

May it be My Custom

An Exploration into the Prayers of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Todd Zinn

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Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

School of Rabbinic Studies

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Adviser: Rabbi Richard Levy

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Introduction

A number of years I was handed a piece of paper with a prayer written on it. It was titled Rebbe Nachman's Prayer, without any acknowledgement of where it originated from or who translated it. It read,

Master of the Universe

Grant me the ability to be alone,

May it be my custom to go outdoors each day,

Among the trees and the grass, among all living things

And there may I be alone, and enter into prayer to talk with the one whom I belong.

May I express there everything in my heart,

And may all the foliage of the field – all grasses trees and plants –

Awake at my coming, to send the powers of their life into the words of my prayers

So that my prayer and speech are made whole

Through the life and spirit of all growing things,

Which are made one by their transcendent Source.

May I then pour out the words of my heart

Before your presence

I found great meaning in these words. I connected to them on a personal spiritual level. I used them in my prayers and when I led others in prayer. Soon after I became aware of these words, I started to see them in a number of different

spaces and books; including in Mishkan T'fillah For the House of Mourning. I realized that this particular prayer had entered into a variety of Jewish spaces, of all denominations. I slowly became curious about the origin of these words. Where were they from? What did the Hebrew text of them look like? Are they actually Nachman's words or did someone else write them and attribute them to him?

I thought these were simple straightforward questions that could be answered with a quick internet search. I was wrong. I searched on the internet, through books and asked professors, and ended up with more questions than I had started with. While I did not have an answer to my primary question, what is the origin of this text, I did have a broader question, if this comes from and has made its way into liberal Jewish spaces, what other texts are there from Nachman that liberal Jews might also find meaningful?

This is the question that guided my early research. Finding other teachings that could have the same level of impact as the one known as Nachman's Prayer. Trying to translate them into language that is accessible and usable in a variety of contexts. That was the goal of this project.

I do not pretend that this project is exhaustive; it only addresses a tiny portion of Nachman's works. It does however, take those texts and translate them into words that are understandable for modern Jews and usable in a variety of teaching and prayer spaces.

I eventually did find the source of the prayer that inspired this project. The prayer itself was written by Natan Sternhartz in Likkutei T'fillot, and was inspired by

Likkutei Moharan 2:11. The original text from Likkutei Moharan is included as part of this project.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav was born into a rabbinic family. His maternal grandfather was the Ba'al Shem Tov and his paternal grandfather was Nachman of Horodenka, one of the Ba'al Shem Tov's disciples. Born with this lineage, great things were expected of him. Trying to live up to those expectations was something he wrestled and struggled with all the days of his life.

Born in 1772, Nachman's early life was dominated by stories of a troubled young man. He was obsessive about ascetic practice, withdrawing from those around him, focusing on pain and suffering and being strict in his observance of tradition. He would do everything in his power not to enjoy his food, attempting to swallow it without chewing, so that he did not have to taste it. He would read the Book of Psalms, focusing only on those verses that evoked pain and suffering, not on the sections about joy and happiness. (Green, 27-28) This focus on pain would become a major theme of his life. Two of the other major themes are contemplative and meditative practices and an emphasis on nature. These three themes appeared early in his biography and can be seen throughout the course of his life and writings.

These three themes, suffering, meditation and nature are ones that will be explored in greater depths because they had direct impact on the writings that will be translated and discussed. Other significant themes of his life included his lack of comfort with human sexuality, a connection to his past and the land of Israel, concerns about the anti-intellectual strains of Hassidut and messianism. While

these are interesting to explore, they do not connect directly with the writings to be looked at, so they will not be explored in any depth.

In order to understand Nachman's life and teachings, the Hassidic world he was born into must first be put into context. Hasidic communities began to take shape in Eastern Europe at the end of the 17th Century, and they rose to prominence with the rise of the Ba'al Shem Tov. Nachman's grandfather was the most significant figure in the Hasidic community. He was the figure that most contributed to the rise and development of the Hasidic communities. It was this world that Nachman was born into.

"The term Hasidim is found in the Bible and is derived from the frequently occurring hesed, generally translated into English as 'lovingkindness', 'mercy', 'love', 'loyalty', even 'grace' or 'charm'." (Jacobs, 1) It is this term that was chosen to describe the new movement and community. A movement characterized by a loving relationship with God and whose goal was to find attachment to God. At the same time, Jews who maintained the tradition, "The upholders of the status quo were very soon referred to as Mitnagedim ('opponents'), implying that they, and not the Hasidim, were obliged to be on the defensive." (Jacobs, 1)

"Hasidism sought, by means of a daring simplification of the long and often abstruse Kabbalistic tradition, to place the goals of contemplative religion within the reach of every Jew." (Green, 23) Up to this point the Kabbalistic traditions of Safed were too difficult for most Jews to understand or practice. Hasidic leaders wanted to

make this Judaism more normative, to allow for the common people to be able to practice this kind of Judaism.

In order to make this change a reality, the Hasidic leaders changed the emphasis of Jewish practice. Traditional Judaism had always used the act of study as the central act of Jewish expression. It was the connection to the past, to the lineage of tradition, to the Rabbis and leaders who came before that was the most important. Hasidic Judaism however, reoriented it to emphasize a personal connection to God above all else "...a sense of the presence of God in all places and in every moment, a belief that all of human life is a way to His service, and an emphasis on enthusiastic prayer (as opposed to study) as the central act of the religious life." (Green, 23) By changing this emphasis, they changed the focus of religious life and the way in which that focus is expressed.

Study and the performance of Mitzvot continued to be incredibly important and necessary ways to express one's faith and engage with Judaism. However, prayer became the most significant of these ways. While emphasizing prayer, the way in which one prays also became of utmost importance. A singular focus and intention was required to engage in this kind of prayer. This focus was on finding God and attaching oneself to God, *devekut*. It was on removing the self from prayer and focusing entirely on the divine. "The longing for the worship of God, and to comprehension of His divinity, is through prayer offered with self-sacrifice and burning enthusiasm." (Jacobs, 20)

In addition to the traditional liturgy, a new emphasis was placed on personal contemplative prayer. Often prayed in the vernacular, these served as an opportunity to pour out one's soul and petition God. "Hasidic prayer belongs to the group of mystical exercises of a most rigorous nature through which the self is transcended." (Jacobs, 35) It is this kind of prayer that Nachman focuses on, personal contemplative and petitionary prayer, prayer as the vehicle through which one achieves attachment to God.

This was the goal of the writings that will be looked at in detail, Nachman's understanding of Hasidic prayer. Nachman was born into this world, born just 12 years after the death of his influential grandfather. While his life was short (he was only 38 when he died) his life and his work were filled with influence. They were also filled with personal struggle and challenge.

Nachman's life was a life of incredibly high highs and incredibly low lows; his personal suffering is seen throughout his works and experiences. His ecstasy also appears, but in short glimpses, specific periods of time, where joy and happiness take over and obscure the darkness of his life. The joy is often how Bratslav Hasidism is stereotyped, as modern Bratslavers are known for their clapping and dancing. While these come directly from Nachman's teachings, he used them as a way to do battle with the negativity and suffering, to push them out and overwhelm them. "Nachman's dancing...is thus much more serious than might be assumed at first glance...it is a theurgic act, aimed at doing battle with the forces of evil." (Green, 141)

Stories of Nachman's suffering appeared early in his life, "The childhood depicted...is that of a pained young ascetic, one who at an early age knew the difficulties of the religious life and struggled with all his strength to overcome them." (Green, 27) These stories start at an incredibly young age, unlike his contemporary Hassidic Rabbis, who are often depicted in childhood as either aloof children communing with God or incredibly studious and wise beyond their years. Nachman is seen as a suffering soul from his earliest days.

It is this suffering that turned Nachman into the teacher and leader, because of his ability to identify with the sufferings of others. Nachman was very open about his own struggles, both with his followers and in his later works. He was able to lead them precisely because he had experienced the same sorts of struggles. "Nachman functions so well as a zaddiq not because he has always remained above the reaches of sin, but rather precisely because he himself has undergone all the conflicts and torments that even the most beleaguered of his followers could ever imagine – and has emerged triumphant." (Green, 15)

Unlike earlier and contemporary Hassidic leaders, Nachman was open about his struggles. He was not only seen as a righteous ideal to strive to, but also as a human being who struggled and battled the same sort of challenges and demons as everyone else. It was this struggle that led Nachman to begin composing his own prayers. "His energies were all centered around a life of intense and pain-filled prayer. The young Nahman was not satisfied with the prescribed prayers of the

liturgy; he would compose his own prayers, in the Yiddish that he spoke, and through them he would plead to God to draw him near to His service.” (Green, 27)

The experience of composing his own prayers is one of the other major themes we see in Nachman’s work. He often spoke of the importance of praying from your heart, of pouring out your soul before God. “The true core of religion is that struggle for faith which goes on within the heart of the individual believer, that the essence of prayer is hitbodedut, or lone outpouring of the soul before God...” (Green, 3) Nachman saw hitbodedut, often translated as meditation, as an opportunity to be alone and engage with God on a more personal level than one might be able to when engaged in formal prayer.

Hitbodedut is an opportunity to become closer to God, to develop a deep and personal relationship with the divine. It was a nearness to God, devekut, an attachment that Nachman saw as the goal of prayer. The more personal, the more open, the more vulnerable a person was during their prayer the closer they could become to God. “This lone act of hitbodedut was depicted as the single most important activity of both zaddiq and Hasid. There is simply no other way to be close to God, Nahman taught, and nearness to God was the single ultimate goal that a Bratslav Hasid was to allow himself.” (Green, 145)

Someone who was practiced in hitbodedut could use it in all different settings. Nachman spoke of his own ability to remove himself from those around him. When he was seated in the middle of the room surrounded by others, he could practice hitbodedut and remove himself from the space and commune with God. (Green, 32)

He also practiced hitbodedut by removing himself from others, secluding himself in a closed room to remove distractions. Nachman often used this as an opportunity to go out into the world, to feel closer to God by entering nature.

Nature is another major theme of his work. Nachman believed we could see God in every aspect of the natural world, but we could only do this by entering into it. "The man of God seeks out the individual and distinct spark of divinity in each corner of the natural world, sees each blade of grass as the wondrous and unique creation of God." (Green 159) In order to understand the power of the tree or grass, you needed to work to be a part of it.

Nachman did this himself, by leaving the comfort of his own home to go explore alone. From the earliest days of his life, stories are told of him wandering off into the forest to be at one with God. "On some days he would take a horse from his father-in-law's yard and ride to the edge of the forest, leaving the horse tied to a tree while he wandered through the woods alone, lost in thought. At other times he would take a small boat out into the nearby river, one of the tributaries of the Dnieper, to be alone with God in the midst of the water." (Green, 34)

When Nachman writes of the ideal prayer community, in his story, The Master of Prayer, he describes a group of people who live disconnected from the modern world around them. They spend their time in prayer and are provided for by the world around them. "He particularly tried to persuade his disciples to follow his example and go out to pray in the fields and forests. Indeed, Nahman's ideal of a Hasidic community, with which he opens his tale, The Master of Prayer, depicts a

ragged band of disciples living in the woods and sustained by the fruits of nature.”

(Green, 152) These kinds of disconnects and immersion is seen throughout his work. He talks of the power of praying alone and the importance of doing so in the woods, fields and mountaintop.

