

ESSENTIAL RABBI NA'HMAN

16

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



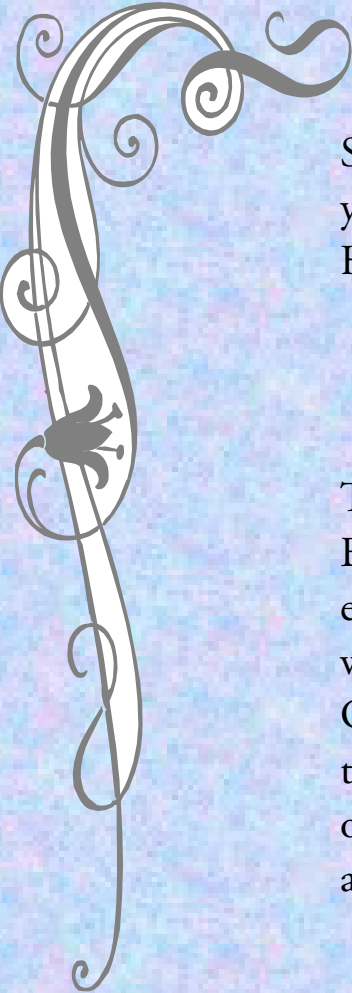
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16

I

Hope and courage

"Be strong and courageous, all who hope in God" (Psalms 31:25) . Even if you feel you have failed to reach true holiness or devotion, you can still hope . And this way you can be "strong and courageous". No matter what happens, don't let anything discourage you. Be sure also to encourage your friends not to become disheartened, no matter what happens. You may be all too aware of your own failings, but this should not prevent you from encouraging others. It is easier to inspire others than to strengthen yourself, for "A prisoner cannot free himself" (Berachot 5b) . Nothing is worse than giving in to discouragement. In time of war, the Torah says: "Do not be afraid and do not be terrified" (Deuteronomy 20:3) . The rabbis explained: "Do not be afraid." "of the hordes of troops," ".and do not be terrified" - "of the sound of the war horns" (Sotah 42a) . Whoever wants to enter the service of God must endure all this, for he will face a multitude of fearsome struggles - "the hordes of troops and the sound of the war horns". You must stand firm. Never surrender your ground. Trust that God will help you and don't turn aside from Him. "Retreat is the beginning of defeat" (Sotah 44b) . In any case, where can you go to escape from God? "Where can I flee from You? If I rise to heaven, You are there; if I descend to Hell - You are there too!" (Psalms 139: 6- 7) . For God is everywhere. You must be very stubborn in serving God. And even if you feel that you yourself are far from God, be sure not to discourage others. Do the very opposite: strengthen them in every way possible.



Speak to them with words that restore the soul. By doing so, you too will eventually come back to serving God. Sichot Haran #120

II

Even a little is precious

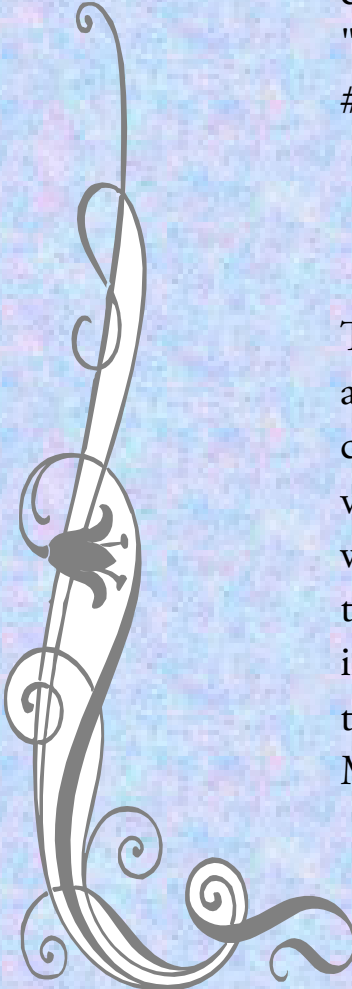
There are people who draw close to God but later fall away. Even so, the short time they serve God is very precious in His eyes no matter what happens later. "You have heartened Me with one of your eyes" (Song of Songs 4:9) . In this verse, God addresses the Jewish people, recalling their acceptance of the Torah. The Midrash asks: "Why does the verse say, 'with one of your eyes'? The answer is because the other eye was already looking at the Golden Calf!"

