

HITBODEDUT MEDITATION AND PERSONAL PRAYER

Set aside time each day to meditate and pray alone in a room or some meadow and express your innermost thoughts and feelings and personal prayers to God. Use every kind of appeal and argument. Use words that will endear you to God and win His favor. Plead with God to draw you closer and let you truly serve Him. This is Hitbodedut.

You should hold these conversations in whatever language you speak best. Our set prayers are said in Hebrew, but if this is not one's native language, it is difficult to use it to give expression to all

one's innermost thoughts and feelings and the heart is less drawn after the words. It is easier to pour out your heart and say everything you need in your own language.

You should tell God everything you feel, be it contrition and longing to repent over the past or requests and supplications to come truly close to God from now on, each person according to his level.

Be very careful to get into the habit of spending time every day on your personal prayers and meditation. Fix a regular time for this and then be happy for the rest of the day!

Hitbodedut is of the greatest value. It is *the* way to come closer to God, because it includes everything else. No matter what you lack in your service of God, even if you feel totally remote from His service, tell God everything and ask Him for all that you need.

If at times you find yourself unable to speak to God or even open your mouth, the very fact that you are there before Him wanting and yearning to speak is itself very good. You can even turn your very inability to speak into a prayer. Tell God that you feel so far away that you cannot even speak to Him! Ask Him to have mercy on you and open your mouth to tell Him what you need.

Many great and famous Tzaddikim have said that all their achievements came only through Hitbodedut. Anyone with understanding can recognize the supreme value of this practice, which ascends to the most sublime heights. This advice applies to everyone equally, from the very least to the very greatest. Everyone is capable of practicing it and can attain great levels. Happy are all who persist in it.

It is also good to turn Torah teachings into prayers. When you study or hear a teaching of a true Tzaddik, make a prayer out of it. Ask God when you too will be able to fulfill this teaching. Tell Him how far from it you are and beg Him to help you attain everything contained in the lesson.

A person of understanding who wants the truth will be led by God in the path of truth, and he will learn how to practice Hitbodedut and offer words of grace and sound arguments to persuade God to bring him to true service.

Hitbodedut rises to a very high place. This applies especially to turning Torah teachings into prayers, which creates the greatest delight above.

Hitbodedut is the highest level: it is greater than everything.

Likutey Moharan II, 25

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Like a person talking to his friend

When God helps with Hitbodedut, it is like a person talking to his friend.

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The origins of prayer

Prayer originally began with each person pouring out his heart before God in his own words and language. This is explained by Rambam (Maimonides) in his Code of Torah Law (Prayer 1:4) , where he states that personal prayer was the main form of prayer prior to the institution of the set prayers by the Men of the Great Assembly.

According to the law, even today the original form of prayer remains primary. Besides following the order of prayers established by the Men of the Great Assembly, it is extremely beneficial to make a regular practice of offering your own prayers and requests from the depths of your heart in the language you understand best, asking God to help you serve Him truly. This is the essence of prayer, and this is the way all the Tzaddikim attained their high levels.

Sichot Haran #229

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Bypassing the bandits

There is another advantage in expressing yourself to God in your own words. One can recite existing prayers and supplications, but these are already known to the destroyers and maligning forces that lie in wait along the paths of these prayers. They know these paths only too well.

It is like on a public highway. Murderers and robbers lurk there all the time waiting for the unwary, because they know the road. But when a person goes on a new path that is as yet unknown, they are not there to ambush him.

Similarly, when you talk to God in your own words, this is a new pathway, an original prayer that springs directly from your heart. Accordingly the maligning forces are not lying there in wait. Even so, you should also recite Psalms and other supplications as well as your personal prayers.

Likutey Moharan II, 97

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Hitbodedut is for everyone

From the smallest to the greatest, it is impossible to be a truly good person without Hitbodedut.

Likutey Moharan I, 100

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Pray for everything

You must pray for everything. Even if your garment is torn and you need another, you should pray to God to give you something to wear.

Do this for everything: make it a habit to pray for all your needs, great or small. Your main prayers should be for fundamentals: that God should help you to serve Him and draw closer. Even so, you should also pray for minor things.

God may give you food and clothing and everything else you need in life even without your asking for them. However, you are then like an animal. God provides all living creatures with their food. But if you do not draw your needs through prayer, your livelihood is like that of an animal. A *man* must draw his vitality and all his needs from God only through prayer.

Is it beneath your dignity to pray even for something minor? You must pray for everything, even the most minor things.

Sichot Haran #233

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Start with thanks

When a person wants to pray to God and ask for what he needs, he should first thank God for all of His past kindnesses and only then ask for what he needs. Because if he starts by asking only for what he needs, God says, "Have you nothing to thank Me for then?"

Siach Sarfey Kodesh 1-2

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Talk to God a lot

Talk to God a lot! Think carefully about your purpose in this world and what you are doing with your life. Take yourself in hand. Plead with God to have mercy on you and help you serve Him. Make up your own pleas and arguments in your own words, using whatever language you speak best.

Anyone who follows this practice for a period of time each day will certainly succeed in finding God. Even if you think you have been doing this for days and years without achieving what you want, keep firm and persist, because in the end you will reach your goal.

