

Publisher's Preface

Our Sages call prayer the “service of the heart” (*Taanis* 2a). Prayer is an opportunity to focus on ourselves—to look deep into our hearts and discover our true aches and pains, our real joys and goals. Prayer helps us recognize who we are, and assess our relationship with God. Through prayer, we are not spectators to life but actual participants, because we can involve our whole heart and soul in connecting to our Creator.

Is that what prayer means to you? Or is it little more than rote recital, imparting little meaning or excitement?

Your passport to a world of meaning, personal fulfillment, and connection is the *siddur*, the compilation of prayers formulated by the Men of the Great Assembly during the Second Temple era. These sages were blessed with *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) to compose prayers that fly straight to their mark—both on our hearts and in the heavenly realms. In fact, says the ARI, every day the morning prayers take us on a spiritual ascent, traversing the Four Worlds described in the *Kabbalah*: the Worlds of *Asiyah* (Action), *Yetzirah* (Formation), *Beriah* (Creation), and *Atzilus* (Nearness). We begin the morning service by reciting the sacrificial offerings, which correspond to the lowest of the worlds, the World of *Asiyah*. Then we proceed to the next higher world, that of *Yetzirah* (the angelic world), when we recite the *Pesukey d'Zimra* (Verses of Praise). From there we ascend to the World of *Beriah* (the World of the Throne of God), paralleling the *Shma* and its blessings. The final part of our daily ascent is the *Amidah* (*Shemoneh Esreh*), when we enter the World of *Atzilus* (Nearness) and stand directly before God.

Rebbe Nachman adds that the daily prayers as a whole parallel the daily sacrifices that were offered in the Temple. The sacrifices were called *KoRBanos* (קרבנות) because they served *leKaReV* (לקרב),

The third volume in the series is a detailed commentary on the prayers, encompassing both the simple *pshat* (meaning) and the Kabbalistic teachings of the ARI. Some of these ideas are already expressed in the *Shulchan Arukh* (Codes of Law) and quoted in the *Mishnah Berurah*. But with Rebbe Nachman's explanations, it becomes very clear how much of a difference we can make in our lives when we recite the prayers in earnest.



The Breslov Research Institute wishes to extend its deep and heartfelt gratitude to those who helped make this project a reality. To Louis and Rachel Esther Schonfeld, who jumped in with zest and fervor to support the *siddur* project—even before we got it to the drawing board! To Brian and Tzipporah Hannan, who leaped at the opportunity to bring forth Rebbe Nachman's ideas on prayer in the *siddur's* embryonic stages. To Rabbi Avraham Sutton, for his magnificent work in translating and producing a *siddur* that will enlighten and encourage all who wish to pray with fervor and understanding. Thanks also to Y. Hall for yet another incredible editing job as well as to B. Aber for another fine typesetting job. And to those who contributed their time, effort and money to help bring this first volume to completion, may HaShem be with you all—always.

May God grant that we merit to understand and feel the power of our prayers so that they ascend to their intended place on high. Through this, may we merit to the Coming of Mashiach, the Ingathering of the Exiles, and the Rebuilding of the holy Temple, speedily in our days. Amen.

Chaim Kramer
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to draw close) and unite all the worlds. Today, in the absence of the Temple and the sacrifices, we accomplish the same thing with our prayers. When we open the *siddur* and begin our prayers, we literally connect our lowly material world to the highest of the Supernal Worlds, and we can draw closer to God than we ever imagined possible (see LM I, 14:8). Just as prayer binds a person to God, it joins and connects all of creation. Our prayers directly impact this physical world and its environment, our emotional reliability, and our financial stability—and, of course, our prayers support and sustain the spiritual worlds on high.

When it comes to understanding prayer, no one emphasizes the ideas and ideals more than Rebbe Nachman (1772-1810) and his foremost disciple, Reb Noson (1780-1844). Their extensive writings yield a bounty of insights and advice for what the “service of the heart” can really feel like, how to let your inner being flow and soar with the words of prayer, how to maintain your concentration while praying, and how to pray every day with freshness and vitality. They also offer many commentaries on the verses and phrases found in the prayers themselves. On the most basic level, they explain why we say what we say. Why are the prayers arranged in this order? Why are certain concepts mentioned and not others? Why are there morning, afternoon and evening prayers, each with a different “flavor”? What is the meaning of all the assorted blessings and additional supplications? Why is it important to pray with a *minyan* (quorum of ten men)?

