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THE MYSTICAL DIMENSION  
Volume Two

# "Deep Calling Unto Deep"

The Dynamics of Prayer and *Teshuvah*  
in the Perspective of Chassidism

by  
Jacob Immanuel Schochet

Second Edition חזקת ומוכנס לאינטרנט  
[www.hebrewbooks.org](http://www.hebrewbooks.org)  
ע"י חיים תשס"ז



KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY  
770 Eastern Parkway, New York 11213  
5755 • 1995

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Second Edition 1995

**Kehot Publication Society**  
770 Eastern Parkway / Brooklyn, New York 11213  
(718) 774-4000 / FAX (718) 774-2718

**Orders:**  
291 Kingston Avenue / Brooklyn, New York 11213  
(718) 778-0226 / FAX (718) 778-4148

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Schochet, Jacob Immanuel

**The Mystical dimension / by Jacob Immanuel Schochet**

550 p. 15x22 1/2 cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Contents: v. 1. The mystical tradition -- v. 2. Deep calling  
unto deep -- v. 3. Chassidic dimensions

ISBN 0-8266-0528-1 (v. 1)

ISBN 0-8266-0529-X (v. 2)

ISBN 0-8266-0530-3 (v. 3)

1. Mysticism--Judaism. 2. Prayer--Judaism. 3. Repentance--  
Judaism. 4. Hasidism. 5. Judaism. I. Title.

BM723.S338 1990 90-4090

296.7'12--cd20 CIP

*Printed in the United States of America*

ב"ה

**Dedicated**

בדו"ר

**לכ"ק אדמו"ר**

**The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

זי"ע

Whose personification of all the ideals  
discussed in these pages  
inspired their writing  
and motivates their emulation

# “Deep Calling Unto Deep”

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## PREFACE

Over the course of the past few decades I was invited to deliver numerous lectures about the history and teachings of Jewish mysticism, and particularly of Chassidism. At the same time I also published a number of books, essays and studies in those fields. By virtue of the great and increasing interest in Jewish mysticism, many people have urged me for years to gather and publish these lectures and essays in one depository for ready access.

For most of the lectures, however, I have at best very brief notes of key-words and some references, except for those that were recorded by listeners. Also, most of the articles and essays, written over the course of close to three decades, are in need of updating or revisions. The great amount of time and effort required for producing transcripts, and for editing and revising all materials, prevented me from undertaking this task. On the other hand, there are troubling strictures relating to “He who withholds ‘corn’ . . .”

(Proverbs 11:26), as interpreted by our sages.<sup>1</sup> Thus I started gradually with a selection of materials for which there has been a greater demand, to produce this initial series of three volumes on the mystical dimension in Judaism.

The essays and studies in these volumes deal essentially with explanations of the mystical tradition and perspective in general. The emphasis is on themes and topics that are both central and practical in Chassidic thought. Most of the material was revised, and updated with references to presently readily accessible editions of sources. Occasional overlapping of some themes and ideas is to be expected. More often than not, however, these "repetitions" complement or supplement one another. In view of the fact that this is a collection of essays and studies composed at separate and varying times, there is disparity and inconsistency in the transliteration of non-English words and the rendition of names (e.g., in some parts *Rambam*, and in others *Maimonides*; *Joseph* and *Yosef*; and so forth).

The copious footnotes should not scare off the average reader by giving the appearance of a technical text. These volumes do not represent original insights of the author. They are no more than an attempt to present ideas and teachings of old. Most of the notes thus simply present my sources. Other notes explain or qualify the text, or offer further elaborations.

The numerous quotations from, or references to, Talmud, Midrashim, Zohar, and early classical sources, are not intended as a display of erudition. They simply demonstrate

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1. *Sanhedrin* 91b. See *Zohar* III:46b; *Sefer Chassidim*, section 530, and the commentaries *ad loc.* Cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 23a; *Sukah* 49b; *Vayikra Rabba* 22:1; *et passim*.

how the cited teachings of Chassidism, especially its alleged innovations, are firmly rooted in the historical tradition of normative Judaism.

The modern trend is to put footnotes at the end of chapters, or of the whole book, to avoid the appearance of an overly technical text. Personally I find this awkward. Taking advantage of an author's prerogative, I applied my preference for footnotes in the margins of the relevant passages to more readily serve their purposes.

In view of the intended aims of these volumes, the citations of Chassidic thoughts and teachings generally concentrate on the original sources of the early masters, more particularly — the teachings of R. Israel Baal Shem Tov and his successor, R. Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezhibezh. Bibliographical details for texts cited appear in the index.

The mystical tradition is the most delicate part of our Torah. Thus it is the author's fervent prayer to be spared of errors in this undertaking. By the same token he hopes also that these volumes will contribute somewhat to the goal of illuminating the world with the light of *pnimiyut Hatorah*. This will of itself speed the Messianic promise of "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9), "and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour and every man his brother saying, 'Know G-d,' for they shall *all* know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them" (Jeremiah 31:33).<sup>2</sup>

J. I. S.

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2. *Zohar* III:23a; Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 9:2, and *Hilchot Melachim* 12:5.

## **Bibliographical notes for The Mystical Dimension**

### **Volume One: The Mystical Tradition**

- “To Be One With The One”**: Combination of revised article published in 1971 and transcripts of lectures.
- “Jewish Mysticism: Authentic Tradition vs. Subjective Intuitions”**: Edited transcript of lecture delivered at the International Symposium of Jewish Mysticism, Oxford (England) May 1981.
- “Let Your Well-Springs Be Dispersed Abroad”**: The text of the first seven chapters appeared first in *Di Yiddishe Heim* XVIII:4 (Spring 5737), then with notes as Foreword to the 3rd edition of *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism* (1979). The present edition is a slightly emended version of the original, with the addition of the last three chapters.

### **Volume Two: “Deep Calling Unto Deep”**

- “The Dynamics of Prayer”**: Revised and expanded version of a series of articles that appeared in *Di Yiddishe Heim* V:2-VI:4 (Fall 5724 — Summer 5725).
- “The Dynamics of Teshuvah”**: Edited transcript of a lecture delivered at the International Symposium of Jewish Mysticism — Oxford (England) May 1981 — with the addition of notes.

### **Volume Three: Chassidic Dimensions**

- “The Dynamics of Ahavat Yisrael”**: Revised combination of part of an article that appeared in *Tradition* XVI:4 (Summer 1977) and a series of articles that appeared in



*Di Yiddishe Heim* VIII:3-IX:2 (Winter 5727 — Fall 5728).

**“The Concept of the *Rebbe-Tzadik* in Chassidism”**: Edited transcripts of lectures with the addition of notes.

**“Serve G-d With Joy..”**: Revised and expanded edition of an article that appeared in *Di Yiddishe Heim* XXV:3 (Spring 5746), with the addition of notes.

**“Religious Duty And Religious Experience In Chassidism”**: Revised edition, with the addition of notes, of an article that appeared in *Di Yiddishe Heim* XIV:3 (Winter 5733) to mark the bicentennial of the passing of the Maggid of Mezheritsch.

**“Lamp-lighters: The Philosophy of Lubavitch Activism”**: Slightly revised articles that appeared in *Di Yiddishe Heim* XIV:1-2 (Summer — Fall 5733), and *Tradition* XIII:1 (Summer 1972).

## Foreword

A legal system compounds two levels: the overt “letter of the law,” and the covert “spirit of the law.” The “letter of the law” prescribes precisely, and in no uncertain terms, the requirements for external modes of behaviour. The “spirit of the law” prescribes the ideal level of internal modes of attitude and character.

In logical sequence, the “spirit of the law” precedes and determines the “letter of the law.” On the practical level of human reality, however, the “letter of the law” is more immediate. It serves as a means to train the consciousness and attitude of the “spirit of the law.” Legal obligations, therefore, assume an objective validity even when unaware of the underlying principles and intent.

This concept applies no less to the “legalism” of the Torah, to *Halachah*. The observance of the Torah and its *mitzvot* (precepts) is and remains incumbent regardless of an individual’s knowledge and understanding of *ta’amei hamitzvot* (reasons for the precepts) or his appreciation of

their spiritual or philosophical purpose and significance. The very fact that the *mitzvot* are legal obligations by Divine ordinance is sufficient reason to obey them, and lends objective validity to their observance.

On the other hand, the perfunctory performance of a *mitzvah*, involving no more than the physical limbs of man (to the exclusion of mind and feeling), reduces that *mitzvah* to a lifeless action. Though this, too, has merit and value, it is a far cry from what the *mitzvah* should and could be and effect.

All this is in terms relating to the general context of Torah and *mitzvot*. There are, however, certain principles of the Torah where the "spirit of the law," the very meaning and intent, can not be distinguished or separated from the "letter of the law." In other words, there are *mitzvot* whose intent is absolutely essential to their performance for being the very essence of the act itself. Two of these principles are *Tefilah* (prayer) and *Teshuvah* (repentance).

Both *Tefilah* and *Teshuvah* are fundamental concepts of religion. They are the very ethos of religion. Both require *kavanah* (intent; consciousness of the action) in the fullest sense. To speak of *Tefilah* or *Teshuvah* without *kavanah* is an absurdity, a contradiction in terms. *Tefilah* and *Teshuvah* are both synonymous with thought, intent, awareness of what one is doing at the time. Needless to say, thought itself is a comprehensive term which subdivides into many levels and degrees of depth, width and intensity.

*Tefilah* and *Teshuvah* are unique from another perspective as well. On the one hand they constitute objective acts in their own rights, like all other *mitzvot*. On the other hand, more than other *mitzvot*, both imply direct and overt conse-

quences: both involve a dynamic process, in the very definition of their practice and its performance, on both the exoteric and esoteric levels. Moreover, the dynamics of *Tefilah* and *Teshuvah* are most intimately related with the degree or intensity of their *kavanah*.

It is not surprising, then, that the mystical tradition of Judaism in general, and Chassidism in particular, offer unique insights to the dynamics of both *Tefilah* and *Teshuvah*. There is an immense wealth of material on these subjects in the writings of the Chassidic teachers.

Chassidism dwells a great deal on the mystical doctrine of R. Isaac Luria (the *Ari*), the most authoritative master of the Kabbalah, that notwithstanding the fact that the *mitzvah* of Torah-study is superior, nowadays, in the era of *ikvot Meshicha* (lit. 'on the heels of Mashiach,' i.e., the period immediately preceding the Messianic redemption), *Tefilah* constitutes the primary service of G-d.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on *Tefilah* is so closely identified with Chassidic teaching and practice, from the very beginning of the Chassidic movement, that it is rightly taken as one of the typical and unique principles of Chassidism. The same applies to the wider sense of the concept of *Teshuvah*.

This volume deals with the dynamics of these two comprehensive *mitzvot* with special emphasis on the Chassidic perspective. The first part, on *Tefilah*, is a revised and expanded version of a series of articles published nearly thirty years ago. The Chassidic dimension was taken essen-

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1. R. Chaim Vital, *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 7. See also *idem.*, *Eitz Chayim* 39:1-2, and *ibid.*, 47:6. Cf. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, Kuntres Acharon, sect. IV and VIII.

tially from the principal works of R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the *Chabad*-school. For this edition, we incorporated a great deal from the presently accessible teachings of the founder of Chassidism, R. Israel Baal Shem Tov, and his disciple and successor, R. Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezhibezh. Obviously there is much more that could be added, even from these three early masters, but time-restrictions did not permit to undertake that task at this time.

The second part, on *Teshuvah*, is an edited transcript of a lecture, with the addition of references and notes. By its very nature it is even more limited than the part on *Tefilah*.

In spite of these shortcomings, it is hoped that this volume will succeed in offering a better understanding of the dynamics of *Tefilah* and *Teshuvah* in general, and a meaningful glimpse of the Chassidic dimension thereof in particular. In turn, these should help to make the practice of these fundamental and comprehensive principles of Judaism a more consciously vital experience on all three levels of their thought, speech and deed.

J. Immanuel Schochet

Toronto, Ont., 18th of Shevat, 5750

**יהי רצון מלפניך . .**

**The Dynamics of Prayer**

# The Dynamics of Prayer

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# יהי רצון מלפניך . .

## The Dynamics of Prayer

### I

#### Introduction

*Tefilah* (prayer) is an essential constituent of religion. It is for the soul what food is for the body.<sup>1</sup> As fire flickers upwards, drawn to its supernal source, so does prayer issue forth — the Divine within man drawn to the Divine beyond. It is hard, if not impossible, to conceive of faith in G-d without some concept of *tefilah*.

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1. R. Judah Halevi, *Kuzary* III:5. Note that *tefilah* is synonymous with the very soul of man: Rashi, *Berachot* 5b, s.v. *toref nafsho* (citing I Samuels 1:15 as proof-text). Cf. R. Judah Loew (Maharal), *Netivot Olam*, Teshuvah: end of ch. 5.



The act of prayer and the belief in a personal G-d, in Divine Providence, are interdependent principles.<sup>2</sup> The religious person senses this in times of plenty, when he wishes to express gratitude, or in times of need, when he needs comfort, by communing with his Maker and Sustainer. In times like the months of Elul and Tishrei, periods of Heavenly and personal examination and judgment, when vital decisions about our immediate future are in the balance, we turn to G-d with more fervent prayers than usual. For in a most serene part of the High Holidays' liturgy<sup>3</sup> we are reminded that prayer is one of the means by which we can avert the undesired, the trials and troubles that often plague us.<sup>4</sup>

Thus we confront a most unusual and wonderful aspect of prayer: to avert, escape, and even change, unfavourable decrees. This power, however, as well as the positive aspect of prayer to elicit the Heavenly blessings for our well-being, appear quite mystical on the one hand, and rather contradictory on the other. Several serious questions arise when considering this nature of prayer.

First and foremost, we understand prayer to be the act of a finite creature. Heavenly blessings and decrees, however, are from the independent Creator. How, then, can an act of man, completely dependent for everything on G-d, influence, as it were, and actuate, G-d, who is Absolute? How can the Infinite be made, as it were, to change His own decrees, because of the words and deeds of a finite being which *He* made and formed, *He* animates and sustains?

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2. R. Joseph Albo, *Ikkarim* IV:16. Cf. below, note 18.

3. Hymn of *Unetaneh Tokef*.

4. *Yerushalmi*, *Ta'anit* 2:1; *ibid.*, *Sanhedrin* 10:2. Cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 16b.

These are valid questions that will and ought to be asked by every thinking person. They ought to be asked, so that the search for answers will lead to a more profound understanding of the vital aspects upon which they touch. But this search must begin with some general premises and definitions of prayer.

## II

### Principle of Unity

*"To love G-d, your G-d, with all your heart'  
(Deuteronomy 11:13); which is the service of the  
heart? It is prayer."'<sup>5</sup>*

**T**his terse definition of prayer as the "service of the heart," quite adequately covers its meaning. The heart is the central organ which controls the blood-circulation, the very flow of life. On the metaphysical level, the heart is also the medium through which humanness expresses itself. In the heart are ignited the sparks of human feelings and passion. From it flicker the flames of human desires and caprices, and through its manifestations we perceive man's character and personality.

From the heart springs life to all limbs, for from it flows the stream of blood to all the limbs, to the very end of

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5. *Sifre*, Ekev, par. 41; *Ta'anit* 2a.

the body, and from the same heart stem the ascending and conjoining aspirations of the soul to its source in G-d.<sup>6</sup> Little wonder, then, that G-d says to man: "Give Me your heart. For when your heart is Mine, then I know that you are Mine!"<sup>7</sup>

This, then, is the general idea of prayer: the service of man's heart. It means a complete, unconditional surrender of the self to G-d: becoming so bound up and united with G-d that one perceives only the Divine aspect in everything. Prayer is the direct, undisturbed communication with G-d, the channel bringing us to the reality of unison with the true Essence of all.<sup>8</sup>

This definition is actually implied in the Hebrew term for prayer: *tefilah*. The word *tefilah* is derived from a root-word that means to join together, to unite.<sup>9</sup> *Tefilah* sets out to join and unite man and G-d, creature and Creator, to permeate the former with the radiance of the Latter. This is accomplished only when *tefilah* is the true service of the heart: with proper devotion and concentration; involving the totality of man — every part of the mind, absorbing all thoughts and feelings. If the mind does not fully partake, the bond is loose and incomplete. Man remains exposed to the

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6. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, Bereishit, p. 7d.

7. *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 1:8. *Zohar* II:93b, and III:160a. Cf. *Sanhedrin* 106b.

8. See Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* III:51.

9. See Onkelos, Rashi, Rashbam, and Seforno, on Genesis 30:8. Rashi on Numbers 19:15. *Torah Or*, *Terumah*, p. 79d; and *Siddur im Dach*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, p. 22c. See R. Menachem M. Schneerson of Lubavitch, *Likutei Sichot*, vol. I, Pekudey, sect. VIII; and *idem*, glossary note on *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5709, p. 79.

danger of extraneous thoughts intruding and interfering. That kind of prayer is like a roofless — thus insecure — courtyard: defenseless against any downpours of harmful rains.<sup>10</sup>

Total involvement is the first and foremost condition for prayer. It is the meaning of "to love G-d and to serve Him with *all* the heart," with all one's being; to surrender oneself completely, to dissolve in the unity of the bond with thoughts or desires for nothing else. In the metaphorical terminology of the Kabbalah and Chassidism, therefore, this proper form of prayer is spoken of as a *zivug*, a figurative state of marital union, the offspring of which is new conceptions, new love and reverence for G-d. These effects result from consciousness of the Divine, in each person on his or her own level, corresponding to the individual efforts in prayer.<sup>11</sup>

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10. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 8c. See also *Torah Or*, Bereishit, p. 1c.

11. *Likutei Torah*, Beshalach, p. 2d; *ibid.*, Bamidbar, p. 5d. See also R. Chaim Vital, *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 7; and *Shulchan Aruch Arizal*, Kavanat Hatefilah:1.

