



ESSENTIAL
RABBI
NA'HMAN
7

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

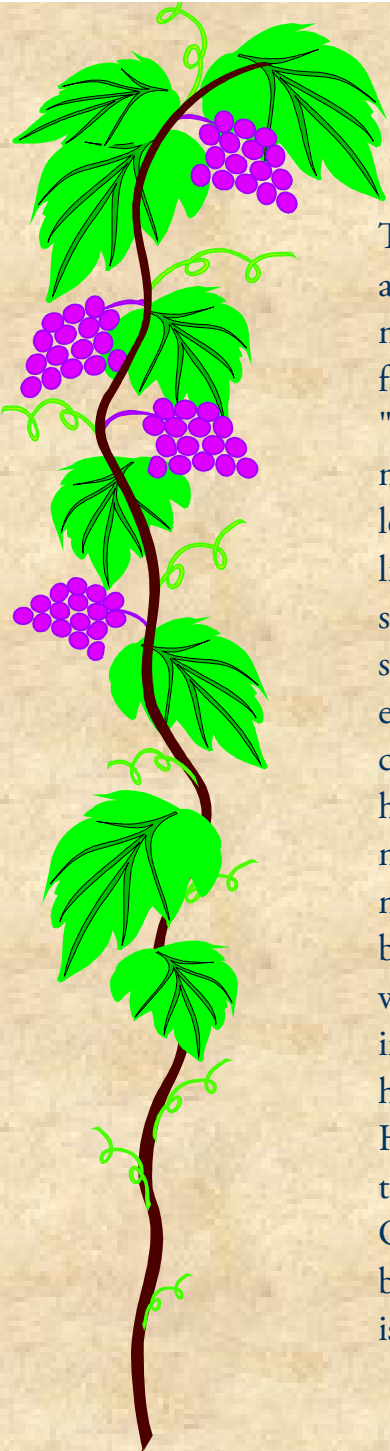


I

The goal of knowledge: to know that we know nothing The ultimate goal of all knowledge of God is to realize that one knows nothing. Yet even this is unattainable. A person may come to realize his own ignorance, but only in a certain area on a particular level. There is still the next level, which he has not even touched. He does not know enough about the next level to begin to realize his ignorance. No matter how high he climbs, there is always the next step. A person therefore knows nothing: he cannot even understand his own ignorance. For there will always be a level of ignorance beyond his present level of perception. Sichot Haran #3 The more you draw yourself to God, the more you must realize how far you are from Him. When a person believes that he has succeeded in achieving closeness to God and understanding of Him, it is a sign that he does not know anything at all. If he did, he would understand that he is very far from God and knows absolutely nothing, because God's greatness is without limits. Likutey Moharan I, 63

II

Hints, messages and guidance You should reflect on the different situations and occurrences that God sends your way day by day. Each day has its own thoughts, words and deeds. They are all completely unique to that day. God "contracts" His infinite, endless Godliness in such a way that Godliness is present even in the innermost point of the finite material world in which man finds himself. Thus God sends to each individual the thoughts, words and deeds appropriate for the day, the person and the place. Within them are hints intended to draw the person closer to God's service. This is why you should pay attention to what happens to you and consider what it may signify. Think about the thoughts, words and deeds that God sends you each day in order to understand His hints to you to draw closer to Him at every moment. This applies to everyone, no matter who and in what circumstances . But be cautious when thinking about these things: you must stay within certain limits and not delve to excess, because otherwise it is possible to stray beyond the bounds of holiness. Flying off into speculation can be dangerous. Stay within the limits of human understanding and steadily expand your horizons without trying to step beyond your level, because you may not investigate that which is too wondrous for you" (Chagigah 13a) . Likutey Moharan I, 54



III

The seven lamps of the head To gain spiritual understanding and awareness, you must sanctify the seven "lamps" of your head: your mouth, nostrils, ears and eyes. Guard your mouth from speaking any falsehood. Sanctify your nostrils with the fear of Heaven, as it is written: "...he will scent the fear of God" (Isaiah 11:3) . The way to sanctify the nostrils is through meekness and humility. You must be patient and not let anger burn inside you, even if people treat you badly. Use your ears to listen to the words of the Sages: believe in what they say. The way to sanctify your ears is through discretion and loyalty. If people tell you secrets, be sure to keep them and not reveal them to anyone. Lower your eyes and avert them from evil. Sanctifying the seven "lamps" of the head can bring you to complete spiritual understanding and awareness. Your heart will then burn with passion for God, because the activity of the mind generates heat and fervor in the heart. The more you occupy your mind with thoughts of Torah and devotion, the more your heart will burn for God. The deeper your understanding, the greater your fervor will become. This fervor purifies the heart, protecting it from becoming inflamed with evil desires, which merely pollute it. When a person's heart is pure, he will never be at a loss for words when he speaks to God. He will always find new words and new approaches. One who sanctifies the seven "lamps of the head" can attain awesome levels of perception of God. These heights of understanding are a blessing from God which is bestowed from above without any preliminaries and introductions. This is the gift of ruach hakodesh : holy spirit. Likutey Moharan I, 21

