

# Pray Like a Child

written by Yehudis Golshevsky

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Rebbe Nachman's deep yet completely simple and straightforward immersion in prayer was a wonder to those who were close to him. He prayed in a brokenhearted way, begging for mercy with total self-effacement, like a young child pleading with his father.

Once, when a young man came to the Rebbe to ask for guidance in his private prayers, Rebbe Nachman demonstrated: "Master of the universe! Please have mercy on me! What will become of me in the end? Is this how I'm going to spend my life? Is this the life that I was created for?"

This was how Rebbe Nachman prayed—simply, directly, feelingly—and this is how he taught his students to do *hitbodedut*. To speak one's innermost heart and yearning out before God just as one would with his most trusted friend.

During the final Rosh HaShanah of his life, Rebbe Nachman was already in residence in Uman. He was deathly ill with the tuberculosis that would take his life. He was so debilitated that he could barely leave his bed. His family and students were in constant attendance, trying to alleviate his suffering and hoping to hear his words, and to see him take a turn for the better.

At the time, the Rebbe's grandson Yisrael was with him in the house. The four-year-old was known to be especially clever.

Once, as little Yisrael walked by his bed, Rebbe Nachman called out, "Yisrael! Please pray that I'll have relief!"

"Of course!" answered the child. "But first, give me your gold watch!"

Rebbe Nachman smiled and said to his disciples at the bedside, "See – the child already speaks like the tzaddikim do! He knows to ask for an object from the petitioner, so that he can perform a *pidyon* (soul-redemption) when he prays!"

Rebbe Nachman dutifully removed his watch and handed it to little Yisrael.

The boy solemnly accepted the item. Then he turned aside and said, "HaShem! HaShem! Please make my grandfather well!"

Everyone laughed at his childish simplicity in prayer. But Rebbe Nachman didn't even smile.

He gestured toward his little grandson and said emphatically, "Do you see? To pray, one must speak with the utmost innocence and simplicity, just like a little child who asks something of his father!"

*Based on Or HaArot I, pp. 113-115*