

ליקוטי מוהר"ן סימן צ"ט

וְאֵתְחַנֵּן אֵל ה' בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר (דברים ג).

דְּהִנֵּה הָאָדָם צָרִיךְ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּדַבְּקוֹת גְּדוּל לְהֵשֵׁם יִתְבַּרְךָ. אַךְ אִם לְפַעְמִים יֵשׁ עֵת, שְׂאִינוּ יְכוּל לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּדַבְּקוֹת. אֵל יֹאמֶר אֵינִי מִתְפַּלֵּל כָּלֵל, מֵאַחַר שְׂאִינוּ יְכוּל לְכוּן כְּרֹאזִי וּלְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּדַבְּקוֹת, וְהִתְפַּלֵּה אֵינֶה מְקַבֶּלֶת. וְכִמוֹ שְׂאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ, זְכוּרֵנָם לְבִרְכָה (ברכות לד): עַל רַבִּי חֲנִינְיָא בֶּן דּוּסָא שְׁהָיָה מִתְפַּלֵּל וְכוּ' אָמְרוּ לוֹ וְכוּ' אָמַר לָהֶם אִם שְׂגוּרָה תְּפַלְתִּי בְּפִי יוֹדֵעַ אֲנִי שֶׁהוּא מְקַבֵּל וְאִם לֹא יוֹדֵעַ וְכוּ'. וְזֶהוּ עַל דְּרַךְ שְׂאָמְרֵנוּ, אִם בְּדַבְּקוֹת, שְׂאִזִּי הִתְפַּלֵּה שְׂגוּרָה וּמְרָצָה בְּפִיו, מְקַבֶּלֶת. וְאִם לֹא, חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם, לְהַפְּךָ.

3. **he should not say, I just won't pray...since he is unable to pray....** Having stated that a person should pray with great *devekut*, Rebbe Nachman obviates the erroneous conclusion that unless one can recite the prayers in this most complete manner there is no point to praying. Although our lesson's focus is prayer, which involves thought and speech, the Rebbe's statement is equally applicable to the mitzvot we fulfill through action. Whether it be keeping the laws of Shabbat, taking the Four Species, or eating *matzah*, a person should not say, "If I can't perform the mitzvah perfectly, I won't perform it at all." As we will see, it is a mistake to assume that if our deeds or prayers are lacking in appropriate concentration and *devekut*, they are meaningless and without value and therefore not worth doing.

4. **our Sages, of blessed memory, taught....** The Mishnah teaches that after Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa would pray for the sick, he would say, "This one will live and this one will die." (Some commentators explain that he did not actually express this in words but indicated it by means of his demeanor; see the second interpretation in *Tiferet Yisrael*.) When asked how he knew this, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa explained that if the words of his prayer flowed effortlessly from his heart to his lips (*Rashi, s.v. im shegura*), he knew that they had been accepted and the sick person would recover. However, if his prayer lacked fluency, he knew that the Heavenly court had rejected his petition and had torn it up (alternatively, had "torn up" the sick person; *Rashi, s.v. she'hu meturaf*).

5. **This is in line...accepted...the reverse.** "This" refers to the Talmud's story about Rabbi

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“I pleaded with God at that time, saying.”¹

(Deuteronomy 3:23)

A person should pray with great *deveikut* to God.²

Yet if upon occasion it happens that he cannot pray with *deveikut*, he should not say, “I just won’t pray”; since he is unable to pray with appropriate concentration and *deveikut*, and so the prayer is not accepted.³

This is as our Sages, of blessed memory, taught about Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, that he would pray [for the sick and say, “This one will live and this one will die.”] They said to him, [“How do you know this?”] He answered them, “If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, I know that it has been accepted. But if it is not, I know [that it has been torn up]” (*Berakhot* 34b).⁴ This is in line with what we have said: With *deveikut*, his prayer is then fluent in his mouth and accepted. But without it, God forbid, it is the reverse.⁵

1. **I pleaded with God...saying.** Scripture relates that although Moshe prayed to be allowed to enter the Holy Land, God denied his request. Rashi explains that *V’Etchanan* (“I pleaded”) is derived from the Hebrew word *chanun*, which connotes mercy. It refers to prayer and supplication in which one does not ask to be answered in reward for one’s merits, but as an underserved gift from God. Rebbe Nachman will relate this here to the main theme of the lesson: praying to God at all times, no matter what measure of concentration and immersion in prayer one is able to attain.

2. **pray with great deveikut to God.** The Hebrew term *deveikut* is typically translated as “cleaving” or “adhering.” With respect to worshipping God, Chassidic teaching defines *deveikut* as the mystical attachment to the Divine that comes in the wake of ecstatic devotion in prayer and the performance of mitzvot. That said, *deveikut* to God certainly goes beyond achieving a state of ecstasy. At its deeper, more comprehensive levels, *deveikut* is best described as absorption in God, wherein one loses the awareness of oneself as a separate entity (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 4:9). The soul and God are then said to be one (cf. Deuteronomy 4:4), and there is a complete convergence of the human and Divine Will, considered to be the ultimate goal of spiritual perfection. In *Likutey Moharan* I, 22:9, Rebbe Nachman equates *deveikut*’s negating of the ego-self with rejecting the thinking mind as one’s vehicle to God-consciousness—supplanting it with an open and listening heart. Here, the Rebbe relates specifically to *deveikut* in prayer, which is devotion of the heart. As he notes in *Likutey Moharan* II, 84, *tefilah*, the Hebrew word for prayer, means “binding” and “joining.”

