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Resuming the Broken Dialogue
On Madness and the Limits of Reason
in Michel Foucault and Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

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Introduction

According to a survey made in 2007 by “Times Higher Education,” Michel Foucault (Poitiers 1926-Paris 1984) had been that year's most cited author of books in the Humanities.¹ This survey is proof to the lasting influence and prowess of Foucault's thought in academia. To the best of my knowledge, though, there has been no comparative study between Foucault's work and the teachings of Rabbi Nachman ben Simcha (1772 Medzhibozh-Uman 1810). This should come as no surprise since both thinkers have, *prima facie*, nothing in common: between *la Rive Gauche* and early nineteenth-century Podolia there seems to be a world of a difference. Yet, Nachman was not a typical product of his time and personal circumstances. Scholars have compared him in the past with Søren Kierkegaard,² Friedrich Nietzsche³ and Franz Kafka,⁴ to mention just a few luminaries. In the course of this paper I will attempt to add Foucault's name to this illustrious list by showing the significant similarities in both authors' concept of madness and the role it plays in relation to reason.

Given the limited scope and characteristics of this paper, my study will focus on Foucault's *History of Madness* and Nachman's teachings 64 and 5 from *Liqqutei Moharan*⁵ and *Liqqutei Moharan Tinyana*. In order to structure my study, I will divide the paper in three parts. The first and second parts are analytical, dealing with *History of Madness* and Nachman's teachings respectively. At the beginning of the second part I will also include a general introduction to madness in Early Chasidism and a short biography of Nachman. In doing so, my aim will be to provide a framework for a better understanding of Nachman's teachings. Finally, in the third part, I will compare Foucault's and Nachman's thought, in the hope that their comparison will be mutually illuminating and provide us with new insights into their work.

Although Nachman is popularly known as the *rebbe* of joy, in the following pages there won't be – I almost regret to say – much joy, except for the last lines of this introduction. It is undoubtedly a great joy for me to bring into a conversation the ideas of Foucault and Nachman for

1 Source: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=405956>. Retrieved 15.12.10.

2 Green p. 164; Magid p. 514

3 Magid states in p. 514 that Nachman should not be compared with Nietzsche, but he does so clearly in p. 501 n. 18.

4 Magid p. 514. The whole book by Kamenetz is devoted to this comparison.

5 Taking into account that the different authors I quote have different ways to transliterate Hebrew, I have unified the disparate criteria in one. I offer the following transliterations for the most problematic letters: ה [h], ו [w, in its consonantal value], ח [ch], כ [kh], ק [k], צ [tz], ג [q]. To simplify things, I will omit transliteration signs for ך and ם.

the first time and to do so in this year, when we commemorate the two hundredth *Yahrtzeit* or death anniversary of Rabbi Nachman.

PART I

1.1 Methodological introduction

Taking into account the focus of this paper, my analysis of Foucault's *History of Madness* (HM hereafter) will be selective and it explicitly disavows any claims at comprehensiveness. For this purpose, I will be concerned exclusively with the thought of Foucault as developed in HM. The debate about the nature and historical accuracy of this work is beyond the scope of this paper.⁶ Following Roy Boyne,⁷ I will use the generic term “madness” since the distinction between folly, madness, dementia and insanity is not of primal interest for my argument. Finally, in the course of my analysis of HM I will discuss three specific topics:

- A Vindication of Madness
- The Unreason of Reason
- Madness and Power

1.2 Analysis

1.2.1 A Vindication of Madness

Given Foucault's allusive style and encyclopaedic richness, it is not an easy task to identify the main points put forward in HM. It is clear, though, that Foucault's exercise in rewriting the history of madness is based on a re-evaluation of the concept of madness itself. Madness, as the most extreme and quintessential form of unreason, is for Foucault the paradigm of whatever is repressed and excluded in Western European society since the Renaissance. The madman, even more so the madwoman, is the embodiment of the Other.⁸ To make this point clear, it is important to distinguish between unreason in general and madness in particular. Within the broad category of unreason, Foucault includes sexual offenders, criminals, freethinkers, paupers and mad people. For a modern reader, this mixture of profiles seems bizarre, to say the least. The inability to distinguish between crime and poverty is disturbing, but not as much as the inclusion under one category – the

6 For a discussion about Foucault's historical accuracy, see: Guttning, G. “Foucault and the History of Madness” in: Guttning, G., ed. (2005), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

7 Boyne, p. 34 n. 2

8 Boyne p. 6

unreasonable – of sane and mad alike. Aware of this provocation to modern sensibility, Foucault argues that during the Classical Age (ca. 1650-1800)⁹ there must have been a unifying criterion to put together such a heterogeneous ensemble:

To our eyes, the population designated to fill the space long left empty by lepers seems a strange amalgam, but what appears to us as a confused sensibility was evidently a clearly articulated perception.¹⁰

Barbarity is not devoid of its own reasons. Taking into account that HM as a whole is an extremely critical reappraisal of the way mad people have been treated from the “Age of Confinement”¹¹ until modern psychiatric practice, Foucault's search for a rationale serves less to justify the Classical Age as to provide the grounds for a moral relativism embedded in a historical perspective. Given the adequate premises, any practice could be thus justified. The thrust of Foucault's argument is not aimed against the ghost of the past but against the concrete here and now. What practices currently accepted will be regarded as brutal in due time? Going back to the issue of what was the unifying criterion to confine such a disparate group of people, Foucault writes:

[Confinement] brings together a new sensibility to poverty and the duty to relieve it, new forms of reaction to the economic problems of unemployment and idleness, a new work ethic, and the dream of a city where moral obligations go hand in hand with civic duties, all held together by the authoritarian forms of constraint.¹²

Confinement is a multi-faceted attempt at social engineering. Economics and morals form a tight knitted fabric. If the main criterion for internment during the Classical Age was the lack of productivity, the modern reader will distinguish between those who refuse to work, those who do not find work because their labour force is superfluous given the market conditions and those who are not able to work at all. According to Foucault, this differentiation is alien to the dawn of the Classical Age. At that time all three cases were subsumed into the first one: poverty was the outcome of idleness. This is what made the policy and police of internment possible:

Confinement, the signs of which are to be found massively across Europe throughout the

9 These dates correspond roughly to the decree that founded the Hôpital Général in Paris (1656) and Philippe Pinel's appointment as doctor at Bicêtre (1793).

10 Foucault p. 54

11 Foucault p. 420

12 Foucault p. 54

seventeenth century, was a “police” matter. In the classical age the word had a meaning that was quite precise, referring to a bundle of measures that made work possible and necessary to all those who could not possibly live without it.¹³

However, a purely economic approach would be misleading. It would also badly account for the confinement of freethinkers and sexual offenders, for instance. As the penultimate quote makes clear, confinement is a complex phenomenon. In essence, the combination of economics and morals resulted in the perception of poverty, i.e. idleness, as a “scandal”¹⁴ no less intolerable than the opinions of the freethinker. What united the different groups of people under confinement is that they undermined morals and their supreme value, work. The “scandal” had far-reaching effects and it was considered a de-stabilising force. This is the common denominator that Foucault defines as unreason. By the same token, the economic, social and political order, underpinned by an increasingly dominant bourgeois morality, is what is defined as reason by the ruling elite, mainly the Crown and the bourgeoisie. In this bold move, Foucault transforms the Age of Reason, the Enlightenment, into the Age of *Raison d'État*, understood as a period in which the well-being of the state is paramount and individuals are accessory to this aim. Reason is here the discourse of power to perpetuate itself.

This definition of reason and unreason will assist us to put the concept of madness in a sharper relief. At the beginning of the Classical Age madness was barely differentiated from other forms of unreason, but by the time of the reforms by Philippe Pinel and Samuel Tuke,¹⁵ madness had become the form of unreason *par excellence*:

A vacuum thus appears at the heart of confinement, a void that isolates madness, denouncing in it all that is irreducible and unbearable to reason: madness now appears with all that distinguishes it from the other confined forms as well. The presence of the mad seems an injustice – but only *for the others*. The great envelopment that made for the confused unity of unreason is now broken. [...] Marking its distance, and becoming a clearly identifiable form in the confused world of unreason did not liberate madness: instead a direct link was forged with the world of confinement, a link that became almost its essence.¹⁶

13 Foucault p. 62

14 Foucault p. 144

15 P. Pinel (1745-1826) and S. Tuke (1784-1857) the pioneers of modern psychiatric treatment in France and England respectively.

16 Foucault p. 401. Italics in the original.

In its irreducibility and essentiality, madness becomes the main expression of the classical experience of confinement. Foucault barely manages to disguise a romantic admiration for the resilience of madness in face of triumphant reason. Madness is the ultimate rebellion and dissidence, the piece that doesn't fit in the grand cosmic jigsaw, the exception to reason's arrogant claim of totality: madness as the eternal Other. It is within this otherness that the truth of madness is to be sought.

In pure counter-cultural fashion, Foucault flips the meaning of madness and presents it as an “absolute liberty.”¹⁷ This freedom is an aspect of madness' otherness, its unassailable difference. True, the freedom granted by madness is threatening and uncanny, inscribed in the realm of animality, but in a regime of pervasive oppression as the one described by Foucault, the concept of freedom cannot be completely depleted of its positive connotations. This absolute freedom could help us to explain why madness has become a regular companion to art:

The frequency in the modern world of these oeuvres that explode into madness no doubt proves nothing about the reason of this world, the meaning of these oeuvres, nor even about the relationships that are made and unmade between the real world and the artists who produce such an oeuvre. And yet that frequency must be taken seriously, like the insistence of a question; since Hölderlin and Nerval, the number of writers, painters and musicians who have “lapsed” into madness has multiplied.¹⁸

The question is, what is the nature of this relationship between madness and art? The terrifying freedom granted by madness – or the madness triggered by uncompromising freedom – is one element, but there is more to it. Art and madness draw from a common source, sharing a common language. Notwithstanding this, they are mutually exclusive: “*where there is an oeuvre, there is no madness.*”¹⁹ They are bound in ontological terms, but differ at the phenomenological level. Art is the manifestation of that common spark that breaches the gap with reason, while madness remains apart. In spite of this tension, the kinship abides. Moreover, it could be argued that their “game of life and death”²⁰ is actually a stratagem. From this perspective, art becomes the champion of madness in the world of reason but also its possibility of transcendence:

The ruse is a new triumph for madness. The world believes that madness can be measured, and

17 Foucault p. 157

18 Foucault p. 536

19 Foucault p. 537. Italics in the original.

20 Foucault p. 536

justified by means of psychology, and yet it must justify itself when confronted by madness, for its efforts and discussions have to measure up to the excess of the oeuvres of men like Nietzsche, van Gogh and Artaud. And nothing within itself, and above all nothing that it can know of madness, serves to show that these oeuvres of madness prove it right.²¹

The pride of place that art enjoys in the world of reason is turned against reason itself. When measured against the works of Nietzsche, Vincent van Gogh and Artaud reason is at lost. Besides, if reason would fulfil its program of destroying the source of madness, it would do away with art, too.²² Art, through the tense interplay between ontological affinity and phenomenological distinctness in relation to madness, provides the world of reason with a possibility of transcendence:

[T]hrough madness, an oeuvre that seems to sink into the world and reveal there its non-sense, and to acquire these purely pathological features, ultimately engages with the time of the world, mastering it and taking the lead. By the madness that interrupts it, an oeuvre opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, opening an unhealable wound that the world is faced to address. By it everything that is necessarily blasphemous in an oeuvre is reversed and, in the time of the oeuvre that has slumped into madness, the world is made aware of its guilt.²³

What Foucault seems to tell us is that no ontology will be complete as long as it excludes the insights revealed by madness. Furthermore, the possibilities of transcendence to a higher level of consciousness depend on acknowledging the hidden and unfathomable source of what is known to us as art and madness. A face to face with the Other is ultimately a confession of our own limits.

1.2.2 The Unreason of Reason

In the previous section, I have already pointed out the displacement of meaning in the word “unreason” operated by Foucault. From the perspective of the Classical Age, unreason is a moral transgression that endangered the economic, social and political order. I also explored the implicit conclusion that, given this definition of unreason, reason appears to be the discourse of power to perpetuate itself. The politically motivated substitution of reason for *raison d'état* is not necessarily

21 Foucault p. 538

22 Attitudes towards madness might have started to change in the psychiatric community. The idea that the suppression of madness would be an impoverishment of human experience is echoed by Charles P. Heriot-Maitland (p. 315): “Schizotypy also provides the capacity for creative or divergent thought, which, within a basically focussed consciousness, is invaluable. [...] The point is that schizotypal personality is actually useful, and to enjoy its benefits, we unfortunately must suffer its most extreme consequences from time to time.”

23 Foucault p. 537

a proof of its unreason, but certainly of its corruptibility. This definition of reason is thus far removed from “the intellectual power, the capacity for rational thought, and related senses.”²⁴ The reason of the Classical Age seems disconnected from rationality, or maybe not so?

The fiercest attack on the unreason of reason is presented through the description of the conditions of classical confinement and the superstitious basis for the treatments provided. HM abounds in descriptions of the abuses committed at Bicêtre and Salpêtrière in the handling of its mad inmates: men chained for life or trapped in cages suspended from the floor²⁵; women bitten by rats²⁶ or confined in crowded, tiny cells, deprived of the most basic hygiene or comfort. This treatment is based on the premise that mad people have been downgraded to their uttermost animality, what Foucault calls “the zero degree of [their] own nature.”²⁷ The alleged animality of mad people produced an outlandish set of related beliefs:

It was common currency until the late eighteenth century that the mad could put up indefinitely with the miseries of existence. Hence there was no need to protect them, cover them or even provide warmth for them. [...] The ability that the insane possessed to tolerate like animals the worst excesses of the weather was still accepted as medical dogma by Pinel, who repeatedly admired “the constancy and facility with which the mad of both sexes can tolerate prolonged extremes of cold.”²⁸

This “medical dogma” is not only disturbing because it justifies brutal treatment, but also because it assumes that mad people have some sort of superhuman power to endure all kind of physical adversities. In the exchange of reason for animality, the Classical Age showed its own unreason, invoking under the disguise of nature a demonic spectre that would endow mad people with fantastic powers.

Bringing his account to new heights of brutality, Foucault also describes the case of a Scottish farmer who claimed to have a cure for madness. His method consisted in employing mad people in “the most menial tasks possible around the farm, using some as beasts of burden.” Furthermore, this farmer “[reduced] them to obedience by a flurry of blows if they ever stepped out

24 Source: Oxford English Dictionary, <http://www.oed.com>. Retrieved 15.11.10.

25 Foucault p. 147

26 Foucault p. 146

27 Foucault p. 148

28 Foucault pp. 148-9

of line.”²⁹ Foucault observes:

When a madman became a beast, the animal presence in him removed the scandal of madness, not because the beast had been silenced but because all humanity had been evacuated. [...] Madness was cured when it was alienated in a thing that was nothing other than its own truth.³⁰

The “scandal” of madness was the lewd cohabitation of humanity and animality in the madman. Although his humanity was nothing but a shade, the madman still bore its mark on his body, in his voice, in the rare flash of an instant of lucidity. Under such circumstances, the reasonable tended to regard the madman as a liminal creature and his liminality created unease, subverting the natural and moral order. He was neither human nor beast and both of them. In this context, cure could only come by wrestling the madman out of this threshold, either pulling him towards reason or destroying his flickering humanity once and for all. From here there is a straight line of thought leading to eugenics and the euthanasia programs for the “unfit.” The unreason of reason appears in this constant flirt with death: mad people were starved, caged, subjected to extreme temperatures, beaten, chained and murdered in their humanity.

