



THE WINGS OF THE SUN

Traditional Jewish Healing in Theory and Practice

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Chapter 13

The Ten Kinds of Melody

1. The Beggar who had no hands

Rebbe Nachman used his stories as the medium for some of his most exalted Torah teachings. Healing in general, and the ten pulses and ten kinds of melody in particular, are central themes in the last major story Rebbe Nachman ever told, the tale of the Beggar who had no hands in the story of the Seven Beggars. The Beggar with no hands relates:

"You think there is something wrong with my hands. Actually, there's nothing wrong with my hands. I have great power in my hands. But I do not use the power in my hands in this physical world, since I need this power for something else entirely. Regarding this I have the word of the Water Castle.

"Once a number of people were sitting together and each one boasted about the power in his hands. One boasted that he had a certain power in his hands, another boasted that he had a different power. Finally, one boasted that the power in his hands was such that if an arrow were shot, he could retrieve it. The power in his hands was so great that he could bring an arrow back even after it was shot.

"I challenged him: 'What kind of arrow can you retrieve? There are ten types of arrows. This is because there are ten types of poisons. When someone shoots an arrow, he first coats it with some type of poison. There are ten types of poison. When one coats the arrow with the first type of poison, it does a certain degree of harm. If the arrow is coated with the second type of poison, it does worse harm. Thus there are ten types of poison, each more harmful than the other. That's why there are ten types of arrows. All the arrows are actually the same, but since they are rubbed with different poisons and there are ten types of poison, it is considered as if there are ten types of arrows.'

"That's why I asked him what kind of arrow he could bring back. I also asked him if he could retrieve the arrow only before it struck its victim, or if he could bring it back even after it had struck. To the second question, he replied, ' I can retrieve an arrow even after it hits its target.' But his answer to the first question was that he could retrieve only one type of arrow. I said to him, ' If so, then you cannot heal the Queen's Daughter. If you can only turn back one type of arrow, you cannot heal her.'

"Another of those present boasted that he had such power in his hands that whenever he took or received something from someone else, he was actually giving to him. For him the very act of receiving was an act of giving. Therefore, he was a master of charity. I asked him what type of charity he gave, since there are ten types of charity. He replied that he gave a tithe. I said to him, ' If so, you cannot heal the Queen's Daughter. You cannot even approach the place where she is; you can go through only one wall in the place where she is staying. You cannot get to where she is.'

"One of those present boasted about the power in his hands, saying that there were officials in the world - highly placed people in charge of cities and nations - each of whom needs wisdom. He said that through his hands he could give them wisdom. He did this by laying his hands on them. I asked him, ' What type of wisdom can you confer with your hands? There are ten types of wisdom.' When he specified the kind of wisdom, I said to him, ' If this is the case, you cannot heal the Queen's Daughter. You cannot understand her pulse, since there are ten types of pulse. You can only confer one type of wisdom, and therefore only understand one type of pulse.'

"One of those present boasted that he had such great power in his hands that when there was a stormwind, he could hold it back with his hands. Then with his hands he could make the wind blow with the proper force so that the wind was beneficial. I asked him, ' What kind of wind can you hold with your hands? There are ten kinds of wind.' He specified the type of wind he could hold. I said, ' If that is the case, you cannot heal the Queen's Daughter. You can play only one type of melody. She can be healed only through melody, and there are ten types of melody. But you can play only one type of melody out of these ten.'

"All the people who were there asked me, ' What power do you have?' I replied, ' I can do what you cannot do. In each of the cases you discussed there are nine portions that you cannot accomplish. I can accomplish them all.'

"This is the story: Once there was a king who desired a Queen's Daughter. He made all kinds of plots to capture her, until he finally succeeded and took her captive. Then the king had a dream. The Queen's Daughter was standing over him, and she killed him. When

he woke up, he took the dream to heart. He summoned all the dream interpreters, and they all said that it would come true quite literally: she would kill him.

"The king could not decide what to do with her. If he killed her, it would grieve him. If he sent her away, this would anger him, since then another man would have her. This would frustrate him terribly after having worked so hard to get her, only to see her with someone else. Furthermore, if he exiled her and she ended up with someone else, there would be all the more chance of the dream coming true. With an ally, it would be even easier for her to kill him. Still, he was afraid because of the dream, and he didn't want to keep her near him. The king simply did not know what to do with her. Because of the dream, his love for her gradually waned. As time passed, his desire for her grew less and less. The same was true of her: her love for him declined more and more, until she came to hate him. Eventually she fled.

"The king sent his men to search for her. When they returned, they reported that she was near the Water Castle. It was a castle made of water. It had ten walls, one inside the other, all made of water. The floors inside this castle were also made of water. This castle also had trees and fruit, all made of water. It goes without saying how beautiful this castle was, and how unusual. A castle of water is certainly something wonderful and unusual. It is impossible for anyone to enter the Water Castle. It is made entirely of water, and anyone entering it would drown.

"Meanwhile, the Queen's Daughter was circling the Water Castle. The king was informed of this, and took his army and set out to capture her. When the Queen's Daughter saw them coming, she decided that she would flee into the castle. She would rather drown than be captured by the king and have to stay with him. There was also the possibility that she would survive and succeed in actually entering the Water Castle. When the king saw her fleeing into the water, he said, ' If this is how it is....' He gave orders to shoot her, saying, ' If she dies, she dies.'