This was how King David composed the Book of Psalms. King David's main time for his private prayers to God was when he lay on his bed at night. He would hide under the covers and pour out his heart to God. King David said: " Every night I converse from my bed in tears." (Psalms 6:7) . Happy is the person who makes this a regular practice, because it is supremely exalted.

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Like a child pleading with his father

It is very good to pour out your heart to God like a child pleading with his father.

Doesn't God call us His children? "You are children to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 14:1) . Therefore it is good to express your thoughts and feelings and all your troubles to God, like a child nagging and complaining to his father.

Even if you think you have done so much wrong that you are no longer one of God's children, remember that God still calls you His child. As the Rabbis taught: "For better or worse, you are always called His children" (*Kiddushin* 36a) .

Even if you think God has rejected you and told you that you are no longer His child, you must still say: "Let Him do His will - but I must do *my* part and continue acting as His child."

How good it is when you can arouse your heart and plead with God until tears stream from your eyes and you stand like a little child crying before his Father.

Confusing thoughts may enter your mind, but if you stand firm, God will send you another thought to encourage you. You may think you are no longer one of God's children. But if you do your part, God will eventually send you thoughts of encouragement.

Sichot Haran #7

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Conquering God

"Sing to the One who rejoices when conquered" (*Pesachim* 119a) .

Sometimes you must conquer even God! You may think that God has rejected you because of your sins and that you are still not doing His will. Even so, you must remain very firm and throw yourself before Him. Stretch out your hands and plead with God to have mercy on you and draw you to His service. Cry out: "No matter what, I want to be a Jew!"

This is how you overcome God. God has great joy when you conquer Him in this way.

Sichot Haran #69

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Wanting to cry

It is good to talk to God and pray with so much feeling that you shed tears like a child crying to his father. But if you pray with the constant thought that you want to cry, this can be highly distracting and may prevent you saying the prayers with all your heart.

When you say your prayers, separate yourself from all other thoughts and focus only on the words you are saying to God, just as a person speaks to his friend. Your heart will then be naturally aroused and you will come to genuine tears.

Likutey Moharan II, 95

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Even one word

If you cannot speak at all in your Hitbodedut, even saying a single word is also very beneficial .

If you can only say one word, keep strong and repeat that word over and over again, countless times. Even if you spend day after day meditating with that word, this in itself is very good. If you are persistent and repeat that word countless times, God will have mercy and open your mouth, and you will be able to express yourself.

Likutey Moharan II, 96

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Ribono Shel Olam

Even if the only thing you can say in your Hitbodedut is *Ribono Shel Olam!* "Master of the World!" this is also very good.

Chayey Moharan #440

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The difference between depression and a broken heart is that when you have a broken heart, you can be standing in a crowd of people and still turn around and say, "Master of the World!"

Sichot Haran #231

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The silent scream

You can shout and scream with a "still, small voice" without anybody hearing you. Everybody can do this. Imagine the sound of such a scream in your mind. Imagine the shout exactly as it would sound. Concentrate on hearing the scream in your mind until you are literally screaming with this soundless "still, small voice" - and nobody else will hear anything.

This is actually a scream and not mere imagination. Just as there are channels that bring the sound from your lungs to your lips, so there are nerves that bring the sound to the brain. You can draw the sound through these nerves, literally bringing it into your head. When you do this, you are actually shouting inside your brain.

When you imagine this scream in your mind, the sound actually rings inside your brain. You can stand in a crowd of people screaming this way and no-one hears you.

It could be that when you do this, a faint sound may escape your mouth. This is because the sound traveling through the nerves to the brain can also activate the vocal organs, and they may then produce some sound. But it will be very faint.

It is much easier to shout in this way without words. When you wish to express yourself in words, it is harder to hold the voice in the mind without letting a sound escape your lips. Without words, it is much easier.

Sichot Haran #16

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Today I am starting

During your Hitbodedut, it is good to say: "Today I am starting to attach myself to You!"

Make a new start each time, because everything that comes later is always in accordance with the beginning.

No matter what happens, it is always good to make a new start each time and say, "Today I am beginning..." If things were already good, now they will be even better! And if they were not good before, then you certainly need to start anew.

Chayey Moharan #437

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Every heartbeat a flame of yearning

A Jewish heart should be so strongly drawn to God that every heartbeat is a flame yearning for God.

Even when you are sitting with other people, you can lift your hands and your heart to God and cry out to Him with soulful longing.

Sichot Haran #230

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The power of desire

When you speak to God, make it a habit to express your longing and yearning to extricate yourself from evil and attain true good. Putting your longing into words is the way to draw your spiritual power from the realm of the potential and possible to the realm of the real and actual.

Longing and yearning alone create *potential* spiritual power, but the words of your prayers and conversations with God bring this spiritual power into the realm of the *actual* so that it becomes realized in actual fact. This is the way to accomplish what you yearn for.

Letters of Torah are present throughout the Creation. By expressing and articulating your yearning and desire in words, you invest these letters with new vitality and power for good. This brings you new life and strength and draws goodness and blessing into all the worlds. Numberless souls are stirred to make their own return to God, all through your words of prayer to your Maker.

How precious are the longing and yearning that you express before God. The main thing is actually to articulate the words. Make this your regular practice and devote time to it every day. This will benefit the entire world.

