

BSD

“My Father, My Father”

The Personal Relationship Between a Chassid and his Rebbe

A main innovation of Chassidut is the personal, inner and essential – even intimate – connection between a chassid and his rebbe. (As the Alter Rebbe wrote in his forward to the Tanya, “I speak of those who know me well... words of affection were common between us”). We can look at the personal connection as support in the application of the Torah in life and dealing with its hardships, which is perhaps more crucial in our weak generations. On a deeper level, however, the essential connection and emotional fortitude that this connection provides is inseparable from the Chassidic quest for redemption.

As a rule, we pray that we will not have to face any trials in life. Successfully negotiating a trial, however, elevates us, manifests our soul powers, turns our faith into internal knowledge and makes our love of God tangible, enabling us to apply it in our daily lives. Nevertheless, it is only in special cases (and mainly for special souls) that a person is allowed to request or initiate a trial for himself - and it doesn't seem that a person can initiate a trial for someone else. The Magid of Mezritch explains, however, that Moses created a trial for the Spies. He knew that if they – his disciples – would withstand the trial (by virtue of their connection to him), he himself would be able to enter the Land of Israel and would transition from the “first redeemer” to the “last redeemer” and would immediately lead the Nation of Israel to the complete redemption and the building of the eternal Holy Temple.

Withstanding a trial by the power of the Rebbe and for his good – in order to elevate him for the sake of the entire Nation of Israel – is part of the holistic existence of Israel in its Land, where the Nation works as one integrated body. Thus, when the disciples-chassidim withstand the trial as emissaries-representatives of the Rebbe, they fulfill a vital requirement on the path to the Land of Israel and the redemption.

How can one person initiate a trial for someone else? This is actually quite common. Parents always initiate trials for their children. When a mother brings a child into this world, the ‘world of trials’ – she has initiated a trial for him! When a father sends his son to develop independence – from learning how to walk to getting married – he challenges him with trials. Parents challenge their children with trials specifically by virtue of the essential bond between them. They believe in their children's fortitude and feel that their children's trials are their own. When their children fall, it hurts them and when they succeed they feel that they have succeeded. With this feeling, Rebecca sends Jacob to face off against Esau and to endanger himself by stealing the blessings. This is also how “his father's image” saved Joseph during his trial with Potiphar's wife.

Between a chassid and his Rebbe, as well, the key is the personal-essential connection, similar to the father-son relationship. An example of this is when Elisha the Prophet cried out “My father, my father” to his Rebbe, Elijah the Prophet during his great trial, when his Rebbe was taken from him and it was now upon him to continue his work.



Gal Einai

Revealing the Torah's
Inner Dimension

In the Zohar (II 121a) it is written that “Every rabbi is from Babylon and every rebbe is from the Land of Israel.” The Ba’al Shem Tov explains that a ‘rebbe’ is characterized by his infinite flow of Divine Torah innovations, along with his ability to apprehend their essential point and to bring them to actualization in reality. The actualization of these abilities for the good of the entire Nation of Israel depends upon the difference between a rabbi and a rebbe – upon the transformation from a rabbi who is expert in and adjudicates Jewish law, to the experience that ‘this is my Rebbe.’ (In Hebrew, the *yud* at the end of the word ‘rebbe’ indicates possession: *my* Rebbe, not just *a* rebbe). A chassid is totally connected to his Rebbe with an unbreakable soul-bond – as if the rebbe was actually his father. The development of this connection, which is a foundation of Chassidut, makes it possible for the Nation of Israel to actualize its destiny and reach the true and complete redemption.