



ESSENTIAL

RABBI NA'HMAN

11

*A translation of selected writings of  
Rebbe Na'hman  
and his main disciple Rav Nosson*





## I

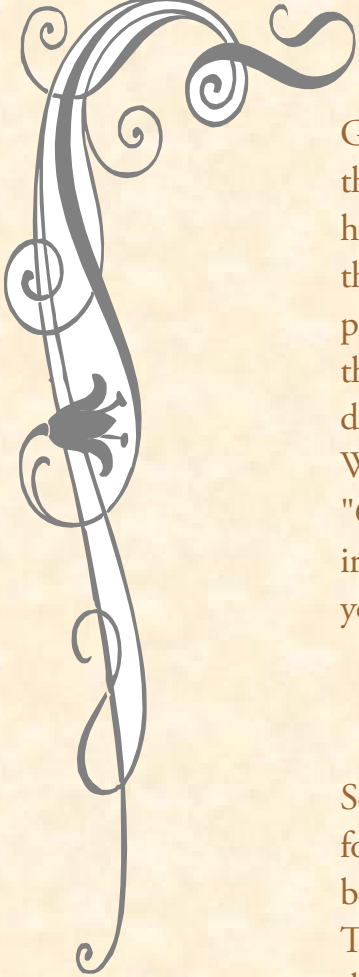
### Praying to impress

One who is dependent on other people finds it easier to pray alone, because as soon as he prays with others he becomes subject to all kinds of false motives. His prayer becomes a lie because he feels he must put on an act in order to impress others. This is because he needs them for something. Some depend on others for their livelihood. Even a person of independent means may still depend on others for his own self-esteem, because he needs their approval or adulation. Such needs can easily cause a person to put on a false act for others as he prays. Someone else may be more honest. Being somewhat in awe of God, he would feel ashamed to act out a cheap lie in his prayers merely to impress. He would like to pray truthfully - but his truth is excessive. And therefore it is not really the truth, because there is no such thing as excess truth: there is only one truth. Such a person would be ashamed to think of himself as lying outright in his prayers, so he tries to cover over the lie with truth. For example, he may want to make a gesture of piety - perhaps a clap of the hands - to impress someone. Only he is ashamed to do it merely to impress. Accordingly he deceives himself: his evil urge leads him on a trail of thought which persuades him that he really does need to make such a gesture as part of his prayer. He finds a rationalization for his gesture or handclap, a veneer of truth to cover up the lie. But he has much too much truth. For the fact is that there is only one truth: to pray truthfully to God and God alone. But this person has multiple truths. He uses many different truths to cover the underlying falsehood. This is all because he depends on others, and this is why he is filled with false motives. He produces a truth to persuade himself that his intention is really this or that... Yet in reality there is only one truth. Likutey Moharan I, 66

## II

### Irrelevant thoughts

Many irrelevant thoughts may come into your mind while you pray. Don't pay any attention to them at all. Simply do your part: say your prayers in the proper order, ignoring all disturbing thoughts. These extraneous thoughts are actually of great benefit. Without them prayer would be impossible. Tremendous maligning powers seek to denounce our prayers, but these irrelevant thoughts disguise our prayers so that unholy forces disregard them, enabling our prayers to enter on high. God knows our innermost thoughts. We may have distracting thoughts, yet God knows that in the depths of our hearts, our thoughts are focused only on God. When you pray, your innermost thoughts are always directed toward God.



God searches all hearts and He sees this innermost desire. He sees through the disguise and accepts the prayer in love." Many thoughts are in man's heart, but God's counsel is what stands" (Proverbs 19:21 ) . "Many thoughts are in man's heart" - these are the many extraneous thoughts a person has when he prays. Yet "God's counsel is what stands". This means that there is an innermost point in your heart where your thoughts are directed to God alone. This innermost point is called "God's counsel." Within this point, your intent is to God alone. This can never fail, for "God's counsel is what stands." You therefore need pay no attention to irrelevant thoughts and distractions. Simply ignore them and continue with your prayers. Sichot Haran #72