III

At the very time when they accepted the Torah, they already had ideas of going astray! Yet even the short time they were close to God was still very dear to Him, and this is why He says, "You have heartened Me with one of your eyes." Sichot Haran #123

IV

Torah secrets



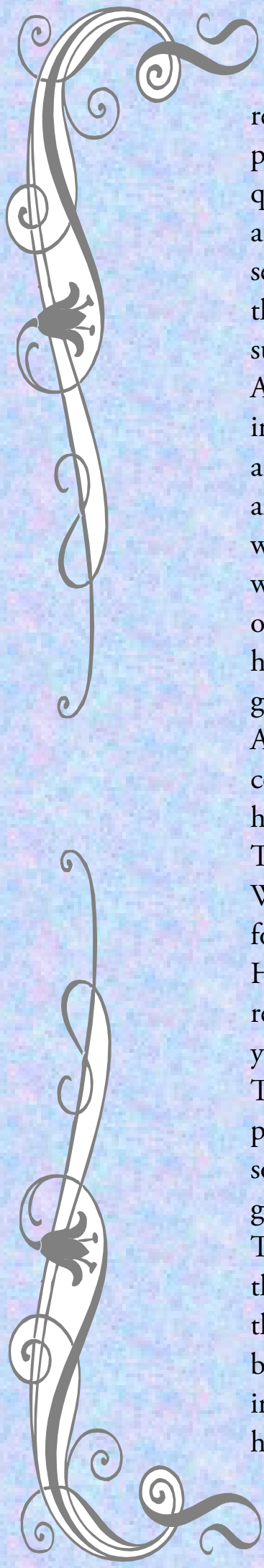
The places that seem lowest of all and furthest from God actually contain the most exalted life force of all, albeit concealed: namely the "secrets of Torah". One who has fallen very far should therefore understand that in the very place in which he finds himself he can still draw close to God because of the exalted life force that is concealed there. When he succeeds in returning to God, exalted levels of Torah will be revealed through him. These are the "secrets of Torah". Likutey Moharan I, 56



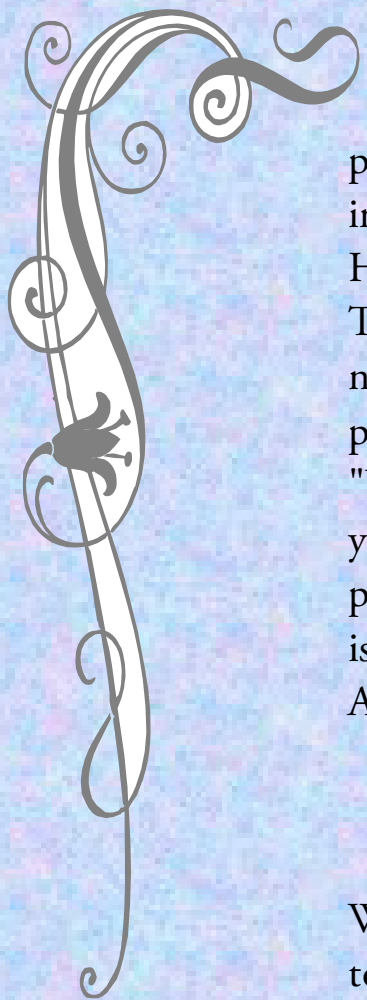
V

Where is the place of His glory?

There are people who sink very low indeed and fall into all kinds of doubts and even have questions about God Himself. Nevertheless, the whole purpose of their falling is for them to rise up afterwards. The fall is for the sake of the ascent. For the root of the entire creation is glory. Whatever God has created, He has done so only for His glory. "Everything that is called by My Name. I have created for My glory..." (Isaiah 43:7) . It follows that His glory is the root of the entire creation . And although everything is a unity, there are nevertheless gradations within creation. Each individual portion of creation contains its own unique glory, which is the root of that portion. Each of the ten utterances with which the world was created has its own unique glory, which is its root, because glory is the root of everything. Each utterance is a garment expressing God's glory, for "the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). What about sin and evil? God's glory is not present there, for "I will not give My glory to another" (Isaiah 42:8) . There is a limit that prevents the glory from spreading there. Although "the whole earth is full of His glory", there is nevertheless a limit that prevents it from spreading to the "outside places", which are beyond the bounds of holiness - for "I will not give My glory to another". But know that in spite of this, even the "filthy places" and even idolatrous temples necessarily derive their life-force from God. But know that they receive it from the Hidden Utterance of Bereishit , "In the beginning" (Genesis 1:1) . This utterance includes all the others, and all of them derive their vitality from it. The glory of the Hidden Utterance is concealed to the ultimate degree. It is from there that they derive their life-force. For it is impossible for the "filthy places" to receive their vitality from the revealed utterances, because "I will not give My glory to another". Only from the Hidden Utterance, which is concealed to the ultimate degree, can they receive vitality. It is impossible to understand this with human



