

This Is Prayer!

written by Yehudis Golshevsky
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Once, after finishing his evening prayers, Rebbe Nachman went with a number of his students to break bread. The Rebbe's beloved disciple, Reb Noson, was among their number, but unlike them he hadn't yet prayed the evening service. As the group walked, Reb Noson veered off in the direction of the synagogue. As soon as Rebbe Nachman realized that Reb Noson was no longer with them, he asked, "Why has Reb Noson left us?"

The student explained that Reb Noson hadn't yet prayed that evening, but that he would certainly come to join them after he had finished.

Rebbe Nachman seemed lost in thought for a moment. Then he asked with great simplicity, "How are we to wait for him to return after his prayers? Who can say what will happen to him during prayer? Prayer requires genuine self-sacrifice. How can we know for certain that he will return to us at all?!"

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One Shabbat, at the hour of the third meal—that high point of yearning within the holy day—Rebbe Nachman's chassidim were gathered in the main room, waiting for him to come and conduct the meal. Rebbe Nachman was taking far longer than usual. Usually by that hour the Rebbe would already be sitting at the head of the table while his students imbibed his precious teachings.

At a certain point the Rebbe's close disciple, Reb Shimon, decided to go into the Rebbe's private room to see if anything was wrong. What could possibly be delaying him?

Reb Shimon stood outside the door, suddenly abashed at interrupting Rebbe Nachman. His hands and legs began to tremble—did he really have the nerve to enter the room unbidden? He was beset with doubts; was it really permitted for him to bother the Rebbe even when a crowd of students anxiously awaited him at the table?

But the sun had nearly set, so Reb Shimon entered.

He saw an amazing sight. Rebbe Nachman was lying face down on the floor, prostrate in prayer, crying like a baby. His lips were streaming with impassioned prayers, and a puddle of tears had formed around his head.

All Reb Shimon could think was, "So this is prayer!"

Based on Or HaArot I, pp. 111-113