"The soldiers shot her and hit her with all ten types of arrows rubbed with the ten types of poison. She ran into the castle and went inside. She went through the gates in the walls of water. The walls of water have such gates. She passed through all ten walls of the Water Castle, until she came to its interior. When she reached there, she fell unconscious.

"And," said the Beggar with no hands, "I heal her. Someone who does not possess all ten types of charity cannot enter all ten walls: he will drown in the water there. The king and his army tried to pursue her, but they all drowned in the water. I, on the other hand, was able to go through all ten walls of water. These walls of water are like the

waves of the sea which stand like a wall. The winds support the waves and lift them up. The ten walls are made up of waves which stand there permanently, but they are lifted up and supported by the winds. I, however, was able to enter through all ten walls.

"I was also able to draw all ten types of arrows out of the Queen's Daughter. I also know all ten types of pulses, and could detect them with my ten fingers. Each of the ten fingers has the power to detect one of the ten types of pulse. I could then heal her through the ten types of melody. And thus I heal her. Therefore I have this great power in my hands...." (Rabbi Nachman's Stories pp.410-34).

The healing power of melody

Rebbe Nachman explained that the Princess in the story is the divine soul in every Jew, which is the "daughter" of the King of the Universe. The soul seeks to escape the "evil king" who holds her captive: this is the evil urge, the animal soul. But the divine soul is weary and faint because of her sins. The sins themselves are the "ten poisonous arrows," corresponding to the ten sefirot of the unholy realm, which gain sway through transgression. In the words of Rebbe Nachman: "Only a very great Tzaddik has the power to enter every place where the soul has fallen and remove all ten arrows from her. In order to heal her, he must be able to discern all ten types of pulse-beat, and he must know all ten kinds of melody, for her main cure is through melody and joy" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #273).

As we saw in the previous chapter, the ten pulse patterns governing the circulation of the blood around the body draw their vitality from the ten sefirot of Abba, Chokhmah - "Wisdom." The Kabbalah view is that illness results from an impairment in the flow of vitality from Abba via the divine soul, registered as a flaw in the pulse. The remedy is to restore the flow of vitality in order to revitalize the pulse and bring physical healing. The question we were left with at the end of the previous chapter was: how can the flow of vitality from Abba be restored?

The story of the Beggar with no hands provides us with the vital clue: the main cure of the soul is through melody and joy. There are ten kinds of melody, and these bring vitality to the ten kinds of pulse. The "ten kinds of melody" are mentioned in the Talmud and Zohar. "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Through ten expressions of praise the book of Psalms was composed: Nitzuach, Nigun, Maskil, Mizmor, Shir, Ashrey, Tehilah, Tefilah, Hoda'ah and Haleluyah" (Pesachim 117a and see Rashi on Psalms 1:1). The Zohar tells us that the ten kinds of melody correspond to the Ten Sefirot (Zohar III, 223b).

Nowhere in Rebbe Nachman's writings do we find a detailed typology of the various possible flaws in the pulse, the particular spiritual and physical maladies corresponding to each one, and the specific "songs" that are the remedy for each of the different kinds of flaws. Presumably, if Rebbe Nachman had thought full knowledge of all the details to be necessary in order to follow his path of health and healing, he would have revealed them. Instead, he made it one of

the most important quests of his life to discover what he called the (Tikkun HaKlali), the General Remedy (see Rabbi Nachman's Tikkun). Rebbe Nachman first began to talk about this in 1805, five years before he passed away, and he discussed it in a number of his teachings.

The General Remedy consists of all the ten kinds of melody together. Initially, Rebbe Nachman taught that any ten psalms contain the ten kinds of melody (Likutey Moharan I, 205). Then in the spring of 1810, shortly before he left Breslov for Uman, Rebbe Nachman revealed ten specific psalms that contain all the ten kinds of melody and are the General Remedy par excellence. The psalms are: 16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137 and 150. Rebbe Nachman's revelation of the Ten Psalms came just a week before he began telling the story of the Seven Beggars (see Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #141, note 468).

Rebbe Nachman saw in the General Remedy a complete remedy for all spiritual flaws. And since these, in his view, are at the root of physical maladies, the General Remedy is an integral part of his healing pathway. He taught:

"There are places that are so fine and narrow that no remedy has the power to penetrate them except through the General Remedy, which injects healing into even the narrowest, finest places. First it is necessary to apply the General Remedy, and through this all the individual flaws will automatically be rectified. It is true that the General Remedy is higher and more exalted than all the individual remedies. But all the different remedies depend on the mind and brain: it is necessary to draw purity from the mind and brain. And the only way to elevate the mind is through the General Remedy. This is why it is first necessary to go to the higher level - the General Remedy - in order to rectify the mind and brain, and through this everything else is automatically rectified" (Likutey Moharan I, 29:4 & 10).

According to this teaching, the healing power of the General Remedy lies in the fact that it "draws purity from the mind and brain" down into the body. We saw in the previous chapter that the life of the body depends on the vitalizing power of Abba, which is clothed in the "life of the brain," and extends into the body through the pulses. If the flow of vitality from Abba is impaired, it is necessary to reach up to this high level in order to restore the flow. It is through the ten kinds of melody making up the General Remedy that this is accomplished. But before we examine the healing power of melody in greater depth, let us first look more closely at what it comes to rectify: flawed simchah.