IV

Eternal life God alone has eternal life because He lives to eternity. Yet a person who is merged with his root namely with God - also lives to eternity. Being merged in God's oneness he lives eternally, like God. Likewise, only God has perfection, and besides Him all are lacking. Yet one who is merged with God has complete perfection. In essence, the way to merge with God is through knowing Him, as the sage said: "If I knew Him, I would be Him". For man's essence is his mind. Wherever a person's mind and thoughts are , that is where the entire person is. Thus one who attains knowledge and understanding of God is literally in that place. The greater one's knowledge, the more one becomes absorbed in the root: God.

No matter what a person lacks, be it livelihood, children, health or anything else, it is only because of a lack of Godly knowledge and



awareness. Some people lack all knowledge of God yet appear to enjoy the best of everything. But in truth everything they have is nothing. Conversely, when one who possesses complete knowledge lacks something, this lack is truly nothing, for "If you have acquired knowledge, what do you lack, and if you lack knowledge, what have you acquired?" (Nedarim 41a). All completeness or lack of completeness depends on one's depth of Godly knowledge and awareness. Anger and cruelty result from a lack of Godly knowledge and awareness, for "anger rests in the lap of fools" (Ecclesiastes 7:9). This is why a sick person is prone to anger, being subject to stern judgments, which take the form of constricted consciousness, making him angry. However, in time to come Godly knowledge and awareness will be revealed and all will know God, "for the earth will be full of the knowledge of God." (Isaiah 11:9). Accordingly anger will then no longer exist, "and the wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard with the kid. and the cow and the bear shall feed. they shall not do evil and they shall not destroy, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God." (ibid. 6-9). At present it is impossible for them to live together because of anger. But in time to come they will be able to live together because the anger will no longer exist on account of the knowledge which will then be revealed. Likutey Moharan I, 21

V

Unanswerable questions There are certain questions that trouble many people, such as how we can have free will if God knows the future. You must accept that it is beyond the capacity of the human mind to understand such things, because the answers lie on a level of wisdom so transcendent that the human mind is unable to fathom it. This wisdom can never enter the human mind, but it encompasses the mind from the outside. If a person could grasp this wisdom, he would no longer be human but an angel. The very fact that we cannot understand the mystery of free will is precisely what gives us our freedom. In time to come, men's minds will expand and the secrets of free will and providence will be revealed. Free will as such will then disappear. Man's mind will emerge from its limitations and he will become like an angel having no free will. Likutey Moharan I, 21

VI

God is in everything The whole earth is full of God's glory. No place is devoid of God, Who fills all the worlds and transcends all the worlds.



Therefore even one whose occupation involves contact with non-believers cannot excuse himself from serving God on account of being constantly surrounded by gross materialism. Godliness can be found everywhere, in all material things and even in the languages of the nations. Without Godliness they could not exist or endure at all. It is just that as the levels descend, Godliness becomes increasingly "contracted" and veiled in many garments. Accordingly, even if you are sunk in the very lair of evil on the lowest of all levels, even if you believe you are so far from God that it is impossible for you to draw closer, you can still find Godliness in the very place to which you have sunk. There too you can attach yourself to Him and repent with all your heart. Even there, God is not far away. It is just that the veils are thicker. Likutey Moharan I, 33

VII

God's glory cries out from all things, for "The whole earth is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3) . Even the stories of the nations cry out with God's glory: "Let the nations tell of His glory!" (Psalms 96:3) . His glory is reflected even in their tales and stories. God's glory cries out, calling and signaling you to draw closer. For God wants you with all His love and kindness. Sometimes your prayers become like flames and the words flow from your lips with burning fervor and desire. This is God's own light within you, calling you to draw near. Your fervent passion is a spark of God's own essence - for "He is your praise, He is your God" (Deuteronomy 10:21). God Himself is your praise and prayer. Sometimes you can literally pray before God Himself. And even when God withdraws and seems far away, you must still pray to Him. You must actually cast your prayers, throwing them towards God from afar, as it says: " Cast your burden upon God" (Psalms 55:23) . "Happy is the man who knows how to cast arrows" (Tikkuney Zohar) . These "arrows" are the prayers that must be thrown towards God. Sichot Haran #52