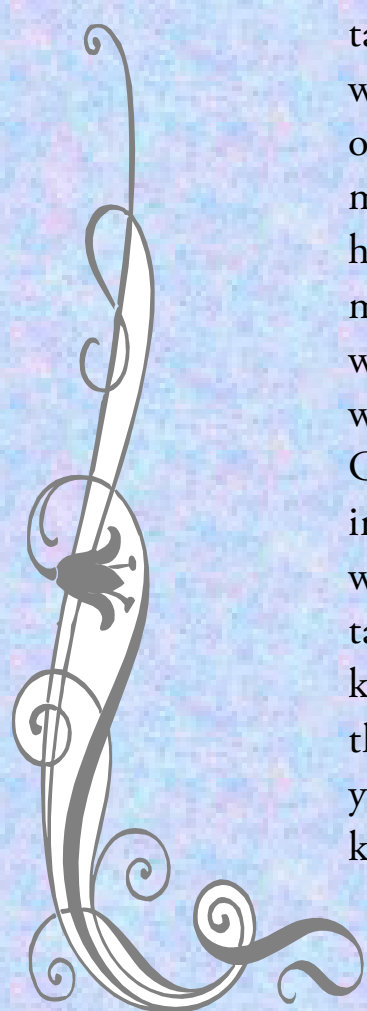
reason, and we are not permitted to delve into it. When a person sinks to these "filthy places", he is filled with doubts, questions and confusion. But when he starts examining himself and sees how far he is from God's glory and begins asking and searching, Ayeh? - "Where is the place of God's glory?" - this is the essence of the solution. He sees for himself that , having sunk to such places, he is far from God's glory . When he asks Ayeh? "Where?" - this is his way to rise up and transform his fall into a great ascent. For the purpose of the descent is to lead to an ascent. Ayeh? - "Where is the place of His glory?" This alludes to the exalted glory of the highest utterance, Bereishit , which is the source of the life-force of these places. Therefore when a person searches in earnest, Ayeh? - "Where is the place of His glory?" - this itself brings him back and he rises to the highest glory, Ayeh , which because of its great concealment gives life to these places. Having fallen there, by then searching Ayeh? - "Where is the place of His glory?" - he returns and connects himself to this exalted place, injecting new vitality into his very fall, and he can then rise to the most exalted heights. The essence of Teshuvah is an earnest search for God's glory. When a person sees that he is far from God's glory , he yearns for it. He asks, labors and toils: Ayeh? - "Where is the place of His glory?" This itself is his answer, his repentance and his remedy. Understand this well. "If someone asks you, 'Where is your God?' tell him, 'In the great city of Rome '" (Yerushalmi Taanit 1) . For even in places filled with idols and cults, God is present, albeit hidden. If you sink to such places, God forbid, as soon as you begin to search Ayeh? - "Where is the place of His glory" you draw life for yourself from the life-force of holiness. The vitality of the unholy forces, the "husks", derives only from the concealment, from the fact that God is so totally hidden that there is no awareness of Him at all. But as soon as you begin to search, "Where is the place of His glory?" this is an indication that you know that God exists, even though He is hidden, and this is why you are searching Ayeh? - "Where is the



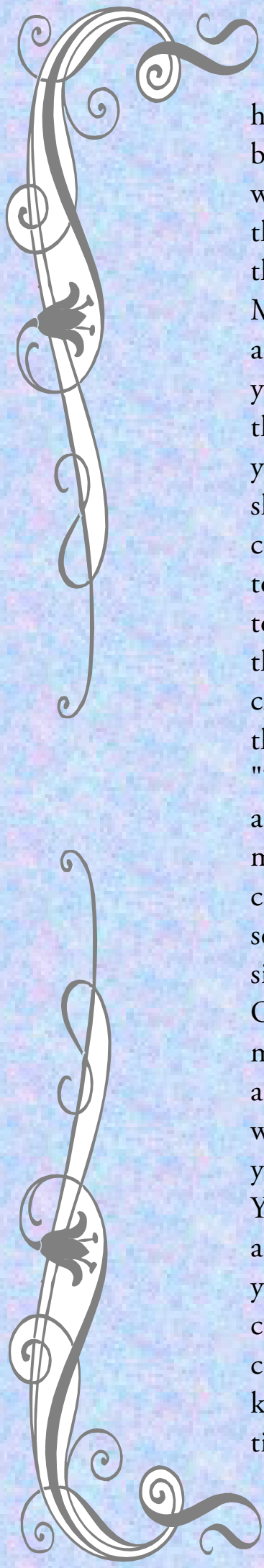
place of His glory?" This is how you can give yourself new life in the place to which you have sunk. This is because Ayeh is the Hidden Utterance from which all things derive their vitality. The unholy "husks" are nourished by the concealment, but you now vitalize yourself with the life-force of holiness in the very place to which you have sunk - by earnestly searching Ayeh? - "Where is the place of His glory?" Afterwards you can lift yourself from there completely and reach holiness itself in a place where God's glory is revealed. For the essence of holiness is that God's glory should be revealed. Blessed be God forever. Amen. Amen. Likutey Moharan II, 12

