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CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE OF PRAYER

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1-1 Praying for the spiritual aspect of physical things.

THE requests in our prayers, such as those for livelihood or rain, are not for these physical things. Rather, they are directed at their supernal spiritual roots. Thus, in the physical is found only the external aspect of things; their spiritual aspects reside in the inner aspect of things.

Shemen Sasson, Psalms 86



1-2 Praying in order to attach yourself Above.

WHEN you attach yourself Above during the Amidah¹, you will merit to be elevated on high during that prayer. As our Sages said, “A person who seeks to be purified will be helped.”² Through this prayer, you can bind your thoughts to the Oneness Above. And then you will reach to an even greater level; that of being attached on High even when you are not engaged in prayer.

Tzava'as HaRivash 37

¹ Also referred to as the Shemonah Esreh (eighteen benedictions); the main section of daily prayer, recited standing and inaudibly.

² Talmud, *Shabbat* 104a

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1-3 To cling to G•d, the Source of all desire.

IT is written, “A prayer of a poor man when he is faint [with an affliction] and pours out his tale of woe before G•d.”¹

The Baal Shem Tov explained this verse with the following parable.

In honor of his birthday, a king announced that he would distribute from his royal treasure house to whoever of his subjects was in need. Many people came with their requests, some asking for livelihood others for precious jewels. For each one of them, the king ordered his servants to fulfill their requests.

Now, there was one poor but wise man who was granted his one and only request, that he be given permission to speak with the king every day. As is known, there is nothing that the king’s coffers lack because the king’s wealth is so great; everything in the kingdom belongs to him. Thus, while the other people received their requests from the king’s servants, who, by their very nature, are limited in that they are unable to give beyond that which the king had instructed; the wise man was able to ask the king, directly, on a daily basis for his needs and therefore was always able to obtain whatever he requested.

¹ Psalms 102:1

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So too with a person who serves G•d by desiring to speak only to Him. All of G•d's goodness is given to him. This is why the "prayer for a poor man," asking only for the permission to speak with G•d everyday, "includes" all of his other prayers.

That is, when he pours out his woes before G•d and only requests to speak to the King Himself, then all of his prayers are answered by the Source of all desire.

Me'or Einayim, Ki Seitzei



1-4 Prayer draws down Divine life-force.

WORDS of prayer create vessels to draw down shefah, the flow of Divine life-force into creation. Since G•d knows our thoughts, why do we have to pray? Because it is the words of prayer themselves that draw down the Divine life-force into the creation.

Mevaser Tzedek, Terumah



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1-5 Parable of how G•d puts us into different situations to arouse our awareness of His presence and our love for Him.

THERE was once a king who had a musician that could play the violin beautifully. The king loved one particular melody and requested that it be played in his chamber many times a day. Eventually, however, the melody became boring to the ears of the violinist; and he lost his previous enthusiasm and desire to play it.

What did the king do to fill him with fresh enthusiasm and drive? When he wanted to hear the melody, he brought in a random person from the street who had never heard it before. The new audience brought renewed energy and enthusiasm to the musician. Thus the king did for a long time.

Eventually, though, the king sought advice from his counselors about his musician, for it was getting difficult to always find a new person to bring in from the street. It was suggested that he permanently blind the musician, so that whenever the king wanted to hear his favorite melody, he would tell the musician that someone new had just come in the chamber, someone who had never heard it before. Since he could no longer see, he'd believe that someone new was really there. Then,

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then the musician would be inspired with a fresh desire to play the melody so beloved by the king.

What does this parable mean? We pray to the King of Kings daily, pronouncing the same liturgy three times a day.¹ That is, every day we pray the exact same Amidah — morning, noon and night. Therefore, to us, our prayers become old or even boring. What does the King of the World do about this? Each day, He puts a person into different situations requiring His help. Then, G•d sends the person subtle hints and messages throughout the day that He is with him. Usually, He does this in the extraneous thoughts that come to the person. Of course, one must know how to interpret these thoughts. When the person believes that G•d is with him, he can summon the power to arouse in his heart a feeling of deep love and attachment to G•d.

When G•d grants a person insight and strong discernment, the person knows very well that no one prayer is ever like another, and whatever was spiritually lacking and subsequently repaired in the morning prayer could not have been so easily repaired in the afternoon and evening prayers. Everything depends on the [person's] or suppli-

¹ This refers to the Amidah, which is liturgically identical for each of the three weekday prayer services.

