**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**The Path of the Piaseczner Rebbe**

**By Dr. Ron Wacks**

**Shiur #45: During Prayer (continued)**

**The Great Miracle**

We can grasp something of the intensity of the inner work that is required of a person at prayer from the following excerpt, which R. Kalonymus cites in the name of the Ba’al Shem Tov:

It is a great kindness on the part of the blessed God that a person remains alive after praying, for in the natural course of events he should die, having no life-force left, after spending it all on prayer in the intensity of his *kavana*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

A different version of this teaching reads:

In the name of the Ba’al Shem Tov, of blessed memory, who said that it is a great miracle when a person remains alive after prayer, that his soul did not leave him with the intensity of his cleaving.[[2]](#footnote-2)

One way of explaining the danger involved is that the soul might disengage from the body as a result of the intensity of longing for unification with God, and that God in His mercy grants a person vitality that keeps him alive.[[3]](#footnote-3) Another explanation focuses on the sorrow of completing one’s prayer: “When he remembers that following prayer, he returns to this world, it is truly a miracle that his soul remains within him…”[[4]](#footnote-4) The unbearable pain of “parting from God” with the conclusion of the prayer is a threat to a person’s continued existence.

R. Kalonymus teaches that this state is not reserved for people of the stature of the Ba’al Shem Tov, but rather belongs to everyone. In other words, every person should experience such utter closeness to God when he prays that he feels and appreciates the Divine kindness of being kept alive afterwards.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This great longing in prayer is expressed in other ways, too. A person’s main encounter with God takes place during prayer. One should therefore wait with anticipation for the time for prayer, when he can pour out his heart and tell God everything that is happening in his life, like a child who waits to tell his father what he is experiencing and to request his help where necessary.[[6]](#footnote-6) The climax of this sense of closeness comes at the end of the prayer:

Therefore the crux of the *yichud* (unification)[[7]](#footnote-7) is at the end of the prayer, in other words, in the *Shemonah Esrei*, which comes after the *Pesukei De-Zimra* (psalms of praise) and recitation of the *Shema*, because the Jewish soul bursts forth there with all its strength with love and awe, wanting and longing.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The “unification” is an expression of the longing of the soul to cleave to and become one with God. The entire course of the prayer leads up to this climax, and after such intense spiritual activity it is clear why it is only through Divine mercy that the worshipper is still alive and able to go on.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. R. Dov Ber of Mezeritch, *Likutim Yekarim* (Jerusalem, 5741), *ot* 2, 31; *Derekh Ha-Melekh*, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ba’al Shem Tov al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem, 5767), Introduction, *ot* 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Concerning *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) in prayer and how a person is spared this death, see the fascinating teaching by R. Tzadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin, *Dover Tzedek* (Bnei Brak, 5733), *Acharei Mot*, *ot* 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Derekh Ha-Melekh*, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The term is meant here in the sense of “*devekut*” – closeness. For more on this *yichud*, see R. Waks, *Be-Sod Ha-Yichud: Ha-Yichudim Be-Haguto Ha-Kabbalit-Chassidit shel R. Chaim ben Shelomo Tyrer Mi-Czernowitz*” (Los Angeles, 2006), pp. 155-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Derekh Ha-Melekh*, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)