# Narrative Structure and Didactic Allegory in the Tales of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav

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i. On the Stories of Nahman of Bratslav: A Methodological Introduction.

When analysing a work of the religious imagination, particularly one in narrative form, the question confronting the researcher is of a hermeneutical nature. He / she must ask: "Is it possible to go beyond an analysis of narrative structure and characterization so as to uncover the original intentionality of the author? Is the researcher capable of discovering the vision and internal motivations that compelled a religious thinker to supplement sermon and treatise by expressing himself through story?" If the argues that these questions may be answered affirmatively, he / she must then face the issue of external control, the necessity of uncovering reliable sources of information beyond the narrative, to inform and correct interpretative statements and protect them from the charge of subjectivity or anachronism.

In that religious teachers rarely told tales for their simple entertainment value, a historian attempting to understand such literature is faced with one of three possibilities. The first is that the narrative comes to serve a didactic function. In other words, it is a concretization in narrative form of a tradition's or master's beliefs so as to make them more accessible or palatable to its audience. Most sermonic parables and unsophisticated allegory fit into this category.[1]

Secondly, there is the possibilty that the tale constitutes an intensely personal expression on the part of the narrator / teacher, providing, at the very least, a veiled intimation of his own private experiences, yearnings and perhaps even his failures. If such is the case, the narrative comes not so much as to reveal doctrine as

to express the personality of the teacher, even if this is done only allusively. In such tales, one might even discover that the spiritual master / narrator himself appears, in various guises, as a character.

Or finally, it might very well happen that the narrative is the product of both motivations; that the theologico - didactic impetus is intimately intertwined with the personal - revelatory. This will occur if one of the mysteries being unveiled by the author is nothing less than the soteriological significance of his own task and destiny. Here, the story will be little short of a mythical apologia pro vita et doctrina sua. It is my contention that many of Rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav's stories fit into just this category.

Of course, as soon as one begins this process and identifies 'story or poem A' as a work expressing the theological vision of Master B, one must immediately face the issue of controls. How and by what means does a researcher know that the story is being interpreted in a manner that at least coheres with its authors' weltanschaung (assuming such to be accessible to us), If the author of our tale was a literate individual trained in the literary classics of his people, we can obviously begin by noting his uses of earlier symbolism and motifs. Does he share and exploit a symbolic language known to his contemporaries and predecessors? Does he use common symbols in a similar manner or do they undergo a profound alteration of meaning in his stories?

Furthermore, if the author left didactic works such as sermon collections, or if we possess accounts of his life and work, we would obviously use these as aids in the interpretation of his narratives and poetry. However, here too we must first strive to determine the reliability of such external sources, being watchful that we are not biased

by hagiographic propoganda.

All of these issues come to the fore when we direct our attention to the narrative tales of R. Naḥman of Bratslav, spun in the last years of his life as he was fighting a losing battle with tuberculosis and pursuant to the frustration of what censored texts intimate to have been profound Messianic expectations concerning his person and his career. These stories were related publicly to circles of disciples, recorded by Naḥman's meticulous secretary R. Nathan of Nemirov, and finally published by Nathan in 1815 with notes apropo the date and place of telling and partial explications of their meaning, as intimated by Naḥman himself. Nathan later published further comments upon the tales in his own work, the Likkutei Halakot, a mystical commentary on Joseph Caro's authoritative lawcode, the Shulḥan Aruk.[2]

One's first impression of many of Naḥman's tales is that they are Eastern European fairy tales clothed in a barely Jewish garb. The thirteen 'canonical' tales recount stories of lost princesses, misshapened but illuminated beggars, and misplaced princes, who, while on quests, confront challenging tasks and meet such diverse characters as forest magicians, dwelling in houses suspended above the trees, and mysterious merchants.

Yet these narratives are simultaneously allegories of spiritual quest, complete with Zohar-culled symbolism, a text that Nahman's sermons prove him to have known well. Furthermore, they are stories set in a world that has been shattered by some prior catastrophe and where good and evil, truth and falsehood are painfully intermingled and at times all but indistinguishable. The tales tell of a princess who has been cast out of her father's house by a curse

and entrapped by the "Not Good One", of children orphaned by a conflagration, and members of a great court scattered by a whirlwind. Theirs is a world which must be set aright, this being the task of a character who appears in such varied guises as a court vizier, a conquering hero and a master of prayer, who has set out in search of his lost comrades and sovereign.

Nahman's tales are clearly didactic polemics in support of the values enunciated in his sermons. They concern the confrontation between simple faith and philosophical speculation ('The Wiseman and the Simple Man') and spirituality versus material desires ('The Master of Prayer').

Yet the Kabbalistic initiate, when reading or hearing these stories, knows himself to have entered the world of Lurianic myth, with its vision of a world shattered in a primal, prehuman catastrophe, and in which the Divine Presence wanders in exile until the forces of good redeem Her. The initiate recognizes Naḥman's fantasies of quest as being, first and foremost, stories concerning the task of Tikkun, the redemption and reunification of both the world and God. On their esoteric level, the tales recount the identities of those who set out to affect the process of Tikkun, the dangers that they face, and the sources from which they gain succour.[3]

One might even argue that the stories are themselves an act of Tikkun, a sanctification of narrative, in which fantasy is raised to the realm of sacred myth.

It is primarily as moral and Kabbalistic allegories that Naḥman's early biographer / commentators, Rabbis Nathan of Nemirov and Naḥman of Chernin, present these tales. Both Martin Buber and Shmuel Abba Horodetsky, who were the first to translate and describe these texts for Western readers, follow the early Bratslaver

tradition by emphasizing their didactic side. Buber, in his German translation, emphasizes the moral-religious tendenz of the tales, interpreting them as the means by which R. Naḥman taught his auditors how to follow the path of simple faith. S. A. Horodetsky, who had no polemical ax to grind against Hasidic esotericism, followed the footsteps of the traditional Bratslaver exegetes and categorized the stories as allegories of Hasidic values and the Lurianic mythos.[4]

However, the contemporary critic quickly notices that the so called didactic level of these stories is quite subtle, hiding far more than it reveals. To the uninitiated, a Naḥman tale is essentially a delightful fairy tale, albeit one that often contains a clear moral or religious thrust and message, concerning, for example, the superiority of simple faith over rational speculation. However, in the course of the narrative, a major character will engage in some recondite, symbolic act which a Kabbalistic initiate will readily recognize as an allusion to the Lurianic vision of cosmic exile and redemption. Then the narrative's events take on a profoundly deeper significance as the allegorical referents of the tale suddenly, in what can be described as an epiphany, begin to unfold.

Let us take for an example, the eleventh tale of the Sippurei Ma'asiyot, "The Story of the Son of the King and the Son of the Maid Who Were Exchanged." In terms of folk motifs, this long narrative is an elaborate rendition of the changeling motif. On the same day, a midwife delivers two boys, one to the queen and one to the wife of a trusted royal servant. As both babies were born in the royal palace (although one as it were "upstairs" and one "downstairs"), she succeeds in exchanging them. And thus, a servant's son attains a throne while the true prince is raised as a servant.

At the conclusion of the narrative, filled with many delightful folk motifs but little overt Kabbalistic symbolism, the wandering, misplaced prince enters a city of wisemen. He is there offered the throne of that land if he can conclusively demonstrate his wisdom by passing several tests. In the last of these tests, the prince enters a mysterious garden. In its center stands a glorious carved throne, guarded by gold and silver lions and flanked by strange objects of furniture, a candelabra and a table. Stemming out from under the throne are roads heading into all directions of the kingdom. None of the wisemen understands the significance of the graden and its symbolism. Its decipherment is the prince's task.

The prince enters and notices that the crown affixed to the top of the throne is missing a rose, which he finds lying at his feet. This he replaces, simultaneously repositioning the furniture in the garden. At this point, the metal animals burst out in song and he is crowned king.

The initiate immediately recognizes the rose to be a symbol of the Divine Presence, who is identified by Kabbalistic exegesis as being identical with the Song of Song's rose amongst the thorns.[5] The goal of a Jew's observance of the commandments is to return the Divine Presence to her proper place within the world of divinity and resituate her upon the heavenly throne.[6]

All the other objects discovered by the prince in the garden also allude to the mystery of the Presence's redemption. The table and candelabrum that he discovers there allude to the table for the showbread and menorah, appurtenances of the ancient sanctuary that served as the Presence's terrestial dwelling place before its destruction. The Garden and its roads, evoking as it does images of

Eden and its rivers, symbolizes the supernal Eden, the Shekinah as the nurturing and creative source of the world. Thus, the prince's activity in the garden depicts the mystery of the Shekinah's return from exile via the agency of the holy man's actions.