### III

#### Daily Schedule

The consciousness and awareness of all-permeating Divinity, and the consequent love and reverence born therefrom, are not to be restricted to the hours of communion alone. The moments of Torah and *tefilah* should generate a state of mind and feeling that lasts continuously, throughout the rest of the day, even when involved with physical and material pursuits, even while attending to our bodily needs, even when in the midst of an association with people. It is the state of mind which the Song on the relation between man and G-d poetically describes in the words of "I sleep, but my heart is awake; the voice of my Beloved knocks" (Song 5:2).<sup>12</sup>

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12. *Moreh Nevuchim* III:51. — In this context there is a parable of the Baal Shem Tov: A great, merciful king proclaimed that whoever has any needs should but come and ask, and it shall be

For this very reason there are set times for *tefilah*, distributed over the span of the day. One prayer will thus generate that feeling and state of mind until the time of the next prayer.<sup>13</sup> The prayer of *shacharit* is the first thing in the

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granted to him. Some asked for silver and gold, others for high positions. One wise man, however, requested permission to address the king three times each day. The king was pleased that this man preferred speaking to the king to any riches. Thus he decreed that when this wise man wishes to enter the king's innermost chambers to address him, he should be led by way of the king's treasures to take whatever he desires, without restraint. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 97.

Another version: A king decreed that whoever submits a request will have it answered. Now one man, who longs and desires to commune with the king at all times, had a dilemma: submitting a specific request will gain him his wish, but then he will no longer have an excuse to commune with the king. Thus he prefers not to obtain material needs in order to retain an excuse to appear before the king time and again. This is the meaning of, "A prayer for the poor, when he enwraps himself and pours out his prayer before G-d" (Psalms 102:1): the poor prays to be able to present his petition before G-d. *Degel Machaneh Ephrayim*, Tetze (*Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, Noach, par. 125). Cf. *Yoma* 76b. (See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. IX, p. 271f., for an explanation of the parable.)

13. *Kuzary* III:5. See *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 4:1, where the daily prayers are said to parallel the evident changes of daybreak, sunset and nightfall.

This resolves the problem of the continuous repetition of daily prayers. As the Midrash puts it: on the human level, the more we ask and borrow from someone, the less he will like us, and, in fact, he will tend to ignore or repulse us. This is not the case, however, with G-d: the more we approach Him, and the more we press our prayers upon Him, the more He rejoices, and He accepts us at all times. (*Midrash Tehilim* 4:3 and 55:6) For every time that we approach G-d, we demonstrate our consciousness of His existence and sovereignty, as well as our total

morning, to exert its influence over all our thoughts and deeds of the day; and the prayer of *arvit* is the first thing in the evening, to hold and keep us through the night.<sup>14</sup> No less important is the prayer of *minchah*, in the afternoon. It is recited in the midst of our activities, at the height of our mundane entanglements, at a moment when thoughts of the sublime appear altogether incongruous to our self-centered interests. Just then, at the very point of possible detachment, we need to strengthen our bonds. We are told to interrupt whatever we are doing, and we are called upon to remember and acknowledge that there is a higher purpose to everything, that there is "Justice and a Judge" on whom everything depends.<sup>15</sup>

Prayer thus demonstrates man's awareness of his dependence on his Creator, man's gratitude and appreciation.<sup>16</sup> For prayer is to remind us continually of G-d,<sup>17</sup> to teach and remind us that G-d takes notice of us and our

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dependence on G-d; R. Mosheh of Tarani (Mabit), *Bet Elokim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 2.

See below, sect. IX-X, additional reasons for the frequency of daily prayers.

14. See *Sefer Hachinuch*, par. 420.

15. *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 3. R. Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, *Sefer Hamaamarim-Kuntreisim*, vol. I, p. 412; and *idem*, *Sefer Hamaamarim* 5700, p. 150. See *Zohar* I:72a. Cf. R. Shmuel of Lubavitch (*Maharash*), *Torat Shmuel* — 5627, p. 58, for another aspect in the significance of the *minchah*-prayer.

See *Tikunei Zohar* 50:86a that the acronym of "Se'u marom eyneichem — (Lift up your eyes on high [and see who has created these] — Isaiah 40:26) — שמע — is also an acronym for *shacharit*, *minchah* and *arvit*!

16. See Ramban, Commentary on Exodus 13:16. *Kuzary* III: 17.

17. *Moreh Nevuchim* III:44.



ways.<sup>18</sup> All that is the union and conjunction implied by the word *tefilah*.

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18. See R. Bachya ibn Pakuda, *Chovot Halevovot*, Cheshbon Hane-fesh, ch. 3:mode 18; *Moreh Nevuchim* III:36; R. Chasdai Crescas, *Or Hashem* III:2, Klal 1:1; *Ikkarim* IV: 16 and 18; R. Isaac Arama, *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Tzav: sha'ar 58; *Bet Elokim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 2; and *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 3 — that prayer is an affirmation of the principles of existence of G-d; sovereignty of G-d; omnipotence of G-d; Divine Providence; man's total dependence on G-d; and the possibility of evoking Divine grace and compassion even if not deserved (cf. *Tanchuma*, Vayera:1; *Midrash Tehilim* 4:5; R. Yehudah Hachassid, *Sefer Chassidim*, par. 130). Prayer thus gives the lie to the heresies of atheism and deism, and to the fatalism expressed in Job 21:14 ("What is the Almighty that we should serve Him, and what good does it do if we pray to Him?").

In this context it is explained why prayer (the *amidah*) requires that the feet must be kept together and level, and that the hands be folded over the heart (*Berachot* 10b; *Shabbat* 10a; *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 95): in this position one is like bound up, unable to do anything, helpless and defenseless on his own, thus altogether dependent on G-d. R. Shlomo ibn Aderet (Rashba) on *Berachot* 10b; *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 5. See also *Bet Elokim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 7.

## IV

### Speech and Thought

It follows, then, that *tefilah* is a concise summary of “I have set G-d before me at all times” (Psalms 16:8). It is a synonym for *kavanah*, for these two concepts are in effect one and the same.<sup>19</sup>

*Kavanah* means proper thoughts and devotion, proper intention and attention, “to clear the heart (mind) of all thoughts and visualize oneself as standing in the presence of the *Shechinah*.”<sup>20</sup>

Practically speaking, this means that prayer involves two faculties of man: speech and thought. When there is a

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19. See *Pesikta Zutrata* (*Midrash Lekach Tov*), Ekev, on Deuteronomy 11:13; Ramban's glosses on *Sefer Hamitzvot* I:5. *Likutei Torah*, Balak, p. 71b.

20. Rambam, *Hilchot Tefilah* 4:15-16. Cf. *Berachot* 31a; *Sanhedrin* 22a.

lack of *kavanah*, a lack of awareness of the fundamental principle that *tefilah* means 'standing before the Almighty and addressing Him,' there is in effect no prayer.<sup>21</sup> The articulation of the words of prayer and the accompanying thought are like the body and soul of prayer, and *tefilah* without *kavanah* is "like a body without a soul, a husk without a kernel . . . of which it is said, 'This people draws near, with its mouth and lips it honours Me, but it has removed its heart from Me' (Isaiah 29:13)."<sup>22</sup> When praying like this, one may as well be digging holes in the ground or chopping wood in a forest.<sup>23</sup> That kind of prayer is no different than the mindless chirping of birds.<sup>24</sup>

The significance of *kavanah*, the fact that consciousness is the essence of *tefilah*, lends validity and value to the prayers of the simple and ignorant. They may not understand the meanings of the words they utter, but insofar that

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21. *Yerushalmi, Berachot* 4:4 (also *ibid.* 5:2): "Without *dei'ah* (knowledge; consciousness) there is no prayer!" Version in *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 115 (and see there the commentators): "Without *binah* (understanding; contemplation) there is no prayer." On the legal requirements of *kavanah* for prayer, see *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 93 and 96-101 (especially in *Shulchan Aruch Harav*). Cf. R. Chaim Soloveichik, *Chidushei R. Chayim Halevi al Harambam*, Hilchot Tefilah 4:1. [The basic principle underlying his comments, however, was already anticipated and stated by R. Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, *Derech Pikudecha*, end of first introduction (p. 12).] See also *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Ha'emtz'a'i*, nos. 18 and 36; and cf. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. XXII, p. 117f.

22. *Chovot Halevot*, Cheshbon Hanefesh, ch. 9. See also R. Saadiah Gaon, *Emunot Vede'ot* V:4, citing Psalms 78:36-7 as prooftext.

23. *Moreh Nevuchim* III:51, citing Jeremiah 12:2 as prooftext.

24. *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Tzav, sha'ar 58.

their prayers are offered with simple faith and total sincerity they are beloved and acceptable. Indeed, the pure prayer of simple folks is favoured by G-d even when read incorrectly or naively mistaking its true meanings, or when altogether spontaneous as opposed to the prescribed formulations of the prayer-book.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, notwithstanding the fact that *kavanah* is the very soul of prayer, this does not mean that it could be offered as a mental exercise alone. Whenever possible,<sup>26</sup> it must be articulated. It must be expressed by spoken words. For speech — which is an extension and manifestation of thought — is the unique mark of the human.<sup>27</sup> Generally speaking, then, the absence of speech means absence of full

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25. See *Shir Rabba* 2:4:1 (on Song 2:4): “‘*Vediglo* (his banner) upon me is love’ — if an ignorant man reads *ve'ayavta* (you shall hate) instead of *ve'ahavta* (you shall love), G-d says ‘*dilugo* — his mistake is beloved to Me’.. If a child reads *Mushe* instead of *Moshe*, or *Aharun* instead of *Aharon*.. G-d says, ‘*liglugo* — his babbling is beloved to Me’.. Even if a child skips the Name of G-d many times he comes to no harm and G-d declares ‘*dilugo* — his omission is beloved to Me.’” Cf. *Zohar* III: 85b; and *Likutim Yekarim*, sect. 3. Note, in this context, the various stories about the sincere devotion of simple folks, in *Sefer Chassidim* (Ms. Parma), sect. 5-6; *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 385; R. Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, *Torat Hachassidut*, p. 6. See also *The Great Maggid*, p. 59ff. Cf. *Maamarei Admur Hazaken* — 5570, p. 53.

26. *Berachot* 31a; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 101:2. See *Midrash Tehilim* 4:9, that when it is not possible to articulate prayer, one should meditate in the heart, as it is written, “Say in your heart...” (Psalms 4:5).

27. See Targum Onkelos, Rashi, and Ramban, on Genesis 2:7. Cf. also *Zohar Chadash*, *Bereishit*, 10d; and *Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, *Bereishit*, par. 91ff.

human status.<sup>28</sup> In that defective state one is no longer a human recipient for the Divine grace. Thus one must articulate requests with actual words — requesting as a *human* being who has needs and who is able to have these needs filled.<sup>29</sup>

The need for verbal prayer is understood also by a more literal aspect of the speech-thought/body-soul analogy, viewing the body as a vessel or container: verbal prayer provides a 'vessel' or 'container' to receive the outpouring of the Divine grace requested. Speech has a physical reality and makes it possible for the Divine grace to flow to the physical reality of the material world. The spoken words thus become the instrument or intermediary through which the spiritual fulfillment of prayer can become realized on the physical level. Thought, on the other hand, is a mental or spiritual reality. It is a mental or spiritual tool or vessel. To be sure, mental prayer, too, is 'heard' Above, and it, too, draws forth a response. The answer to prayer, however, is restricted to the vessel provided; thus it will flow only to the spiritual vessel of thought, and will not become realized on a physical level.<sup>30</sup>

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28. There is an intentional qualification here, as noted in the sequel of this citation (see next note): the perfect *tzadik* is an altogether spiritual individual. He is in effect 'all soul,' on a level of complete attachment to the spiritual realm (*cf. Tzava'at Harivash*, par. 105). The prayer or outcry of his heart, therefore, is heard even when not articulated orally.

29. *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 2. On the need of articulating prayer, see also R. Bachya, Torah Commentary on Numbers 12:13; and *Bet Elokim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 3.

30. See R. Jacob Joseph of Polnoy, *Ben Porat Yossef*, p. 23c, and *ibid.*, p. 53b (cited, with parallel passages, in *Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, Noach, note 59). See also R. Dov Ber of Mezhirech, *Maggid Devarav Leya'akov*, sect. 261.

## V

## Comprehensive Principle

In view of all the above, it is readily seen that prayer is a general principle: the principle of becoming absorbed in the G-d-man relationship, to become G-d-centered as opposed to self-centered.

In this context we can understand why many codifiers do not regard daily prayer as a Biblical precept (*de'orayta*), as one of the 613 *mitzvot*, but merely as an ordinance of the sages (*derabanan*).<sup>31</sup> For the *mitzvot*, the 613 directives of

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31. See Ramban on *Sefer Hamitzvot* I:5; R. Isaac of Corbeil, *Amudei Golah* (*Sefer Mitzvot Katan*), par. 11. Cf. R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim 106; *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Hazaken*, no. 15; and *Likutei Sichot*, vol. XIV, p. 223.

Ramban points out that it appears from the Talmud that daily prayer is a Rabbinic precept. Rambam's view, that it is Biblical, finds support in *Zohar* III:257a (see also *ibid.* II:270b; and I:207b). From this source it would even seem that not only

the Torah, are the 'instruments,' the specific means, to effect the realization of the Torah's purpose. General, all-comprehensive principles are not part of a code of particular do's and don'ts.<sup>32</sup> *Tefilah*, as defined, is one such general principle. It is the very soul, the vital force, for all the *mitzvot*, for all the specific instruments.<sup>33</sup>

*Tefilah* is thus compared to the spinal cord. The 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah correspond to the the 613 parts in the human body: the 248 commandments correspond to the 248 limbs,<sup>34</sup> and the 365 prohibitions correspond to the 365 veins.<sup>35</sup> Now, the vertebrae of the spine are counted among the 248 limbs.<sup>36</sup> The spinal cord itself, however, is not included among these. Just as the spinal cord in the vertebral column is the backbone supporting and upholding the body, so is prayer the spinal cord and backbone of the *mitzvot*. That is why it is not included among the specific commandments.<sup>37</sup>

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daily prayer is Biblical, but also the three daily prayers! This view, not shared by Rambam or others, is as unique as difficult to maintain; see R. Reuven Margolius, "Haraya Mehemna-Sefer Hamitzvot" (prefacing his edition of the *Zohar*), par. 11, and *idem*, "Harambam Vehazohar," *Sinai* 33:p. 128. This problem may be resolved, however, by considering that the practice of the three daily prayers (initiated by the patriarchs; *Berachot* 26b) was instituted by Moses (*Tanchuma*, Tavo:1. Cf. Psalms 55:13, and Daniel 6:11). The *Zohar* may thus be interpreted as mentioning not only the general precept but also the prevalent practice.

32. See Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, shorash 4.

33. *Likutei Torah*, Balak, p. 71b.

34. *Makot* 22b.

35. *Zohar* I:170b.

36. *Ohelot* 1:8.

37. *Likutei Torah*, Balak, p. 70c. See also *Torah Or*, Esther, p. 91a. Cf. *Mayim Rabim* — 5636, ch. 88.

## VI

### The Ladder

There is another analogy for prayer. Though of a different nature, it is more explicit and definitive of the nature and workings of prayer.

*Tefilah*, as stated, joins man to G-d. It is the means to uncover and reveal the Divine in man and creation. It raises us from the chaos of worldliness, from an aimless and confusing wilderness, to a life of meaning and purpose. Through prayer we move from where we *are* to where we *ought to be*. It is the elevator by means of which we ascend and soar ever higher, from the darkness of matter to the very source of light. It is the link between lower and higher, between earth and heaven, body and soul.

Thus prayer is the ladder that appeared in Jacob's dream: "A ladder set in the earth, and its top reaches into the heaven; and behold, the messengers of G-d ascend and descend on it." (Genesis 28:12) This ladder refers to the prayer



of man on earth, which reaches into Heaven, i.e., unto G-d.<sup>38</sup>

By means of a ladder one climbs from the ground to the roof. By means of prayer (the speech of the devoted heart), the soul climbs higher and higher: ascending step by step, from its present level to the very peak of all levels, drawn upwards by its passion for G-d, until it becomes fully absorbed in the radiance of the Infinite, blessed be He.<sup>39</sup>

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38. *Zohar* I:266b; *ibid.* III:306b.

39. *Torah Or*, Vayakhel, p. 88a. Cf. below, chapter XV.

## VII

### Self-Improvement

**I**n short: Prayer is the service, the submission of man's heart to G-d. It is the consciousness in man of the Omnipresent. It is the ladder on which man's soul ascends to become united with, and absorbed in, the Infinite. Translated into practical terms, this means that prayer elevates man and matter. This is indicated already in the statement that he who prays "should direct his eyes downwards and his heart upwards"<sup>40</sup>: 'downwards' — to the soul, the Divine Presence inherent to everything; 'upwards' — to the Holy One, blessed be He.<sup>41</sup>

Through prayer we realize G-d's all-permeating presence, even in what appears to us as nature and matter. Through prayer we come to realize that G-d the Infinite

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40. *Yevamot* 105a.

41. *Tikunei Zohar* 21:50b.

(Divine Transcendence) and G-d manifest in the order and workings of the universe (Divine Immanence) is One, and there is nothing beside Him.<sup>42</sup> The soul, spirituality, Divinity, comes to the fore, penetrates matter, lends it its ultimate form, and confers upon it meaning and purpose. For when all of man's appetitive powers, all his interests and desires, are directed fully and consciously to the sublime (the concept of *kavanah*), then man himself, wholly and totally, soul *and* body, spirit *and* matter, is in that sublimity.<sup>43</sup>

This process of self-elevation through prayer can actually be traced. Though sometimes prompted by personal desire, self-centered wishes, the immediate cause of prayer is always reason. When the impulse of desire awakens, man's rational faculty seeks a way to realize that particular desire. As it considers the issue, it concludes that realization is possible only through Omnipotent G-d. Thus it is led to the decision that the appropriate thing to do is to pray to Him.<sup>44</sup>

In carrying this decision to its logical conclusion, we set into motion a chain-reaction of reflection on one's personal status and subsequent self-improvement. After all, the petitioner understands that he will have to put himself into the good graces of the Supplier. Begging a favour, he will seek to be pleasing and acceptable to Him on whom he is dependent for the fulfillment of his wishes. Reflecting on the nature of G-d, in order to know the most effective method for success-

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42. See *Zohar* III:229b; *Likutei Torah*, Chukat, p. 61dff. Cf. *Shulchan Aruch* (Harav), Orach Chayim 95:3, which will resolve the problem raised by *Nitzutzei Orot* on *Zohar* I:132a.

43. For man is identical with his thought (*Zohar* I:266b); thus man himself is where his thought is; *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 69, and see the notes there.

44. *Ikkarim* IV:17.

ful prayer, he must realize that there are certain modes of behaviour which are incompatible with his aims.

