

ESSENTIAL
RABBI NA'HMAN

12

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



I

When harsh decrees threaten Israel , they can be sweetened through dancing and hand- clapping. Likutey Moharan I, 10

II

Joy of the mitzvah

Dancing for joy over a mitzvah is a wonderful thing. There are times when it is a mitzvah to drink wine, as on Shabbat and festivals, or at weddings and other religious celebrations. If you drink on such occasions, do not drink to excess but in moderation. Your intention should be for the sake of Heaven, to experience the true joy of Israel , which is to rejoice in God, who chose us from all the nations. As the joy begins to radiate within you, it will spread to your legs until you literally start to dance for joy. This will banish the forces of impurity, which take hold of the legs, mitigating harsh judgments and enabling you to receive blessings. The fervor with which you dance is "a fire offering, a sweet savor to the Lord" (Numbers 28:8) . However, when a person dances with the heat of the evil inclination, this is a "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:1) , while the wine he drinks is the "wine of drunkenness", which allows the forces of impurity to take hold . Holy dance has the same power to sweeten harsh judgments as a redemption performed by a Tzaddik. Likutey Moharan I, 41

III

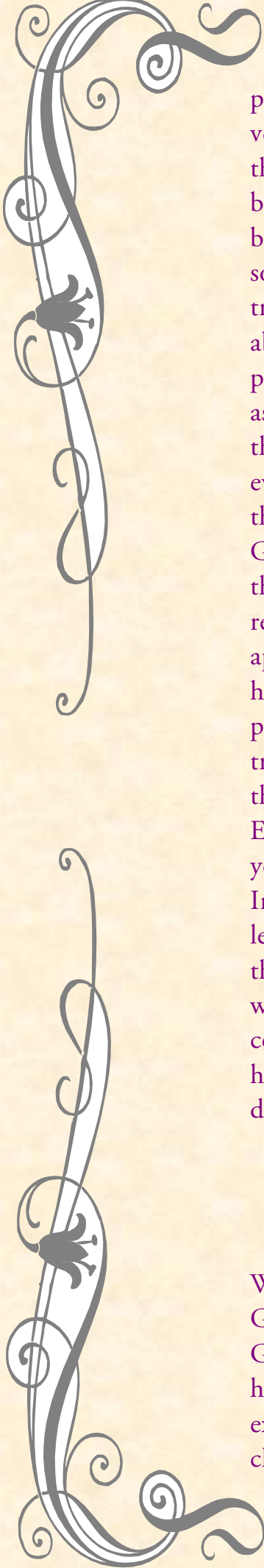
MEMORY

You must be very careful to cultivate a good memory and not fall into forgetfulness. What is a good memory? It means keeping the world to come constantly in the forefront of your mind, never forgetting it. It would be very proper for every Jew to make it a daily habit, as soon as he opens his eyes in the morning , before doing anything else, to recall that the world to come is the only true goal. He should do this as soon as he wakes up. Likutey Moharan I, 54

IV

The benefits of forgetting

Most people see forgetting as a problem, but I see it as a great benefit. If you never forgot anything, it would be impossible to serve God because remembering everything from the past, you would never be able to lift yourself up to God. Whatever you tried to do, you would constantly be disturbed by your memories of the past. But having the

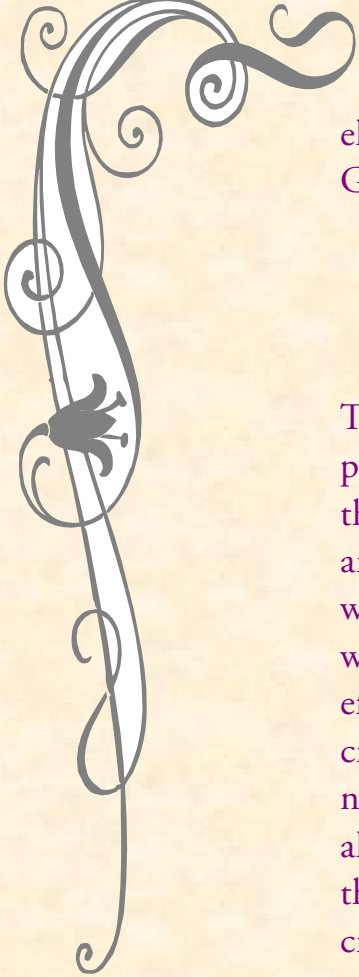


power to forget, you do not need to be disturbed by the past. This is very important when trying to serve God. Most people are troubled by the past, especially when trying to pray. Precisely then their minds become filled with all kinds of distracting thoughts about their business, household and other affairs. They worry that maybe they did something wrong or should have acted differently. When a person tries to pray or study, he can easily become troubled by thoughts about past wrongdoings and personal failings. This is a universal problem, as we all know. The best advice is simply to forget! As soon as something is over and done with, regret whatever you must and then push it out of your mind and pay it no further attention. Don't even start rehashing things that are over and done with. Understand this well, because it is a very important principle. In Torah study too, God gave us the power to forget so that we should always appreciate the Torah as we did the first time we learned it. Since you forget, relearning or reviewing a lesson is like learning it anew, and you appreciate it as much as the first time. Imagine a group of men who have been hired to fill up barrels that are full of holes. Everything they pour into the barrels leaks out. The fools ask what purpose there is in trying so hard to fill the barrels if everything poured in leaks out. But the wise man says, "What do I care? I get paid for each day of work. Even if the barrels leak, my wages won't be reduced!" Similarly, even if you forget what you learn, your reward will not be reduced.