However, probably the most disturbing thing is not what the Classical Age did *to* mad people, but what it did *with* them:

In *Observations d'un voyageur anglais*, Mirabeau recounts how the mad were shown at Bicêtre “like strange beasts, to anyone willing to hand over their shilling.” People went to see the gaolers show off the mad as if they went to see a mountebank training monkeys at the fair in Saint-Germain.³¹ [...] Up until the early nineteenth century and until the indignation of Royer-Collard, the mad remained monsters – literally things or beings worthy of being put on show in public.³²

At last, the madman turned into a monster. In all fairness, though, it is worth noting that the word “monster” is introduced by Foucault and not by the sources. In doing so, Foucault points out that animality is for him too plain a term to define the quasi-mythological otherness of mad people. Regarding the translation, the relation between *montrer* and *monstre* is far from being literal, if by literal what is meant is an etymological connection between both words. As the original makes

29 Foucault p. 149

30 Foucault p. 150

31 Foucault pp. 143-4

32 Foucault p. 145

clear,³³ Foucault was making a pun and not suggesting a common etymology (*montrer* and *monstre* are unrelated). The translators' error is nevertheless a felicitous mistake. Interestingly enough, the origin of *monstre* in Old French can be traced back to the twelfth century, when it was used in the sense of “prodigy” or “marvel.”³⁴ This medieval reference appears in the *Libri Psalmorum Versio Antiqua Gallica* in an Anglo-Norman translation of Psalm 45:9 from the Vulgata:³⁵

*Venite et videte opera Domini
quae posuit prodigia super terram.*

*Venez e vedez les ovres del seigneur,
les queles il posat monstres sur terre.*³⁶

The Biblical verse in Old French echoes in Foucault's text. *Come and see the prodigies of the Lord* turns in Foucault's hands in *come and see the monsters of unreason*. It is also significant that in this verse, as in I Chronicles 16:12,³⁷ the monsters are prodigies brought by God as a token of His glory. The parallelism is particularly fitting, since prodigies – just like madness – have an ambivalent quality in which awe and fear are combined. If we turn now our attention to the quote about Mirabeau reproduced before,³⁸ it is remarkable to observe the resourcefulness of the man of reason to make money out of the good-for-nothings *par excellence*. If lack of productivity was a cause for confinement, confinement is no excuse for the lack of productivity. The circle of economics and morals closes once more upon unreason. So what is the unreason of reason in this case? Is it the vexing exploitation of mad people, or the belief that the freak show has pedagogic value for the audience? Foucault seems to suggest that, the unreason of reason is particularly to be found in its farcical coherence, its readiness to mock its own rules and morals. As illustrated in HM, by the end of the eighteenth century wardens were too sensitive to display the mad inmates – they charged other madmen with the task instead – but they had no qualms to put the day's takings in their pockets.

Foucault's assault on reason deals also with the reforms introduced by Pinel and Tuke, the cherished fathers of the humane treatment in the asylum. In relation to them, Foucault writes:

[I]nside the asylum, the doctor had pride of place, since it was he who transformed the space into a medical institution. Despite that, and this was the key point, the intervention of the doctor

33 The original reads: “*Jusqu'à l'indignation de Royer-Collard, les fous restent de monstres – c'est-à-dire des êtres o des choses qui valent d'être montrés.*” *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, ed. 1972, p. 162)

34 Source: Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales <http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie>. Retrieved 17.11.10.

35 Psalm 46:9 in the Hebrew Bible.

36 Michel, F., *Libri Psalmorum Versio Antiqua Gallica* (ed. 1860, p. 62)

37 *Remembrez des merveilles de lui, les queles il fist, ses monstres, e les jugemenz de la buche de lui.*

38 cf. footnote 32

was not done on the basis of some skill or medical power as such that he alone possessed, justified by a body of objective knowledge. It was not as a scientist that *homo medicus* gained authority in the asylum, but as a wise man. If medical practitioners were required, then it was not for the knowledge that they brought, but rather as a moral and juridical guarantee of good faith. Any man of good conscience and unquestionable virtue, providing he had a long experience of the asylum, could just as well take his place.³⁹

In this excerpt Foucault lays bare one crucial aspect of the unreason of modern reason. The *homo medicus* in the asylum presents as science – the objective, unappealable fact – what in reality is an extension of the discourse of power into morals. In doing so, the mechanism of social control is concealed in the aseptic truth of science. Progress is thus measured through the increasing sophistication of this concealment. This sophistication is also expressed in the new way that mad people are being treated in the asylum. In the days of classical confinement, mad people were fettered, caged, watched from the other side of bars by a warden. In the asylum the body of the madman has been released to enjoy an unprecedented freedom, but Foucault cautions us against appearances. The increased degree of mobility – always circumscribed to the limits of the asylum – is offset by the new psychological constraints: in the asylum the chains, the bars and the warden have taken over the mind of the inmate in the form of guilt and remorse. The new therapeutic approach, constructed as an omniscient instance that judges and punishes, was aimed at grabbing hold of the inmate's consciousness, the innermost seat of his liberty:

This almost arithmetical obviousness of the punishment, repeated as often as necessary, and the recognition of fault by the repression that was exerted were all intended to bring about an interiorisation of the judicial instance, leading to the beginnings of remorse in the patients' mind. Only then did the judges agree to bring the punishment to an end, as they were sure that it would continue indefinitely inside the patient's conscience.⁴⁰

But even in the reformed asylum, Foucault tells us, there are those who do not afford rehabilitation:

Disobedience on account of religious fanaticism, resistance to work, and theft, the three great sins against bourgeois society, three major attacks on its essential values, were all inexcusable, even in the mad. Such faults demanded imprisonment pure and simple, and exclusion in the most rigorous form possible, as all three crimes demonstrated the same resistance to moral and

39 Foucault p. 504

40 Foucault p. 502

social uniformity, which were the *raison d'être* of the asylum such as it was conceived by Pinel.⁴¹

Singling out those who refuse to surrender their consciousness to the rules of “moral and social uniformity,” the asylum exposes its continuity with classical confinement and its unreason. The radical difference is that Pinel's and Tuke's reforms have been presented as a break with the past, as the triumph of humanitarianism and science over barbarity and superstition. This is one of Foucault's radical criticisms of reason, its deceptiveness. At the core of this criticism is the very appropriation of the word “reason” for something that has little to do with it: the ideology of power. According to Foucault, the saturnalia of reason's unreason continues unhindered in the asylum, though by more subtle and pervasive means.

To sharpen his case about the unreason of reason, Foucault also argues inversely outlining the reason of unreason. Through the analysis of different deliria, Foucault reaches the striking conclusion that this kind of phenomena are underpinned by a precise logic (syllogism, induction, enthymeme). The inherent logic of delirium, “the ultimate language of madness,”⁴² is also that of reason:

[B]eneath the obviously disordered delirium reigns the order of a secret delirium. In this second delirium, which is, in a sense, pure reason, reason that has slipped off the external rags of dementia, the paradoxical truth of madness is to be found.⁴³

The delirious madman described by Foucault is someone caught by the immediacy of his imagination. The image that triggers his delirium has acquired the value of absolute truth. Under its spell, the madman is not able to differentiate between dream and waking reality, but beyond this point, he faithfully applies the logical pattern laid down by reason. In the eyes of the reasonable the weakness of the madman's inference is to have adopted a false premise. His madness is to remain attached to his error. In relation to the image, the blindness of the madman in the belief of its truth is only matched by the blindness of the man of reason in the belief of its falsity. This, I would argue, is what according to Foucault lays at the core of the unreason of reason: the faith in its godlike ability to judge truthful from false premises. The unreason of reason is revealed in the hubris of its certainty. Following Foucault, Roy Boyne traces the impact of the Cartesian revolution on the

41 Foucault pp. 502-3

42 Foucault p. 233

43 Foucault p. 234

perception of madness. While Montaigne was still able to write that “It is a stupid presumption to go about despising and condemning as false anything that seems to us improbable” and that “There is no more patent folly in the world than to reduce these things to the measure of our own power and capacity,”⁴⁴ philosophy after Descartes would be increasingly at pains to keep the same kind of critical distance with itself:

We have here a fundamental distinction between, on the one hand, the kind of thinking that will acknowledge the limits of both its actual and potential knowledge, and therefore is not prepared to dismiss unreason, and, on the other hand, the autonomy, sovereignty and sobriety of the rational subject presented by Descartes.⁴⁵

What is folly to Montaigne is reason to Descartes, the logical outcome of a strict “dualism of autonomous mind and extended matter.”⁴⁶ In his study about Foucault and Derrida, Boyne discusses Descartes' method of systematic doubt as described in the *Meditations* and the philosopher's refusal to contemplate the possibility that he might be mad:

What does this philosophical exclusion of madness signify? It signifies that it is the subject who is the wellspring of truth [...] the subject as intellect, as thought, as the source of sovereign truth. It is this subject, the rational subject, which will become the defining figure of the post-Renaissance world.⁴⁷

After Descartes, reason seems unable to transcend itself, trapped in the narcissism of the subject. It is no wonder that the delirious madman has to be *rationalised* as sleepwalker. Otherwise his inexplicable existence would remind us of the frailty of our own constructed certitudes. In face of reason's unreason, the verses of Pedro Calderón de la Barca ring with a perennial challenge:

*¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí. / ¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión,
una sombra, una ficción, / y el mayor bien es pequeño;
que toda la vida es sueño, / y los sueños, sueños son.*⁴⁸

44 Quoted in: Foucault p. 46 and Boyne p. 44

45 Boyne p. 45

46 Boyne p. 47

47 Boyne p. 46

48 English translation: “What is life? a tale that is told; / What is life? a frenzy extreme, / A shadow of things that seem; / And the greatest good is but small, / That all life is a dream to all, / And that dreams themselves are a dream.” Translation by Arthur Symons in: *Hispanic Anthology: Poems Translated from the Spanish by English and North American Poets* (New York: G.P Putnam's Sons, 1920).

1.2.3 Madness and Power

In the relation between madness and reason, I have attempted to describe both their otherness and sameness.⁴⁹ This is indeed “the paradoxical truth of madness:”

And this doubly so, as what is to be found there is both that which makes madness true (faultless logic, well organised discourse, and the flawless flow within the transparency of a virtual language), and that which makes it truly mad (its own nature, the rigorously particular style of all its manifestations and the internal structure of delirium).⁵⁰

I have described madness as a state of liminality – between humanity and animality but also, by extension, as the point where other and same meet – and cure as the forceful attempt to remove this paradox and restore order. I have also discussed how this restoration, carried out under the pretence of morals, bears the mark of the discourse of power. All these issues are relevant to the following discussion, though my analysis on the relations between madness and power will focus on a different point. In the following section, I will attempt to explain the relations of power in terms of presence and absence, proximity and distance. I believe that unreason in all its forms – the combination of poverty, crime, acts deemed immoral and madness – offers a privileged case for the study of such relations.

One of the key concepts in HM is what Foucault dubbed the “Age of Confinement.” This period came to be, according to Foucault, “almost overnight.”⁵¹ This urgency is explained among other things by the confluence of two different factors: the need to replace the lepers in the moral universe of the period, and the ongoing attempts to tackle mendicancy. In relation to this, Foucault writes:

In the classical world, work and idleness created a dividing line that replaced the exclusion of the lepers in the medieval leprosarium in the landscape of the moral universe as in the physical geography of haunted places. The ancient rites of excommunication were once again renewed, but this time in the world of production and commerce.⁵²

49 In section 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 respectively.

50 Foucault p. 234

51 Foucault p. 54

52 Foucault p. 71

As described by Foucault, the rise of confinement was directly connected to the decline of leprosy. What this connection reveals is the need to fill an absence by removing a certain presence from society and compelling it to fill the void left by the lepers, in our case. It is rather telling that the weakest members of society were chosen to fulfil this task. The beggars had also been the focus of much concern by the authorities for a long time. At least since the sixteenth century there had been several attempts to rid cities of their beggars. At that time the main way to deal with beggars was to banish those living in the city and prevent the entry of new ones:

A parliamentary act of 1606 decreed that in Paris all beggars were to be whipped in a public place, branded on the shoulder, and then thrown out of the city with their heads shaved. The following year another act created companies of archers to guard the gates of the city and refuse entry to any of the poor who tried to return.⁵³

Banishment and containment were two sides of the same coin. They served the purpose of keeping the city free of beggars as a purified locus of civilisation. The city defined itself in opposition to the countryside. What laid beyond the fortified walls was a hostile territory inhabited by real and imaginary dangers. The city was conceived as an island of culture and wealth, certainly connected to other cities and centres of power through a network of roads and smaller human settlements, but still isolated in the immediacy of the surrounding wilderness. It is in this cultural context that the expulsion of the beggars should be understood. After the burg had been cleansed of its paupers, the next task was that of containment. The burgher lived with a siege mentality. He was painfully aware of the flimsy protection that the walls of the city could afford against wars, plagues and economic crises. In the dialectic between freedom and confinement, it is worth noting that beggars were given the dubious privilege to roam the open spaces while burghers chose the security of a life within the walls. In the Classical Age, as described by Foucault, this state of affairs underwent a profound transformation. Apropos of the creation of the Hôpital Général in 1656, Foucault writes:

It was certainly a novel solution, and the first time that the purely negative measures of exclusion had been replaced by the idea of confinement: the unemployed were no longer simply expelled or hunted down, and responsibility was taken for them by the nation, but at the expense of their individual liberty. Between the confined and society there was an implicit system of obligation: they had the right to be nourished, but they had to accept the physical and moral constraints of confinement.⁵⁴

53 Foucault p. 63

54 Foucault pp. 63-4

During the Classical Age and under the increasing influence of bourgeois morals, there was a change of course in dealing with the have-nots. Their bare survival was guaranteed by the state, but in return they had to surrender their freedom. Foucault tells us that the same companies of archers that were stationed at the city gates in 1607 to keep away the indigents were in charge, fifty years later, to hunt down beggars and herd them into the premises of the hospital at the city's edge (the much dreaded "Hospital Archers").⁵⁵ What is relevant for my discussion are the ways the Renaissance and the Classical Age dealt with paupers. In both cases, the policies put in place to tackle extreme poverty can be analysed in terms of presence and absence. In both periods, the aim of the authorities had been to eliminate the presence of paupers in their midst. To create such absence the Renaissance relied on banishment and containment outside the walls while the Classical Age opted for seizure and confinement within a double layer of walls: those of the city – i.e. civilisation – and those of the hospital.

Renaissance	Classical Age
Banishment Containment Archers at the gates Outside the walls/In the open spaces Physical and moral freedom	Seizure Confinement "Hospital Archers" ⁵⁶ Inside the walls/At the city's edge Freedom from starvation

The differences between both tables are apparent, but what they have in common is that power is exerted through the control of the physical space and the distribution of human groups, imposing relations of proximity and distance according to changing needs. Until the Renaissance the aim was to achieve a total absence of beggars in the city. In the Classical Age, on the other hand, there was a virtual absence: beggars were not supposed to be seen. When mad people were brought under confinement, the same set of concepts could be applied for the analysis. The authorities decreed their internment, imposing the absence and the distance, but at the same time rulers encouraged, or at least permitted, the public display of madwomen and men, restoring the presence and the proximity to a certain degree. There is no doubt that the display of mad people consisted of a

55 Foucault p. 64

56 Foucault p. 64

fettered presence and a proximity behind bars. It was more an act of voyeurism than an encounter, but the virtual absence was definitely shattered. All this points to a definition of power as the ability to create and suppress boundaries, enforcing distance or proximity, absence or presence, at will. The same applies at the level of discourse. When we discussed the Cartesian revolution, the sovereign exercise of the rational subject had been to exclude madness as a possible epistemological premise. Power acts through this network of relations of proximity and distance, presence and absence, that is called order when it functions according to its own needs.