Likutey Moharan I, 31

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A settled mind

It is a great achievement to be able to settle your mind for a period of time each day and regret what you must. Not everyone is able to attain mental calm and tranquility for a time every day. The day flies past and is gone, and a person finds that not once in all his life did he have time to settle his mind.

Make every effort to set aside time to review your life calmly. Think about all your different activities and interests and how you behave. Consider carefully if this is how you should spend your days.

Someone who does not meditate cannot attain wisdom. He may occasionally be able to think clearly, but not for any length of time. His power of concentration remains weak and unsustainable. He will never realize the folly of this world.

But one who has a clear, settled mind can understand that everything is madness and vanity.

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The spider's web

You want to speak to God but find it hard? You are like a warrior who girds his loins to overcome a mighty wall but when he comes to the gate, he finds it blocked with a spider's web. Could anything be more foolish than to run away from the battle because the gate is covered with a spider's web?

The main thing is speech. With speech you can win every battle. It is possible to meditate in thought, but the most important thing is to express yourself in words.

You may find it difficult to speak to God. You may also find it difficult to speak to a true Tzaddik. This is only because you are shy and lethargic and lack sufficient boldness.

This is silly! Here you are, ready to use your speech to overcome the great battle against the evil urge inside you. You are on the verge of victory: you are ready to break down the walls and open the gates with your words.

Should you hold back because of a minor barrier caused by a lack of confidence? This is nothing but a spider's web covering the walls you want to break down with your words.

Sichot Haran #232

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Out in the meadows

Hitbodedut is best done outside the town in a place where grass grows, because the grass will awaken your heart.

How good it is to pray to God and meditate in the meadows amidst the grass and the trees. When a man goes out to the meadows to pray, every blade of grass, every plant and flower all enter his prayers and help him, putting power and strength into his words.

Likutey Moharan II, 11; Sichot Haran #227

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Your own place

It is very good to have your own room where you can be alone and engage in Torah study, prayer, meditation and private conversation with God. Even just to sit in such a room is also highly beneficial .

If you do not have your own room, you can still seclude yourself and talk to God. You can make your own room under your Tallit. Just drape your Tallit over your eyes and speak to God as much as you desire.

You can also seclude yourself with God when you lie in bed under the covers. This was King David's custom, as it is written: "Each night I converse from my bed" (Psalms 6:7) .

You can also sit down with some book and let others imagine you are studying when in fact you are speaking to God. There are many other methods you can use if you truly want to practice Hitbodedut . Nothing is loftier than Hitbodedut, which is the root and foundation of holiness, purity and repentance.

Sichot Haran #274-5

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It is good to choose somewhere to sit day and night engaged in Torah, prayer and devotion. When you need to eat, run to some house and quickly grab a piece of bread or the like to appease your hunger and then go back to serving God.

Sichot Haran #248

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Hitbodedut at night

The best time for Hitbodedut is at night , when everyone is asleep. Ideally you should go to a place outside the city and follow a solitary path where people don't even go during the day.

Empty your heart and mind of all your mundane preoccupations and then work to nullify all your negative traits, one after the other, until in the end you nullify all sense of self completely. First work on one character trait, then another and another, until you reach the point where you are free of any self-centeredness and any sense of independent existence.

You must be as nothing in your own eyes. Then you will be worthy of attaining true self-nullification and your soul will be merged with its root. The whole universe will be merged with you in your Source. You and everything with you will be merged in the Unity of God.

Likutey Moharan I, 52

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The main time for Hitbodedut is at night. Seclude yourself and express yourself to God. Speak with all your heart and search out the goodness in your soul. Find the good points that are inside you and cleanse them of all evil until you pour out your heart like water before God. This is the way to subdue all lust and desire and attain true happiness. You will develop a good memory, and thus you

will constantly remember the world to come, never losing sight of the end goal and purpose of this life. This is the way to repent and return to God.

Likutey Moharan I, 54

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Water wears away stone

Even if many days and years pass and it seems as if you have accomplished nothing with your prayers and conversations with God, don't give up! Every single word makes an impression.

"Water wears away stone" (Job 14: 19) . It may seem that water dripping on hard stone could not make any impression, yet when water drips on stone continuously for many years, it can literally wear a hole in the stone. We actually see this.

Even if your heart is like stone and it seems that your words of prayer are making no impression at all, still, as the days and years pass, your heart of stone will also be softened. For: "Water wears away stone".

Sichot Haran #234

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When Mashiach comes

There are certainly worthy people who do not practice Hitbodedut. But I call them confused. When Mashiach suddenly comes and calls them, they will be disoriented and confused.

But those who practice Hitbodedut will be like a person who wakes up from a restful sleep with a calm, settled mind. This is how we will be when Mashiach comes: our minds will be calm and settled, without panic or confusion.

Sichot Haran #228

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THE POWER OF SPEECH

Prayer must be spoken out in actual words - literally. It is not enough to think the prayers. It is true that God knows what we are thinking. But the words have to be spoken, because speech is the vessel with which we receive the flow of blessings. According to our words, so is the blessing we receive .

One who perfects his speech can receive abundant blessings through the vessels he forms with his words. This is why we must actually articulate our prayers with our mouths.