2. The Number One Destroyer

"All the illnesses people suffer come only because of a lack of joy" (Likutey Moharan II, 24). At first sight Rebbe Nachman's statement is quite surprising. Does he really mean that all illness is caused only by a lack of joy? The human body is amazingly complex. It is enough to look at any medical guide to see the enormous number of conditions and illnesses that can afflict the various body parts and systems. Surely they have all kinds of different causes.

There are bacterial and viral infections - 'flu, diarrhea, measles, chickenpox and many more. Do all these strike only because the people who contract them, many of them children, suffer from a lack of simchah? According to medical authorities, genetic predisposition is an important factor in conditions ranging from Tay-Sachs to cancer, heart and other diseases. How can we say that these too are caused by a lack of simchah? What about the deterioration and degeneration of bodily tissues that comes with age, leading to arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and so on? What about the many medical problems related to people's occupations or the climates they live in? Are these too to be blamed on a lack of simchah? And what about the growing incidence of cancer, leukemia, asthma and other diseases related to the millions of tons of toxic chemicals being poured into the atmosphere as a result of industrial processes, automobile exhaust and so on? Can environmentally caused diseases also be connected with a lack of simchah?

It is not too difficult to name various medical problems that are seeming exceptions to Rebbe Nachman's general statement. But it would be a pity to allow this to obscure the main point Rebbe Nachman is making. Conventional medicine is skeptical about anything that cannot be measured in the blood or seen under a microscope. Western doctors tend to focus on detectible physical changes in the bones, muscles, tendons, organs, skin, nerves, veins, arteries, blood, hormones, etc., etc. Disorders are attributed to the physical intervention of bacteria, viruses, parasites, organic or chemical toxins, excessive intake of fat, inadequate vitamins, and so on. But Rebbe Nachman is not talking about the physical course of disease. He is asking us to pay attention to something even more primary. What is the root cause of the physical problem? What are the underlying mental and spiritual factors that cause the body to become susceptible to illness in the first place?

Atzvut and marah shchorah: depression

In fact, Rebbe Nachman's statement, made almost two hundred years ago, predates much contemporary thinking about the non-physical roots of many kinds of bodily illness. In order to gain a fuller understanding of what Rebbe Nachman is saying, let us first take a look at the terms he uses when talking about the flaw in simchah. In the main, he uses two terms: marah shchorah and atzvut.

The Hebrew term מַרְחָה (marah shchorah) literally means "black bile." The word מַרְחָה (MaRaH) comes from the biblical root מַר (MaR), meaning bitter. Marah appears in the Talmud to refer both to the physical bile (Bava Metzia 107b) and to the kind of irritable, aggressive behavior that was thought to result from an excess of bile (Ketuvot 103b). In Zoharitic, kabbalistic and later rabbinic literature, marah shchorah refers simply to sadness, depression and similar states. It corresponds to the word "melancholy," which derives from two Greek words meaning black bile, congealed blood from the spleen thought to be the cause of sorrow, hopelessness, apathy and withdrawal.

The word אַצְוּת (atzvut) is a noun formed from the biblical root אַצַּו (ATzaV), meaning to be grieved or pained (as in Genesis 3:16, Proverbs 10:22, etc.). But atzvut

does not refer only to what is classified as "clinical depression" in the narrower sense of the term. It also covers a wide variety of other negative states, such as frustration, worry, anxiety, impatience, irritability, fear, aggressiveness and hostility.

In essence, atzvut and marah shchorah are the states we fall into when we fail to find satisfaction and joy in what is (or was in the past, or seems likely to be in the future). They are terms that apply to the various complexes of disappointment, sorrow, sadness, anger, bitterness, aggressiveness, pessimism, withdrawal and the like that may arise when we look at ourselves, our lives and our circumstances, and judge them to have fallen short of the criteria we set for ourselves.

For Rebbe Nachman, the root of atzvut lies in a person's inability to accept the way God is dealing with him or her. "Atzvut is like someone who is angry and enraged, as if he is fulminating against God and complaining against Him for not arranging things the way he wants them to be" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #42). This is a sign of arrogance. It is as if one is saying, "I want to be in complete control! I want to have everything my way" - instead of accepting that God governs all things, that He is good and beneficent, and that everything He sends is for the best.

True health involves more than normal bodily functioning. It is to be vital and alive, not to let our lives go to waste on negativity, frustration and depression. When Rebbe Nachman says that "all the illnesses people suffer from come only because of a lack of joy," he is not necessarily referring only to the kinds of complaints that would be recognized as illnesses by today's medical practitioners. His statement includes all the maladies - mental, psychological and spiritual as well as physical - that shorten and destroy people's lives.

Atzvut and the body

Yet Rebbe Nachman is not speaking only of spiritual maladies, but also of actual physical illnesses. It is obvious that atzvut and the confusion, irritability, rash impulsiveness and carelessness that may accompany it lie behind many of the tragic fatalities and injuries caused by all kinds of accidents. In addition, as the underlying reason for many people's excessive eating, smoking and drinking, etc., atzvut is the root cause of much of the heart disease, cancer and other health problems ravaging our societies.