Nachman’s life was one full of struggle and suffering. Those themes come across in his writing, especially when he speaks of prayer. Prayer was a way to connect with God, to attach oneself to the divine. Working towards this attachment gave Nachman a sense of purpose and comfort. We see this theme; along with those of meditation and nature pervade his work.

Likkutei Moharan

Nachman like many of his contemporaries never wrote anything. He never recorded any of his own teachings or stories. Instead, these Rabbis often had a devoted follower who served as a secretary, recording their teachings and preserving them. For Nachman, this was Natan Sternhartz, also known as Natan of Nemirov. While Nachman never wrote, Natan was a prolific writer. He recorded Nachman's teachings and he also wrote his own material.

Likkutei Moharan is a record of the sermons of Rebbe Nachman. Most of the book is made up of teaching recorded verbatim. Nachman would deliver a teaching on Shabbat afternoons. Natan would memorize the teaching and record it after Shabbat had ended. He would then show it to Nachman and they would edit it together. Towards the end of the Likkutei Moharan, the teachings are recorded in a less regimented fashion. Some of those teachings are ones Natan heard, but did not record immediately. Others are ones he heard second hand, from other followers of Nachman.

After Nachman's death in 1810, Natan became the informal leader of the Breslover Hassidic sect. Nachman had not designated a successor on purpose, but Natan's position made him a natural fit. For the rest of his life Natan wrote prolifically, about Nachman, his teachings and his life. One of the most interesting of these works in Likkutei T'fillot. In which Natan takes each of the Likkutim from Likkutei Moharan and turns them into words of prayer. This form is something that is echoed in the work of this project.

Note on Translations

Likkutei Moharan has been translated before and will be translated again. The vast majority of these translations have been done by modern day Breslover Hasidim. When they make these translations they have a very specific frame through which they see them and a goal in mind. This frame and goal often make it difficult for people from different backgrounds to access and find meaning in these translations. The goal of these translations is to make the work of Nachman accessible to individuals who are approaching them from a variety of backgrounds and knowledge levels.

In doing so, thought has been put into the way in which the translations have been done. Significantly, the masculine language remains intact. The Likkutim are often addressed to the third person masculine singular, he, him, his. Initially, I was going to translate them into the third person plural, they, them, their, however, this felt too impersonal. Consideration was put into using the second person singular or using both the third personal masculine and feminine. Both of these options caused challenges both linguistically and with the flow of the translations. For that reason, they remain true to their original, third person masculine singular. While it remains masculine, we should note that the intention is to be inclusive.

Note on Structure

This bulk of this project is the translations, commentaries and kavvanot which begin below. There are ten likkutim, each of which includes the original hebrew, an english translation, a commentary and one or two kavvanot. The translations are intended to be usable and teachable. The commentaries to illuminate the theological, historical or textual connections that Nachman makes, and to bring additional depth to the english translation. The kavvanot to show how the translation and commentary might be used to set intention in a prayer service, to introduce a piece of liturgy or to weave into a dvar torah. The hope is that this project will not be an esoteric academic endeavour, but a usable, adaptable, and teachable tool.

לשון רבנו זכרוננו לברכה
 ואלה המשפטים אשר תשים לפניהם: (שמות כא)
 אמרו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה (קידושין לה. ב"ק טו.): הןשוו אשה לאיש. ואיתא
 במכילתא: יכול יהיו התלמידים לומדין ואינם מבינים – תלמוד לומר: אשר תשים
 לפניהם, ערכם לפניהם כשלחן ערוך

דע, כי עקר הגלות אינו אלא בשביל חסרון אמונה, כמו שפכתוב (שה"ש ד): תבואי
 תשורי מראש אמונה; ואמונה הוא בחינת תפלה, כמו שפכתוב (שמות יז): ויהי ידיו
 אמונה, ותרגומו: פרישן בצלו

וזה בחינת נסים למעלה מהטבע, כי התפלה למעלה מטבע, כי הטבע מחייב כן,
 והתפלה משנה הטבע, וזה דבר נס, ולזה צריך אמונה, שיאמין שיש מחדש ובדו
 לחדש דבר פרצונו

ועקר אמונה, בחינת תפלה, בחינת נסים, אינו אלא בארץ-ישראל, כמו שפכתוב
 (תהלים לז): שכן ארץ ורעה אמונה; ושם עקר עליות התפלות, כמו שפכתוב
 (בראשית כח): וזה שער השמים

ובשביל זה כשפגם אברהם במה אדע (שם טו), ובזה פגם בירשת ארץ, שהיא בחינת
 אמונה, בחינת תפלה, הנה גלות מצרים. ודוקא יעקב ובניו ירדו מצרים, כי הם
 בחינת שנים-עשר גססאות התפלה, והוריד אותם בגלות

ומצרים הוא הפך הנסים, כמו שפכתוב (שמות יד): ומצרים נסים לקראתו – שאין
 שם מקום הנסים, ואין שם מקום התפלה, כמו שפכתוב (שם ט): והנה כצאתי את
 העיר אפרש את כפי. וכל הגליות מכנים בשם מצרים, על שם שהם מצרים
 לישראל. וכשפוגמין באמונה, בתפלה, בארץ-ישראל, הוא יורד לגלות

וזה שאמרו חכמינו זכרונם לברכה (סנהדרין צז.): אין משיח בן-דוד בא אלא עד
 שתכלה פרוטה מן הכיס; הינו שיכלו האפיקורסים שאין להם אמונה בנסים, ומכסים

כָּל הַנְּסִים בְּדֶרֶךְ הַטֶּבַע, כִּי עָקַר הַנְּסִים בְּאַרְצֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי אֶרֶץ־יִשְׂרָאֵל שׁוֹתָה תַּחֲלָה
(תענית י.), וּשְׁתִּיתָה מִהַתְּהוֹמוֹת, שֶׁהֵם לְשׁוֹן: וַיִּתְּהֵם כָּל הָעִיר (רות א), שֶׁעַל דָּבָר נָסִי
תִּמְהִין הָעוֹלָם

וְזֶה (תהלים מב): תְּהוֹם אֶל תְּהוֹם קוֹרֵא; כִּי יֵשׁ נֶסִין עֲלָאִין, שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת תְּהוֹם
עֲלָאָה, וַיֵּשׁ נָסִים תַּתְּאִין, שֶׁהֵם בְּחִינַת תְּהוֹמָא תַּתְּאָה

וּמִלֶּאךְ שְׁפָלוֹל מִכָּל הַנְּסִים, מִשְׁנֵי הַתְּהוֹמוֹת, דְּמִיָּא לְעִגְלָא (תענית כה:), שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת
עֲגוּלִים, בְּחִינַת אֲמוּנָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (תהלים פט): וַאֲמוּנַתְךָ סְבִיבוֹתֶיךָ; וּפְרִיטָא
שְׁפוֹתָהּ, שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינַת תַּפְלָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (שם נא): אֲדֹנִי שְׁפָתַי תִּפְתָּח, וְהוּא כָּלְלוֹת
הַנְּסִים

וְזֶה פְּרוּשׁ: עַד שֶׁתִּכְלֶה פְּרוּטָה מִן הַפִּיס – כִּי יֵשׁ בְּגִי־אָדָם הַמְּכַסִּים כָּלְלִיּוֹת הַנְּסִים,
הַכְּלוּלִים בַּמִּלֶּאךְ דְּפְרִיטָא שְׁפוֹתָהּ, מְכַסִּים בְּדֶרֶךְ הַטֶּבַע; וּכְשֶׁתִּכְלֶה זֹאת וְתִתְרַבֶּה
אֲמוּנָה בְּעוֹלָם – אַז יָבוֹא מְשִׁיחַ, כִּי עָקַר הַגְּאֻלָּה תִּלּוּי בָּזָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב: תָּבוֹאִי
תְּשׁוּרֵי מִרְאשׁ אֲמָנָה

Translation:

“These are the laws which I put before you” (Exodus 21:1)

Our Sages of blessed memory said, “woman is equal to man.” (Kiddushin 35a,

Baba Kamma 15)

It is taught in the Mekilta “Is it possible for the students to study but not
understand?” The Torah says, “I put before you”, arranged before them like a set
table.

Know, the essence of exile is just because of a lack of Faith, as it is written, "Come, look at the head of faith" (Song of Songs 4:8) Faith is an aspect of prayer, as it is written, "his hands were faithful" (Exodus 17:12) Which is translated as, spread out in prayer

This is an aspect of miracles from above in nature, because prayer is above nature, because nature obligates prayer and prayer changes nature, and this is a miracle, and this needs faith from one, who believes this is renewable, and it is in his hands to renew it at his will.

The essence of faith, the aspect of prayer, the aspect of miracles, is only in the land of Israel, as it is written, "Dwell in the land and cultivate faith" (Psalms 37:3) There the essence is going up in prayer, as it is written, "This is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:17)

Because of this, Abraham said damagingly, "How shall I know" (Genesis 15:8)

This is damage to the inheritance of the land, which is an aspect of faith, an aspect of prayer, the exile in Egypt. Of course, Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt, because they correspond to the 12 kinds of prayer. He brought them down into exile.

Egypt is the opposite of miracles, as it is written, “And the Egyptians fled as it approached” (Exodus 14:27) That is not a place of miracles, and it is not a place of prayer, as it is written, “As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands.” (Exodus 9:29)

All exiles are known as Egypt, because they caused pain to the Israelites. When they cause damage to faith, to prayer, to the land of Israel, they go down to exile.

This is what Our Sages of blessed memory said, “The Messiah ben David will only come when the last money is gone from the pocket, and the apostates disappear, for they do not have faith in miracles and cover up all the miracles with nature.

The essence of miracles in the land of Israel, because the land of Israel drinks first, drinks from the depths, this is the words, “The city was amazed” (Ruth 1:19) because through the aspect of miracles is the world amazed. (Taanit 10)

“Deep calls to the deep” (Psalms 42:8) Because, there are upper miracles which are aspect of the depths above, and there are lower miracles, which are aspects of the depths below.

And the angel which comprises all the miracles, from both depths, resembles the ox, (Taanit 25) which is an aspect of a circle, an aspect of faith, as it is written, “Your faith surrounds you” (Psalms 89:9) And its lips are open, this is the aspect of

prayer, as it is written, “Adonai open my lips” (Psalms 51:17) this is the sum of all the miracles.

This is the meaning of “the last money is gone from the pockets” – because there are people who hide all the miracles. Including the angels whose lips are open, conceal by explaining nature. When this is gone, there will be much faith in the world – thus the messiah will come because the essence of redemption comes from faith, as it is written “come, look from the top of faith” (Song of Songs 4:8)

Commentary:

Emunah is often translated as faith or faithfulness. Faith is an innate conviction, one that transcends reason and does not need proof. The root, *aleph mem nun*, is defined as faith or trust. Faith requires trust, belief in something outside of oneself; trust in something bigger than the self. That is why Nachman points to Abraham’s question, “How shall I know?” as an example of the trials of faith and a moment without faith.

God has promised Abraham descendants and inheritances, but in that moment without any children of his own, Abraham questions God’s promise and looks for proof. In moments of weakness even the most faithful individuals sometimes struggle. Nachman also mentions another time when an upstanding and faithful person struggled with his faith.

In Exodus 17, Moses stood on top of a hill and watched as Joshua led the Israelites in battle against Amalek. During the battle when Moses raised his hands, the Israelites were successful, but when he lowered them they began to lose. Nachman understands the raising and the lowering of his hands not to be about the physical heaviness but instead to be an emotional heaviness. Moses raised his hands not to be only because of the physical help of those around him, but also because of a resurgence of faith.

