

Sukkot Drashot honoring Reb Nachman of Breslov and his great-grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov, with words from Basha Hirschfeld, Leah Bowden and Reb Judith Goleman

Basha begins

This week is the week of *Sukkot*.

The harvest is in. The moon is full.

We have been through the cleansing of High Holy Days.

We have stripped ourselves of any identity that kept us stuck in a world of this and that, a world of for and against. We have taken on the woes of our whole community, and we have been cleansed.

And then, after the final blowing of the *Shofar*, we go right out and build a dwelling, a very temporary dwelling. A *Sukkah*, with open walls, and a webbed ceiling so we can see the sky, so the light of the full moon by night and the sun by day can touch us.

We are no longer separate from God, pleading for forgiveness, feeling our pain and our shortcomings. Now we are one with the elements, the wind, the sky, the earth, and we are not afraid.

Reb Nachman – whom we are honoring tonight with quotes and stories, wrote a beautiful Niggun which you might know – it says:

“The whole world is a very narrow bridge and the main thing is to not be afraid.”

In this time of *Sukkot* we declare ourselves as children of God - of the Great Spirit – we acknowledge that we are nomads on this earth. We sit in our temporary dwelling with walls open to the world and say yes, we have come through the narrow place, and we are dwelling in the open now, and we are not afraid.

At *Sukkot* we acknowledge that our dwelling on this earth, our homes, and yes even our bodies, are temporary – those of us who have survived fire season are aware of the temporary nature of our dwellings. And all of us are - more or less - aware that our bodies are temporary dwellings for our souls... But the shelter of God’s love, (and for me that word is “the unfolding of reality itself”) the shelter of our connection with reality, never goes away.

That permanent shelter is the ineffable presence of Spirit, and no matter what our circumstances, we can find shelter in that peace. *Ufros Aleinu Sukkat Shalom...* Spread over us your shelter of peace...

We are a tribe of wanderers. I don't know about you, but I never quite believe I have a permanent home in any country. Being a child of German Jewish refugees, that readiness to pick up and leave is in my DNA.

We are wanderers - less attached to the permanence of any material dwelling, but deeply connected to the power that moves the spheres – some call that God – deeply connected to the *Shekhinah* dwelling in us and in the earth.

I am told the **Sukkah** has been compared to a **Chuppah** – where we get married. We join our spirit with the spirit that moves the spheres.

And the Joy of that marriage - after the trials of the High Holy Days - is palpable. We are relieved, of course. We made it through! But we are also JOYOUS.

Alan Lew, in his book, "This is Real and you are completely Unprepared" says:

"When we speak of joy here, we are not speaking of fun. Joy is a deep release of the soul, and it includes death and pain. Joy is any **feeling fully felt**, any experience we give our whole being to. We are conditioned to choose pleasure and to reject pain, but the truth is, any moment of our life **fully inhabited**, any feeling fully felt, any immersion in the full depth of life, can be the source of deep joy."

Leiah continues

Light drew Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, whose *yarzheit* is today, and he wavered throughout his life from light to dark. Some think he may have been bipolar. His writings were often of a self-help nature; he urged people to dance even when we don't want to.

I wanted to celebrate him today because it seems to me that even as our congregation's Jewish Renewal flavor certainly draws style and nourishment from the Chasidic movement in general, thanks to Reb Zalman Schachter Shalomi, specifically, it seemed to me, we are Rebbe Nachman's spiritual children.

He believed music is crucial to spiritual development. He invented the niggun. There will be a link in the chat later so you can listen to his niggun as sung by Richard Kaplan, who died this week. Nachman urged people to pray outside, in nature. And he thought outside

contemporary Jewish practice, meeting toward the end of his life with Maskilim, men engaged in the Enlightenment; he looked for the Divine spark outside of Judaism as well as within, just as many of us have done and still do.

Nachman likened the fruits of the earth to music, in his “Song of the Grass.” Reb Irwin’s translation of this includes these lines:

“Know that every Wisdom has a melody of its own from which it Flows forth, each Wisdom, according to its nature and level. And this from level to level up to the very point of Creation. . .

“There is a melody that comes through nature...and when our forefather Jacob sent his ten sons to Joseph, he sent a tune from the Land of Israel along with them. And that is the meaning behind his words: "Take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels (*kechu mizimrat ha'aretz*) but as Rashi explained, read *zimrah* in the sense of "song".

“Every blade of grass sings a song of praise and from the song of all the grass the shepherd's tune is made. . .

“If it were granted to you to hear the sound of the songs and hymns of the grass, how each blade sings without ulterior motive or extraneous thought nor expects any reward, you would know how lovely and fair their song is and how good it is to worship Adonai truly among them.”

Thank you, Rebbe Nachman. And so perhaps in this *shmitah* year, we can appreciate nature and all its songs without putting upon it the obligation of production.

Here’s the [link to Richard Kaplan’s rendition of Reb Nachman’s Niggun](#):

Reb Judith continues

I’ve been asked to speak tonight about the Baal Shem Tov, the great grandfather of Rabbi Nachman. I feel this as a tremendous honor and heavy responsibility.

I have loved the Baal Shem Tov since I was a teen ager, when I read about him in “Tales of the Hasidim” by Martin Buber.

The Baal Shem Tov lived from 1700 to 1760. He was a HUGE soul, full of light, who saw God everywhere in everything. He had an extraordinary and profound connection with other humans and with high spiritual realms.

It’s said that he could heal people of illness because he could see deeply into their soul and connect them to spirit and bring about their healing. He was a great teacher, but taught simply, with simple stories and sayings that had a deep resonance and effect. He engaged fully with ordinary people, really living the experience of seeing God indwelling in all Creation.

I want to tell you some things about his life.

His parents were people of great integrity. Both died in his childhood, and the community looked after him. He would often skip school and spend the day in the forest, in nature. In later childhood he began a practice in which he would sleep during the day, then at night when everyone left the synagogue, he would study holy writings all night. Everyone thought he was a dull child who was lazy. Meanwhile he developed huge and deep scholarship.

Later he was given the task of walking the children to school while he told them tales. He became a teacher. Then it was noticed that he had a gift for resolving conflicts between people – when they came to him both the person who won the case and the person who lost went away happy, they felt that true justice had been done. He was placed on the *Bet Din*, the judges of court cases.

One day a Rabbi who was the father of a great scholar came to the court with a case. When he looked at the Baal Shem Tov, for a moment he saw a curved sign shining on his forehead. He remembered seeing a sign like this shining on the forehead of his daughter when she was an infant. He decided this was the man who should marry his daughter.

The Baal Shem Tov agreed, but stipulated that the marriage contract should refer to him only by his name, Israel ben Eliezer, and should not mention his scholarship or his gifts or his family line. “After all, you want me, the human being, not my scholarship” he said.

The marriage contract was drawn up, and the Rabbi set off for his home city, however he passed away before arriving at his home.

The great scholar who was his son found the marriage contract and was aghast! My sister should marry someone with no scholarship and no family line? This is terrible! But his sister said, “If this is what my father wants, I will do it.”

When the Baal Shem Tov came to pick up his bride, he dressed in the coarse clothing of a Polish peasant, and spoke in a coarse manner. He only revealed himself his true nature and his scholarship, in secrecy, to his bride. They married.

The brother-in-law came to visit right away, worried about his sister’s well-being.

He and the Baal Shem Tov were praying together. The brother-in-law took a long time at his prayers, because he inserted Kabbalistic *kavanot* for many prayers, but it took the Baal Shem Tov much longer to pray. When they finished, the brother-in-law asked the Baal Shem Tov why it took him so long to pray.

“Well,” he answered, “when I pray, so many souls come to me and ask for my help to release them from purgatory so their souls can advance, and of course I have to help them all, so it takes me a long time.”

During the night the brother-in-law noticed that there was a strange light in the house. He went to investigate. He saw the Baal Shem Tov studying and praying, and light was coming out of him.

He became a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov.

It is said that this joyous and holy and powerfully spiritual soul that was the Baal Shem Tov was reborn within his great grandson – Rabbi Nachman.