But atzvut can have an even more direct effect upon the body. Significantly, the very word atzvut has definite physical connotations, as in the verse, "He binds up their wounds (atzvoteyhem)" (Psalms 147:3). The first time the Hebrew root appears in the Bible is when God said to Eve, "I will greatly multiply your pain and travail: in pain shall you bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). Pain is felt through the nerves, and thus (ATzVut) is connected with the Hebrew word (ETzeV), which means a "nerve."

The nerves are the communication system between the mind and brain on the one hand and the rest of the body on the other. Not only does the nervous

system carry information to the brain from our skin, sense organs, muscles, blood vessels and internal organs. It also includes the so-called efferent neurons that carry orders away from the brain to influence specific body parts and systems in particular ways. The somatic nervous system transmits motor signals to the skeletal muscles, initiating movement. The autonomic nervous system controls involuntary, unconscious functions such as our breathing rate and blood circulation, digestion and the secretions of hormones that govern critical bodily processes. There are two divisions of the autonomic nervous system: the sympathetic and parasympathetic. In the simplest terms, the work of the sympathetic could be said to be involved with "arousal," while that of the parasympathetic is involved with "calming."

The sympathetic nervous system is perhaps the most direct link between our minds and our bodies, translating emotional states almost instantaneously into physical changes in the body. The sympathetic nervous system responds especially to anxiety, fear and anger. The effect of these is to send nerve impulses causing the release of stimulatory hormones that influence bodily functioning in a variety of ways. The heart rate speeds up, the lungs move more rapidly, the entire digestive system is inhibited, from the salivary glands (causing the dry mouth associated with anxiety) to the entire twenty-five feet of the intestines. The liver releases large quantities of stored sugar into the blood stream, making more glucose available to the skeletal muscles, increasing their contraction, while the entire body tends to be drawn into a defensive half-crouch, with the shoulders and head thrust forward, the abdomen tightly drawn in, the knees bent, hands tense, and the eyes moving rapidly.

In face of a real threat, this so-called "fight or flight response" is entirely appropriate. It gears the body for a burst of action either to confront the danger head on, or physically run away to escape it. The problems arise when our everyday fears and anxieties lead to the same response without our having any direct outlet for energetic action. Our blood remains flooded with sugar and arousing hormones, leaving us with a shaky, overstimulated feeling. Our muscles stay tensed and our heart rate and blood pressure remain unnecessarily high long after the initial stimulus. This is where mental anxiety turns into chronic physical tension.

Stress and illness

The role of stress in many cases of cardiovascular disease - the chief cause of premature death in the industrialized world - has now been established beyond all doubt. Adrenaline (or epinephrine), the hormone produced by stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system, releases fats into the blood that may end up in the plaque that blocks the coronary arteries. Another hormone, noradrenaline, causes blood platelets to clump together, increasing the chances of a blood clot that could precipitate a heart attack. When released in large quantities, as in the case of hostile encounters, noradrenaline can lead to heart rhythm disturbances that can sometimes be fatal.

The part played by anxiety and tension in many other physical conditions is also

well documented. Medical authorities acknowledge that some eighty percent of digestive disorders, from nervous indigestion and stomach ulcers to colon cancer, have no obvious physical cause. Stress can be a factor in diabetes, thyroid failure and many other disorders. Doctors point to worry, frustration, financial insecurity and marital discord as the most usual conditions that bring on arthritis. Excessive muscular tension can distort the body in innumerable ways, giving rise to chronic fatigue, all kinds of back pain, neuralgia, migraine and a host of other problems.

The physiological effects of the various manifestations of atzvut - from "frayed nerves," negativity and aggressiveness to chronic depression and despair - are the subject of the new science of psychoneuroimmunology, which investigates the influence of mental factors on the functioning of the body's immune system. The advent of AIDS has highlighted the importance of a healthy immune system in fending off disease by showing what happens when immunity is weakened. A growing body of evidence points to the decisive role of mental states and attitudes in ailments ranging from colds and 'flu to cancer.

No one today disputes the damaging effects on health of habitual overindulgence, heavy smoking, drinking and other forms of abuse, all of which are clearly rooted in atzvut. But while the more subtle long-term effects of demoralization, despondency and other forms of conscious and unconscious atzvut may be far more difficult to measure, this does not make them any less significant. They may be precisely the factors that explain why one member of a family with a "genetic predisposition" to a particular illness succumbs while other members of the same family do not, or why some people in a toxic environment develop certain diseases while others remain healthy.

The environment

Looking more globally, the growing menace of environment-related diseases may seem less bound up with any special lack of simchah in the innocent victims than with the overall contamination of the atmosphere by the thousands of chemicals used in contemporary industrial processes and everyday life. Scientific understanding of how many of these substances affect human beings is still elementary. Even so, there is little doubt that pollution is the main factor behind the steady increases in industrialized countries in the incidence of all kinds of cancers, asthma, birth defects and a variety of insidious problems of the nervous system (fatigue, faulty memory, inability to concentrate, irritability, etc.).