Moses stood at the top of a hill, watching the Israelites prevail in battle, but his faith waned. It was challenged in the moment and the Israelites began to lose. Yet, through his own trust he regained his faith in their ability to prevail, and raised his hands in faithful prayer.

One of the other interesting points Nachman makes in this section is his caution against explaining away miracles, by saying they are just nature taking its course. Nachman says this is the way apostates react. There are two important considerations Nachman suggests here.

First, to remember that prayer has power over nature. This is something discussed at length in Likutei Moharan 2:11, the relationship between prayer and the natural world. Secondly, the importance of faith, explaining away miracles is an example of a lack of faith. There are places where it is difficult to pray or remain faithful, but explaining away the beauty and miracles of the world only makes that more difficult.

Kavvanah:

Moses raised his arms in faith.

Moses watched as Joshua's army battled Amalek, and he raised his arms in faith.

Even when they tired. Even when they got too heavy to hold on his own. He continued to raise his arms in faith and Joshua prevailed.

How do we express our faith? Do we hold our arms outstretched? Do we lift our heads up high?

How do maintain our faith, even when our arms are heavy? When we are tired and prepared to give up, how do we hold on a little bit longer?

Where does this power come from?

Nachman teaches, that it is through prayer that faith is maintained, for "This is the gate of heaven." (Genesis 28:17)

Prayer maintain faith, and faith strengthened prayer.

וְלַעֲכוּ"ם אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לָהֶם לֵידַע גְּדֻלָּתוֹ שֶׁל הַקְדוּשׁ-בְּרוּךְ-הוּא כִּי אִם עַל-יְדֵי בְּחִינַת יַעֲקֹב, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָּתוּב (ישעיהו ב'): בֵּית יַעֲקֹב לָכוּ וְנִלְכָּה בְּאוֹר ה', כִּי הוּא גִלָּה אֱלֻקוֹתוֹ שֶׁל הַקְדוּשׁ-בְּרוּךְ-הוּא יוֹתֵר מִשָּׁאֵר הָאֲבוֹת,

כִּי אַבְרָהָם קָרָא הֵר, וַיִּצְחָק קָרָא שְׂדֵה (פסחים פח.), וְשְׂדֵה הוּא יוֹתֵר מִשָּׁג וְנִצְרָךְ לְהַעֲוִלֵם מִהֵר. וַיַּעֲקֹב קָרָא בֵּית, וְשֵׁהוּא מְקוֹם יָשׁוּב לְבְנֵי-אָדָם יוֹתֵר מִשְׂדֵּה, הֵינּוּ שִׁיעֲקֹב קָרָא אֶת מְקוֹם הַבֵּית-הַמְּקֻדָּשׁ, וְשֵׁהוּא מְקוֹם הַתְּפִלָּה, בֵּית, וְשֵׁהוּא מְקוֹם יָשׁוּב לְבְנֵי-אָדָם,

כִּי הַעֲלָה אֶת הַתְּפִלָּה מִהֵר וְשְׂדֵה לְבְּחִינַת בֵּית, שִׁישׁ בּוֹ תְּפִיסָה לְבְנֵי-אָדָם יוֹתֵר מִהֵר וְשְׂדֵה, כִּי בְּבְחִינַת בֵּית יֵשׁ גַּם לַעֲכוּ"ם הַשָּׂגָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפָּתוּב (ישעיהו נו'): כִּי בֵּיתִי בֵּית תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל הָעַמִּים, וְכִשְׁהוּא בְּבְחִינַת בֵּית, כְּדִין אֶת־יִקְרָא שָׁמָּה עֲלָאָה כַּנ"ל:

זֶה פֶּרוּשׁ (תהלים מח): גְּדוֹל ה' וּמְהֻלָּל מְאֹד, כְּלוּמַר, אֵימָתִי גְדוֹל ה', כִּשְׁהוּא מְהֻלָּל מְאֹד – מִסְטֵרָא דְמוֹתָא, וְשֵׁהוּא בְּחִינַת עֲכוּ"ם (כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנוֹם לְבִרְכָּהּ (ב"ר פ' ט) עַל פֶּסוּק (בראשית א): וַהֲנִה טוֹב מְאֹד, מְאֹד – זֶה מִלֶּאךְ הַמּוֹת), כִּשְׁהוּא מְהֻלָּל מֵהֶם, אֲזִי הוּא גְדוֹל, כִּי הוּא עֶקֶר גְּדֻלָּתוֹ;

וְאֵימָתִי הוּא מְהֻלָּל מֵהֶם, בְּעִיר אֱלֻקֵּינוּ הֵר קִדְשׁוֹ, דְּהֵינּוּ כִּשְׁבְּחִינַת הֵר נַעֲשֶׂה עִיר אֱלֻקֵּינוּ, וְשֵׁהוּא יָשׁוּב בְּנֵי-אָדָם, בְּחִינַת בֵּית, וְשֵׁהוּא מִשָּׁג יוֹתֵר מִהֵר וְשְׂדֵה, דְּהֵינּוּ כִּשְׁמַעְלִין אֶת בְּחִינַת הַתְּפִלָּה מִבְּחִינַת הֵר לְבְּחִינַת עִיר וּבֵית, שָׁאֲז יֵשׁ גַּם לַעֲכוּ"ם הַשָּׂגָה כַּנ"ל, אֲזִי דִיקָא גְדוֹל ה', כִּי זֶה עֶקֶר גְּדֻלָּתוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ, כִּשְׁגַם הַרְחֻקִּים יוֹדְעִים מִמֶּנּוּ יִתְבָּרַךְ כַּנ"ל:

Translation:

It is impossible for idolaters to know the greatness of God, because of Jacob, as it

is written, "The house of Jacob, come let us go into the light of God" (Isaiah 2:5)
He reveals the divinity of God is greater than the remainder of the Patriarchs.

Abraham called it a mountain and Isaac called it a field. A field is greater concept than a mountain. And Jacob called it a house, which is a better dwelling place for man than a field. Thus, Jacob called the place Beit Mikdash, this is a house for prayer, that it is a place for man to dwell.

Prayer is elevated from a mountain and field to a house, that has within it an understanding of man greater than a mountain or a field. Because a house also has an understanding for idolaters, as it is written, "For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." (Isaiah 56:7) This is a house, because with this God's exalted name grew greater.

This is the explanation, (Psalms 48:2) "God is great and greatly praised" that is, when is God great? When God is greatly praised by idolaters and death (as our rabbis said, from the verse "it was very good" (Genesis 1:31) this is the angel of death) when they praise God, then he is great, because this is the essence of greatness.

When is it that they praise God? In the city of our God on the mountain of holiness. It will be on the mountain that will be the city of our God, that will dwell

with man, a house, that will concentrate more than a mountain or field. Behold, it will raise up an aspect of prayer from an aspect of the mountain, an aspect of the city or the house. “God is great” because this is the essence of the blessed greatness, that is also the distance of knowledge of knowing God.

Commentary:

This translated section is a small portion from a longer sermon. Because only a small section is translated here, it loses some of its larger context. The section uses the central metaphor of the mountains, field and house. Each of these is attached to one of the patriarchs, the mountain to Abraham, the field to Isaac and the house to Jacob. Abraham because it was on a mountain that he attempted to sacrifice his son Isaac, Isaac a field because it was in a field that he was meditating when he first saw his wife Rebecca, and Jacob a house because of the phrase “house of Jacob”. It was in each of these places that the patriarchs encountered God.

Nachman assigns each of these greater significance and importance in regard to being places of prayer. A house offers something neither a mountain nor field can offer. It offers the stability of walls and focus. The distractions within a house are different from those outside of a house. Indoor spaces also allow for a different degree of closeness to people and community that are difficult to attain in a limitless space of the outdoors.

I do not believe Nachman is trying to discourage individuals from engaging in prayer in the outdoors. In other spaces this is something he specifically encourages. Instead, Nachman is making the argument that praying indoors also has great power and importance. That one should not be discounted for the other; instead they both are places of connection, in different ways.

The proof text that Nachman uses for the house of Jacob reads, “house of Jacob, come let us go into the light of God” (Isaiah 2:5). House of Jacob is a very common phrase throughout the bible, so the use of this specific phrase carries with it some significance. The verse encourages us to follow the light of God. This is important because it stands in contrast to those who follow other lights. Idolatry at the time often included a worship of astrological figures, the sun, moon and stars. So, Nachman encourages us to follow only the light of God, not these other lights in the world.

One of the important differences between the first two spaces Nachman mentions, mountains and fields and the final space, houses, is the presence of a roof. With a roof, you can no longer see the outside world; you can no longer see the sun, moon and stars. This makes it difficult to worship them, or for an individual's prayer to be confused with idol worship. So, God's house can be a prayer for all people, as long as they do not engage in idolatry.

Kavvanah:

Abraham prayed on a mountain

A mountain of sacrifice

A mountain of struggle and challenge

Isaac prayed in a field

A field of love

A field of peace, calm and quiet

Jacob prayed in a house

A Beit Yaakov, a house of Jacob

A Beit Mikdash, a house of prayer

We pray on mountains

We pray in fields

We pray in houses

For Isaiah spoke, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"

(זימם רשע לצדיק וחרק עליו שניו. יי' ישחק לו כי ראה כי יבא יומו וכו') (תהלים לז)

הענין הוא כך. דקשה, מאין יבוא מחשבה זרה לצדיק, שרוצה להתפלל בדבקות גדול, הלא אמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה (יומא לח:): הבא לטהר מסייעין אותו.

אלא הענין הוא כך, כי מעת השבירה נפלו הניצוצות מכל העולמות, ועל-ידי תפלות הצדיקים עולין מעט מעט, מדרגה אחר מדרגה

וכשצדיק עומד להתפלל, ומדבק את עצמו למדה שהוא בה עתה, נופל לו מחשבה זרה מעין אותה מדה. וכשבא למדרגה יותר גדולה, נופל לו המחשבה זרה מעין המדה הזאת שהוא בה עתה. והצדיק צריך לידע מאיזה מדה ומאיזה עולם היא זאת המחשבה זרה, וצריך לידע במה להעלותה לאותו עולם ולאותו המדה שהוא עתה בה

אך לפעמים הצדיק רוצה להעלותה ואינו יכול. הטעם הוא, כי נופל לו מחשבה זרה ממדרגה עליונה, שלא בא עדין למדרגה זו, לכן אי אפשר לו להעלותה, כי יש לו עדין מדרגה תחתונה מזו, הינו מדרגה שהוא בה עתה

אך קשה, למה באה לו מחשבה זרה קדם זמנה

דע, כי יש קבלה בידי, כי פשיש מחלקת על איזה צדיק, נופל מחשבה זרה מעין אותה מחלקת לצדיק אחר. ומחמת שרוצה להעלותה, אף-על-פי שאינו מעלה אותה, משביר בכח הרצון כל בעלי המחלקת

וזה פירוש הפסוק: זימם רשע – הינו מחשבה זרה. לצדיק, וחרק עליו שניו – הינו שרוצה להעלותה. וה' ישחק לו, כי ראה כי יבא יומו – הינו שעדין לא בא למדרגת המחשבה זרה זו. אך מאין יבוא לו המחשבה זרה זו, ומפרש, חרב פתחו רשעים, ופרש רש"י: חרב – לשון מלחמה, הינו שנתעורר מחלקת על איזה צדיק. חרבם – הינו המחשבה זרה של אותה המחלקת. תבוא בלבם – הינו בלב צדיק זה. ועל-ידי שרוצה להעלותה, בכח הרצון הזה – וקשיתםם תשברנה; כלומר, המחלקת הנ"ל

Translation:

“The wicked plots against the righteous, and bites him with his teeth. God laughs at him because God sees his day will come.” (Psalms 37:12 – 13)

This is the matter; it is a difficult subject, from where do strange thoughts come to the righteous who wants to pray with a lot of attachment? Our teachers, may their memories be for a blessing, said: They come to help them purify themselves.