For example, of disobedience it is written — “He that turns away his ear from hearing Torah, even his prayer is an abomination” (Proverbs 28:9);<sup>45</sup> of injustice — “Who also eat the flesh of My people and flay their skin from off them .. then they shall cry unto G-d but He will not answer them” (Michah 3:3f.); and likewise with other forms of misbehaviour condemned by G-d.<sup>46</sup>

To think of G-d, and to accept the idea of His Being (inherent in the very concept of prayer), of itself also implies the acceptance of His decrees.<sup>47</sup> It is altogether absurd to disregard G-d’s wishes while asking Him to fulfill our own. Thus it is said, “As He called and they would not hear, so they shall call and I will not hear” (Zechariah 7:13).<sup>48</sup> It is equally absurd to expect the grace of a grant when refusing to be gracious ourselves: “Whoso stops his ears against the cry of the poor, he also shall cry but shall not be answered” (Proverbs 21:13).<sup>49</sup>

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45. See *Devarim Rabba* 10:1. *Shabbat* 10a.

46. *Emunot Vede’ot* V:6. See also *Tanchuma*, Mishpatim:16; *Sefer Chassidim*, sect. 158; and *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 2.

47. See *Mechilta*, Yitro, on Exodus 20:3. See also Ramban, Commentary on Exodus 20:2.

48. See *Tanchuma*, Bechukotai:2.

49. *Oti’ot deR. Akiva*, s.v. dalet. See *Shabbat* 151b, “He who is merciful of others, mercy is shown to him by Heaven; but he who is not merciful to others, mercy is not shown to him by Heaven;” and *Sefer Chassidim*, sect. 553: “One may pray and not be answered because he is not concerned with another person’s suffering and humiliation. It is fitting that he will not be answered, because he should have thought, “If I had suffered the same as the other, I would have prayed for it, and it is

*Tefilah*, as indicated by another meaning of this term itself,<sup>50</sup> thus is a trial, a form of judgment. In our context it is a form of self-judgment, to sustain and enhance that which is right and just already, to correct that which needs improvement, and to implement that which as yet is missing.

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written, 'Love your fellow like yourself' (Leviticus 19:18)" .. That is why all prayers and supplications were ordained in a plural form" (cf. *Zohar* I:160b; *Kuzary* III:19; and see "The Dynamics of *Ahavat Yisrael*," end of ch. IX, and note 103 there).

Cf. *Shemot Rabba* 22:3; *Kohelet Rabba* 1:34. *Emunot Vede'ot* V:6; and *Chovot Halevovot*, Cheshbon Hanefesh, ch. 3:modes 7-8.

50. See *Sanhedrin* 44a on Psalms 106:30, interpreting *vayefalel* (he prayed; see Targum *ad loc.*) "he wrought judgment."
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## VIII

### The Crucible

Prayer causes us to reflect upon ourselves, upon our behaviour and attitudes. Even while speaking to G-d, we are actually addressing ourselves.<sup>51</sup> Even while seeking the betterment of our material status (the aim of certain prayers), it accomplishes the betterment of our spiritual status.<sup>52</sup> Prayer inspires the ideal of *imitatio Dei*, of emulating the ways and attributes of G-d:<sup>53</sup> as He is compassionate and merciful (i.e., as we perceive Him, and as we expect Him to express Himself towards us with His attributes of compassion and mercy), so you be compassionate and merciful. This is the effect of prayer.

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51. The Hebrew verb for praying, as *hitpalel*, is a *hitpa'el* — i.e., reflexive — tense!

52. See *Emunot Vede'ot* V:5-6.

53. *Mechilta* on Exodus 15:2; *Sifre*, Ekev, par. 49; *Sotah* 14a. See *Moreh Nevuchim* I:54.

"What the refining pot does for silver, and what the furnace does for gold, prayer does for man" (Proverbs 27:21).<sup>54</sup> Silver or gold mixed with base metals, when thrown into an adequately heated refining pot will become separated from the drosses. The precious elements will emerge independently. Repeatedly subjecting the same silver or gold to this process of refinement results in ever greater purity for the precious elements, with an ever more complete detachment and removal of base particles. Though some of those particles were so minute that their presence was hidden and not detectable by the naked eye, the heat of the fire detaches and eliminates them, leaving the silver and gold in a state of purity. It is likewise with prayer:

The animal soul and the Divine component in man are in a state of mixture. Good and evil are intermingled. The flames of fire of prayer, however, expose the different components, even the most minute, and separate the precious and wholesome elements from the base and deleterious ones. The beneficial elements are purified and absorbed, while the worthless residuum is discarded and eliminated.<sup>55</sup>

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54. This is an interpretative translation, as rendered in R. Eleazar Azkary, *Sefer Charedim*, Teshuvah: ch. 4; *Tanya*, Igeret Hakodesh, sect. XII; R. Dov Ber of Lubavitch (*Mitteler Rebbe*), *Derech Chayim*, ch. 46. See also below, sect. XIV (note 102).

55. *Torah Or*, Ki Tissa, p. 111cf. See also *ibid.*, Beshalach, p. 65b; *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p. 28c, and Chukat, p. 62a.

## IX

*Bitul HaYesh*

“**T**o love G-d, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart.” This is the classical proof-text for prayer, as cited earlier. That verse, however, has more words: “with all your heart *and with all your nefesh*.”

*Nefesh* is usually translated as ‘soul’ or ‘life’ (and the literal meaning of the verse thus implies a readiness for self-sacrifice<sup>56</sup>). Even so, the term *nefesh* may also mean — and in various passages is interpreted as — ‘will’.<sup>57</sup> This second meaning applies also to our definition of prayer. Thus we can now rephrase our proof-text to read “‘To serve Him with all your heart and all your will’ — this is prayer.”<sup>58</sup>

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56. See *Sifre*, Ekev, on Deuteronomy 11:13. Cf. *Berachot* 54a.

57. See Genesis 23:8, and Rashi *ad loc*. See also Jeremiah 15:1, and *Likutei Sichot*, vol. II, p. 456.

58. Cf. *Torah Or*, Miketz, p. 36b. See also *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p.



This is not a far-fetched or arbitrary interpretation when considering that the *total* submission (and thereby: sublimation) of will is the very purpose of prayer. The ideal of the Mishnaic dictum "Nullify your will before His will"<sup>59</sup> is the aim of, and becomes realized through, prayer. *Tefilah* requires and must effect a state of "All my limbs shall say, 'G-d, who is like You!'" (Psalms 35:10). For *tefilah* is to involve man wholly and totally: all wills and desires must be subjected to His, the Divine Will. The very essence of *tefilah* thus implies *bitul hayesh*, to negate and nullify all traces of ego, of self-centeredness.<sup>60</sup>

Prayer demands a transcendence of self, "as if stripped of physicality, no longer sensing one's own reality in this world."<sup>61</sup> "Man must regard himself as *ayin* (naught) and

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26b (and Balak, p. 71b), tracing the initial word *le'ahavah* (to love) to the root-word *avah* (to will; to consent). Cf. R. Dov Ber of Lubavitch, *Shaarei Teshuvah*, p. 98ff.

59. *Avot* 2:4. See *Siddur im Dach*, Sha'ar Hatefilin, p. 16b.

60. *Torah Or*, Esther, p. 122c. Note that *bitul hayesh* is the very mark and test of purity and holiness, while selfhood is identified with evil and idolatry; see *Tanya*, ch. 22; and cf. *Chulin* 89a.

61. *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 62 and 97. See *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, 98:1; and *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 259.

In this context note also Maharal's interpretation of "One should always enter the Synagogue through two doors .. and pray" (*Berachot* 8a): to pass through one door only indicates a departure from the outside, i.e., removing oneself from all mundane matters. This alone, however, is not yet union with G-d, which requires two things: a) to remove oneself from any other things; and b) to unite with G-d before whom one prays. Neither of these two is sufficient without the other. Thus one must enter through 'two doors': passing through the first door signifies the 'move away from the outside,' then entering through the second door signifies 'coming inside,' to unite with G-d. *Netivot Olam*, *Avodah*, ch. 5.

forget about himself altogether.. Thus he is able to transcend the temporal and enter the 'world of thought' where everything is the same: life and death, sea and land.. If one remains bound to the materialism of this world, one is bound to the diversity of good and evil; how, then, can he transcend the temporal to the sphere of absolute unity and oneness? Moreover, when assuming selfhood and concerned with personal needs, the Holy One, blessed be He, cannot be vested in him; for He, blessed be He, is *En Sof* (Infinite), thus cannot be held by any vessel. It is different, however, when regarding oneself as *ayin* (naught).''<sup>62</sup>

In this sense, too, *tefilah* is said to have taken the place of the Scriptural sacrifices.<sup>63</sup> On the altar of *tefilah* one is to offer the animal soul and nature of man. The natural desires and inclinations of the heart and the body are to be refined and purified to the point of exclusive concern with the necessary and proper. The appetitive powers of the animal soul are to be directed towards the Divine, to seek Its nearness and to desire absorption therein.<sup>64</sup>

Prayer will thus remove man from anything improper, even while motivating the practice of that which is just and right. That is how *tefilah* helps and leads to self-sanctification, not only in matters of *chiyuv* (incumbent obligations) and *issur* (incumbent prohibitions), but also in matters of *reshut* (the optional) — of 'may' and 'need not.'<sup>65</sup>

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62. *Maggid Devarav Laya'akov*, sect. 151 (partially quoted in *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 406).

63. *Berachot* 26b and 32b. See *Likutei Torah*, Tetze, p. 34c.

64. *Torah Or*, Ki Tissa, p. 111c. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p. 28b; *ibid.*, Sukot, p. 78d.

65. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p. 20d; also *ibid.*, Bamidbar, p. 13d.

## X

### Sublimation

**A**cknowledgment of the unique Oneness of G-d, and the subsequent denial of selfhood for anything but G-d, is both the condition and the result of prayer. It is the underlying premise for the elevation, sublimation and ultimate self-actualization of man, and through man of all matter. For man on earth is sustained through the physical entities of the realms of minerals, vegetables and animals. These move along with man who utilizes them. As man, therefore, fulfills his obligations on earth, he sublimates not only himself, to confer purpose to his own being, but does so likewise to all matter involved in his life and actions.<sup>66</sup>

Every single day is a new chapter, a separate entity, with its own unique requirements. *Tefilah*, therefore, needs to be a daily function. Every day new matter is used, absorbed

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66. See *Tanya*, ch 37. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p. 26c<sup>ff</sup>.

and involved in the sustenance of life. This new matter, too, must be developed and sublimated, made to partake in the "to serve Him." Food newly consumed every day becomes part of the human body, and it, too, must be brought 'under the wings of the *Shechinah*' and made to experience the yearning for G-dliness.<sup>67</sup>

Thus it is understood why — as a rule — one may not eat prior to prayer.<sup>68</sup> One can hardly raise something to a level beyond one's own rank and reach. Only after an initial working on the self, one can undertake to elevate prospective additions to that self as well. "Correct yourself, and then correct others."<sup>69</sup>

In the natural state before prayer, that is, before the mental submission to the sovereignty of Heaven and the submission of the personal will and desires to the Will of G-d, man is only *potentially* on a higher plane than the mineral, vegetable and animal objects. The distinct quality and superiority of humanness as 'crown of the creation', is attained only when man realizes the obligations with which he is charged. Only *after* the act of *tefilah*, after the personal whims and inclinations have been sacrificed, after ascending to the level of "Man in His image, in the image of G-d," only then is man justified in ruling over the subhuman realms and to use these for himself.<sup>70</sup>

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67. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, *a.l.*; and Bamidbar, p. 6a.

68. *Berachot* 10b; *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 89. Cf. *Likkutei Sichot* (English), vol. II: Shemot, p. 88ff.

69. *Baba Metzi'a* 107b.

70. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, *a.l.*; and *ibid.*, Balak, p. 72a; Pinchas, p. 79d; and Sukot, p. 78d. See also *Sefer Hamaamarim-Kuntreisim*, vol. I, p. 21af. Cf. *Berachot* 14a; and *Zohar Chadash*, Ruth:90df. *Zohar* I:13b. Note also the principle that the

## XI

### Battle of Prayer

**T**he process of sublimation is not an easy task. The daily resurgence of the misleading *yetzer* (evil disposition) requires the frequency of daily prayer.<sup>71</sup> The hour of prayer is an hour of relentless battle.<sup>72</sup> The constantly reemerging materialism of the mundane involved in daily life, challenges man to a laborious struggle if he is to retain the uniquely

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*tefilah* which ascends to heaven raises with it the Torah, *mitzvot*, and blessings etc. which one uttered without the proper ardour and *kavanah*; R. Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Orah*, sha'ar 2; *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Hazaken*, no. 82.

71. *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 2c; and Ki Tetze, p. 34c.

72. "The time of prayer is a time of battle;" *Likutei Torah*, Balak, p. 72a; *ibid.* Ki Tetze, p. 34c; and *Siddurim Dach*, p. 23b; citing this as a statement of the *Zohar*. (See *Zohar* III:243a, and also *ibid.* I:240b. Cf. Targum on Genesis 48:22; *Baba Batra* 123a; and *Tanchuma*, Beshalach:9). See R. Dov Ber of Lubavitch, *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, p. 97ff.

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human image and identity and to remain sensitive to higher ideals and aspirations. Intense *tefilah* is the weapon for man to defend himself and to struggle to overcome and conquer all obstacles.<sup>73</sup>

The gravitational pull of material substance to base materialism, which forces man to struggle for spiritual survival, is apparent especially in these days of the *galut*. The destruction of the first *Bet Hamikdash* led not only to a dispersion of the Jewish people, but also to an obstruction of the centrifugal position of the Divine spark in man — exiling and imprisoning it, as it were, in his physical body.<sup>74</sup>

At first there had been a powerful emanation of holiness from the Sanctuary in Jerusalem. This radiation of G-dliness prevented the forces of evil from attaching themselves to man and ruling over him. The spirit of Divinity, the radiance of “the wonders of G-d,” was fully perceived and experienced through the Holy Temple. Thus there was no need for frequent acts of prayer aside of the reading of the *Shema* twice daily, and the occasional prayers explicitly prescribed by the Torah.<sup>75</sup>

The return from the Babylonian exile and the rebuilding of the *Bet Hamikdash* did not restore the pre-exilic condition.<sup>76</sup> There was no longer an all-encompassing con-

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73. *Torah Or*, Shemot, p. 51b; *Likutei Torah*, Balak, p. 71b.

74. *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 2bff.

75. Needless to say, this did not deprive the people of their freedom of choice to obey or disobey the Torah. This is quite evident from the historical accounts of those days. The possibility of sin remained in view of the principles stated in *Yoma* 38bf.; *Makot* 10b; and *Zohar* I:198b.

76. See *Yoma* 9b and 21b; *Sotah* 48b; *Pessikta Rabaty*, s.v. Rani Vesimchi.

cern with spiritual objectives or intellectual contemplation to effect an over-awing awareness of the *Echad uMeyuchad*, the sole, true Essence of all.

The destruction of the First Temple and the exile from the Holy Land debased the people, who now felt drawn to material delights. The *yetzer hara*, which before (generally speaking) had been in a state of slumber and subjection, was now aroused and made ever-increasing inroads where access had previously been denied.

To counter this trend and stem the tide of materialism, the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah* (Men of the Great Assembly) instituted the set orders of statutory prayers and benedictions (in addition to the original ones).<sup>77</sup> The turmoils in the

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77. The one hundred and twenty sages of the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah*, among them several prophets, composed and ordained for Israel the prayers and blessings in a set order; *Berachot* 33a, and *Megilah* 17b.

Before that time, the practise was that "one who was fluent would offer many prayers and supplications. If someone had trouble with speech, he would pray as well as he could, whenever he desired to do so. The frequency of prayer, too, depended on everyone's ability: some prayed once a day, and others many times.. This was the situation from the time of Moses until Ezra.

When Israel was exiled in the days of the wicked Nebucadnezzar, they mingled with Persians, Greeks, and other nations. Children were born to them in those foreign lands, and their language was confused. Everyone's language was a mixture of many tongues, so that they were unable to speak properly in any one language except incoherently, as it is stated in Nehemiah 13:24.. When anyone prayed, he was unable to express himself in Hebrew, to ask for his needs or to praise G-d, without mixing in other languages.

When Ezra and his *bet din* (court) saw this, they composed

period of the Second Temple, and in the *galut* following its destruction, increased the need for these. In these present times, therefore, *tefilah* has become the principal *avodah*

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and ordained for them the Eighteen Blessings (*Shemoneh Esrei*) in a fixed order.. including the requests for all things that could be desired by every individual as well as for communal needs. They did so in order that the prayers should be available to all, that all should learn them, so that the prayer of those defective in speech would be as perfect as that of those expert in refined speech.. They ordained also the frequency of prayers..." Rambam, *Hilchot Tefilah*, 1:3-10.

The fixed text of the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah* is not simply a matter of convenience to help the masses with their prayers. When they composed the prayers, they were Divinely inspired, rendering every word and nuance very precisely (see R. Ya'akov Yehoshua Falk, *Pnei Yehoshu'a* on *Berachot* 28b; cf. *Teshuvot Harosh*, Klal IV:20; *Tur-Orach Chayim*, sect. 113 and 118; and my "Gimatriya: The Principle of Numerical Interpretation," note 78-79). Their text, therefore, is authoritative and obligatory for all of Israel. While spontaneous prayer and certain additions (*beyond* the statutory prayers) is permitted (see *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim*, sect. 107, 112, and 119; especially in *Shulchan Aruch Harav*), the basic text ordained by Ezra and his *bet din* must remain unaltered: "No one is permitted to diminish or augment the wording .. The rule in this matter is that whoever alters the wording fixed by the sages for the benedictions is in error, and he must repeat them in their wording .. and whoever omits (blessings of the morning or evening prayers) has not fulfilled his obligation." Rambam, *Hilchot Keri'at Shema*, 1:7.

"R. Isaac Luria (Arizal) said that one should not recite any *piyutim* (liturgical poems) that were not composed in accordance with mystical devotions, but only those arranged by the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah* and by R. Eleazar Kalir — because these follow the mystical devotions.. (see R. Chaim Vital, *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, beg.). The *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah* knew which elicitations of the Divine life-force are neces-



(service of G-d),<sup>78</sup> the focal point around which life must evolve.

