

The Voice of Prayer

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June 17, 2020



Reb Naftali was the regular *ba'al tefillah* (prayer leader) during Rebbe Nachman's time. Once Reb Naftali was away and it was necessary to choose a replacement on the spot. Everyone trembled at the thought that he would have to be the *ba'al tefillah* in the presence of the Rebbe. The awe of the Rebbe's presence was so great – who could dare display and demonstrate his voice in front of him?

Rebbe Nachman selected one person who was known not to have such a sweet voice. This person could not carry a tune so well, but he was ordered, "Go to the *amud* and *daven* (pray)."

This man went to the *amud* and started to *daven* with feeling, out loud. He gave forth his power of prayer very loudly with a broken heart, a broken voice. The entire service, they could hardly make out the words he was saying. All they heard was a

crying voice, crying out words. The people felt this might be embarrassing because it could have incurred Rebbe Nachman's displeasure.

After the prayers were over, Rebbe Nachman walked over to this man and said to him, "*Yeyasher kochakha*, your *davening* was a pleasure." This means that it penetrated through the upper heavens. This is what you call a *ba'al tefillah*. It's not about how sweet the melody is, nor is it about how well you carry a tune, or how you inject musical notes into it. It's the feeling that's put into the *davening* that counts.

Therefore, when a person is called to the *amud*, he should put feeling and power into it. Don't stand there praying with a very low voice and let the others carry you. A *chazzan* is supposed to give of his voice, and he's supposed to give of himself when called upon. When you are summoned to be the *ba'al tefillah*, don't hesitate. Of course, it's polite to wait an additional moment. Don't rush to it, don't get too anxious, but you're not supposed to allow yourself to be begged for too long a period of time.

From "Rebbe Nachman's Soul," Vol. 2, Sichah 66