

ESSENTIAL

RABBI NA'HMAN

18

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



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I


Each one has his limits

Our sages teach that "It is forbidden to gaze at what is above and below, what is before and what is after" (Chagigah 11b) . Each and every person has his own unique "above" and "below" where he may not gaze, depending on his level. Some people's intellect stops at the stars and the limits of the physical world, and they are therefore forbidden to delve any further. The mind of those engaged in philosophy and science reaches only as far as the stars. Beyond the stars they know nothing. Even concerning what is under the stars, they are often wrong and have major disagreements among themselves about everything. Each person has a point where his intellect ends. He is not allowed to go beyond this, because for him anything beyond this is "what is above and below" . Here he must depend on faith alone. Sichot Haran #224

II

The faith of our fathers

Believe in God with pure, simple faith without trying to understand things philosophically. Most ordinary people may appear to be far from philosophy yet almost everyone is sunk in it to some degree. Even young children often have confusing theories. Cleanse your mind and heart of philosophy. Cast it aside and pay no attention to doubts or questions: all you need is pure faith in God and the true Tzaddikim. We received the holy Torah from Moses our Teacher. It has been handed down to us by outstanding Tzaddikim in every generation. We can

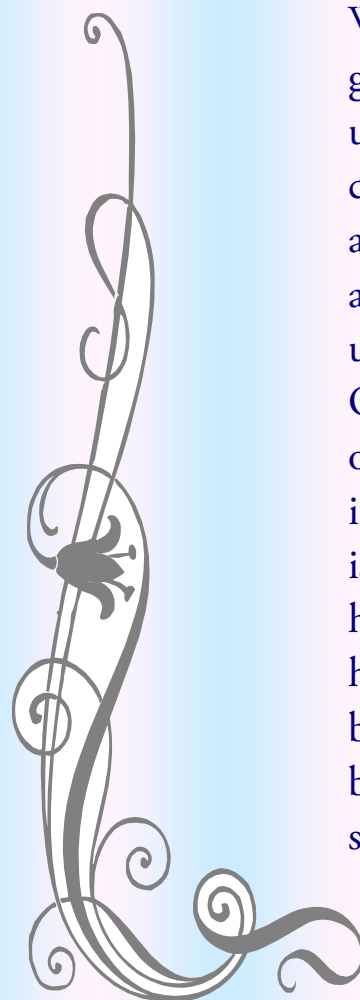


rely on them without resorting to philosophical theories. Our task is to follow in their footsteps and believe in God with pure, simple faith, observing the Torah and its commandments as taught by our ancestors. When a person is sincere and unquestioning, he can attain holy desire, which is even higher than wisdom. It is true that wisdom is higher than faith, but one must avoid sophistry and speculation, relying on faith alone. Faith has the greatest power. When you follow the path of faith, you can attain desire, which is even higher than wisdom. One who attains desire experiences tremendous longing and yearning for God. The feeling becomes so intense that he does not know what to do, and he cries out !!! . . .


But there is a philosopher in man's heart. This is the Evil One, who puts doubts and questions into the heart. We must overcome this philosopher and drive him out, strengthening ourselves in faith alone. Sichot Haran #32

III

Questions and answers



Within the bounds God has set for man's intelligence it is a great mitzvah, a positive duty, to sharpen the mind and understand as clearly as possible whatever the human mind is capable of grasping. However, there are certain questions (such as the paradox of man's free will and God's foreknowledge) the answers to which are beyond the capacity of the human mind to understand. Only in time to come will the answers be revealed. On no account should one delve into these questions. It is said of those who speculate on such questions, relying on their own intelligence: "None who go to her return" (Proverbs 2:19) . It is impossible to solve these questions through reason. We must have pure faith. Even when it comes to the questions which do have a solution , there are times when the paths of the mind become blocked and one is unsure how to answer the non-believer who casts doubts in one's heart. The remedy then is to study the codes of Torah law. If one still finds oneself confused