The Breslov Research Institute is proud to present this three-volume *siddur* project based on the teachings of Rebbe Nachman. The first two volumes—a weekday *siddur* and a Shabbat/Yom Tov *siddur*—each contain the full text of prayers as codified by our Sages. The English translation was created by Rabbi Avraham Sutton, a world-renowned lecturer and teacher of the prayers for some 30 years. Rabbi Sutton has worked for years to define and design a *siddur* not just as a prayer book, but as a vehicle to bring out the deeper meaning of the prayers. In addition to translating the prayers into clear, lucid English, he also inserts words or phrases into the translation to clarify the meaning of the verses, greatly expanding our comprehension and awareness. These volumes also present insights from Rebbe Nachman, Reb Noson, and many others to help us feel the import of our prayers.

Introduction to Prayer

WHAT IS PRAYER?

What is prayer? And why do we have to pray? Since God knows all our thoughts, why must we articulate them? Isn't it enough just to gather our thoughts and let God make of them what He will?

Good questions, but ones that only scratch the surface of what prayer is about. We turn to Rebbe Nachman to understand the true nature of prayer, both on a universal and on a deeply personal level.

The Rebbe explains that the act of praying to God and having those prayers answered parallel the workings of the Ten Sefirot (see Charts, p. XX). The *Kabbalah* explains that God continually sends bounty and blessing to the world through the Ten Sefirot. The first *sefirah*, *Keter*, receives the bounty from on high and sends it down through the next nine *sefirot*, culminating in *Malkhus*. From there, the bounty descends to our world. Each *sefirah* acts as a vessel to receive blessing from the *sefirah* above it. Moreover, each *sefirah* parallels a different part of the human body. *Keter* corresponds to a person's inner will, or desire; *Chokhmah*, *Binah*, and *Daas* to the intellect; *Chesed* to the right hand; *Gevurah* to the left hand; and so on down to *Malkhus*, which corresponds to the mouth (see *Tikkuney Zohar*, Introduction, p. 17a; see below, *Patach Eliyahu*, p. XXX).

Our prayers, too, start at the level of *Keter*, which parallels our inner will—that urge or impulse that directs our desire for what we need or want. From that desire springs our thoughts (*Chokhmah*, *Binah*, *Daas*), which develop ideas for bringing potentiality into actuality. Our will/*Keter* descends through the Ten Sefirot, culminating in *Malkhus*/the mouth. In order to draw down blessing into our world, we must utter the words of our prayers. Then God hears us and answers us by sending down blessing.

what emerges from a person's mouth is his will and innermost desires. When we yearn and long for holiness, our desires—our souls—create the vowel points with which to move the words we are saying. (Conversely, if a person has evil desires, those are the words that emerge.) Thus, it is one's very soul that comes forth in prayer (LM I, 31:6-8).

Rebbe Nachman takes this a step further. These words, given life and movement by the vowels, by the soul, then emerge from the person's mouth. And these “souls,” which are now the letters of our prayers, move from him to the air around him. Just as the airwaves move the words a person utters, so too, they move the person's soul through the air. His words of prayer can permeate the atmosphere around him and create positive results, both for himself and for those around him (*ibid.*).

Prayer is the expression of our souls. How much we desire good, and how much effort we put into prayer, determines its power and effectiveness—for us and for everyone around us.

WHY DO WE PRAY IN HEBREW?

God created the entire world and supervises every detail of it. He understands the words that each person speaks, and even the thoughts that each person thinks. So why is Hebrew the language of prayer? Can't a Jew in America pray in English, or a Jew in Russia pray in Russian?