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cant's clear perception in recognizing and properly interpreting everything he encounters in the world. Wherever he looks, he should be able to identify and therefore see Divinity encloded there. And so long as he grasps the exaltation of G•d in new ways, and to be sure, in all ways, enthusiasm and longing are born in him to speak before G•d with fear and love, as though he has never prayed before. The King of Kings clearly perceives great yearning, love and innate caring to fully appreciate (within the scope of his ability) G•d's tangible and intangible presence in every aspect of his life experiences. The supplicant then becomes accustomed and even desirous to grasp His Majesty in the every facet of his life. Service to G•d, one of the three pillars of life¹ becomes a great delight to Him. G•d rejoices to call such a person wise and does not trouble Himself further to send him different hints. Rather, He takes away his vision of this lowly world and gives him a vision of the worlds that transcend time. Then, there is no division of the midot² at all, and everything is of equal value to him.

Once the person has achieved this level, where his vision of the worlds transcends time, his

¹ Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:2

² The Divine and mortal attributes of character, spiritual emotions and mental states.

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service is always new. Further, since the person is then independent of time, he does not acquire the aspect of old age. Then, when he serves G•d with great desire and enthusiasm as well as with feelings of powerful love and attachment at every moment, it enables him to remain wholly and directly attached to Him. At this stage, it is good for him in this world and in the world to come. Amen!

Ohr ha-Meir, Koheles, s.v. "Berabos Hatovah."



1-6 Causing prayers to ascend.

THE desires and intentions of an intelligent person that prays with his intellect do not physically ascend like pipe smoke leaving the mouth and ascending upwards. Rather, it is when a person's desire and intention are with feeling and enthusiasm that the prayers will ascend.

Ohr HaMeir, Song of Songs



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1-7 Praying for G•d's sake.

PRAYERS for physical needs, such as “Heal us and we shall be healed” and “Bless us with a good year,”¹ are like turning to a father who longs to fulfill his son's desires and to make sure that he lacks nothing, even so-called foolish things. For it is the nature of the One Who is Good to do good.

G•d's only thought is how to bestow material goodness on the Israelites, who are called His children. The words of prayer draw down sustenance and shefah into all the worlds, even into the material world so as to satisfy G•d's longing.

When you pray for yourself, Heaven scrutinizes your prayers to see if they are worthy of being received. But when you pray for the sake of G•d, nothing can stop your prayers from being received and accepted immediately.

Kedushas Levi, Likutim Shonim p.509



1-8 Praying for a sick person.

IF a sick person prays for himself, the prayer can work because he repents for his own misdeeds.

¹ Prayers from the Amidah

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But how do the prayers of others work on his behalf?

The answer is that prayer of others elevates the *dinim*,¹ located in the realm of Malchut (the realm of Divine Kingship), against the sick person to their root in the realm of Binah.² There, the *dinim* are sweetened and the letters creating the Divine judgments are recombined for good; for all Divine judgments are made with letter combinations.

Raw Yeibi, Psalms 18



1-9 Effect of praying for another.

IT is written that when you pray on behalf of your friend for something that you need for yourself, your prayer will be answered first.³ The reason is that when you pray for your friend, you uplift the Divine judgments against your friend, located in the realm of Gevurah,⁴ to their source. Therefore, through the act of praying itself, you will

¹ Divine judgments

² Attribute of Understanding

³ Talmud *Bava Kama* 92a

⁴ Attribute of Severity

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access the Supernal source of the Divine judgement in the realm of Gevurah, at which time your own needs will be addressed. Once there, you can also change the Divine judgment and cause healing to flow down on to the sick person.

Me'or Einayim, Naso



1-10 Praying to reach new levels of understanding.

THE primary way to advance to new levels of understanding is to study Torah and pray with all of your strength. Then, you attach yourself to the Light of the Infinite, may He be blessed, that dwells within the letters of Torah and prayer. This infusion of Divine light subdues any physical inclination, and you can experience the abnegation or divestiture of your physical being. Then, you will enter the Supernal worlds and constantly rise to new levels of understanding and clarity.

Toldos Aharon, Shelach



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1-11 Praying well.