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Guard your tongue

Never let a word of wickedness leave your mouth. Don't ever say you will be wicked or commit a sin, even if you mean it as a joke and have no intention of carrying out your words.

The words themselves can be very damaging. They can compel you to fulfill them even though you did not mean them seriously.

This was what caused King Jehu's downfall, because he said, "Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve him very much" (II Kings 10:18) . When King Jehu said these words, he had no intention of committing idolatry. He said them only to trick the Baal worshipers, as explained in the following verse. Yet these words were his downfall, because he later came to commit idolatry.

From this the Talmud learns that "a covenant is made with the lips" (*Sanhedrin* 102a) . You should therefore be very careful about what you say.

Sichot Haran #237

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Speaking derogatorily about other people reinforces the hold of fantasy and illusion over us. When people use bad language and speak derogatorily about others, their spiritual awareness and understanding are withdrawn from them and they fall from the love of God and descend into animalistic passions and desires. The source of these passions and desires is man's faculty of imagination, which is part of his animal nature. Imagination feeds on falsehood and slander and is directly opposed to the faculty of memory with which we keep our true situation in this life and our eternal destiny in the forefront of our minds.

Those who abuse language fall into forgetfulness, which is the death of the heart. Their heart dies within them and they never remember that the true goal of our life in this world is the eternal life of the world to come. Such people are dead even in their lifetime, because they have no conception of their true goal and purpose.

Likutey Moharan I, 54

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Speech is the breath of the lips of the Holy One, blessed be He. To abuse it is to turn it into a "raging storm wind" (Psalms 148:8) . This raging storm wind is the great accuser - the source of all man's trials and challenges. This wild spirit erodes man's very flesh. It is the root of all the slander, falsehood and evil that people speak about each other. It is called the "end of all flesh" (Genesis

6:13) because it wastes and destroys man's flesh and his very life. All this is the result of abusing speech.

Likutey Moharan I, 38

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The hammer

A certain king sent his son far away to study. The son eventually returned to the king's palace fully versed in all the arts and sciences. One day the king told his son to take a particular stone that was as big as a millstone and bring it up to the top floor of the palace. But the stone was so heavy that the prince could not even lift it up. He was very upset that he could not fulfill his father's wish.

Eventually the king said to his son, "Did you really imagine that I meant you to do the impossible and carry the stone just as it is up there? Even with all your wisdom, how were you supposed to do such a thing? That was not what I meant. I wanted you to take a big hammer and smash the stone into little pieces. This is how you will be able to bring it up to the top floor."

In the same way, God commands us to "lift our heart with our hands up to God in the heavens" (Lamentations 3:41) . Our heart is a "heart of stone" (Ezekiel 36:26) , a very heavy stone. There is no possible way to raise it to God except by taking a hammer and breaking and smashing the heart of stone.

The "hammer" is speech!

Chayey Moharan #441

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Mother of children

Speech is a "mother of children" (Psalms 113:9) . Just as a mother always stays with her child and never forgets him even if he goes to the filthiest of places, so the power of speech never leaves a person even if he finds himself in the filthiest of places.

Even one who has sunk to the lowest level can always remind himself of God's presence if he speaks words of holiness: Torah and prayer. Regardless of his situation, he should try to speak words of Torah and prayer, meditate and speak to God, and he should discuss matters of faith with his teacher and friends. This way he will always be able to remind himself of God's presence regardless of how far he is from God, even if he falls to the "filthy places" . His faculty of speech will not desert him, and he will never be able to forget God.

Understand the tremendous power of speech. It can save you from destruction.

Likutey Moharan I, 78

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If you know how

Speech has tremendous power. If you know how, you can even whisper to a gun so that it cannot shoot.

Likutey Moharan II, 96

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PRAYER

Prayer is the root of all attachment and devotion to God. Prayer is the gate through which we approach God, and through prayer we may come to know Him.

Likutey Moharan II, 84

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Prayer helps for everything

Prayer helps for everything. Even if a person is unable to study Torah, he will be able to do so if he prays for it. Everything good can be attained through prayer: Torah, devotion, holiness... everything good in all the worlds! Amen.

Likutey Moharan II, 111

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"The world was created for me"

"Every person must say: The whole world was created for me" (*Sanhedrin* 37a).

If the world was created for me, it is therefore my constant obligation to examine and consider what is needed to repair the world and provide everyone's needs, and to pray for them.

Likutey Moharan 1, 5

Be bold

The secret of prayer is to be bold. We must have the audacity to ask God for everything we need - even if we need to ask Him to work miracles for us. Only with boldness and daring can we stand up and pray to God.

When we consider God's utter greatness - if we can form any conception of it at all - and think of our own smallness and worthlessness, how can we stand up and pray before Him? Even so, when we pray, we must cast our timidity aside and boldly ask God for everything we need. Only with bold assertiveness can we overcome the obstacles and barriers that stand in the way of our service of God.

Likutey Moharan I, 30

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Never insist

Never insist on anything in your prayers. Ask for what you want as a request. If God grants it, He will grant it. And if not, then not!

Regardless of what you need - livelihood, children or anything else - it is forbidden to insist stubbornly that God should fulfil exactly what you are asking for, because this is like taking something by force: it is a kind of robbery. Just pray and entreat God for kindness and mercy.