(Yoma 38b)

This is the matter, at the time of the broken vessels, sparks fell into the whole world, and by way of the prayers of the righteous, little by little they go back up, step after step. A Tzaddik stands to pray and attaches himself to an attribute, a value, and strange thoughts come to him from that same attribute. When he comes to a bigger step, the strange thoughts fall from that new attribute. The Tzaddik needs to know from which attribute and from which world the strange thoughts are from, and needs to know how they go up into that world or into the attribute they come from.

There are times when the righteous wants to go up a step, but cannot. This time, because he fell back because of the strange thoughts from the upper step, that he has not yet reached, therefore it is impossible for him to go up, because he is always at the step underneath it, which is the step that he is at now.

This is hard, why do strange thoughts come to you before their time?

Understand, I have received a tradition, but there is a disagreement among the tzaddikim, these strange thoughts fell because of this disagreement and his desire to go up to a higher step, despite this he cannot go up, his desire and strength must be enough to shatter the masters of disagreements.

This is the interpretation of the verse: Plots of the wicked – these are the scattered thoughts. The righteous that bite their teeth – these are the desire to go up. God laughs at him because God sees his day will come. – He still cannot come to the higher steps because of the scattered thoughts. Where do these strange thoughts come from?

It is interpreted, “The wicked have taken out their sword” (Psalms 37:14) The interpretation of Rashi: Sword – language of war, this is to awaken the disagreement of the righteous. “Their sword” (Psalms 37:15) This is the strange thoughts from the same disagreement. “It enters their heart” (Psalms 37:15) This is the heart of the tzaddik. By the way of those who wish to go up, the strength of their desire. “Their bows will be broken” (Psalms 37:15) is to say, the disagreement as I said above.

Commentary:

Rebbe Nachman acknowledges a reality of prayer in the middle of this discourse, distractions. Instead of attempting to ignore this reality or blaming on a weak willed or weak minded individual, he acknowledges that even the Tzaddik, the most righteous, might become distracted while praying. He then does not suggest that you clear your head, remove the distracted thoughts, and return to prayer. Which is what you might expect. Instead, he suggests that you look to find the source of those thoughts; because it is only once you have traced the thoughts to their source and dealt with the root issue, that you can properly concentrate on your prayers.

Nachman also suggests two root causes of distracted thoughts during prayer, the over zealous effort of the individual praying and a lack of desire and strength. These two ideas work to complement each other. When you try to pray too much, too hard and too fast you are susceptible to becoming distracted. This can happen because of your own over zealousness in prayer and because you have not built up the strength or desire to maintain focus throughout your prayer. Both of these causes suggest a singular solution, the development of an extended prayer practice, one that builds up over time, so you can maintain your focus.

Nachman says this in Likkutei Moharan 2:84, that you should set out a prayer goal, to pray all day, but you can build up to that goal. Begin by praying a short amount of time and slowly increase it. Like any skill or muscle, prayer must be used, trained and developed. If you wake up one morning, never having run

before and try running a marathon, you most likely will not succeed. You need to work up to that length, practice, train, and run shorter distances before you can run a marathon. The same is true of prayer. You can not wake up one morning and attempt to pray with the highest level of attachment and focus, instead you need to start slower and lower, working up to that point, developing your prayer practice.

Kavvanot:

While we pray, we can become distracted, strange thoughts can invade our heads
Even the most righteous among us, the most focused and experienced can suffer from these distractions

Rebbe Nachman encourages us, do not ignore them, do not try to push them away, instead ask, where are they coming from? What are they trying to tell me?
They are an opportunity, to learn about ourselves, to understand our own challenges and struggles and refocus our intention

The thoughts that invade our head while we pray can instead be an opportunity

Prayer is a muscle

A muscle that must be stretched and exercised and trained

A muscle that must be used

When we try to pray too much, too hard, too fast - we become distracted and can not finish

When we try to pray with too much focus, too much intention, too much concentration - we become distracted and can not finish

Instead, stretch that muscle, exercise that muscle

A little bit at a time, one step at a time - then you will be able to maintain your focus and finish your prayers with meaning and intention

דע, כְּשֶׁהָאָדָם מְתַפֵּל בַּשָּׁדָה, אָזי כָּל הָעֵשְׂבִים כָּלָם בָּאִין בְּתוֹךְ הַתְּפִלָּה, וּמְסִיעִין לוֹ, וְנוֹתְנִין לוֹ כֹּחַ בְּתַפְּלוֹתוֹ. וְזֶה בְּחִינַת שְׂנֵקֵי רֵאֵת הַתְּפִלָּה שְׂיִחָה, בְּחִינַת (בראשית ב): שְׂיִחַת הַשָּׁדָה, שְׂכָל שְׂיִחַת הַשָּׁדָה נֹתְנִין כֹּחַ וְסִיוֹעַ בְּתַפְּלוֹתוֹ.

וְזֶה בְּחִינַת (שם כד): וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׁוּחַת בַּשָּׁדָה – שְׂתַפְּלוֹתוֹ הָיְתָה עִם סִיוֹעַ וְכֹחַ הַשָּׁדָה, שְׂכָל עֵשְׂבֵי הַשָּׁדָה נֹתְנוּ כֹּחַ וְסִיוֹעַ בְּתַפְּלוֹתוֹ כַּנִּ"ל, שְׂבִשְׁבִיל זֶה נִקְרָאת הַתְּפִלָּה שְׂיִחָה כַּנִּ"ל.

וְעַל־כֵּן בִּקְלָלָהּ נֶאֱמַר (דברים יא): וְהֶאֱדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ; כִּי כָּל יְבוּל הָאָרֶץ צָרִיכִין לִתֵּן כֹּחַ וְסִיוֹעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַתְּפִלָּה, וְכַשֵּׁי פָגָם וְעָפּוּב עַל זֶה, אָזי נֶאֱמַר: וְהֶאֱדָמָה לֹא תִתֵּן אֶת יְבוּלָהּ.

כִּי אֶפְלוּ כְּשֶׁאִינוּ מְתַפֵּל בַּשָּׁדָה, נֹתְנִים גַּם־כֵּן יְבוּל הָאָרֶץ סִיוֹעַ בְּתַפְּלוֹתוֹ, דִּהְיִנוּ כָּל מֵה נְשָׁמוֹךְ אֶל הָאָדָם, כְּגוֹן אֲכִילָתוֹ וְשִׁתְּיוֹ וְכִיּוֹצֵא, רַק כְּשֶׁהוּא בַּשָּׁדָה, שְׂאִזי סְמוּךְ לָהֶם בְּיוֹתֵר, אָזי כָּל הָעֵשְׂבִים וְכָל יְבוּל הָאֲדָמָה נֹתֵן כֹּחַ בְּתַפְּלוֹתוֹ כַּנִּ"ל.

וְזֶה יְבוּל – רְאִישֵׁי־תִבּוֹת: וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׁוּחַת בַּשָּׁדָה – שְׂכָל יְבוּל הַשָּׁדָה הַתְּפִלָּה עִמּוֹ, כַּנִּ"ל: (זֶה הָעֵנָן מִבְּאֵר הַיֵּטֵב בַּמֶּאֱמָר "תִּקְעוּ בַחֲדָשׁ שׁוֹפָר", הַמִּתְחִיל בְּדָף א, עִין נְשָׁם):

Translation:

Know this, when a person prays in the field, then all the grasses enter into the prayer, they assist them and give strength into his prayer. This is an aspect in which prayer is called 'conversation', the aspect of "plants of the field" (Genesis 2:5) all the plants of the field give their strength and assistance into his prayer.

This is the aspect of “Isaac went out to meditate in the field” (Genesis 24:63) his prayer was with the assistance and strength of the field, all the grasses of the field gave their strength and assistance into his prayers, as I said above, because of this we call prayer ‘conversation’, as I said above.

Therefor, of curses it says, “the land will not give its crops” (Deuteronomy 11:17). Because all the crops need to give their strength and support into the prayers, and if there is a time when there is a flaw or blemished, then it says, “the land will not give its crops”

Even, when a person does not pray in the field, the crops also give their assistance into his prayers. Behold, all that is near him, like his food, drink and similar – aid his prayers. Only when he is in the field, then he is very close to many of these things, then all the grasses and crops of the land give their strength in his prayers, as I said above.

This is crop – the acronym, Isaa**C** went **O**ut to **P**Ray in the field, that all the crops of the field are in his prayers, as I said above.

Commentary:

“When God made earth and heaven, when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because God had not sent rain

upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil.” (Genesis 2:4 – 5)

The verse, which Nachman quotes from, indicates that the shrubs and grasses were on the earth yet they had not yet sprouted. The verse gives two separate reasons for this, that God had not yet sent rain and that there was no person to till the soil and harvest the plants. Rashi however, connects these two ideas. He explains that they had not yet sprouted because humankind was not there to pray for rain. Once Adam was created, he prayed for rain and the plants bloomed. In this way, humankind and plants entered into a symbiotic relationship from their very beginning, the plants need people to pray for rain so that they can grow and to harvest them once they have grown. People, in turn, need the plants to eat and sustain themselves.

Nachman however adds to this, making the plants more of an equal partner in this relationship. People can pray for rain for plants and plants can send their support into the prayers of the people. Plants and people have a physical connection, of planting, harvesting and sustenance. They also have a spiritual connection of praying and sending power into those prayers.

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching” (Genesis 24:63)

Many commentators point to this verse as Isaac meditating or praying, and use it as a proof text for the creation of the afternoon prayer service. (Talmud Brachot 26b) This understanding leads to the question, why did Isaac go out into

the field to pray? Could Isaac simply have prayed in his home? Sforno writes that Isaac was going out into the field to find some privacy where he could be without interruption. That the environment of the field was one that was more conducive to focus and mediation.

Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev, Nachman's contemporary, writes that the walk in the field was intended to fill his heart with joy. He relates the word lasuach to simcha, "Isaac talking a stroll was intended to fill his heart with joy. In the field he would be able to communicate with his Creator."

Kavvanot:

"And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching" (Genesis 24:63)

Why did Isaac go out into the field to pray?

Could Isaac simply have prayed in his home?

Was Isaac going into the field to find some privacy where he could be without interruption? (Sforno)

Was Isaac hoping to fill his heart with joy? Simcha?

"Isaac talking a stroll was intended to fill his heart with joy. In the field he would be able to communicate with his Creator." (Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev)

Why do we pray in fields? Why do we pray in sanctuaries? Sanctuaries of God's creation?

Perhaps, this is why Isaac prayed in the field.