IF you can pray well, even once, you can uplift all the lost prayers¹ that were previously left below. Together, all your prayers will be perfected and rise to the realm of Supernal Desire.

Tiferes Shlomo, Shabbat Teshuva



1-12 Praying when suffering leads to revelation of G•d's kindness and deliverance.

THE light of the Shechinah is enwrapped in four types of suffering. Before all of the worlds were brought into actuality, these types of sufferings were hidden in G•d's essence. To G•d, the past, future and present are all one. The creation of the world meant that He transformed time from a potentiality into an actuality.

Before the Creation, there was no suffering, only glory, majesty, strength and joy. However, when G•d created all of the worlds, the ability to experience suffering and limitations² also came

¹ Those said without faith and cleaving to G•d

² Referring to constricted and narrow states of consciousness and existence; known as *mochin d'katnus*

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about. Therefore, because of suffering and limitations, people pray with more effort. Through prayer, G•d's loving-kindness and deliverance to the world is revealed; for when you suffer and are in distress, you pray with greater spiritual attachment, concentration and intentions that are more pure.

Ohr HaGanuz LaTzaddikim, Shemos



1-13 Praying for the sake of G•d.

IT is written, “In all their afflictions, He was afflicted”¹, and “I am with him in distress”². This seems to be a contradiction with the statement in *Tikkunei Zohar*: “They cry out like dogs, but there is no one to wake in repentance to break out of their prison cell.” Is G•d with us in our suffering or not?

The main repentance must be for His honor, which means rectifying and removing the agony caused by our sins. In all that you request, have in mind the honor of the Shechinah and pray that G•d's requests should be fulfilled. This is the meaning of, “May G•d fulfill all of your requests.”³

¹ Isaiah 63:9

² Psalms 91:15

³ Psalms 20:6

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That is, all of your requests should be that G•d is fulfilled.¹ When your intentions are only for the sake of G•d, you cause the Divine Presence to ascend and create a Unification with Him.

Mevaser Tzedek, Chukas



1-14 The ideal religious belief in G•d comes from both following the path of the forefathers and intellectual investigation.

WHY do we say “Our G•d and the G•d of our fathers?” Because there are two types of people who believe in G•d. The *first* believes in the Holy One because they follow the path of their forefathers, and remain strong in their faith. The second comes to religious belief through which investigation into the existence of G•d has been undertaken.

The first type of belief has the advantage of steadfastness that is impossible to entice or divert. Even if presented with numerous refutations, G•d forbid, their faith remains steadfast in that they received it in an unbroken chain from their

¹ This is the implication of the literal translation of the Hebrew syntax of the verse.

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forefathers. Still, they never undertook investigation into the existence of G•d. Therefore, the disadvantage of the first type of belief is that their faith is like a commandment done by rote, without apparent reason or understanding.

The second type of belief has a distinctly different advantage in that they know their Creator through extensive investigation. Thus, they are strong due to the knowledge and understanding in their perfect faith. The result is an all encompassing love. However, the disadvantage to this type of belief is that they can or may be easily dissuaded. If people present them with evidence that refutes their conclusions, their faith can be weakened or removed if they are convinced, G•d forbid.

Now we can appreciate that one who has both of these types of belief possesses the firmest faith of all. That is, they rely fully upon their forefathers and have also come to their belief as a result of their own investigation. This is a good and pure faith, and this is why we say, “Our G•d and the G•d of our fathers.” This can also explain the verse, “Taste and see that G•d is good”¹ – taste for yourself through investigation and see the conduct of our forefathers.

Kesser Shem Tov p.19c

¹ Psalms 34:9

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1-15 One shouldn't stand to pray without the realization of what is lacking in the upper worlds.

ONE should not stand to pray except with koved rosh¹ – with the realization of what is lacking in the head, which are the upper worlds. For example, when a son does not follow the right path, the father suffers and walks around “without a head.” On the other hand, when the son is wise and honest, he broadens his father's mind. So, too, with the Congregation of Israel. When they experience lack, it is because the Divine effluence does not pour forth. This outflow is withheld due to a lacking on their part, when they caused a blemish in the upper worlds.

*Likkutei Amarim of
R. Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk*

¹ Literally, a heavy head. Referring to an attitude of reverence. Mishna *Berachos* 5:1