

THE NESIYA INSTITUTE
Hanukkah Study Guide 5769/2008

The Tale of the Menorah, By Rebbe Nachman of Breslav

Adapted from a translation by Aryeh Kaplan

Once a son left his father, and remained in a distant land for many years. When he returned home, he boasted about how he had learned the art of making menorahs. He told his father to invite all the local masters of this craft, so that he could demonstrate his skill.

His father invited all the masters of the craft to see the skills that his son had learned during the time he was away. However, when the son took out a lamp that he had made, they all realized that it was very ugly. The father later went to them, and asked them to tell the truth. Since they had no choice but to tell the truth, they told him that the lamp was very ugly.

Later the son boasted to his father, "Didn't you see the wisdom of my craft?" The father replied that the other craftsmen considered it to be very inferior work.

To this the son asked to know what was the defect that the craftsmen had found, and it emerged that each of them had noted a different defect. What one craftsman had praised, another had found defective; the craftsmen did not agree on what was defective and what was beautiful in the menorah.

The son replied, "They have it backwards. Through this lamp, I have demonstrated my skill. In this lamp, I included the shortcomings of all the local masters of this art. I have shown each one of them his own defect, since each of these defects was actually in he who perceived it. For I made this menorah only from shortcomings and nothing else, to demonstrate to all of them that they do not have perfection. Each one has a defect, since what is beautiful to one is deficient to the next. This is a menorah of defects, and now I will begin its restoration."

Questions for Consideration:

1. Why doesn't the son show the menorah to his father alone? Why doesn't the father tell the son his own opinion of the menorah?
2. What might the son be trying to teach 'the masters' about the art of making a beautiful menorah? What might he be trying to teach his father?
3. What does the son mean when he says "I showed each one his own defect"?
4. What does the story tell us about the potential of art or ritual to teach us how to improve ourselves, individually or as a community?
5. What is the relevance of this story to Chanukah?

Background about Rebbe Nachman of Breslav:

Rebbe Nachman of Breslav, the great grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, was one of the most creative, influential and profound of the Chassidic masters. Born in 1772, in Medzeboz, Ukraine, Rebbe Nachman became an outstanding *tzaddik*, Torah sage, mystic, teacher, Chassidic master and storyteller. Attracting his first follower at the age of 13, by the end of his life he had gathered a devoted following of Chassidim who looked to him as their source for spiritual guidance in the quest for God. Rebbe Nachman passed away from tuberculosis in 1810. He is buried in Uman, a small town in Ukraine, where he had moved a few months prior to his death. His gravesite continues to be a site of pilgrimage for thousands of Jews today. Even after his passing, Rebbe Nachman's influence has remained potent. His rich legacy of teachings, sayings and stories has made him a source of guidance and inspiration. The challenging ambiguity and complexity of his tales allow them to be continually analyzed and reinterpreted.

We hope you will enjoy making this tale part of your Chanukah celebration.