Likutey Moharan I, 20 & 196

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God's kindness

God does us a great kindness by allowing us to use human terms when addressing Him in prayer and by answering our requests. If it were not for His kindness, it would be completely inappropriate to address Him with names, descriptions and praises consisting of mere words and letters. The fact that we are able to do so is all due to God's kindness.

The realization that, although God is exalted beyond all human titles and praises, He permits us to address Him in human terms in order to bind ourselves to Him, should be sufficient to inspire us to pray with fervor and passion. This is a sign of His great love and tender mercy. We should therefore at least be sincere when we address Him this way, since it is only through His love and mercy that we are able to do so at all.

Likutey Moharan I, 15

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You must force yourself to pray

Pray with great strength, putting all your power into the words of your prayers.

You must force yourself to pray. Some people say that a person should not force himself to pray, but the opposite is true. You must force yourself to put all your strength into your prayers.

True devotion is to bind the thought to the word, focusing your mind on the words of the prayers by listening and paying careful attention to what you are saying. This way your inner power will enter your prayers automatically.

All your inner power waits for the moment when it is drawn into words of holiness. When you focus your thoughts on what you are saying, this power rushes forth into the words. Simply pay attention to the words and your inner power will enter your prayers without your having to force it.

Sichot Haran #66

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Working yourself up

Sometimes you may feel no enthusiasm during your prayers. You should then *act* as if you feel enthusiasm, making your heart burn with the words of the prayers. This is similar to the way a person can work himself up into such a temper that he actually becomes angry. People then say, "He's making himself angry . "

Sometimes when you pray, you must likewise work yourself up into a passion. You must force yourself to put fire and emotion into the words. Eventually the enthusiasm will become real: your heart will burn for God and you will pray with genuine fervor.

Sichot Haran #74

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Leaping into Gan Eden

People say one should pray quietly as if standing before a king. But I say, pray with cries and hand-clapping. This is the way to leap into Gan Eden with joy!

Tovot Zichronot p. 107

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Pray early

It is best to pray early in the morning. Prayer is of supreme importance - who knows if you will be able to pray later? Make every effort to pray as early as you possibly can.

Sichot Haran #31

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Nusach : Styles of prayer

Chassidus is not associated with any specific style of prayer. One can be a Chassid and pray in Nusach Ashkenaz.

Siach Sarfey Kodesh 1-90

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Finding yourself in the words

When reciting Psalms and prayers, make sure you find yourself in everything you say. It is simple and easy to find yourself in all your prayers: you don't need to be clever.

The Psalms in particular were written for the entire community of Israel and for each and every individual. All of a person's internal wars and struggles and everything else he endures are all expressed in the Psalms , which mainly relate to the war against the evil urge and its forces. These are the main enemies seeking to keep a person from the path of life and drag him down to the deepest hell if he is not on guard against them. The entire Book of Psalms is about this war.

The foundation of all the different pathways to God lies in reciting Psalms and other supplications and offering our own personal prayers from the heart, entreating Him to draw us closer to His service. This is the only way to win the war. Happy is the man who persistently prays and entreats God at all times and in all situations, because he will certainly win the war.

Much good advice exists about different ways of coming closer to God, but in most cases it is very hard to carry out the actual advice. Therefore the main thing is prayer and supplication. Regardless of who you are or the circumstances in which you find yourself, always try to offer some prayer and request to God to take you from darkness to light and bring you to complete repentance. Give Him no quiet until He answers you. Even if you cry to God for a very long time and He still seems very far away, if you are persistent in your prayers, He will certainly answer you eventually and draw you to His service.

Likutey Moharan II, 101

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The galbanum

Even if you consider yourself a sinner, you must still keep firm and make every effort to pray.

Tell yourself: Maybe I am far from God because of all my sins. Yet if so, there can be no perfect prayer without me. Didn't the Rabbis teach that "every prayer that does not include the sinners of Israel is not a true prayer" (*Keritot* 6a) . This is because prayer is like an incense offering, and the Torah requires that the incense must contain galbanum even though , by itself, it has a foul smell .

Therefore even though I consider myself a sinner, I am an essential ingredient in the prayers and the service cannot be complete without me. If I am a sinner, I must strengthen myself all the more to pray to God. I must have trust that in His mercy He will accept my prayer, since the perfection of the prayer depends on me - the the galbanum in the incense.

Just as the foul-smelling galbanum is a vital ingredient in the incense, so too my tainted prayer is a vital ingredient in the prayers of all Israel . Without it, they will not be complete.

Sichot Haran #295

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The difference between spiritual and physical work

The greatest of all religious devotions is still easier than making a living and trying to acquire worldly possessions!

How much effort a merchant devotes to getting to the market on time! The moment Shabbat is over, he starts getting busy. First he has to find a wagon. Next he must hurry and load up his wares. Then he has to travel through the night, driving sleep from his eyes and breaking his whole body as he sits on top of the loaded wagon. After all this, he has to stand on his feet for the whole day in the freezing cold...

The merchant has to endure all this hardship and discomfort for the sake of a mere possibility: *perhaps* he will make a profit! He might equally well lose everything including his expenses, which is what usually happens. To make a living in this world, people go to the greatest lengths, enduring extreme hardship - all because of the slender hope that they might make a small profit.