Although, when read at face value, the narrative is a fairy tale concerning a prince's struggle to discover his true royal identity, the story also, on its esoteric level, relates how the ẓaddik struggles to discover his inner spiritual powers and struggles to redeem the Shekinah from her exile. His battle with the imposter might very well be an allegory of the soul's struggle for dominance over the flesh. Or, in that it is a struggle for a birthright, evoking Jacob's conflict with Esau - the paradigmatic enemy of the Jewish people, it can also be read on a corporate level. In this case, it would be an anti-gentile polemic, arguing that Israel alone is the true child of the royal court, who possesses the knowledge and ability to redeem the world. Both readings are supported by internal evidence, nor does one contradict the other. For Nahman's characters and symbols are multivalent, capable of simultaneously bearing a number of related interpretations, and no one reading can ever be said to fully exhaust their meaning.

If Nahman's symbolism is so profoundly polyvalent, how then is one certain that one's reading is something more than a purely subjective rendering? As we have begun to see, an answer to this objection lies in the fact that Naḥman's fantasies are so designed as to come to a point where classic Kabbalistic symbolism becomes a central force in the narrative, giving the initiated reader a clear intimation as to the inner theological meaning of the story. Until this point, much of the esoteric meaning of the tale remains quite opaque to the average auditor, who remains content to enjoy the story on its exoteric level.

However, from this vantage point, the initiated reader is able to look back and unravel the inner significance of earlier occurances and characters. When the prince has placed the rose upon the throne, the reader realizes that the mysterious, forest-dwelling magician who had rescued the hero when lost in the forest and had sheltered him in his aerial home, represents the zaddik, who dwells between heaven and earth and rescues individuals from the dark forest of ego and despair. Yet, it is only around these moments of inner revelation that the esoteric levels of the story come into focus and enigmatic trickster magicians are transformed from Bratslavian renditions of Tom Bombadil into zaddikim.

There are narratives in the Bratslavian canon where the esoteric meaning is more readily apparent. An example is the famous story of the princess who is delivered into the hands of the "Not Good One" as a result of her father's curse. This princess is clearly the Shekinah, the rose among the thorns, who must be rescued from the forces of evil.

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This interpretation is supported by the means by which the vizier attempts to effect her rescue. Rather than storming her captor's citadel by force, the vizier reverts to theurgic means, securing him-self in an abandoned place and lamenting her loss for a year, marking off the last day by a fast. However, at the end of that final day, as the sun sets, the vizier succumbs to hunger and eats an apple. As a result, he sleeps for years. Forced to repeat the process he fails yet a second time when he breaks his fast by drinking from a fountain of wine.

One does not require profound Biblical erudition to realize that the vizier's consumption of apples parallels Adam's repast of forbidden

fruit, while his drunken state mirrors Noah's misadventure with his vineyard. If the Princess is the Shekinah, the vizier represents the primordial saints Adam and Noah, who failed to accomplish the work of Tikkun, due to the abovementioned transgressions.[7]

If Nahman's tales guide us to the land of Faery, it is nonetheless a distinctly Kabbalistic Faery. For although his stories function quite well as independent narratives, a perceptive reader finds them to be highly symbolic accounts wherein the main protagonist seems to represent both the paradigmatic righteous person and the entire Jewish people in search of pure faith and the Shekinah's redemption.

Having seen how these stories work as Kabbalistic allegories, one must still ask whether they are to be viewed solely as imaginative didactic devices. What was the force that compelled Nahman to consciously spin elaborate narratives towards the end of his life and the frustration of his ambitions?

In that the tales appear after the failure of Nahman's Messianic labors in 1806, several contemporary Israeli scholars, particularly Joseph Weiss and Joseph Dan, interpret them as constituting intensely personal statements on his part. Weiss and Dan go so far as to deny that a didactic intentionality served as the major impetus behind their creation. In their opinion, the hero of these stories is not simply the paradigmatic righteous individual but instead, Nahman himself, the suffering zaddik hador, the leader of his generation who struggles against his own sense of sinfulness and the plots of his jealous, wonder working contemporaries.

Both in his teaching and political career, Nahman of Bratslav was a rebel. Where many of his contemporaries interpreted the Baal Shem Tov's motto "the fullness of the earth is His Presence" in terms of a non-dualistic theology which often culminated in the

denial of the objective reality of the ego and discrete phenomena, Nahman's teachings are distinguished by a profound awareness of the distance separating the human soul from God. His teachings, prayers and stories are suffused with a longing to bridge that gap, to vanquish the sinfulness that sunders the bond connecting humanity to Divinity.[8]

Naḥman's profound sense of personal sinfulness is complemented by an equally intense sense of self value and mission. His claim to be ẓaddik hador was not simply an assertion to spiritual pre-eminence amongst the other (and older) masters of his generation. In Naḥman's eyes, the ẓaddik hador bears the soul of no less a personage than Moses. This hoary soul is furthermore destined to function as that of the Messiah ben David's in the end of days.[9] Naḥman eventually came to see himself as being more than the mere bearer of the future Messianic soul. In mid-summer 1803 he seems to have publicly announced himself to have been Messiah ben Joseph, a warrior figure who will pave the way for Messiah ben David.[10] Naḥman's struggles for faith, charity and holiness were then not simply those of an individual zaddik, striving to be a worthy master in Israel. Rather, they were part and parcel of the process of cosmic redemption.

Joseph Weiss, in his groundbreaking essays on Bratslaver Hasidut,[11] was the first to fully comprehend and enunciate the correlation between Naḥman's self-image of suffering servant and the mythic universe enunciated in his sermons and tales. Weiss argues that Naḥman regarded himself as the human personification of the world's contradictions, brokenness and distress. It was he who bore the burden of the world's shattered state and in his own personal integration the world too would be redeemed. Consequently, wherever Naḥman speaks of 'the ẓaddik' or 'the ẓaddik hador' in his sermons, he is referring to himself, his trials and mission. And thus, Naḥman's collected sermons, the

Likkutei MoHaRaN, are to be viewed as the attempt of a great master of introspection to create a self portrait. "In Likkutei MoHaRan, a microscopic examination of the soul is performed ...and all of the torments of Hell pass over it on account of this examination."[12]

So too, Weiss argues that there is no statement in the tales that does not refer to Naḥman's person or to his spiritual experience - "occurences too heavy to bear, its alternate cries and awakenings." The key to the narratives' symbolism is the simultaneous identity of all of the stories' characters with their narrator, R. Naḥman.[13]

In support of this radical claim, Weiss cites Nahman's story of the leprous prince, who finds himself afflicted in all of his members. Neither magical potions nor doctors' cures alleviate his sufferings. A biographer could easily see in this story a reference to Naḥman's worsening tuberculosis, but why would Naḥman have symbolized his disease with a reference to leprosy, a malady that Jewish tradition had always viewed as a divine penalty incurred for the moral breach of slander?[14] Weiss notes that in Kabbalistic literature, leprosy is equated to the mashka d'ḥivya, the "hide of the serpent", a symbol of sexual desire and transgression. Naḥman's writings and liturgical enactments are permeated with the tension resulting from his unsuccessful struggle to stifle his sexual desires. It is no surprise then, if at one point, his imagination transformed him into a leprous prince.[15]

Weiss' tendency to interpret all of a narrative's major characters as facets of Naḥman's personality leads to some interesting if extreme readings of the tales. For example, in the story of the changeling prince, Weiss argues that the prince and usurping servant respectively represent the good and evil inclinations. The expulsion of the true prince from the kingdom and his fall into profound depression and a

profligate lifestyle are an allegory of the soul's defeat by the passions, which mire it in vain pursuits.[16]

Weiss admits that he encounters difficulty in sustaining this particular allegorical interpretation of the two men's struggle throughout the story, given its preoccupation with the issue of Tikkun. This particular reading seems forced, for the theme of the prince's struggle with the flesh is exhausted at an early stage in the story. Furthermore, as there seems to have been no doubt in the mind of any traditional Jew concerning the evil inclination's inability to perform salvific acts, Weiss' interpretation cannot unveil the significance of the prince's feat in the garden.

