

Clarification of Rabbi Yisroel Odesser's Shlichus to our Generation

Dear Friends,

In honor of the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Odesser on 18MarCheshvan, I wish to offer the following comments and observations. What follows may not be pleasant to all of you to read; but believe me it is offered with love and fervent hope for the Ge'ula, which as Rebbe Nachman says depends on Coming Close to the True Tzaddikim of the Generation, and on elevating the Truth over falsehood.

First let me start by saying that Rabbi Odesser, ztza"l (Hebrew abbreviation meaning: "May the memory of a Tzaddik [Perfectly Righteous and Holy Person] be for a blessing") was an awesome figure, a Torah Giant as well as a Mystic, in the fullest sense of the word. In his later years he suffered terribly from various ailments, and was confined to a wheelchair. He also was extremely guarded in his speech and actions. He would reveal to us only the tiniest drop of his true thoughts, desires, and hopes. Therefore it is difficult for anyone to try to speak with "authority" about him. If you talk to any one of the perhaps hundreds of people who knew him first hand, each would present a different slant on Rabbi Odesser and ideas. Each also risks coloring his perceptions with the distortions of his own personality flaws. This is another way of saying that sometimes we would have major misunderstandings about Rabbi Odesser, and he would actually let these misperceptions stand for reasons only he knew. Thus no-one really can speak authoritatively about Rabbi Odesser in the end. He viewed us all as children, a mixture of good and bad. He worked hard to try to wean us from the bad and to let flourish the good. Yet his ways of relating to people were mysterious and had the aura of a master psychologist with awesome understanding of human nature. And this from a man who spent the majority of his time in solitude, meditating and praying in the splendid isolation of Israel's parks and forests!

What I gleaned from Rabbi Odesser is the following. I saw that he stressed three main points:

1. That saying "Na Nach Nachma Nachman Me'Uman" is a powerful spiritual "segula" (Hebrew meaning "remedy") that could help a person overcome all sorts of negative thoughts, feelings, ruminations. It also could achieve minor miracles for a person in times of danger or trouble. I myself find that singing Na Nach to various melodies that I like (each one to fit a different mood and time) helps me feel more positive and generates energy and determination within me. Many so-called serious Torah scholars laugh at us, but the fact is that every Jew, no matter how pious and learned, has large periods of transitional time, such as when he is travelling or walking or shopping or dealing with his children and family when it is not possible to open a book. Na Nach fills these periods with the joy of song and the holiness of this unique Kaballistic formula for expressing the name of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. It is the ultimate weapon to ensure that we always are in touch with our Creator and with our own souls.
2. Acquiring and learning from Rebbe Nachman's books. In this sense Rabbi Odesser seemed to use Na Nach as a sort of advertising slogan to persuade the public of the greatness of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (Breslov was where he spent most of his years as a Chassidic Rebbe; Uman was where he lived his last half-year of life and died and was buried--on the 18 Tishray, in the middle of the Holiday of Succoth) and to encourage them to buy his books and to learn from them and to implement their advice. Rabbi Odesser believed that Rebbe Nachman was akin literally to the Bible's Moses, and he required equal reverence from us in order to help us and to lead us and the entire world into its Final Redemption. Rabbi Odesser was uncompromising in his scorn of those who doubted or even denigrated Rebbe Nachman, G-d forbid, and would accuse such persons of the greatest evil, claiming that their reluctance to embrace the Truth stemmed from their arrogance and that they imperilled all of Israel and the World with their obstinate denial of the light of Rebbe Nachman's teachings. He even would term such persons "Hitler" and claimed that they literally were greater enemies to

Israel and the World than the demon Hitler himself. (Concerning this, please see Letter #59 from Rabbi Odesser's book of letters to Israeli President Shazar, Ibay HaNachal at: <http://www.breslov.com/netzach/ibey059.html> (another web-site about Rabbi Odesser) or browse yourself through the letters at: http://www.moharan.com/pages_ang/letters.htm
One letter I reproduce for you here:

THE WAR AGAINST HAMAN-AMALEK*

With G*d's Help
12 Adar 5724

In honor of the President of Israel, the daughter of my eye and my heart, Mr. Sh. Z. Shazar, who merited with mercy and great miracles from Hashem to feel a sharp feeling and to believe to believe in the True Tzaddik, father of the Sages and head of all the choice Tzaddikim, singular in their generations. And who digs with powerful exertions, with a heart burning and firing like a coal of fire to enlarge and to publicize throughout the world the name of the Tzaddik, the Master of the world and the grace and glory and loveliness and beauty of the whole world, who reveals and illuminates G*d's Divinity to everyone in the world. And through whom will be the complete rectification of the world. May Hashem finish what He began to do amazingly with you, such amazing wonders, until you will merit to behold the pleasantness of Hashem. And the main rectification of the world in each and every generation is only through [the Tzaddik].

Everyone knows that nothing is fixed in this world. And everyone will be forced to depart from here in the passing of a quick moment. For all of time is not considered even like a moment to one who puts his heart and his mind well to the flight of time, more than a bird in flight. And we need to strengthen ourselves greatly in order that we not forget all the goodnesses and kindnesses and miracles and wonders that Hashem Yisborach has shown to you. Be very very careful and guard your soul greatly not to forget at any moment the powerful kindness and mercy that Hashem Yisborach has done for you to draw you near to the True Tzaddik. Indeed all our days would not suffice to give thanks and praise for what Hashem Yisborach has done for you. Grab and eat, grab and eat the foods of the Tzaddik each and every day, as much as is possible, even in all the business and great preoccupations that you have.

The husk of Haman-Amalek wants to gain power in every generation, through heresies and atheism, through the questions and investigations that are impossible to answer now in any way. But Hashem Yisborach fights against him in every generation and supresses him through the True Tzaddik, the aspect of Moses and Mordechai, who merited to such a great level until he can draw down the Holy Unity also into the very very distant places, into the force of the strengthened heresies and secular wisdoms of vanity that awaken and renew themselves in every generation in these our generations.

The Author

3. Publishing and distributing Rebbe Nachman's books to the general public. This was perhaps the sine qua non for Rabbi Odesser. And he insisted that the books be printed at cost and sold at cost. Since he died in Oct. 1994 (18 Cheshvan 5755), two major groups have emerged that spend great time and effort trying to fulfill this idea. Between they have sold almost 2 million books, pamphlets, tapes, and posters to the Israeli public, a publishing feat in general, and evenmore so in the Orthodox world, with its more limited market. These books are sold literally at cost. For example, they might sell Likutay Moharan (Rebbe Nachman's Master work) for 30 shekels, when a book of its size and scope would fetch 100 shekels in a regular bookstore. This goal was part of (2) above, a way of bringing Rebbe Nachman's light into the homes and hearts of every Jew. It seemed

that Rabbi Odesser viewed saying Na Nach as a preliminary to this step, although it had great value in its own right as well as a sort of Jewish super-mantra.

4. Rosh HaShana and the grave of Rebbe Nachman. This is the most precarious and obscure of the legacy of ideas that Rabbi Odesser left us with. It is a sacred part of Breslov teachings to gather by the grave of Rebbe Nachman in Uman on the eve of Rosh HaShana (a traditional time in all Orthodox sects to visit graves of Tzaddikim and to pray for mercy) and to pray on Rosh Hashanah itself together. When Breslovers were centered in the Ukraine they all made great efforts to travel to Uman to implement this teaching.

This prevailed throughout the 19th Century. Later, following the Soviet Communist Revolution, when the borders were closed, the Breslovers in Eastern Europe would gather together in Lublin, a prominent Jewish city in Poland, for Rosh Hashanah. With Rebbe Nachman's grave inaccessible to them, they sufficed with prayers and meals together in Poland. Breslovers regarded Rosh Hashanah as a holy obligation, upon which depended the fortune of the entire year to come. Rebbe Nachman himself said (written in books) that he could make spiritual rectifications on Rosh Hashanah that even he could not do the rest of the year, and that all of his followers were obligated to come to him for Rosh Hashanah, even after his death. The Breslovers would sacrifice greatly to be near Rebbe Nachman's grave, and when this was impossible at least to be together. (Incidentally, this convocation is called in Hebrew "Kibbutz" and is the source for the modern Hebrew word meaning a socialist type commune.)