But power has also its limits. It can confine mad people but it cannot confine madness. Although madness is excluded at all levels, it continues to pop up from the midst of the social fabric. At the close of the Classical Age, the place of confinement itself was believed to spread malignant vapours that tainted the city with unreason.⁵⁷ As the authorities were faced with this irrational fear, a second and more thorough isolation – the forerunner of the humanitarian reforms – was deemed necessary:

There was no question for the moment of suppressing the houses of confinement. The concern was rather to neutralise them as possible causes of a new disease. They were to be reorganised through a process of purification. The great movement of reform that swept through the institutions in the second half of the eighteenth century had its origins there, in the desire to reduce contamination by the destruction of vapours and impurities; quelling the fermentation would prevent diseases, and evil, from permeating the air and spreading their contagion to the atmosphere of the cities. Hospitals, gaols and houses of confinement were all to be better isolated, surrounded by purer air.⁵⁸

The place of confinement at the city's edge was an absence in presence. Although the inmates were fettered and put behind bars, kept away from the public eye except for the most exhibitable mad people, the mere thought of their proximity served as catalyst for the anxieties of the period. Following the path traced in the previous section, the unreason of reason unfolded developing a pseudo-science of vapours and emanations based on the belief that evil was a contagious disease that could be transmitted through the air. In this context, “*homo medicus* had not been called to the world of confinement to *arbitrare* between sickness and evil, and decide in what measure acts were criminal or insane, but rather as a *guardian*, to protect others from the confused danger that

57 Foucault p. 355

58 Foucault p. 359

emanated from inside the walls of confinement.”⁵⁹ The choice for the guardian instead of the arbiter was actually a regression to the Renaissance model. The *homines medici* became the modern archers at the gates. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the distance imposed by power at the time of the foundation of the Hôpital Général was not considered sufficient any more. A further removal was required to transform the virtual absence of the Classical Age into total absence.

The same dialectic was applied under the reforms of Pinel and Tuke. In the new asylum, not only mad people had been driven out from the city under the pretence of a pseudo-scientific claim, there was also an attempt to push madness into the innermost recesses of the patients' conscience. This dialectic in which power controls and regulates through presence and absence, proximity and distance, is to be found all the way through HM until Freud:

Freud demystified all other asylum structures: he abolished silence and the gaze, and removed the recognition of madness by itself in the mirror of its own spectacle, and he silenced the instances of condemnation. But, on the other hand, he exploited the structure that enveloped the medical character: he amplified his virtues as worker of miracles, preparing an almost divine status for his omnipotence. He brought back to him, and to his simple presence, hidden behind the patient and above him, in an absence that was also a total presence, all the powers that had been shared out in the collective existence of the asylum.⁶⁰

As described by Foucault, unreason in all its forms was a focal point of the exertion of power. This has allowed us to take a closer look at the relations of power in terms of presence and absence, proximity and distance.

The previous exercise will allow us to bring to the surface some ideas that belong to the subtext of Foucault's HM. These ideas run counter to Dostoevsky's words: “It is not by locking up one's neighbour that one convinces oneself of one's own good sense.”⁶¹ Our study has shown that, from the perspective of power, the contrary is true: madness is not a state of mind but rather a state of being locked up, displaced, excluded. In its most extreme implication, madness ceases to be a psychic phenomenon and becomes a random categorisation. The madman is not mad because 'he has gone off his rocker,' he is mad because someone else has decided so. Going still one step further, as the mechanisms of power become more abstract and complex through a succession of

59 Foucault p. 358. Italics in the original.

60 Foucault p. 510

61 Quoted in: Foucault p. xxvii

interrelated absences and distances, the reasons why someone has been confined will not only be obscure for the internee, but increasingly they will be unknown to the confiner, too. Absolute power is power devoid of reasons. Through the shadows projected by HM, Foucault confronts us with the prospects of the ultimate totalitarian state. He already gives us a taste of it while discussing the role of the hospital directors,

whose powers over inmates extended beyond the confines of the hospital, in effect to anyone within their jurisdiction. “They are granted full powers where authority, direction, administration, commerce, policing, tribunals, correction and punishment are concerned, over all the poor of Paris, both within the hospital and without.”⁶²

In the Classical Age, the hospital was a state within a state, with the difference that the unprecedented authority granted to directors made of them no regular bureaucrats. In their omnipotence, they rather resembled godlike figures with absolute power over life and death.

62 Foucault pp. 48-9

PART II

2.1 Madness in the Context of Early Chasidism

In order to better understand the concept of madness in Rabbi Nachman's thought, it is important to locate this phenomenon in the larger context of Judaism in general and Early Chasidism in particular. The history of madness in Judaism is at least as old as the Bible. The most well known case is that of King Saul, whose jealousy for David paved the way for his folly. About him it is written:

From that day on⁶³ Saul kept a jealous eye on David. The next day an evil spirit of God gripped Saul and he began to rave in the house. (1 Samuel 18:9-10)⁶⁴

And also:

[Saul] was on his way [...] to Naioth in Ramah, when the spirit of God came upon him too; and he walked on, speaking in ecstasy, until he reached Naioth in Ramah. Then he too stripped off his clothes and he too spoke in ecstasy before Samuel; and he lay naked all that day and all night. (1 Samuel 23-24)

The madness of Saul provided a pattern for the understanding of madness in Judaism in terms of spirit possession. According to Jeffrey Howard Chajes the first accounts of spirit possession appeared in the sixteenth century.⁶⁵ The phenomenon seems to have emerged with particular strength in the times of Isaac Luria (1534-1572). In *Sefer Divrei Yosef*, a work by the seventeenth-century historian of Ottoman Jewry Joseph Sambari, there is a description of a possession occurred in 1571 in Safed and involving a young man.⁶⁶ In this case, the man in question was allegedly possessed by the spirit of a sailor who had died at sea but whose death could not be proved. Due to these circumstances, his wife – also living in Safed – was unable to remarry and had to live the life

63 The day David was given a hero's welcome after defeating Goliath.

64 All the Biblical quotes provided by myself are extracted from: *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003).

65 Chajes p. 2

66 Chajes p. 44

of an *agunah*. As the case unfolded, the spirit confessed having committed adultery while in Constantinople. He, therefore, deserved to die as it is prescribed in Leviticus 20:10. The investigations also uncovered the infidelities of the wife and of several young men from Safed. Chajes also suspects that the man who was possessed by the spirit might have been one of the woman's lovers himself. This case of spirit possession is particularly interesting for two reasons: on the one hand, the confessions of the spirit provided an authoritative witness to the truthfulness of the *mitzwot* and the system of rewards and punishments associated with them;⁶⁷ on the other, the possession put an end to the deadlock of the wife's situation and, in this way, it restored harmony in the community. As a whole, the episode served to reinforce the established morals and religious values.

The case of the possessed man in Safed provides the background to understand the cases of possession in the milieu of Early Chasidism. Zvi Mark has researched this topic in particular and he came to the conclusion, already implied in the case of King Saul, that certain types of madness (hysteria and schizophrenia mainly) were considered a form of spirit or demonic possession by seventeenth and eighteenth-century Jews.⁶⁸ According to Mark, the place of madness in the system of values of that period was ambivalent. On the one hand, madwomen and men were pitied for the suffering that the possessing spirit inflicted to them. On the other hand, the community profited from the insights into the spiritual world gained from mad people.⁶⁹ In line with the episode described about the possessed man from Safed, Mark argues that the alleged contact of the mad with spirits helped to strengthen the faith of the community and their system of religious values.⁷⁰ In relation to this, Mark advances a bold thesis, namely that the publication of the *Shivchei ha-Besht* – the apocryphal biography of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chasidic movement – was meant to provide a substitutive method to strengthen people's faith and bear witness of God's glory in a time when spirit possessions had ceased due to the Jews' many sins.⁷¹ The inspirational value of *Shivchei ha-Besht* as a substitute for the role played by the insane in Jewish society might be related to the fact that the Besht himself was often described by his antagonists as a madman. In this vein, Mark explains that the Besht's unusual behaviour while being in a state of *devekut* was perceived by others as mad.⁷² Mark also links the states of *dybbuq* and *devequt*: the spirit possession in the former

67 In this case, the belief that God's punishment for adultery is death.

68 Mark 2003, p. 257

69 Mark 2003, pp. 263-4

70 Mark 2003, p. 260

71 Mark 2003, p. 261

72 Mark 2003, p. 267

is compared with the possession by the spirit of the *Shekhinah* in the latter.⁷³ Mark's article as a whole leaves the impression that Early Chasidism was built, to a significant extent, on the belief that spiritual mediation passed *mutatis mutandis* from the mad possessed by a *dybbuq* to the emerging figure of the *tzaddiq* engaged in states of *devequt*. In this context, the Besht represents the watershed: in him the madman and the mystical *tzaddiq* are one.

In a later article,⁷⁴ Mark analyses the perceptions of madness among Nachman's contemporary *tzaddiqim*. He reproduces a testimony given by R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apta (1755-1825), the *Ohev Yisrael*, in which he declares:

The person who desires to ascend to the Lord from one level to the next: for every level he must first be called from Heaven and given that level. For true submission to the Lord, may he be blessed, [is exhibited] specifically by the one who worships the Lord and truly does not desire any level, until he is summoned from Heaven and this is imposed upon him, for this is needed by the world. *And, behold, with our own eyes we have seen many Chasidim who have gone mad, Heaven forbid, or who have fallen prey to melancholy [...]* The matter, however, is that those people seek to ascend to the Lord, but the ladder is hidden from their eyes, for they do not serve the Lord, may He be blessed, gradually. They seize something that does not belong to them, with no call or permission from Heaven.⁷⁵

Building upon this account, Mark claims that madness and melancholy were not uncommon among Chasidim. In my view, the most interesting part from the testimony is that madness is presented as the outcome of an excessive religious zeal that brings the devout person to transgression. Mark concludes from this that “the highest levels of divine service border on madness.”⁷⁶ A similar account of madness as transgression in the pursue of higher spiritual rungs is also given by Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav himself:

This is the aspect of the four who entered the Garden: R. Akiva entered unscathed and emerged unscathed; Ben Azzai looked and was stricken; Ben Zoma looked and died; Aher cut the plants. These four aspects are present in everyone who seeks to enter the worship of the Lord, and to follow the *tzaddiq* and the rabbi of the generation. There is the one who enters and draws near to the *tzaddiq* [...] And there is the one who loses his mind, by rising above his level; this is the

73 Mark 2003, p. 285

74 Mark 2004

75 Quoted in: Mark 2004, pp. 27-8. Italics in the original.

76 Mark 2004, p. 35

aspect of 'looked and was stricken,' the aspect of the one who has not served the Lord.⁷⁷

Now, if we take the two articles by Mark side by side, we reach the conclusion that in Nachman's milieu there must have been two totally different conceptions of madness. The first kind of madness was the visionary madness of those possessed by spirits (*dibbuqim*). Regardless of what kind of spirits those were, either benign or evil, possession was deemed a mainly positive phenomenon since it provided the community access to the secrets of the spiritual world. Besides, possession appeared to offer a way for the fallen soul to act in the world and redress the wrongs committed in a previous life. At the same time, possessed people had a tendency to denounce the sins of other members of the community that had escaped scrutiny until then. In its double aspect of individual and collective purge, possession had a moralising effect on the community. Similarly, the contact with the spiritual world served to reinforce the religious values. It is difficult to determine to what extent these accounts are accurate rather than fables meant to uphold the authority of the rabbis. In any case, it is clear that a rather positive approach towards visionary madness was common currency. The second kind of madness, on the contrary, is burdened with negative connotations. This is the madness of the religious man that, in his extreme zeal, becomes a transgressor. Both in the testimony of the *Ohev Yisrael* and in the teaching of Rabbi Nachman, this kind of madness is the fate of those who challenge the epistemological limitations imposed on them by God. Madness is likened here to a hubris created by human ambition and arrogance. In the following sections, while discussing the concept of madness in the works of Nachman, we will have to keep this distinction in mind.

2.2 Rabbi Nachman, the *Mensch* – A Very Short Biography

For a man born 1772 in provincial Medzhibozh and who died at the age of 38, Nachman had quite an eventful life. The story of Rabbi Nachman ben Simcha, also known as Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, started actually even before he was born. He was the great-grandson of Israel ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov. Since his childhood, Nachman was groomed to become a *tzaddiq*. According to Arthur Green, Nachman had ambivalent feelings towards the great career that he was expected to carve for himself. He was much more attracted to the *nistar* type of *tzaddiq* – the hidden *tzaddiq* – than to the *mefursam* type – the religious leader and public figure.⁷⁸ To a large extent, this ambiguity was due to what Nachman perceived as the signs of decadence in the Chasidic movement. In

⁷⁷ Quoted in: Mark 2004, p. 38

⁷⁸ Green p. 41

Nachman's eyes, Chasidism was becoming the victim of its own success. He saw in Chasidism the call for a constant search for God and spiritual intensity, but instead he was confronted with a religious establishment more concerned with the earthly needs of their communities than with the redemption of their souls. Nachman wanted to rekindle the revolutionary spark of his great-grandfather, but his youth and uncompromising manners often brought him the alienation from other *tzaddiqim*. In line with his beliefs, Nachman also put great demands upon his disciples. His path was meant only for a spiritual elite.⁷⁹ Nachman's ambivalence was also reflected in his character. Through his life, Nachman was reported of suffering from alternating states of elation and depression.⁸⁰ Green suggests that Nachman's moodiness could offer an explanation for his “existentialist” and mystical facets: Nachman's euphoric phases would be related to his experience of God's closeness, while the periods of brokenheartedness would correspond to his feelings of alienation from God.⁸¹

Nachman's life seems to have been marked out by a series of momentous events. On the eve of Passover of 1798, he suddenly decided to embark himself in a journey to the Land of Israel.⁸² He did not hesitate to leave his family behind at their own mercy and, following on the footsteps of his great-grandfather, Nachman left for the Holy Land in the company of his disciple Simeon. Nachman was away from home for more than a year. He also succeeded where Israel ben Eliezer failed: on September 10, 1798 – the eve of Rosh Ha-Shanah – Nachman disembarked in the port of Haifa.⁸³ About this journey it is said that, after Nachman walked four ells in the Land of Israel, he felt that he had already achieved what he had been seeking.⁸⁴ From that moment on, he was ready to return home.⁸⁵ This reinforces Green's interpretation of this episode: the main goal of the journey was not to reach the Land of Israel, but rather the journey itself. This is what Green calls Nachman's “*rite de passage*.”⁸⁶ During this journey Nachman was directly exposed to Napoleon's campaigns in Palestine. He barely survived the siege of Acre fleeing into a Turkish warship by mistake. While struggling with great hardships – including a near death experience – Nachman reached some of his greatest spiritual insights during his time in the sea. I cannot help thinking that the surreal episode of Nachman and Simeon trapped in a Turkish warship is somehow reminiscent of Foucault's “ship

79 Green p. 44

80 Green p. 48

81 Green p. 323. I don't think that Green wanted to suggest that mystics tend to be happy and existentialists sad and depressed. I think that his point was that Nachman's personality and thought is complex enough to escape any simple categorisation.