While it is counted among the languages of the world, Hebrew is actually the mother of all tongues, as it is the language from which all other languages sprang (see Genesis 11 and in *Rashi* 1 & 7). More importantly, it is the language that God used when creating the world. The ARI teaches that the letters of the *aleph-bet* are the “building blocks” of Creation (*Etz Chaim* 5:5; *Bereishis Rabbah* 18:4). God first created the *aleph-bet* and infused each letter with His spirit and wisdom. Then he used these letters to write the Torah, which is known as the “blueprint” of Creation (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1). Accordingly, the letters of the *aleph-bet* contain Divine spirit, a power that can elevate our prayers to God.

For us, too, the Hebrew letters possess the power of creation. Through their recital, we can bring about healing, livelihood, a

Some people, however, don't feel blessed, even after they've prayed. Why do so many feel shortchanged, or lacking any blessing at all? What happened to all that bounty?

The answer is that one who doesn't have the proper vessel in which to hold the blessing cannot receive it. Try serving wine without a bottle or a glass. Only with a vessel can we receive blessing. Rebbe Nachman thus teaches that it is specifically the articulation of our thoughts—our prayers that emerge from our mouth/*Malkhus*—that creates the vessel to receive God's blessing (LM I, 34:2). The more effort we place into our prayers, the greater the vessel we will have to receive God's blessing, and the stronger the vessel will be to hold and retain that bounty.

It is important to remember that blessing comes in many forms. Most people look at wealth as a blessing, but what about good health, contentment in the home, friends, and a sense of personal satisfaction in one's work or hobbies? “Who is considered wealthy?” asks the Mishnah. “One who is happy with his lot.” (*Avot* 4:1). Being happy and content with what we have, and not regretting what we don't have, is the key to being rich in all areas of life.



On a personal level, Rebbe Nachman teaches that prayer isn't something we *have* to do, but something we *need* to do. More than the recital of words on a page, prayer is an outlet for our deepest desires.

Prayer is composed of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (see next section), but on their own, those letters are lifeless forms, lacking spirit. They gather vitality only when they are articulated with the proper vowels—those dots and dashes which give “movement” to the letters. For example, the Hebrew letters *ישב* (*Y-Sh-V*) can be read several ways: *yashuv*, *yashav*, *yosheiv*, *yishuv*, *yasheiv*, and so on. Until the vowels are placed in their proper positions, the letters lack “life” and meaning.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the vowels are formed through our desires. *KiSuFin* (כיסופין, yearning and longing) are found in the soul, as it is written, “My soul yearns (*niKhSaFah*, נכספה) and pines” (Psalms 84:3). This means that our innermost feelings are always longing and yearning to come to fruition. Therefore, the Rebbe teaches,

of prayer. Having lived together for hundreds of years in the Land of Israel with the holy Temple in their midst, the Jewish people naturally prayed in Hebrew and knew what to pray about even if the words weren't written down.

Their return from exile, however, told a different story. In the travails of the exile, many Jews lost the tradition of what to pray about, and they no longer spoke the same language — this one spoke Greek, that one Persian, and so on. Realizing that the art of prayer was on the verge of being lost, the Men of the Great Assembly took the bold step of writing down prayers that every Jew would say. These 120 leaders of the generation were blessed with *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration) to compose prayers that would be accepted by God. They established the *Shachris* (morning), *Minchah* (afternoon) and *Maariv* (evening) prayers in Hebrew so that this common tongue would unite the people even if they were forced into exile again.

The three daily prayers correspond to the daily sacrifices in the holy Temple—two sacrifices every day and a nighttime service when the remains of the sacrifices were burned (*ibid.*). An additional reason given by the Talmud for the three daily prayers is that they parallel the three Patriarchs—Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—who established prayer as a way of life (see *Berakhos* 26b).

PRAYING WITH A MINYAN

As powerful as is the prayer of the individual, the prayer of the many is infinitely more potent. The Talmud teaches that communal prayer creates a situation known as *eis ratzon* (a time of Divine favor), which is an auspicious time for those prayers to be accepted (*Berakhos* 8a; see also *Orach Chayim* 90:9). Jewish law sets the minimum number of people required for a *minyan*, or prayer quorum, at ten men or boys over the age of *Bar Mitzvah*. A person should make every effort to pray with a *minyan*.