VIII

The concealment within the concealment There is nothing in the world that does not contain Godliness, however hidden it may be. There are two levels of concealment. The first is simple concealment; the second is the "concealment within the concealment". When God is hidden with only one degree of concealment, it can certainly be hard to find Him. Yet with great effort and searching it is possible, because at least you know



that God is hidden from you. However in the "concealment within the concealment", the very fact that God is hidden is itself concealed. The person has no idea that God is hidden from him. It is then very hard indeed to find Him. Godliness becomes concealed as a result of sin. When a person commits a sin and then repeats it, the sin becomes permissible in his eyes, and this is what causes the first concealment. The more the person sins, the deeper he falls into the "concealment within the concealment". Yet even in the "concealment within the concealment" Godliness is present, because without His life-force nothing in the world could exist. Through devotion to the Torah you can strip away all the veils and reveal God's presence even when the "concealment within the concealment" is most intense. At last the unremitting cry of the Torah is heard: "How long, thoughtless people, will you continue loving thoughtlessness?" (Proverbs 1:22) . In the end you will be able to return to God regardless of where you have fallen. Likutey Moharan I, 56

IX

A taste of the world to come When a person knows that everything that happens to him is for his own good, this is a foretaste of the world to come. To be serene and patient regardless of what you encounter in life is the highest level of knowledge and understanding of God. Have faith that everything is for your ultimate good. Likutey Moharan I, 4

X

The world to come that we can experience even in this world, when God helps us at certain moments, is quite indescribable! Chayey Moharan #486

XI

HITBODEDUT MEDITATION AND PERSONAL PRAYER

Set aside time each day to meditate and pray alone in a room or some meadow and express your innermost thoughts and feelings and personal prayers to God. Use every kind of appeal and argument. Use words that will endear you to God and win His favor. Plead with God to draw you closer and let you truly serve Him. This is Hitbodedut. You should hold these conversations in whatever language you speak best. Our set prayers are said in Hebrew, but if this is not one's native language, it is difficult to use it to give expression to all one's innermost thoughts and feelings and the heart is less drawn after the words. It is easier to pour out your heart and say everything you need in your own language. You should tell



God everything you feel, be it contrition and longing to repent over the past or requests and supplications to come truly close to God from now on, each person according to his level. Be very careful to get into the habit of spending time every day on your personal prayers and meditation. Fix a regular time for this and then be happy for the rest of the day! Hitbodedut is of the greatest value. It is the way to come closer to God, because it includes everything else. No matter what you lack in your service of God, even if you feel totally remote from His service, tell God everything and ask Him for all that you need. If at times you find yourself unable to speak to God or even open your mouth, the very fact that you are there before Him wanting and yearning to speak is itself very good. You can even turn your very inability to speak into a prayer. Tell God that you feel so far away that you cannot even speak to Him! Ask Him to have mercy on you and open your mouth to tell Him what you need. Many great and famous Tzaddikim have said that all their achievements came only through Hitbodedut. Anyone with understanding can recognize the supreme value of this practice, which ascends to the most sublime heights. This advice applies to everyone equally, from the very least to the very greatest. Everyone is capable of practicing it and can attain great levels. Happy are all who persist in it. It is also good to turn Torah teachings into prayers. When you study or hear a teaching of a true Tzaddik, make a prayer out of it. Ask God when you too will be able to fulfill this teaching. Tell Him how far from it you are and beg Him to help you attain everything contained in the lesson. A person of understanding who wants the truth will be led by God in the path of truth, and he will learn how to practice Hitbodedut and offer words of grace and sound arguments to persuade God to bring him to true service. Hitbodedut rises to a very high place. This applies especially to turning Torah teachings into prayers, which creates the greatest delight above. Hitbodedut is the highest level: it is greater than everything. Likutey Moharan II, 25

XII

Like a person talking to his friend

When God helps with Hitbodedut, it is like a person talking to his friend. Likutey Moharan II, 99

שבת שלום ורחג שבועות שמח