*Tefilah* has thus become our present-day Sanctuary from which the rays of holiness and purity must emanate to pierce, penetrate, pervade, illuminate, and channel all of the material and mundane reality. It awakens the dormant Torah-conscience of every individual. It frees the imprisoned

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sary at all times — evenings, mornings, and afternoons. Thus they composed the appropriate and necessary (Divine) Names and Appellations, words and letters, with the wisdom granted to them by G-d; and likewise R. Eleazar Kalir . . . Thus everything is precisely calculated according to need . . . The wording is based on the need of eliciting the appropriate life-force to the worlds. This is not the case, however, with words or combinations that man devises in his heart . . . for who knows whether the life-force needed for the worlds will flow through these words . . ." (*Maggid Devarav Leya'akov*, sect. 261)

It follows, then, that everyone must follow the precise order and wording of the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah*. Though Halachah permits certain changes in the order, to facilitate communal prayer (see *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 52), one must make every effort to avoid this: "Surely you know that the whole order of *tefilah* was founded and arranged on the basis of a proper order. By delaying the earlier parts, you separate and destroy the order.. Thus stop doing this." (R. Joseph Karo, *Maggid Meisharim*, Beshalach:1) "The *maggid* (of R. Joseph Karo) cautioned to rise very early to assure the recitation of the prayers in sequence, as opposed to the skipping suggested by the codifiers; for he who skips upsets the Heavenly channels and the bond of the worlds." (R. Shabrai of Rashkov, *Sidur Arizal*, Dinei Halichah Lebet Haknesset, p. 35; cited in *Be'er Heitev*, Orach Chayim 52, note 1.)

78. *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 7. *Tanya*, Kuntres Acharon, sect. 4 and 8. See also *Siddur im Dach*, p. 163b, that the present state of *galut*, and especially the time closer to the Messianic redemption, requires ever more prayer.
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Divine spark that flickers in each, and makes it burst forth into a fiery flame consuming the obstacles of the body and animal soul, and to generate a state of ardent love and desire to become attached to — verily, united with — the Source of Life.<sup>79</sup>

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79. *Torah Or*, Shemot, p. 51b; *Likutei Torah*, Ki Tetze, p. 38b. See also *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 2c; Nasso, p. 32d; and Chukat, p. 61df.

## XII

### Humility and Joy

**T**he battle of prayer is not to be underestimated. Prayer needs fortitude, a stringent effort on the part of him who prays.<sup>80</sup> The involvement must be total, a rallying of all strength and concentration as when fighting a formidable enemy.<sup>81</sup> Indifference, carelessness, worries, or thoughts about non-related things, are hardly helpful in a physical struggle, and much less so in the spiritual one of *tefilah*.<sup>82</sup>

The preparation, the rallying of all powers to wage a successful battle, is possible by approaching prayer with genuine joy:<sup>83</sup> "to pray with an infinitely immense joy,

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80. *Berachot* 32b; see Rashi *ad loc.*

81. *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Hazaken*, no. 82. See also *ibid.*, no. 83.

82. Cf. *Tanya*, ch. 26.

83. *Berachot* 31a. See *Zohar* II:165a, and *ibid.* III:8b. Cf. *Shabbat* 30b; *Zohar* I:180b, and *ibid.* 216b.

"The root of prayer is heartfelt joy in G-d, as it is said,

whereby all perturbing thoughts become dispelled. The focus of this joy is 'Let Israel rejoice in its Maker' (Psalms 149:2), an immense delight in the greatness of the Creator."<sup>84</sup>

This joy is attained by an initial sense of sincere humility, which signifies a sense of *teshuvah*.<sup>85</sup> *Tefilah* must be preceded by the self-chastisement of a spirit broken by awareness of improper thoughts and deeds of the past. The sacrifice of a "broken and penitent heart" (Psalms 51:19) prior to prayer, opens the channels of union with G-d. Simultaneously it fills the heart with a yearning for the Divine, and with a joy — caused by faith and trust in G-d — which dispels all traces of depression and anxiety.<sup>86</sup> For G-d

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'Glory in His holy Name, let the heart of those who seek G-d rejoice.' (I-Chronicles 16:10) David, the king of Israel, therefore, played the harp with all his prayers and psalms in order to fill his heart with joy in his love for G-d;" *Sefer Chassidim*, sect. 18, and see *Mekor Chessed*, *ad loc.* "Prayer with great joy is certainly more acceptable before G-d than prayer with sadness and tears;" *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 107 (see there the sequel, and the notes, and also *ibid.*, sect. 108).

84. *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Hazaken*, no. 17.

85. *Berachot* 30b: "One should not rise to pray except with *koved rosh* (lit., 'heaviness of head;' Rashi: 'i.e., *hachna'ah* — humility')." This is a state of *teshuvah tata'ah*, the lower or initial form of *teshuvah* (*Tanya*, Igeret Hateshuvah, ch. 10). *Tefilah* itself is then *teshuvah ila'ah*, the superior or ultimate level of *teshuvah*, of return to and union with G-dliness (*ibid.*; and *ibid.*, Igeret Hakodesh, sect. VIII).

86. *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Hazaken*, no. 17. See *Tanya*, Igeret Hateshuvah, ch. 10-11. Cf. *Berachot* 30b: "Worship G-d with reverence, rejoice with trembling" (Psalms 2:11) .. where there is rejoicing there must also be trembling." Prayer must combine the moods of joy and reverence (*Midrash Tehilim* 100:3), fear of G-d and love of G-d (*Sifre*, Va'etchanan, par. 32; see *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 349). See "Serve G-d With Joy," note 22.

in His abundant love for Israel accepts sincere *teshuvah* — always<sup>87</sup> and instantaneously, at the very moment of its inception in the mind of man.<sup>88</sup>

This love between Israel and its Maker finds no greater expression than in *tefilah*. Thus G-d longs, as it were, for Israel's prayers.<sup>89</sup> For nothing supersedes *tefilah*.<sup>90</sup> To G-d it shows that he who prays yearns for His nearness. To Israel it is the means of coming 'close, in every kind of closeness,' for the closeness attained by prayer is 'as talking into the ear of a friend.'<sup>91</sup> Prayer, therefore, is a special gift and privilege for which we express innermost gratitude.<sup>92</sup>

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87. *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Hazaken*, no. 17. See *Tanya*, Igeret Hate-shuvah, ch. 11.

88. See *Pessikta Rabaty*, Shuvah Yisrael. Cf. *Kidushin* 49b.

89. *Midrash Tehilim* 116:1

90. See *Tanchuma*, Tavo:1; *Sifre*, Va'etchanan, par. 29. *Berachot* 32b (and see there *Tossafot*, s.v. gedolah).

91. *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 9:1.

92. *Yerushalmi*, *Berachot* 1:8.

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## XIII

### Order of Prayers

**T**he workings and aims of *tefilah* are indicated in the very order (*sidur*) of the prayers. The composition of this order is not arbitrary. It follows a precise order and pattern.<sup>93</sup>

The principal parts of the daily morning-prayers are: *Pesukei Dezimra* (Verses of Praise); *Birchot Keri'at Shema* (Blessings of the *Shema*); *Keri'at Shema* (the *Shema* itself, as well as the prayers following it); and *Shemoneh Esrei* (the Eighteen Blessings of the *Amidah*). There are also the *Birchot Hashachar* (Morning-Blessings, which originally used to be recited immediately as the specific occasions for their recitation arose<sup>94</sup>), and additional prayers that follow the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

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93. See above, note 77; and see also below, note 106.

94. *Berachot* 60b. *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 46.

The general plan and arrangement of the *Sidur* follows the idea that man precede any requests and supplications by articulating the praises of G-d.<sup>95</sup> The purpose of this is twofold: (a) When submitting a request, first of all there must be an acknowledgment of the authority and ability of the one we petition to fulfill our wishes. In our context, when approaching G-d with our prayers, we must first acknowledge His majesty and absolute sovereignty. In turn, (b) this implies also an acknowledgment and proclamation of our own submission and allegiance.<sup>96</sup>

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95. *Berachot* 32a. *Zohar* I:169a and 243bf.; *ibid.* III:260b. See *Sefer Hachinuch*, sect. 430 and 606.

96. See *Bet Elokim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 2. Cf. *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, ch. 12.

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## XIV

### Implications of the Order

Here again we note the reflexive nature of *tefilah* (the *hitpe'el*-form of *mitpalel*): by speaking to, and of, G-d, we also address ourselves.

“The *Pesukei Dezimra* were instituted to arouse and enhance a condition of thirsting (for G-dliness), from the depths of the heart, when contemplating how even ‘the heavens and the heavens of the heavens..’ praise the Divine Name .. Likewise, *Birchat Yotzer Or* (the blessing ‘Who Forms Light’) which precedes the *Shema*, was instituted to draw man’s attention to how the angels say ‘Holy..’.”<sup>97</sup>

All this is “to arouse in the animal soul a desire and thirst to perceive the Glory of the King, (first) by means of the order of praises: how ‘*Baruch She’amar vehayah ha’olam*

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97. *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 2c. Cf. *ibid.*, Balak, p. 71c.



— blessed is He who spoke and the world came into being' by a single utterance and a single saying .. as stated in the *Zohar*<sup>98</sup> that He created the world with a single thought .. He is 'Yachid, Chey Ha'olamim — the Only One, the Life of all worlds': He is the Only One, for He is alone, as prior to the creation of the world .. 'Meshubach umefo'ar adey ad — praised and glorified foreverlasting': above to no end and below to no limit .. The soul of every living being thus longs for Him, to cleave unto Him. How much more so when noting that His Great Name and Sovereignty are over us, as it is written, 'He exalts the glory of His people' (Psalms 148:14),<sup>99</sup> and 'He declares His words to Jacob' (Psalms 147:19).'' Drawing attention to these principles ignites joy in the heart of man, a "rejoicing in his Maker, a great joy in G-d who makes His *Shechinah* dwell in our midst .."

Then we proceed in our prayers and recite in *Birchot Keri'at Shema* (the blessings preceding the *Shema*) how the angels sanctify .. and yet 'ahavat olam — You loved us with an everlasting love, with exceedingly abounding mercy,' i.e., exceeding that of the angels .. (as explained in *Tanya*<sup>100</sup>).'' From there we progress "to ascend and reach the level of *mesirat nefesh* (self-sacrifice) at *Echad*,<sup>100\*</sup> and then 'you shall love .. with all your heart' — that is, with both your inclinations<sup>101</sup>: that the appetitive faculty of the animal soul, which craves the material things and objects which delight man, shall also return to G-d and desire the nearness of G-d who is good ..

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98. *Zohar* II:20a.

99. See *Midrash Tehilim* 4:4.

100. *Tanya*, ch. 49.

100\*. See below, note 113.

101. *Berachot* 54a; *Sifre*, Va'etchanan, par. 32.

Thus it was stated already elsewhere,<sup>102</sup> that 'The refining pot for silver and the furnace for gold, and as for man his praise' (Proverbs 27:21); this means that the way and manner of man praising G-d (in prayer) is a refining pot and crucible: the flames from the fire of love (for G-d) consume the appetitive faculty of the animal soul until it will turn to the love of G-d to cleave unto Him with desire and thirst, with a genuine yearning of the soul."<sup>103</sup>

Stirred and inspired by the contemplation on the Creator and Sustainer of all, one is rendered fit to petition the Almighty. The *Pesukei Dezimra* elevate man, raising him ever higher,<sup>104</sup> up to the climactic point in the *Shema*, the

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102. See above, sect. VII, and note 54 *ad loc.*

103. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p. 28b. See also *Torah Or*, Bereishit, p. 7d; *Likutei Torah*, Shir Hashirim, p. 43c. Cf. *Kuzary* II:17, for a strikingly similar interpretation.

104. Note R. Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Orah*, sha'ar 1: "King David composed the *zemirot* (songs; psalms) to clear a way for prayer to pass through. For all those troops (of demons) are like a cloud, preventing prayer from ascending, as it is said, 'You have covered Yourself with a cloud, so that no prayer can pass through.' (Lamentations 3:44) David came and composed *zemirot* so that when a person recites these — those demons of destruction, spoilers and obstructors, depart and go away. *Zemirot* is an idiom of *mazmer* (pruning shears), as in 'He will cut off the sprigs with pruning-shears.' (Isaiah 18:5) That is why it is written (Psalms 119:54), 'Your statutes were *zemirot* for me, in the house of *miguri* (my dwelling);' that is, in all those places along the way where I was afraid of (those demons), and I suffered from dread and *magor* (terror), I scattered them and cut them down." (See also Rashi on Exodus 15:2: "*Vezimrat* is an idiom of '*lo tizmor* — you shall not prune' (Leviticus 25:4); and '*zemir* — the cutting down of the terrible ones' (Isaiah 25:5); thus an expression of 'lopping off' and 'cutting down'.")

The recitation of the praises of G-d in *Pesukei Dezimrah*, therefore, summons the forces of holiness, and subdues and cuts

goal of *tefilah*, namely "G-d is One" — to become "fully absorbed in the One, 'to become one with the One' in the *Shemoneh Esrei* . . For *tefilah* replaces the sacrifices. It causes the fire to descend . . to consume the sacrifices, i.e., the animal soul; that is, even the will of the physical body is turned to G-d exclusively, and in the heart there is but One — with no alien element beside Him."<sup>105</sup>

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down the *kelipot* (the forces of impurity and evil). See R. Immanuel Chay Rikki, *Mishnat Chassidim*, Masechet Olam Ha'asayah 10:1; R. Dov Ber of Mezhirech, *Or Torah*, sect. 261; *Torat Shmuel* — 5627, p. 402; R. Sholom Dov Ber of Lubavitch (*Reshab*), *Besha'ah Shehikdimu* — 5672, pp. 620 and 806.

105. *Torah Or*, Vayakhel, p. 113c; and see also *Likutei Torah*, Shir Hashirim, p. 43c. Cf. *Likutei Torah*, Ki Tetze, p. 38a-b.

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## XV

### Four Rungs of the Ladder

The order of the prayers is one of gradual ascent, rising ever higher among the 'Four Worlds,' from one sphere to the next — the higher — one: from (a) *Asiyah*, the 'World of Action' of the *Birchot Hashachar* to (b) *Yetzirah*, the 'World of Formation' of the *Pesukei Dezimra*, to (c) *Beri'ah*, the 'World of Creation' of *Birchot Keri'at Shema* and the *Shema*, to (d) *Atzilut*, the 'World of Emanation' of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.<sup>106</sup>

The faculties of the animal soul relate to this material world. Their sustenance is from the vital powers in the

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106. *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 4-6; *Sha'ar Hakavanot*, Derushei Tefilat Hashachar. Cf. *Zohar* II:215b. See R. Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, *Likutei Diburim*, vol. III, p. 994ff. Note that also the prayers following the *Shemoneh Esrei* divide into four analogous parts, albeit in descending order, to draw the effects down to the mundane; *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha'ar XIV:ch. 3ff.; *Sha'ar Hakavanot*, Inyan Mizmor Ya'ancha.

victuals which sustain the life of man's body and his animal soul, and which have the potential of being elevated to sanctity. Man, therefore, is bound to 'below' (material reality). Thus he must elevate the soul and bind it unto G-d. He must conquer the *sitra achara* (the 'other side,' as opposed to the 'side of holiness') and turn it around to "serve Him with all your heart," i.e., with both your spiritual and physical inclinations, to the point of attaining *Echad*<sup>107</sup>:

The essence of all prayer is the contemplation of *Echad* — that "G-d is *Echad* (One)" (Deuteronomy 6:4), the sole reality, even now after the creation of the universe in space and time. He is and remains *Echad* — east, west, north, south, above and below,<sup>108</sup> and likewise in terms of time (past, present and future).<sup>109</sup> For relative to G-d it is all the same, the present status with that prior to creation, prior to the categories of time and space.<sup>110</sup>

The gradual intensification of the order of prayers follows the pattern of the ladder that appeared in Jacob's dream,<sup>111</sup> the *four rungs* of which<sup>112</sup> one is to ascend. *Tefilah*

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107. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p. 26c

108. With the word *echad* we affirm that G-d is the sole reality in the universe (the letter *aleph* of *echad* stands for the number 1), above (in the seven heavens) and below (the earth; together 8, signified by the letter *chet* which stands for the number 8), and in all four directions of east, west, north and south (the letter *dalet* stands for the number 4); see *Berachot* 13b; *Zohar* I:12a; *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim 61:6.

109. Cf. *Zohar* I:256b: "'He who prolongs the word *echad*, has his days and years prolonged' (*Berachot* 13b), because it is the source for all the days and years of the universe."

110. *Torah Or*, Ki Tissa, p. 111c. Cf. *Tanya*, ch. 20.

111. See above, section VI.

112. See *Bereishit Rabba* 68:12, in view of *Moreh Nevuchim* II:10 (quoting *Tanchuma* — though this quote is lacking in our

is the 'ladder set in the earth, and its top reaches into heaven.' One begins all the way below: first the *Birhot Hashachar*, 'Blessed are You . . . who opens the eyes of the blind.' One proceeds from the lowest level until literally reaching the state of "You shall love G-d.." — i.e., submitting the soul at *Echad*.<sup>113</sup>

The ladder of *tefilah* allows us to ascend. It is the intermediary "uniting the higher with the lower . . . The one above can descend on it to the one below, even as the one below can ascend on it to the one above."<sup>114</sup> Of this ladder it is said that "the messengers of G-d ascend and descend on it": by means of this ladder man elevates himself. His *mitzvot* (which are referred to as 'messengers of G-d'<sup>115</sup>), the observance of which involves matter, ascend and rise upwards on this ladder. In turn, it is by means of this ladder that the Heavenly Grace is drawn forth and downwards.<sup>116</sup> *Tefilah* 'reaches into heaven' and establishes a *zivug* (union) with offspring of a completely new consciousness.<sup>117</sup>

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editions). See also Rambam's reference to Genesis 28:12 in the introduction to *Moreh Nevuchim*, and relate it to our context.

113. When affirming the unity of G-d with the word *echad*, one should have in mind readiness for *mesirat nefesh* (self-sacrifice) for the sanctification of G-d's Name. See *Tikunei Zohar*, Introduction:10b; R. Joel Sirkis, *Bach on Tur*, Orach Chayim, beginning of sect. 61. *Peri Eitz Chayim*, Sha'ar Keri'at Shema, ch. 7; *Sha'ar Hakavanot*, Inyan Kavanat Keri'at Shema:5 (p. 137b). See also *Tanya*, Igeret Hakodesh, sect. 32; and note carefully *Likutei Torah*, Vayikra, p. 5a; and *Mayim Rabim* — 5636, ch. 188.