Reb Noson points out a fascinating idea about the effectiveness of communal prayer based on the *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation), as taught by Rebbe Nachman (LM II, 8:6). The *Sefer Yetzirah*, an ancient mystical work attributed to the patriarch Avraham, states:

plentiful crop, a marriage partner, children, and even the Mashiach himself. The things we are requesting do not yet exist or are not yet available to us. We direct our prayers to God that He—Who has the power to create—will make a new reality for us, producing those things that we are asking from Him, through the letters of Creation.

The power of prayer thus works wonderfully when recited in Hebrew, even when not understood by the person, since it contains Divine spirit. The daily prayers offered in Hebrew will always ascend. Prayers offered in other languages may not always be able to ascend to their intended place.

While our Sages are quite clear that the daily prayers should be recited in Hebrew (*Orach Chayim* 101:4; see *Mishnah Berurah* 101:13-19), they do permit other forms of prayer in any language (*Berakhos* 40b; *Sotah* 32a). *Hisbodedus*, a private prayer in one's mother tongue, is an excellent example of this. Rebbe Nachman teaches that when one prepares himself to pray to God, even in a foreign language, he can draw the Divine spirit upon himself (see LM I, 156:1). In fact, the Rebbe further states that words offered from the heart to God are actually God's words *placed* in that heart, so that the person's heart becomes the messenger to deliver His words to Him! (LM I, 138).

WHAT IS THE SIDTUR?

The *siddur*, or Jewish prayer book, is a millennia-old document. It contains the order of prayers established by the Men of the Great Assembly at the beginning of the Second Temple era some 2,300 years ago. Some variations have crept in, due to the longstanding exile, yet strangely enough, these differences are very minimal. This is because the idea of prayer is one that is deeply entrenched in Jewish tradition and we all have the same basic intention when offering our supplications to God.

Rambam (*Yad HaChazakah, Hilkhos Tefillah* 1) writes about the origin of our prayers. Prior to the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel from the Babylonian exile, he explains, prayer was a mitzvah to be performed once a day, whenever and wherever the person was ready to pray. Those familiar with Rebbe Nachman's teachings on *Hisbodedus* (private, spontaneous prayer) are familiar with this type

Rebbe Nachman often spoke about prayer and gave over many ideas on how to attain and maintain focus and concentration, even when things don't seem to be working out the way we want them to. He also encouraged his followers who were having difficulty with their prayers, emphasizing that they should never be discouraged.

Rebbe Nachman admits that proper concentration doesn't come easily. Even more, it's nearly impossible to go through the entire service with proper concentration. The trick, says the Rebbe, is to select a small portion of the prayers that you *will* say with concentration. Focus on each word in that section, listening closely and really hearing what you're saying. When you focus on the meaning of the words and pay attention to what you're saying, you will attain proper concentration.

The rule is that a person should not frustrate himself at the outset by thinking about the entire service, because it will then be difficult and burdensome for him. Rather, each time he should determinedly recite just a little with proper concentration—because a small amount *can* be said with proper concentration—and then after he masters that section, a little more (LM II, 121).

Rebbe Nachman understands that focusing on just a few words doesn't work all the time. You may be making a great effort to pay attention and listen to the words, but you're still unable to concentrate. Then the only thing to do is to say the words in the simplest and most literal way possible, even if it means you say them without any vitality or enthusiasm.

For example, you may be at the beginning of the *Amidah* saying the words “Great, mighty, awesome God.” You know that these words, should arouse you, but they don't. The solution is to just say the words. Make believe you are a child just learning to read, and simply say the words. In most cases, God will then touch your heart with a flame and it will be aroused to pray with feeling (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #75).

ON THE LAST ROSH HASHANAH EVE OF HIS life (5571/1810), Rebbe Nachman was deathly ill. He asked his little grandson, Yisrael, to pray for him. “God! God!” Yisrael called out, “let my grandfather be well!” The people nearby started smiling. The Rebbe said, “This is how to pray. Simply! What other way is there?” (*Tzaddik* #439).

Two stones build two houses; three stones build six houses; four build twenty-four houses; five build 120 houses; six build 720 houses; seven stones build 5,040 houses. From here on, go out and calculate that which the mouth cannot speak and the ear cannot hear (*Sefer Yetzirah* 4:12).

The commentators explain that the “stones” are the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the “houses” that they build are the letter-permutations (i.e., combinations) that can be formed. Thus, for example, with the letters AB it is possible to form two permutations: AB and BA. With three letters, ABC, it is possible to form six permutations: ABC, ACB, BAC, BCA, CAB, and CBA. Likewise with four letters, and so on.

In his lesson, Rebbe Nachman elaborates on this idea and explains that the “stones” represent the souls of the Jewish nation. As each person joins the *minyan* in prayer, the number of “houses” that are built increases exponentially. The ultimate “House of Prayer” (Isaiah 56:7) in which all will come to serve God and pray to Him is built with the addition of each soul who joins the *minyan*. If we were to count the “houses” built by the “stones” of just ten people (a *minyan*), we reach a number of 3,628,800! Each additional “stone” adds many millions and billions to this number.

What are these “houses”? They represent the realm of holiness, God's kingdom, which is built by the people attending the *minyan*. The more people who pray together, the more the realm of holiness increases. Each individual also benefits personally from the aura of Divine favor created by the *minyan*, so that his prayers will be answered (LH, *Piryah veRivyah* 5:6).

CONCENTRATION AND FOCUS

Wouldn't it be nice if we could open the *siddur* and pour out our hearts to God? To recite the prayers in a manner that they flow from our innermost feelings? That, after all, is what prayer is all about. But with today's pressures, we're always in a rush and can't, won't, or don't take the time to focus and concentrate properly. What can we do to make our prayers heartfelt and effective?

practice as prayer, these “damagers and accusers” lie in wait for us, ready to inject foreign thoughts to get our minds off our holy pursuit. How can we stop them from pushing us off track?

The solution, says the Rebbe, is to ignore these thoughts entirely. Continue to pray in a calm, orderly fashion, and don’t look over your shoulder to see if the thoughts are still there. Then they will automatically fall away. “This can be compared to warfare, in which a person has to proceed and infiltrate many killers and ambushers,” he explains. “When he is mighty and passes through them, on the way he defeats them. As he proceeds, he cuts off this one’s hand and defeats him, and that one’s foot, incapacitating them” (LM II, 122).

Another way to trip up these attackers is by infusing your prayers with renewed vitality. “The external forces already know about the formal prayers, supplications, and entreaties,” Rebbe Nachman says. “They lie in wait on the paths of these prayers, because they are already familiar with them. This can be likened to murderers and thieves who always lurk on well-traveled public thoroughfares because these roads are already known to them. But when a person travels via a new path or route, one as yet unknown, it does not at all occur to them to set their ambush there. It is the same with a person’s private conversation with God (*Hisbodedus*), which is a new pathway and a new prayer, which he utters from his heart anew” (LM II, 97). The same idea can apply to the formal prayers, when you make a renewed effort to recite them as if they are new!

Someone suggested to Reb Noson that perhaps it would be better to pray quickly in order to avoid being waylaid by foreign thoughts. Reb Noson disagreed, maintaining that it was better to pray slowly. By praying quickly, a person could rush through the entire prayer with one foreign thought and never concentrate on even one word. By praying slowly, there is always a chance that

THE STORY IS TOLD OF RABBI LEVI YITZCHAK of Berdichov, who went over to a person in his synagogue one day, right after the prayers, and gave him a very warm “*Shalom aleichem*.” Startled, the man said, “But I’ve been here the whole time!” Rabbi Levi Yitzchak answered, “But during the prayers your mind wandered to Warsaw, where you were thinking of your business. Now that your prayers are finished, you have returned here to Berdichov!”

“People who want to pray with inner concentration should avoid hurrying their prayers, because they often experience several different moods in one and the same prayer,” Rebbe Nachman notes. “They may start off with a great effort to concentrate, only to find that afterwards their mind goes off in all directions. When this happens, they should say the words in the simplest manner possible: ‘Great, mighty, awesome God.’ Their enthusiasm will often return. The same thing can happen several times while saying one prayer” (*Tzaddik* #508).

The act of speaking is very effective for spiritually rousing a person. Even if it seems to him that he has no feelings, when he speaks many inspirational words, supplications, entreaties, and the like, the very act of speaking reveals and rouses his heart and soul to God (LM II, 98).

But what happens if you complete the entire service and still don’t have any feeling? Do not worry, and do not be discouraged, Rebbe Nachman stresses. “You can still say a Psalm. There are other prayers to be said. In general, you must force yourself to do every holy task with all your might. This is especially true of prayer. But if you are not worthy of achieving this, it is still forbidden to become discouraged. Be strong and cheer yourself as much as possible” (*Rabbi Nachman’s Wisdom* #75).

Reb Noson adds, “The verse says, ‘Pour out your heart before God’ (Lamentations 2:19). If you can’t pray properly, then pour out your heart, even without concentration, just as water might pour out accidentally” (LH, *Minchah* 7:44). Eventually, your heart will open in the right way.

BATTLING EXTRANEIOUS THOUGHTS

It happens to all of us. We’re reciting our prayers and trying to connect with their meaning, when all of a sudden some foreign or extraneous thought diverts our focus. Or suddenly we “wake up” in the middle of the prayers and realize that our mind has been far, far away for some time. Why, despite our best intentions, do we get so distracted during prayer?

Rebbe Nachman assures us that the problem isn’t with us, but with external forces (known as *kelipos* or evil forces) that constantly attempt to pull people away from holiness. During such an exalted

Through his prayers, each Jew acquires absolute mastery and control—he can achieve whatever he desires (LM I, 97).

Prayer helps nullify a heavenly decree before—and even after—it has been issued (*The Aleph-Bet Book*, *Tefilah* A:14).

Reb Noson was once talking about the greatness of prayer. The Midrash states: After the prayers have been received in heaven, an angel takes an oath from them and then sends the prayers upward, to the Crown which adorns the Holy One's head (*Shemos Rabbah* 21:4). "Take note," said Reb Noson. "Even angels cannot rise to the level that the prayers can reach!" (*Aveneha Barzel*, p. 88).

Faith, Prayer, Miracles, and the Holy Land are all one concept (LM I, 7:1). How so? When we pray, it is a sign of our faith in God. Why else would we be praying? Prayer increases our faith and, as we pray, we gradually develop a more intimate feeling for our Creator. This, in turn, can lead to miracles. The more we pray, the more we can attain mastery over the elements. This is because our prayers are directed to God, and He has mastery over all of creation. Therefore God can, and will, perform miracles for those whose prayers are filled with a refined level of faith. And miracles and prayer are conceptually related to the Holy Land, for they reveal holiness and the kingdom of heaven.

There are three types of prayer: a prayer of David (Psalm 86), a prayer of Moshe (Psalm 90), and a prayer of the poor man (Psalm 102). Of the three, the poor man's prayer is by far the most powerful (*Zohar* III, 195a).

The poor man's prayers are clearly the most powerful, says Reb Noson, because they come from a broken heart. The pauper stands before God and bemoans his fate: "Why me? Why do I have to suffer?" This prayer is so effective that it breaks all barriers and rises directly before God. How much more powerful is a prayer of someone who cries out to God that he is spiritually impoverished, that he is steeped in his physicality and wants to draw closer to God? Such a prayer will certainly rise directly before God! (LH, *Tefillin* 5:43).

he might concentrate properly on at least a few parts of the prayer (*Aveneha Barzel*, p. 61, #25).

GIVING CHARITY BEFORE PRAYING

Both the Talmud and the Codes speak of giving charity before reciting the prayers (see *Bava Batra* 10a; *Orach Chayim* 92:10). Rebbe Nachman explains that when a person gives charity, he merits to *mishpat* (judgment and justice). The act of charity is an act of judgment: one impoverishes himself and enriches another. Then "he orders *devarav* (literally, 'his words'—referring to his prayers) with *mishpat*" (Psalms 112:5). As a result of giving charity, his words and prayers become judicious and incisive, rising directly to their intended destination (LM I, 2:3-4).

Reb Noson takes this concept a step further. God wishes to bestow bounty, but sometimes we are not yet ready to receive that blessing. However, there is no more powerful tool to arouse God's compassion than when we human beings perform acts of kindness and charity. It is specifically our charitable deeds that invoke God's "charitable deeds," causing Him to shower down bounty and blessing (LH, *Halva'ah* 2:2).

One can fulfill this mitzvah by donating a few coins to a charity box at home or in the synagogue before praying.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

As we prepare to open the *siddur* and pour out our hearts to God, let us remember the power and potential of what we're about to do:

Rebbe Nachman teaches: A Jew's main attachment to God is through prayer (LM II, 84).

The essence of our life-force comes from prayer (LM I, 9:1). Prayer brings life to all the worlds (*ibid.*, I, 9:3).

Prayer has the power to change nature (LM I, 216). This applies both to the forces of nature and to one's own human nature.



שחרית

The Morning Prayer

blessings are meant to enhance his awareness of God in all the transitory and changeable situations he will encounter during the day.

Reb Noson asks: How can a person find the spiritual in the mundane and feel an awareness of God by going through the daily rituals of arising, washing his hands, dressing, and so on? Most of these exercises are done out of habit, with little thought for the act itself, much less its significance. Reb Noson finds an answer in one of Rebbe Nachman's most famous lessons, *Azamra!* (LM I, 282). The Rebbe teaches that a person should always seek the good within himself, even if it is only a little bit, and build his life around that good point. After all, every person has done something good in his life. If you focus on the positive, you will find good. If you focus on the negative, you will find bad. So always look for the good points in yourself and others.

Reb Noson compares sleeping (a subconscious act) to lethargy and depression. A lethargic person loses his desire to act; he becomes apathetic to life. When he awakens in the morning, he has to "get himself going" and find a reason to get out of bed. A lethargic person needs to be awakened from his slumber, and the way to do it is to find the good deeds he has performed or the fortunate situations he has seen, thus arousing his good points.

All this is alluded to in the morning blessings. The blessing, "Who imbues the heart with understanding," means one is aware of the difference between day and night, between what is light and good and what is darkness and evil. Being aware of this difference, he can identify and strengthen his good and positive points, and distance himself from his weak and negative points. "Who has not made me a non-Jew...who gives sight to the blind...who straightens those who are bent down...who releases the bound...who clothes the naked..." Someone who sees the negative is like a blind person; he feels imprisoned in his depression, bent over and lacking any good. But the blessings he recites remind him of his good points, wherein he can feel encouraged to face the challenges of the day and overcome his frustrations (LH, *Birkhos HaShachar* 1:11).

Reb Noson's focus on seeking the good is the way to infuse not just our morning but our entire day with joy and appreciation!

The Morning Blessings

Upon awakening in the morning, a person should say, "God, the soul You have placed within me...." Upon hearing the call of the rooster, one should say, "Who imbues the heart with understanding...." Upon opening the eyes, one should say, "Who gives sight to the blind..." (*Berakhos* 60b).

The passage in the Talmud dealing with the laws of blessings enumerates the blessings we should recite each day when we arise, get dressed, put on our shoes and our belts, and so on. These blessings are known as *Birkhos HaShachar* (The Morning Blessings).

The Talmud is teaching us how to express our appreciation to God for returning our souls to us after a night's sleep (when we felt "dead" tired). It also shows us how to express our appreciation for being able to see, to stretch and stand up, to put on clothes and shoes, and to walk upon the ground. We see that what we take for granted and do out of habit has truly great significance, and that God is the One who makes it all possible.

The *Shulchan Arukh* states that these blessings were established because a person is not allowed to derive pleasure from this world if he doesn't thank God for it (*Mishnah Berurah* 46:1; see *Berakhos* 35a). Learning to be appreciative of what we have or of what we can do, and expressing our gratitude to God for these "favours," is an ongoing process of discovery that helps us become more aware of ourselves, our immediate surroundings, and our overall environment. It's a way to bring God into our lives and to look for His wonders throughout the world.

A Jew begins his morning with a series of blessings that shape his day. He washes himself and cleanses his body of waste matter, he dons the *tzitzit* and *tefilin*, and he recites the various morning blessings covering the different yet necessary functions each person experiences. All of these devotions and