The problems begin with Eretz Yisroel, the Land of Israel, for here there are two seemingly incompatible contradictions in Rebbe Nachman's teachings. One is the primacy of the Rosh Hashanah Kibbutz in Uman; the other is the absolute necessity for every Jew to live in the Land of Israel. This latter point is stressed repeatedly throughout Rebbe Nachman's teachings. Thus we are faced with a dilemma of living in Eretz Yisroel in great distance from Rebbe Nachman's grave in Uman. Please remember that in the 19th century the journey to Uman from Israel was long and perilous. To travel there for Rosh Hashanah meant leaving a month early and returning a month late, missing all the Festivals that follow Rosh Hashanah. One great Breslover leader in Jerusalem actually died in Uman following Rosh Hashanah and was buried there. Another actually refused to travel to Uman for Rosh Hashanah for fear of dying there and being forced to be buried outside of the Land of Israel. It is said that Rebbe Nachman's own attendant, Rabbi Shimon, left Uman and moved to Israel after the Rebbe's death in 1810. He never even attempted to return to Uman, even just for Rosh Hashanah. Critics reply that eventually he meant an untimely and harsh death, when he was murdered amidst meditation by an Arab marauder. Perhaps a punishment for avoiding Uman?

The problems intensify in more modern times. For 70 years the Soviet borders were sealed shut and Uman was all but inaccessible. A very few attempted to visit the grave and sometimes were allowed half-an-hour by the Soviet authorities there. Suddenly in 1989 a large gathering was allowed to take place in Uman for Rosh Hashanah. About 1000 people visited there. Since then the conditions have steadily improved and the numbers have grown, until almost 8000 prayed there this year on Rosh Hashanah. The Breslovers have created a Central Committee to oversee construction of a huge shul in Uman, housing, and other facilities. It seems that they want Uman to be the center for Judaism in all the former Soviet Union, much as New York serves that role in America.

(Please see:

1. <http://www.shamash.org/jb/bk960920/ivisit.htm>
2. <http://www.shamash.org/jb/bk990910/ustinyukraine.shtml>)

I caution you that rumors are that there is tremendous graft in Uman, with huge payoffs to the Mayor and Police, and other exorbitant bribes in order to allow the Breslovers to "do their thing." I myself merited to visit Uman ten times in the span of four years, and I saw wonderful things there. However since Rabbi Odesser died I have ceased to travel there. This is a personal and painful story that I cannot go into now. You should realize, however, that when thousands of chassidim visit Uman, with their fur hats, their Festival food,

and their money it places considerable strain on relations with the locals, who largely are poor and very simple. It is an incongruous mix of realities, one that I grew increasingly wary of. Of course the officials of Uman welcome the gathering (and the payoffs they receive) but it's hard to know if it is an appropriate thing in the eyes of the local people.

Rabbi Odesser was insistent about the kibbutz in Uman. However the problem is that he also was insistent that the official Breslov leadership was corrupt and unreliable. The reason for that is their opposition to and denigration of Rabbi Odesser's "Letter from Heaven" and its song Na N'ach. This requires a long and separate discussion to try to explain. Let me state now that since Rabbi Odesser's death, his followers have split into two: one group continues to travel to Uman for Rosh Hashanah. They pray and eat together there, apart from the thousands of official Chassidim, who largely belittle our group. They are stubborn that this is Rabbi Odesser's will, to travel to Rebbe Nachman's grave even if the others in the group are your detractors and opponents.

Another group remains in Israel, prays at Rabbi Odesser's grave on Rosh Hashanah eve, and prays together at the Western Wall on Rosh Hashanah itself. They eat and sleep in a Yeshiva in the Old City of Jerusalem, near the Wall. This group claims that when Rabbi Odesser died he received the full spiritual gifts of Rebbe Nachman, and just as he was his messenger in his lifetime (as it says in the Petek: "My precious student" <http://www.moharan.com/album_photos/petites/13.jpg>), so has he become Rebbe Nachman's messenger in his death. In other words: Rabbi Odesser's grave site has the equivalent spiritual power and segula as Rebbe Nachman's in Uman:

http://www.moharan.com/album_photos/grandes/g23.jpg

Personally I find this view more compelling, for a number of reasons:

