

How to work with the cards

What is the purpose of the cards?

The basic set of Breslove Cards contains 32 cards, all derived from symbols in the story "The Master of Prayer", as told by Rabbi Nachman of Breslev. The cards are meant to clarify and read into **spiritual processes**, they are **not meant to predict the future!!** The future depends very much on man's free choice, and it is not our business to predict it. We often feel the desire to uncover the secrets of the future in order to reduce the uncertainty in our lives, which may cause us great anxiety. We should, however, acknowledge the fact that the urge to expose the future stems from fear, doubt and insecurity. It is a drive to control what lies outside the boundaries of human control. Hassidism teaches us to live with integrity and purity, and to develop an inner confidence in the notion that "all the deeds of the Merciful One are for the best". These cards are meant to help your development on life's spiritual path, they therefore do not support such fear of the unknown, causing us to want to hold the reigns of life and be in control. The quality of sincerity taught by the *Torah* aims at developing our ability to cope successfully and joyfully with life's uncertainty. This ability is considered a spiritual quality. This is the spiritual path supported by the Breslove cards - they are therefore not meant to predict the future in any way.

*So what **is** their purpose?*

The cards are meant to help us in deepening our understanding of the spiritual processes presiding over our lives,

to help us in clarifying what is going on in our inner world and how we should deal with such matters. For example: When we deliberate whether or not to travel to a certain place, and we find it hard to reach a decision, partly because of a sense of haziness obscuring our clarity, it would be correct to pose the question to the cards in order to receive clarification of the different sides to the problem and recommendations as to how to broach the issue. (See the explanation of the readings of the Seven Emanations). Therefore, if I wanted to clarify the significance of a certain relationship that I am involved in, or one that I am about to begin or terminate, I will formulate a question that will help me to clarify such an issue (often the act of formulating the question is in itself a great way of clearing things up) and I will request a reading of the cards that will answer this question.

It is important to remember that every person is a free being, responsible for himself and having free will, and ultimately the decision regarding all action in our lives is ours alone. The decision to consult the cards is yours, and the decision to take heed of what the cards suggest, or not to, is yours alone. The cards are simply another wise advisor, offering us assistance in making decisions during the course of our lives – but the choice remains yours – whether or not you listen to the advice and if so, how you integrate it into your life. Here I would like to refer to the wonderful story appearing in the Book of Kings II (Chapter 20), about Hiskiyahu, King of Judah, who fell very ill and Yeshayahu, the prophet, who came to visit him and prophesized that he would die of his illness. But Hiskiyahu did not accept the prophecy. He ordered Yeshayahu to leave the room, turned to the wall and burst into tears of prayer. Yeshayahu the Prophet, who was already on his way home,

was immediately instructed by God to go back and inform Hiskiyahu that his prayer had been heard and that he would recover from his illness and live for another fifteen years. Hiskiyahu chose not to listen to the words of the prophet and turned directly to God in prayer. In doing so, he changed the course of events. The Grecian approach taught man that his destiny and the prophesy of the Delphic Oracle are unchangeable. Man was a slave to his destiny. But God's *Torah* has taught and still teaches that there is a dimension of freedom that is not controlled by destiny and that "nothing is stronger than penance". I would like to emphasize this issue of basic freedom before we begin working with the cards. Because even if their message is true, as were the words of the prophet Yeshayahu, man still has the strength to change his destiny by taking full responsibility for his life and by simple prayer, straight from the heart.

Before the reading:

Before opening the cards, it is important to do the following three things:

1. Formulate a clear question, or a clear intention regarding what you would like to clarify through this reading. (Remember – the question cannot include a request to predict the future!). The wording of the question should include a clear decision regarding the number of cards to be drawn and the position of each card that you will place before you. Do not allow this to remain vague, it is very important to make a decision before the reading.

2. Shuffle the cards well; when you know what question you would like to ask, you may also whisper the question again and again like mantra, while shuffling the cards. If I am performing a reading for someone else, I usually shuffle the cards while praying for a clear and comprehensible reading, and then give the cards to the other person to shuffle while he thinks about his question, and only then do I instruct him to begin to open the cards.
3. Pray! In the prayer preceding the reading, we ask for a clear reading and for great wisdom in analyzing and understanding the reading. When we read for another person, we also request that the language we will use in analyzing the reading will be understood by the spirit of this person, that our words will touch him in the right places and that they will be healing and not harmful.

