Rabbi Nathan,

27 Special thanks to Nick Amik for translating this passage from Hebrew.

26 Rabbi Nathan, 25 Avraham Baruch Pevzner, 24 Menachem M. Schneerson,


22 Even praying at the grave of the tzaddik is considered to be like praying at the Temple. See Menachem M.


20 See b.

19 Cf. b.

18

17 b.Pesachim 68b.

18 Zohar ii, 163b. See also Zohar i, 9a. Cf. Zohar ii, 32a in its comments on Exodus 23:17 where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is called “the face of the Lord.”

19 Cf. b.Rosh HaShanah 18b; b.Bava Batra 4a.

20 See b.Sukkah 27b where 2 Kings 4:23 is cited as a proof text for visiting one’s teacher on the festivals. Also see Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 5:7.


22 Even praying at the grave of the tzaddik is considered to be like praying at the Temple. See Menachem M. Schneerson, Whispers between Worlds (trans. Rabbi Eliyahu Touger; Brooklyn, NY: Sichos in English, 2009), 11–17.


25 Avraham Baruch Pevzner, Al HaTzaddikim (Kfar Chabad: Beis Agudas Chassidei Chabad, 1991) as summarized by David Berger, The Rebbe, the Messiah, and the Scandal of Orthodox Indifference (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 97. Rabbi Majeski sees a Torah allusion of this in the phrase “man of God” (ish haEllokim, איש אלוקים) in Deuteronomy 33:1 and Psalm 90:1. He also brings up, citing Reishis Chochma and the Alshich, that Exodus 25:8, “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them,” could be translated “that I may dwell in them.” See Majeski, A Tzaddik and His Students, 30.


27 Special thanks to Nick Amik for translating this passage from Hebrew.

28 Rabbi Nathan, Likutey Etzot: Advice of Rebbe Nachman, 233. Rabbi Israel Dow Odesser said of Rebbe Nachman, “Rabbeinu is the father, he is the mother, he is everything. He is the Torah, he is the faith, he is everything. Everything is Rabbeinu!” and that “Breslov is Truth and everyone needs to receive from Rabbeinu. If people oppose Rabbeinu, then they are false!” (Israel Saba: Conversations of the Holy Rabbi Israel Dow Odesser [Jerusalem, Israel: Keren Rabbi Israel Dow Odesser, 2007], 466, 472).


32 Rabbi Shloma Majeski, Yechudis: The Essence of Chosid-Rebbe Relationship, audiotape lectures (Brooklyn, NY: Sichos in English).

33 Likutei Etzot, Tzaddik 79 [Greenbaum].

34 Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, To Know and To Care: An Anthology of Chassidic Stories about the Lubavitcher Rebbe (3 vols.; Brooklyn, NY: Sichos in English, 1993), 1:87.


36 Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kasover, Sefer Ahavat Shalom (Jerusalem, Israel: Ma’yan haHasidut, 1995), 161. Translation by Aaron Eby.

37 Reb Naftoli of Ropshitz, Der Sanzer Tzaddik (Austria: 1930/31), 27.


40 Torat Menachem 5711, 1:106.


43 See also b.Chullin 7b where the example of Elisha’s bones (2 Kings 13:21) is used to prove the greater power of the righteous after their death.

44 Or HaChayim on Genesis 23:23.

45 Schneerson, Whispers between Worlds, 29–32. See also Kav HaYashar 71. Cf. the Master’s words about the ruach, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7) and “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth … He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13).

46 Rabbi Nathan, Until Mashiach Comes, 158.

47 Yitzchok Breiter, Seven Pillars of Faith and A Day in the Life of a Breslover Chassid (Monsey, NY: Breslov Research Institute, 1989), 43. See also Rabbi Nachman, Rabbi Nachman’s Tikun (trans. Avraham Greenbaum; Monsey, NY: Breslov Research Institute, 1984), 11, and Rabbi Nathan, The Fiftieth Gate (trans. Avraham Greenbaum; 2 vols.;
Such declarations are not unique to Breslovers only but are found in other Chasidic circles, e.g., Rabbi Menachem Nochum of Chernobyl, Me'or Einayim, Beshalach [end].


Likutei Sichos 4, 1257.

Also *Likutey Moharan* 1, 2:6. See also Rabbi Nathan, *Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom*, 413 and *Likutey Etzot*, Tzaddik 15–16.

*Likutey Etzot*, Tzaddik 14 [Greenbaum].

Chayei Mohoran 332 [Greenbaum], also Chayei Mohoran 87.


See *Uman! Uman! Rosh HaShanah! A Guide to Rebbe Nachman’s Rosh HaShanah in Uman* (Monsey, NY: Breslov Research Institute, 2001). Breslovers find an early reference to this practice in b.Rosh HaShanah 29b where people would travel to the bet din (i.e., a group of tzaddikim) to hear the shofar blown on Rosh HaShanah. Also note the custom of visiting the graves of tzaddikim on Erev Rosh HaShanah in Schneerson *Whispers between Worlds*, 18.


Genesis 2:24.

John 17:22.

60 Literally: “an intermediary who separates” (*memutza mafsik*, ממעץ מפסיק).


b.Sotah 46a.


Hebrews 7:25. Cf. Romans 8:34.


It is interesting to note that Yaffa Eliach speculates that the Chasidic concept of the tzaddik was heavily influenced by a dissenting sect of the Greek Orthodox Church. See Eliach, “The Russian Dissenting Sects and Their Influence on Israel Baal Shem Tov, Founder of Hassidism,” 76.
The Bram Center celebrates the rich history and broad diversity of Jewish Yeshua-followers while focusing on the development of a Torah-based and traditional expression of Messianic Judaism. The Bram Center emphasizes three areas of focus: Yeshua faith, Torah-centered Messianic Judaism, and the land of Israel.