114. *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 2b. Cf. *Tikunei Zohar* 45:83a.

115. *Tanchuma*, Vayigash:6

116. *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 2c. Cf. *ibid.*, Yom Kippur, p. 68b; and *Igrot Kodesh-Admur Hazaken*, no. 82.

117. *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 2d. Cf. *Tanya*, ch. 12; and above, end of sect. II.

## XVI

*Berachot*

**T**he reflexive-reflective aspect of the initial segments (*Birchot Hashachar*, *Pesukei Dezimra*, *Birchot Keri'at Shema* and the *Shema*) is to affect man in a way that readies him to stand before the Supreme King for the *Shemoneh Esrei* in appropriately reverent manner to submit his requests and petitions.<sup>118</sup> At this point there is an unfolding of the mystery of *tefilah* that we set out to discover.

Prayer seeks to elicit the Divine Grace and Favour. All of *tefilah*, every prayer and blessing, is basically and essentially a variation of the request *Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha* (conventionally translated 'May it be Your Will,' or 'May it please You;' but literally meaning 'May there be (a state of) Willingness before You').

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118. *Torah Or*, Ki Tissa, p. 111d.

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Man prays for a state of grace and willingness,<sup>119</sup> to arouse, manifest and elicit the Divine Grace and Favour.<sup>120</sup> This is the basic premise of both petitionary prayer as well as of a *berachah* (a blessing; generally a statement of gratitude).

When saying '*baruch* — blessed be' (or any other form of this term) one is not simply using an honorific word or expression of gratitude. The term *berachah* has the connotation of increase and addition; the root-word is an idiom that means to draw forth, to engraft, to make grow: when saying *baruch* (or *yitbarach*) one elicits, draws forth and downwards from Above, the Divine blessing and increase relating to the subject-matter of the benediction.<sup>121</sup> Thus even a blessing is really another way and form of saying *Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha*.<sup>122</sup> In this context it is said that all of prayer is a form of *berachot* (blessings), namely in the sense of drawing forth a manifestation of G-dliness in the world at large and in the soul of man.<sup>123</sup>

This, then, is the order of prayer and the analogy to Jacob's ladder. Man ascends, elevates, purifies and sanctifies himself, and in turn causes the 'descent' of the Divine grace

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119. *Torah Or*, Miketz, p. 42b. Cf. *Likutei Torah*, Chukat, p. 66a; Balak, p. 70dff.; and Shir Hashirim, p. 43c.

120. *Likutei Torah*, Bamidbar, p. 13d. Cf. *ibid.*, Shir Hashirim, p. 37a-b. Cf. *Netivot Olam*, Avodah, end of ch. 2: "'The prayer of the upright — *retzono* (His Will)' (Proverbs 15:8). The term *retzono* alludes to how far man's prayer reaches: to *ratzon ha'elyon*, the Supreme Will."

121. See *Zohar* III:270bff. *Torah Or*, Bereishit, p. 6aff.; R. Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (Tzemach Tzedek), *Sefer Halikutim*, s.v. *berachah*, p. 706ff.

122. See *Sefer Hachinuch*, sect. 430.

123. *Likutei Torah*, Nasso, p. 26b.



and blessing. Divinity, with its inherent blessings, becomes manifest below.<sup>124</sup>

*Tefilah* thus confers upon man a special capacity without which he may not have been fit to receive certain benefits. It prepares and readies the recipient for the Supernal grace.<sup>125</sup> For grace and blessing are bestowed upon man commensurate to his fitness and purity, in all aspects of his thought, speech and deed.<sup>126</sup> In that sense, *tefilah* is man's *mikveh* (ritual bath), after full and complete immersion in which one emerges purged and pure.<sup>127</sup>

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124. *Torah Or*, Vayakhel, p. 88a. Cf. above, note 120.

125. See *Ikkarim*, IV: end of ch. 17 and ch. 18.

126. See *Sefer Hachinuch*, sect. 16, 378, 433, *et passim*.

127. *Midrash Tehilim* 4:9; *ibid.* 65:4; *Eicha Rabba* 3:samach; *Pesikta deR. Kahana*, sect. XXV (Shuvah). See *Devarim Rabba* 2:12, and note there the commentary *Perush Maharzav*. See also R. Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch, *Yomtov Shel Rosh Hashanah* — 5666, p. 387.

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## XVII

### Divine Pathos

**A**t this point we must confront another problem relating to prayer.

On the one hand, *tefilah* is to effect *bitul hayesh*. On the other hand, man must show his dependence on G-d by praying for all his spiritual and material needs. How is it possible to submit petitionary prayers for life and good health, for sustenance and forgiveness of sin, which of themselves imply self-awareness, yet speak simultaneously of self-negation?

The Baal Shem Tov already raised this question<sup>128</sup> by drawing attention to a contradiction between two passages in the *Zohar*: one passage<sup>129</sup> refers to those who pray for their

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128. *Degel Machaneh Ephrayim*, Likutim (appendix at end of book, recording teachings the author received from his grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov), s.v. bi'er (cited in *Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, Noach, note 121)

129. *Tikunei Zohar* 6:22a.

personal or material needs as 'arrogant dogs, barking *hav hav* — give us food.' Yet in another passage<sup>130</sup> it is said that he who does not pray daily for sustenance is of little faith!

To understand the Baal Shem Tov's answer, we must first explain the mystical concept of "*avodah tzorech gevoha* — service and worship for the sake of Above."

It is written, "He shall call upon Me and I will answer him; I am with him in distress" (Psalms 91:15). This is one of a number of verses that speak of Divine pathos, of the sufferings that the *Shechinah* shares with man.<sup>131</sup> (This is one of the concepts of which our sages say that "if they had not been explicitly written in Scripture it would be impossible to say such a thing.") In the words of the *Midrash*:

The Holy One, blessed be He, says: "When anguish comes upon the children of Israel and they call upon Me, they should make themselves partners with My glory and I shall answer them immediately." Thus it is written, "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him."

What is meant by "I am with him in distress?" R. Yudan offered a parable of a pregnant woman who was angry with her mother. As she was giving birth, her mother went upstairs. When she screamed from pain below, her mother heard her voice upstairs and screamed with her. Her neighbours asked her: "Why is it that you scream? Are you giving birth along with her?" She answered them: "Is it not my daughter who is in pain? How can I endure her cries?"

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130. See *Zohar* II:62a-b.

131. See *Mechilta*, Bo: Pis'cha, ch. 14 (on Exodus 12:41); *Sifre*, Beha'alotecha, par. 84; *Zohar* I:120b; and numerous parallel passages.

Thus I scream with her, because my daughter's anguish is mine as well!"<sup>132</sup>

The *Mishnah* points out that the *Shechinah* senses, as it were, the actual pain and anguish of everyone, even of the wicked and sinful, let alone the righteous.<sup>133</sup> For all beings are rooted in the *Shechinah*. The lower world is a reflection of the upper world, most intricately bound up with it. There is a reciprocal relationship of the one affecting the other. This lends cosmic significance not only to celestial determinations, but also to human actions and conditions. Man's modes of behaviour have an effect on all realms, to the uppermost.<sup>134</sup> Man's conditions below, therefore, are also symptomatic reflections of spiritual conditions.

The *Shechinah* is the Divine Presence of which it is said that "the whole earth is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3). It is the very root and source of all souls.<sup>135</sup> In turn, every soul is a spark of the *Shechinah*.<sup>136</sup> A corpse, the lifeless or soul-less body, does not feel pain or sense any needs. By implication, then, suffering is sensed by the soul, not the body. If this pain is sensed by the individual extension of the *Shechinah*, therefore, it is sensed also by the *Shechinah per se*. For the sparks or extensions of the *Shechinah*, inherent in the human soul, are inseparable from their source.<sup>137</sup>

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132. *Midrash Tehilim* 20:1.

133. *Sanhedrin* 46a.

134. See *Zohar* II:20a. *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, p. 37, note 4; and see "To Be One With The One," ch. XIV-XV.

135. *Zohar* I:25a; *Tikunei Zohar* 3b. See also *Tikunei Zohar* 21:50b, and 53:87b; *Zohar Chadash*, Bereishit:10d; *Tanya*, ch. 37.

136. *Zohar* III:17a, and *ibid.* 231b; *Tikunei Zohar* 21:52a; *Tanya*, Igeret Hakodesh, sect. 31.

137. See the quote from the Baal Shem Tov in *Degel Machaneh Ephrayim*, Bechukotai (*Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, Noach, note 121); and above, note 128.

## XVIII

Prayer for the *Shechinah*

When an individual senses pain, anguish and distress, or other deficiencies, he must realize that his condition reflects, as it were, an analogous condition in the celestial spheres.<sup>138</sup> The individual need or problem is just that: individual, restricted to that person, limited to one small detail in the cosmic order. On the higher plane, however, on the plane of the *Shechinah* sharing in that distress, it becomes a general problem.

Quite clearly that general problem is of greater significance and import than the individual problem. Hence the concept of praying for the alleviation of pain or need on the general level (*tzorech gevoha*). For as this is effected on the

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138. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 20, 61, 126, 182, 296, and 395. *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 73, and see the notes there (especially the quote from *Ma'or Einayim*, Nasso).

higher, comprehensive level, it will instantaneously effect total alleviation and fulfillment on the particular level as well.<sup>139</sup>

Man's primary concern, therefore, should be with the general, the universal, rather than with the particular. To care but about the particular, personal need, and to disregard the universal, is egotism. It reduces the whole meaning and purpose of creation, the exercise of prayer and *mitzvot*, to crude self-gratification — serving G-d for the sake of receiving compensation, like 'arrogant dogs barking for their food.'

In this context, man should regard himself as *ayin* (naught) and forget about himself: *bitul hayesh*.<sup>140</sup> He should direct all his requests and prayers "for the sake of the *Shechinah*," for the sake of the whole, and not just the part. This will of itself fill the needs of the part as well.<sup>141</sup>

That is, then, how the Baal Shem Tov<sup>142</sup> resolved the contradiction and problem stated: One may, can, indeed *must*, pray for all and any needs — if for nothing else but the acknowledgment and consciousness of Divine Sovereignty and everything's total and continuous dependence on G-d. But one must never lose perspective; one must not get carried away by transient details instead of concentrating on the whole.

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139. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 182, 268, and 395; *Maggid Devarav Leya'akov*, sect. 53; *Likutim Yekarim*, sect. 123; and the notes on *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 73.

140. See *Maggid Devarav Leya'akov*, sect. 151; *Or Torah*, sect. 387.

141. See sources cited above, notes 138-140; also *Maggid Devarav Leya'akov*, sect. 12, 40, and 145; *Or Torah*, sect. 56, 450, and 502.

142. See above, note 128.

Now it is much easier to discuss and understand the principle of prayer for the sake of the *Shechinah* than it is to practice it. *Avodah tzorech gevoha* is in fact a very sublime level of spiritual achievement which is not within easy reach for everyone. For the average person it is a more idealistic goal rather than a realistic one. Personal needs are sensed on the immediate level, unlike idealistic objectives.

In the service of G-d, who is the very essence of absolute truth,<sup>143</sup> there is no place for falsehood, for pretense and hypocrisy. Thus when overcome by the anguish of personal needs and unable to rise above them, one should *never pretend* to pray for the sake of the *Shechinah*! G-d examines the heart and knows the truth. It is, therefore, better for man to be honest and to pray for himself, than the falsehood of pretending concern for the *Shechinah*. At all times, more than anything else, there must be sincerity. Prayer must reflect the precise feelings and contents of the heart, for "He who works deceit shall not dwell in My house, he who tells lies will have no place before My eyes" (Psalms 101:7).<sup>144</sup>

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143. *Zohar* I:2b; *Yerushalmi*, *Sanhedrin* 1:1; *Devarim Rabba* 1:10; *Tikunei Zohar* 63:94bf.; Rambam, *Hilchot Yessodei Hatorah* 1:4.

144. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 145. Cf. *Zohar* III:297a; *Tikunei Zohar* 63:94b. See also R. Chaim Vital, *Likutei Torah Veta'amei Hamitzvot*, and *Sha'ar Hapessukim*, on Psalms 145.

For a deeper explanation of the concepts discussed in this chapter, see *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. XIX, p. 292ff., and vol. XXIII, p. 217ff.

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## XIX

### *Yehi Ratzon...*

**W**e have now arrived at the following premises: Prayer is the service of the heart, the worship of G-d involving the totality of man. It is the ladder by means of which man steps out of befuddling worldliness, and ascends toward the spiritual reality to become joined to the Divine. The essence of prayer is *bitul hayesh*, self-negation, loss of selfhood, divesting oneself of physical and material bonds, thus to acknowledge and submit to an all-encompassing consciousness of the Divine. Even while seeking the fulfillment of specific, immediate goals, the involvement with prayer has a long-term, reflexive effect upon man: purifying and elevating man and everything associated with him.

As for the immediate goal, the specific need and request, all prayer is basically the formula of *Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha*, petitioning for a state of Divine grace and mercy, the effect of which is the fulfillment of man's suitable



wishes. As man ascends on the ladder of *tefilah*, the Divine blessings descend correspondingly.

In short, this means that prayer prompts and motivates man. It moves him from one place to another — a higher — one. In turn, man's prayer also 'moves' and elicits the Divine grace and blessings.<sup>145</sup>

It is now possible to deal directly with our original problem, the basic problem of prayer: what is the meaning of the request *Yehi ratzon*, which seems to imply that G-d should change and have a different will? How could there be a change in G-d of whom it is said, "I G-d, I have not changed" (Malachi 3:6)!<sup>146</sup> In other words: "how can prayer avail to change G-d's will to decree good for someone after it had not so been decreed? Surely G-d does not change from 'willing' to 'not-willing', or from 'not-willing' to 'willing'!"<sup>147</sup>

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145. *Likutei Torah*, Chukat, p. 66a. See also *ibid.*, Balak, p. 70dff.

146. See *Maamarei Admur Hazaken-Et'halech*, p. 245; *Maamarei Admur Hazaken* — 5562, p. 73.

147. *Ikkarim* IV:18. See *Emunot Vede'ot* II:4-5. Cf. *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, pp. 56f., 63ff., and 142.

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## XX

## Prayer and Change

As stated already, prayer confers upon man a capacity without which he may not have been fit to receive a certain benefit, by preparing and readying the petitioner for the Divine grace. The kindness of G-d, invoked by prayer, emanates to prospective recipients in accordance with their ability of receiving it.

This does not mean that the benefits received are in compensation for our good deeds. Indeed, “we do not present our supplications before You by virtue of our righteousness, but because of Your abundant compassion.” (Daniel 9:18) The kindness of G-d, and the mercies He bestows upon all His creatures, are based upon pure, gratuitous grace. They are not in the nature of compensation, as G-d said to Job: “Who has given Me anything beforehand that I should repay him” (Job 41:3).<sup>148</sup> Thus it follows that prayer can make a

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148. *Devarim Rabba* 2:1. *Ikkarim* IV: beg. of ch. 16.

person fit to receive Divine benevolence even though he may be as wicked as King Menasseh, and the prayer was but forced by distress.<sup>149</sup>

Nonetheless, there is a correspondence between man's status and the Supernal emanations. Generally speaking, Supernal decrees or determinations, of whatever kind, are conditional upon certain degrees, levels or dispositions of man. Thus it stands to reason that as that degree of disposition changes, then whatever had been determined also changes.<sup>150</sup>

The problem of change, therefore, falls back upon the principle of "potentiality and actuality." G-d is not subject to change. Even with regards to new occurrences, innovations and seemingly novel developments on earth, it is said, "There is nothing new under the sun. If there be anything whereof it is said, 'see this, it is new' — it has already been in the ages before us." (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10). This means that even 'new things' have been preconceived and prepared at the time of creation to become actualized and revealed at the proper time and under suitable conditions. There is then no change now at all, but merely the actualization of something which so far existed in potential.<sup>151</sup>

It is likewise with prayer. The Divine will provides, from the very beginning, that a change 'below' (a *real* change in man, thus a specific act) can evoke (what appears to be, from the human perspective) a change Above. In other

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149. *Ikkarim* IV: end of ch. 16.

150. *Ikkarim* IV:18.

151. See *Avot* 5:6, and the commentaries *ad loc.* — especially Rabbam and *Tossafot Yom Tov*. See also *Moreh Nevuchim* II:29.

words, 'Above' there are, so to speak, certain possibilities, various states of *potential* decrees, reflecting the different possibilities of various states of man (both on the individual level as well as on the general, communal level). Man's particular condition of the moment, the status of his present reality, determines the applicable possibility to become realized or actualized. Any change or mutation, therefore, is not in G-d the Emanator, but in man the recipient.<sup>152</sup>

To rephrase this more subtly: The petition of *Yehi Ratzon* is for the emergence of the pure grace and compassion of G-d. To be sure, the Heavenly relationship with the worlds must follow the rulings of the Torah, according to which there is no suffering without initial sin.<sup>153</sup> Our own conduct is the cause of any agony. In prayer, however, we beseech G-d to transcend the demands of strict justice (to act *lifnim mishurat hadin* — beyond the limitations of the law), and to bestow gratuitous kindness. We pray for the Divine grace which is beyond that which is vested and expressed in

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152. See *Or Hashem* III:2, Klal 1:1; *Tzafnat Pane'ach*, p. 79a, quoting the Baal Shem Tov (cited in *Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, Noach, note 155); R. Elimelech of Lizensk, *No'am Elimelech*, beg. of Vayechi; R. Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, *Bnei Yisas'char*, Maamarei Hashabbatot 8:8 (and see there also 8:9-16). See also above, sect. VI-VII. For an original source for this principle, see *Bera-chot* 32a; *Sifre*, Va'etchanan, par. 27; and *Torah Shelema* on Exodus 32:10, note 80<sup>a</sup>.

153. *Shabbat* 55a (see Ramban, *Sha'ar Hagemul*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. Chavel, p. 274; and *Ikkarim* IV:13). The world must follow the pattern of Torah, as the Torah is the very blueprint of the world and the tool through which it was created (*Tanchuma*, Bereishit:1; *Bereishit Rabba* 1:1-2; *Zohar* I:5a, and 47a), and the world is sustained through the Torah (*Zohar* I:47a; *Pesachim* 68b).