Nonetheless, Weiss' suggestion that one read at least some of the heroes of these tales as images of facets of Naḥman's personality is a profoundly perceptive one. This particular tale, recounting the struggle of a dethroned prince to conquer his passions, subdue his doubts and alienation, and to discover his true identity as a redeemer, possesses far too many parallels to Naḥman's own struggles with doubt and with his older, established opponents, the Shpoler Zeyde,(Aryeh Leib of Shpola, d. 1812) and his uncle, Baruḵ of Medzibozh for it to be anything less than a psychologically accurate portrait of Naḥman's checkered career. There is much to be said for Weiss' argument that Naḥman's tales should be read as mythical autobiography.

Weiss' insights have considerably influenced Yosef Dan's analyses of Naḥman's tales. In his study, HaSippur haHasidi, Dan backs off from Weiss' persoanalistic interpretation of the entire Bratslavian canon, and prefers to distinguish between what he labels Naḥman's didactic "analytic prose", i.e. his collected sermons, and the tales.. The latter "do not possess a didactic tendency but constitute the

literary expression of a complex, split soul, who was unable to disclose itself fully in analytic prose, but sought out a literary framework so as to be able to give some indication of matters that could not be completely uttered."[17]

Dan contrasts the didactic sermons, lucid expressions of Nahman's vision and values, to the stories, in which "the hidden is greater than the revealed, matters are not understood, and in no manner is anyone able to learn either Lurianic Kabbala or Ḥasidic ethics from these esoteric stories via a speedy reading."[18] Dan finds the tales to be at their vaguest precisely at the point where a truly didactic motivation would have caused them to be profoundly explicit.

> At that time when Naḥman arrives at the point in which there is room for explicit didacticism, i.e. for imparting instructions for Tikkun directed activity and the bringing of redemption, he closes off and interrupts the story in the middle, without exploiting the didactic opportunity. We can do naught but reject the exegetic / didactic approach and relate (instead) to these stories as a literary expression of profound experiences, which R. Naḥman was unable to enunciate in analytic prose, He was even unable to bring these matters to completion in narrative, but cut himself off in the middle.[19]

Dan bases this forceful claim upon the incomplete state of two of Naḥman's major redemption tales, "The Seven Beggars" and "The Lost Princess". The former is simply incomplete, for the seventh beggar never appears to give the orphan children his blessing and tell his story. In contrast to "The Seven Beggars","The Tale of the Lost Princess" is completed, but from a literary perspective the closure is profoundly unsatisfactory. The progress of the vizier's excruciating search for his princess is related in great detail, with no quarter shown towards his failures. Finally, he locates her in a mountain fortress and bribes his way in. And at this point, Nahman breaks off the narrative abruptly with the statement "And in the end, he brought her out."

These aborted and unsatisfactory closures cry out: "Interpret me!", for Nahman was an inventive storyteller and blessed with a fine sense for narrative structure. Dan, following Weiss, argues that the problematic closure stems from the fact that it is Naḥman who is the vizier. The vizier's failures, his inability to overcome human frailty and physical desires, do not merely mirror those of Adam and Noah but R. Naḥman of Bratslav's as well. Furthermore, it is possible that Naḥman sees himself in a literal sense as the reincarnation of Adam and Noah, sent into this world to fulfill their uncompleted mission.

Revealed in this tale is the extent to which Nahman has interiorized the Lurianic mythos and merged it with his personal sense of self. Nahman as the vizier existed before the moment of the primal Shattering of the Vessels, symbolized by the King's curse of his daughter. He has been in search of the Shekinah / Princess since the beginning of Creation. In the end he will succeed and the Shekinah will be redeemed, but the mortally ill zaddik, as he told the story, knew neither how nor even whether he would merit the completion of this task in his present life.[21]

Undoubtedly, there is much that is extraordinarily personal in even the most didactic of Naḥman's tales. In "The Simple Man and The Wiseman", extolling the virtues of naive faith over speculative reasoning, the errant and ultimately atheistic wiseman is described as being a physician by profession. The story expresses more than Nahman's misgivings concerning philosophy. It no doubt reflects the ẓaddik's unsettling experience with Westernized Jewish physicians in Lemberg, bearers of the incipient Enlightenment. Nevertheless, contrasting as it does the fate of a physician / philosopher and a

simple cobbler in their quest for wisdom, (the cobbler sees the king and becomes a vizier while the philosopher lands in Hell), the story carries too much didactic content for it to be viewed primarily as a personal statement.[22] Thus, Weiss' and Dan's denial of a didactic motivation in these tales is extreme. Most of Naḥman's tales contain a readily identifiable didactic base, whether the message is of an exoteric moral-spiritual content or an esoteric Kabbalistic one.

It must also be noted that there are moments int the tales where one sees instances of redemptive closure. An example is the story that we will examine in the second half of this essay "The Master of Prayer". Here we do learn how the princess / Shekinah is redeemed.

How then are we to deal with this issue of didacticism versus expressionism in the interpretation of Naḥman's stories? On their primary level, Naḥman's Tales are generally lovely fairy tales and can often be read quite adequately as such. They will often convey a spiritual or moral message, such as the supreme value of simple faith, a message readily comprehendible from the narrative itself. Yet, they often bear an esoteric, Kabbalistic meaning, accessible to those initiated into the Zoharic corpus and conversant with Lurianic texts. This esoteric level deals with the issues of exile and Tikkun and the struggle of the righteous to bring it about.

This esoteric level hardly exhausts Naḥman's tales. For the reader conversant with Naḥman's sermonic works, his self-identification with the figure of the zaddik hador, quickly realizes that both the Tales and the sermons share many common motifs and images. The righteous figures of the stories are not simply generic holymen but images of Naḥman, his career and struggles. And thus, at their most esoteric level, the Tales reveal their personal side. These works,

however, should not be regarded as effusions of the romantic ego, but rather as carefully crafted and jealously guarded mysteries in which Naḥman subtly initiated his followers into the secret dimensions of his life and mission. In this literature, then, the personal and the didactic are inextricably intertwined.

In order to enter Nahman's world more readily and deal with this issue in a more concrete manner, let us analyze a Nahman tale, "Ba'al haTefihah" - "The Master of Prayer".

ii. Narrative Structure and Didactic Intent in "The Master of Prayer".

In terms of its narrative structure, "The Master of Prayer" is a tale that begins in media res.[1] We are told of a "Master of Prayer" (Ba'al haTefilah) who has comprehended that the purpose of life is avodat hakodesh, the worship of God. He goes about enlisting men in this cause and eventually builds a community of the faithful, living a common life of prayerful simplicity.

In contrastto this essentially monastic commune, Nahman describes a second terrestial community, whose inhabitants worship weath and conform to a rigid,propertybased hierarchy that is a mocking imitation of the great chain of being. For in this land, the destitute are classified as being fowl, the merely poor as beasts, while the affluent as called stars and the wealthiest worshipped as gods.

Although Naḥman volunteers nothing concerning the origins of the Master of Prayer at the beginning of the story, it is readily apparent that he is a symbolic figuration of the Hassidic ẓaddik, whose charismatic piety stands in sharp relief to the greed and confusion of ordinary mortals. The detailed description of two diametrically opposed societies with which the tale begins causes the auditor or reader to expect a carefully constructed and even tragicomic parable contrasting spiritual and material wealth. For at first glance, the story seems to concern itself with the issue of Taḳlit haAdam, the purpose of human existence, as demonstrated in an account of the zaddik's oft times unsuccessful (Nahman is quite honest about the frustrations plaguing the holyman business) attempts to redeem fallen humanity. Thus, at the start, the story presents itself as a largely exoteric moral parable on the order of "The Wiseman and the Simple Man.'

Yet, approximately a third of the way into the narrative, Nahman

transposes his clever moral satire into a complex mythic vision of world redemption. The story of the Master of Prayer's struggle to redeem the inhabitants of the Land of Wealth becomes a subplot in a greater narrative framework of loss and quest; on first sight the stuff of romance, on closer examination the lifeblood of Lurianic myth.