VI

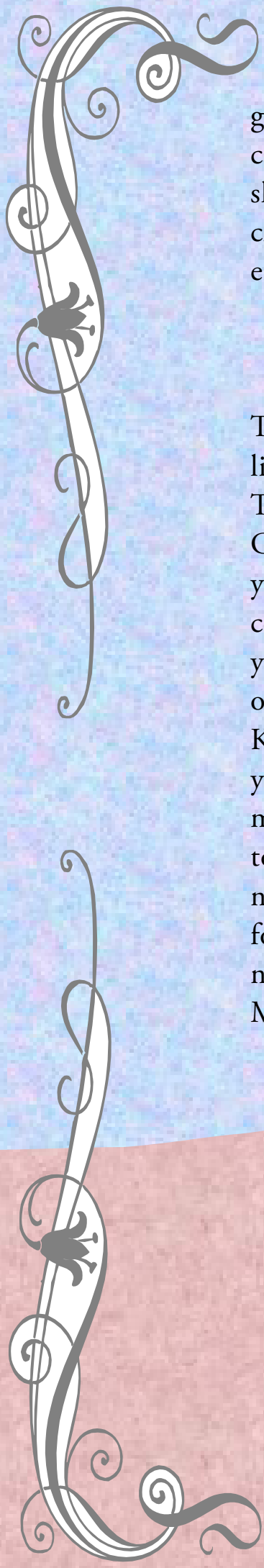
The narrow bridge



When a person makes a start and tries to bring himself closer to God, he usually experiences a feeling of rejection. It is as if forces beyond his control are trying to prevent him from entering God's service. Yet in actual fact this apparent rejection is nothing but a way of bringing him closer. But it takes tremendous determination not to become discouraged when you see that the days and years are passing and in spite of all your efforts to draw closer, you are still far away. You may feel you have not even begun to enter the gates of holiness. You may see yourself as still being coarsely materialistic and feel that your mind is confused. No matter what you try to do to serve God, it seems as if the evil forces will not allow you to succeed. You may start thinking that God is paying no attention whatever, as if He has no interest in your devotions. You keep calling out to Him, pleading with Him to help you. Yet you feel as far away as ever. It takes tremendous determination to overcome all this. The key is to ignore all the discouragement. The truth is that all this apparent rejection has no other purpose than to bring you closer. All the Tzaddikim have had to endure this, as we know from their personal testimony. They too felt that God



had no interest in them, because they saw how long they had been searching, putting in hard work and effort, yet they were still far away. If they had not determinedly ignored these feelings, they would have remained where they were in the first place and would never have achieved what they did. My dear friend and brother: the basic rule is to keep firm and be strong. Try with all your strength to be persistent in your devotions. Pay no attention to all these discouraging thoughts. And if you are very far from God and you feel that your every movement must be a blemish in God's eyes, you should know that on the contrary, if someone is all that coarse and materialistic, even the slightest motion he makes to try to detach himself from his physicality and turn towards God is very great and precious. If he moves no more than a hairsbreadth in his efforts to purify himself and come closer, that hairsbreadth makes him run thousands and thousands of miles in the worlds above. (See below, p. 354, "The Sad Tzaddik", for further explanation.) If you think about this, it will make you very happy. Indeed you should make a great effort always to be happy, because depression can cause tremendous damage. You should know that as soon as a person wants to start serving God, it is a very grave sin for him to be depressed. Depression comes from the Other Side, which God hates. In order to serve God, you must be obstinate. On no account should you give up and abandon the practices you have begun. Don't give up in any way, no matter what happens. Remember this well, because you will be in great need of it when you start serving God. You must be very obstinate indeed, holding yourself strong and firm in your place each time the evil forces try to throw you down. This will happen very often. Your task is to continue as best as you can without allowing yourself to fall completely, God forbid. Inevitably you must encounter all kinds of difficulties and setbacks. You will fall down many times before you can enter the gates of holiness. Even the



greatest Tzaddikim have gone through all this. There are cases when a person is already at the gate of holiness, only to slide back because of these difficulties. When a person is close to the gate, the forces of evil try to prevent him from entering.

VII

This pushes some people into retreat.

That is the way of the Evil One: when he sees a person literally at the gates, he attacks more powerfully than ever. That is why you need to be so strong. If you want to enter God's service, remember all this very well. Strengthen yourself in every possible way and do what you can to continue with your devotions. Eventually, with God's help, you will surely succeed in entering through the gate. God is overflowing with love and very much wants your devotions. Know that every single effort you make is important. All your attempts to detach yourself even slightly from the material world and draw closer to the spiritual are added together. They will all come to your aid when you really need it, when you are under pressure or in trouble, God forbid. And know that in life a person has to pass over a very narrow bridge. The main thing is not to be afraid. Likutey Moharan II, 48

Shabbat Shalom

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