82 Green p. 67

83 Green p. 70

84 Sternhartz p. 54

85 Green p. 85

86 Green p. 84

of fools.”⁸⁷ Nachman and Simeon were finally ransomed by the Jewish community of Rhodos and arrived at Medvedevka – Nachman's new home after Medzhibozh – sometime in the summer of 1799.⁸⁸

According to Green,⁸⁹ after Nachman's initiatory journey he decided to embrace his role as *tzaddiq*. On August 22, 1800 Nachman decided to move to Zlotopolye. Nachman's move to Zlotopolye was significant. This town was considered to belong to the area of influence of another *tzaddiq*, Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Shpola, known as “the Zeide” (the Old Man).⁹⁰ By moving his headquarters there, Nachman triggered a bitter controversy with the Zeide that would haunt him almost until his death. As Green depicts this episode, Nachman provoked the Zeide on purpose: Nachman saw in him a symbol of the establishment that he wanted to undermine.⁹¹ The dispute with the Zeide, though, took its toll in terms of psychological stress for Nachman and finally, in late summer 1802, he decided to move to Bratslav.⁹² In Bratslav Nachman experienced a renaissance. There he developed most of his intellectual activity, including his teachings (*Liqqutei Moharan*) and stories (*Sippurei Maasiyot*). The move to Bratslav elicited a new period of euphoria in Nachman's life that culminated in his Messianic activities of 1804-6. This period came to an abrupt end when his beloved son, Shlomo Ephraim, on whom Nachman had pinned his Messianic hopes, died a few weeks after Shavuot 1806.⁹³ As if things could not get worse, in the summer of 1807 the first symptoms of Nachman's tuberculosis – the illness that would claim his life after three years of struggle – became manifest.⁹⁴ In spite of Nachman's proverbial despise for doctors, shortly after Sukkot 1807 he decided to move temporarily to Lemberg to get medical treatment.⁹⁵ Lemberg was an important town, open to the enlightening influences that radiated from Berlin. Green explains that in Lemberg, a man with an insatiable curiosity such as Nachman became fully aware of the cultural *tsunami* that was about to hit even the most distant corners of Eastern Jewry: the Haskalah.⁹⁶ It is highly probable that Nachman's physicians were *maskilim* themselves. By the summer of 1808 Nachman could not put up any more with the doctors and the cure of absolute rest

87 Foucault pp. 3-43

88 Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov, the loyal disciple of Nachman, provided a full account of his master's journey to the Land of Israel (Sternhartz pp. 31-102).

89 Green p. 84

90 Green p. 101

91 Green p. 105

92 Green p. 135

93 Green p. 211

94 Green p. 233

95 Green p. 238

96 Green pp. 236-40. With this, I am not suggesting that Nachman was not concerned about the Haskalah before. Teaching 64 is a good example that he was. My point here is that in Lemberg, for the first time, he had to live in the midst of *maskilim*. This daily contact with secular-minded Jews made Nachman aware of the scope of the challenge that the Haskalah posed to Chasidism itself.

that they prescribed him. He moved back to Bratslav and from that moment the fight against the Haskalah became one of his main obsessions. After his return from Lemberg, Nachman also started to compose the stories that have won him praise. Finally, in the spring of 1810, Nachman seemed to have foreseen his own death and decided to move to Uman to spend there the last months of his life.⁹⁷ The reasons why he chose Uman are shrouded in mystery, but the main two theories, not mutually exclusive, are: (1) he wanted to redeem the souls of the Jews murdered there during the Gonta massacre of 1768; (2) he wanted to bring *tshuvah* to the notorious *maskilim* of Uman.⁹⁸ Either way, Nachman was in the business of redemption. As a matter of fact, once in Uman Nachman held intensive contacts with the local *maskilim*, who seemed to have had sympathy for him. On this respect, the accounts from the different sources are heavily coloured with ideological bias. While the Chassidic sources say that Nachman brought several *maskilim* back into the fold,⁹⁹ the secular periodical *Sion* reported that Nachman was introduced to the German classics by the *maskilim* in Uman and that, as a consequence of this, Nachman quoted Schiller in his works pretending that he had heard those words from a Chasidic master.¹⁰⁰ In any case, we know that the relationship between Nachman and the *maskilim* of Uman caused serious misgivings among Nachman's disciples.¹⁰¹

On 15th October 1810¹⁰² Nachman died in Uman in the house of a prominent local *maskil*.¹⁰³ His teachings, homilies and stories have reached us thanks to the tireless work of Nachman's most devoted disciple, Rabbi Nathan Sternhartz of Nemirov, who through the years compiled Nachman's speeches.¹⁰⁴

2.3 Teaching 64 from *Liqqutei Moharan*

2.3.1 Methodological Introduction

97 Green p. 252

98 One of them was Hirsh Ber Hurwitz, who would later become professor of Oriental languages at Cambridge University. In England he changed his name to Hermann Bernard and converted to Christianity. See Khaim Lieberman's article in the bibliography for further details.

99 Lieberman pp. 293-6

100 Lieberman p. 296

101 Green pp. 261-2

102 18th Tishrei 5571

103 In relation to this, there is an ironic biographical parallel with Foucault. Nachman chose to die in Uman, a stronghold of the Haskalah in his eyes. Foucault, on the other hand, died on 25th June 1984 of an AIDS related infection in the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière. Maybe his death in one of the institutions that he scrutinised in HM had also redeeming effects. Cf. Miller, J. (1993) *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, pp. 21-4)

104 Nachman delivered his speeches in his vernacular Yiddish, but Nathan compiled them in a Hebrew translation.

According to Alon Goshen-Gottstein, teaching 64 has probably been the most studied teaching of Rabbi Nachman¹⁰⁵. In his article, he includes a review of recent scholarship about this teaching. He divides scholars in two groups: the first group of scholars, led by Green and Shaul Magid, perceive Nachman as an existentialist *avant la lettre* and have a modernist approach; the second group, led by Mark and supported by Goshen-Gottstein himself, consider Nachman a mystic and have a traditionalist approach. I would argue that the complexification of Nachman's figure through Mark's research is most welcome, though less ground-breaking than Goshen-Gottstein would like to, since Green already discussed Nachman's mystical side in his book *Tormented Master*. In my opinion Nachman's life and works allow both readings and no description of Nachman's thought would be complete without them. Therefore I consider unnecessary and counter-productive to take sides in this debate. Nachman's paradoxical nature and complex character escapes any attempt at facile classification. I also consider unfair to put Green in one of these two boxes. Green cautions against such reductionism in his book: "Nachman is the very antithesis of a systematic author. He has left us no tract in which he undertakes a step-by-step consideration of the major problems of Jewish theology. While his teachings reflect penetrating insight in the realm of religious thought and a deep awareness of the issues confronting the Jewish believer, he made no attempt to construct a fully elaborated theological synthesis."¹⁰⁶ Finally, I do not understand how, after attacking Green and Magid for their existentialist bias, Goshen-Gottstein can write the following sentence in the final conclusions of his article: "[The] fundamental questions [of creation] do not have to be answered intellectually. They have to be responded to existentially."¹⁰⁷

2.3.2 Analysis

Teaching 64 from *Liqqutei Moharan* (LM hereafter) is not dated in the sources, but probably was presented sometime between 1805 and 1806,¹⁰⁸ during the peak of Nachman's Messianic career and before the death of Nachman's son. In the following pages, I will discuss most of the sections in the teaching. I will leave out section 4,¹⁰⁹ in which the topic of rabbinical dispute is discussed as a phenomenon that mirrors Creation. This section is important and interesting, but not essential for my argument.¹¹⁰

105 Goshen-Gottstein p. 144

106 Green p. 285

107 Goshen-Gottstein p. 173

108 Green p. 311

109 LM 7 pp.409-17

110 For a comment of this section see: Ouaknin pp. 282-4.

In teaching 64, Rabbi Nachman comments the opening verses from the fifteenth weekly Torah portion, *Bo*. Teaching 64 starts discussing Creation. According to Nachman, the different worlds of Lurianic Qabbalah were created out of God's compassion (*rachmanut*). This statement is important since Creation is the coming about of difference in the continuum of divinity: Creation is creation of otherness.¹¹¹ This otherness is the source of all possible dialectical relations. Nachman's life and works will at times explore what happens when, from the perspective of the creature, this relationship seems to be non-existent, triggering feelings of separateness and alienation. In this teaching, on the other hand, Nachman argues that, from God's point of view, Creation was the outcome of His compassion. Without the otherness of Creation there could have been passion but not compassion.¹¹² In relation to the word compassion/*rachmanut*, Marc-Alain Ouaknin points out to the etymological root of the word (from *rechem*, “womb,” “uterus“) and provides the following quote from Shmuel Tringano's *Le récit de la disparue*:

[*Rachmanut*] describes the uterine nature of the womb, that is to say, the capacity of the uterus to be what it is: to conceive the fetus, the *ubar*. It is the capacity of the *rechem* to open up, to make an empty space in the heart of fullness of the person and to make room for the embryo, for a being Other.¹¹³

According to Tringano compassion is not only the *telos* of Creation, it is Creation itself. The idea that Creation came into being out of God's compassion contrasts with the estrangement and solitude often felt by Nachman himself. The different experiences of creature and creator point in the direction that otherness is a neutral concept: it provides the framework for relations, but it has no influence on the nature of such relations.

Once the question “Why Creation at all?” has been, at least tentatively, addressed, Nachman proceeds to describe the process of Creation following Lurianic Qabbalah. What particularly draws the attention of Nachman is the vacated space (*chalal ha-panui*):

The Vacated Space is the result of the contraction; that [God], so to speak,¹¹⁴ withdrew His

111 cf. Ouaknin p. 273

112 cf. Goshen-Gottstein p. 153

113 Quoted in: Ouaknin p. 273. From this point of view, God's madness (see section 2.4.2 below) could be considered a form of cosmic hysteria, from the Greek *hysteria*, uterus.

114 According to Ouaknin (p. 275), the expression “so to speak” (*ki-ve-yakhol*) is used in Qabbalistic literature to introduce problematic passages. Through this formula of rhetoric compromise, intellectual *chutzpah* can be incorporated into the discourse.

Godliness from that place. Thus there is, so to speak, no Godliness there. Were it not so, it would not be vacated. There would be then nothing but *Ein Sof*, with no place whatsoever for the world's creation. However the actual truth is that, even so, there is surely Godliness there as well. For there is surely nothing without His life-force. This is why it is not at all possible to comprehend the concept of the Vacated Space until the Future.¹¹⁵

While pondering about the contraction (*tzimtzum*) of the *Ein Sof*, Nachman reaches a startling insight: the created worlds – among which our own is one of them – can exist only because of God's absence.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, in the vacated space resulting from the contraction, Nachman locates a central tenet of his thought: the paradox of being and non-being¹¹⁷ (*yesh wa-ain*), the presence and absence of God in the vacated space.¹¹⁸ Nachman is torn between the need to account for the existence of evil and the created worlds through otherness, and the impossibility to deny God's oneness as the ultimate reality. According to Nachman, this paradox is beyond the powers of reason and it will only be comprehended in the future, i.e. the Messianic times. In this way, Nachman frames the contradictions arising from the vacated space in epistemological terms.

In Nachman's thought, the vacated space is not completely filled by the divine emanations. Even after the “breaking of the vessels” (*shvirat ha-kelim*), a layer of vacated space separates the created worlds from *Ein Sof*. According to Magid and Goshen-Gottstein, the radical idea that the void remains after Creation is Nachman's alone.¹¹⁹ As we will see, this idea has the most far-reaching implications. As it is described at this point of the teaching, the vacated space provides a sort of buffer zone that prevents the created worlds to be reabsorbed into the *Ein Sof*.¹²⁰ Hence, we can distinguish between the immanent Godliness of the created worlds, where holy and unholy intermingle, and the transcendent, pure Godliness of *Ein Sof*. Nachman's cosmological model resembles a cosmic Kinder Egg formed by three concentric spheres: Created Worlds, Vacated Space and *Ein Sof*.

115 LM 7 p. 387

116 cf. Green p. 314

117 cf. Grözinger p. 900 In relation to this paradox, Ouakin (p. 277) quotes Joseph Weiss: “It is not the world which is the scene of the question, but the question which is the scene of the world.”

118 As Green points out (p. 312) it is significant that, in order to explain the paradox of the vacated space, Nachman does not resort to the concept of *reshimu*, the residual light left by the *Ein Sof* after its contraction. In Nachman's thought, the absence of God is genuine and unmitigated. Goshen-Gottstein (pp. 181-2 n. 41), on the other hand, considers this omission secondary and explains it in terms of literary style.

119 Magid p. 499 n. 13; Goshen-Gottstein p. 183 n. 46

120 LM 7 p. 397

Ontological value	Nachman's model	Related events
Immanent Being	Created Worlds	<i>Shvirat ha-kelim</i>
Non-Being	Vacated Space	<i>Tzimtzum</i>
Transcendent Being	<i>Ein Sof</i>	

Once Nachman has unfolded his model, he draws several important phenomenological consequences. According to him, there are two kinds of heresies, the first one has its roots in the breaking of the vessels and the second one in the vacated space. The first heresy manifests itself in what Nachman calls “extraneous wisdoms” (*chokhmot chitzoniot*). The exact meaning of this term is unclear. Neither Green¹²¹ nor Mark¹²² provide an explanation for it. The Breslov Research Institute (BRI hereafter) translates it as “secular wisdom,”¹²³ but this translation should not be taken uncritically without further examination. Support for this translation comes from the recently published book by Chani Haran Smith, in which the author identifies “extraneous wisdoms” with “secular fields of intellectual inquiry.”¹²⁴ Also Shmuel Yosef Agnon suggests in his novel *A guest for the night* that “extraneous wisdoms” was a term used in Chasidic circles to refer to secular knowledge.¹²⁵ Nachman's text itself implies that extraneous wisdoms are something different from sorcery (*kishuf*),¹²⁶ though they share the same root in the dross of holiness resulting from the breaking of the vessels. Taking all this into account, it is safe to assume that in Nachman's Jewish context the heresy of “extraneous wisdoms” is non other than the Haskalah. According to Nachman, the Mishnaic dictum “And know what to answer the heretic”¹²⁷ is meant for this heresy. The full meaning of this dictum will become clear when discussing the second heresy, but at this stage Nachman interprets the answer hinted by the Mishnah as the possibility to find God in the first

121 Green p. 311

122 Mark 2009, p. 157

123 LM 7 p. 389

124 Smith, C.H. (2010), *Tuning the Soul Music as a Spiritual Process in the Teachings of Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav*, (Leiden: Brill, p. 116)

125 Louvish, M., tr. (2004) *A Guest for the Night* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, p. 197)

126 LM 7 p. 390

127 *Avot* 2:14

heresy. This possibility is clearly underpinned by the Lurianic Qabbalah:

Therefore, although whoever succumbs to this heresy should surely flee and escape from that place, nevertheless, having fallen there it is possible for him to find the way to get free. For he will be able to find God in that place, provided that he seeks and searches for Him there. Since the [heresy stems] from the Shattering of the Vessels, there must be some holy sparks and some letters that broke and fell there, as is known.¹²⁸

Nachman's main innovation has been to link secular knowledge to the breaking of the vessels, but once this has been done, its possibilities of redemption are already provided by the traditional corpus of Lurianic Qabbalah. Nachman truly begins to explore *terra ignota* when he discusses the second heresy:

However, there is another type of heresy. There are pseudo-wisdoms [*chokhmot she-einam chokhmot*] yet since they are intricate and people cannot comprehend them, they appear to be wisdom. [...] Likewise, the philosophers [*mechaqgrim*]¹²⁹ have a number of conundrums and questions [*qushiot*] that in fact have no [basis in] wisdom [...] In truth, it is impossible to answer these questions. This is because the questions [that arise] from this heresy stem from the Vacated Space in which, so to speak, there is no Godliness. [...] Therefore, of this heresy it is said (Proverbs 2:19) “None that go to her return.”¹³⁰

The second heresy poses a much more formidable challenge to the *tzaddiq*. This heresy is expressed through philosophical speculation and its tendency to delve into unsolvable questions and mind-boggling paradoxes (*qushiot*) that result in the denial of God. The possibility to find an answer there – i.e. to find God – is null, since the absence of Godliness is what defines the vacated space from where this heresy stems. Magid suggests that the search for an answer in both heresies is not only the search for God, but also for a concrete answer. The questions arising from the first heresy can be countered through religiously-minded arguments and explanations. The questions posed by the second heresy, on the other hand, demand answers that are beyond human understanding and language. According to Magid, the first question is intellectual while the second is experiential.¹³¹ This seems to be the case, as Nachman mentions in the preceding quote that the *chokhmot she-einam chokhmot* “are intricate and people cannot comprehend them,” leaving us to think that the *chokhmot chitzoniot* are just as false but at least within the grasp of human comprehension. At this

128 LM 7 p. 391, 393. My singular in square brackets.

129 Those who investigate, those who inquire. Green p. 313 and Goshen-Gottstein p. 156 translate it also as “philosophers.”