Yet if we look beyond the manifest problem of degradation of the environment to the mechanisms that drive it - the appetite for ever greater consumption, and especially the mindless thirst for maximum profits regardless of the long-term consequences - we see that their roots lie in the profound lack of simchah that pervades our society and culture as a whole. It is the absence of true simchah that fuels the insatiable craving for wealth, resources and territory that is the cause not only of environmental despoliation but also of most of the conflict within and between nations in our tortured world. Thus the stricken Princess in Rebbe Nachman's story of the Beggar with no hands symbolizes not

only the individual Jewish soul but the Divine Presence itself, which has been all but driven from the world by the arrows of global atzvut, manifest in the rampant materialism, nihilism, hatred, violence and other ills afflicting our societies.

3. Holding back the stormwind

In the story of the Beggar with no hands, the Beggar relates: "One of those present boasted that he had such great power in his hands that when there was a stormwind, he could hold it back with his hands. Then he could make the wind blow with the proper force, so that the wind was beneficial." The person with this power in his hands specifies which type of wind he could hold, but the Beggar replies, "If so, you cannot heal the Queen's Daughter. She can be healed only through melody, and there are ten types of melody. But you can play only one type of melody out of these ten."

The "stormwind" is a graphic symbol for atzvut, the ravaging force that shortens and destroys so many lives, upsetting and distorting the vital pulse, causing weakness, illness and death. In the words of the Tikkuney Zohar:

"There is a pulse pattern that stems from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is the root of the good and evil inclinations - 'the blade of the sword that was constantly turning' (Genesis 3:24), changing from a staff into a serpent and from a serpent into a staff (cf. Exodus 4:2-4). The beat of the good inclination brings health and healing to all the limbs and organs of the body, while the beat of the evil inclination causes sickness. Whichever is stronger dominates. If a person's merits are greater, the beat changes from a serpent to a staff, kindness prevails, and his whole body is healed. But if his sins are greater, the beat changes from a staff to a serpent and bites his limbs all over, causing pain and disease....

"But there is a pulse from the Evil Tree which has no good in it at all. From here comes forth a stormwind that ravages the human body - 'a mighty wind that shatters mountains and breaks the rocks' (Kings I, 19:11). The 'mountains' are the bones of the body while the 'rocks' are the flanks. This stormwind comes forth recklessly without measure or limit, 'and the ship was likely to be broken' (Jonah 1:4). The 'ship' is the body. This ship tosses and turns on the waves of the sea. The waves are the ten lower crowns [the ten sefirot of the side of unholiness]..." (Tikkuney Zohar #69, 108b).

What we learn from the words of the Beggar in Rebbe Nachman's story is that the key to healing lies in taking this "stormwind" of atzvut - the source of the flaw of the pulse - and "holding it back with one's hands" in order to "make the wind blow with the proper force, so that the wind will be beneficial." The "stormwind" itself is turned into a "melody" which enlivens and restores the pulse, bringing healing.

What does all this really mean? How is the "stormwind" of atzvut held back with

one's hand and turned into a "melody"? And how does this relate to healing in terms that we can understand?

Rhythm and melody

Let us begin by considering music. We are all familiar with the amazing power of music to sweep us up into its mood and rhythm. We may be in no particular mood to start with, or even depressed and full of negativity. But when we suddenly hear a catch of lively music or a song, the beat begins to take over, and before we know it, we are tapping and moving to the music. Our whole energy is transformed and our low spirits forgotten. Our mood is now the mood of the music. Lovers of all kinds of music can attest to its power to mold their deepest sensibilities and become a part of their very selves.

Even without a melody line, a forceful rhythm soon draws people under its spell and can hold them enthralled for long periods, as can be seen with native African and South American drummers. But rhythm alone soon becomes boring. Music's power to move and entrance lies primarily in the melody. The melody line itself calls for an appropriate rhythm. The rhythm plays a vital role in establishing the mood and energy of the music. But it is the melody that really speaks to the heart and soul. In Torah terms, the melody is "higher" than the rhythm. Holy music is far more than incidental entertainment. A holy melody contains exalted wisdom. In the words of Rebbe Nachman: "Know that every wisdom in the world has its own unique song and melody, and it is from this song that this wisdom is actually derived. And so from level to level, for a higher wisdom has an even more exalted song and melody" (Likutey Moharan I, 64:5).

The relationship between rhythm and melody corresponds to the relationship between the Hebrew vowels on the one hand, and the (taamim), the tunes or chants to which the Torah text is traditionally sung, on the other. In the previous chapter we saw that the Hebrew letters are like bodies that come to life only when animated by the vowels, which give them "soul," enabling them to function together to form meaningful structures. The vitality that the vowels breathe into the letters parallels the vitality that the pulse gives to the human body. Indeed, as we saw, the pulse patterns themselves exhibit the same forms as the Hebrew vowel signs. The vowels correspond to the "rhythm."

However, the vowels are considered to be merely a low level of soul. This means that they enable the letters to function together to form whole words, but no more. Individual, isolated words possess only a limited power to communicate. Fuller, more subtle communication depends upon the arrangement of words into the meaningful structures we call sentences. In the Torah text, the patterns of words in each verse and the way they work together to communicate whole ideas is governed by the taamim - melodies - which are seen as a higher level of soul.

In the words of the Tikkuney Zohar:

"The letters are the nefesh (the lowest part of the soul). They are the

vessel for the vowels (which are the ruach, "wind" or "spirit," a higher part of the soul). But above them is the neshamah (the "breath," a yet higher part of the soul), which is a crown over all the letters and vowels. And from this crown come all the individual crowns of all the letters and vowels: these are the taamim, the chants that give movement to the letters and vowels." [The "crowns" mentioned here are not to be confused with the tagin - "crowns" - over certain letters, which are on a lower level than the vowels.] (Tikkuney Zohar #69, 108a).

