



A Palace of Pearls: The Stories of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Howard Schwartz (Retold by) , Zann Jacobrown (Illustrator) , Rami Shapiro (Preface)

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Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1810) is widely considered to be one of the foremost visionary storytellers of the Hasidic movement. Now, Howard Schwartz has compiled the most extensive collection of Nachman's stories yet. In addition to his famous Thirteen Tales, Schwartz includes here many stories, parables, dreams, and folktales.

The great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of the movement, Rabbi Nachman came to be regarded as a great figure and leader in his own right, guiding his followers on a spiritual path inspired by Kabbalah. In the last four years of his life he turned to storytelling, crafting highly imaginative, allegorical tales for his Hasidim. Three-time National Jewish Book Award winner Howard Schwartz has masterfully compiled the most extensive collection of Nachman's stories available in English. In addition to the well-known Thirteen Tales, including "The Lost Princess" and "The Seven Beggars," Schwartz has included over one hundred narratives in the various genres of fairy tales, fables, parables, dreams, and folktales, many of them previously unknown or believed lost. One such story is the carefully guarded "Tale of the Bread," which was never intended to be written down and was only to be shared with those Bratslavians who could be trusted not to reveal it. Eventually recorded by Rabbi Nachman's scribe, the tale has maintained its mythical status as a "hidden story."

With utmost reverence and unfettered delight, Schwartz has carefully curated *A Palace of Pearls* alongside masterful commentary that guides the reader through the Rabbi's spiritual mysticism and uniquely Kabbalistic approach, ultimately revealing Rabbi Nachman to be a literary heavyweight in the vein of Gogol and Kafka. Vibrant, wise, and provocative, this book is a must-read for any lover of fairy tales and fables.

A Palace of Pearls: The Stories of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav Details

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From Reader Review A Palace of Pearls: The Stories of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav for online ebook

Justin says

I received this book, for free, in exchange for an honest review.

This book is comprised of timeless stories.

Each story has a feeling similar to traditional folk tales with Rabbinical flair (think Hansel and Gretel with a Jewish Attitude). There is a meaning in each story, but the meaning isn't superficial and takes some digging. Luckily each story comes with its own interpretation/commentary.

Rachel says

Thanks to Steve Donoghue for sending me this book (and to Oxford Press for sending him an extra copy! :P) I started reading on Yom Kippur and finished a few weeks later. There's a lot to take in!

This collection comprises Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav's various fairytales, folktales and parables, dreams, half-finished stories, and stories told about the Rebbe. It was very comprehensive, and each bit was followed by Schwartz's "sources and commentary."

Out of the gate I felt this disconnect, because stories of lost princesses read like standard, gentile fare (with messages mostly centered around policing female sexuality, so it seems. :P) But Nachman's meaning is more esoteric, with the characters representing Jews, the Torah, and Gd. Also the feminine aspect of Gd, Shekinah, who symbolizes our exile from the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Thematically, stories often have to do with Jews wandering a broken world and trying to do their part to restore themselves to Gd and temple.

Other stories more directly reference Jewish concerns, or are about more specific biblical events. Like "The Prince and the Slave" is Nachman grappling with the fact that on its surface, the story of our Patriarch Jacob includes him stealing his brother's birthright. A huge no no, so we need some justification. There's so many stories in here and I took so long to read them that admittedly I don't remember them all. Also, I'm well out of my depth when it comes to this level of study. I feel like Schwartz is a little too laudatory of Nachman's genius, but I was also aware that I was missing some connections.

Still...in terms of writing style, the stories could be annoyingly facile. And I'm not sure if this was an accurate translation or not, but waaaaay too many sentences started with "now." Now that started to annoy me. :P

As a side effect of Schwartz's commentary, I feel like I got a glimpse into Nachman's personality. As a revered leader, he struck me as charismatic and at least slightly egotistical. You can't really claim to be a *tzaddik* if you don't have a high opinion of yourself, so. :P He was ashamed of his appetites for food and sex, lest they interfere with his devotion to Gd. He also lived in the shadow of his great grandfather, the Ba'al Shem Tov who was credited with founding the Hasidic movement. His Hasidim built up a lot of justification about his greatness, and why he should be the Ba'al Shem Tov's heir above his other relatives.

To this day, the Bratslaver Hasidim haven't appointed a new Rebbe to take his place. They are known for their huge, annual pilgrimage to Uman, where he was buried (a real feat when the area was under Soviet control!) Several Bratslavers broke apart his chair when the Nazis invaded in order to smuggle it in pieces to

Jerusalem, where it now lives on, restored.

This wasn't a traditional glimpse into the life of a man or a community, but I found it intriguing. And it breathes some creative life into one of the ways that Nachman and his Hasidim viewed the world.