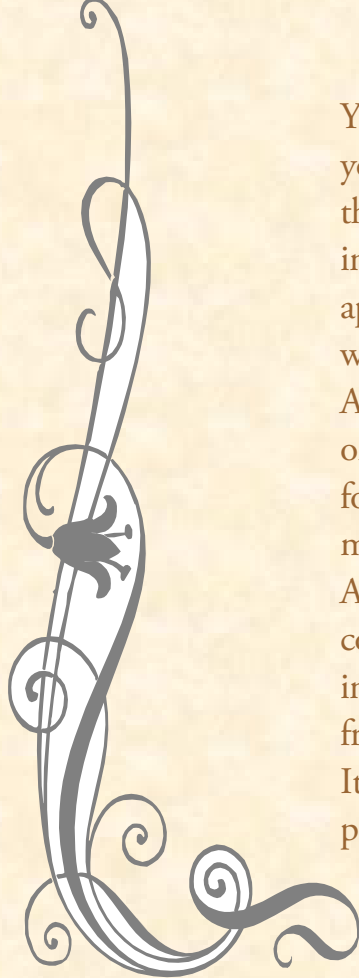
### III

#### Distractions

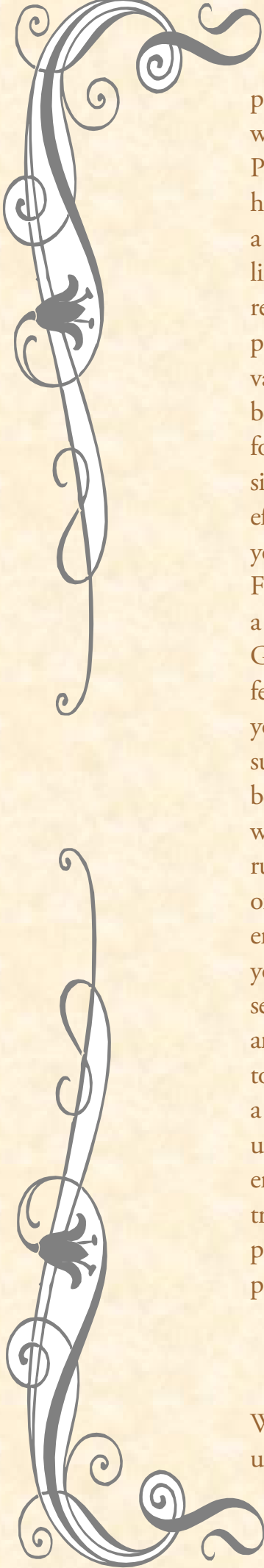
Some people say that if you pray with true inner intention and are wholly focused on your prayers, you should not hear any outside disturbance because your devotion will be strong enough to block out everything else. This is not true. Even the greatest Tzaddik would be distracted and distressed if, while praying with outstanding intensity and devotion, someone approached him and disturbed or ridiculed him. Sichot Haran #284

### IV

#### Where to direct your thoughts



You should force yourselves to pray with great devotion, powerfully binding your thoughts to each word. True devotion means listening attentively to the words you are saying. It is not advisable to try to pray using the mystical intentions of the prayers as found in the Kabbalistic writings - and this applies even to people who are fit to study such works. Perfect prayer is when you say the words of the prayers with complete simplicity: Baruch Atah. "Blessed are You." Listen carefully to what you are saying: concentrate on the meaning of the words. It is ridiculous to say that one should not force oneself to pray. Quite the contrary: you should pray with all your might and put all your strength into each letter of the words of the prayers. As to the disturbing thoughts that occur during prayer: ignore them completely. Keep doing your part, going systematically through the service in order, paying no attention to any distractions. Turn your mind away from all such thoughts completely. The prayer service and limbs of the body It is impossible to pray the entire service with complete devotion, but each person can say a certain portion of the service with genuine feeling. One