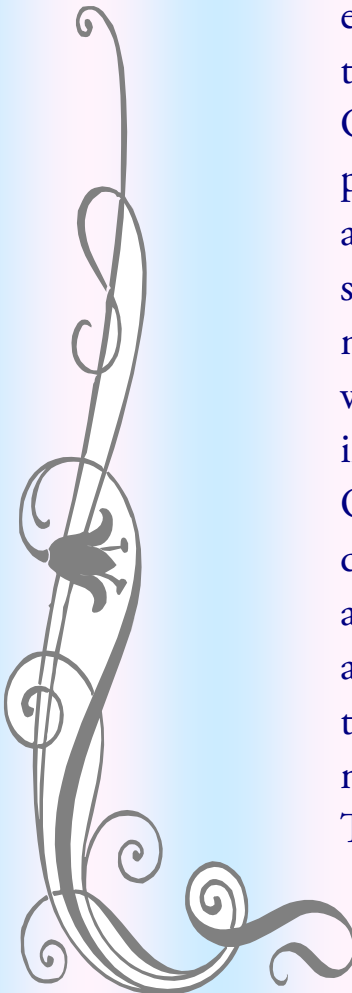
and unable to answer these questions, one should rely on faith alone. The main thing is to have faith. Likutey Moharan I, 62

IV

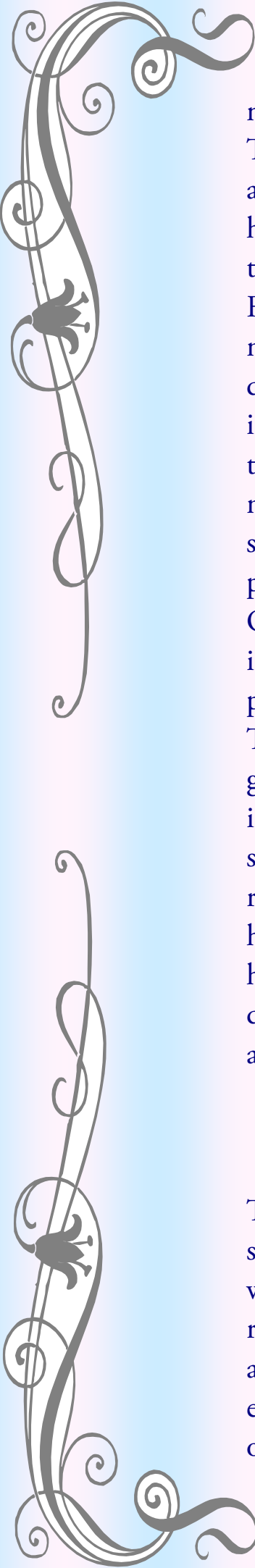
We believe in God with faith alone, not because of philosophical analysis. We believe that He created the whole universe, that He sustains His universe and that in time to come He will renew it. Philosophical works pose what appear to be extremely difficult questions while providing very weak answers. On further enquiry anyone can challenge the answers, which will be of no avail, merely generating more questions. But the truth is that all their questions are nothing. They are mere vanity and striving after the wind. It is best to avoid such works completely. Sichot Haran #40

V

Fear and awe vs. philosophy and science



The only way to start serving God is through fear of His retribution for wrongdoing. Without this fear it is impossible even to take the first step. Very few people are able to devote themselves wholly to God out of love alone. One can also serve God through a sense of awe at His supreme greatness and power. This is a higher level of fear, but it is also very hard to attain. For most people the pathway to serving God starts with simple fear of His retribution. The study of philosophy can never bring a person to God. On the contrary, it fills his mind with doubts and questions that simply reinforce his innate evil impulse. Man is naturally drawn after worldly temptations. Only through fear of punishment can he control his material desires and walk in the ways of God. Philosophy raises doubts and questions, strengthening man's natural inclination to turn away from God. This is why a person can never become Godly through the study of philosophy. Certain philosophical works may contain some good thoughts but they provide no benefit. The usual end result is great confusion, with the person losing