In the future God will make you remember everything you ever learned, even if you forgot it during your lifetime. The same applies to those teachings of the true Tzaddik that you do not understand. In the world to come you will be able to understand them. In the life to come, your soul will remember and understand all the Torah you heard and learned in this world. Happy is the man who spends his days in Torah and devotion. Sichot Haran #26

V WILL AND DESIRE

When a person is content to want only what God wants, this makes God the King. But when a person desires something other than what God desires, this gives strength to unholy forces. A person must nullify his own will to the point where he has no will and desire for anything except what God desires, whether it be that he should have wealth and children or not, God forbid. It should be the same with everything



else he wants. He should desire only what God desires. This makes God alone the King Likutey Moharan I, 177

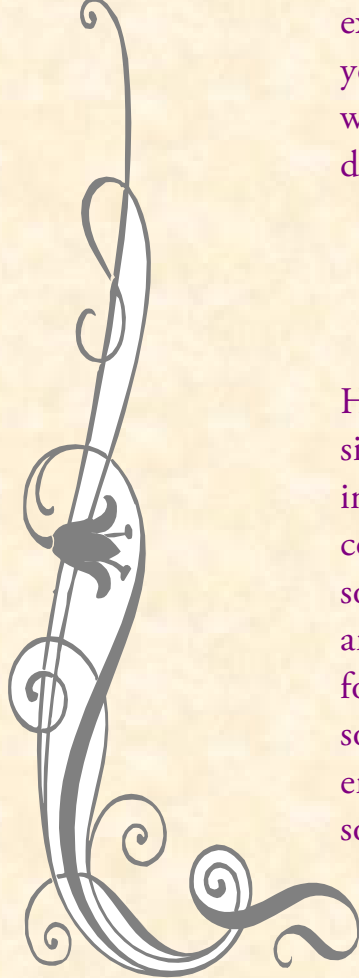
VI

Yearning

The Hebrew letters are consonants: without vowels, they cannot be pronounced but remain like a body without a soul. Without the soul, the body is unable to move or do anything. The vowels - the soul that animates the letters - are formed through yearning and desire, whether for good or bad. The yearning for evil creates bad vowels, which make the letters join together and interact to produce bad effects. But if a person yearns to repent, good vowels - good souls - are created and the letters join and interact to produce good results. It is not sufficient for a person to feel longing and yearning in his heart alone. He must express his longing and yearning on his lips. This is the basis of our prayer service. The yearning in the person's heart creates soul and letters in potential, but it is when the person expresses his desire with his mouth that the soul is produced in actuality. For the soul comes forth from the mouth, as it says, "My soul came forth through his speaking" (Song of Songs 5:6). In order to bring forth your soul from potential to actual existence, you must express your yearning and longing in words. This is how you turn your desire into a reality and accomplish what you want, and this is why it is so important to speak to God every day and articulate your desires and good intentions with your lips. Likutey Moharan I, 31

VII

The power of one sigh



How precious when you sigh out of longing for something holy. The sigh you emit because you are far from holiness breaks the bond of impurity that was trapping you. Now you can bind yourself with the cord of holiness. But the opposite is true when you sigh with desire for something wrongful, God forbid. One sigh of regret over your sins and great distance from God is worth more than many fasts and other forms of self-mortification. The sighs you emit when you desire something holy can actually break the force of your bodily urges, enabling your soul to draw nearer to your body and communicate to it something of her own perception of God. Likutey Moharan I, 109



VIII Thirsty for God

Thirst is a very great desire. It is wonderful to long, yearn and thirst for God. The greater your thirst for water, the greater your pleasure when you reach water and drink. Therefore the pleasure is caused by the thirst! The same is true of holy longing and yearning for God and for true devotion. This will be the main delight of the world to come, which will be a time of desire and longing. This is the "desire of all desires", the level to which Moses ascended when he left the world. Likewise Abraham paid "four hundred silver shekels" for his final resting place (Genesis 23:16). The holy Zohar says these are the four hundred worlds of yearning that the Tzaddikim will inherit in the future. They are worlds of yearning because then we will be worthy of true thirst and yearning for God. Quenching this thirst will be the main delight of the future world. Sichot Haran #259

IX The power of thought

Human thought has tremendous power. Thought alone can bring about many things. Even prices in the market rise because of people's thoughts and expectations.