לְשׁוֹן רַבְּנוּ זְכוּרֵנוּ לְבִרְכָּה

דַּע, שֶׁעָקָר הַתְּחִבּוּרִים וּדְבָקוֹת לַהֲשֵׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ הוּא עַל־יְדֵי הַתְּפִלָּה. כִּי הַתְּפִלָּה הִיא שֶׁר, שֶׁדָּרָךְ שֶׁם נִכְנָסִין לַהֲשֵׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, וּמִשָּׁם אֲשֶׁתְּמוֹדָעִין לָהּ. כִּי תְּפִלָּה הִיא מַלְכוּת, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (תהלים ק"ט) וְאֲנִי תְּפִלָּה; וְתְּפִלָּה – לְשׁוֹן הַתְּחִבּוּרִים, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (בראשית ל): נִפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹקִים נִפְתַּלְתִּי, תַּרְגוּמוֹ לְשׁוֹן הַתְּחִבּוּרִים

וּבִשְׂבִיל זֶה עַל־פִּי־רַב כְּשֶׁאָדָם מִתְּפַלֵּל נוֹפְלִים לוֹ מִחֲשָׁבוֹת שֶׁל גְּדֻלוֹת. כִּי הַתְּפִלָּה, הֵינּוּ בְּחִינַת מַלְכוּת, בְּחִינַת אֲנִי, הִיא בְּגָלוּת בְּתוֹךְ מַלְכוּת הָרָשָׁעָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (יחזקאל א): וְאֲנִי בְּתוֹךְ הַגּוֹלָה. וְכִשְׁהִיא רוּצָה לְצֵאתָ, אֲזִי מִתְאַחֶזֶת בָּהּ מַלְכוּת הָרָשָׁעָה, הֵינּוּ גְדֻלוֹת, שֶׁגְּדֻלוֹת הִיא מִמַּלְכוּת הָרָשָׁעָה, שֶׁרוּצָה לְהִתְגַּדֵּל וּלְמַלֵּךְ. וְזֶה שֶׁמִּתְּפַלְלִים בְּכַח, בְּזֶה נוֹתֵן כֹּחַ בַּתְּפִלָּה לְהִתְחַזֵּק כְּנֶגֶד מַלְכוּת הָרָשָׁעָה לְצֵאתָ מִגְּלוּתָא. וְזֶה (תהלים סח): תָּנוּ עֹז לְאֱלֹקִים עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל גְּאוּתוֹ. כִּד הַגְּאוּת, הֵינּוּ מַלְכוּת הָרָשָׁעָה, גּוֹבֶרֶת עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַתְּקוּן לָזֶה – שֶׁתְּתַפְּלוּ בְּכַח וְתִחַזְקוּ אֶת אֱלֹקִים, הֵינּוּ בְּחִינַת אֲנִי

וְזֶה (דברים ח): וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ, כִּי הוּא הִנִּיתָ לְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל. פְּרוּשׁ, שֶׁעַל־יְדֵי הַכֹּחַ תִּתְּקֵן אֶת אִשְׁת־חֵיל, בְּחִינַת מַלְכוּת. וְזֶה פְּרוּשׁ: לְמִקְנֵי נִכְסִין (הֵינּוּ תַּרְגוּם שֶׁל לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל – לְמִקְנֵי נִכְסִין). פְּרוּשׁ, כִּי הַמַּלְכוּת כִּד אִי־הִיא בְּגָלוּתָא אֲזִי אוֹמֶרֶת: אֵל תִּרְאוּנִי שֶׁאֲנִי שֶׁחֲרָחֶת (שה"ש א), כִּי הִיא מְלַבֶּשֶׁת בְּלָבוּשִׁין אַכְמִין, בְּלָבוּשִׁין דְּקַלְפִּין, וּמִכֶּסֶה בָּהֶם

וְאֲזִי: כְּצִפּוֹר נוֹדֶדֶת מִן קִנָּה כֵּן אִישׁ נוֹדֵד (משלי כז), כִּי הִיא קוֹן דִּילָהּ. וְכִד אָדָם מִתְּפַלֵּל בְּכַח וּמוֹצִיא אוֹתָהּ מִגְּלוּתָא, מִפְּסוּיִין דִּילָהּ, וְנַעֲשִׂית קוֹן לְהַקְדוּשׁ־בְּרוּךְ־הוּא. וְזֶה פְּרוּשׁ: לְמִקְנֵי – לְשׁוֹן קוֹן; נִכְסִין – לְשׁוֹן פְּסוּיִין. וְעָקָר כְּוִנָּתָךְ יִהְיֶה, שֶׁתִּתְּקֵן הַשְׂכִּינָה כִּדִּי לְזוּגָה עִם בַּעֲלָהּ

וְזֶה פְּרוּשׁ: לְמַעַן הָקִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ – הַקָּמַת הַבְּרִית רַמְזָה לְזוּג. כִּי מִתְחַלָּה צָרִיךְ אֲתַעְרוּתָא דְלִתְמָא, הֵינּוּ תְּקוּן הַשְׂכִּינָה, וְכִשְׁהַשְׂכִּינָה מְלַבֶּשֶׁת בְּלָבוּשִׁין נְהִירִין: חֲנוּר סִמֵּךְ יָרֵק, בְּחִינַת אֲבוֹת, וְהִיא בְּחִינַת שְׁבוּעָה, בְּחִינַת שְׁבָעָה. וְנַעֲשֶׂה כְּאֵלֵינוּ עֲכָשׁוּ נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹת. וְזֶה: אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתֶיךָ כִּי־הָיָה – כִּי־הָיָה דִּקְא. נִמְצָא, עַל־יְדֵי

תַּפִּלָּה בְּכַח נִתְחַדֵּשׁ הַשְּׁבוּעָה לְאַבוֹת

Translation:

Know this, the essence of connecting and devotion to God is by way of Prayer.

Because prayer is the gate, the path that one can enter to God. And from there you can acquire a personal knowledge of God.

Because prayer is kingship, as it is written “I am prayer” (Psalms 109:4) And prayer is the language of connection, as it is written, “I have wrestled with God, I have wrestled” (Genesis 30:8) translates as the language of connection.

Because of this, from the prayers of many people come thoughts of their own greatness. Because prayer, is an aspect of kingship, an aspect of I, she is exiled from with the kingship of evil, as it is written, “I am among the captives” (Ezekiel 1:1) When she wants to go leave, seized from the evil kingdom, behold the pride, that grows from the conviction of kingship, that wants to be proud and rule.

And those that pray with strength, with this they give strength into their prayer to become stronger against the conviction of kingship to escape from their captivity.

And this, “Give the strength to God, and his majesty over Israel” (Psalms 68:35) A vessel of haughtiness, the kingship of evil, becomes stronger over Israel, this is can be repaired – when you pray with strength, it will strengthen God, behold the

aspect of I.

And this, “You will remember Adonai your God, for it is God that gives you power to get strong.” (Deuteronomy 8:18)

The explanation, by way of strength, you can repair a woman of valor, the aspect of kingship. And this is the explanation, to acquire wealth, (behold the translation of woman of valor is to acquire an asset). An explanation, because the kingship is a vessel for exile as it says, “Don’t Look on me, as I am dark skinned” (Song of Songs 1:6) Because she is dressed in black clothes, in clothes of skins, and hidden by them.

Thus, “like a bird that wanders from her nest, so a man wanders” (Proverbs 27:8) because she is his nest.

The vessel of man praying with strength, brings himself out of exile, covered with it, making a nest for God.

And this is an explanation, to acquire – is a nest, assets - are hidden things. The intention should be to, to repair the Shekinah in a couple with Her master.

And this is an explanation, “in order to establish my covenant” – established the

covenant hints of the pair, Shekinah and Master together. Because from the beginning needs arousing, behold the repair of the shekinah.

The shekinah is dressed in clear clothes: pale sumac green, aspect of patriarchs, and she is an aspect of an oath, aspect of seven, you make like now sworn to your fathers. "That He swore to your forefathers, as this day" a day like this exactly. Find, by way of strong prayers the oaths to your fathers is renewed.

Commentary:

Nachman's discussion of prayer here has a number of sexual overtones. The Sefirot is a system with many sexual associations, especially when juxtaposing the pair of the Shekinah and Master, as a covenantal pair. Here the text compares prayer to kingship, the lowest of the system. The text also discusses a devotion to God, *dekehut*, sometimes translated as cleaving, is also the same verb used to discuss the relationship between Adam and Eve, "shall cleave to his wife" (Genesis 2:24). The text also references Eshet Chayil, a woman of valor, and Song of Songs, two sexual texts.

Sexual imagery is not something unique to Nachman's writings, it is seen across Hasidic literature. However, the process of prayer as opening up to a sexual process and prayer as the act through which one finds connection and devotion to God is important to consider.

Nachman opens the section by juxtaposing two competing ideas in prayer, the aspect of I and the aspect of kingship. The first is self reflective, it reinforces the importance of the individual and the person as a significant impact on prayer. The second is surrender; it reinforces the importance of giving over to God and removing the self from prayer. These two aspects are in constant competition with each other, how much of yourself to put into prayer and how much to give up. How much to surrender and how much to keep; and how God plays into this balance.

When discussing this struggle, Nachman brings in a proof text on wrestling. Yet, instead of using the most famous instance of wrestling in the Torah, Jacob wrestling in Genesis 32:22 – 32, he brings a very different text. In Genesis 30:8, Rachel is naming one of her handmaid, Bilhah's sons, Naphtali, which translates as a contest, battle, rivalry or wrestling. The root letters, *peh*, *tav* and *lamed* when rearranged are the same root letters for *t'fillah* or prayer. This use of creative anagrams is something seen throughout Nachman's writings. He works to draw unique connection and meanings. Here connecting Rachel's struggle with an individual's prayer.

There is also a second connection between this verse and the subject at hand. The text reads, *naphtuli elohim*, which is usually translated as a mighty wrestling, but *elohim* is also a name for God. It could instead be translated as I wrestled with God. While Rachel did not physically wrestle with God, she did struggle with her relationship with God, in Genesis 31 she takes an idol from her

father's house. While her motives are unknown, perhaps she is struggling with her own understanding of and relationship to God. This struggle is the one Nachman is discussing in detail in this section. What is the role of the individual and what is the role of God in prayer. How do we find balance between these two forces?

Kavvanah:

Rachel proclaimed, "I have wrestled with God, I have wrestled" (Genesis 30:8)

Rachel did not physically wrestle with God, the way her husband Isaac did.

Rachel struggled with God. In one of the most challenging moments of her life, as she left her father's home for the final time, she wrestled with God. Looking for comfort and protection, she was not prepared to move forward.

So too, do each of us struggle. We struggle in the challenging moments of our lives, unable to acknowledge God's power.

We, like Rachel, need to wrestle with God. We need can struggle with our faith.

We can struggle with our prayer.

We can acknowledge God's presence and move forward together.

לְעֵנֵן הַתְּבוּדוֹת וְשִׂיחָה בֵּינוּ לְבֵין קוֹנוֹ וְאַמִּירַת תְּהִלִּים וּתְחִינּוֹת וּבִקְשׁוֹת,

טוב מאד כְּשֶׁזֹּכִין לְאַמְרָם בְּלֵב שְׁלֵם בְּאַמֶּת, עַד שֶׁיִּזְכֶּה לְכָפוֹת לִפְנֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ כִּבֵּן הַבּוֹכָה לִפְנֵי אָבִיו.