1. It is logical to assume that if Rabbi Odesser was Rebbe Nachman's messenger in his lifetime, then he continues to be so in his death. The Petek clearly terms Rabbi Odesser "My precious student" and singles him out as the only true representative of Rebbe Nachman in our generation.
2. Rabbi Odesser had a Messianic fervor that no other personality in Breslov has. He was filled with fervent optimism about the Jewish Nation, and he was able to embrace even the most alienated Jew as no one else can.
3. The people who subscribe to this latter view are themselves the most aggressive and forceful purveyors of Rabi Odesser's message in the world. They seem to draw tremendous confidence and inspiration from their Kibbutz in Jerusalem.
4. Finally and perhaps most importantly, Rabbi Odesser's grave is accessible to everyone in Israel, and in the whole world. As successful as the gathering in Uman is, still even 10 thousand people is a tiny percentage of world Jewry. And Rabbi Odesser insisted that every Jew must receive his Tikkun (rectification) through Rebbe Nachman's grave. The trip to Uman is expensive (with all costs included it runs close to \$800), and is still dominated by the cloistered Me'a she'arim type Chassidim. The average Israeli, who might have a pony tail and earrings, would not consider joining with them for Rosh Hashanah.

However there are important problems with this view, which I will try to describe:

1. On Rosh Hashanah 1992 Rabbi Odesser declared (in Uman) that "Uman is finished," and that in the future Rosh Hashanah would take place in Jerusalem. He viewed this as part of the final redemption: that the Kibbutz should shift back to Israel.
2. Rabbi Odesser once told me personally, when I asked him about the wisdom of a certain person travelling

to Uman: "That is good, but how much better would it be if Rebbe Nachman's grave were brought here [to Israel]."

3. Rabbi Odesser made certain efforts, even meeting with then-Israeli President Chaim Hertzog in the summer of 1992, to secure Israeli Governmental assistance to actively exhume and transfer Rebbe Nachman's body to Israel. In Feb. 1993, at an official state meeting between President Hertzog and Ukrainian President Krupchik in Jerusalem, an agreement was announced authorizing this transfer. Immediately thereafter elements of Breslov in Me'a She'arim intervened, with the assistance of Orthodox Keneset member Menachem Porush (a renowned oponent to Breslov!), to convince the Ukrainian President to retract his agreement, and the deal was cancelled.

4. The roots of this problem go even deeper. Rebbe Nachman states (Chayay Moharan (Rebbe Nachman's official biography) #162 that his had wished to die and be buried in Israel, but that two things prevented this:

1) His fear that, owing to his great weakness from tuberculosis, he would die on the ship journeying there and his body would be thrown overboard to the sea, as was the custom in those days.

2) His concern that his followers, all of whom then lived in the Ukraine, would be unable to visit his gravesite owing to the perilous and difficult journey to Israel. He wished to remain close to his followers and that his gravesite serve as a focal point of prayer for them.

5. Rebbe Nachman visited Israel in 1798, when he was 26 years old. He wished to go straight to Jerusalem, but for various reasons was prevented by the Turkish authorities and was forced to stay in the Galilee. He spent most of his time in Tiberias. In 1888 Rabbi Odesser was born in Tiberias to a prominent Chassidic family (not Breslov, as Breslov was virtually unknown in Israel, and the few elements that were here were reviled by the Chassidic community at large). In 1922, still in Tiberias, he received his Petek terming him "My precious student" and revealing Na Nach. Thus one could argue that Rebbe Nachman, who himself had arrived as far as Tiberias but had been thwarted in his goal to reach Jerusalem, "passed the baton" on to Rabbi Odesser (in the form of the Petek, which contains many allusions to a Rebbe's appointing his student as his successor), whose own burial in Jerusalem represented the culmination of Rebbe Nachman's own dream.

6. Rebbe Nachman entered Uman on 5 Iyar in 1810. 138 years later to the date this became Israel Independence Day: 5 Iyar 1948. 138 has profound mystical connotations with regard to the Messiah and the Redemption.

7. Rebbe Nachman died at 38; Rabbi Odesser at 106. together they lived 144 years, a number that has profound significance and that is alluded to in the Song Na Nach. thus one might argue that these two Tzaddikim together fulfilled a sort of joint-mission.