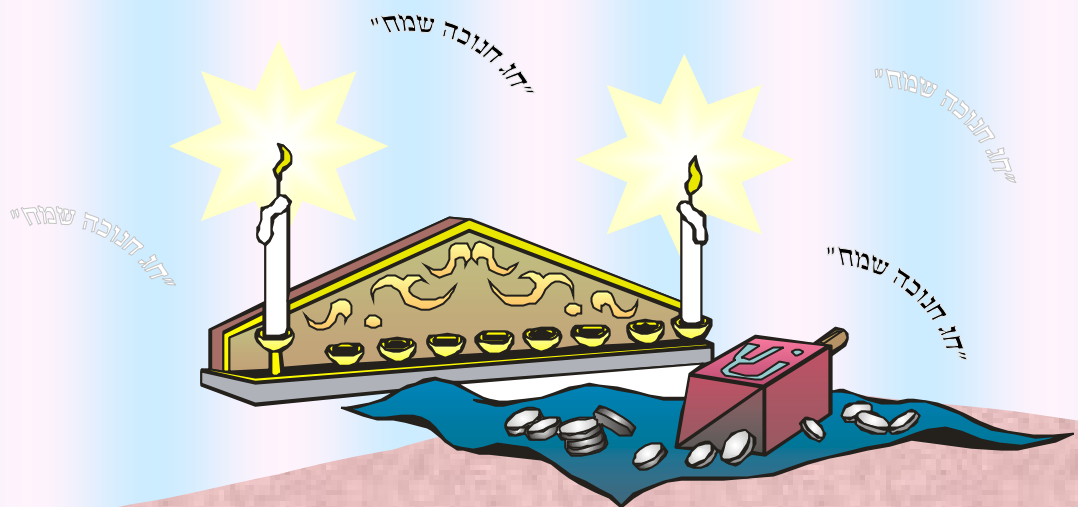
much more than he gains. We are fortunate that Moses our Teacher showed us the right way. The Torah begins without any philosophical proof: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) . We must believe in God through faith alone without demanding philosophical proof. Fear of retribution is the main gateway to true devotion. All new ideas and inventions come from above All scientific discoveries and inventions come from above. Without inspiration from above, they could never be discovered. When the time comes for an idea to be revealed to the world, the necessary inspiration is granted from above to some thinker or scientist. A thought enters his mind and is thus revealed. Many people may previously have sought this idea but it eluded them. Only when the time comes for the idea to be revealed does the inspiration come to the discoverer. The same is true when a person sees new ideas and interpretations in his Torah studies. They would never have occurred to him if the ideas were not granted from above. The place from which a person's inspiration derives depends upon that person. One who pursues secular wisdom draws his inspiration not from the holy side but rather from the unholy "other side". All wisdom comes from on high, each concept emanating from its proper place. Each idea has its own place. There are thousands and thousands of different levels. All discoveries, sacred or profane, have a root above, each in its own particular place. Sichot Haran #5

VI

Kabalah begins where philosophy and science end

The true wisdom of the Kabalah begins where philosophy and science end. Philosophers and scientists can speculate only within the limits of the physical world. Their knowledge may reach as far as the stars and galaxies, but beyond that they know absolutely nothing. Even their theories about the physical world end in great confusion, as they themselves admit. The wisdom of the Kabalah begins where their wisdom ends - beyond the

physical world. The Kabbalah includes the entire physical world as part of the World of Action (Asiyah), the lowest world. But the Kabbalah then goes beyond the World of Action to the Worlds of Formation (Yetzirah), Creation (Beriyah) and Emanation (Atzilut). Even the World of Action has its own interior spiritual level, of which the scientists and philosophers have no knowledge at all. The Kabbalah is concerned with the spiritual root of the World of Action and beyond. Thus the Kabbalah begins where scientific knowledge ends. The philosophers and scientists think that all knowledge ends with the stars, but the entire system of the Kabbalah deals with worlds and levels that are beyond the stars. Yet even one who gains some understanding of the Kabbalah, the true wisdom, must recognize that in the transcendental worlds there are likewise levels beyond levels, high above high, without end or limit, for "His greatness is unfathomable" (Psalms 145:3) . Sichot Haran #225



Shabbat Shalom

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