130 LM 7 p. 395. My transliterations in square brackets.

131 Magid p. 503

point of the argument it is important that we understand what Nachman means by heresy (*epiqorsit*): if the answer to heresy is to find God (to unveil His presence), heresy must be then the appraisal of His absence that results in scepticism, doubt and ultimately unbelief. In Nachman's eyes, what makes the proponents of this heresy so threatening is that their claims are not completely untrue. According to Green:

When philosophers confront the void and deny God they are in fact right in a certain way: they have arrived at that place where there is, in fact, no God. Within the universe of philosophical discourse there is no way out of this frightening conclusion.¹³²

Nachman reveals himself as the pioneer of a “Jewish spirituality founded upon the real possibility of unbelief.”¹³³ The heresy of the vacated space must be taken seriously and accounted for, since it is grounded in a genuine experience of God's absence – an experience that Nachman knows all too well. At core, the problem is that once unbelief has gained a foothold in Nachman's religiosity it has the potential to undermine the whole system. Nachman's model rests on the belief in the transcendent God of the *Ein Sof*. It is this belief which breaths life into the whole system – not unlike the emanations that bring the created worlds into being – and what allows Nachman to dismiss the first heresy, declaring the apparent absence of God from our physical world a mere illusion. But if what is experienced at a higher level of reality is the vacated space, the genuine experience of God's absence casts a doubt downwards and upwards. Downwards it suggests that the real illusion in our physical world might be the existence of an immanent God. Upwards it poses the forbidden question: what if there was no *Ein Sof*, but just an all-encompassing void? Nachman is the Chasid standing at the edge of this abyss. In the words of Magid:

The anguish and anxiety that permeated [Nachman's] life as well as his discourse suggested that his experiences were not of the absence of God's presence but the presence of God's absence; the void is not a lacuna between two dimensions of God, but the possibility of the non-existence of the transcendent God, which makes the immanent God an illusion.¹³⁴

In relation to this heresy Nachman brings the *asmakhta* from Proverbs “None that go to her return.” And who is the Biblical *ishah zarah* in the times of Nachman if not the Goddess of Reason? The same one that a few years earlier, in 1783, the French Convention had raised to the altars of Notre-

132 Green p. 314

133 Magid p. 501

134 Magid p. 503

Dame in Paris while proclaiming the triumph of the new religion – *le Culte de la Raison*. The Goddess of Reason is modernity's *ishah* and *avodah zarah* in one.

The sources provide us with examples of the questions and paradoxes raised by the second heresy. Nathan gives the following account not exempt of humour:

On the paradox of knowledge [God's prescience] and free will [...] our blessed rabbi said he already had the correct answer to this question and the answer was, as usual, completely clear [...] He had already written it up but lost the paper where he had written it, and now he has forgotten it.¹³⁵

If Nachman had an answer for this paradox, at least from a technical point of view, it should be considered as a paradox belonging to the category of the first heresy. At the time of Nathan's writing, though, the answer was lost, making this paradox a heresy *de facto* of the second kind. Nachman seems trapped between what he is supposed to believe – that God is prescient – and what his experience shows him every day – that he is able to make choices based on his free will.¹³⁶ Reason is what brings both statements together and judges them incompatible. Reason forces upon Nachman a coherence of thought that he is unable to attain at an emotional level. Another question is raised in teaching 64 itself, this time introduced by an unexpected heretic: Moshe Rabbeinu. Nachman recalls the famous passage from b. *Menachot* 29b in which Moses ascends to heaven to receive the Torah and finds God fixing crowns to the Torah's letters. After Moses has learnt that God is doing so for the sake of Rabbi Akiva – another case of God's prescience! – Moses asks to be shown Akiva's reward. What Moses sees then is Akiva's flesh being sold at the market by the Romans. At this sight Moses asks “Is this the Torah, and is this its reward?” Moses echoes here another question from the void, the question of theodicy, Job's cry. As we will see in the next teaching, this was a question that haunted Nachman for years. In the case of Rabbi Akiva, Nachman's paradox is his believe, stated at the opening of the teaching, that God created all the worlds out of compassion. How could a compassionate God deliver Rabbi Akiva to such a terrible death?¹³⁷

135 Quoted in: Liebes p. 121

136 Goshen-Gottstein (pp. 183-4 n. 50) does not consider this paradox as belonging to the second heresy. He rules out the possibility of falling into antinomianism in the case of Nachman. His main argument is that “The paradox of Divine knowledge and human free will is not a source of heresy in the classical works of the Jewish philosophy of the middle ages.” The problem with this argument is that Nachman's yardstick are not the medieval Jewish philosophers, who he accused of spreading heretic ideas.

137 Although Goshen-Gottstein (p. 159) does not discuss the death of Rabbi Akiva here, I owe the insight into the paradox of evil and compassion in teaching 64 to him.

Nachman has laid open for us his innermost dilemma with doubt and reason. At this stage it is worth to quote in Nachman's vernacular Yiddish one of the last public messages that he delivered before his death:

*Gevalt! Zeit eich nit meyaesh! Kein yeush is gor nit far handen!*¹³⁸

From this point we must walk the narrow bridge. Nachman tells us that the way to cross over the vacated space is faith. In the following passage, Nachman provides an accurate description of what he means by faith:

[B]elieving that God fills all the worlds and encircles all the worlds, and since He encircles all worlds then also the Vacated Space itself exists by virtue of His wisdom, and in actual truth His Godliness is surely in that place, just that it is impossible to comprehend this and to find God there.¹³⁹

Nachman's faith is not to believe in what we do not know, rather to believe in what we cannot, on principle, understand. Faith is to embrace our epistemological limitations instead of struggling to overcome them. This is what Nachman describes as “perfect faith” (*emunah shlemah*),¹⁴⁰ a particular kind of irrational faith but also a humbling lesson about the boundaries set to reason. From a critical perspective, of course, it can be argued that Nachman's prescription to overcome the problems of faith is even more faith, a radical faith that demands from us to suspend judgement. In relation to this, Magid writes:

[F]aith should not be viewed as the solution to a problem, but as the unfolding of the divine mystery. Gabriel Marcel's distinction between “problem” and “mystery” may shed light on my claim [...] Marcel states, “A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. A mystery is something in which I myself I am involved.”¹⁴¹

I have no interest in making an apology of Nachman and I consider legitimate to view his retreat to

138 Quoted in: Liebes p. 118. My exclamation marks. The translation provided by Green (p. 265) is: “Gevalt! Do not despair! There is no such thing as despair at all!”

139 LM 7 p. 399

140 LM 7 p. 397

141 Magid p. 515

“perfect faith” as an admission of dialectical defeat. Nevertheless, I would argue that Magid/Marcel's insight opens also new – and, above all, more interesting – perspectives. According to Nachman, the Jewish people is particularly endowed with the attribute of perfect faith. To make his argument he weaves a beautiful *midrash* of Exodus 3:18, in which YHWH is called “God of the *Ivriim*.” The translation of the relevant passage presents certain complications. I will therefore offer first the original in Hebrew and then two different translations, one by the BRI and one by Goshen-Gottstein:

ועל-כן ישראל נקראים עבריים, על-שם שהם עוברים באמונתם
 על כל החכמות. ואפלו על החכמות שאינם חכמות, הינו
 האפיקורסית השנית הבא מחלל הפנוי כנ"ל¹⁴²

This is why the Jews are called *IVRim* (Hebrews), because with their faith *OVRim* (they prevail over) all the wisdoms, and even the pseudo-wisdoms – i.e., the second heresy, which stems from the Vacated Space.¹⁴³

And therefore Israel are called Hebrews (עבריים), because they go beyond (עוברים) all wisdoms with their faith. And even the wisdoms that are no wisdoms, that is the second misbelief, that come from the vacant space.¹⁴⁴

The main differences arise about how to translate *ovrim be-emunatam al kol ha-chokhmot*. Goshen-Gottstein offers the obvious translation of the verbal root *avar* as to cross, to pass, but this does not account for the meaning of the preposition *al*. The BRI, on the other hand, translates it as “prevail over” in the sense of overcoming, defeating. This translation acknowledges the preposition but loses the important connotation of transit and movement. Each translation, in any case, provides us with an insight into the perfect faith of the Jewish people as conceived by Rabbi Nachman. Faith enables Jews to overcome all wisdoms and, more importantly, it carries them to the other side of the vacated space. This interpretation is reinforced by the quote from Joshua 24:3: “God is called 'the God of the *IVRim*' from the expression '*EiVeR* (beyond) the river' which connotes sides.” In Nachman's thought, the Jew is the one that crosses the abyss to reach the ultimate Other – i.e. God.

142 LM 7 p. 400

143 LM 7 p. 401

144 Goshen-Gottstein p. 160. Green (p. 315) provides quite a free translation “Israel are called *Ivrim* [lit. “those who cross over”] because in their faith they transcend all intellectuality.”

The one that crosses the abyss, though, should not delve into it. As Nietzsche's aphorism goes, “*Wenn du lange in einen Abgrund blickst, blickt der Abgrund auch in dich hinein.*”¹⁴⁵ The one who looks into the vacated space will, sooner or later, delve into the questions that arise from it. This task is reserved for a great *tzaddiq* alone. Nachman calls this *tzaddiq* “the great *tzaddiq* in the aspect of Moses.”¹⁴⁶ As stated later in the teaching, this great *tzaddiq* is the *tzaddiq* of the generation (*tzaddiq ha-dor*).¹⁴⁷ This probably refers to Nachman himself.¹⁴⁸ This great *tzaddiq* must face the second heresy rooted in the vacated space and expose himself to its God-denying paradoxes. The response of the great *tzaddiq* to this challenge is none other than silence. As Goshen-Gottstein points out, this is in accord with the description of the vacated space as a sphere devoid of language – a pre-linguistic sphere in fact.¹⁴⁹ Since the worlds were created by God's speech, the vacated space precedes and excludes language. Another insight into the silence of the great *tzaddiq* is provided by his relation to Moses:

For Moses is the aspect of silence, in the aspect that is called “heavy of speech” (Exodus 4:10), the aspect of a silence more exalted than speech.¹⁵⁰

The speech impediment of Moses is seen, therefore, as a prefiguration of the silence of the great *tzaddiq*. This *midrash* also fits well with the verses from the *parashat ha-shavua* that Nachman is expounding.¹⁵¹ In relation to Moses, Nachman still provides another interpretation of silence. It is in this context that Nachman quotes the *haggadah* from b. *Menachot* that has been already mentioned:

When [Moses] asked regarding the death of Rabbi Akiva, “Is this the Torah, and is this its reward?” they answered him, “Be silent! Thus has arisen in thought” (b. *Menachot* 29b). That is, you must be silent and not ask for an answer and solution for this question. This is because “this has it arisen in thought,” which is more exalted than speech. Therefore, you must keep silent regarding this question, because it is in the aspect of “arisen in thought,” where there is no speech to answer it.¹⁵²

145 Nietzsche, F. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Zur Genealogie der Moral* (München: DTV, ed. 1999, p. 98).

146 LM 7 p. 403

147 LM 7 p. 425

148 If Nachman were to publicly declare himself the *tzaddiq* of the generation, these claims would spark great tensions among other *tzaddiqim*. Therefore it is comprehensible that Nachman used a slightly veiled language which, in any event, remained transparent for his disciples. It should be also taken into account that this teaching was probably delivered at the height of Nachman's messianic expectations. (cf. Green p. 119)

149 Goshen-Gottstein p. 158

150 LM 7 p. 407. Since the worlds were created by God's speech,

151 Goshen-Gottstein (p. 186 n. 62) compares the “hardened heart” of Pharaoh [*kaved lev*] with the “heavy speech” of Moses [*kaved peh*].

152 LM 7 p. 407

Silence becomes for Nachman a more elevated mode of being. His attitude antedates by more than a century Ludwig Wittgenstein's seventh proposition in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, muss man schweigen.*” But if Wittgenstein's silence can be interpreted as awe-inspired, for Nachman silence is the way to cope with the terrifying absence of God mediated by the second heresy. The silence of the great *tzaddiq* allows him to plunge into the questions of the second heresy and remain unscathed. This journey into the heart of faithlessness is done for the purpose of redemption:

[By the *tzaddiq*'s delving into the second heresy], he elevates from there a number of souls that fell and became submerged within this heresy.¹⁵³

If we regard the vacated space as an ontological category and the second heresy as its phenomenological implication in our physical world, Nachman's approach can be interpreted as a form of transcendence. He does not argue with the “words of heresy”¹⁵⁴ in our physical world, but rather transcends them through the pre-linguistic silence from the vacated space. A provocative question comes to mind: could this be understood as a form of *devequt* with God's non-existence?¹⁵⁵ Through silence Nachman is not only creating the conditions for the redemption of the fallen souls, he is also bringing the second heresy back to its source. The redemptive aspect made possible by the *tzaddiq*'s silence provides also a more nuanced approach to Nachman's previous statement in relation to Proverbs 2:19 (“None that go to her return”). Now it is clear that those who delve into the second heresy are unable to return by themselves, but they still have a hope for redemption in the great *tzaddiq*. It is written in the Talmud:

R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself? They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.¹⁵⁶

To close the circle, one last open question remains: how is the lifting of the souls effected? We have seen how silence allows the great *tzaddiq* to plunge into the second heresy and keep his

153 LM 7 pp. 403-5

154 LM 7 p. 403

155 Or, is the presence of the *tzaddiq* filling the void left by the absence of God?

156 b. *Berakoth* 5b

faith. Now we will explore how the great *tzaddiq* lifts the fallen souls of other Jews and – in contrast to R. Johanan – extricates himself from the abyss of unbelief.¹⁵⁷ The answer is found in section five of teaching 64:

Know, too, that by means of the melody [*niggun*] of the *tzaddiq* who is the aspect of Moses, he elevates from the heresy of the Vacated Space the souls that fell into there.¹⁵⁸

The melody of the *tzaddiq* pulls him out of the bottomless pit and with him, all the fallen souls attached to the *tzaddiq*. The “words of heresy” cannot be answered in their own terms within their linguistic-epistemological framework. Any attempt to do so would only result in being ensnared by the faithlessness of the heresy. *Niggun* is here the overcoming of dialectics in a higher and completely different mode of being. Melody achieves to break through heresy and propels the *tzaddiq* and the fallen souls beyond the vacated space. In this sense, melody acts as a restorative of faith. The fallen souls become again *Ivriim*, those who cross over. Nachman's silence and melody are also another instance of the motif of the “descend of the *tzaddiq*” into the realm of evil for redemptive purposes. According to Green, this principle was inspired by Sabbateanism.¹⁵⁹ The parallels with Sabbateanism do not end here. The *niggun* of the great *tzaddiq* has also strong Messianic connotations. While explaining the relation between the *tzaddiq* of the generation and Moses, Nachman states:

This is the explanation of (Exodus 15:1): “Then Moses will sing.” Our Sages, of blessed memory, said: It does not say “sang” but “will sing.” This is a Biblical source for the resurrection of the dead (b. *Sanhedrin* 91b).¹⁶⁰

And later in the teaching:

This is because [the *tzaddiq's* melody] is in the aspect of the summit of faith – i.e., the most exalted faith of all – since through this melody and faith all heresy is nullified.¹⁶¹

At the time of delivering this teaching, Nachman, the self-appointed *tzaddiq ha-dor*, still believed

157 This possibility is never explicit in Nachman's teaching, but I would argue that it is alive at a subtextual level. The journey to the heart of faithlessness bears always the risk of not coming back.