אָבֵל אָמַר, שְׂפִנְשֶׁהָאָדָם אוֹמֵר תְּחִנּוֹת וּבִקְשׁוֹת וְחֹשֵׁב בְּלִבּוֹ וּמַצְפֶּה שְׂיִכְפָּה, זֹאת הַמְחֻשְׁבָּה אֵינָה טוֹבָה, וְהִיא מְבַלְבֶּלֶת גַּם־כֵּן אֶת דַּעְתּוֹ, כִּי מַחְמַת זֶה אֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לוֹמַר הַבִּקְשׁוֹת בְּלֵב שְׁלֵם בְּשִׁלְמוֹת, כִּי צָרִיכִין בְּשַׁעַת אַמִּירַת תְּחִנּוֹת וּבִקְשׁוֹת לְהִרְחִיק מֵעֲצָמוֹ כָּל מִינֵי מַחֲשָׁבוֹת חוּץ שְׂפָעוֹלָם, רַק לְכַוֵּן דַּעְתּוֹ אֶל הַדְּבוּרִים שֶׁהוּא מְדַבֵּר לִפְנֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, כְּאֲשֶׁר יְדַבֵּר אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ, וְאִזּוֹ מִמִּילָא בְּקַל יִתְעוֹרֵר לִבּוֹ, עַד שְׂיָבֹא לְכִכְיָה גְדוֹלָה בְּאַמֶּת.

אָבֵל כְּשֶׁחֹשֵׁב וּמַצְפֶּה עַל זֶה שְׂיִכְפָּה, אֲזִי זֶה וְזֶה אֵינוֹ עוֹלָה בִּידּוֹ, כִּי הָאַמִּירָה בְּעֲצָמָה נִתְבַּלְבֶּלֶת עַל־יְדֵי־זֶה כִּנ"ל. כִּי זֶה שֶׁחֹשֵׁב וּמַצְפֶּה שְׂיִכְפָּה, הוּא גַם־כֵּן בְּחִינַת מַחֲשָׁבָה

זָרָה שְׂמֵבֶלֶפֶלֶת, הַכּוֹנֵה, שְׂאִינוּ יָכוֹל לְשַׁמֵּעַ הֵיטֵב מֶה שֶׁהוּא מְדַבֵּר עַל־יְדֵי־זֶה, כִּי
הָעֶקֶר – לְדַבֵּר הַדְּבוּר בְּאַמֶּת לִפְנֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִי שׁוּם מַחֲשָׁבוֹת אַחֵרוֹת כָּלֵל כֶּנ"ל.
וְאִם יִזְכֶּה לְבִכְיָה בְּאַמֶּת – מֶה טוֹב, וְאִם לֹא – לֹא, וְלֹא יִבְלֶבֶל אֶמִירָתוֹ בְּשִׁבִּיל זֶה
כֶּנ"ל:

Translation:

On the topic of meditation and prayer between a man and his creator, saying
psalms, petitions and requests.

It is very good, when one merits saying them with a full heart in truth, until he is
worthy of crying before God, like a son cries before his father.

But, Rebbe Nachman said, when a man says petitions and requests, and
contemplates in his heart and notices that he is crying, it is a though that is not
good, because he is confusing his concentration. This causes him to not be able
to say the requests with a full heart.

For he needs in the hour of saying petitions and requests to distance himself from
those extra thoughts out in the world. Only to direct his understanding to the words
that he is saying to God, like a man when he speaks to his friend, obviously he
removed the heaviness and elevates his heart, until he comes to a great truthful

weeping.

But when he notices and thinks of his crying, it does not come, because his words become confused, as I said above. When he notices and thinks of his crying, they are foreign thoughts that confuse his intention, he is not able to hear well what he is praying.

This is the point – To speak true speech before God without thinking any other thoughts, as I said above. If you merit true tears – this is good, and if not – not, but do not confuse your speech because of this, as I said above.

Commentary:

Nachman talks in a number of different places about the challenge of distractions in prayer; how to create a space without distractions and how to address those distractions when they do come. In Likkutei 96, he discusses tracing the distraction back, to understand where it came from, so that you can address the root of the distraction. Here, he is talking about a specific distraction that comes from inside yourself, unlike the others which often come from outside forces. Why does Nachman talk about crying specifically?

Nachman seems to be addressing crying specifically, because he believed it was a real problem in his community; individuals trying too hard to elicit false emotion. This too can be an issue in modern communities, with people trying to

act in a specific way simply to be seen by others. Nachman warns against this, he does not want anyone to think about how they look while praying. He instead, wants people to pray with honest emotion, not constructed emotion.

Nachman knows that when someone thinks about how they look while they are praying they will no longer be praying with the proper concentration and intention. So, he tells us that praying should be like talking with a close friend, because when talking with a close friend, you are usually are not concerned about how you are seen. When talking with a close friend you do not need to portray yourself as anything other than who you truly are. This is should also be true when engaged in prayer.

It is important to remember that at the end of the section, Nachman reminds us, that crying during prayer is not bad. You should allow yourself to be emotional if that is how you are actually feeling. However, you should not force yourself to feel specific feelings to have specific emotions if those do not come naturally. This is a dual challenge of engaging in true honest prayer.

The text causes us to wonder, how we distinguish between various forms of honesty and truth. Nachman encourages prayer with a full heart of truth, a true full heart of prayer. *Emet* or truth has many different interpretations. We often distinguish between objective fact and personal truth. Objective fact is something that can be proven. Compared to personal truth, which depends on an individual's perspective and personal experience. Here Nachman offers a spin on an

understanding of truth, because he talks of a *lev shalem bemet*, a full heart of truth. A *Lev Shalem*, a full heart, is a specific phrase and has unique connotations.

The phrase appears a number of times throughout the bible, when King David asks his son Solomon to serve God, Chronicles 28:9, and when Solomon dedicates the Temple, I Kings 8:61 among them. Each of these instances, the *lev shalem* suggests someone does work or approaches a situation with in complete accord. *Lev Shalem*, suggest complete and total integrity, an approach to a situation from a place of vulnerability. It is idolatrous kings who are viewed in the bible as not having a *lev shalem*, I Kings 11:4, 15:3.

Yet, Nachman adds to this understanding of full heart, one of undivided integrity, by saying *lev shalem bemet*; a heart full of integrity, vulnerability and also honesty. It is those three words that Isaiah uses to tell King Hezekiah to pray for healing, Isaiah 38:3. Which he does, he opens himself up, makes himself honest and vulnerable, he cries and is healed.

It is this sort of encounter that Nachman wishes to recreate in every prayer. We should approach prayer from a space of integrity, from a space of honesty, so that our prayers too can be answered.

Kavvanah:

Nachman said, Do not confuse your prayers, do not make yourself cry, do not distract yourself with false emotions, do not try to portray yourself in prayer as

someone you are not.

This will only make it more difficult to pray with real emotion, true concentration and honest intention.

Instead, focus on your prayers. Pray with your full heart. Maintain your whole self.

Pray with integrity.

If you experience emotions, that is great. If not, that is great too.

Prayer should be like talking with a close friend. You should be open and vulnerable, and most importantly you should be yourself.

עוד אָמר לענגן התבודדות, שְׁהִיָּה דְרָכוֹ ז"ל לְזִרְזוֹ מְאֹד בְּזֶה לִהְיוֹת רָגִיל מְאֹד
בְּהַתְּבוּדוֹת, לְפָרֵשׁ שְׂיָחָתוֹ לִפְנֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּכָל יוֹם וַיּוֹם
וְאָמַר: שְׂאֲפִלוּ כְּשֵׁאִין יְכוּלִין לְדַבֵּר כָּלֵל, אֲפִלוּ כְּשִׁמְדִּבְרִין רַק דְּבוּר אֶחָד, גַּם־כֵּן טוֹב
מְאֹד

וְאָמַר: שְׂאֲפִלוּ אִם אֵינוֹ יְכוּל לְדַבֵּר רַק דְּבוּר אֶחָד, יִהְיֶה חֲזָק בְּדַעְתּוֹ, וַיִּדְבֵּר אוֹתוֹ
הַדְּבוּר כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה פְּעָמִים בְּלִי שְׁעוֹר וְעֶרֶךְ, וְאֲפִלוּ אִם יִבְלֶה כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה יָמִים בְּדְבוּר
זֶה לְבַד גַּם זֶה טוֹב. וַיִּהְיֶה חֲזָק וְאִמִּין, וַיִּרְבֶּה לְדַבֵּר אוֹתוֹ הַדְּבוּר פְּעָמִים אֵין מִסְפָּר,
עַד שְׂיִרְחֵם עָלָיו הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, וַיִּפְתַּח פִּיו, וַיּוּכַל לְפָרֵשׁ שְׂיָחָתוֹ

וְאָמַר, שְׁהַדְּבוּר יֵשׁ לוֹ כַּח גָּדוֹל מְאֹד, כִּי הֵלֵא יְכוּלִין לְלַחֵשׁ עַל קִנְיָה־שְׂרָפָה נְשִׁלָּא
תּוֹכֵל לִירוֹת. וְהֵבִן

וְאָז כְּשִׁדְּבֵר מְזֶה, דְּבֵר הַרְבֵּה מִהַתְּבוּדוֹת, וְהֶאָרִיךְ מְאֹד בְּשִׂיחָה נִפְלְאָה בְּכַמָּה מִיָּנִי
לְשׁוֹנוֹת, וְחֲזָק אוֹתָנוּ וַיִּזְרֵז אוֹתָנוּ מְאֹד מְאֹד בְּזֶה, לְהִתְחַזֵּק לְהַרְבּוֹת בְּהַתְּבוּדוֹת וּשְׂיָחָה
בֵּינוֹ לְבֵין קוֹנוֹ

וְאָמַר: שְׂרָצוֹנוֹ שְׂיִהְיֶה לָנוּ כָּל הַיּוֹם כְּלוּ הַתְּבוּדוֹת, וּלְבִלּוֹת כָּל הַיּוֹם עַל זֶה, אֲךָ לֹא
כָּל אָדָם יְכוּל לְקַיֵּם זֹאת. עַל־כֵּן בְּהִכָּרַח לְצוּרוֹת לָהֶם שְׂיִהְיֶה לָהֶם עַל־כָּל־פָּנִים אִיזָה
שְׁעָה הַתְּבוּדוֹת, כִּי גַם זֶה טוֹב מְאֹד

אָבֵל מִי שְׁלָבוֹ חֲזָק בַּה', וְרוּצָה לְקַבֵּל עָלָיו עַל עֲבוֹדָתוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּאַמֶּת, רָצוֹנוֹ שְׂיִהְיֶה לוֹ
כָּל הַיּוֹם הַתְּבוּדוֹת. וְהִזְכִּיר אָז מְאֹד חֲכָמֵינוּ זְכוּרָנָם לְבִרְכָּה (ברכות כא): וּלְנֹאִי
שְׂיִתְפִּיל אָדָם כָּל הַיּוֹם כְּלוּ

Translation:

Rebbe Nachman said more on the subject of meditation, this was the path of

Rebbe Nachman of blessed memory; he was very enthusiastic about regular

meditation, to set aside this prayer before God every single day.

He said, even if he cannot speak at all, even if he can only say one single thing, this is also very good.

He said, Even if he are can only say a single thing, he should be strong in his knowledge, to say this single thing over and over again without any measurable pause, and even if he wears himself out by saying only this same thing day after day, this is also good. He will be strong and brave, and continue to say this same thing without number, until God has mercy on him, and opens his mouth, and he is able to express his prayers.

Rebbe Nachman said, words have a lot of strength, a word has power that can not be silenced, like a gun cannot be made not to shoot.

Then, he spoke of this, saying a lot on meditation, he spoke a lot on prayer and said it in many wonderful different ways, strengthen us and give us enthusiasm, in order to strengthen the many through meditation and prayer, with himself and with his creator.