אָף עַל פִּי כֵן אֵל יֹאמֶר הָאָדָם כֵּן, אֲלֵא יִתְפַּלֵּל תָּמִיד. וְאִם
 לֹא יוּכַל לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּדַבְּקוֹת כְּרֵאוּי. יִתְפַּלֵּל בְּכָל כַּחוֹ. כִּי בְּעֵת
 שְׂיִתְפַּלֵּל בְּדַבְּקוֹת כְּרֵאוּי, אֲזִי יַעֲלֶה כָּל הַתְּפִלוֹת עִם הַתְּפִלָּה
 הַזֶּה שֶׁהִתְפַּלֵּל כְּרֵאוּי.

וְזֶה:

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל ה' — תָּמִיד, בֵּין בְּדַבְּקוֹת בֵּין שְׁלֹא בְּדַבְּקוֹת.

בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר — הֵינּוּ בְּעֵת שְׂאֲזוּכָה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּדַבְּקוֹת, שֶׁהוּא
 בְּחִינַת שְׂגוּרָה תְּפִלַּתִּי בְּפִי. וְהֵינּוּ "בְּעֵת הַהוּא לֵאמֹר", שֶׁהַדְּבָרִים
 נֶאֱמָרִים וּמְרָצִים בְּפִיו מִחֲמַת שְׂמֵתְפִלֵּל בְּדַבְּקוֹת, אֲזִי יַעֲלֶה כָּל
 הַתְּפִלוֹת שֶׁהִתְפַּלֵּל עַד עֵתָה כַּנִּלְ"ל:

these prayers are not accepted—i.e., they fail to ascend to God, but instead remained mired in this world, waiting for the chance to rise up. This opportunity comes when a person finally does attain *devekut* in prayer. The prayer he prays with proper *devekut*—even if it lasts but a moment (cf. *Avot* 4:17)—rectifies and raises up all his prayers over the years that hitherto have not been able to ascend. This is the reason a person should never say that without *devekut* there is no point in praying.

9. **This is.** Rebbe Nachman now shows how his teaching is alluded to in the words of the opening verse.

10. **I pleaded with God.** A person should pray in whatever manner he can. If he can pray with great *devekut*, good; if not, he should pray anyway, and try to do so with all his might. In the context of our lesson, this is the meaning of *V'Etchanan* ("I pleaded")—i.e., praying always. It means praying not just with one's merits, with having reached *devekut*, but even when one knows the prayers are undeserving and will not be accepted on high (see n.1 above).

11. **at that time, saying....** There will come a time when he recites a prayer with great *devekut*, so that the words are fluent in his mouth. "At that time," his effortless "saying" will ascend and carry with it all his other, less acceptable prayers.

The opening verse thus translates in the context of our lesson as follows:

I pleaded with God — I will always pray to God, with or without *devekut*.

at that time, saying — For the time will surely come when I will merit praying with *devekut*, and every prayer I have ever uttered will ascend together with that prayer.

Even so, a person should not say, as above, [“I just won’t pray”]. Rather, he should always pray.⁶ And if he is unable to pray with appropriate *devekut*, let him pray with all his might.⁷ For at a later time, when he prays with appropriate *devekut*, all the prayers will ascend together with the prayer that he prayed properly.⁸

This is:⁹

I pleaded with God — Always, with or without *devekut*.¹⁰

at that time, saying — In other words, at the time I merit to pray with *devekut*, which is the aspect of “my prayer is fluent in my mouth.” This is the meaning of “at that time, saying”—the words utter forth and are fluent in his mouth because he prays with *devekut*. Consequently, all the prayers that he prayed until now ascend, as explained.¹¹

Chanina ben Dosa, from which we learn that the prayers one recites without *devekut* are not accepted—at least not immediately, as Rebbe Nachman explains next.

6. **he should always pray.** Even when Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa did not attain *devekut*, so that his prayers did not flow without effort, he continued to pray. He did not say, “If I can’t pray with great *devekut*, I just won’t pray.”

7. **let him pray with all his might.** That is, one must put into one’s prayers as much effort and concentration as one possibly can (*Tefilot v’Tachanunim* I, 7). Obviously this itself is not the state of *devekut*, which, as explained above, is the complete convergence of one’s own will with the Divine Will (see n.2), and which earlier in this volume Rebbe Nachman speaks of as surrendering one’s soul while praying (see Lesson #80:3). Still, the absence of absorption in God, while it may render the prayer unacceptable, does not preclude the value of praying (see the following note). Therefore, when a person’s inability to lose the ego-self in *devekut* makes effortless prayer impossible, he should pray *with* the ego-self—i.e., with effort and exertion and whatever concentration he *can* muster.

8. **all the prayers will ascend together with the prayer that he prayed properly.** This can be better understood when seen in light of the Ari’s teaching that throughout the creation there are sparks of holiness waiting to be redeemed and raised up to their initial level of holiness (see earlier in this volume: Lesson #90 and n.2; Lesson #96 and n.6). These holy sparks cannot ascend on their own, but require the assistance they receive from man’s good deeds and devotions to God. In the context of our lesson, the sparks of holiness correspond to the prayers a person prays without great *devekut*. As indicated in the story about Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa,