

ESSENTIAL

RABBI NA'HMAN

13

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





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*13*

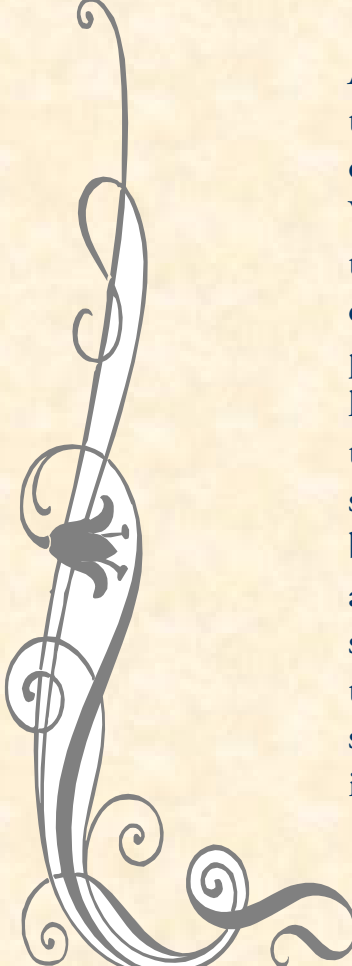
I

## **Show us a love that we understand**

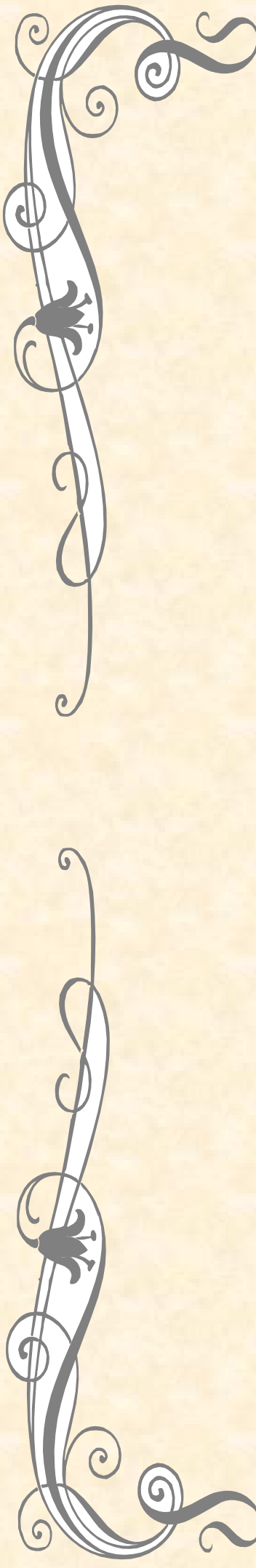
When the sons of Jacob were about to journey to Egypt with Benjamin, Jacob said to them, " May the eternal God give you love " (Genesis 43:14) . This expresses the very essence of Godly love, when He " gives you the love " - namely, when God puts His love in our hands. For God, it can be that even serious illness and other forms of suffering are expressions of His love, because certainly God sends everything He sends to a person out of love, even when He sends them severe pain and suffering. However, we ask that He should entrust His love to us and put it in our hands, because we do not understand His love and we are unable to bear it. May God put His love in our hands and give us love in our terms, because we understand love in the simple sense where it means healing from illness and the like. Likutey Moharan II, 62

II

## **Bitter medicine**



All physical medicines are bitter, and the same is true in healing the soul: the soul is healed through bitterness. You may have to overcome many obstacles and endure much suffering in order for your soul to be healed. With physical illnesses there are times when the body becomes so weak that the invalid cannot bear the bitterness of the medicines. The doctors despair of ever curing him and simply abandon him. Similarly, when a person falls under the influence of sin, which is the sickness of the soul, he may be unable to bear the bitterness of the remedy. There may seem to be no hope for him at all. However, God is filled with love. When He sees that a person wants to return to Him but lacks sufficient strength to bear the bitter remedies necessitated by his sins, He takes pity and casts all the person's sins aside in order to save him excessive suffering. God sends him only as much as he can bear. Many find that as soon as they try to return to God and follow the paths of the Tzaddikim, they suddenly encounter difficulties and obstacles on every side. At times it is impossible to bear the bitterness and overcome the obstacles. There have



been cases of people who became so discouraged that they went back to their old ways, God forbid.

One who truly desires to draw closer to God should have faith that regardless of how much bitterness or suffering he may endure, everything is being sent to him out of love. If the suffering were really in proportion to the magnitude of his sins it would have been far greater. He would have been much too weak to bear it and he would have been totally lost. But God in His love only sends as much bitterness and suffering as a person can bear. This much he must bear, and it is certainly within his power to endure it Likutey Moharan I, 27

### III

#### **The cry of the heart**

When words and cries don't help, cry deep in your heart without letting out a sound. Likutey Moharan II, 5

### IV

#### **Self-nullification**

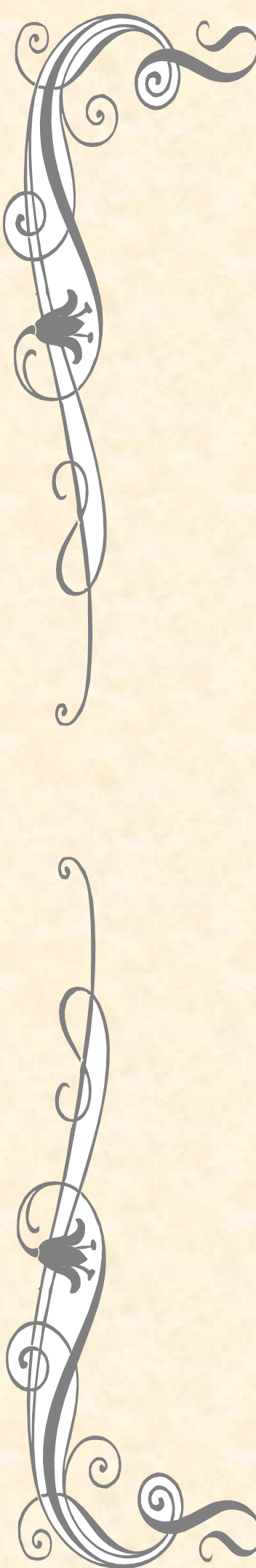
When things are very bad, make yourself into nothing. How do you make yourself into nothing? You close your mouth and your eyes, and you are like nothing! Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed by the evil urge. You are racked with confusion and negative thoughts, finding it impossible to overcome them. You must then make yourself like nothing. Anyone can do this. Close your mouth and your eyes and don't think about anything - as if you have no mind and no thoughts. You are completely nullified before God. Sichot Haran #279

### V

#### **Suffering and consolation**

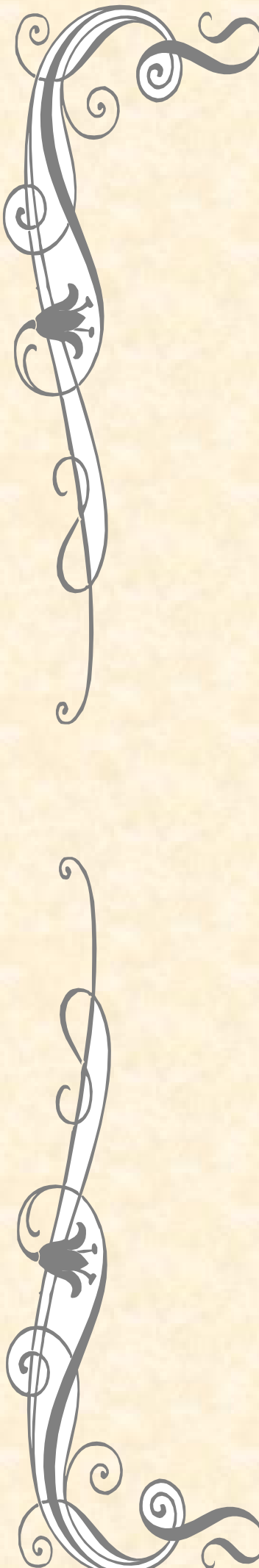
The ultimate goal of the entire creation is Unity: "On that day God will be One and His name One" (Zechariah 14:9) . The prophet speaks of "that day" - a future time, when the goal of the creation will have been attained: God will be One. This ultimate goal is entirely good. For oneness - unity - is entirely good, as we learn from the comment of the Rabbis on this verse in Zechariah: "On that day HaShem will be One and His name One." - "Is this meant to imply," asked the Rabbis, "that right now He is not One? Of course not !

What it means is that in our present state, we make a distinction between the different kinds of experiences God sends us in life. When bad things happen, we bless God as 'the true Judge', while when good things

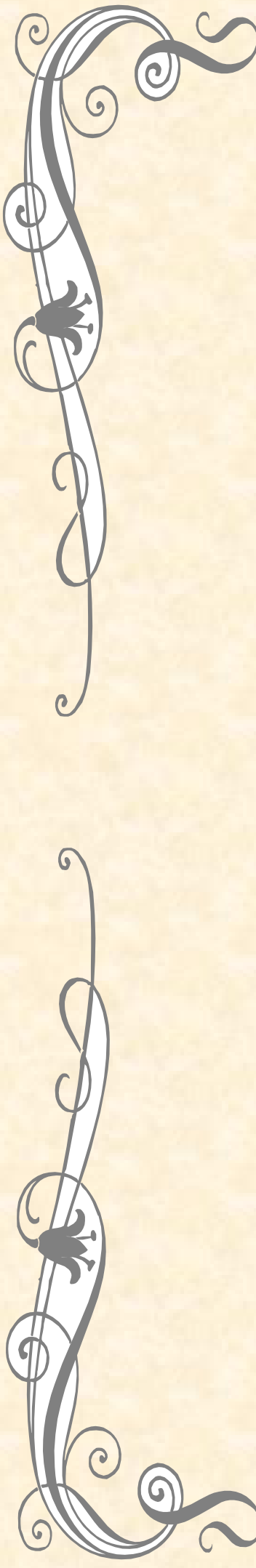


happen, we bless Him as 'the good and beneficent'. But in time to come we will bless Him for everything as 'the good and beneficent'" (Pesachim 50a) . Thus we see that unity is the ultimate goal and this goal is entirely good. Since the ultimate goal is entirely good, in the end everything will turn out to have been for the good. Even when bad things happen and you are beset with troubles and suffering, God forbid, by looking at the ultimate purpose, you will see that these things are not bad at all; they are actually of very great benefit. All suffering is sent from God intentionally for your own ultimate good, whether to remind you to return to God or to cleanse and scour you of your sins. If so , the suffering is really very beneficial, because God's intention is certainly only for good. Whatever evil and suffering you endure, God forbid, if you just look at the ultimate goal - God's purpose - you will not experience it as suffering at all. On the contrary, by realizing the purpose of this suffering, you will be filled with joy at so much good. For the ultimate purpose is entirely good, all unity! And the deep truth is that there is no evil at all in the world: everything is good. Then why do we feel pain when we suffer? The pain that people endure when they suffer is only because their spiritual understanding is withheld from them and they cannot focus on the ultimate purpose, which is entirely good. It is then that they feel the pain and sorrow of their suffering. But when understanding is present and one keeps one's attention on the ultimate goal, one feels no pain and suffering at all. The pain response This will help you understand a deep mystery: why it is a natural reflex response when a person suffers great pain, heaven forbid, as for example when having a limb amputated, that he screws up his eyes and shuts them tight. When we want to look at a distant object, we narrow our eyes and screw them up in order to focus our vision on the object. Vision is the agent sent forth by the mind to bring the object into the brain. When an object passes by at high speed, we may not know what it is even if we actually see it with our own eyes, because there is not enough time for the brain to register it. Likewise when something is very far away, our power of vision may not reach there to bring it back into the brain. We are distracted by what we see at the edges of our field of vision , and in addition our vision becomes diffused over such a great distance and lacks sufficient power to bring the object into our brain. This is why we have to narrow our eyes to see a distant object. We have to limit our vision so that other things don't interfere, and we must focus on the desired object in order to strengthen our vision and avoid its being diffused. Then it is possible to see the far-off object. So it is when we want to look at the ultimate goal of creation,





which is all good, all unity. We must close our (physical) eyes and focus our vision - the inner vision of the soul - on the goal. For the light of this ultimate goal is very far away. The only way to see it is by closing one's eyes. One has to close them completely and keep them firmly shut. One may even have to press on them with one's finger to keep them tightly closed. Then one can gaze on this ultimate goal. In other words, you must turn your eyes away from this world and close them to it completely. You must keep them tightly shut and not even glance at the vanity of this world and its mundane temptations. Then you will be able to see and apprehend the light of the ultimate goal, which is all good. And then the suffering will disappear. For the main reason why one suffers is because one is far from this goal. This is why it is a natural response to screw up one's eyes when suffering pain - in order to escape the suffering and nullify the pain through gazing at the ultimate goal, which is entirely good. The only way to focus on this goal is by closing one's eyes. And even though the individual may be totally unaware of what he is doing, the soul knows everything. That is why it is a natural reflex to close our eyes when suffering pain. Glimpsing the unity At the actual moment of self-transcendence when one is nullified in the ultimate goal, which is all good and all unity, the pain and suffering are nullified and actually disappear. However it is not possible to remain permanently in this state of self-transcendence as that would be beyond the limitations of our human existence. In this lifetime self-transcendence can only be experienced for brief moments, just as the angels in Ezekiel's prophecy of the Chariot are described as "running and returning" (Ezekiel 1:14) . They "run forth", momentarily transcending their limitations and rising towards God, but then they "return" again to their separate selves. When a person returns from the state of self-transcendence to normal consciousness, the conscious mind returns to the brain, which is the seat of the mind, the "vessel" of consciousness. But the limited human brain, the vessel, is unable to maintain the state of self-transcendence, because this is Ein Sof , limitless Infinity, which is the ultimate goal: all one, all good. As a result, the brain now feels the pain of the suffering, because it is in the brain that all sensations of pain and suffering are felt. Nerve passages extend from the brain to all the limbs in the body, and through them the brain is aware of pain in whatever limb is affected . Indeed, after one returns from self-transcendence to normal consciousness, the pain and suffering may attack even more strongly. It is like two fighters wrestling with one another: when one sees that the other is getting the upper hand, he fights