8. Rabbi Odesser was born a few months before Hitler, of accursed memory. The year in which he received the Petek, 1922, marked the beginning of Hitler's public diatribes in Munich against the Jews. Hitler committed suicide on Lag B'Omer of 1945 (18 Iyar, the Yahrzeit of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, author of the Zohar, and a great mystical Festival to this day; last year hundreds of thousands of Jews visited his gravesite in Miron innorthern Israel on Lag B'Omer), when Rabbi Odesser almost surely was one of the few persons who prayed there at the gravesite in Miron. When I knew him in the early 1990s, Rabbi Odesser frequently would speak about Hitler's spirit and the tremendous danger he posed to the Jewish People. He seemed to have a personal mission in this world to uproot and destroy Hitler in specific and Amalek (his evil spiritual kin) in general. This process is one of the important tasks of the Messiah.

9. Two years ago I had a very vivid dream in which it was revealed to me that the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, founder of modern Kaballah and buried in Tzefat in northern Israel) is Messiah from Joseph, and Rabbi Odesser, buried in Jerusalem, is Messiah from David. Virtually every Orthodox Jew accepts that the Arizal

was in fact Messiah from Joseph, as he himself alluded shortly before his death. Based on this I place credence in the latter revelation that Rabbi Odesser was Messiah from David.

10. Rebbe Nachman said that his song (NA NACH) would be revealed in the world by the greatest Tzaddik of the generation. He also said that there would be nothing new until the Messiah, implying that the Messiah would stand on a sort of equivalent status to Rebbe Nachman himself.

11. Rabbi Odesser said that anyone who repudiated the authenticity of his Petek and the Song Na NACH was a heretic and had no true bond to Rebbe Nachman's teachings and was not really Jewish! It is an indisputable fact that the trip to Uman to this day is run by the most vitriolic and acerbic detractors of Rabbi Odesser, which makes it difficult for any Na Nacher to participate with them.

Now I wish to discuss the opposition to the Petek. Rabbi Odesser's story is clearly recorded for all to see. He describes the circumstances leading to his discovery of the Petek, insisting that he found it in a locked bookcase that only he had access to (because his fellow Yeshiva students were opposed to Breslov, and would try to steal his books!). He also insists that no one knew these circumstances, that are alluded to in the Petek.

The detractors claim that Rabbi Odesser's Rabbis saw his depression and worried for him, so much so that they wrote the Petek in an effort to encourage him. this version is implausible for the following reasons:

1. Rabbi Odesser claims to have found the Petek in his locked bookcase, to which he and only he had a key.
2. He had revealed to no one that he had eaten on a fast day, which is clearly alluded to in the Petek. ("The sign is on the 17th of Tammuz they will say that you are not fasting.")
3. The Petek contains many powerful allusions to some of Rebbe Nachman's most profound teachings. It is inconceivable that even a well-meaning Rabbi of the Yeshiva, who was not learned in Breslov teachings and in fact opposed the group, could write such words. Anyone with a modicum of intelligence and spiritual sensitivity should be able to understand this.
4. Rabbi Odesser claimed that the head of the Tiberias Chassidic community, Rabbi Mordechai of Slonim, himself an ardent opponent of Breslov, made a full inquiry into who had "written" the Petek. He discovered no one, and determined that it was in fact true and authentic. A fellow student of Rabbi Odesser at that time, a certain Rabbi Avraham Ashkenazi who lives in Benei Berak, claims to have been sent by Rabbi Mordechai to inquire of every household in Tiberias (which then was a tiny community of perhaps 100 Orthodox families). He found no one who admitted responsibility for this "prank", and based on this investigation Rabbi Mordechai concluded that the story was completely true. A friend of mine in Jerusalem, Rafael Zeitlin, an American Torah scholar, interviewed Rabbi Ashkenazi a few years ago. You may phone him at: 972.2.571.2724 to confirm this story.
5. The opponents claim that a certain Yoel Ashkenazi, Avraham's brother, actually wrote the Petek as a well-intentioned "prank" on Rabbi Odesser. However Avraham denies this. In addition Yoel has been deceased for twenty years, and when pressed the detractors can produce no hard evidence to substantiate their claim. Yoel himself certainly is unavailable for questioning.
6. Rabbi Odesser received a forceful recommendation from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, the world's leading Halachic Authority, in New York in 1985, who writes of the Petek that he has seen "a secret document, a wondrous thing" and that Rabbi Odesser is a "genius in the field of Kabbalah." <http://www.moharan.com/album_photos/petites/21.jpg>
7. The Talmud records a number of cases of Peteks falling from Heaven. These are recorded in a few books in Hebrew. I can try to provide you with references if you wish.