The vowels that animate the letters correspond to the rhythm of a piece of music, which is what makes the difference between a meaningless succession of sounds - the individual notes - and an expressive progression of beats. Similarly, in the human body, it is the rhythm of the pulse that governs the metabolic rate and harmonious functioning of all the different limbs and organs. However, in the Torah text, the taamim, the tunes or melodies, are on an even higher level than the vowels. It is the taamim that determine the overall sense of the text and what it communicates, just as in music it is the melody line that conveys the essential message. Similarly, in the human being, the neshamah level of the soul - which expresses itself through and is influenced by melody - is higher than the ruach, which corresponds to rhythm and expresses itself in the pulse. Since melody is on a higher level, it has the power to influence and alter the pulse. This is the meaning of Rebbe Nachman's statement that the various types of melody "enter into the ten different pulses of the human body, giving them life" (Likutey Moharan II, 24).

We saw in the previous chapter that the human pulse, which governs all our vital processes, is a garb for the wisdom of Abba, which channels vitality into all the worlds. A flaw in the pulse is a flaw in the flow of wisdom: YUD, the ten sefirot of Abba, are turned away, causing DeVoY, illness. It is because holy melody contains exalted wisdom on the level of neshamah that it is the remedy for a flaw in the pulse, which is on a lower level, that of ruach. As Rebbe Nachman said in explaining the General Remedy: "It is first necessary to go to the higher level in order to rectify the mind and brain, and through this everything else is automatically rectified" (Likutey Moharan I, 29). The flawed pulse is rectified by "drawing purity from the mind and brain," and this is accomplished through the power of holy melody.

The pulse is a ruach, the "wind" or "spirit" that gives life to the human body. When the pulse is flawed, it is because this ruach has turned into a ruach se'arah, a "stormwind," because of atzvut. The art of healing is to "hold back the stormwind with one's hands" in order to "make the wind blow with the proper force, so that the wind will be beneficial." The "stormwind" - the negative spirit of atzvut - must be transformed into a holy melody that will enliven and restore the pulse, bringing healing. But how is this done? What is the power in the hands that is needed to accomplish this - the power that the Beggar in the story possessed to perfection?

How songs are made

In the following passage, Rebbe Nachman speaks about how a musician makes

melodies - by picking out the "good notes." The player's ability to create inspiring melodies depends on the skill in his hand, because it is with his hand that he chooses the right notes:

"It was through music that a spirit of prophecy would rest upon the prophets (as in Kings II, 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' (Samuel I, 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 is the spirit of prophecy, holy spirit. But when good and bad are mixed up, it is impossible to receive true prophecy.

"The person playing a musical instrument gathers together the good spirit, the spirit of prophecy, and separates it from the anxious, 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, so as to build the good spirit, the spirit of prophecy, which is the opposite of the depressed spirit. He has to move his hand up and down on 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 in 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' (Samuel I, 16:16).

"Thus by playing the musical instrument with one's hand, one sifts out, 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 which comes through the hand of the player. For the root of the power of the spirit of folly lies in anxiety 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, as it is written: 'And it was when the musician played that the hand of God was upon him' (Kings II, 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 can thereby subdue the evil spirit" (Likutey Moharan I, 54:6).

Clearly this passage is more than an analysis of the art of the instrumentalist in the literal sense. The musical instrument is a metaphor for ourselves and our lives. We ourselves are the players. The question is: how do we play ourselves? How do we play our lives? For the way we play governs the spirit that fills our minds and hearts, putting its stamp on every facet of our experience in this world.

A musical instrument, a guitar for example, is essentially a soundbox. Plucking or strumming the strings sets the air vibrating. Potentially, the air can vibrate in an infinite variety of ways. The sounds that come out may be sweet, harmonious and pregnant with meaning, or raucous, dissonant and senseless, depending on the player. The art of playing lies in knowing how to move one's hands up and down the instrument in order to tense the strings exactly the right amount, neither more nor less, and to pick out just the right notes in the right combinations.

Similarly, our lives and personalities are full of potential. The "air" we set vibrating with our various thoughts, words and actions is both our own inner consciousness and the atmosphere that surrounds us in our various relationships and in all the different situations we face as we go through life. The vital question is: which notes do we play? Which thoughts and feelings do we choose to dwell on? What attitudes do we take towards situations and events? How do we talk about things? About ourselves? About others? What initiatives do we take? What responses do we make?

Every one of our thoughts, words and deeds is a note in the far greater symphony of life. As long as we play with a little care and good sense, we have the power to fill ourselves and the world around us with vibrations of grace, beauty and holiness. But the fact is, there are few born players. Many people carry on playing regardless of how the sounds come out, blithely unaware of the ugly din they may be creating. Some of us have uneasy feelings about the way we are playing. We start listening more carefully - only to discover a disturbing cacophony within ourselves and all around us. We take a hard look at ourselves, and wonder if we ever played a right note in our lives.

Searching for the good points

It was precisely to remedy the atzvut caused by this sense of inadequacy and failure that Rebbe Nachman taught his pathway of searching for the good points, "Azamra - I will sing!".