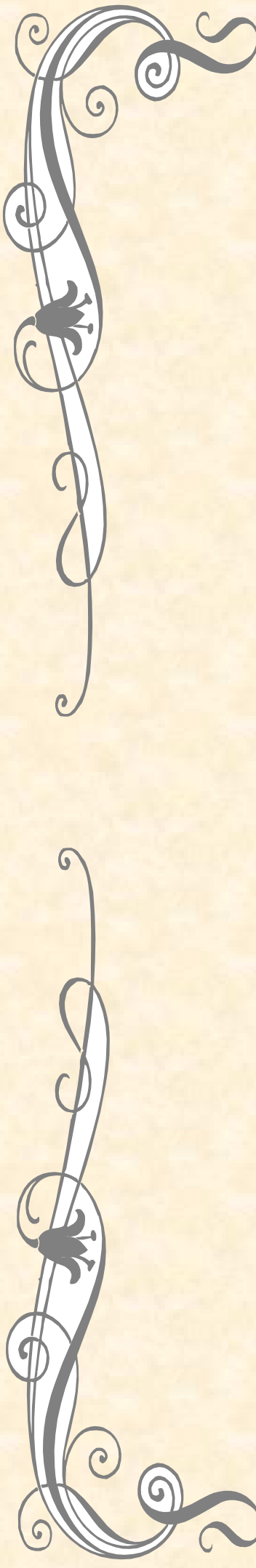


back even harder. Similarly, when the forces of judgment gripping the person see that he wants to overcome his suffering and nullify it through self-transcendence and absorption in the ultimate goal, they attack even more strongly. This is why afterwards, when one returns from the state of self-transcendence, the suffering is felt even more intensely, because the forces of judgment fight back against him since he wanted to escape them. Consolation Afterward show, however the suffering is lightened and we can derive a measure of consolation from the new spiritual insights achieved through the suffering. The reason suffering leads to spiritual insight is that suffering brings one to self-transcendence. Subsequently , even though one returns from self-transcendence to normal consciousness, a trace of it still remains, and from this trace comes Torah insight. This is because in the state of self-transcendence, nullified in the ultimate goal, one realizes that one's pain and suffering are actually of very great benefit. This fills one with joy, which is the "vessel" for receiving new Torah insights. It is the deeper Torah insights resulting from the remaining joyous trace of self-transcendence that later cool the intensity of one's suffering. For Torah quenches the thirst of the soul, namely the pain and suffering. "Happy is the man whom God chastises and from Your Torah you teach him" (Psalms 94:12) . The chastisement and suffering are what bring one to greater Torah insight. And indeed, if out of suffering you come to enhanced understanding, this is a sign that you dealt with the suffering in the proper way. Your deepened spiritual awareness is a sign that you were able to use the suffering to attain the state of self-transcendence, nullification in the ultimate goal . Likutey Moharan I, 65

## VI

### What is this world?

Everyone in the world is in pain and full of suffering: there is not a single person who really possesses this world. Even the highest and wealthiest have none of this world. All their days are pain and anger, and they endure constant worry, anxiety and sorrow, sighing and groaning... Each has his own private suffering. Not one of the very wealthy and privileged has everything exactly as he wants it at all times. They too are constantly full of pain and suffering, as everyone who knows them is fully aware. It may sometimes look as if a certain person has this world to perfection, enjoying all the pleasures of wealth, possessions, esteem, magnificent palaces, utensils, ornaments and royal treasures. Yet if you look carefully, you will find that he too constantly suffers all kinds of pain and vexation.



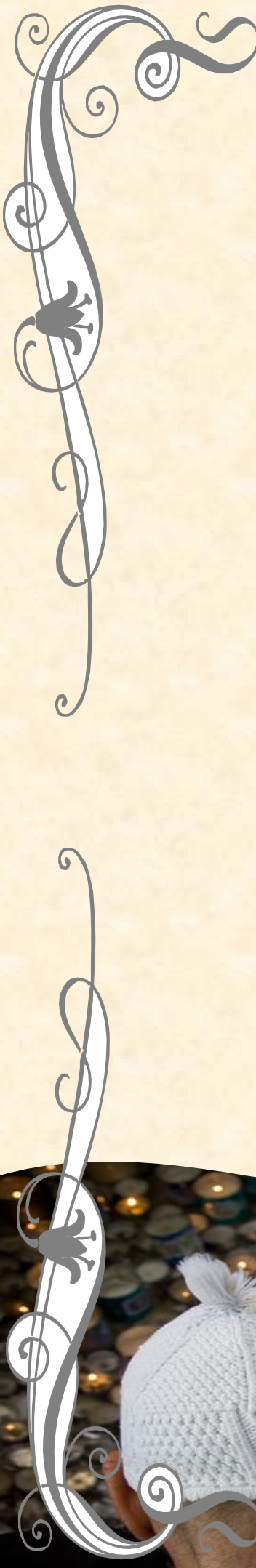
Everyone speaks of "this world" and the "world to come". As for the "world to come", we believe in it. Maybe "this world" also does exist somewhere! But the world in which we find ourselves here would appear to be Gehinnom , because everyone is constantly in great pain and we find no "this world" at all! Likutey Moharan II, 119