Torah (the right to which is forfeited by sin), but emanates from the infinitely higher level of the very source of the Supernal grace and love — where Divine compassion is simple and pure (gratuitous, and not reciprocal).<sup>154</sup>

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154. *Torah Or*, Miketz, p. 42b; *Likutei Torah*, Shir Hashirim, p. 43c. Cf. R. Menachem Mendel (Tzemach Tzedek) of Lubavitch, *Derech Mitzvotcha*, Ha'amanat Elakut, ch. 9 (also *ibid.* ch. 3-4, *et passim*); and *ibid.*, Shoresch Mitzvat Hatefilah, ch. 29.

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## XXI

### Averting Decrees

There are various levels in prayer and its efficacy. These may depend on the conditions of man on one hand, and the degree of finality to which Divine decisions have advanced on the other.

The change in man, which confers upon him (or upon the subject for whom one prays) the capacity to draw forth and to receive Divine favour, is accomplished by some with little effort, while others may require continuous and most intense prayer.<sup>155</sup> Still others may need to have their prayers accompanied by some devout act or acts indicating true repentance and submission.<sup>156</sup>

Moreover, there is a distinction between states of 'ge-

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155. Cf. *Berachot* 34b; *Ta'anit* 19a, and 23aff.

156. *Ikkarim* IV:23.

neral propensity' (*before* a decree has been issued), a definite decision (*after* a decree), and a final and absolute decision (a decree accompanied by an oath).<sup>157</sup> The first two are states of relative potentiality, in which decrees may be averted and changed. In the words of our sages: "An outcry<sup>158</sup> benefits man both before a decree and after a decree."<sup>159</sup> The third case, however, is — *generally speaking*<sup>160</sup> — final and irrevocable.<sup>161</sup>

Now we have seen that prayer is subject to the principle that "a stirring from Above is in response to a stirring or initiative from below."<sup>162</sup> In context of the preceding, we understand also why it is necessary to pray and perform certain acts to have our needs and requests attended to,

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157. See *Rosh Hashanah* 18a.

158. The emphasis is on *tze'akah* (outcry), rather than *tefilah*, as it denotes a much deeper and more intense approach to G-d; see *Zohar* II:19b and 20a.

159. *Rosh Hashanah* 18a. — A classical example of nullifying a decree already passed (without an oath) is the case of King Hezekiah; see *Berachot* 10a.

160. Even in the case of a 'decree *with* an oath,' there is a difference between an individual and a community: communal prayer affecting a multitude is more powerful and effective, to the extent that it may rescind even such a decree; see *Rosh Hashanah* 18a; and *Ikkarim* IV:21. — On the efficacy of communal prayer see also *Berachot* 7b, 8a, and 30a; *Sifre*, Pinchas, par. 136, and *ibid.*, Va'etchanan, par. 30; *Zohar* I:167b, and 234a; *Kuzary* III:18; *Sha'arei Orach*, sha'ar 2; Rambam, *Hilchot Tefilah* 8:1; etc.

161. *Rosh Hashanah* 18a. The classical example for this, is Moses, whose prayer to rescind the decree against him was refused because it was subject to an oath; see Rashi on Numbers 20:12; and *Ikkarim* IV:21.

162. A basic and frequent theme in the *Zohar*; see there, e.g., I:77b, 86b, 88a; II:31b; and III:105a, 112b; and so forth.

notwithstanding the fact that G-d knows these needs beforehand.

Nonetheless, the implications of this idea in general, and particularly in terms of man having the power — especially through prayer<sup>163</sup> — to avert or convert ‘bad’ (i.e., severe) decrees, remain rather difficult. Even when invoking the principle of “potentiality and actuality,” which answers the question of change, we are still left with an equally difficult problem: it would seem that if not G-d’s will, then at least G-d’s *knowledge* would change as man’s condition changes through prayer.

This problem, however, is no more than a restatement of the classical dilemma of *yedi’ah-bechirah*, the enigma of G-d’s foreknowledge of the contingent (the variables of the possible, subject to man’s freedom of choice).<sup>164</sup> “Just as we do not (indeed: *cannot*) enquire after (the necessary truth of) G-d’s knowledge being unchanged by the fact of there being a category of the contingent, so we cannot enquire after it being unchanged by prayer. Nonetheless, we believe that the category of the contingent is real, seeing that experience testifies to it. Likewise we believe that prayer is effective in nullifying a decree, as experience testifies to it.”<sup>165</sup>

If the Divine will were distinct from G-d Himself (as is the case with man and human will), one could properly speak of a change from ‘before’ to ‘after.’ If there were but the faintest similarity between human will and the Divine

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163. See above, note 4.

164. See Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah*, ch. 5-6; *Moreh Nevuchim* III:20.

165. *Ikkarim* IV:18; see there at length.



will — even of the sort of, for example, some analogous relationship between inanimate matter and pure intellect etc. — it might be possible and proper to pose our problem. In fact, however, it is written, "My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8).<sup>166</sup>

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166. See sources cited above, note 146. Cf. *Derech Mitzvotecha*, cited above note, 154; and *Moreh Nevuchim* III:20.

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## XXII

### Divine Providence

**A**nother problem remains. It is quite apparent that the acts of man will not necessarily prove successful. Man may do all that is necessary, and do so in a proper way, and still fail to realize his goals. It is likewise with prayer: one may pray properly, at the right time and with the right devotion, yet his request is not fulfilled.<sup>167</sup>

Now the reason may be that G-d refuses to assent as a form of punishment or trial, or because the petitioner is not yet fully prepared and ready. Then, again, there may be some other, external impediment.<sup>168</sup>

Another, and possibly most frequent reason, is that “No” may also be an answer, and in fact the best possible

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167. See the sources cited above, note 127, and *Pessikta deR. Kahana*, sect. XXIV (Dirshu); *Zohar* I:105b, and III:58a.

168. See *Ikkarim* IV: beg. of ch. 24; and see also *ibid.*, ch. 13.

answer. The request may not have been assented to by Divine Providence for a good reason: Omniscient G-d knows that the favour requested is ultimately not in the best interest of the petitioner. For many of man's prayers are inappropriate and unreasonable. They are mere personal desires which we, thinking in terms of 'here and now,' imagine to be needs or essential for our welfare and happiness.<sup>169</sup> Of this it has been said, "'The needs of Your people are many and their wit is scant:'<sup>170</sup> because their wit is scant, that is why their needs are many."<sup>171</sup>

In this context we must consider two things. On the one hand, man must always retain faith and trust in G-d, and hope that his requests (insofar that they are proper, reasonable, and suitable) will be fulfilled. This trust in G-d must be strong and sincere, to the extent that "even when a sharp sword is already on your neck, do not refrain from asking for G-d's mercy."<sup>172</sup>

On the other hand, one must be careful not to fall prey to the sin of presumptuous calculation on prayer (*iyun tefilah*), that is, to expect that G-d will definitely accept and grant the request as compensation due for praying.<sup>173</sup> To be sure, one ought to hope, wait patiently, "Hope in G-d, be

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169. *Ibid.*, based on *Tanchuma*, Terumah:9 (see also *Tanchuma*, ed. Buber, Toldot:14, Terumah:8, and Bamidbar:3). Cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 17bf.; *Berachot* 60a; *Moed Katan* 18b; etc.

170. *Berachot* 29b.

171. *Torah Or*, Vayishlach, p. 26c. Cf. R. Shmuel of Lubavitch, *Mayim Rabim* — 5636, ch. 1.

172. *Berachot* 10a. See *Midrash Tehilim* 4:3. Cf. *Hilchot Yessodei Hatorah* 10:4; and *Ikkarim* IV:48f.

173. See *Berachot* 32b (with Rashi and Tossafot *ad loc.*); and *ibid.* 55a. See also *Baba Batra* 164b, and *Rosh Hashanah* 16b; *Zohar* I:202b; *Tossafot* on *Shabbat* 118b, s.v. *iyun tefilah*.

strong .. and hope in G-d" (Psalms 27:14).<sup>174</sup> Nonetheless, one must also keep in mind and consider that (as stated) there are various reasons why requests may be refused. Thus there is no reason to despair. On the contrary: contemplation on this principle should lead man to "examine his deeds, as it is written 'Let us search our ways and investigate' (Lamentations 3:40)."<sup>175</sup>

The proper attitude to prayer, and its most suitable content, therefore, would be some form of the prayer of R. Eliezer: "Lord of the Universe! Do Your will in heaven above, and give repose of spirit to those that fear you below; and do what is good in Your eyes. Blessed are You, G-d, who hears prayer."<sup>176</sup> This means: "Do not attend to my words or to my requests to do what *my heart* desires or what *I* ask; for oftentimes I pray for something which is bad for me, because I imagine and think that it is good. You, however, know better than I whether it is good for me or bad. Therefore: *You* decide, and not I; do what *You* know is good — 'do what is good in Your eyes.'"<sup>177</sup>

"Salvation belongs to G-d" (Psalms 3:9). G-d alone, and not man, knows the way of salvation. Thus "Cast your burden upon G-d and He will sustain you" (Psalms 55:23). "Commit your way unto G-d and trust in Him, and He will act" (Psalms 37:5) to provide what is good and beneficial for you.<sup>178</sup>

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174. See *Berachot* 32b; and *Midrash Tehilim* 40:1. See below, text for note 181.

175. See *Berachot* 5a; and *Ikkarim* IV:6.

176. *Berachot* 29b.

177. *Ikkarim* IV:24. See *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 4, and notes *ad loc.* Cf. *Nidah* 31a (on Isaiah 12:1); and R. Manoach of Narbonne, *Sefer Hamanoach*, *Hilchot Tefilah* 4:19.

178. *Ibid.* See also *Chovot Halevovot*, *Sha'ar Habitachon*, ch. 4.

## XXIII

### *All Prayers Answered*

**I**t would seem that some prayers are not answered. This does not mean, however, that they were in vain or not effective.

First of all, the principal objective of prayer is not that it be answered according to wish. Thus we are taught that he who sets his mind in prayer on the anticipation of seeing it fulfilled (*iyun tefilah*), will suffer heart-ache, as it is written, "Hope deferred makes the heart ache" (Proverbs 13:12).<sup>179</sup> The ultimate goal, therefore, is not the actual fulfillment of the request submitted, but the awareness "that in the whole universe there is none to whom it is fitting to pray other than G-d," and the recognition that man is altogether deficient "and only G-d can provide whatever he lacks."<sup>180</sup>

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179. *Berachot* 32b; and see above, note 173.

180. *Bet Elokim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 2.

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The mental, emotional and spiritual results of prayer, as defined above, are more than sufficient to render *tefilah* worthwhile and effective.

To be sure, this does not mean that one should ignore the literal or common meaning of prayer, to petition G-d for all and any needs. On the contrary: when one sees that he prayed and was not answered, he should pray again and again, as it is said, "Hope in G-d, be strong and let your heart be valiant, and hope in G-d."<sup>181</sup> Nonetheless, one must not lose sight of the essence and underlying premises of the principle of *tefilah*.

Secondly: Some objectives, as, for example, the Messianic redemption, require multiple prayers — both in terms of the prayers articulated as well as in terms of petitioners. Though the literal results of these prayers are not perceived at the time, each of them is and remains significant: each of these prayers is effective, albeit partially, insofar that each contributes to the necessary sum-total, the ultimate whole.<sup>182</sup>

Moreover, these individual prayers are not only part of a whole, which takes time to complete, but they effect

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181. See above, note 174. Thus man must always strengthen himself and pray. Even when he feels unable to pray, or that he lacks the proper *kavanah* or *hitlahavut* (sense of ecstasy), and therefore thinks that his prayer would be unbecoming, he should still force himself and carry on. The sincere effort will of itself arouse the proper mood and attitude. See *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 72, 85 and 86, and the notes there. Cf. *Zohar* I:243b: "Just because he is unable to concentrate the heart and mind, should, therefore, G-d's praise be diminished?!"

182. *Bet Elokim*, Sha'ar Hatefilah, ch. 17.

partial or 'miniature' responses of the very genus of the request submitted to G-d. For throughout the period of the *galut* there are many forms of 'miniature' salvations and redemptions.<sup>183</sup>

Thirdly, and most importantly: Every single prayer is effective and answered, though not necessarily on the level of the petitioner. In the words of the Baal Shem Tov:

*One must believe that as soon as the prayer has been uttered, one is answered for what has been requested. It may be asked, that at times the fulfillment of the request is not perceived. In fact, however, (the prayer has been answered, except that) it is in a manner hidden from the petitioner. For example, one may have prayed specifically for the removal of his distress, and this request was granted in terms of the world in general. (The petitioner's personal anguish may remain, but) that itself is actually for his own good, or to expiate some sin, and the like. When man's mind is set on awaiting the actual fulfillment on the specific, personal level, he brings materialism into the prayer, which in fact should be completely spiritual, for the sake of the Shechinah and not for the sake of the mundane. (The ulterior motive, therefore,) becomes a separating barrier.<sup>184</sup>*

In another version, recorded by the Baal Shem Tov's grandson and disciple R. Mosheh Chaim Ephrayim of Sudytkov:

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183. *Ibid.* (citing *Zevachim* 19a as an example).

184. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 80. See there also sect. 81, 176, and 214. *Maggid Devarav L'ya'akov*, sect. 145; *Likutim Yekarim*, sect. 123; *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 73 and 123, and the notes there.

My master and grandfather said that all prayers are effective in the upper worlds, and sometimes in other parts of the earth. (Sometimes one may ask for one thing, and he is given something else; and sometimes the prayer's effects are limited to the upper worlds.) He based this on the verse, "When the exalted things are debased among the children of man" (Psalms 12:9) — i.e., "the things that stand in the pinnacle of the universe, yet people debase them."<sup>185</sup> This refers to prayer which effects awesome things in the highest places of the worlds, yet people think that their prayers are not accepted and therefore treat them lightly.

For sometimes the effect of prayer is in the upper realms of the universe, and not below, and people, therefore, think that their prayer was, Heaven forbid, in vain. In truth, however, this is not the case. All prayers are accepted, but their effect is according to what omniscient G-d determines to be for the best interests of man and the world.<sup>186</sup>

*Excessive self-deprecation on the part of man, thinking his prayers to be of no avail, is in effect false humility, and may lead him astray. False humility causes man to think that his service of G-d, his prayers and Torah, is of no consequence. In truth, however, he must realize that he is a 'ladder set on the earth, and its top reaches into heaven': all his motions, his speech, his conduct and involvements, leave impressions in the uppermost realms. By thinking to himself, 'who am I that I could blemish or*

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185. *Berachot* 6b (see Rashi).

186. *Degel Machaneh Ephrayim*, Tetze, and *ibid.* Ekev (*Sefer Baal Shem Tov*, Noach, note 118). This interpretation appears also in *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 138.



*correct anything above or below, that my doings will leave a mark, he will be led to follow the inclinations of his heart, imagining that he has nothing to worry about.*<sup>187</sup>

Thus we are taught, "'Da mah lema'alah mimach'<sup>188</sup> — know, that whatever is Above — it is all from and through you yourself!'"<sup>189</sup> All of man's actions are of cosmic significance. All of man's actions elicit commensurate reactions.

\* \* \*

*The needs of Your people Israel are many, and their wit is scant. Yehi ratzon milfanecha, O G-d, our G-d, to give to each and everyone what is sufficient for his maintenance, and to each body sufficient for what it lacks; and do what is good in Your eyes. Blessed are You, G-d, who hears prayer.*<sup>190</sup>

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187. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 145.

188. *Avot* 2:1.

189. *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 142.

190. *Berachot* 29b, according to the version of R. Isaac Alfassi (*Rif*) and R. Asher (*Rosh*), *ad loc.*; and Rambam, *Hilchot Tefilah* 4:19.

תדע לך כח התשובה . .

The Dynamics of *Teshuvah*

## The Dynamics of *Teshuvah*

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## תדע לך כח התשובה . .

### The Dynamics of *Teshuvah*

*“Rebbe, I am a sinner. I would like to return, to do teshuvah!”*

*R. Israel of Ryzhin looked at the man before him. He did not understand what the man wanted:*

*“So why don’t you do teshuvah?”*

*“Rebbe, I do not know how!”*

*R. Israel retorted:*

*“How did you know to sin?”*

*The remorseful sinner answered simply:*

*I acted, and then I realized that I had sinned.”*

*“Well,” said the Rebbe, “the same applies to teshuvah: repent and the rest will follow of itself!”*

## I

### Torah: The Ground Rules

**R**evelation is the foundation of religion. Revelation constitutes the basic premises of religion: (a) There is the

Revealer. G-d exists. He is real. (b) G-d speaks to man. G-d not only exists, He also cares. He is a personal G-d. There is *hashgachah* (Divine Providence). Because G-d cares, like a loving and concerned parent cares for his child, He reveals to us what we should know about reality. He guides us and teaches us the way wherein we are to walk and the acts that we must do.

This is *Torah*, the "Tree of Life to those who hold fast to it."<sup>1</sup> G-d's word, the Revelation, is called *Torah*. For *Torah* means instruction: "It instructs and reveals that which was hidden, unknown."<sup>2</sup> "It teaches man to walk in the right path. It counsels him how to return to his Master."<sup>3</sup>

Revelation, the Torah in all its immensity of 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions, is realistic. It is not alien to man and physical reality. It is not superimposed from without. "It is not hidden from you nor far off. It is not in the heavens that you should say: Who shall go up for us to the heavens...? Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say: Who shall go over the sea for us...? It is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it."<sup>4</sup>

Torah is not attached to the world. It precedes and transcends the world.<sup>5</sup> It is the blueprint for Creation.<sup>6</sup> "The

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1. Proverbs 3:18.

2. *Zohar* III:53b.

3. *Zohar* III:260a. See R. Menachem M. Schneerson *shelita* of Lubavitch, *Likkutei Sichot* (English), vol. I, p. XV.

4. Deuteronomy 30:11-14.

5. *Bereishit Rabba* 8:2; *Pesachim* 54a.

6. *Bereishit Rabba* 1:2.

Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world.”<sup>7</sup>

The universe, man, all that exists, was created, fashioned and made on the basis of, and suited to, the contents and requirements of Torah. This allows for the possibility, and thus the demand, that man — every one of us — can live up to the obligations and ideals of Torah.<sup>8</sup>

We are bound up with Torah in a reciprocal relationship. As Torah is the blueprint for the universe, the universe reflects all components of Torah.<sup>9</sup> And as it is with the macrocosm, so it is with the microcosm, with man. The human body and the human soul reflect the 613 precepts: 248 organs corresponding to the 248 commandments; 365 veins corresponding to the 365 prohibitions.<sup>10</sup>

Observance of the positive precepts animates the relative organs, attaches them to Divinity and elicits for them Divine illumination, vitality and energy.<sup>11</sup> Observance of the prohibitions protects the relative veins and vessels against contamination, against influences alien to their nature and purpose.<sup>12</sup>

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7. *Zohar* II:161a; *Bereishit Rabba* 1:1.

8. See *Likkutei Sichot* (English), vol. I, Bereishit: sect. III, p. 2f. Cf. *Shemot Rabba* 34:1: “The Holy One, blessed be He, does not impose burdensome precepts upon His creatures; He comes to man according to his own strength .. according to the ability of each individual.” See also *Avodah Zara* 3a; and Rambam, *Shemonah Perakim*, ch. 2 and 8.

9. See J. I. Schochet, *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, chapter I, section 1, and notes 4-5 *ad loc.*; *Likkutei Sichot* (English), vol. I, p. 199 and note b *ad loc.*; cf. *Zohar* I:134b and III:202a.

10. *Makot* 23b; *Zohar* I:170b.

11. See R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Tanya*, ch. 23 and 37; *ibid.*, *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 1.

12. See *Tanya*, ch. 24 and 37; *ibid.*, *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 1.

## II

### The Nature of Sin

**R**evelation, Torah, the life based upon it, constitutes morality, virtue, goodness.

What constitutes sin?

On the simple level, sin means breaking the law, violating the Torah by acts of omission or commission. Our duties are spelled out clearly. The law is defined. To ignore the letter or the spirit of the law, let alone to contravene it, that is sin.

On a deeper level, the meaning of sin is indicated in its Hebrew terminology. The general term for it is *aveirah*. It is of the root *avar* — to pass or cross over, to pass beyond. *Aveirah* means a trespass, a transgression, a stepping across the limits and boundaries of propriety to the "other side."

More specific words are *chet*, *avon*, *pesha*. *Chet* is of a

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root meaning to miss, to bear a loss. *Avon* is of a root meaning to bend, twist, pervert. *Pesha* is of a root meaning to rebel. Technically, legalistically, *chet* refers to inadvertent sins; *avon* to conscious misdeeds; and *pesha* to malicious acts of rebellion.<sup>13</sup>

Sin, thus, is a move away from Divinity, away from truth. “Your sins separate you from your G-d”<sup>14</sup> who is truly “your life.”<sup>15</sup> It separates us from Torah, our lifeline, that which attaches us to the source of our life and all blessings.

To neglect the commandments is to deprive ourselves of the illumination and vitality which their observance draws upon us, to forfeit an opportunity, to render ourselves deficient: *chata'im*, at a loss. To violate the prohibitions is to defile the body, to blemish the soul, to cause evil to become attached.<sup>16</sup>

Sin offers man temporary gains, but it is altogether irrational, self-defeating. Attractive and sweet at the outset, but bitter in the end.<sup>17</sup> Thus, “The Holy One, blessed be He, and the Torah are astounded: How is it possible that a person will sin?!”<sup>18</sup>

No person will commit a sin unless a spirit of folly has entered into him.<sup>19</sup> Sin is an act of ignorance or foolishness.

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13. *Yoma* 36b.

14. Isaiah 59:2. See *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 5.

15. Deuteronomy 30:6 and 30:20. See *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 9; and *Tanya*, *Igeret Hakodesh*, sect. IV.

16. See above, notes 11-12.

17. *Yerushalmi*, *Shabbat* 14:3.

18. *Zohar* III:13b and 16a.

19. *Sotah* 3a. See *Tanya*, ch. 19 and 24. Cf. R. Sholom Dovber of Lubavitch, *Kuntres Uma'ayon* I:1, IV, and XVI:2.



Invariably it can be traced to lack of knowledge, to negligence or carelessness. If premeditated, let alone an act of willful rebellion, it is outright stupidity. Either way, it is rooted in heedlessness, in shortsightedness, in failure to think. It follows upon a blinding obsession with the here and now, egocentricity, self-righteousness.<sup>20</sup>

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20. See R. Yitzchak Arama, *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Nasso, Sha'ar 73. Cf. *Kuntres Uma'ayon* XIII:1, XIV, and XVI:2; R. Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, *Torat Hachassidut*, XX-XXIV; *Likkutei Sichot* (English), vol. II, Bo: section IX.

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### III

#### The Principle of *Teshuvah*

**T**he folly of sin derives from man's physical nature.

What is man? A composite of body and soul.

The soul is spiritual. By its very nature it reaches out to, and strives for, spirituality.

The body is material, and thus attracted to the allurements of its own elements, of matter.<sup>21</sup>

Yet these two are combined. The soul is removed from its "supernal peak" to be vested in the lowly body.

This "descent" is for the purpose of an "ascent": to elevate and sublimate the physicality of the body and the matter to which it is related in its lifetime.<sup>22</sup> There is tension

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21. See Rambam, *Hilchot Yessodei Hatorah*, ch. 4.

22. See *Tanya*, ch. 37-38.

between body and soul, between matter (and the natural or animalistic life-force that animates and sustains it), and the *neshamah*, the sublime soul and spirit of man. But they are not irreconcilable.

The body *per se* is neither evil nor impure. It is potentiality: not-yet-holy, even as it is not-yet-profane. Man's actions, the actions and behavior of the body-soul compound, determine its fall into the chambers of defilement or its ascent to be absorbed in holiness.<sup>23</sup>

To succeed in elevating and sublimating the body and its share in this world is an elevation for the soul as well. It is precisely the exposure to temptation, the risks of worldliness, the possibility of alternatives and the incumbent free will of man, that allow for achievement, for ultimate self-realization.<sup>24</sup>

"The body of man is a wick, and the light (soul) is kindled above it . . . The light on a man's head must have oil, that is, good deeds."<sup>25</sup>

The wick by itself is useless if not lit. The flame cannot burn in a vacuum; it cannot produce light nor cling to the wick without oil. Torah and *mitzvot*, good deeds, unite the wick and the flame, the body and the soul, to actualize inherent potentiality, to produce a meaningful entity.<sup>26</sup>

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23. See *Tanya*, ch. 8-9. Cf. *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, ch. X-XI.

24. See Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah*, ch. 5. Cf. *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, ch. XI.

25. *Zohar* III:187a.

26. See *Tanya*, ch. 35 and 53.

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The *neshamah*, the soul, a spark of G-dliness within us, fills us with practically unlimited potential. Man is granted the power to make of himself whatever he likes, in effect to determine his destiny.<sup>27</sup>

The veracity of mundane temptation, however, is no less real. "Sin crouches at the door."<sup>28</sup>

Torah confronts this fact: "There is no man so righteous on earth that he does good and never sins."<sup>29</sup>

If sin was final, the history of mankind would have begun and ended with Adam. The Creator took this into account. The original intent was to create the world on the basis of strict justice. As G-d foresaw that such a world could not endure, He caused the attribute of mercy to precede the attribute of justice and allied them.<sup>30</sup>

"When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He consulted the Torah about creating man. She said to Him: 'The man You want to create will sin before You, he will provoke You to anger. If You will deal with him commensurate to his deeds, neither the world nor man will be able to exist before You!' G-d then replied to the Torah: 'Is it for nothing that I am called the Compassionate and Gracious G-d, long-suffering...?'"<sup>31</sup>

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27. See R. Chaim Vital, *Sha'arei Kedushah* III:2.

28. Genesis 4:7. See *Yoma* 19bf., and Rashi *ad loc.*; and *cf. Sukah* 52b.

29. Ecclesiastes 7:20. [*Cf. Tossafot, Baba Batra* 17a, *s.v. sheloshah*].

30. Rashi on Genesis 1:1; *Zohar Chadash*, Noach 21d; *Bereishit Rabba* 12:15.

31. Exodus 34:6.

Thus, before creating the world, the Holy One, blessed be He, created *teshuvah* (repentance), and said to it: "I am about to create man in the world, but on condition that when they turn to you because of their sins, you shall be ready to erase their sins and to atone for them!"

*Teshuvah* thus is forever close at hand, and when man returns from his sins, this *teshuvah* returns to the Holy One, blessed be He, and He atones for all — all judgments are suppressed and sweetened, and man is purified from his sins. How is he purified from his sins? By ascending with this *teshuvah* in proper manner. Rabbi Isaac said: When he returns before the Supreme King and prays from the depths of his heart, as it is written:<sup>32</sup> "From the depths I call unto You, oh G-d!"<sup>33</sup>

Torah, the rules and regulations for life, preceded the world and served as its blueprint. These rules demand strict adherence. "But for the Torah, heaven and earth cannot endure, as it is said:<sup>34</sup> 'If not for My covenant by day and by night, I had not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth.'"<sup>35</sup>

Sin means to defeat the purpose of Creation, to deprive creation of all meaning. This must result in the world's reversion to nothingness. Thus the need for the attribute of mercy, of compassion.<sup>36</sup>

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32. Psalms 130:1.

33. *Zohar* III:69b. See also *Pirkei deR. Eliezer*, ch. 3.

34. Jeremiah 33:25.

35. *Pesachim* 68b.

36. See *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Acharei, Sha'ar 63.

Mercy means to recognize the legitimacy of justice, yet to show compassion, to forgive nonetheless.<sup>37</sup> Mercy means to recognize the valid demands of the law, but also to temper these demands by considering the fact that “the drive of man’s heart is evil yet from his youth.”<sup>38</sup> It offers another chance.

This is the principle of *teshuvah*.

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37. See *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, ch. III, sect. 5, s.v. tiferet, and especially note 103 *ad loc.*

38. Genesis 8:21. See also *ibid.* 6:5.

## IV

The Power of *Teshuvah*

*As for the wicked man, if he should return from all his sins that he committed and guard all my decrees, and do justice and righteousness, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions which he committed will not be remembered against him.... Do I then desire the death of the wicked, says G-d, the Eternal G-d, is it not rather his return from his ways, that he may live?*

Ezekiel 18<sup>39</sup>

“*Teshuvah* is a principle indispensable to religion, indispensable to the existence of individuals believing in the Torah. For it is impossible for man not to sin and err

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39. See also Ezekiel, ch. 33; and *Zohar Chadash*, Noach 22a-b.

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— either by erroneously adopting an opinion or moral quality which in truth is not commendable, or else by being overcome by passion and anger. If man were to believe that this fracture can never be remedied, he would persist in his error and perhaps even add to his disobedience.

“The belief in *teshuvah*, however, leads him to improvement, to come to a state that is better, nearer to perfection, than that which obtained before he sinned. That is why the Torah prescribes many actions that are meant to establish this correct and very useful principle of *teshuvah*.”<sup>40</sup>

Without *teshuvah* the world could not endure. Without *teshuvah* man could not but despair, crushed by the burden of his errors. Torah is the foundation of the universe, it assures and sustains its existence. *Teshuvah* insures its survival.

The power of *teshuvah* is overawing. There is absolutely nothing that stands in the way of *teshuvah*.<sup>41</sup> The thread of *teshuvah* is woven throughout the whole tapestry of Torah, of our tradition.<sup>42</sup> It is not simply a *mitzvah*, one of 613 channels to tie us to G-d. It is a general, all-comprehensive principle, the backbone of religion.<sup>43</sup>

There is no sin that cannot be mended and remedied by *teshuvah*.<sup>44</sup> *Teshuvah* removes a burdensome past and opens

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40. Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim* III:36.

41. *Zohar* II:106a; *Zohar Chadash*, Bereishit 20d; *Yerushalmi*, *Pe'ah* 1:1. See *Tanya*, ch. 25, and *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 4.

42. See *Berachot* 34b; *Hilchot Teshuvah* 7:5.

43. See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. IV, p. 1144f.

44. See *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 4. Cf. R. Eliyahu de Vidas, *Reishit Chochmah*, Sha'ar Hakedushah, ch. 17 (and note there the



the door to a new future. It means renewal, rebirth. The *ba'al teshuvah* becomes a different, a new, person.<sup>45</sup> It is much more than correction, more than rectification. *Teshuvah* elevates to a status even higher than the one prior to all sin. Even the perfectly righteous are surpassed by the *ba'al teshuvah*.<sup>46</sup>

Sin is time-consuming. It is an evolutionary process. Man does not fall at once, suddenly. He is trapped by one wrong act or attitude, often seemingly innocuous, which leads to another. When failing to recognize and stop this process, a chain-reaction is set into motion and leads to the mire of evil.<sup>47</sup>

*Teshuvah*, however, even in the worst of cases, is immediate.

*"Ba'alei teshuvah are meritorious. For in the span of... one instant they draw close to the Holy One, blessed be He, more so than the perfectly righteous who draw near... over the span of many years!"*<sup>48</sup>

As *teshuvah* is not part of a gradual process and development, it is not subject to any order, to the "bureaucracy" of a normative procedure. It is a jump, a leap. A momentary decision to tear oneself away. One turn. One thought. And thus it affects even law, justice: When someone betrothes a

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original interpretation of the case of Elisha ben Abuya in *Chagigah* 15a).

45. See *Sifre*, Va'etchanan, sect. 30; *Vayikra Rabba* 30:3; *Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:4.

46. *Berachot* 34b; *Hilchot Teshuvah* 7:4. See also *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Nitzavim, Sha'ar 100.

47. See *Shabbat* 105b; *Sukah* 52a-b.

48. *Zohar* I:129a-b. See also *Pessikta Rabaty* 45:9. Cf. *Avodah Zara* 17a: "Rabbi wept and said: 'Some acquire eternal life after many years, others in one hour!'"

woman on condition that "I am a *tzaddik*, a righteous person without sin," the betrothal is valid and binding even if he was known to be absolutely wicked. How so? Because at that very moment of proposal he may have meditated *teshuvah* in his mind!<sup>49</sup>

The single thought, the momentary meditation of *teshuvah*, is sufficient to move man from the greatest depths to the greatest heights.

Just one thought, indeed; for the essence of *teshuvah* is in the mind, in the heart.<sup>50</sup> It is a mental decision, an act of consciousness, awareness, commitment.

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49. *Kidushin* 49b; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Even Ha'ezer* 38:31. See Chida, *Birkei Yosef* on *Yoreh De'ah* 240:18, and his *Ahavat David*, sect. 4 (discussing *Sifte Kohen* on *Choshen Mishpat* 37:7).

The principle that a *ba'al teshuvah* is superior to a *tzadik* (above, note 46) appears to be disputed in the Talmud without any explicit resolution. This raises the question why Rambam and others adopted this view as authoritative. A number of texts deal with this issue (see *Likutei Sichot*, vol. XIV, pp. 361-363; *Berit Olam* and *Mekor Chessed* on *Sefer Chassidim*, par. 60; *Sha'arei Zohar*, and *Einayim Lamishpat*, on *Berachot* 34b; etc.). R. Joseph Rosen of Rogatchov supports their case by referring to our Halachic ruling of *Kidushin* 49b: *per force* we must say that a *ba'al teshuvah* is either equal or superior to the *tzadik*, or else the condition would not have been fulfilled (see Rabbi S. J. Zevin, *Hamo'adim Behalachah*, p. 67f.). See, though, *Likutei Sichot*, *ibid.*, p. 363, for a critique against this argument.

50. See *Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2-3; *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 1. See also *Tanya*, ch. 29, and *Igeret Hakodesh*, sect. X.

## V

The Nature of *Teshuvah*

Where does the enormous potency of *teshuvah* come from? How can it erase the past, change the present, mold the future — recreate, as it were?

The power of *teshuvah* derives from its transcendent nature. Like Torah, *teshuvah* preceded the Creation.<sup>51</sup> It is not part of the world, of Creation, of a creative process. It is beyond time, beyond space, rooted in infinity. In the sphere of infinity, past and present fade into oblivion.

*Teshuvah* is in the heart, in the mind.<sup>50</sup> One thought of *teshuvah* is enough. For thought, the mind, is not restricted

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51. See above, the text corresponding to note 33. Also, *Pesachim* 54a, and *Bereishit Rabba* 1:5. "The greatness of *teshuvah* lies in its preceding the creation of the world;" *Midrash Tehilim* 90:12.

by the limitations of the body. The mind can traverse the universe in seconds.<sup>52</sup> And the mind — *machshavah*, thought — is man, the essence of man.<sup>53</sup> Man is where his thoughts are.<sup>54</sup>

Fasting, self-mortification, may be means through which man expresses remorse. They may be acts of purification, of self-cleansing. But they do not constitute *teshuvah*.<sup>55</sup> *Teshuvat hamishkal*, penance commensurate to the sin, “to balance the scales,” is important. So is *teshuvat hageder*, the voluntary erection of protective “fences” to avoid trespassing. Empirical reality may dictate such modes of behavior corresponding to certain forms of weakness.<sup>56</sup> However, these deal with symptoms only. They relate to specific acts that constitute the external manifestation of sin. They do not touch sin itself. They do not tackle the root and source from which sin grows. That root and source is in the mind, in the heart: ignorance, carelessness, neglect, wrong attitudes, egocentricity, self-justification.

Just as sin is rooted in man’s will and mind, so must *teshuvah* be rooted in man’s will and mind.<sup>57</sup>

*“He who sets his heart on becoming purified (from ritual defilement) becomes pure as soon as he has immersed himself (in the waters of a mikveh), though nothing new has befallen his body. So, too, it is with*

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52. See R. Dov Ber of Mezhirech, *Or Torah*, sect. 245, 391, and 444.

53. *Zohar* I:266b; and III:247b.

54. *Keter Shem Tov*, sect. 56; *Tzava’at Harivash*, sect. 69, and the notes *ad loc*.

55. See *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 1-3.

56. See R. Yehudah Hachassid, *Sefer Chassidim* (Parma), sect. 37; R. Eleazar of Worms, *Rake’ach Hagadol*, s.v. *Teshuvah*.

57. *Hilchot Teshuvah* 6:2.