158 LM 7 p. 419. My transliteration in square brackets.

159 Green p. 67

160 LM 7 p. 425

161 LM 7 p. 427

that redemption was within reach. As he envisioned it, his *niggun* would raise the fallen souls and destroy all heresies. His particular form of *tiqqun* was specially aimed at the second heresy. The denial of God is for Nachman the ultimate unreason of reason. As Green puts it:

The persistent questions facing the dialectician are part of an ontological reality greater than the thinker's mind. In raising these questions and trying to deal with them by discursive reasoning, however, philosophers lose themselves in an eternal web of paradox from which they do not know how to free themselves. It is in this way that they are led to the denial of God, a state which for Nachman seems tantamount to madness.¹⁶²

According to Nachman, to pride ourselves in our confusion of knowledge with ignorance, fact with prejudice and certainty with blindness is a form of epistemological madness.

2.4 Teaching 5 from *Liqqutei Moharan Tinyana*

2.4.1 Methodological introduction

Compared to the previous teaching, teaching 5 from *Liqqutei Moharan Tinyana* (LM II hereafter) has received much less attention from scholars. Some parts of this teaching relevant to our discussion have been briefly discussed by Yehuda Liebes¹⁶³ and Green.¹⁶⁴ Mark¹⁶⁵ comments most of the texts in more detail and I will quote him several times. I will also use his translation for the texts from section 15C. On the whole, my reading will follow Mark's structure, while complementing some of his insights with my own ideas.

2.4.2 Analysis

Teaching 5 was delivered in Bratslav on Monday night, Rosh Ha-Shanah 5570 (September 11, 1809).¹⁶⁶ Nachman was at that time very sick – he would die one year later – and his feverish period of Messianic activity had already subdued. Teaching 5 is the longest in the whole LM, dealing with different and complex topics. For this reason, I will focus on the passages relevant to our discussion, mainly in section 7 and 15C.

162 Green pp. 310-1

163 Liebes pp. 122-6

164 Green pp. 304-6

165 Mark 2009, pp. 13-22

166 LM 12 p. 269 n. 1

The teaching starts discussing faith (“The main thing is *emunah*”)¹⁶⁷ and the need of the faithful to refine and burnish their souls. For this, Nachman believes that it is crucial to develop a sense for boundaries and constrictions. Bringing a new twist to Rashi's interpretation, Nachman associates this concept with one of the names of God, *Shaddai*, and by extension with phylacteries (*tefillin*), due to the *minhag* of spelling the holy three-lettered name with the phylacteries. After this brief introduction, it is worth to quote the passage from section 7 at length:

This is also the concept of the *Shadday* of *tefillin*, the concept of constriction [*tzimtzum*].¹⁶⁸ Every person has to reign in his mental faculties [*she-tzarikh kol echad we-echad letzamtzem et mocho we-sikhlo*] not allowing the mind to go beyond his limit. This is so that the mind does not roam where it has no permission to go according to his level, as in: Do not inquire into that which is too wondrous for you; into that which is concealed from you do not investigate (b. *Chagigah* 13a). This is *Shadday*/constriction: *ShaDday* – in Whose Godliness *yeSh Dai* (there is enough) for every creature (*Rashi*, Genesis 17:1), In other words, every created being has his *dai* and limit in His blessed Godliness. One is permitted to extend one's intellectual pursuits only up to that boundary, no further. For the limit and restriction of each person's intellectual pursuit is according to his measure [of worthiness]. Even in the realms of holiness one is forbidden to go beyond one's limits, as in: Do not inquire about that which is too wondrous for you...; the idea of “lest they break through to God in order to see...” (Exodus 19:21).

And this is the meaning of “I will put you in the cleft of the rock” (Exodus 33:22), which was said about Moses at the time he merited seeing and entering into the mystery. In other words, God promised to shield him. He would be concealed in the rock's cleft – i.e. the constriction – so that the mind would not roam beyond his limit.¹⁶⁹

As in the commentary of the Talmudic *haggadah* about the four rabbis who went into the Garden/Paradise,¹⁷⁰ Nachman is dealing here with the question of epistemological limitations. Nachman argues that each person has access to a different level of knowledge, but there is always a limit nonetheless. Madness, as we have discussed before, would be the forceful attempt to go beyond that limit. To be a human being means to acknowledge that *yesh dai* – there is a limit. If this applies to religious/holy pursuits, as we saw in the commentary to the *haggadah* of the four rabbis, this must surely apply, *qal wa-chomer*, to secular/intellectual pursuits as well. In the case of

167 LM 12 p. 271. Italics and transliteration in the original.

168 The word *tzimtzum* has certainly Qabbalistic connotations and has been previously translated as “contraction.” In the context of this teaching and in relation to the intellect, though, constriction seems a more accurate translation. This is also the translation suggested by Mark (2009, p. 14).

169 LM 12 pp. 321, 323, 325. My first two transliterations in square brackets.

170 b. *Chagigah* 14b

religious inquiries, it is significant that Nachman takes the story of Moses and objectifies these epistemological limitations in the “cleft of the rock.” As pointed by Exodus:19:21, during the revelation at Sinai the punishment for overstepping the limits – i.e. seeing God's face – was not madness but death. This applies certainly for the common folk, but in the case of Moses it is not completely clear. In Exodus 33 there is a tension between verse 11 and verse 20:

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another (Ex. 33:11)

You cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live. (Ex. 33:20)

Nachman decides to go with Exodus 33:20 and for this purpose quotes the rock's cleft. The presence of God demands a degree of constriction, otherwise it becomes destructive. In this case, the intellect can attain certain insights as long as it acknowledges its constriction. The state of Moses in the rock's cleft represents for Nachman the level of insight that can be attained through the intellect (*mochin*), understood as the activity of the rational mind (*daat*).¹⁷¹ In relation to this, Mark writes:

The insights described in this passage¹⁷² are of a particularly intellectual nature, and they are attained in consequence of the activity of the intellect and the rational mind. At this stage, there is no hesitation in regard to the importance, helpfulness and unique quality of rational thinking as a method of attaining insights, with the stipulation that this insight must correspond to a person's spiritual level.¹⁷³

Mark's comment is very important to avoid a facile caricature of Nachman as an anti-rationalist. Nachman is not against reason as long as it remains within its limits, but he certainly has a problem with reason when it attempts to decide in questions of faith. Once Nachman has explained the insights available to the intellect, he starts exploring which other levels can be attained when the rational mind is not active, as in the case of dreams. According to Nachman, a refined intellect produces refined words which leave a trace (*reshimah*) even when the rational mind is not active. Similarly, impure words leave an impure trace also when the rational mind is not in control. The nature of the *reshimah* is eventually responsible for the kind of dreams that the dreamer has. A refined trace will attract dreams mediated by angels,¹⁷⁴ while an impure trace will attract dreams mediated by demons.¹⁷⁵ Nachman brings his reflections on dreams in relation to Moses, too:

171 Mark (2009) translates *mochin* as intellect (p. 13) and *daat* as “consciousness” (p. 2) and “rational mind” (p. 13).

172 cf. footnote 169

173 Mark 2009, p. 14

174 LM 12 p. 331

175 LM 12 p. 335

Moses passing signifies the departure of *daat*, which is analogous to sleep, at which time *daat* departs and all remains is the vestige.¹⁷⁶

In this way, Nachman is introducing two different epistemological categories: “Moses in his lifetime” and “Moses' passing away.” The first category is related to waking/rational consciousness and the second one to oneiric states. As the unfolding of the teaching will make clear, these two categories are organised hierarchically. Therefore, the dream mediated by the angel (Moses' passing away) provides a higher insight into God's essence than the activity of the intellect (Moses in his lifetime). The constriction imposed on Moses in his lifetime (the cleft of the rock) is loosened when he passes away and his imagination is released from his intellect. From this point, we are ready to approach the section of the teaching that, for our purposes, conveys the core message. In section 15C we read:¹⁷⁷

Indeed, what is necessary is precisely to 'cast away the mind,' [*lesalleq et ha-moach*] because it is necessary to cast aside all rational processes [*lehashliakh kol ha-chokhmot*] and serve God simply. [...] And this is not only the case in regard to the foolish ideas entertained by the common folk, but even to ideas that are truly intelligent, even of those of a person who has a truly great mind. When a person comes to some type of service of God, he must cast aside all ideas [*lehashliakh kol ha-chokhmot*] and serve God with utter simplicity.¹⁷⁸

As Mark points out,¹⁷⁹ there are two remarkable elements in this part of the teaching. The first one is Nachman's idea of “casting away the mind” out of own volition. We have seen how, in the case of dreams, the rational mind was not active and this allowed the mediation of angels when the *reshimah* was refined. Concerning dreams, though, the deactivation of the rational mind is not a wilful act, rather a natural development in the process of sleep. Here, on the other hand, Nachman advocates for a deliberate “casting away of the mind” as a way to serve God with simplicity.¹⁸⁰ The other important point is that Nachman asks to get rid not only of the foolish wisdom of common man (*chokhmot shel shetut shel stam bnei adam*) but also the genuine wisdom of true luminaries (*chokhmot gemurot afilu mi she-yesh lo moach gadol beemet*).¹⁸¹ What Nachman is telling us here is that service of God is not a matter of degrees of knowledge and truth. These different levels were of

176 LM 12 p. 331

177 For this section I will use the translation provided by Mark (2009).

178 Mark 2009, p. 17. My transliterations in square brackets.

179 Mark 2009, pp. 17-8

180 Green (p. 305) claims that Nachman focus on simplicity is similar to that of R. Zusya of Anipol and R. Abraham Kalisker. As it will become clear later, Rabbi Nachman's attitude is not that simple.

181 cf. Mark 2009, p. 17

central importance when discussing the epistemological limitations of human beings, but *avodah* is something else. *Avodah* is not done for the sake of human knowledge, but for the sake of God, to please Him (*laasot nachat le-Hashem*) and to do His will (*ratzono*).¹⁸² In the service of God we are entering a completely different category. The point is not that levels and degrees of knowledge are not important, rather that such knowledge and the rational mind that rules over it have to be deliberately cast away in order to be able to worship in the most exalted manner. In the passage immediately following the previous one, Nachman makes clear that “casting away the mind” is by no means an exclusively abstract activity:

And a person must even behave himself and do things in a manner that appears mad [*she-nireh ki-meshugga*] for the sake of serving God, which is the aspect of 'In her love you will be intoxicated [*tishgeh*] constantly' [Proverbs 5:19]. For the love of God, a person must do things that appear mad [*devarim ha-nirin ke-shiggaon*] in order to perform God's commandments and do His will. A person must roll in all sorts of refuse and mud in order to serve Him and perform His commandments. And this is true not only in regard to a literal commandment, but to anything where God's will is involved – this is called a *mitzwah*. [...] And a person must roll in all sorts of refuse and mud to do God's will and please Him.¹⁸³

The stakes are now higher. Nachman is not only asking to “cast away the mind,” he also expects his followers to act accordingly, and to illustrate this new ethos he chooses the most shocking image: “to roll in all sorts of refuse and mud.”¹⁸⁴ Nachman is introducing here an interesting distinction between genuine acts of madness and acts that appear to be madness. We already discussed how, in the case of the Baal Shem Tov, his behaviour while in a state of *devekut* was perceived by others as madness. The border between genuine and perceived madness is particularly thin in the case of Nachman: what is the difference between authentic madness and someone who at a mental and behavioural level has embraced madness? In the words of Mark:

Performing acts of madness does not only involve a readiness to be viewed as mad by others. It means that one is truly ready to be mad. [...] Rabbi Nachman directs a person to make use of external, public acts in order to create a desired internal state.¹⁸⁵

182 LM 12 p. 408

183 Mark 2009, p. 18. My transliterations in square brackets.

184 According to Green (p. 305), rolling in the mud as a test of faith is similar to the “holy fool” with whom R. Zusya of Anipol was often identified.

185 Mark 2009, p. 18

It is also revealing that Nachman chooses a form of self-humiliation to illustrate acts of madness (“to roll in all sorts of refuse and mud”). This self-humiliation opens madness to a social dimension – in the Chasidic milieu it triggers ambivalent feelings of pity and awe; in the world of reason described by Foucault it is a form of stigmatisation and scandal that needs to be locked away. While this self-humiliation might alienate sanctimonious Jews and appal reason, Nachman contends that it pleases God. Hashem seems to find pleasure in exposing the deceptiveness of normality and human order. Hence, God becomes a boundless force rejoicing at our bewilderment. Nachman makes clear that he is speaking of a madness of unconditional love. In the verses that precede the quote from Proverbs, we encounter again the *ishah zarah* tempting Nachman. This might be the explanation to why he must cast away his intellect: to escape the seduction of the Goddess of Reason and become intoxicated by the love of Torah. Finally, Nachman's boldness is remarkable when he describes the rolling in refuse and mud as a *mitzwah*, just like the study of Torah or the keeping of the Sabbath. The lesson is that everything can potentially become a *mitzwah*, it just depends on God's will.¹⁸⁶

We have discussed so far Nachman's acts of madness as part of the service to God. In the continuation of the teaching, Nachman's argument comes full circle as it links again with the epistemological discussion. I will quote this passage at length:

And then, when his love for God is so strong that he abandons all of his wisdom, and he casts himself [*mashliakh atzmo*] into refuse and mud for the sake of serving God, in order to please Him, he affects his intellect positively. At that point he attains insights that transcend his intellect – insights that not even Moses gained in his lifetime: an understanding of why 'the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being' (b. *Brakhot* 7a), which is a perversion of justice [*mishpat*], and something that appears to pervert fairness [*ke-ivut ha-din*], heaven forbid, which Moses himself did not understand in his lifetime – i.e., when the intellect was completely functioning, when it is not absent, which corresponds to Moses in his lifetime. On the one hand, the absence of the mind, the aspect of sleep, corresponds to Moses' passing away, whereas, on the other hand, the presence of the mind, when the mind is present and not absent, corresponds to Moses in his lifetime. In this aspect it is not possible to understand why the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being. But when a person's love of God is so strong that he throws himself down and rolls in the refuse and mud in order to serve God, and acts literally like a slave because of his love for God, then he can attain an insight into that state which is known as 'Moses in his lifetime' (i.e., when the mind is present), in which he cannot

186 So much to Nachman's potential for antinomianism. Cf. footnote 136.

understand why 'the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being.'¹⁸⁷

With this new twist of his argumentation, Nachman brings us back to the epistemological question. He reveals to us that the way to attain the highest spiritual insight is not to look for it at all. Through unconditional love for God it becomes possible to receive prophecy, but the *kawanah* is to serve God, not illumination. This is the paradox of achieving self-realisation through the selfless path. To the one who “casts away his mind,” who acts “in a manner that appears mad,”¹⁸⁸ who faces humiliation and alienation from others due to his *avodah lishmah*, God shows him His compassion. This ties in with the opening sentence of the previous teaching: “God created the world as a consequence of His compassion.”¹⁸⁹ Nachman suggests that pious acts of madness permit to realise the *telos* of Creation. The dialectical relationship between creator and creature is activated through acts of madness. And how is God's compassion expressed? Nachman tells us that God shows His compassion revealing the answer for a question from the void: why the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being. During Nachman's Messianic period, to reach an answer for this question would have been a very high form of *tiqqun* with strong Messianic connotations. There is no reason to believe that his opinion had changed in this teaching, though the feeling of imminent redemption was not in the air any more. God's compassion is to answer Job's painful cry, the question of theodicy. Nachman plays again with the distinction between appearance and truth. The fact that “the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being” is something that appears to be a perversion of divine justice, but to give credit to this possibility is not a living option – as William James would put it¹⁹⁰ – for a religious man such as Nachman. Therefore, without denying the human experience of injustice, there must be an explanation for God's ultimate just purposes. God is presented also as having cast away His mind, seemingly acting like mad, but Nachman believes that in truth He must be wise and just and that His unintelligible behaviour – like Nachman's rolling in refuse and mud – must be motivated by the most wondrous reasons. Maybe Nachman needs to cling to God's sanity in order to preserve his own. Finally, Nachman suggests that by way of casting away the mind and engaging in acts of madness for the sake of God, it is possible to reach a level of prophecy higher than Moses, both in his lifetime and in his passing away. In the Talmud (b. *Brakhot* 7a) it is said that Moses made God three requests: to let the Divine Presence rest upon Israel, to prevent the Divine

187 Mark 2009, p. 19. My transliterations in square brackets.

188 It is also significant that Nachman uses the same verb in “casting away all wisdoms” (*lehashliakh kol ha-chokhmot*, LM 12 p. 406) and “casting oneself into refuse and mud” (*mashliakh atzmo le-refesh we-tit*, LM 12 p. 412). This repetition suggests to us the deep interrelation of both events: the one who is casting his mind is already casting himself into the mud of madness.

189 LM 7 p. 383

190 In his classical essay, *The Will to Believe*.

Presence from resting upon idolaters and to show him – Moses – His ways. This last request focused on the question of why the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being. The *amoraim* agree that God granted the first two requests, but there is dispute in relation to the third request and the related question. Nachman decides to follow the opinion of R. Meir, who believed that God never granted Moses his last request. Not surprisingly, in b. *Brakhot* 7a the issue of Moses seeing God's face and hiding in the cleft of the rock is also discussed. The following passage will help us to shed more light into our discussion:

There are some people in the aspect of the son, who search through the hidden treasures of their father (*Zohar* III, 11b), while others are in the aspect of a slave, who has but one role: that is to do his task, and who may not ask for any reason or explanation. He has one obligation: to do his work that he has been assigned. But there are also people who are the aspect of a son who so loves his father that out of that love he does the work of a slave, of what a simple slave must perform. He leaps from the great rampart, into the very midst of battle [*milchamah*]; he rolls in all sorts of mud and refuse, if only to please his father, carrying out actions that not even a simple slave would do. And then, when his father sees how strong his love is, so much so that out of his love he acts with total servitude, then he reveals to him even those things that he would not give to a [regular] son: [...] why 'the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being' – something that not even Moses was able to understand in his lifetime.¹⁹¹

In this passage Nachman offers us an image to illustrate the one who casts away his mind and performs acts of madness: he is the son who does the work of the slave. Again appearance and truth are dislocated: judged by his acts he is a slave, but in truth he is a son. Another motif that repeats itself is humiliation: the son who reduces himself to the wretchedness of the slave. In case this would not qualify as an act of madness, the figure of the son-slave is also ready to “leap from the great rampart, into the very midst of battle” and “roll in all sorts of mud and refuse,” “carrying out actions that not even a simple slave would do.” He is more than a slave, his lowness and disregard for himself have no equal. The scene of the son-slave leaping from the rampart into the midst of battle is enigmatic. What is this *milchamah*? The scene is reminiscent of the *tzaddiq* in teaching 64 plunging into the second heresy. This seems to be the battle that Nachman has fought through all his life between faith and reason. According to Liebes, the sons who search through the treasures of their father are a reference to the mystics at the highest level of Judaism – *tannaim*, Jesus (*sic*), Shimon bar Yochai, Moses, the *tzadiqqim* – while the slaves would be Nachman's followers

191 Mark 2009, p. 20. My transliteration in square brackets.

worshipping “in utter simplicity” and the son-slave Rabbi Nachman himself.¹⁹² Nachman's last quoted passage allows us to complete the following table:

Aspect	Activity	Psych. state	Category	Outcome
1. Moses in his lifetime	Intellect (<i>mochin</i>)	Conscious	Epistemological	Constriction (<i>tzimtzum</i>) – limited insights (<i>yesh dai</i>)
2. Moses' passing away	Dream mediated by an angel	Unconscious	Epistemological	Trace (<i>reshimah</i>) – constriction is loosened but not suppressed
3. The son who does the work of the slave	Casting away the mind + acts of madness out of unconditional love	Conscious towards unconscious	<i>Avodah</i> towards epistemological	Prophecy through God's compassion

It is clear that for Nachman these different stages come in a hierarchy. After the first stage, the less involvement from the intellect and the rational mind, the higher the insight. For the final leap into prophecy, though, God's compassion is needed. A human being cannot attain that rung on her own and should not aim for it in the first place. Prophecy comes as a by-product of the service for the sake of God. According to Nachman, love is what can break the epistemological barrier between creature and creator. Love is corresponded by love: the selfless love of the son-slave is what arouses the loving-kindness of God. The dialectical relationship between creature and creator is activated by love. Furthermore, in the process of gaining greater intimacy, the distance and the absence – the vacated space – is replaced by proximity and presence. It remains the question if, in the final stage of Nachman's hierarchy, there is any constriction or limit at all. Is that complete *unio mystica* or just the most exalted level of prophecy attainable for a human being *qua* human being?

192 Liebes p. 123

PART III

3.1. Introduction to Part III

In the previous two parts I have attempted to elaborate on Foucault's and Nachman's concept of madness and the central role it plays in their criticism of “enlightened” reason. In this third part I will bring the discourse of Foucault and Nachman together in an attempt to highlight their affinities and illuminating divergences. To do so, I will structure my comparison around four topics:

- Madness in Foucault's Classical Age and Early Chasidism
- Madness Vindicated
- Unreason Exposed
- Power and the Void

The three last topics will run parallel to the three topics discussed in the first part's analysis. A brief section with my closing remarks will put an end to my study.

3.2. Madness in Foucault's Classical Age and Early Chasidism

As has become apparent in the course of this paper, the perception of madness by the Classical Age and by Chasidic society was significantly different. According to Foucault, during the Classical Age madness was subsumed in the category of unreason. The mad person was confined due to her withdrawal from the labour market. The reason why mad people were perceived as scandalous was their alleged idleness. The Classical Age seemed able to endure their poverty but not what was considered their rebellious refusal to work. This rebellion undermined morals and challenged the established order. In this way, the mad person became an enemy of the state and, consequently, had to share the same fate as criminals: confinement and punishment. The madman was a public enemy that had to be starved, beaten, chained, subjected to extreme temperatures, locked away. The dialogue between unreason and reason that still took place in the Renaissance was completely suppressed and substituted by the megalomaniac monologue of reason. Selected specimens of mad people were put in show for the public, but their display was far from resuming the dialogue between madness and reason. On the contrary, exhibition only sanctioned their

transformation into soulless animals, objects made of flesh. Mad people had no role to play in society, except to fill the void left by lepers in the moral universe of the period and, through their display, serve as edifying example for the public. As a consequence of the transformation of mad people into objects for display, the misery resulting from immorality became a tool to teach morality.

In the case of Early Chasidism, the picture is very different. According to the research done by Mark,¹⁹³ there were two kinds of madness at the time: the kind of madness triggered by the possession of a *dybbuk* – which I would call visionary madness – and the madness triggered by the attempt to reach a spiritual rung beyond the level that has been granted to the seeker – which I would label as transgressive madness. If we focus on visionary madness (what, according to Mark, modern psychiatric practice would describe as schizophrenia and hysteria)¹⁹⁴ it seems that this group of mad people enjoyed an important position in Early Chasidic society. The most obvious difference with the Classical Age is that, instead of being imprisoned, they were allowed to move freely. As Mark describes it, feelings towards mad people were not completely positive, but rather mixed, a combination of uncanny fear and pity. Nevertheless, the community profited on the whole from the insights into the spiritual world gained from mad people. In this sense, the figure of the mad person was not very different from the shaman in other cultures. The importance of visionary madness in Early Chasidic society is most clearly shown in Mark's thesis regarding *Shivchei ha-Besht*, namely, that the biography of the Baal Shem Tov was meant as a substitute for the dwindling cases of possession. In Early Chasidic society, mad people fulfilled a public role. Their living witness to the actuality of the spiritual world and their denunciation of other people's sins served to strengthen the faith of the community. It remains the question of how much of that was an idealised instrumentalisation of mad people created by Chasidic leaders in order to buttress the established values and their own authority. In any case, it is interesting to see how in Foucault's Classical Age madness was removed from society because it was perceived as a threat to order and morals, while in Early Chasidism madness was used precisely to reinforce these principles. In spite of the opposite approaches, both cases have in common that the rulers recognised the link between madness and power. The “absolute liberty”¹⁹⁵ of the mad individual breaks the habits of submission and assent upon which authority is built and reminds sane people that obedience is, in the last analysis, a matter of personal choice. Another parallel between the Classical Age and Early Chasidic society is the public role of the madman in the aspect of *montrer/monstre*. In Early Chasidic society mad

193 Mark 2003 and 2004.

194 Mark 2003, p. 257

195 Foucault p. 157

people were still freaks and, according to the sources,¹⁹⁶ the *dybbuk* responsible for the possession had a tendency to use his newly acquired body to make public confession of his sins and accuse others. The aspect of *montrer/monstre* was certainly there, but the important difference in relation to the Classical Age was that in Early Chasidism the madman – or rather the spirit that possessed him – was in charge of the situation. He was not an object to be exhibited, but an exhibitionist. This active approach influenced also his relationship with the public: as much as the community watched him, he watched them and took any opportunity to reveal their secret sins.

Another parallelism between the Classical Age and Early Chasidic society has to do with the superhuman powers that in both cases were attributed to mad people. As we have seen, until the late eighteenth century it was considered a medical dogma, still accepted by Pinel, that mad people could endure the most extreme temperatures.¹⁹⁷ In Early Chasidism, as it has been already mentioned, mad people were supposed to have spiritual powers. In both cases we can find a shared belief that some daemonic potency dwelt at the root of madness. It is rather telling that the Classical Age, under the spell of reason, chose physical attributes to describe the daemonic nature of mad people, while Early Chasidism highlighted the spiritual qualities. In spite of its physical disguise, though, I would argue that at the source of the Classical Age's prejudice there is a trace of a very old spirituality. The fantastic animality with which the Classical Age endowed madness might well have been the vestige of the ancient reverence for the gods of nature.

In the case of transgressive madness, the parallels between Early Chasidic society and the Classical Age are still clearer. In both cases transgression was severely punished. According to Foucault the idleness associated with mad people was a serious transgression of Classical Age's "police."¹⁹⁸ In the texts written by the *Ohev Yisrael* and Nachman already quoted,¹⁹⁹ transgression is described as the forceful attempt to attain a higher spiritual level without meriting it. In the first case, madness is the cause of transgression (idleness), while in the second case madness is the outcome of transgression (the punishment). The following table illustrates the different relations of madness and transgression in the Classical Age and Early Chasidism:

196 See for instance the case of Raphael Anav's daughter in: Chajes pp. 104-113

197 Foucault pp. 148-9

198 Foucault p. 62

199 cf. footnotes 75 and 77.

	Cause		Transgression		Outcome/ Punishment
Classical Age	Madness	<i>leads to</i>	Idleness	<i>leads to</i>	Confinement
Early Chasidism	Religious zeal		Attempts to reach unmerited spiritual level		Madness

Madness stands at both sides of the transgression line (from the Latin *transgressionem*, to step over). In teaching 64 Nachman used the concept of transgression in a positive way to describe the *Ivriim*, the Jew as holy transgressor, but in the text about the four rabbis who entered the Garden, transgression is used in negative terms as an unlawful overstepping of the limits. Madness surrounds the experience of transgression: for the Classical Age you must be mad to transgress; for Early Chasidism you must transgress to become mad. I would argue that madness is to be found at both ends. In the same way that mad people in Classical Age remained mad after confinement, mad Chasidim who had wanted to break through their epistemological limitations must have nourished their madness even before they transgressed. Nachman offers at this point a seeming paradox: madness is both the punishment for struggling against epistemological limitations and, in the form of “casting away the intellect,” the way to overcome these very limitations. The difference is that the first madness is triggered by the thirst for knowledge, a self-centred kind of madness, while the second madness is a madness of love and selfless dedication to God.

3.3 Madness Vindicated

As we have already seen, the Chasidic milieu in which Nachman lived had an overall positive attitude towards visionary madness. Nachman's ideas, therefore, found encouragement in his intellectual environment. In teaching 5 from LM II the topic of madness and its virtues is explicit. In teaching 64, on the other hand, the influence of madness in Nachman's thought is less apparent. In any case, it is significant that Nachman chose silence and melody as the ways to face and redeem the second heresy. Both silence and melody are non-rational means, the first is pre-linguistic, since it corresponds to the vacated space, while I would argue that the second is post-linguistic, corresponding to the Messianic times. Silence and Melody are related also to two modes

of being in dialectical relationship: silence as immobility (the *tzaddiq* dwelling in the heresy of questions without answer) and melody as movement (the *tzaddiq* breaking through the heresy with music rather than words). Nachman's later infatuation with madness could well be rooted in his belief that only non-rational acts can nullify heresy and bring redemption.²⁰⁰ According to Goshen-Gottstein, who in turn quotes Mark's Ph.D. thesis *Madness and Knowledge*, "in the manuscript version [of teaching 5 from LM II] the verse relating to the God of the Hebrews is not understood as crossing over, but as throwing off understanding."²⁰¹ Were it not for this statement, I would have thought that Nachman's transition from silence and melody to full-fledged madness had been the outcome of a process of radicalisation. However, Mark's insight about the manuscript reveals that Nachman was already musing with the idea of "casting away the mind" in 1805-6, at the peak of his Messianic career.

For Foucault, the vindication of madness is tightly linked to his criticism of enlightened reason. When reason ceases to be a search for truths guided by the intellect and becomes the discourse of power to perpetuate itself, any form of rebellion against such an oppressive regime should be welcomed. Foucault finds in madness the paradigm of dissidence, the "absolute liberty"²⁰² that escapes any attempt of being assimilated into order and that, for this very reason, needs to be confined. The "idleness" of madness is not a transitory state, it is a matter of essence. At the same time, the irreducibility of madness is the basis of its otherness. According to Nachman, God also does things that appear to be mad, as when He lets the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being. God is also the irreducible Other who finds *nachat* in the *tzaddiq's* acts of madness, probably because these acts mirror His own. God is the Other that cannot be reached by reason, only by love, and what is love if not humanity's greatest folly? And whose freedom can be more absolute than the Almighty's freedom?

Foucault's characterisation of madness in terms of absolute freedom, irreducibility and otherness echoes Nachman's conception of God. However, the strongest point of contact between both authors is related with Foucault's concept of art and Nachman's acts of madness. Following Foucault, I have described art and madness as two different phenomenological manifestations of the same ontological instance. In spite of their strong filiation, while mad people were locked in the asylum, works of art were presented on the altar of culture. Maybe the difference is not as conspicuous as we think. We could consider museums as the asylums of art, a governmental

200 LM 7 pp. 425, 427

201 Goshen-Gottstein p. 185 n. 59

202 Foucault p. 157

institution in which art is confined and selected pieces are put in display “to anyone willing to hand over their shilling”²⁰³ for the sake of public education. It is worth noting that the Ashmolean Museum, reputedly the first public museum in Europe, was inaugurated in 1683,²⁰⁴ only 27 years after the decree that founded the Hôpital Général in Paris. The parallelisms between how madness and art have been treated until our days betray their kinship. In spite of their similarities, in the Classical Age as now, art enjoyed a high regard in the eyes of reason, whereas madness was a sickness: something to cure, to suppress, to get rid of. As Foucault presents it, once the dialogue with madness had been disrupted, the only path left for reason to access the secrets of madness' ontological source was art. Foucault suggests that, although art and madness are two different things, you cannot have one without the other since they are both rooted in the same ontological reality. In this way, art acts as a sort of mediator between reason and this hidden reality. Art for Foucault has a visionary quality which, in the case of Nachman, reaches its plenitude in the prophetic revelation that, God willing, follows acts of madness. In this way, Nachman explores the other path, the path of madness, of a radical, deliberate madness. This path is also much riskier than the path of art. Transgressive madness may take hold of the seeker if intentions have not been purified, i.e. if the acts of madness are not performed out of selfless love. And even if the seeker is perfect, the final leap into prophecy is not achieved by merit or effort; it is a grace, an act of God's compassion. The path of art provides an insight, a glimpse, whereas through Nachman's path of madness the seeker might see the face of God. The question is, does it matter at all? For the one who has achieved perfect, unconditional love, are epistemological questions of any relevance? Will she love God more? The mystical answer could be: she will not love God more, she will be God.

To conclude the discussion about art and madness, I would like to take a second look to the following passage from HM in light of Rabbi Nachman's teaching 64:

[T]hrough madness, an oeuvre that seems to sink into the world and reveal there its non-sense, and to acquire these purely pathological features, ultimately engages with the time of the world, mastering it and taking the lead. By the madness that interrupts it, an oeuvre opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, opening an unhealable wound that the world is faced to address. By it everything that is necessarily blasphemous in an oeuvre is reversed and, in the time of the oeuvre that has slumped into madness, the world is made aware of its guilt.²⁰⁵

203 Foucault p. 145

204 Source: <http://www.ashmolean.org/about/historyandfuture>. Retrieved 10.12.10.

205 Foucault p. 537

This highly esoteric passage by Rabbi Michel shows a striking parallelism with teaching 64: the sinking into the world, the void, the moment of silence, the question without answer, the reversal of blasphemy, the final *tiqqun* in the awareness of guilt. Are we confronted here with an oeuvre or with a *tzaddiq*?

3.4 Reason Exposed

As we have seen, one of the issues discussed by Foucault has been the madman's liminal character between humanity and animality, but also between sameness and otherness, the “paradoxical truth of madness.”²⁰⁶ According to Foucault, this created a profound unease among the reasonable. The madman's liminality – the fact that he was neither human nor beast and both of them – was a flagrant challenge to order. For reason to keep its supremacy, this paradox had to be removed, by forceful means if necessary. The unreason of reason was thus exposed in its flirting with violence and death, but also in its lack of tolerance towards difference and its inability to deal with situations that escape the framework of logic. As described by Foucault, in the Classical Age reason was unable to cope with paradoxes, since they posed a threat to its sovereignty. Nachman, on the other hand, experienced great anxiety because of the existential paradoxes that he was confronted with. He believed these paradoxes stemmed from the vacated space in which there is truly no God. Nachman also wanted to solve these paradoxes, but he taught that their resolution would not be possible until the Messianic times. When Nachman wrote teaching 64, though, he was probably involved in a frenetic Messianic activity. He might have believed that the overcoming of the paradox of evil and God's justice, or free will and God's prescience, was close. However, even when his hopes of world redemption were shattered, he still clung to the question of why the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being. Nachman struggled through his life to learn how to live with these paradoxes. This was his madness. Where others, in order to preserve their faith, had declared that God was always just, no matter what happened, or that free will was only an illusion, Nachman stood fast in his doubt, in his search, in his liminal existence. His quest for meaning was a continuous new beginning. Nathan wrote once about him:

Many times he said to us that he knew absolutely nothing at all. Sometimes he swore to it, to show us that he *really* knew nothing, despite the fact that on the previous day or even in the previous hour, he had revealed the most precious words to us.²⁰⁷

206 Foucault p. 234

207 Quoted in: Green p. 163

Nachman always remained a Chasid. Although he had a genuine sympathy for the *maskilim* of Uman, his main concern had been to bring them back into the fold. It would be a gross distortion to present Nachman as a model of intellectual tolerance, but he certainly was an example of how to open oneself to differences and paradoxes without losing your own identity.

The point made in the previous paragraph is related to the following discussion. Probably the core assumption shared by Foucault and Nachman is their belief, repeated over and over, in the limits set to reason. For both authors, madness is the very expression of these limits, the territory into which reason cannot penetrate. Madness permanently reminds reason that it is not alone and that it is not all-powerful. Foucault and Nachman join their forces in their demand for reason to acknowledge its limitations. Following Foucault, Cartesian reason – the definition of the intellect as the “wellspring of truth”²⁰⁸ – is a form of epistemological hubris. All the unreason of reason can be traced back to this instant of dazzle. Nachman, too, insists on the necessity that the intellect acknowledges the “cleft of the rock” (Exodus 33:22). The constriction (*tzimtzum*) of the intellect is certainly a form to impose limits to intellectual endeavour, too. In an academic context, an assertion of this nature is rarely welcomed, but Nachman's thought suggests that the acceptance of boundaries is what makes debate possible. The acknowledgement of limits is also the acknowledgement of the other. Without this plurality, reason would be in danger of becoming self-referential and despotic. *Yesh dai*, there is a point where the reasons of reason are enough and a different mode of being becomes necessary: the imperatives of logic give way to the search for meaning.

A less charitable reading of Nachman is also possible, portraying him as the traditional religious authority, the moralist, the reactionary, whose world of faith and superstition is in retreat and who needs to erect new barriers and walls in order to fend off the attacks of triumphant reason. Nachman, the adversary of free intellectual endeavour, cautions his readers quoting from the Talmud “Do not inquire into that which is too wondrous for you; into that which is concealed from you do not investigate.”²⁰⁹ The fact, however, is that he did inquire, he did investigate. He read books of Greek philosophy and absorbed everything he could lay his hands on.²¹⁰ I would argue that Nachman's critics have an issue with his elitism rather than with his reactionaryism. Nachman trusted only in himself, the *tzaddiq ha-dor*, to sink into the God-denying complexities of reason and re-emerge a believing man. For his disciples, he admonished the simple faith of traditional piety. Even Nachman's concept of limit is not monolithic. At times he implied that the limits set to reason

208 Boyne p. 46

209 b. *Chagigah* 13a

210 Lieberman pp. 293-4

had already been established – as with the paradoxes of theodicy and free will, for instance – but in other occasions Nachman presented a fluid concept of limit, the idea that different people attain different degrees of intellectual insight. In this way, Nachman left the door open to an original epistemology in which the boundaries of knowledge can always be expanded through the intellect but never abolished. The abolition of these boundaries comes not by way of the intellect, but prophecy.

3.5 Power and the Void

In the last section devoted to the analysis of HM, I discussed the relations of power in terms of absence and presence, proximity and distance. These same parameters have been used by Nachman in section 64 to describe Creation. The key concept in Nachman's cosmology, and his most original innovation²¹¹ in relation to Lurianic Qabbalah, is the vacated space. The point of departure for Nachman's thought is to acknowledge the actuality of a sphere devoid of God's presence. It is rather significant that Nachman's emphasis in teaching 64 is in God's absence from the vacated space, rather than His presence in the created worlds and the *Ein Sof*. Before his descend into the second heresy and the subsequent redemption of the fallen souls through melody – the threshold of Messianic times – the *tzaddiq* is confronted with the vacated space and the experience of distance and alienation from God. According to Nachman, humanity is trapped in the most thorough confinement and only Jews, the *Ivriim*, can aspire to get a glimpse of the outer spheres through their faith. This is the simple faith, however, that Nachman was not able to profess. His intellectual and spiritual restlessness prevented him to settle for this option. Nachman's complex faith implied that his anxiety in face of God's absence remained. The assurance that even the vacated space must be sustained by God's life-force – the paradox of being and non-being – did not attenuate the experience of solitude and emptiness. This explains, to a large extent, the central importance of *hitbodedut* (seclusion) in Bratslav Chasidism. According to Green:

The most essential religious practice of Bratslav [...] was this act of *hitbodedut*, lone daily conversation of God. The *chasid* was to set aside a certain period of time each day, preferably out of doors, if possible, and always alone, when he was to pour out before God his most intimate longings, needs, desires and frustrations. Nachman emphasized the need to do all this aloud, to bring those usually unspoken inner drives to the point of verbalization. [...] There is simply no other way to be close to God, Nachman taught.²¹²

211 Magid p. 499 n. 13; Goshen-Gottstein p. 183 n. 46

212 Green p. 145

Mark adds:

The service of *hitbodedut* in the Bratslavian sense is similar to 'casting away one's intellect;' [...] Praying about the hardship and difficulty of existence can bring a person to a state of suffering, [...] this in turn can lead to a person being ecstatically carried away in pain and suffering, dissociating himself from his rational mind.²¹³

I would argue that *hitbodedut* is not the experience of closeness to God, but rather the search of it. The point of departure is the awareness of God's distance. In this situation, the fact that the righteous suffer and the wicked enjoy well-being is doubly painful: it is painful because it punishes pious people like Nachman, but first and foremost, it is painful because these people do not know why they are being punished. This is one of the shadows projected by HM, too. As the network of power grows and gets more sophisticated, decision-makers become more abstract and remote. In a totalitarian state, where reason understood as the ideology of power is at its purest, there is a category of inmates who do not know why they are being confined – and neither do their wardens. In its extreme manifestation, the totalitarian state becomes one in which the great leader has long been gone or dead but the state apparatus continues to operate blindly, recklessly, consummating its mechanistic principles until entropy brings it to a halt. The main point is that none of this would have been possible without reason's claim of totality. The moment epistemological dissidence was outlawed, the way was paved for the “intellect's despotic rule”.²¹⁴

The extreme nightmare of reason, translated to the world-view of Nachman, is the vision of a godless universe, or even more frightening, the vision of a completely disengaged God, forever distant and absent, non-existent to all human purposes. For someone like Nachman, even more terrible than the death of God would be the death of His compassion. “God created the world as a consequence of His compassion.”²¹⁵ If God's compassion would end with no hope of renewal, Creation would become an empty carcass. For Nachman, a meaningless universe would be even more unbearable than a universe without God. In spite of their disparate backgrounds, Nachman and Foucault express a similar anxiety. Still, an important difference remains: while Foucault frames this element of his discourse in social and political terms, Nachman articulates it in an existential and metaphysical context. The figure that bridges the gap between Nachman and Foucault is no other than Franz Kafka. Acting as a hinge between Foucault's secular culture and Nachman's

213 Mark 2009 pp. 135-6

214 Mark 2009, p. xi

215 LM 7 p. 383

spirituality, Kafka's work would be the ideal vehicle to voice the anxieties of both authors in a language and form that would not be alien to any of them. About Kafka, Gershom Scholem wrote:

The void is the abyss, the chasm or crack which opens up in all that exists. This is the experience of modern man, surpassingly well depicted in all its desolation by Kafka, for whom nothing has remained of God but the void – in Kafka's sense, to be sure, the void of God.²¹⁶

According to Magid, Scholem wrote this passage as a reference to Nachman, too.²¹⁷ The comparison between Nachman and Kafka has been brought to a completely different level in the recently published book by author and professor Rodger Kamenetz, *Burnt Books: Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav and Franz Kafka*. In this book, Kamenetz suggests that the striking parallelism between Nachman's and Kafka's life – both became famous as writers of strange tales, both died at an early age, both asked their closest associate to burn their books after their death – have one explanation: Kafka was a *gilgul* or reincarnation of Rabbi Nachman.²¹⁸ At first sight, this seems difficult to believe, but after my previous exposition about the unreason of reason it won't be me who labels Kamenetz's opinions as mad.

3.6 Closing Remarks

In the course of this paper I have attempted to show that, from different points of departure, Foucault and Nachman were engaged in the same conversation about madness and reason. Their concerns intersected at three critical junctions: 1) the possibility of transcendence through non-rational means (art and acts of madness); 2) the criticism of reason's claim of absolute sovereignty; 3) the anxiety towards a distant and absent power. In spite of their sustained criticism of reason, it is important to point out that neither Foucault nor Nachman were anti-rationalists. Foucault's ultimate goal in HM had been to restore the broken dialogue between reason and madness, rather than to substitute the dictatorship of the former by the rule of the latter. In this sense, Foucault advocated for a conception of reason in the spirit of Montaigne.²¹⁹ He believed that the acknowledgement of its limits would not weaken reason but make it whole. Nachman, too, considered that the intellect is a useful and legitimate tool to acquire a certain level of insights, as long as it remains within the “cleft of the rock.” Furthermore, Nachman's epistemological hierarchy (Moses in his lifetime, Moses'

216 Quoted in: Magid pp. 513-4

217 Magid p. 514 nn. 53, 55. In the original source, though, there is no explicit reference to Nachman. See: Scholem, G. *On Jews & Judaism on Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, p. 283)

218 Kamenetz p. 168

219 cf. footnote 44

passing away, the son who does the work of the slave) can be understood also as an ascending process. The son that does the work of the slave is not the simple believer, but the intellectual *tzaddiq*. The intellect is the first rung of the ladder ascending towards prophecy. Foucault's and Nachman's attitude towards reason is more therapeutic than destructive. It is an irony of history that these two men who so much objected to the medical profession²²⁰ ended up becoming the self-appointed doctors of reason.

Finally, I regret lacking more time and space to take a closer look to the topics of madness and foolishness as they are described in roughly half of Nachman's tales: *The Lost Princess*, *The Cripple*, *The Smart One and the Simpleton*, *The Burgher and the Pauper*, *The Exchanged Children* and *The Master of Prayer*. A particularly promising story is *The Smart One and the Simpleton*.²²¹ In this tale, which follows the intertwined biographies of two men, Nachman portrays a man of simple faith and a *maskil* side by side. Interestingly enough, the man of simple faith is considered a madman by his neighbours and his wife. At the end of the story, however, it becomes clear that the *maskil* is even madder than the Simpleton for holding fast to his rationalistic beliefs in face of irrefutable wonders. This succinct account is further complicated by the fact that, according to Green, Nachman identified himself with the Smart One.²²² Moreover, although the Simpleton is the moral model, the Smart One is the undisputed literary hero of the story. The complexity of his character is what brings the story to life. I hope this small sample will suffice to show that an analysis of the concept of madness in Nachman's tales is long overdue.

220 For Nachman's criticism of medicine see: Green p. 243

221 The Hebrew title of this tale is *maaseh tet mi-chakham we-tam*. As part of the analysis of this tale, it would be interesting to research the possible intertextual links, if any, with the Pesach Haggadah.

222 Green pp. 169-70

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