"It is a well-known fact that when a person becomes depressed over his gross physicality and evil deeds and sees how distant he really is from holiness, it generally makes him completely incapable of praying. He cannot even open his mouth. This is because of the depression and heaviness that come over him when he sees the overwhelming distance separating him from God. But through searching for your good points you can give yourself new life. Even if you know you have caused much damage and sinned time after time, you must still search until you find the good points that remain in you" (Likutey Moharan I, 282).

The essence of the search for the good points is to salvage goodness even out of the worst darkness:

"When you start examining yourself, it may seem as if you have nothing good in you at all. You see that you are full of sin, and the

Evil One wants to push you into depression and sadness as a result. Even so, you must not allow yourself to fall - not on any account. Search until you find a little bit of good in yourself. For how could it be that you never carried out a single mitzvah or did anything good in your entire life? You may start to examine this good deed, only to see that it is full of blemishes and devoid of purity. Even so, how is it possible that it contains not even a modicum of good? You have to search until you find some little good point in yourself to restore your inner vitality and attain joy.

"And in just the same way, you must carry on searching until you find yet another good point. Even if this good point is also full of blemishes, still, you must extract some positive point from here too. And so you must go on, searching and collecting additional good points. And this is how melodies are made" (ibid.).

The search for the good points is itself the art of "music-making" as explained in Rebbe Nachman's earlier-quoted teaching about the music-player. Each of the "notes" which the musician plays as he "sifts the good air from the bad" is a good point. And through joining the notes together - collecting more and more good points - a "melody" is formed that dissipates the "bad spirit" of atzvut and causes a holy spirit of joy, prophecy and Godly connection to dwell in us.

The key to finding the good in ourselves, in others and in all the various situations we face in life lies in how we judge things. This is why Rebbe Nachman begins his teaching of "Azamra!" with the rabbinic dictum about judging positively: "Judge all people in the scale of merit" (Avot 1:6). The Hebrew word for "scale" is (kaph), which literally means the palm of the hand. It is the hand that "sifts" and selects. In the same way, we have to train ourselves to use our faculty of judgment to sift through and find the good, not to accuse and condemn. People and situations are always multifaceted. There are usually many ways of viewing and evaluating the same person or situation, both positively and negatively. What aspects do we choose to focus on? What do we "harp" on?

Some people will always go for the negative, castigating themselves, other people, and life in general. But Rebbe Nachman is teaching us a different way: to use our "hand of judgment" to pick out the good at all times. It was the power of positive judgment that the Beggar in the story possessed to perfection, and with this power he was able to hold back the stormwind of atzvut and make it blow with the proper force so as to be beneficial. This was the power with which he healed the Princess.

Ten kinds of song

Our greatest task in life is to become expert "players," to turn this mode of positive judgment into an habitual orientation, so that we are always going from good point to good point. Every single one that we find is a spark of Godliness shining into the world, and a source of true joy. Every mitzvah we do gives us a connection with God's supreme goodness, and then God "rejoices,"

as it were, because His purpose in creating the world - to bestow good upon His creatures - has been fulfilled. This reciprocal joy of God and man is the innermost "point" and purpose of all the mitzvot. This is why each mitzvah is called a "good point": it is our point of connection with God's eternal goodness.

Each good point is a new note in the melody of life. In this world of trial we are constantly faced with "air that is a mixture of good and bad" - ups and downs, ambiguous and difficult situations, new problems. Even our most prized achievements are often followed by relapses into darkness and depression. Our inner worlds, like the outside world, are in a constant state of flux and change. Each day brings its own unique challenges. Each new situation calls for a different way of reaching out to God. All the various ways of connecting to God are included in the ten kinds of melody.

Holy song is the paradigm of devotion to God. The entire creation is a downward emanation from God to man, designed with the purpose of bringing man to connect with God. The climax of creation is when man attains his purpose and sings out joyously to God in recognition and thanksgiving. The ten kinds of melody correspond to the ten sefirot. In one aspect, the ten sefirot are or yashar, "direct light," creative energy that emanates from God in order to bring the universe into being and orchestrate all its workings. But the purpose of creation is that God's creatures should come to know Him and reach out to attain His goodness. Thus in another aspect, the sefirot are or chozer, "returning" or "reflected light." The downward chain through which God reveals Himself to the creation turns into an upward ladder of ascent on which we, His creatures, rise step by step beyond the bounds of the finite until we become totally merged within His unity.

Each of the mitzvot is rooted in the ten sefirot, and thus every mitzvah, each good point, is a "note" in the symphony of man's ascent to God. Each of the different junctures of life calls for a different mode of outreach to God. Sometimes we overflow with thankfulness, sometimes we must acknowledge God's strict justice and superior wisdom. There are times when we cannot see God's goodness at all, and we must search. Sometimes we must look deeply into ourselves in introspection, confession and contrition. There are times when we must work on ourselves without any sense of being assisted. At other times we must cry out for help - or scream in pain. Sometimes we must make requests, at other times express our gratitude. Each of the different modes of outreach is an aspect of the ten kinds of melody. All of them together make up a symphony of joy: "God rejoices in His works" (Psalms 104:31), and "Israel rejoices in his Maker" (ibid. 149:2).