He said, it was his will that it should be for us to meditate the entirety of the day, to spend all day on this, not every person can fulfill this understanding. However,

they need to be commanded, that they should be on their faces, they can do only an hour of meditation. This too is very good.

But, one whose heart is strong in God, and wants to accept for himself the yoke of service of God. His will is to be all day in meditation. Our sages said, “Would that a person pray all day long.” (Brachot 21)

Commentary:

In discussing the importance of developing a meditative practice, Nachman shares a common theme seen throughout Jewish writing. He sets an ideal of meditating all day, but then addresses the reality, of one who might not be able to fulfill this ideal. That even though one might not be able to meditate all day, this does not negate one’s need to develop a meditative practice, to meditate for an hour. That too is good.

Nachman also lays out the process of Hitbonenut, chanting, as an alternative to Hitbodedut, meditation. There are many stories of individuals who are too young or lacking in education to fully engage in a traditional prayer service. Instead, all of these stories share that engaging with a single letter, word or phrase is as good as praying the entire service, if one has the correct intention and feelings behind them. This is part of what Nachman is sharing here, that chanting a single thing is good until you are able to chant more in the future.

One of the things Nachman does, which is different than other texts, is the

desire to hold onto his ideal and encourage others to seek it out. The ideal is to be in meditation all day, even if one cannot fulfill that ideal now, that should not stop them from trying to reach it in the future.

One of the unique metaphors Nachman uses here is translated as “a word has power that can not be silenced, like a gun cannot be made not to shoot.” The exact translation is difficult to parse, but Nachman is making a larger point about the power and importance of words, subject matter he expounds on in great detail in other writings. The metaphor seems to be saying that words can have the same impact as a gun, they have the power to impact others and they have the power to permanently change the world. As such, it is incredibly important to consider how we use words, to speak carefully, with intention and with practice.

Kavvanah:

Nachman said, “It should be for us to meditate the entirety of the day, to spend all day in prayer.” But, “If you can only pray for an hour. This too is very good.”

Nachman said, “It should be for us to pray with all the words, to communicate all the desires of our hearts” But, “If you cannot speak at all, or you can only say one single thing, this is also very good.”

Nachman sets a goal in prayer, something difficult, but aspirational. Then he tells

us we may never achieve it, but if we are working towards it, that is all we need to be doing. We may never, most of us will never, spend all day in prayer, but we can still aspire to it.

אָחד מאַנשי שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ סִפֵּר לִי, שֶׁהָיָה מְדַבֵּר עִם רַבֵּנוּ ז"ל בְּעִבּוּדַת הַשֵּׁם כְּדַרְכּוֹ, וְהָבִין רַבֵּנוּ ז"ל שֶׁהוּא עוֹסֵק קִצָּת לְכוּן כּוֹנֵנוֹת בְּתַפְלָתוֹ, וְהִקְפִּיד עָלָיו רַבֵּנוּ ז"ל מְאֹד וְאָמַר לוֹ שְׂלֹא יַעֲסֹק עוֹד בְּזֶה, וְלֹא יִתְפַּלֵּל עִם כּוֹנֵנוֹת, רַק יִכּוֹן פֶּרוּשׁ הַמְּלוֹת כְּפִשּׁוּטוֹ.
(אָף-עַל-פִּי שֶׁזֶּה הָאִישׁ לָמַד כְּתָבֵי הָאֶר"י ז"ל עַל-פִּי פִקְדָתוֹ, אָף-עַל-פִּי-כֵן לֹא רָצָה שִׁיתְפַּלֵּל עִם כּוֹנֵנוֹת כָּלָל).

וְאָמַר לוֹ רַבֵּנוּ ז"ל, שְׁמִי שְׂאִינוֹ רָאוּי לָזֶה, כְּשֶׁמִּתְפַּלֵּל עִם כּוֹנֵנוֹת הוּא כְּמוֹ כְּשׁוּף, פִּי בְּכְשׁוּף נֶאֱמַר: לֹא תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת (דְּבָרִים יח), וְדַרְשׁוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרָנָם לְבִרְכָּה (שַׁבָּת עה, ר"ה כד, סְנֵהֲדָרִין סח): לֹא תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֲבָל אֲתָה לָמַד לְהָבִין וּלְהוֹרוֹת. כִּי הוּא בְּעֵינֵי הַכּוֹנֵנוֹת לְהַבְדִּיל, שְׂאִין צָרִיכִין לָלַמַּד אוֹתָם כִּי-אֵם לְהָבִין וּלְהוֹרוֹת, אֲבָל לֹא לַעֲשׂוֹת עִמָּהֶם, דִּהְיָנוּ לְכוֹנָם בְּתַפְלָה, מִי שְׂאִינוֹ רָאוּי לָזֶה.

וְאָמַר כִּי עֵקֶר הַתַּפְלָה הִיא דְּבִקּוּת לְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, וְהָיָה טוֹב יוֹתֵר לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּלִשׁוֹן לַעֲזַ שְׁמֵדְבָרִים בּוֹ, כִּי כְּשֶׁמִּתְפַּלְלִים בְּלִשׁוֹן שְׁמֵדְבָרִים בּוֹ, אֲזִי הֵיִלֵּב סְמוּךְ וְדְבוּק מְאֹד בְּדְבוּרֵי הַתַּפְלָה, וְיִכּוֹל לְדַבֵּק עֲצָמוֹ בְּיוֹתֵר לְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ. אֲךָ כְּבָר תִּקְנּוּ לָנוּ אַנְשֵׁי כְּנֻסַת הַגְּדוּלָה סֵדֶר הַתַּפְלָה (מַחֲמַת שְׁלָאוֹ כָּל אָדָם יִכּוֹל לְסִדֵּר סֵדֶר הַתַּפְלָה לַעֲצָמוֹ, כְּמוֹבָא), עַל-כֵּן אָנוּ חִיָּבִים לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּלִשׁוֹן-הַקֹּדֶשׁ כְּמוֹ שֶׁסִּדְּרוּ לָנוּ. אֲבָל הָעֵקֶר הוּא רַק לְכוּן פֶּרוּשׁ הַמְּלוֹת כְּפִשּׁוּטוֹ, שֶׁזֶּהוּ עֵקֶר הַתַּפְלָה, שֶׁמִּתְפַּלְלִין לְפָנֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ עַל כָּל דְּבָר וְדְבָר, וְעַל-יְדֵי-זֶה מִתְקַרְבִּין וּמִתְדַבְּקִין בּוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ.

וְהָיָה מִי שֶׁמִּדְבֵּר בְּלִשׁוֹן-הַקֹּדֶשׁ תָּמִיד, כְּגוֹן יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, אֵין צָרִיךְ לְחַשֵּׁב בְּדַעְתּוֹ פֶּרוּשׁ הַמְּלוֹת, רַק שְׂיִטָּה אֲזָנוֹ מֵה שֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר, וְזֶה עֵקֶר כּוֹנֵנוֹת בְּתַפְלָה.

וְאֶצֶל הַצַּדִּיקִים הָאֱמִתִּיִּים הַגְּדוּלִּים בְּמַעֲלָה, אֶצְלָם כָּל הַכּוֹנֵנוֹת שֶׁל הָאֶרֶץ ז"ל וְכו' הֵם פֶּרוּשׁ הַמְּלוֹת, שֶׁבְּפִרוּשׁ הַמְּלוֹת שֶׁלָּהֶם כְּלוּלִים כָּל הַכּוֹנֵנוֹת::

Translation:

One from our group said to me, that this was the way of our sages of blessed

memory, the work of God in their way. He understood the Sages, who busied themselves with kavvanot in their prayer, Rebbe Nachman emphasized warned them saying, do not busy yourself with these, do not pray with kavvanot, only pay attention to the simple words. (Even though he taught them the words of the Ari, he did not want them praying with kavvanot at all.)

Rebbe Nachman said to them, one who is not worthy of this, who prays with kavvanot is like sorcery, because of sorcery it says, “do not learn to do” (Deuteronomy 18:9) Our Rabbis explained, You so not learn in order to do “but you may learn in order to understand and teach” (Shabbat 75a)

This is the understanding of kavvanot, is it not the same thing, you should not study them but rather to understand and teach them, but not to use them, thus one who is not fitting to do this, should not weave the Ari’s kavvanot into his prayer.

Rebbe Nachman said, because the essence of prayer is attachment to God, It would be very good to pray in one's vernacular that they speak in. Because when you pray in the language you speak in, your heart is close and attached more to the words of prayer, and you are able to attach yourself more to God. However, the men of the great assembly already established a prayer liturgy for us, (because not everyone is able to order the prayer liturgy for oneself, clearly), because of this we are obligated to prayer in the holy language as was formatted

for us. But, the essence is to develop and concentrate on the basic meaning of the words, this is the essence of prayer, to pray before God on everything, and to draw yourself near and to attach yourself to God.

Thus, those that always speak in the holy language, like a Jerusalemite, does not need to think about the meaning of the words, only to lend an ear to what you are saying, this is the essence of kavvanot in prayer.

The true great tzaddikim, all the kavvanot of the Ari, are the meaning of the words. That is, the way they meaning of the words includes the Kabbalistic meditations.

Commentary:

Rebbe Nachman's primary point in section is the importance of the basic, meaning of the prayers. He discourages the use of Rabbi Isaac Luria's kavvanot, instead he wants individuals to focus on the most basic meanings of the prayers. That you can learn these kavvanot, but you should not use them during prayer, because they create another concept to focus on, which makes it more difficult to direct yourself and attach yourself to God. Which is the most important part of prayer.

Nachman's goal here is to simplify prayer; prayer is not supposed to be an academic exercise. That is only accessible to those who have a deep background and education in the complex themes surrounding the prayers. Instead, prayer

should be straightforward and meaningful; accessible to all kinds of people with varied backgrounds. There is plenty of meaning to be found simply in the words of the prayer without overcomplicating them. That does not mean people should not study some of these complex meanings, should not study the kavvanot. Instead, they should study them, but when going to pray, they should try to leave those complex ideas behind.

Rebbe Nachman briefly lays out the two sides of an argument about what language one should pray in. The everyday language you speak in, the vernacular, or the holy language, Hebrew. The argument for the first is it is easier to understand and provide intention behind the prayers if you pray in your vernacular. The essence of prayer is directing your heart and achieving closeness to God, this can be done more easily in a language you understand. The argument for the second is that liturgy created and prayer by our ancestors is in Hebrew. This liturgical prayer is what is commanded of us.

This two-fold argument is seen in a number of places throughout Jewish thought. The Sages of the Talmud argue over what language one is allowed to pray the Shema. The minority opinion says it must be said in Hebrew, because it is a fixed prayer. Which says, "These words shall be" (Deuteronomy 6:6), meaning exactly these words. However, the majority opinion however, holds that because it is about hearing any language you can hear and understand it in is acceptable. (Talmud Brachot 15a)

Nachman's words echo this disagreement. It is here that I believe Nachman might offer a distinction, you should pray in the liturgy in Hebrew, because that is what was how the Rabbis who developed the liturgy created it. In order to preserve the tradition and fulfill the obligation to prayer, you should pray in Hebrew. However, when meditating, or composing your own prayers, praying in your native language makes it easier to both composing these prayers and to attach yourself to their meaning, creating a stronger and more meaningful connection.

Kavvanah:

Nachman said, Do not busy yourself with the complicated intentions of prayer, instead pray their simple meanings.