*one who sets his heart on cleansing himself from the impurities that beset man's soul — namely, wrongful thoughts and false convictions: as soon as he consents in his heart to withdraw from those counsels and brings his soul into the waters of reason, he is pure.*"<sup>58</sup>

The tragedy of sin is not so much the transgression itself, to succumb to temptation, for "there is no man on earth... that he never sins." The real tragedy, the ultimate sin, is the failure to judge oneself, the failure to do *teshuvah*, "he has left off to contemplate to do good... he does not abhor evil."<sup>59</sup>

Better one self-reproach in the heart of man than numerous lashings.<sup>60</sup> As the bacteria, poisonous and infectious, are eliminated, their symptoms and outgrowths will disappear as well.<sup>61</sup> And as sins cease, sinners will be no

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58. Rambam, *Hilchot Mikva'ot* 11:12. Note the analogy between *teshuvah* and the purifying waters of a *mikveh*. The Midrash goes a step further: *teshuvah* is more than a *mikveh*; it is like the sea, immersion in which also effects purification. A *mikveh* is subject to limitations of time and space. It is limited to a distinct location (a building), and is not always accessible or available. The sea, however, transcends these limitations: it is always accessible and available, if not in one particular spot then in another. "*Teshuvah* is like the sea which is never barred, so that whoever desires to bathe in it can do so whenever he desires;" *Midrash Tehilim* 65:4; *Pessikta deR. Kahana*, sect. 25; and see the marginal references *ad loc.*

59. Psalms 36:4-5.

60. *Berachot* 7a.

61. Here, indeed, is the ultimate test for the sincere and true *teshuvah*: though again exposed to the same temptations, the

more.<sup>62</sup> Thus *teshuvah*, the *teshuvah* that deals with the essence of sin, brings healing into the world.<sup>63</sup>

This is not to understate the external symptoms of sin. For with every transgression “man acquires a *kateigar*, a prosecutor, against himself.”<sup>64</sup> The act of sin assumes reality. It clings to man, it attaches itself to him<sup>65</sup> — leading him further astray in this world only to accuse him later in the hereafter.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, everything in Creation is categorized in terms of matter and form (body and soul). The act of sin, its external manifestation, is the matter (the body) of sin, which creates the *kateigar*. The underlying thought, the intent, the will or passion that generated the transgression, is the form (the soul) that animates and sustains that body.<sup>67</sup>

Self-mortification attacks that body and may destroy that matter. But only a change of heart, conscious remorse, is able to confront its form, its soul. Only the elimination of the thought, intent and desire that caused the sin, will eliminate the soul of the *kateigar*. And when deprived of its soul, the *kateigar* ceases to exist.<sup>68</sup>

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*ba'al teshuvah* is now in control of himself and will not succumb. Thus the symptoms disappear. See *Yoma* 86b.

62. *Berachot* 10a.

63. *Yoma* 86a. Cf. *Tikunei Zohar* 22:66b.

64. *Avot* 4:11.

65. *Sotah* 3b.

66. *Sukah* 52b.

67. Cf. *Tzava'at Harivash*, sect. 116, and the notes *ad loc.*

68. R. Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch, *Derech Mitzvotecha*, s.v. *Mitzvat Viduy U'Teshuvah*, ch. 1. See also *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 7.

Thus

*"rend your heart and not your garments, and return unto G-d, your G-d, for He is gracious and compassionate, long-suffering and abounding in kindness. . . ."*<sup>69</sup> *When rending the heart in teshuvah, there is no need to rend one's garments.*<sup>70</sup>

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69. Joel 2:13.

70. Yerushalmi, Ta'anit 2:1.

## VI

The Disposition of the *Ba'al Teshuvah*

*Teshuvah* is essentially in the heart, in the mind. It is related to the faculty of *binah*, understanding.<sup>71</sup>

There cannot be *teshuvah* without a consciousness of reality: understanding what is required. Recognition of one's status. Introspection. Searing soul-searching. Honest self-evaluation that opens the eyes of the mind and causes a profound sense of embarrassment: How could I have acted so foolishly? How could I have been so blind and dumb in the face of the Almighty, the Omnipresent "Who in His goodness renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation?"<sup>72</sup> How could I forsake the Ultimate, the Absolute,

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71. *Zohar* I:79b; III:122a, and 216a. *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 9.

72. Liturgy, Morning Prayers. For the significance of this phrase see *Reishit Chochmah*, Sha'ar Ho'ahavah, ch. 5; and also *Tanya*, Sha'ar Hayichud Vecha'emunah, ch. 1-3.



for some transient illusion? "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of Living Waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that hold no water!"<sup>73</sup>

*Teshuvah* is directly related to *bushah* — shame, embarrassment. The Hebrew word *teshuvah* contains the letters of *boshet*; transposing the letters of *shuvah* (return), offers the word *bushah* (shame). For *bushah* is an indication of *teshuvah*.<sup>74</sup>

*Bushah*, a sense of shame, flows from an illuminating grasp of reality. It is the proof of true regret over, and of a break with, the past. It is identical with *teshuvah*. To achieve that level is assurance of forgiveness: He who commits a sin and is ashamed of it, all his sins are forgiven him!<sup>75</sup>

It takes understanding to do *teshuvah*: "His heart shall understand, and he will return, and it shall be healed for him."<sup>76</sup> That is why first we pray: "bestow upon us wisdom, understanding and knowledge," and only then: "bring us back to You in complete *teshuvah*."<sup>77</sup>

Wisdom, understanding, knowledge, are prerequisites for *teshuvah*. It takes knowledge to separate right from

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73. Jeremiah 2:13. Cf. *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 7.

74. See *Sefer Halikutim — Tzemach Tzedek*, s.v. *Teshuvah*, p. 352ff.

75. *Berachot* 12b; R. Judah Loew (Maharal), *Netivot Olam*, *Teshuvah*, ch. 5. "Shamefacedness leads to fear of sin; hence it was said that it is a good sign if man is shamefaced. No man who experiences shame will easily sin...;" *Nedarim* 20a. Cf. *Yevamot* 79a.

76. Isaiah 6:10.

77. *Megilah* 17b.

wrong. Only the wise know to distinguish between holy and profane, between pure and impure.<sup>78</sup> Thus *teshuvah* is identical with *binah*.

The *ba'al teshuvah* becomes aware that sin is a partition between G-d and man. Sin disturbs the balance of the universe, sundering its unity. "He who transgresses the precepts of the Torah causes a defect, as it were, above; a defect below; a defect in himself; a defect to all worlds."<sup>79</sup>

The word *teshuvah* can be read as *tashuv-hey* — returning, restoring the *hey*... for when man sins he causes the letter *hey* to be removed from the Divine Name.<sup>80</sup> The Divine Name, the manifestation of G-dliness, is no longer whole. The *hey* has been severed, leaving the other three letters to spell *hoy*, the Biblical exclamation for woe.<sup>81</sup>

"Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil... woe to them that they are wise in their own eyes..."<sup>82</sup>

In turn, "he who does *teshuvah* causes the *hey* to be

78. See *Yerushalmi, Berachot* 5:2; and Rashi on *Berachot* 33a.

79. *Zohar* III:122a.

80. *Ibid.* See *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 4. The word *teshuvah* is divisible into these two components: *tashuv* — *hey*. Note that the letter *hey* represents the physical world: this world was created with the *hey*... because it is like an *exedra* (closed on three sides and open on the fourth), and whosoever wishes to go astray may do so (has the choice to let himself fall through the open bottom of the *hey*). And why is the 'leg' of the *hey* suspended (leaving an opening at the side, from above)? To indicate that whosoever repents is permitted to re-enter. *Menachot* 29b, see there.

81. *Zohar* III:74b, see there.

82. Isaiah 5:20. Note the frequent repetition of this exclamation in that chapter (as elsewhere in the Bible) with reference to sinners; cf. *Sotah* 47b, and Rashi there *s.v.* *rabu hoy hoy*.

restored... and the redemption depends on this."<sup>83</sup> *Teshuvah* restores the *hey*, re completes the Holy Name, re-establishes unity, frees the soul. "*Teshuvah* corrects everything — it rectifies above, rectifies below, rectifies the penitent, rectifies the whole universe."<sup>84</sup>

The *bushah* of *teshuvah* relates only initially to the past. It develops further into an awareness of personal insignificance in the presence of Divine Majesty.<sup>85</sup> On this higher level it signifies *bitul hayesh* (total self-negation). It diverts one's sights from concern with self to concern with the Ultimate. Thus it ignites a consuming desire to be restored to and absorbed in the Divine Presence: "My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living G-d — when shall I come and be seen in the Presence of G-d..."<sup>86</sup> "Oh G-d, You are my G-d, I seek You earnestly. My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You, in a dry and wary land without water... for Your loving-kindness is better than life..."<sup>87</sup>

This longing of the *ba'al teshuvah* is more intense than that of the *tzaddik*, the saint who never sinned. Having been removed from G-dliness, the *ba'al teshuvah* wants to make up for lost time, for lost opportunities. The energy and passion once expended on nonsense and improprieties are

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83. *Zohar* III:122a; *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 4.

84. *Zohar* III:122a.

85. This is the concept of *yirat boshet*, the penetrating awe and reverence before the Divine Majesty to the point of truly sensing personal insignificance. See *Hilchot Yessodei Hatorah* 2:2 and 4:12; *Tanya*, ch. 3; and *ibid.*, *Igeret Hakodesh*, end of sect. XV. See also R. Shmuel of Lubavitch, *Mayim Rabim* — 5636, ch. 136.

86. Psalms 42:3. See *Hilchot Yessodei Hatorah* 2:2.

87. Psalms 63:2ff.

now directed, in ever-increasing measure, towards good. He reaches out with all strength, and thus prompted, leaps to levels unattainable by the *tzaddik*.<sup>88</sup>

His former transgressions, now responsible for his efforts and achievements, are thus sublimated. His descent, in effect, generated his ascent. The former sins are thus converted into veritable merits.<sup>89</sup>

The status requiring *teshuvah* is coupled with grief, heart-breaking remorse.<sup>90</sup> The possibility of *teshuvah* generates hope, faith, confidence: "The heart being firm and certain in G-d that He desires to show kindness, and is gracious and compassionate, generously forgiving the instant one pleads for His forgiveness and atonement. Not the faintest vestige of doubt dilutes this absolute conviction."<sup>91</sup> *Teshuvah* is thus marked by great joy as well.<sup>92</sup>

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88. *Zohar* I:129b; *Tanya*, ch. 7; *ibid.*, *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 8, and *Igeret Hakodesh*, sect. X. Cf. also *Zohar* III:16b and 195a; *Zohar Chadash*, Balak:54b; and *Or Torah*, sect. 36; for the reason why the *ba'al teshuvah* surpasses the *tzadik*.

89. *Yoma* 86b. See *Tanya*, ch. 7.

90. See *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 7.

91. *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 11.

92. *Ibid.* *Teshuvah* thus involves the simultaneous co-existence of two contrary feelings in the heart, as described in *Zohar* III:75a (cf. also *ibid.* II:255a): "Weeping is lodged in one side of my heart, and joy is lodged in the other." (See also *Tanya*, end of ch. 34).

This follows not only from the realization of the import of *teshuvah*, but also from the very fact that *teshuvah* is a *mitzvah* of the Torah: if all *mitzvot* must be fulfilled with joy, how much more so the comprehensive *mitzvah* of *teshuvah*! See R. Mosheh Cordovero, *Perush Seder Avodat Yom Hakipurim*, Tikun 16 (p. 33b); *Likutei Sichot*, vol. XV, p. 548f; vol. XIX, p. 591; and vol. XXIV, p. 529.

Joy is not only a motivating force for the act of *teshuvah*, but also a necessary result of it. For every step away from sin is a step closer to virtue. Every move away from the darkness of evil is a move closer to the light of goodness, coming ever closer to G-d. This fact must fill the heart with joy, a true and encompassing joy and happiness, even as the lost child rejoices in having found the way home.<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, this deep sense of joy, filling one's whole being, is the very test and proof of sincere *teshuvah*.<sup>94</sup>

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93. See R. Dov Ber of Lubavitch, *Poke'ach Ivrim*, ch. 1. Cf. *Igeret Hateshuvah*, ch. 10-11; and *Torat Hachassidut*, XXVIII.

94. *Poke'ach Ivrim*, sect. 15. Cf. *Zohar* III:15b-16a.

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## VII

### The Universality of *Teshuvah*

**T**he conventional translation for *teshuvah* is repentance. This, however, is but one aspect, the aspect related to error, to sins of omission or commission. The literal and real translation is “return.”

Return implies a two-fold movement. There is a source of origin from which one moved away and to which one wants to return.

The descent of the soul into this world is a move away. Regardless of the lofty purposes to be achieved, the sublime goals to be attained, the fact remains that it is an exile. For the soul in its pristine state is bound up and absorbed in its source, in the very “bond of life with G-d.” From this Place of Glory, the manifest Presence of G-d, the soul is vested in a physical body, related to matter, exposed to and involved with the very antitheses of spirituality, of holiness.

To retain that original identity, to regain that original bond, that is the ultimate meaning of *teshuvah*. "And the spirit returns unto G-d who gave it."<sup>95</sup>

*Teshuvah tata'a*, the lower level of *teshuvah*, is rectification, an erasure of the past. On a higher level, *teshuvah* is "coming home," reunion. The child separated and lost, driven to return with a consuming passion, pleads: "It is Your countenance, G-d, that I seek! Do not conceal Your countenance from me!"<sup>96</sup> The innermost point of the heart longs for Divinity so intensely that "his soul is bonded to the love of G-d, continuously enraptured by it like the love-sick whose mind is never free from his passion... and as Solomon expressed allegorically:<sup>97</sup> 'For I am sick with love.'"<sup>98</sup>

This higher sense of *teshuvah* — *teshuvah ila'a*, supreme *teshuvah* — relates to the *tzaddik*, the faultless, as well.

The Torah is given to all of Israel, to every Jew. Nothing in Torah is superfluous. Nothing in Torah is the exclusive heritage of some only. Everything in Torah speaks to every individual, relates to every one. It is only by way of the whole Torah that anyone can become a whole person. Every *mitzvah* serves its purpose. Every instruction is directly relevant to the macrocosm of the universe and the microcosm of every man.

*Teshuvah* is an integral part of Torah. It manifests itself in numerous precepts and instructions. "Every one of

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95. Ecclesiastes 12:7.

96. Psalms 27:8-9. See *Igeret Hakodesh*, sect. IV.

97. Song 2:5.

98. *Hilchot Teshuvah* 10:3.

the prophets charged the people concerning *teshuvah*.”<sup>99</sup> *Teshuvah* thus must relate to the righteous, to the saint, no less than to the sinner. Alternatively, the righteous would be missing out on a significant part of Torah. *Teshuvah ila’a* thus relates to the *tzaddik* as well.<sup>100</sup>

*Teshuvah ila’a* reaches where a normative ascent, a behavior that is faultless yet gradual and normative, cannot reach. It moves man to jump, to leap, blinding him to everything but his objective, disregarding all and any obstacles in the pursuit and attainment of the ultimate goal. In this context the *tzaddik*, too, becomes a *ba’al teshuvah*, “one possessed of *teshuvah*,”<sup>101</sup> a personification of *teshuvah*.

*Teshuvah ila’a* does not mean a withdrawal of man from the world. It reveals G-d in the world: omnipresence in the most literal sense, an encompassing awareness and a penetrating consciousness of the reality and presence of G-d. “To cleave unto Him, for He is your life;”<sup>102</sup> “there is nothing else beside Him.”<sup>103</sup> There is a total negation of ego, a total submersion of personal will in the Supreme Will. Not two entities brought together, but absorption and union to the point of unity.

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99. *Ibid.* 7:5. Cf. *Berachot* 34b.

100. See R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Torah Or*, Vayechi, p. 45a-b; *idem.*, *Likutei Torah*, Shabbat Shuvah, p. 66c-d; and *Mayim Rabim* —5636, ch. 135.

101. See *Zohar* II:106b.

102. Deuteronomy 30:20; see above, note 15.

103. Deuteronomy 4:35. See *Tanya*, Sha’ar Hayichud Veba’emunah, ch. 6.



"This *mitzvah* which I command you this day is not beyond your reach nor is it far off...."<sup>104</sup>

Generally, this verse refers to the entire Torah. In context with the preceding passage it is also interpreted to refer specifically to the principle of *teshuvah*:<sup>105</sup> "Even if your outcasts be in the outermost parts of Heaven"<sup>106</sup> and you are under the power of the nations, you can yet return unto G-d and do "according to all that I command you this day."<sup>107</sup> For *teshuvah* "is not beyond reach nor is it far off,"<sup>108</sup> but "it is exceedingly near to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it."<sup>109</sup>

"One hour of bliss in the World to Come is better than all the life of this world." Yet "one hour of *teshuvah* and good deeds in *this* world is better than all the life in the World to Come!"<sup>110</sup>

"Well," said the Rebbe, "do *teshuvah*, and the rest will follow of itself!"

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104. Deuteronomy 30:11.

105. Commentary of Ramban (Nachmanides) *ad loc.* See also R. Joseph Albo, *Ikkarim* IV:25; and *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Nitzavim, Sha'ar 100.

106. Deuteronomy 30:4.

107. *Ibid.* 2.

108. *Ibid.* 11.

109. *Ibid.* 14.

110. *Avot* 4:17. See *Tanya*, ch. 4, and *ibid.*, Igeret Hakodesh, sect. I.

Note that the term *sha'ah achat* (one hour) can also be interpreted as "one turn" (see Genesis 4:4-5, and Rashi *ad loc.*); cf. the Maggid's *Or Torah*, Hossafot, par. 38; *Likutei Torah*, Rosh Hashanah, p. 61a. Our text, then, may also be read as "one turn of *teshuvah* and good deeds...;" see *Torat Hachassidut*, XXIV. (This interpretation would also resolve the problem of the seemingly inconsistent order in *Zohar* I:129b, and in general the expression of *sha'ah achat* as, e.g., in the quote cited above note 48; though see *Likutei Sichot*, vol. XX, p. 86ff.)

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## **לזכות**

**החתן הרה"ת יוסף בנימין**

**בן רחל שיחי'**

**וב"ג**

**הכלה חנה שרון**

**בת רחל שתחי'**

**ליום נישואיהם**

**בשעה טובה ומוצלחת בכל**

**ביום השלישי שהוכפל בו כי טוב**

**לפ' ויחן שם ישראל – ח"י שבט**

**השנה תהא שנת נסים**