Types of readings

Quick reading – one card:

When we do not need a detailed answer to our question and one main image will provide insight to the issue at hand - this is the time to draw one single card from the pack.

It is sometimes good to draw a “daily card”, not as an answer to a specific question, but rather to provide something to think about, a source of inspiration for the day to come. If you have a suitable place – you can put the card somewhere where you will see it several times during the day, and so be reminded and draw inspiration. (You may like to hang it on the refrigerator, on a magnet, for example, or place it on your desk at work, scan it onto the computer and use it as a screen-saver, etc.) It is sometimes amazing to discover how such a card can serve as an enriching and interesting point of reference, or even guide us in responding to random situations during the course of that day. Sometimes we need a permanent reminder, that flickers and sparkles and reminds us of qualities in our lives that we would like to emphasize more, while the flow of life causes us to forget these important truths. The daily (or weekly or monthly) card is a wonderful way of strengthening qualities that we would like to emphasize more in our lives.

The threefold opening

In this opening, we divide the pack into three separate piles, and shuffle each one separately. In the first pile we

include only the 'character cards', in the second, only the 'accessory cards' and in the third pile, only the 'situation / place cards'. (For your convenience, we have sorted out the cards from 'The Master of Prayer' according to these three categories, and these are listed in a table below).

When do we use a threefold opening?

The threefold opening is intended to answer threefold questions, like "Who is this person for me (character)? What characterizes the relationship between us (situation)? What should I use when coming into contact with him (accessory)?" Of course, the question can be changed, but the 3-part structure should be retained – the first character-focused, the second situation-focused, and the third instrument-focused.

Classification of the cards from 'The Master of Prayer' into categories		
Character Cards (Dark red background)	Accessory Cards (Purple background)	Situation Cards (Dark green background)
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	21, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 32	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 30, 31

Complete reading – The Seven Emanations reading

The complete reading is intended for multi-faceted clarification of spiritual processes. It is particularly beneficial in situations of indecision that require deep clarification. In this reading we position seven cards according to the formation of the seven lower emanations of the Kabbalistic tree-of-life. This layout gives us a complete picture of the different facets of the issue at hand, the inner choice of the heart, the prudent path to take and good tips for the way – as I will explain below.

2
Din
Judgment
Anti-thesis:
“Why not”
The negative
aspect of the
issue

1
Hessed
Love
Thesis:
“Why yes” –
The positive
aspect of the
issue

3
Rahamim
Compassion
Synthesis:
What is the
heart’s inner
decision?

5
Hod
Innocence\
Flexability:
Softening advice
to the way

4
Netzah
Stability:
Encouraging
advice to the
way

6
Yesod
Foundation
What is the
way to go?

7
Malhut
Kingdom /
Manifestation
:
Where do
things lead?

I cannot here go into an in-depth explanation of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, upon which this type of reading is based. A true explanation of this subject needs to be conveyed orally and modeled by a real teacher. On the other hand, many books, both old and new, have already been written on the subject, and many of these are very good. I will therefore explain here only how the position of the cards affects the reading, when placed according to the structure of the Tree of Life.

In order to simplify things –I will use an example: Suppose I am deliberating whether or not and how to make a connection with a certain person. My gut feelings are contradictory, there are sides in favor of, and sides against, and my inner world needs clarification. I request such clarification regarding this dilemma, and open the cards in the formation of the Seven Emanations (see the diagram) after shuffling them and saying a prayer. I place the seven cards upside down, in the order of their positions, and only then do I turn them all over (the fact that certain cards fall one way and others are inverted has no significance. The inverted cards can simply be turned around to simplify matters).

The first card, placed in the position of the emanation of *Hessed* (no. 1 in the diagram), tells me 'why yes'. In other words, what is the positive side to my connecting with the said person – the aspect that broadens the opportunities for the connection between us?