It is easy to over complicate our lives, to try to make prayer more complex than it already is. Don't do that. Make them as simple as possible, pray their most basic meanings, with the greatest amount of intention you can find.

When you do this, you will be able to find connection. To the words of the prayers and to the Divine.

הָיָה מְחִיזֵק אֶת אֲנָשָׁיו, שֶׁקִּבְּלוּ לִפְנֵיו בְּקִבְלָנָא גְדוּלָּה, עַל שֶׁהֵם רְחוּקִים מִתְפִּלָּה מְאֹד וְקָשָׁה עֲלֵיהֶם מְאֹד לְהִתְפַּלֵּל, וְהָיָה מְחִיזֵק אוֹתָם וּמַנְיָחֵם אוֹתָם בְּכַמָּה לְשׁונוֹת, שֶׁלֹּא יִפְּלוּ בְּדַעְתֵּיהֶן בְּשִׁבִּיל זֶה.

וְאָמַר, הֲלֹא אֵצֶל הַגֵּר שְׁנַתְגִּיר, כַּמָּה זְכִיָּה הוּא אֵצֶלוֹ כְּשִׁזְכָּה לִידַע אֲמִירַת הַתְּבוּת לְבַד עַד "בְּרוּךְ שְׁאֵמַר", עַל־כֵּן רָאוּי לְאָדָם לְנַחֵם אֶת עַצְמוֹ וּלְשַׂמֵּחַ אֶת עַצְמוֹ עַל אֲשֶׁר עַל־כָּל־פָּנִים הוּא זֹכֶה לִזְמַר הַתְּבוּת שֶׁל הַתְּפִלָּה.

וְשִׁמְעָתִי שֶׁהָיָה מְדַבֵּר עִם אִישׁ פָּשוּט אֶחָד מֵעֲנִינֵי תְּפִלָּה, שֶׁקָּשָׁה מְאֹד לְהִתְפַּלֵּל, וְנָתַן לוֹ עֲצָה וְאָמַר לוֹ, שִׁיחַשֵׁב בְּלִבּוֹ, שֶׁאֵינוֹ צָרִיךְ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל כִּי־אִם עַד "בְּרוּךְ שְׁאֵמַר", כִּי אוֹלִי הוּא צָרִיךְ בְּגִלְגּוּל זֶה לְתַקֵּן רַק חֵלֶק זֶה מִהַתְּפִלָּה, כִּי אוֹלִי בְּגִלְגּוּל הָרִאשׁוֹן כָּבֵר הַתְּפִלָּל בְּכּוֹנֶנָה שְׁאֵר חֲלָקֵי הַתְּפִלָּה, רַק חֵלֶק זֶה עַד "בְּרוּךְ שְׁאֵמַר" הוּא צָרִיךְ עֲכָשׁוּ בְּגִלְגּוּל זֶה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכּוֹנֶנָה, וְעַל־כֵּן יִכְנִיס כָּל כּחוֹ בְּזֶה הַמַּעַט לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכּוֹנֶנָה עַד "בְּרוּךְ שְׁאֵמַר". וְאַחֲר־כֵּן כְּשִׁיגִיעַ לְ"בְּרוּךְ שְׁאֵמַר", יַחֲשֹׁב: אוֹלִי צָרִיךְ לְתַקֵּן חֵלֶק זֶה, כְּגוֹן מִ"בְּרוּךְ שְׁאֵמַר" עַד "וַיִּבְרַךְ דָּוִד", וַיִּתְּפִלֵּל עוֹד אוֹתוֹ הַחֵלֶק בְּכּוֹנֶנָה, וְכֵן לְהֵלֵךְ.

וְהַפֶּלֶל — שֶׁלֹּא יִבְלִיב דַּעְתּוֹ בַּתְּחִלָּה בְּכָל הַתְּפִלָּה, כִּי יִהְיֶה קָשָׁה וְכִבֵּד עָלָיו, רַק יִתְאַמֵּץ בְּכָל פַּעַם לִזְמַר מַעַט מַעַט בְּכּוֹנֶנָה, כִּי מַעַט יְכוּלִין לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכּוֹנֶנָה, וְאַחֲר־כֵּן עוֹד מַעַט וְכו' כֵּן"ל:

גַּם כָּבֵר מְבֹאֵר, שֶׁבְּאַמֻּת עַל־פִּי הָרֹב אֵין יְכוּלִין לְהִתְפַּלֵּל כָּל הַתְּפִלָּה בְּכּוֹנֶנָה, רַק מַעַט, כִּי כָל אֶחָד מִתְפַּלֵּל אֵיזָה חֵלֶק מִהַתְּפִלָּה לְפִי בְּחִינָתוֹ, כִּי אֵית מְאִרֵּי דִידִין וּמְאִרֵּי דְרַגְלִין וְכו', כְּמִבְּאֵר בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר:

Translation:

Rebbe Nachman would strengthen his followers, when they would complain to

him, that they were very far from their prayer and it was difficult to pray. And he

would strengthen them, and comfort them in different ways, that they should not despair on this.

Nachman said, this is like the convert who merits reciting the words alone until Baruch Shamar. Therefore, see him console him and gladden him, because on its face he merits saying the words of prayer.

I also heard that he spoke with a simple person on the purpose of prayer, who had a difficult time praying. Nachman gave him advice, he said to him, focus on your heart, to pray only until Baruch Shamar, because perhaps he can focus only on a section himself and pray it. Because if the first section he is able to pray with focus, only the section until Baruch Shamar, he needs now to pray a section with intention, Therefore, he can place all his energy on praying to Baruch Shamar. And after he has reach Baruch Shamar, he should think, perhaps he can do the next section, Baruch Shamar until Va'yevarekh David, and pray that section with proper intention, and so on.

The rule – Do not confuse himself from the beginning with all the prayers, because it will be difficult on him. Only strengthen himself to focus each time on a little bit, because a little bit he can pray with focus, and afterwards a little bit more, etc.

Also, it has been explained, in truth the majority of people are not able to pray the

entire prayer service with intention, only a small portion, because each one prays a section according to their ability, because some are masters of the hands and others are masters of feet, as explained elsewhere.

Commentary:

The section opens with a brief statement of the relationship between Nachman and his followers. While only a few sentences in length, the opening is significant because it reminds us that each of us struggles differently. Nachman recognized this in his students and comforted and strengthened them differently because of it.

Nachman is not known for having a particularly close relationship with his students. He often tried to keep them students at a distance. Discouraging them from relocated to be close to him. Instead of teaching and interacting with them on a daily basis, he would encourage them to come visit three times a year during specific holidays.

Even though his relationship with them was not particularly close, he knew that each of them needed something different from him; a different kind of comfort, different words of encouragement, different ways to strengthen their resolve. This is true of us as well; we each struggle with prayer differently and we each need to strengthen our resolve differently to continue find comfort and strength in prayer. The bulk of the section, discusses the idea that it is difficult to maintain focus and intention throughout the entirety of the prayer service. This is not a new idea for

Nachman, it is one he addresses elsewhere, including Likkutei 2:96, when he talks of prayer the same words over and over again until you find new words to pray. Here he recommends concentration and directing your intention for only a short period of the entire service at a time; to approach each of the prayer sections differently, focusing and finding meaning in each one separately.

Kavvanah:

It can be difficult to pay attention for a long period of time, to sit quietly and focus. Especially, in an age of short attention spans, with constant distractions, focussing and praying the entirety of the service is difficult.

Maintaining your focus is challenging.

Nachman said, “strengthen yourself to focus on a little bit.”

Focus only on a small part of the service at a time. Pay attention only for one section.

He continued, “Afterwards a little bit more”

After you have focused on one section, take a breath, take a moment and recommit your resolve to focus on the next section.

In this way, you will be able to focus through the entirety of the service, one section at a time.

לענין המחשבות זרות שבתפלה.

וכבר ידוע, שכל מחשבה ומחשבה היא קומה שלמה, כמובא. ואמר שפשהאדם עומד ומתפלל כסדר ואינו משגיח על המחשבות זרות, ועל-ידי-זה הוא מנצח אותם ומעבירם ממנו (וכמבאר במקום אחר, שאין צריכין להסתפל עליהם כלל, רק לילך כסדר בתפלתו ולבלי להביט לאחרי כלל, ועל-ידי-זה ממילא יסתלקו), אזי בדרך הלוכו בתפלתו הוא מפיל אותם, לזה חותך יד, ולזה חותך רגל, וכיוצא בזה בשאר האיברים.

פרוש, כמו למשל בענין מלחמה, כשצריך לילך ולעבר בין הרבה רוצחים ואורבים, וכשהוא גבור ועבר ביניהם, אזי בדרך הלוכו הוא מפיל אותם, כי לזה חותך יד בדרך הלוכו ומפילו, ולזה חותך רגל וכו', וכיוצא בזה;

כן הוא ממש בענין התפלה, שפשמתפללין כסדר ואין משגיחין על המחשבות זרות ודוחין אותם ומפילים, אזי בדרך הלוכו בתפלתו הוא חותך לזה יד ולזה רגל וכו' כנ"ל. כי כל מחשבה זרה הוא קלפה, והיא קומה שלמה, כמובא, וכשמתגבר להתפלל כסדר ולבלי להסתפל עליהם, אזי הורג אותם או חותך מהם איברים כנ"ל:

Translation:

On the topic of strange thoughts during prayer:

It is already known, that each thought is a complete level, as it is brought.

Nachman said when a person stands and prays in order, and does not pay any attention to the strange thoughts, he overcomes them and removes them, (this is

explained elsewhere, he does not need to focus on them at all, only to go in the order of his prayers, without looking behind him, and because of this the thoughts leave). Therefor, on the path of his prayers he defeats them, cutting of the hand of one, cutting off the leg of another, and similarly with other limbs.

This is explained like in a war, when he needs to go between many murders and ambushers, when he need to pass between them, therefore the path he walks on defeats them, because this one cuts the hand off and defeats them, and this one cuts off the leg and defeats them.

This is exactly like prayer, when he prays in order and does not think about strange thoughts, so he defeats them, then he goes on the path of prayer and cuts off the hand and the leg, etc, as I said above. Because each strange thought is complete, as it is explained, when he strengthens himself to pray in order and looks at them, thus he ignores them and he kills them one by one.

Commentary:

Nachman addresses the idea of strange thoughts in prayer more completely in Likkutei 1:96. There he talks of understanding where those thoughts come from in order to defeat them. Here he adds the idea of simply not paying them any attention to defeat them. These two separate ideas give different strategies to overcome the distracting thoughts that can make it difficult to pray. Some might find it comforting to simply ignore those thoughts. Others might find ignoring them difficult and understanding where they come from in order to resolve them later might be more meaningful and allow for better concentration during prayer. Allowing for two different strategies to combat against these strange thoughts, suggest that each of us prays differently and needs different things from prayer. Developing our own practices is important as it allows for each of us to find our own meaning.

Kavvanah:

You will find yourself distracted during prayer, strange thoughts will find you.

You will think about your grocery shopping, your responsibilities next week, what you are going to have for dinner.

It will happen.

There is no avoiding it.

What you can change however, is how you deal with those thoughts.

Nachman of Bratslav offers two different ways to deal with these thoughts.

First, ignore them.

Some of these strange thoughts can be ignored, you can move on from them, like a passing car.

Look it is there, now it is gone.

Or, you can try to understand it, where does it come from. What is its purpose.

Take a moment to acknowledge it, to understand it, to deal with it

Then return to your prayers.

You will be distracted in your prayers, how you deal with those distractions is up to you.

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