When thought is concentrated intensely, it can exert great influence. All the faculties of the mind, conscious and unconscious, down to the innermost point, must be focused without distraction on the intended result. When many people do this together, their thoughts can actually force what they are thinking to come about. The concentrated thought must spell out every step of the desired result in detail. It is not enough for the thought to be merely overall, because this is an "incomplete vessel" and may even be deceptive. Keeping your mind intently focused on your goal can also help you in studying the Torah. For example, you could focus intently on the thought that you want to complete all four sections of the Shulchan Aruch. You could calculate that if you study five pages every day you could complete all four sections in a single year. Picture in your mind exactly how you will go about this course of study. Concentrate so strongly that you are literally obsessed with the thought. The same approach can also be applied to other studies, such as the Bible or the Talmud and its commentaries. If your desire is strong and your concentration sufficiently intense, your plans will be accomplished. Sichot Haran #62



X
PATIENCE

Sometimes when people don't want to suffer a little, they end up suffering a lot! Siach Sarfey Kodesh I, 6

XI

When to push, when to wait

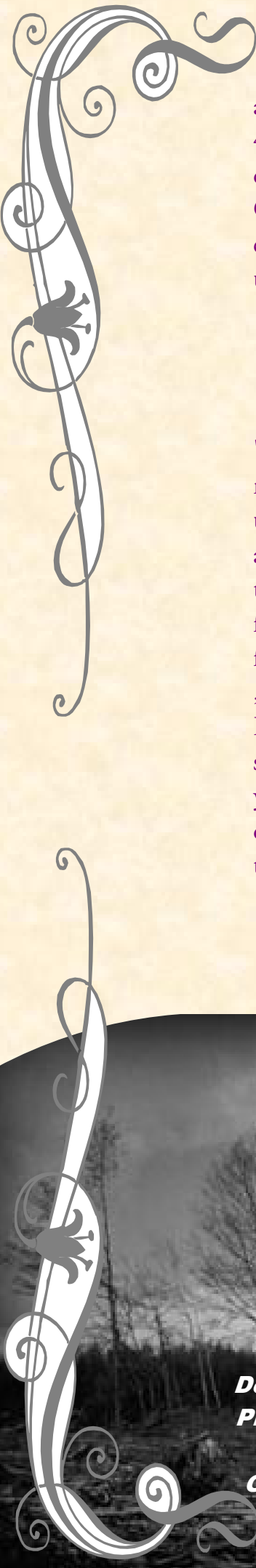
When you just can't fall asleep, it's no use trying to force yourself to sleep. The more you try to force yourself, the more sleep will elude you. The same applies to many other things: it is not good to force yourself too much, because the more you try to force yourself, the stronger the opposing forces will become. At times this applies even to prayer and devotion. You should certainly make every possible effort to sanctify yourself and attain true devotion. When something can be done today, don't leave it for tomorrow - because the world never stops for a moment. Man's world consists only of the present. Whatever you can do to serve God, do immediately and determinedly without delay. Who knows what obstacles you may face from the outside and from within if you leave it until later?

But at times you may see that, despite all your efforts and determination, you simply cannot achieve what you want. Sometimes you must simply wait. Don't be discouraged because you are not achieving what you want. Don't let this push you off course. You must wait a little until the time is ripe. The most important thing of all is to look to God at all times with longing and yearning, even when things are not going as well as you would like in your prayers and devotions. Never despair, no matter what. And as soon as God gives you the opportunity to do something holy, do it at once. Chayey Moharan #431

XII

The problem contains its own solution

"In my distress you relieved me." (Psalms 4:2) Even in times of trouble, whatever God sends, He sends in such a way that the trouble itself contains the salvation. Keep your eyes open for God's love and mercy! If you look carefully you will see that even when God sends you trouble, He is still helping you. He actually helps you by means of the very trouble itself, treating you with tremendous kindness all




along. Thus King David said: "In my distress you relieved me" (Psalms 4:2) . You have helped me by means of the very trouble itself! Of course we want our troubles to be over and we hope and trust that God will quickly save us from all of them and bring us great good. Yet even now, while our troubles are still tormenting us, God is helping us. Likutey Moharan I, 195

XIII

Accepting the bad things

"Love your friend like yourself, I am God." (Leviticus 19:18) You must accept all your troubles and suffering in life with love. You must understand that, considering all the wrong you have done, God is actually treating you very mercifully and sending you less suffering than you really deserve. If God were to mete out the full punishment for your transgressions, you would have to suffer much more, God forbid. In the verse, "Love your friend like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) , the Hebrew word for "your friend", RE-acha , can also be read as RA-acha , "your bad". In other words, you must lovingly accept your suffering and all the bad things that happen to you. Because "...like yourself – "! considering the way you are and considering all your bad deeds, nevertheless, "I am God" - "I am full of compassion and I am treating you with great mercy." Likutey Moharan I, 165

שבת שלום



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