Now I will describe to you my understanding of why the detractors continue to villify Rabbi Odesser:

1. Almost all of them will concede that Rabbi Odesser was an awesome Tzaddik with great knowledge of Rebbe Nachman's teachings and great powers of prayer. However, they insist that the Petek is a fantastical delusion.
2. Almost all the detractors come from or were taught by Breslovers who grew up in Uman before coming to live in Israel in the early part of this century. Rabbi Odesser himself was taught by the great Tzaddik, Rabbi Yisroel Karduner, who had lived for many years in Uman and was steeped in Breslov wisdom and tradition. However many of the detractors seem to view Rabbi Odesser as an outsider, born in a poor village in Israel to a family of non-Breslover Chassidim. They cannot conceive of how a person from his background could merit to receive a Petek and to be ordained therein as Rebbe Nachman's "precious student". (I believe this is akin to the 18 century opposition to the Ba'al Shem Tov by the Lithuanian Torah scholars, who could not fathom how one could learn Torah mystically in the woods without constant guidance from a teacher. Incidentally a similar claim was made against Moses by the elders of the Jewish community in Egypt when he returned after a 60 year sojourn in exile, without any other Jews, to redeem the Nation from slavery. Remember that the Ba'al Shem Tov, Rebbe Nachman, Rabbi Odesser, and all great Tzaddikim have received a conventional Torah education in their youth with a regular Talmudic tutor. By the age of ten or so they have completed the entire Talmud and are by any accounts Torah geniuses. They marry at the age of 13 or so, and then when they take a divergence into mysticism--heavy emphasis on meditation in the forest, prayer, fasting and mortification, etc.--they encounter criticism. However understand that these people were not neophytes at all. On the contrary they were extraordinary Torah Scholars and geniuses who took a special slant towards mysticism and Kabbalah for reasons that only they knew in order to accelerate the Redemptive Process.)
3. Most of the leading figures amongst the detractors were themselves brought into Breslov by Rabbi Odesser! For instance Rabbi Odesser gave great aid to Rabbi Koenig to establish the Breslov community in Tzefat. He taught Eliezer Berland, head of a popular Breslov Yeshiva today. When he revealed to them his Petek, these people left him, unable or willing to believe it. Rabbi Odesser viewed them as men of little faith, less humility, full of impudence and the worst sorts of traitors, and castigated them vociferously.
4. Some of the detractors actually will confide that the Petek is true, but that it is too great a source of light and must be hidden from the masses. Rabbi Odesser insisted that it should be revealed, that it's story would be source of great wonder and encouragement for alienated Jews.
5. I personally believe that many of the detractors are jealous of Rabbi Odesser's being singled out by Rebbe Nachman. Breslov has no Rebbe today. All Breslovers, even the most learned Rabbis, yearn for some sort of closeness to the Rebbe, for signs and indications that the Rebbe views them with special warmth. All Breslovers engage in meditation and are prone to delusions and false comprehensions. I believe that simple jealousy and resentment is the source of much of the opposition to the Petek.
6. Another reason for the opposition is that Rabbi Odesser, with his Petek, succeeded in attracting huge numbers of Israelis to Breslov. He popularized Breslov amongst the masses. The more establishment figures view this process with suspicion, and fear being inundated with insincere persons who seek mystical escapes and quick fixes. Such caution is understandable; however again the problem is that they do not give Rabbi Odesser the authority to make such decisions, as is mandated to him in the Petek.

I've been typing for hours and have exhausted my mental resources. Please read-over this and let's take it from there. This is the deepest and most profound of subjects, going to the heart of the Redemptive Process. It takes time to assimilate.

With Blessings from Jerusalem,
Ibay Hanachal