The greatest possible religious devotion is prayer. And yet, when we stand up to pray, we pray and we manage to complete the prayer!!!

Chayey Moharan #558

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Gathering flowers

When a person stands in prayer, reciting the words of the prayers, he is gathering beautiful flowers and blossoms, like someone walking in a meadow picking lovely flowers and blossoms one by one until they make a bunch. Then he picks more, one by one, until they make another bunch, and he puts them together. So he goes on, picking and gathering more and more lovely bouquets.

So it is in prayer: one goes from letter to letter, until several letters are joined together to make a syllable. One does the same to make whole words. Then one joins together two words, and goes on, picking and gathering, until one completes a whole blessing. Then one goes on picking more

and more, and passes from the first blessing of the Amidah prayer - the blessing of the fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - to the second, which speaks of God's might . One then proceeds to the third blessing, which speaks of His holiness, and so on. Who can adequately praise the great splendor of the gleanings and gatherings one makes with the words of the prayer?

When speech comes forth, it comes from the soul. The utterance comes forth and is heard by the ears, for "you must let your ears hear what you bring forth from your mouth" (*Berachot* 15) . The utterance then begs and pleads with the soul not to leave it behind. As soon as the first letter comes forth - the *Beit* of the word *Baruch* , "Blessed" (opening word of the Amidah prayer) - the letter begs and pleads with the soul not to part from it.

The letter says to the soul: "How could you allow yourself to become separated from me, considering the great bond of love between us? See my precious beauty, my radiance, my splendor and glory! How could you tear yourself away from me and leave me? True, you have to continue with the prayer and gather more precious treasures and delights. But how can you separate yourself from me and forget me? At least see to it that, wherever you go afterwards, you never forget me or become cut off from me."

All the more so when one finishes a whole word: the word pleads and entreats in the same manner, caressing and embracing the soul, refusing to let the soul move on. Yet the truth is that one must go on: there are many more words to be said and many more blessings and prayers to be recited before the conclusion of the service.

The solution is to make the whole prayer into one - to make it into a single unity, so that each individual utterance contains all the utterances making up the whole prayer. From the beginning of the prayer to the end it should all be one, so that when you reach the very last word of the prayer you will still be standing at the very first word of the prayer. This way you can pray the entire prayer and never be separated from even the first letter of the prayer.

Likutey Moharan I, 65

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Shining truth into the darkness

"The wicked walk on every side" (Psalms 12 :9) . This means that the unholy surrounds the holy, because "God made the one corresponding to the other" (Ecclesiastes 7:14) . This applies especially to someone who has already succumbed to the temptation to sin and is so attracted to the unholy that this is where his place is, God forbid. "The wicked" - in the form of strange thoughts, feelings and temptations - have this person surrounded "on every side."

When such a person experiences a spiritual arousal and wants to return to God, he finds it very difficult to pray and express himself to God because of all the strange thoughts and feelings surrounding him on every side. Each person experiences this in his own way. One finds it impossible to bring out the words before God with the proper reverence, love and vitality. None of

one's words and prayers are able to penetrate the screens and barriers separating one from God, and they remain down below.

Only when a person repents with genuine honesty and sincerity will he be able to express himself acceptably with words of reverence and love springing from the depths of a heart truly aroused. Then his radiant words will break through all the barriers and coverings. And with them all the words and prayers that remained below until now will also ascend.

How does one achieve this? The key is through truth, and everything else depends on this. You must follow the path of truth - on your own level. For, "The seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, is truth!" (*Shabbat* 55a, *Yoma* 69b) . Truth is the foundation of everything from beginning to end. Truth is the head, the middle and end of the entire creation.

When a person attains truth, it is as if God's own light is clothed in him, since truth is God's seal. Someone like this can rightly say, "God is my light and my salvation" (Psalms 27:1) . Because God shines to him, he can find plenty of openings to escape the darkness and exile in which he is imprisoned.

In reality many openings exist there. The Rabbis said, "If a person comes to defile himself, there are many openings for him" (*Yoma* 38b, *Menachot* 29b) . If there are many openings through which a person can fall, it follows that there are also many openings through which he can escape. It is just that "the fool goes in darkness" (Ecclesiastes 2:14) : he simply does not see the exits, and he remains tied and bound, unable to escape. That is, until he succeeds in speaking to God truthfully. When he does this, the words radiate with light and God shines to him.

It is only then that "the opening of Your words shines light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Psalms 119:130) . For the shining words themselves - words of truth - show the person the opening. "It gives understanding to the simple" - because those simple people who are caught in darkness and cannot see how to get out will thereby understand and see the opening and then they can escape the darkness. "Saying to the prisoners, 'Go forth!' and to those who are in darkness, 'Be revealed!'" (Isaiah 49:9) .

But the truth has to be the complete truth: clean, clear and without blemish.

Anyone with sense and understanding should pray all his days to be able to say one true word to God the way he should, even just once in his life.

If you are trying to pray but cannot say a single word because you feel you have sunk in to confusion and darkness, try to say what you say with truth, even on the most elementary level. For example, say the words "God help me!" truthfully, even if you cannot say them with any real enthusiasm. Just say the words honestly in whatever way you can. With a true word you will be able to see the openings in the darkness and escape into the light so as to pray properly.

