



## **CHAYA RIVKA ZWOLINSKI**

### **AUTHOR, TEACHER OF JOY AND OPTIMISM**

“Joy isn’t incidental to your spiritual journey – it’s essential.”

Chaya Rivka Zwolinski is the leading teacher of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov’s wisdom for women in North America. She brings compassion and a deep understanding of psychospiritual trauma, transition, and growth to her lectures and multi-modal workshops. She teaches in community centers, synagogues, schools, and other venues, as well as online to students on six continents. She has led women’s tours to Jewish Ukraine and hopes to do so again as soon as peace breaks out.

Chaya Rivka is the founding director of BreslovWoman.org and the Breslov Research Institute’s women’s program. Her articles have appeared in many publications and she’s published several books including *May You Have a Day: Making Every Day Better with the Teachings of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*; *Mashiach: Hope for Turbulent Times*; *The Three-Cornered Shoe*, an anthology of creative work by students in her Breslov writing workshops; and *Therapy Revolution: Find Help, Get Better, and Move On*. She is currently working on the second book in her *May You Have a Day* series, which offers accessible inspiration for daily living. She’s also preparing *Azamra: The Holy Self-Esteem Workbook*.

For speaking engagements, classes and workshops, women’s tours of Jewish Ukraine, and inspiring daily audio lessons, message her at 914-758-9968 or email her at [crzbreslov@gmail.com](mailto:crzbreslov@gmail.com).

# What Does God Want?

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If you're reading this, you might vaguely believe in a Creator. You might believe that an incomprehensible force exploded creation into being. Or you might believe that Armillaria ostoyae (the world's largest organism), D.N.A., and the Milky Way are clear proof of design. You might even believe that God created souls.

Wherever you find yourself on the belief- in-God spectrum, you probably struggle with the idea of a personal God. You doubt that a relationship with God is possible. Yet, the possibility of a human-God relationship is one of the most awe-inspiring things about the Creator. People with faith believe that God is intimately involved in your life and wants you to know that you are cared for. If you find this hard to believe, you're not alone.

The ancient Greeks believed in a God but not a God they could turn to. They had no problem believing in both a profane pantheon of human-like gods as well as an unknowable Creator. The Greeks believed that after creating everything, God sat back (conveniently), in order to allow people the space to do whatever felt good to them, which in ancient Greece meant inventing democracy, developing geometric equations, killing disabled infants, and throwing hedonistic feasts. In many ways, the Greeks set the foundation for Western civilization's notion that God is there – but only up to a point.

This is akin to what I was taught. As a small child, I would walk in the woods feeling very close to God. I'd ask God why I was born and beg to be shown the meaning of life. But the adults in my life said this was foolish. They explained to me that God created everything and now was taking a well-deserved vacation. Their message: God's not available for a relationship; if I believed, I'd be on the road to rack and ruin. Eventually I gave in and abandoned my quest. I later explored Jungian synchronicities, pop- physics, Eastern religions, etc., until a powerful certainty blossomed that the Creator was there for me, up close and personal.

Now I wanted to know: *What does God want from me?*

The answer came from an 18th century Chassidic master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov: *God wants the heart.*<sup>1</sup> As intellectual beings, we see evidence of God's hand in nature. But inside us rages a battle: intellect vs. love, awe, and joy. God wants us to love. God wants us to be in awe of what has been given us, and wants us to live life with joy. This requires faith. But faith isn't a function of the mind. Rebbe Nachman teaches that at times we bump up against the walls of our intellect and there's nowhere to go but to our heart. This doesn't come naturally. When ideas about God, spirituality, and the soul transcend intellect, you can either surrender to your mind or you can take a leap of faith, put unanswered questions aside, and jump into the heart, where faith lives. God wants the heart.

## Footnotes:

1. "God wants the heart." (See Likutey Moharan II, 44). Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, sometimes referred to as the "Doctor of the Soul," is uniquely able to speak to this generation about what's going on in our minds and hearts, what I call psychospiritual issues. His Breslov Chassidic movement is named after a small town in Ukraine where he lived for a time. The Hebrew letters of BReSLoV can be transposed to "LeV BaSaR," a "heart of flesh." What is a heart of flesh? It's living a life that is truly alive, a life rich in faith and joy. (See Ezekiel 36:26: "And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh.") Rebbe Nachman expands on this idea: "Do not read BaSaR, 'flesh', but BoSeR, 'glad.' [That is, a glad heart.] "In [the times of *Moshiach*], everyone will be glad at the good fortune of his friend." (See Tzaddik - Chayey Moharan 339)