The transition from satiric subplot to overarching mythic framework occurs at a moment of crisis in the history of the Land of Wealth. Having returned to said country in order to engage in his missionizing activities, the Master of Prayer finds himself arrested for attempted subversion. During his interrogation, the Land of Wealth is attacked by a powerful warrior who is in the process of conquering the world. Believing himself to recognize the warrior-hero, the Master of Prayer is sent out to his camp as an emissary. And recognize him he does, as both served a wise king (the hero being that king's son-in-law) before a disastrous whirlwind 'confused the world', snatched the hero's infant son from his cradle and scattered the entirety of the royal court. For at that faithful moment, the princess ran after her windnapped child with her parents the king and queen in hot pursuit. The ultimate result of the whirlwind and its ensuing confusion was the dispersion of the entirety of the royal court, as each of its members went out to search for each other. The Hero is engaged in a campeign to unify the kingdoms of the world, but this action is but the consequence of his search for his child, wife and liege.

This great catastrophe serves as the causal nexus of the entire narrative. Not only is the court sent into exile. The very state collapses into conventicles of squabbling individuals, disagreeing about the ultimate purpose of life, making disastrous choices as to its identity and going off by themselves to found new kingdoms.

The wanderings and labors of the Masterof Prayer and the Hero

represent an attempt to correct this state of chaos. By finding the members of the court, the holy man and warrior hope to restore both it and the world to its former unity. The remainder of the tale relates this very process.

With the introduction of the story of the whirlwind into the narrative, Nahman transfers the essential thrust of the tale from the moral to the mythological and places the problem of human error within its proper cosmogonic context. The destructive whirlwind serves as this particular story's symbol of the primeval Shattering of the Vessels, which culminated inthe diffusion and entrapment of divine sparks throughout the worlds.[2] The scattering of the ten figures of the royal court is an allegorical representation of this primordial catastrophe. Just as divine sparks lie buried in physical matter and desires, so too the members of the court are scattered amongst the erring nations.

Thus, the story of the Master of Prayer's adventure in the Land of Wealth is but a subplot or epicycle within the orbit of a far greater narrative structure and quest. And the reunification of the court through the labors of the Master of Prayer is an allegorical depiction of the Zaddik's restoration of the Sefirotic realm through his worship and service.

Thus, this long fantasy suggests a threefold structure of meaning. (1) On its exoteric level we are dealing with a didactic fairy tale analyzing the issue of the purpose of human life and depicting the struggle between materialism and faith. It reveals the inability of material power or wealth to fend off the forces of cosmic judgement; a power lying solely in the hands of a spiritual master such as the <u>Ba'al haTefilah</u>.

This satirical tale is embedded into a wider Kabbalistic framework, (2) distinguished by a profoundly complex and even bizarre set of symbols which I do not pretend to totally comprehend. On its most accessible

esoteric level, the fantasy is an account of cosmic exile and reconstruction (sh'virah and Tikkun), as represented by the scattering of the royal court. In such a world, the forces of judgement (Din) are dominant. These are represented by the figure of the aggressive warrior-hero. It is this awesome power of judgement that the Ẓaddik attempts to nullify by contemplatively restoring the harmony of the divine worlds, reuniting the masculine potency in God (the warrior) with the Shekinah (his wife, the princess). The imagery surrounding these central characters is derived from such fundamental texts as the Zohar and thus readily comprehendible to an initiated auditor or reader.

On this esoteric level, Naḥman is describing our world as the alma d'shikra, a realm of confusion, falsehood and doubt, in which humanity's faulty reasoning culminates in tragic choices concering the purpose of life. This sorry state is the result of a seemingly meaningless and arbitrary accident, which unfortunately renders humanity vulnerable to the forces of judgement. Nevertheless, humanity is protected by the labor of the zaddikim, who lead it to truth, fend off harsh judgement and effect its redemption by bringing about God's.

If Weiss and Dan are correct, these readings hardly exhaust the story's esoteric meaning. Even a superficial reading of Naḥman's sermons reveals that much of the symbolism surrounding the Master of Prayer and the Hero are intimately related to his vision of the Ẓaddik haDor and his redemptive role. Comparison of the tale with the sermons provides sufficient evidence to argue that not only is Nahman the true Master of Prayer and redeemer of holy sparks, but that the figure of the Hero is a reflection of his own sense of Messianic mission.

On its exoteric level, "The Story of the Master of Prayer" is a sharp satire concerning the purpose of life, built upon the contrast

between two very different societies.

The story opens with a description of its central figure, a 'Master of Prayer' "who all of his days occupied himself with prayers, songs and praises to God." He is depicted as a solitary, dwelling "far from civilization", but of the habit to return to town and converse with individuals concerning the "purpose of the world". We immediately realize the narrative to be Nahman's contribution to the honored and learned theological debate occurring in medieval Jewish circles concerning the purpose of creation and human existence. In opposition to the philosophers, who argued that humanity was created for the purpose of attaining a theoretical knowledge of God and His handiwork, the universe, the Kabbalists asserted that its task and reason d'etre was the service of God through the performance of the commandments. The Master of Prayer echoes this debate when he informs his auditors that there is no other purpose in the world other than to be occupied in the service of God and to spend one's days in prayer and praise.[3]

The Master of Prayer engages in his mission until he induces a number of people to join him in his life of meditation and austerity. Eventually, he founds a community in an isolated place watered by a river, and blessed with fruit bearing trees from which his followers gain their sustenance. (p. 140) The description of the holy community's life and location evokes associations with Eden. Underlying Nahman's description of the ideal religious community is the old Kabbalistic conception of a humanity created to watch and tend the Garden, which is to be read figuratively as meaning that the prayers and service of Adam were essential for the wellbeing of the supernal Garden, the She_k_inah.[4]

Three aspects of the Master of Prayers are particularly pertinent; his insight into human nature, his mastery of tricks and disguises,

and his unending feud with the forces of the establishment. The Master of Prayer has the ability to look at his disciples and determine the paths that they should follow, their manner of dress and food, and form of prayer. Given the amount of opposition that his work creates in the world, he is very much a trickster figure, a master of disguises and innuendo, appearing as a poor man or as a merchant as the situation demands. He moves carefully, instilling the seeds of doubt and new faith in a receptive listener, backing away quickly from the hostile and covering his tracks with obfuscation. Naḥman is not afraid to admit that this holy man can deceive as well as enlighten and he revels in the profoundly subversive nature of his task. For the Master of Prayer seperates father from son, entices the rich man to replace his opulence with a life of simple piety and makes a mockery of the world's accepted values.

The Land of Wealth stands in diametric opposition to the Master of Prayer's community. It too is segregated from the rest of the world in order to prevent its inhabitants' 'defilement' and its organization is that of a parallel creation, mirroring and mocking that of God's. A profoundly dehumanized society, its rigid wealth-determined hierarchy is given a peculiar scientific and religious sanction. Believing that the 'influence' of the stars produces terrestial gold, those who possess a substantial level of riches are held to have attained the fecundative power of the celestial luminaries. And those who possess even more wealth are viewed as being either angelic or even divine. And thus a society evolves in which the wealthy are worshipped as gods, while human 'beasts' (the poor) are encouraged to sacrifice themselves beforethe rich in order to reborn with a higher social status (p. 145). The Land of Wealth furthermore boasts public censors who regularly assess individual's assets so as to confirm

their current social status. Charity is not surprisingly forbidden, on the grounds that it decreases the public wealth.

The faith of the inhabitants in these beliefs is whole-hearted. Confronted by the Hero's intimidating army, they refuse to submit to his authority. For they know that he despises wealth and to submit to him would constitute an act of apostasy.

The depiction of the depravity of the inhabitants of the Land of Wealth is far too extreme for us to read this tale as merely constituting a satire of bourgeois society.[5] Its inhabitants are self-worshipping idolators rather than status seeking philistines. Ta'avat haMammon, the lust for riches, is a manifestation of a deeper need for self-aggrandizement and absolute power. Wealth is held to be the highest good and source of divinity because it bestows status and power over the lives of others.

Looking at Naḥman's sermons and his collections of _'Etsot_, volumes of spiritual advice, one discovers that the spiritual issue at stake is the conflict between idolatrous pride and the drive for self-sufficiency and the value of _bittahon_, humanity's obligation to place absolute trust in God and His ability to provide for all of one's needs. Naḥman exhorted his disciples:

> A person should habituate himself to pray all the time for everything that he lacks, whether it is livelihood or sons, or if someone-God forbid!-is sick in his home and in need of healing, for all these things his counsel must be only to pray to God and have faith in Him. For God is good to all, whether for healing or livelihood.... And let his endeavors be towards God, and let him not pursue various schemes, for most of them are valueless... but let him call to God, this being good and beneficial for anything in the world...[6]

Naḥman demands total faith and trust in God, who will provide for all of one's needs. The power of such total trust is exemplified by the Master of Prayer, who is able to provide for his followers' material and spiritual needs due to his faith and prayers. In

contrast, the pursuit of wealth, as the antithesis of bittahon, constitutes false faith and idolatry. Rather than culminating in faith's humility and generosity, it produces greed and inhumanity of a society where the poor are sacrificed to the needs and vanity of the rich.

According to Rabbi Nathan's concluding notes,[7] much of the exoteric content of the narrative is derived from Isaiah 31, a prophecy of rebuke directed against the people of Judah, chastising them for their appeals for Egyptian aid against the Assyrians. Particularly relevant to our tale are verses six and seven. "Return, O children of Israel, to Him to whom you have been so shamefully false; for in that day everyone will reject his idols of silver and idols of gold, which your hands have made for your guilt." Nahman interprets Isaiah as asserting that idolatry is rooted in the lust for material acquisitions. It is this acquisitiveness that culminates in pride and self-assertion, Judah's overweening confidence in abundant chariots and riders (31:1).

Some of the story's fantastic symbolism is also derived from these verses. The Hero's magical sword, whose very sight terrifies officers and troops alike, is suggested by the prophecy's "sword not of men" directed by God against Assyria. The prophecy's closing vision of God's wrath as a "fire in Zion" and an "oven in Jerusalem" (9) seem to serve as the link binding the introductory narrative to its overarching frame. For Kabbalistic exegesis identifies Zion and Jerusalem with the heavenly Jerusalem, the Shekinah.

Kabbalistic exegesis would read Isaiah 31 as demonstrating that humanity can not escape the consequences of its alienation from God. Human sin destroys the harmony of the Sefirotic realm, awakening the forces of divine judgement which flow into the Shekinah and from thence into the world. The hero's siege of the Land of Wealth is the

allegorical depiction of this influx of the forces of harsh judgement.

That point of transition from exoteric moral allegory to esoteric Lurianic myth that plays such a pivotal role in a Nahman narrative, is situated in the image of the whirlwind scattered court. This framework tale strives to solve the perennial question of the origin of error, false values and destructive desires in a world produced by a purposive and perfect Creator. Rather than describing evil as a consequence of human freedom, our narrative follows the lead of Lurianic Kabbala and relegates the problem of evil to the status of subquestion of an even greater issue, the existence of a distinct and non-divine realm in the midst of the all-encompassing unity of God. How is it possible for the Many to have sprung forth from the One, when that One, by definition, precludes all duality?

The answer offered by Isaac Luria (1534 - 1572) of Safed, was that God's first movement of emanational self-disclosure was preceded by a withdrawal of infinite Divinity from Itself, into Itself. This tsimtsum, or inner withdrawal, left a "space" as it were, for both Divinity's revelation as a personal god and for the creation of the cosmos. When the divine lights of the nascent Sefirot poured forth into this "space", the vessels that had been prepared to contain their energies shattered, destroying the delicate balance of the upper worlds and scattering sparks of divine light energy throughout the cosmos.

Nahman's tale of the whirlwind scattered court is read by the traditional Bratslavian commentators as an allegorical expression of Luria's vision.[8] Ten characters are connected to this royal court, a King and Queen, a Princess and her husband the warrior-hero, their infant child and five courtiers: a wiseman, a master of

prayer, an orator, the royal treasurer and the King's friend. When reading the work of a Jewish mystic who was well versed in Kabbalistic lore, one can safely hypothesize that a ten member court is an allusion to the ten Sefirot and use this a tentative starting point from which to start unraveling the allegory.

Let us turn to this epiphany, Nahman's description of the whirlwind.

> There was a day, when there was a great whirlwind in the world. This whirlwind confused the entire world. It turned water into dry land and dry land into sea. Desert into habitable land habitable land into desert. It turned the entire world upside down.
> And this whirlwind came into the palace. It did no damage there but only entered and snatched the princess' child...
> When it had snatched the precious infant, the princess immediately pursued it. And so did the queen and king until they were all scattered and their whereabouts were unknown. (pg. 160)

This scene, in which the princess voluntarily runs into exile after her son, is modeled upon a Zohar passage concerning the exile of the Shekinah, describing the manner in which she accompanies her banished child Israel in his wanderings.

> R. Abba says: 'And even this (zot)too when they are in the land of their enemies.' (Lev. 26:44 ). Come and see how great is the love of the Holy One, Praised be He for Israel, for although they have caused themselves to be exiled amongst the nations, the Shekinah never departs from them. You should not say that these alone are in exile but even zot - this one too is present with them...
> (It is like ) a king who grew angry with his son and as punishment decreed that he distance himself and go to a faraway land. The Matrona heard. "Altho my son is going to a far land and the King is casting him from his palace, I will not leave him. Either we return as one together to the palace of the King or we live together in another land?

R. Abba exploits the fact that the demonstrative pronoun zot (this / this one) is a feminine form and interprets the verse from Leviticus 26 as meaning that this one too, the Shekinah, is with Israel in exile. In the Zohar's parable, the queen enters into exile to protect a child rejected by an angry king, in order to ward off the father's

wrath (divine justice) and the harshness of the journey. The image is quite different in the Nahman tale, reflecting Luria's radical vision, which views exile as a cosmic condition antedating humanity. However, both texts share the image of a mother figure entering exile in order to follow and protect a son. Through this literary allusion, Nahman informs the reader that the allegorical referent of the whirlwind is the primordial Shattering of the Vessels and that the royal court is to be identified with the Sefirotic realm.

If the princess is clearly recognizable as the Shekinah, can any other members of the court be connected with other individual Sefirot? Her husband, the Gibbor, the world conquering warrior-hero, who is wreaking havoc in the world as a result of her loss, must represent Gevurah, the power of divine justice, whose sternness permeates the world without any mitigation when the Shekinah is in exile.

The Queen-mother is readily identifiable as Binah, Understanding. Binah constitutes the third level of divine self-revelation, mirrored in humans in the faculty of discoursive reasoning. The Zohar describes her as a matronly figure, a queen and as the supernal mother. In Naḥman's tale, she produces a sea of bloody tears while mourning for her daughter. This bizarre image is also rooted in Zoharic literature, where blood is understood as aymbolizing judgement, resulting from a disjunction in the flow of divine energies from Binah to the Shekinah.[10]

The King might very well be Keter Elyon (Crown), the first of the Sefirot. However, great emphasis is placed upon his possession of a mysteriously engraved picture of a five fingered hand. This hand is a geographic and temporal map of the entire universe, simultaneously portraying every place and event in the cosmos from the beginning to the end of time. The five fingered handis an allusion to the five books of the Torah, which besides being a work of history and

serves as the blueprint of creation, for it is a fabric woven from the names of God. On its most esoteric level, the Torah is identical with Hokmah, the divine unitive mind, wherein all of the Sefirot and all of the worlds exist in the form of undifferentiated potenitia.[11] As the guardian of this numinous Torah symbol and as the omniscient father figure, who guides the Hero, Orator and Master of Prayer to the heavenly sources of their power, the King himself must be a manifestation of divine Wisdom.

The Treasurer, as the guardian of the King's wealth, wears clothing of such resplendence that an embassy from the Land of Wealth takes him to be a god. It is he who intercedes on behalf of the inhabitants of that land before the thoroughly exasperated Master of Prayer and the Hero and thus he embodies the quality of Hesed, God's forgiving love and the quality of beneficence.

The above identifications are offered with a great deal of confidence, for Naḥman has described these characters in terms of symbolism culled from traditional Kabbalistic sources. The small amount of Bratslavan commentary that exists on this tale in published form insists that all of the Sefirot are intimated in the ten courtly figures, but preserving the text's esoteric character, it refuses to make any further identifications. What follows is meant as nothing more than a tentative suggestion based primarily upon the roles that the characters play in the narrative.

The child snatched from his crib represents that harmony and peace lost in the primal catastrophe. It is his loss that triggers the collapse of a court corresponding to the entirety of the Divine World. In Zoharic terms, he is best correlated with Tiferet, the equalized union of divine justice (Gevurah) and love (Ḥesed). However, since the Hero discovers seven of his hairs, shining with all

of the colors of the rainbow, it might be best to view the child as representing the embodiment of the seven lower Sefirot and as a harmonious manifestation of the merger of the masculine and feminine forces in divinity.