Praying to impress

One who is dependent on other people finds it easier to pray alone, because as soon as he prays with others he becomes subject to all kinds of false motives. His prayer becomes a lie because he feels he must put on an act in order to impress others. This is because he needs them for something. Some depend on others for their livelihood. Even a person of independent means may still depend on others for his own self-esteem, because he needs their approval or adulation. Such needs can easily cause a person to put on a false act for others as he prays.

Someone else may be more honest. Being somewhat in awe of God, he would feel ashamed to act out a cheap lie in his prayers merely to impress. He would like to pray truthfully - but his truth is excessive. And therefore it is not really the truth, because there is no such thing as excess truth: there is only one truth.

Such a person would be ashamed to think of himself as lying outright in his prayers, so he tries to cover over the lie with truth. For example, he may want to make a gesture of piety - perhaps a clap of the hands - to impress someone. Only he is ashamed to do it merely to impress. Accordingly he deceives himself: his evil urge leads him on a trail of thought which persuades him that he really does need to make such a gesture as part of his prayer. He finds a rationalization for his gesture or handclap, a veneer of truth to cover up the lie.

But he has much too much truth. For the fact is that there is only one truth: to pray truthfully to God and God alone. But this person has multiple truths. He uses many different truths to cover the underlying falsehood. This is all because he depends on others, and this is why he is filled with false motives. He produces a truth to persuade himself that his intention is really this or that... Yet in reality there is only one truth.

Likutey Moharan I, 66

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Irrelevant thoughts

Many irrelevant thoughts may come into your mind while you pray. Don't pay any attention to them at all. Simply do your part: say your prayers in the proper order, ignoring all disturbing thoughts.

These extraneous thoughts are actually of great benefit. Without them prayer would be impossible. Tremendous maligning powers seek to denounce our prayers, but these irrelevant thoughts disguise our prayers so that unholy forces disregard them, enabling our prayers to enter on high.

God knows our innermost thoughts. We may have distracting thoughts, yet God knows that in the depths of our hearts, our thoughts are focused only on God. When you pray, your innermost thoughts are always directed toward God. God searches all hearts and He sees this innermost desire. He sees through the disguise and accepts the prayer in love.

"Many thoughts are in man's heart, but God's counsel is what stands" (Proverbs 19:21) .

"Many thoughts are in man's heart" - these are the many extraneous thoughts a person has when he prays. Yet "God's counsel is what stands". This means that there is an innermost point in your heart where your thoughts are directed to God alone. This innermost point is called "God's counsel." Within this point, your intent is to God alone. This can never fail, for "God's counsel is what stands."

You therefore need pay no attention to irrelevant thoughts and distractions. Simply ignore them and continue with your prayers.

Sichot Haran #72

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Distractions

Some people say that if you pray with true inner intention and are wholly focused on your prayers, you should not hear any outside disturbance because your devotion will be strong enough to block out everything else.

This is not true. Even the greatest Tzaddik would be distracted and distressed if, while praying with outstanding intensity and devotion, someone approached him and disturbed or ridiculed him.

Sichot Haran #284

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Where to direct your thoughts

You should force yourselves to pray with great devotion, powerfully binding your thoughts to each word. True devotion means listening attentively to the words you are saying.

It is not advisable to try to pray using the mystical intentions of the prayers as found in the Kabalistic writings - and this applies even to people who are fit to study such works.

Perfect prayer is when you say the words of the prayers with complete simplicity: *Baruch Atah*. "Blessed are You." Listen carefully to what you are saying; concentrate on the meaning of the words.

It is ridiculous to say that one should not force oneself to pray. Quite the contrary: you should pray with all your might and put all your strength into each letter of the words of the prayers.

As to the disturbing thoughts that occur during prayer: ignore them completely. Keep doing your part, going systematically through the service in order, paying no attention to any distractions. Turn your mind away from all such thoughts completely.

The prayer service and limbs of the body

It is impossible to pray the entire service with complete devotion, but each person can say a certain portion of the service with genuine feeling. One person may recite the passages dealing with the Temple incense offering with great feeling. Someone else may pray best during the Psalms of *Pesukey DeZimra*, the "Verses of Song".

This is because the physical human body has a spiritual counterpart, each of whose limbs corresponds to a portion of the prayer service. Each person is associated with a particular limb of the transcendental form. When he reaches the section of the service relating to his limb, he is aroused to great devotion.

Sometimes you may pray a section of the service with great devotion but suddenly the feeling vanishes and you find it impossible to pray properly. Don't be discouraged, because this is inevitable: it means you have left your part of the spiritual form. For the rest of the service, just try to say each word with perfect simplicity.

Like a child learning to read

Sometimes you may make great efforts but find that you still cannot pray. No matter what, do not allow yourself to become discouraged. This is the most important rule of all. Force yourself to say each word of the service with complete simplicity, like a child who is just learning to read. Keep saying the words. In most cases God will then touch your heart with a flame and you will pray with great feeling.

However, you should not make a test of this. Deep inside yourself you well know that you are very remote from true prayer, which is supremely exalted. Prayer is even above the study of Torah. How can you be worthy to serve God in such a lofty way?

Do your part. Simply begin the words of the service - *Adon Olam Asher Malach*, "Lord of the world, Who ruled."