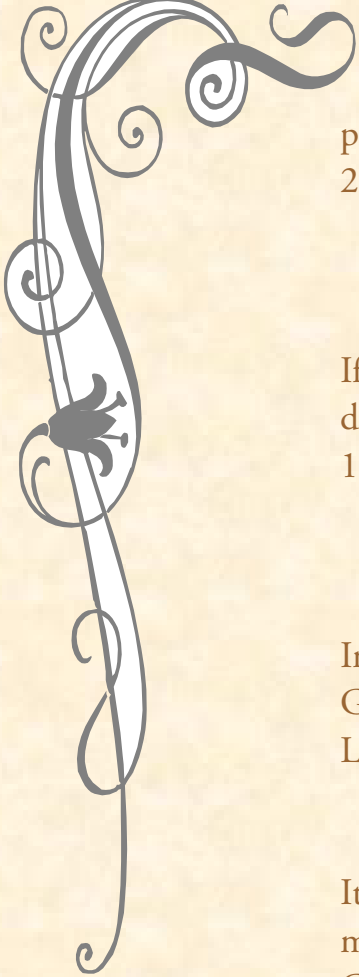
person may recite the passages dealing with the Temple incense offering with great feeling. Someone else may pray best during the Psalms of Pesukey DeZimra , the "Verses of Song". This is because the physical human body has a spiritual counterpart, each of whose limbs corresponds to a portion of the prayer service. Each person is associated with a particular limb of the transcendental form. When he reaches the section of the service relating to his limb, he is aroused to great devotion. Sometimes you may pray a section of the service with great devotion but suddenly the feeling vanishes and you find it impossible to pray properly. Don't be discouraged, because this is inevitable: it means you have left your part of the spiritual form. For the rest of the service, just try to say each word with perfect simplicity. Like a child learning to read Sometimes you may make great efforts but find that you still cannot pray. No matter what, do not allow yourself to become discouraged. This is the most important rule of all. Force yourself to say each word of the service with complete simplicity, like a child who is just learning to read. Keep saying the words. In most cases God will then touch your heart with a flame and you will pray with great feeling. However, you should not make a test of this. Deep inside yourself you well know that you are very remote from true prayer, which is supremely exalted. Prayer is even above the study of Torah. How can you be worthy to serve God in such a lofty way? Do your part. Simply begin the words of the service - Adon Olam Asher Malach , "Lord of the world, Who ruled." Listen carefully to every word you say. Concentrate on the meaning of the words without letting your thoughts stray. Keep your mind focused entirely on the words of the service. Follow the order of the service, even if you feel no inspiration. Continue word by word, page by page, until God sends you true arousal. And even if you complete the entire service without any feeling, you can still say an extra Psalm or prayer with devotion. Be sure to offer your prayers in a state of joy and with a happy tune. Put yourself in a cheerful mood before you start your prayers. Seek out your good points, using them to bring joy to your prayers. The main thing is truth. You may encounter all kinds of distractions when you want to pray, but hold on to truth. No matter what your level, you can speak the simple truth in your prayers. Take this advice to heart and you will certainly be worthy of true prayer. Sichot Haran #75

## V

### **If trouble strikes**

What people do at the end, I want you to do at the very outset. People usually pray when they see that all other means have failed. But you should





pray at the very outset, when trouble first strikes. Siach Sarfey Kodesh 1-293

## VI

### **If a dead man could come back**

If a dead person were allowed back into this world to pray, he would definitely pray most beautifully, with all his strength. Likutey Moharan II, 111

## VII

### **MUSIC, SONG AND DANCE**

In this material world, especially if we have sinned and are very far from God, the main way to attach ourselves to God is through melody and song. Likutey Halachot, Nesiat Kapayim 5:6

## VIII

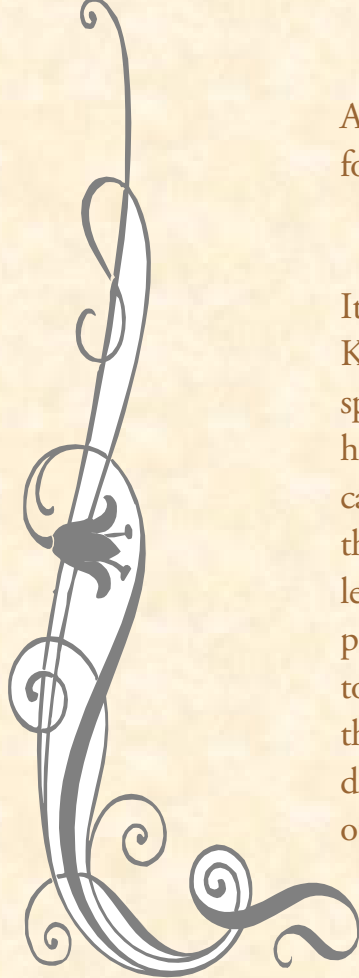
It is good to get into the habit of livening yourself up with a tune. Holy melodies are very exalted, having great power to stir the heart and draw it to God. Even if you cannot sing well, you can still inspire yourself with a tune. Sing it as best as you can, in privacy if you wish. The loftiness of melody is beyond all measure. Sichot Haran #273