The second card, placed in the position of the emanation of *Din* or *Gevorah* (no. 2 in the diagram), tells us 'why not'. In

other words, what is the problematic side to connecting with this person, why I should possibly refrain from making this connection – what is the aspect that reduces the opportunities for the connection between us?

The third card, placed in the position of the emanation of *Tiferet*, is the quality of mercy and compassion, the card that is in tune with the heart (no 3 in the diagram). It tells me what is my heart's true inner decision. Despite all the deliberations in either direction, there is often a clear heart-felt tendency, although or in spite of the fact that we know all sides of the problem. The emanation of *Tiferet* mediates between *Hesed* and *Din* and points on the way to make the integration. If *Hesed* is Thesis and *Din* is Antithesis so *Tef'eret* is the synthesis.

Here we already see a line drawn straight down (in the direction of cards 6 and 7), leading from the decision to the manner of implementation and to the external reality. We should also look in this direction, when considering the advice given (cards no. 4 and 5).

The fourth card, placed in the position of the emanation of *Netzah* (no. 4 in the diagram) is meant to give us encouraging advice. There are two tips to consider – one is from *Netzah* and the other from *Hod*, and the two complement and balance each other. It is important to heed them both! The advice of *Netzah* tells us which quality we should strengthen when walking the path indicated by card no.6, in order to realize the decision proposed by card no. 3. We should be firm, confident and stable in this quality, which is harmonized by *Hod*:

The fifth card, placed in the position of the emanation of *Hod* (no. 5 in the diagram), is meant to provide us with tender advice that balances and complements the advice given by *Netzah*. The advice of *Netzah*, without the tenderness of *Hod*, will lead us to arrogance or excessive hardness, it is therefore important to soften it through *Hod*. What should we be thankful for? What should we confess to?* What quality can add tenderness and flexibility to the process we are undertaking? This is the advice that we receive from the emanation of *Hod*.

The sixth card, placed in the position of the emanation of *Yesod* (no. 6 in the diagram) is meant to show us the **way** to implementation, not the result (!), but rather the process. What is the path I should take? What characterizes it? In which direction should I channel my spiritual wealth? With whom or what am I signing a pact, through which I will embark on my course of action in the world? This is an extremely significant card, and when we interpret it correctly it will incorporate all the aspects dealt with in the previous cards, in a structured, thorough and organized manner.

The seventh card, placed in the position of the emanation of *Malkut* (no. 7 in the diagram) points to the expected result of the spiritual process. It is not a prediction of the future, rather a necessary outcome of the processes mentioned above. In other words, if all the

* Translator's note: The Hebrew words for 'thank' and 'confess' are '*lehodot*' and '*lehitivadot*' respectively. Note the similarity to the word *Hod*.

abovementioned circumstances are fulfilled, and all the advice heeded, then things will naturally work out in such-and-such a way. It is important to remember the symbolism of things, and not to interpret them literally! ('The Baby', for example, when appearing in this position, will not particularly herald the birth of a baby, but rather will signify innocence, a new beginning, etc – as seen in the commentary of the cards).

The seven cards together create a story. The layout of the cards gives us a language and there are inner ties between the various parts of the sentence presented in the language. It is important to take note of the subtle messages and read between the lines.

I intend publishing additional cards in the future, which are taken from more of Rabbi Nahman's stories. All these stories are inter-connected; they all 'speak to each other'. Adding more cards is like adding more words to a language – thereby allowing for deeper subtleties. I have chosen the story 'The Master of Prayer' as the first story because it includes the most basic set of cards, which correlate with all ten emanations, both in their impaired as well as their reformed states. The initial pack of 32 cards enables you to 'speak' the language of the Breslove Cards right away, while with additional cards, the readings will improve even more. It is important to remember the stories, as well as their interpretations. The more lucid the reader's understanding of the Kabbalah, so the reading will be better. In this booklet

I have tried to provide the minimum information required for anyone to be able to use the cards, without necessarily having a prior knowledge of Kabbalah. This information is based on the material I have taught over the last years, where I have guided small groups of students around the world in working with the cards. I believe I have provided the basic and essential information necessary to begin working with the cards – the system and ones skill in using it can naturally be added to, improved upon and refined.