Listen carefully to every word you say. Concentrate on the meaning of the words without letting your thoughts stray. Keep your mind focused entirely on the words of the service. Follow the order of the service, even if you feel no inspiration. Continue word by word, page by page, until God sends you true arousal. And even if you complete the entire service without any feeling, you can still say an extra Psalm or prayer with devotion.

Be sure to offer your prayers in a state of joy and with a happy tune. Put yourself in a cheerful mood before you start your prayers. Seek out your good points, using them to bring joy to your prayers.

The main thing is truth. You may encounter all kinds of distractions when you want to pray, but hold on to truth. No matter what your level, you can speak the simple truth in your prayers. Take this advice to heart and you will certainly be worthy of true prayer.

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If trouble strikes

What people do at the end, I want you to do at the very outset. People usually pray when they see that all other means have failed. But you should pray at the very outset, when trouble first strikes.

Siach Sarfey Kodesh 1-293

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If a dead man could come back

If a dead person were allowed back into this world to pray, he would definitely pray most beautifully, with all his strength.

Likutey Moharan II, 111

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MUSIC, SONG AND DANCE

In this material world, especially if we have sinned and are very far from God, the main way to attach ourselves to God is through melody and song.

Likutey Halachot, Nesiat Kapayim 5:6

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It is good to get into the habit of livening yourself up with a tune.

Holy melodies are very exalted, having great power to stir the heart and draw it to God.

Even if you cannot sing well, you can still inspire yourself with a tune. Sing it as best as you can, in privacy if you wish. The loftiness of melody is beyond all measure.

Sichot Haran #273

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Music and prophetic spirit

A holy melody can bring you to the level of prophecy. Music is the foundation of true attachment to God.

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It was through music that prophetic spirit rested upon the prophets (see II Kings 3:15) . A musical instrument is a vessel containing air (*ruach* , spirit). The air in the instrument is a mixture of good and bad. On the one hand there is the anxious, depressed spirit - a bad spirit, as we find in the case of King Saul: "and an evil spirit terrified him" (I Samuel 16:14) . On the other hand, there is a good spirit, as it is written: "Let Your good spirit lead me in an even land" (Psalms 143:10) . This good spirit is the spirit of prophecy: holy spirit. But when good and bad are mixed up, it is impossible to receive true prophecy.

The musician playing the instrument must gather the good spirit - the spirit of prophecy - and separate it from the sad, depressed spirit. He must understand music in order to know how to sift out and gather up the parts of the spirit and put them together in order to construct the melody, namely the joy, in order to build the good, prophetic spirit, which is the opposite of the depressed spirit. He must move his hand up and down the instrument in order to channel the joy and bring it to perfection.

And when the prophet hears a melody from an expert musician, he receives a spirit of prophecy, the very spirit that the musician gathered with his hand and separated from the depressed spirit. Thus the attendants of the depressed King Saul said to him of the young David: "And he will play with his hand and it will be good for you" (I Samuel 16:16) .

Accordingly, by playing the musical instrument with one's hand, one sifts, purifies and elevates the good spirit and separates it from the bad. This is the way to overcome the evil spirit of folly that seeks to spoil and upset the good, prophetic spirit. The bad spirit is dissipated through the joy that comes through the hand of the player.

For the root of the power of the spirit of folly lies in sadness and depression. Therefore the only way to receive a holy spirit of prophecy is through joy - the joy created by the hand of the player. Thus, "It was when the musician played that the hand of God was upon him" (II Kings 3:15) ; "and he will play with his hand and it will be good for you". The player who has the power of the hand can sift out the good spirit from the bad and thereby subdue the evil spirit.

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Melody, health and healing

The life and workings of the body are governed by ten basic pulses. These in turn are vitalized by ten kinds of melody emanating from the soul. Negativity, anxiety and depression weaken the pulses, and this can cause illness. But when the melody of the soul is joyous, it strengthens the vitality of the pulses and brings health to the body.

Likutey Moharan I, 24

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Sweetening decrees

Melody sweetens the harsh judgments. When you sing the words of your prayers in a clear, bright voice, the Indwelling Presence is robed in radiant garments, and this is how the harsh judgments are sweetened

Likutey Moharan I, 42

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When harsh decrees threaten Israel , they can be sweetened through dancing and hand- clapping.

Likutey Moharan I, 10

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Joy of the mitzvah

Dancing for joy over a mitzvah is a wonderful thing. There are times when it is a mitzvah to drink wine, as on Shabbat and festivals, or at weddings and other religious celebrations. If you drink on such occasions, do not drink to excess but in moderation. Your intention should be for the sake of Heaven, to experience the true joy of Israel , which is to rejoice in God, who chose us from all the nations.

As the joy begins to radiate within you, it will spread to your legs until you literally start to dance for joy. This will banish the forces of impurity, which take hold of the legs, mitigating harsh judgments and enabling you to receive blessings.

The fervor with which you dance is "a fire offering, a sweet savor to the Lord" (Numbers 28:8) . However, when a person dances with the heat of the evil inclination, this is a "strange fire" (Leviticus 10:1) , while the wine he drinks is the "wine of drunkenness", which allows the forces of impurity to take hold .

Holy dance has the same power to sweeten harsh judgments as a redemption performed by a Tzaddik.

Likutey Moharan I, 41