The Sefirotic referent of the Master of Prayer / Zaddik would be the ninth Sefirah, Yesod. The correlation of the Zaddik with Yesod is a commonplace in Hasidic literature. Just as Yesod funnels divine energies into the Shekinah, the Zaddik draws an influx of heavenly power and energy into the world. The Hasidic exegetic imagination identifies the Biblical verse "The righteous (zaddik) is the foundation (yesod) of the world" (Prov. 10:25) as referring both to the ninth Sefirah which links the Shekinah to the upper worlds and to its human counterpart and image, the zaddik who binds the heavenly and earthly realms into one unity.[12]

This leaves us with the minor figures of the wiseman, orator and royal friend. If the King is a manifestation of Hokmah, then it would seem that Nahman's Sefirotology follows a system popular in many Hasidic circles, in which the first Sefirah, Keter, is subsumed into the Ein Sof, the infinite and unknowable deus absconditus, and replaced with Da'at, a third and final step in the unfolding of the Divine Mind. It is here that the royal wiseman, who makes a model of the king's map, would fit. The orator and friend would represent Nezah and Hod.

This attempt to align the narrative's characters with their Sefirotic referents should not be viewed as an empty scholastic exercise. The Zoharic imagery accompanying their descriptions leaves no doubt that such correlations exist and that their lives and behavior mirror and embody the collapse of cosmic order and truth. The presence of such imagery demonstrates that Nahman's

primary concern in relating "The Story of the Master of Prayer" was to reveal the role played by the true zaddik in the reconstruction of the human and divine universes.

What is the consequence of the Shattering of the Vessels? On a human level this catastrophe is the source of all error and false desires in our world. The universe that it has produced is one turned topsy-turvy, marked by all the qualities of a surrealistic dream in which no plans can ever come to fruition or individuals successfully meet. In such a world, scattered members of a royal court constantly discover signs of each other's presence. The Hero finds the hair of the infant prince and the Master of Prayer the bow of the Hero, but never do the wanderers actually manage to unite. Some strange and unexplained force is always described as having intervened.

So too, it is a world in which reason grows corrupt and desires, rooted in divine attributes, become perverted. It is precisely to this corruption of reason that Naḥman devotes much attention.

The inhabitants of Naḥman's imaginary world know that their values should mirror the 'purpose of life'. Unfortunately, that purpose is unknown. Thus, in order to discover it, they embark upon a process of dialectical argument in which a true assumption and empirical observations terminate in disastrous results, mirroring the world's bilbul, its confused and shattered state.

> After the tumult and confusion that confounded the world, the people decided to appoint a king. And they investigated (the question of ) who would be worthy to be made a king over them. And they investigated and said: "Given that the essential thing is the world's purpose, (it follows that) he who strives the most for the world's purpose is worthy to be king."
> And they began to inquire concerning the world's purpose. And they became divided into various factions. One faction said, "The goal is honor. For we see that honor is the most important thing in the world. For if they don't

> give a man his due honor; i. e. if they speak disparagingly of his honor, it leads to murder. For the most important thing to the entire world is honor. And even after death they exert great care to render honor to the deceased and to bury him honorably. They tell him that all that they are doing -'all is for your honor'. Even after death, neither wealth nor desire are relevant to the deceased. Nevertheless, they are very careful concerning his honor. Therefor, honor is the essential purpose of the world. (pp. 162 - 3)

The debate concerning honor is one of Nahman's most biting parodies of philosophical reasoning. From a theological standpoint, the premise that the king must exemplify the world's purpose in his behavior and life, is quite valid. Unfortunately, the would-be logicians develope their argument from a base of empirical data derived from a hopelessly flawed and imperfect world. Never inquiring concerning the validity of the sources of their information, assuming that theirs is the best of all possible worlds and that its standards are normal and sane, their sober and accurate analysis produces outrageous results. The upshot of it all is that they accept a tyrannical old gypsy as their king, having observed him terrorize his clan in his zeal to uphold his honor.

This error is repeated throughout the world. For various groups, starting from a sound premise, treat a shattered world as a valid source of knowledge and having determined sundry physical desires to be identical with the world's purpose, submit themselves to disreputable rulers. Having chosen money as the highest good, the inhabitants of the Land of Wealth worship the rich as gods. Another group, noting that all things are doomed to perish, decide that the ultimate goal of life is murder and mayhem and elect a parricide as their king. Those who seize upon beauty crown a gorgeous woman as their queen; those who choose joy follow a drunkard. So it happens that ten kingdoms are established, all but one of which is devoted to a false ultimate good.

This is the world which the Master of Prayer and the Hero inherit and are striving to redeem. As we have seen, the Master of Prayer attempts to fulfill his task by encouraging individuals to take up a life of piety and devotion. In that the root of the problem is cosmogonic, his activity ultimately turns in a macrocosmic direction. His real task is revealed to be the reunification of the court, that is the unification of the Divine Name, sundered since creation.

Nahman's description of the task reveals the manner in which his Lurianic piety is both rooted in and yet differs from earlier, classical Kabbalistic conceptions of divine service and selfless love. A pre-Lurianic text such as Avodat haKodesh, written by Meir ibn Gabbai in Turkey circa 1531,[13] teaches the devotee that the true aim of Kabbalistic contemplation is the selfless, loving unification of the Divine Name.

> The entire intention of a man in his service must be for the sake of Heaven, which is the unification of the Great Name in deed and thought. This is the service that is for its own sake, and he who serves for this purpose is called a lover of God. He who serves according to this (manner of) love will not have any egocentric goals in his service, nor have any intention towards a goal arising from personal needs. And since he has no goals in his service save to perform God's Will, i. e. the Unification, which is a Divine Need, he will have no mercy on himself, when striving to perfect it. If he is granted the opportunity to sacrifice himself for this he will do so and not hold back. And how much more so will he give his wealth.[14]

The Kabbalistic tradition, seemingly from its conception, asserts that the unity of the Divine Being is dependent upon Israel's performance of the commandments. A spiritually oriented text such as Avodat haKodesh thus defines the true love of God as consisting of selfless, contemplative devotion, without thought of reward, be it in the form of physical well-being or religious experience of a

mystical order. Such contemplative service would concentrate almost totally on the need to unify the Divine Presence with the Divinity's masculine potency, Tiferet.

As the heir of the Lurianic vision of a shattered universe suffused with divine sparks, Naḥman's ẓaddik faces a far more complex task. He must not only reunite the princess with her husband, the Shekinah with Gevurah, a task, which, if achieved, will bring peace into the world.[15] He must go and raise the other divine sparks as well. Thus, Naḥman describes how the Master of Prayer and the Hero move from one kingdom to another, discovering that in each, the first fraudulent king has been replaced with a member of the royal court. The bloody teared Queen has replaced the parricide, the King the honor mongering gypsy, while the Princess has assumed the rule of the kingdom whose inhabitants chose sexuality and beauty as the ultimate good and purpose of creation. In other words, Nahman is arguing that a divine spark is located in the core of every human act and desire, which the zaddik must identify and uplift.

Knowing this, we are not surprised that the Princess, after her discovery, requests that the Master of Prayer purify her people from their continued debauchery, a plea repeated by the other members of the court when he and the Hero enter their respective kingdoms. Their pleas reflect the fact that both the world and the human personality are battle grounds, within which fundamental drives and talents - reason, faith, sexuality, the need for food, the desire for joy, have grown perverse and impure. Yet all draw their ultimate sustenance from true sparks of Divinity. The ẓaddik's purification of the human microcosm is simultaneously a redemption of the macrocosm.

It is of great importance to notice how carefully Nahman has interwoven the cosmic and psychic components of his tale and his

symbolism. The members of the court represent the Sefirot, yet Nahman situates them at the center of real human passions and desires. The divine and human realms are woven into a single fabric. They participate in the same shattered state and draw life and redemptive power from each other.

"The Story of the Master of Prayer" is thus a narrative in which the Messianic theme is written large. In that the Master of Prayer is a pivotal figure in the ingathering of the court (i.e. the raising of sparks), he is a Redeemer figure. Yet one must also note that much traditional Messianic symbolism surrounds the Hero as well in his guise as selfless world monarch. The profound correlation between these two figures only becomes apparent when one turns from the Sippurei Ma'asiyot to Nahman's sermons, particularly those commenting upon the person of the Messiah.

These sermons demonstrate that the imagery and tasks associated with both the Master of Prayer and the Hero are derived from Nahman's conception of the Messiah. In an early sermon dating perhaps to the beginning of Naḥman's public career in Zlotopolye speaks at great length concerning the sources of the Messiah's power.

> For the essence of the Messiah's weapon is prayer...And from there is the essence of all of his vitality. All of the wars which he will conduct and all of his conquests - all derive from there. As it is written (Is. 11:3): "And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord, he will not judge by the sight of his eyes, nor reprove by what he hears, but he will judge the poor in righteousness, and the humble with equity, and he will smite the land with the rod of his mouth and kill the wicked with the breath of his lips"......This is the essence of his weapon. As it says (Gen. 48:22): 'with my sword and bow,' which Rashi interpreted as meaning 'prayer and supplication'. As it says (Ps. 44: 7 - 9): 'For I will not trust in my bow and my sword will not save me. For You have saved us from our oppressors and our enemies have You shamed. We have praised God all day long.'[16]

The Messiah is a heroic conqueror, but his power is that of prayer.

As such, his sword and bow, which appear as the hero's weapons in our story are to be understood as symbolizing the efectiveness of praise and supplication.

The sermon continues with the argument that such awesome theurgic power can be achieved only through the practice of sexual continence as exemplified by Joseph the righteous (Yosef haZaddik).

> One must receive this weapon through that quality of Joseph, i. e. 'guarding the covenant'. As it is written (Ps. 45:4): 'The hero (gibbor) will gird his sword to his thigh' And (Ps. 132:11): 'From the fruit of your belly I will place on your throne' This is the aspect of the Messiah, the aspect of prayer. 'If your children will guard my covenant' (ibid.) That is by means of the quality of Joseph. And Joseph who guarded the covenant, took the birthright, which is the service of prayer,[17]

Joseph displaced his first-born brother Reuben as family priest due to his superior discipline and chastity. So too, the power of the Messiah, which is that of theurgic prayer, is rooted in <u>sh'mirat habrit</u>, sexual continence.

This is not simply a moral statement but also a mystical one, bearing profound ramifications concerning the conquering Messiah's relationship to the Divine realm. Each of the patriarchs corresponds to and embodies the power of the lower seven Sefirot. Thus Abraham exemplifies God's Hesed, divine love. The sexually continent Joseph corresponds to the ninth Sefirah, Yesod, the conduit by which spiritual energies pass from the masculine potency Tiferet to the feminine aspect of the Deity, the Shekinah. The zaddik, by practicing sexual restraint in the human realm, sustains the divine Ẓaddik (Yesod) and facilitates the harmonious union of masculine and feminine within the Godhead. By claiming that Messiah's theurgic might results from his chastity, Naḥman is transforming him into the greatest of zaddikim.

If Nahman envisions the Messiah as being the zaddik par excellence, it becomes necessary to interpret the Hero and the Master of Prayer of our tale as constituting aspects of one and the same individual, for only when conjoined do they manage to fulfill their Messianic missions. This discovery reveals the narrative to constitute a carefully constructed allegory concerning the Messianic role and powers of the zaddik hador.

Nahman's claims for the zaddik hador as a Messiah figure are already enunciated in the sermon preserved in Likkutei MoHaRaN 2.

> Everyone must perform the intention in his prayer of connecting himself to the zaddikim of the generation. For every zaddik in the generation is an aspect of Moses / Messiah. For as we have found, the zaddikim call each other Moses. As in (Shabbat 101b) 'Moses- have you spoken well?!'[18] And Moses, this is an aspect of Messiah. "As it says (Gen. 49:10) : 'Until he comes to Shiloh!' This is Moses Messiah." (Zohar I.25b)[19]
>
> Each and every prayer that one prays is comparable to a limb of the Shekinah, which is analogous to the boards of the Tent of Meeting. For no Jew was able to raise one board to another, each to its place, save Moses alone. Accordingly, he needs to bring and bind all or his prayers to the zaddik hador. As it says (Ex. 39:33): 'And they brought the Sanctuary to Moses!' And he knows how to raise board to board, to make (the Sanctuary) a complete edifice. As it is written (Ex. 40: 18) 'And Moses raised the Sanctuary!'[20]

Messiah is not a unique figure who will appear only once, at the end of time. Rather, his soul appears in each and every generation in the figure of the zaddik hador, who raises Israel's prayers to Heaven, constructing them into a Sanctuary, just as Moses constructed the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness. The zaddik hador is not only profoundly involved in the process of Tikkun, he is at the very least one in a chain of Messianic figures stretching from Moses to the End of Days. And he carries the potential of becoming the manifest Messiah. Listening to the "Tale of the Master of Prayer," Nahman's disciples, who had heard these sermons, no doubt recognized the

esoteric identity of the Hero and the Master of the Prayer and understood it as conveying Nahman's own hopes concerning his career and destiny.

When read on this level, the tale depicts the zaddik hador (Nahman) as having inherited a world in which the presence of God is profoundly hidden and where sparks of holiness exist, but in a fleeting and scattered form. It is a world where human arrogance, as symbolized by the idolatrous worship of wealth, seperates humanity from God and triggers the force of judgement. Naḥman as ẓaddik hador is obligated to engage in a titanic struggle to inculcate true faith in individuals and to simultaneously reconstruct the human personality and cosmos through the power of prayer.

One can claim that "The Master of Prayer" is a personal text but not in the sense that it is a high charged revelatory account of Nahman's innermost fears and goals. Such stories do exist, the best example perhaps being "The Story of the Prince and the Servant's Son Who Were Switched", discussed in the first part of this essay. In that tale, the Nahman figure is depicted as succumbing to depression, becoming lost in debauchery, and finally becoming trapped in a forest from which he escapes only through the grace of a zaddik / magician. This extraordinary account can be read as honest expression of Naḥman's struggle with his sexuality and anxieties.

In "The Master of Prayer", the personal level is conveyed in the calm plane of esoteric didacticism. Through his prayers and service, Nahman as zaddik hador strives to reunite the Shekinah with her spouse, Gevurah and engages in the raising of holy sparks, the mending of the cosmic breach. Thus the ẓaddik hador is a Messianic figure; Naḥman, despite his disappointments, has not renounced his claim to be the toiling, suffering Messiah b. Joseph.

This is an esoteric message, accessible only to those with a knowledge of Bratslavan teachings. Few people outside of Nahman's circle would have recognized the identity rather than the complementarity to the story's two key figures. Their separation probably does not simply stem from the necessity of creating a strong conflict for the sake of the plot, but instead reflects Nahman's need to retreat from his earlier blatant Messianic posturings. Yet, to the insider, the message is clear. The Master of Prayer is not merely a servant / companion of the world redeeming Hero / Messiah. The two are aspects of one person, the zaddik hador, R. Nahman B. Simhah and the tale reveals his identity and mission. It also alerts the modern researcher to the extraordinary manner in which personal expression and didactic interest are interwoven in these narratives.

## Notes

Part i.

[1]A modern gilgul (reincarnation) of this genre is the religious comic book, examples being Marvel Comics' life of John Paul II and the Lubavitcher influenced Mendy and the Golem. The latter relates the adventures of Mendy Klein, his sister Rivkeh of the Bais Challah Cheder and their baby golem, Sholem, as they battle such villains as Oy Vader the Robot. Although each issue is constructed around the mitsvah of the month, it is worth noting that Rebbetzin Klein fixes the car and studies Kabbalah. v. Moment Magazine, May 1983, vol. 8, no. 5, pp. 39 - 42.

[2]The first of these tales, "The Tale of the Lost Princess", was related in the summer of 1806, after the death of Nahman's infant son Shlomo Ephraim. The child died several weeks after Nahman had appeared in public on Shavuot dressed in white robes, a clear announcement of the impending redemption. The zaddik viewed his son's death as a manifest sign of divine displeasure apropo his activities and as a rejection of his overt Messianic activity.

Much of our knowledge of Nahman's life and impromptu teachings derives from three short works, Hayyei MoHaRaN, Shivhei MoHaRaN, and Sihot MoHaRaN, written and collated by his secretary R, Nathan of Nemirov. Despite the profound sense of sacred awe permeating these works, they lack such aspects of classical hagiography as miracle stories emphasizing supernatural powers of healing or precognition. Instead, Nahman provides honest descriptions of Nahman's frequent attacks of depression and his constant struggle against despair, even though he attempts to present them in the best possible light, as signs of Nahman's ceaseless spiritual growth. The Nahman of these works is a believable, three dimensional human being who suffers from real anguish. Thus, the general consensus among contemporary researchers is that they present a generally reliable picture of Nahman's personality. For further discussion see Arthur Green. Tormented Master : A Life of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), pp. 11 - 16 and Yosef Dan. HaSippur HaHasidi. (Jerusalem: Keter Press, 1975), pp. 136 - 7. For the circumstances surrounding the origin of the tales, see Green, pp. 210 - 12.

[3]The best introduction to Lurianic Kabbalah and its sixteenth century setting remain Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), pp. 244 - 86 and Solomon Schechter's essay "Safed in the Sixteenth Century: A City of Legists and Mystics", republished in Solomon Schechter. Studies in Judaism. (New York: Atheneum Books, 1970), pp.231 - 97.

[4]Surveys of prior exegetic approaches to the tales can be found in Yosef Dan, pp. 136 - 41, and Mendel Piekarz's essay "HaParshanut haBratslavit LeSippurei haMa'asiyot" in Hasidut Bratslav. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1972), pp. 132 - 50. The general attitude of these early commentators is summed up by Horodetsky. "Nicht immer kann der Zaddik seine Lehre so ganz unverhült verkünden, ebensowenig wie man dem Kranken die Arznei ohne verschiedene Beimengangen verabreichen kann." S. A. Horodetsky. R. Nahman von Braslaw: Beitrag zur Geschichte

der Judischen Mystik. (New York: Arno Press Co., 1980), p. 65.

[5]The introductory homily to Sefer haZohar is but the most famous example of this identification of the exiled Shekinah with Canticle's image of the thorn-barbed rose. In the Zohar's vision the rose's red and white petals allude to the Shekinah's reception of the downward flowing forces of divine judgement and mercy, whose symbolic colors are red and white. v. "Hakdamat Sefer haZohar", p. 1a. It is literary allusions such as these that Nahman's auditors are expected to pick up.

[6]For further discussion of the Kabbalistic understanding of the redemptive power of ritual observance, see G. Scholem's "Tradition and New Creation in the Ritual of the Kabbalists", in On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism. (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 118 - 57.

[7]Dan, p. 138.

[8]Joseph Weiss, "Contemplative Mysticism and 'Faith' in Hasidic Piety", JJS IV, 1953, pp. 19 - 29.

[9]Green, p. 186.

[10]The incident is discussed in a censored form in Hayyei MoHaRaN 1:6, relating an incident in which Nahman gave a teaching concerning the zaddik in whom the souls of both Messiah figures were contained. This revelation so excited Nahman's disciples that they broke the table around which they were seated! For a discussion of the significance of Nahman's claim, see Green, pp. 189 - 95. For the rabbinic background of the concept of the suffering Messiah ben Joseph, v. Yosef Heinemann. Agadot v'Toldoteihen. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 131 - 6.

[11]These essays have been collected and edited by Mendel Piekarz and published as Mehkarim beHasidut Bratslav. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1974).

[12]ibid. "Iyyunim beT'fisato haAzmit shel Rabbi Nahman", p. 151.

[13]ibid. p. 152.

[14]The ancient rabbinic homilists of the first centuries of the common era were great lovers of puns and word games. They read the Hebrew word M'ZoR'a (leprosy) as a contraction of MoZee (SheM) R'a - a slanderer. The leper is thus punished for his libellous and destructive remarks by being himself cut off from society. See Midrash Tanhuma, M'ZoR'a, pericopes 1 and 2 for examples of such homilies.

[15]op. cit. pp. 159 - 60. For Nahman's sexual trauma and its

impact upon his tortured self-image see Green, pp. 37 - 43.

[16]ibid. pp. 161 - 3.

[17]Dan, p. 143.

[18]ibid.

[19]ibid.

[20]ibid.

[21]ibid. p. 144.

[22]Even though Nahman the intellectual undoubtedly yearned for the simple faith of the cobbler and feared Hell.

Part ii.

[1]The tale is number twelve in the Sippurei Ma'asiyot, pp. 140 - 61. Page numbers in the body of the essay refer to the traditional Bratslaver edition, upon which all translations are based. The best English translation of the tales is that of Arnold Band. The Tales of Rabbi Naḥman. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

[2]The Lurianic myth of "sh'virat hakelim", "the shattering of the vessals" will be discussed further in this essay. For further analysis see Scholem, Major Trends, pp. 265 - 8 and Isaiah Tishby's Torat haRa v'haK'lipot b'Kabbalat haAri. (Jerusalem: Akademon - Hebrew University Student Union, 1960), pp. 13 - 61.

[3]An extraordinary expression of the philosophical stance is found in The Guide for the Perplexed III. 51, where Maimonides describes the amor dei intellectualis in a style that combines biting contempt for religious behaviorism and and true lyrical passion for the contemplative life. Equally passionate and stinging attacks on Maimonides were penned by such eloquent and vociferous Kabbalists as Shem Tov b. Shem Tov in his Sefer haEmunot (Ferrara 1555) and the sixteenth century theologian Meir ibn Gabbai in his Sefer Avodat haKodesh (Lemberg 1857). These texts are defences of the Kabbalistic understanding of taklit haAdam as consisting of the selfless unification of God with no desire for personal gain or even spiritual illumination.

[4]v. the comments of the thirteenth century Catalonian Kabbalist and Talmud scholar, R. Moses ben Naḥman in his commentary to Gen. 2:15, "And the Lord took the human and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work and guard it." He notes that the ancient homilists (Gen. Rabbah 16:8) understood this service as entailing the offering of sacrifices and interprets their statement as rendering support for the Kabbalistic

contention that the performance of the commandments sustains the flow of divine grace and energy into the world. Perushei ha Torah L'Rabbeinu Moshe ben Nahman. ed. Ch. Chavel. (Jerusalem: Mosad haRav Kuk, 5719), p. 31. Similar interpretations can be found in the Zohar I. 25b.

[5]Band, p.

[6]Likkutei 'Azot. "tefillah". ( Jerusalem, 1956), vol. V, p. 246b.

[7]Sefer Sippurei Ma'asiyot. pp. 191 - 2.

[8]v. the Sefer Rimzei haMa'asiyot published as an appendix in current Bratslaver editions of the Tales, p. 27.

[9]Zohar, III. 297a.

[10]Zohar Hadash, Canticles, 86b, quoted by Moses Cordovero, Pardes Rimonim, 'Sha'ar Arkei haKinuyim', chap. 4, 12b.

[11]A contemporary analysis of the Kabbalistic vision of the cosmic Torah is G. Scholem's essay "The Meaning of Torah in Jewish Mysticism", published in On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, pp. 32 - 86. R. Moses ben Nahman's introduction to his Torah commentary is a fine example of this Torah mysticism, in which Scripture undergoes an apotheosis into the living name of God. It is accessible in Chaim Chavel's English translation, Nahmanides. Commentary on the Torah: Genesis. (New York: Shilo, 1971), v. 1, pp. 7 - 16.

[12]Arthur Green. "The Zaddik as Axis Mundi." JJAR 45, (1977), 3.

[13]For this date of Meir ibn Gabbai's work, see G. Scholem's essay "Torah and Revelation as Religious Categories in Judaism" in his The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 298.

[14]Meir ibn Gabbai. Sefer Avodat haKodesh. (Lemberg, 1853), I. 28, p. 30b.

[15]Likkutei MoHaRaN. (Jerusalem, 1969), 14.1, p. 18b.

[16]ibid. 2.1, p.1b. For a dating and further analysis of this sermon in terms of Nahman's political career, see Green, Tormented Master, pp. 187 - 8.

[17]ibid. 2.2. "Sh'mirat haB'rit", 'guarding the covenant', is a euphemism for sexual continence.

[18]The reference is to the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 101b and refers to a conversation between Rava and Rav Safra, in which the former is addressed by the latter as Moses, this being a gracious

honorific. Nahman' interprets Rav Safra's statement as proof that the pre-eminent scholar of a generation does not merely fill the role of Moses but also bears his soul.

[19]The *Zohar* notes that both Moses and Shilo have the same numerical equivalent, 345, and thus Moses and the Messiah are to be equated.

[20]*Likkutei MoHaRaN*, 2:6, 2a.

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