## VII

### **Sweetening pain with divine awareness**

Know that the only reason we experience pain and suffering is because of a lack of Da'at , Godly knowledge and awareness. One who possesses this knows that everything is sent by God and therefore he feels no pain or suffering, because "God gave and God took" (Job 1:21 ) . It is true that there is a certain kind of suffering that is inevitable. This is the pain felt when the soul leaves the body, the pain of illness that comes when the soul begins to separate itself from the body. The soul is so tightly bound to the body in this life that one inevitably feels pain at the moment of separation. Nevertheless this suffering is easy to bear if one knows clearly that everything is under God's providence. All the more does this apply to other kinds of pain and suffering, which a person who possesses Godly awareness does not feel at all. The main reason a person feels pain and suffering is that his Godly awareness is taken from him . Exile and the law of nature The main reason for the suffering of the Jewish People in exile is that they have fallen from Godly awareness, attributing everything to nature, chance and fate. This is why they experience pain and suffering. It has come upon them because they have learned from the nations among whom they live. They see the gentiles in their hour of ascendancy, while the Jews are lowly and despised. As a result the Jews have fallen under the influence of the nations and attribute everything to nature or chance. This is the only reason for their suffering, because if they had the Godly awareness to understand that everything is under God's providence, they would feel no pain at all. The truth is that the Jewish People are beyond nature. It is only when they sin that they become subject to the laws of nature just like the nations of the world, who are governed by nature and the stellar influences. The Jews then experience exile and suffering. The main reason for their exile and pain is that they lack Godly awareness and attribute everything to nature. Providence and prayer In time to come, at the end of history in its present form, "nature" as we understand it will disappear and the world will be governed only by providence. "For the heavens will vanish away like smoke and the earth will be worn out like a garment" (Isaiah 51:6) .





This means that the natural order as governed by the system of stars and planets will no longer operate as such. The expression "vanish away" in the verse signifies that all the constellations will be thrown into confusion and become mixed up. Stellar influences and "fate" will no longer dominate; everything will be governed only by God's providence. The Jewish People will then be in the ascendant. Through prayer we have the power to channel God's providence in a way that goes beyond nature. Nature may dictate one thing but prayer has the power to change nature. This is "greatness" - "For what great nation is there that has God so near to them as HaShem our God whenever we call on Him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7) . Our greatness is that God hears our prayers and alters the course of nature through His providence. Thus Yehoram, king of Israel , said to Gehazi, "Please tell me the great things that Elisha did" (Kings II 8:4) , for "Whatever Elisha did, he accomplished through prayer" (Megilah 27a) . Thus prayer, which gives us access to the realm of miracles and providence, the very opposite of nature, is "great."

Why do we cry when in pain? Why do people shed tears when in pain? Tears draw down God's providence. This we learn from the rabbinic interpretation of the verse, "And the clouds return after the rain" (Ecclesiastes 12:2) "This refers to a person's vision, which becomes weaker through tears" (Shabbat 151a) . From this we learn that tears take away part of one's vision. The fact that tears weaken a person's eyesight and take part of it away means that the vision is drawn into the tears. And this is why people shed tears when in pain. When a person feels pain and suffering, it means he needs God's providence to be saved. This is why people cry, so as to bring down and reveal God's watchful providence. For the providence and vision are drawn into the tears. This is why "Hezekiah wept greatly " (Isaiah 38:3) when he fell sick. Through his tears he drew down God's watchful providence, which is the concept of "greatness" and prayer. Likutey Moharan I, 250



*Shabbat  
Shalom*