## IX

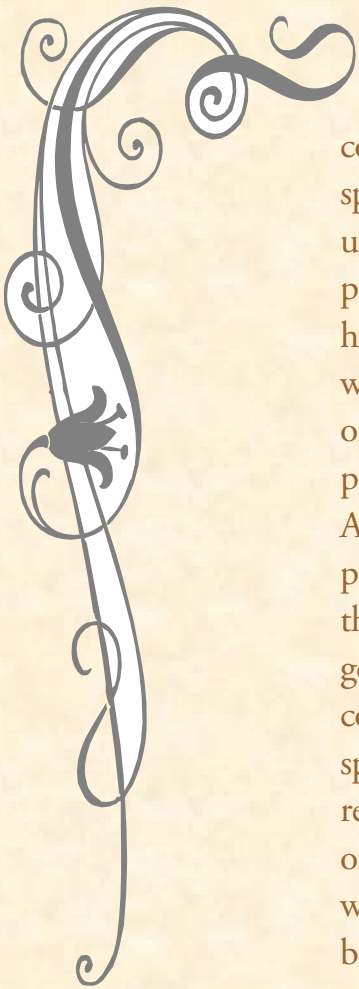
### **Music and prophetic spirit**

A holy melody can bring you to the level of prophecy. Music is the foundation of true attachment to God. Likutey Moharan I, 3

## X



It was through music that prophetic spirit rested upon the prophets (see II Kings 3:15) . A musical instrument is a vessel containing air ( ruach , spirit). The air in the instrument is a mixture of good and bad. On the one hand there is the anxious, depressed spirit - a bad spirit, as we find in the case of King Saul: "and an evil spirit terrified him" ( I Samuel 16:14) . On the other hand, there is a good spirit, as it is written: "Let Your good spirit lead me in an even land" (Psalms 143:10) . This good spirit is the spirit of prophecy: holy spirit. But when good and bad are mixed up, it is impossible to receive true prophecy. The musician playing the instrument must gather the good spirit - the spirit of prophecy - and separate it from the sad, depressed spirit. He must understand music in order to know how to sift out and gather up the parts of the spirit and put them together in order to



construct the melody, namely the joy, in order to build the good, prophetic spirit, which is the opposite of the depressed spirit. He must move his hand up and down the instrument in order to channel the joy and bring it to perfection. And when the prophet hears a melody from an expert musician, he receives a spirit of prophecy, the very spirit that the musician gathered with his hand and separated from the depressed spirit. Thus the attendants of the depressed King Saul said to him of the young David: "And he will play with his hand and it will be good for you" ( I Samuel 16:16 ) . Accordingly, by playing the musical instrument with one's hand, one sifts, purifies and elevates the good spirit and separates it from the bad. This is the way to overcome the evil spirit of folly that seeks to spoil and upset the good, prophetic spirit. The bad spirit is dissipated through the joy that comes through the hand of the player. For the root of the power of the spirit of folly lies in sadness and depression. Therefore the only way to receive a holy spirit of prophecy is through joy - the joy created by the hand of the player. Thus, "It was when the musician played that the hand of God was upon him" ( II Kings 3:15 ) ; "and he will play with his hand and it will be good for you" . The player who has the power of the hand can sift out the good spirit from the bad and thereby subdue the evil spirit. Likutey Moharan I, 54

## XI

### Melody, health and healing

The life and workings of the body are governed by ten basic pulses. These in turn are vitalized by ten kinds of melody emanating from the soul. Negativity, anxiety and depression weaken the pulses, and this can cause illness. But when the melody of the soul is joyous, it strengthens the vitality of the pulses and brings health to the body. Likutey Moharan I, 24

## XII

Sweetening decrees Melody sweetens the harsh judgments. When you sing the words of your prayers in a clear, bright voice, the Indwelling Presence is robed in radiant garments, and this is how the harsh judgments are sweetened Likutey Moharan I, 42

שבת שלום

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***Tizku leMivrot ... beSimcha***