In the words of Reb Noson:

"All closeness and attachment to God comes in essence through calls and cries - our various different prayers, songs, praises, supplications, requests, confessions and appeals to God and our conversations with Him in hisbodedus. All of these are included in the ten kinds of melody. These are the ten modes of prayer that are the foundation of the Book of Psalms. For most of the Psalms are made

up of King David's cries to God and his prayers and appeals to Him to help him carry out His will and escape the turbulent seas of worldly desire and vanity. In the midst of his very cries and screams, King David starts singing, offering praise and thanks to God. All these holy pathways of the Book of Psalms are aspects of the ten kinds of melody, which include all the different prayers, songs and praises offered by the Jewish People in all times and places, and are our essential means of attachment to God.

"All the different calls and cries that make up the ten kinds of melody are experienced through our sense of hearing, because 'you must let your ear hear what you are bringing out of your mouth' (Berakhot 15a). And so too, faith depends on our sense of hearing - the 'hearing' in the heart: understanding. Thus King Solomon said, 'You have given Your servant a hearing heart' (Kings I, 3:9). It is in the heart that we gain our main understanding of the sweetness of faith, each according to his or her unique capacity.

"For God in Himself is exalted beyond all thought or grasp. But in His great compassion, He wanted to benefit His creatures by giving them a taste of the radiance of His Godliness. He therefore 'contracted' His light, as it were, until He put Godly awareness into the hearts of the true tzaddikim in each generation. For these tzaddikim, this awareness is like hearing a voice without being able to see where it is coming from. Thus when the Torah was given, 'you heard the sound of words, but you did not see any image besides the voice' (Deuteronomy 4:12). Even Moses was told by God that 'no man can see Me and live' (Exodus 33:20). If this was true of Moses, how much more is it true of all the other prophets and tzaddikim. Only through 'hearing' can we gain any awareness of God. Thus the prophet says: 'God, I heard Your repute and I was in awe' (Habakuk 3:2).

"This certainly applies to ordinary people like ourselves today. The vitality and holiness we draw from our faith come to us because of our ability to 'hear.' We must listen to the voice of our forebears, who handed down the holy Torah, our holy faith, from generation to generation. We must fulfil all the words of this Torah: 'Shema Yisrael! - Hear, Israel! God is one!' Hear! Because the essence of faith depends on 'hearing' - the hearing in the heart. Herein lies the greatness of the songs and melodies sung by the Jewish People in order to attach themselves to God. All of them are included in the ten kinds of melody - calls and cries that we hear - because the foundation of the Jewish People's attachment to God is through hearing" (Likutey Halakhot, Piriah veRiviah 3 #16).

4. Does simchah really heal?

Rebbe Nachman's "General Remedy" is not a standard technique that can simply be administered like a pill or injection while the patient remains passive.

The Ten Psalms that Rebbe Nachman recommended can certainly be recited with benefit by anyone. But the ten kinds of melody are not so much a matter of specific songs or prayers as a general approach to living - reaching out to God in different ways at different times, and constantly seeking the good. This is an approach to life that requires active involvement on the part of the individual. It must be internalized and cultivated over time.

In the story of the Beggar with no hands, one of those boasting about the power in his hands says that even after an arrow had been shot, he could retrieve it. The Beggar asks him if he could retrieve the arrow only before it struck its victim, or if he also had the power to bring it back and undo its effects even after it had struck. For in order to heal, it is not enough to be able to prevent sickness in the first place, important as this is. The true healer must be able to reverse illness even after the arrows of atzvut have struck and caused actual physical symptoms. While Rebbe Nachman certainly saw simchah as the best possible preventive medicine, he clearly considered the ten kinds of melody to be the remedy for full-blown illness as well, spiritual and physical.

Colossal resources are constantly being poured into research on the medicinal value of all kinds of drugs and therapies. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine how a satisfactory scientific study could be made of the healing effects of deep faith, fervent prayer, joyous Shabbat and festival observance, charity, kindness and wholehearted fulfilment of the other mitzvot. These are hardly the kind of tangible, measurable phenomena that are the grist of scientific investigation. The healing power of simchah is not a scientific claim but a divine promise: "If you will listen carefully to the voice of HaShem your God and do what is right in His eyes and give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you that I have put on the Egyptians, for I, God, am your Healer" (Exodus 15:26).

When someone is brought into the emergency room with all the symptoms of a heart attack or some other major life-threatening illness, it would be grotesque to say, "Sing and be happy, and everything will be fine!" Contemporary medicine has an ever-expanding array of sophisticated drugs and other technologies for effective crisis intervention, saving and prolonging life, fine-tuning vital bodily functions, alleviating pain and enabling people who were in mortal danger to enjoy normal and fulfilling lives.

Yet at the same time, growing numbers of medical doctors as well as alternative healers and psychologists, etc. recognize that patients' will to live, their sense of purpose, optimism and other positive attitudes are key factors in long-term recovery from heart disease, cancer and other medical conditions, as of course they are in recovery from mental and emotional problems, addictions and so on. Heart disease is the number one killer in all the advanced industrial countries. One of the most popular contemporary manuals of recovery gives the following advice:

"The organ most likely to affect your life and to determine the success of your recovery and ultimate return to vibrant good health is that bit of gray matter between your ears. Most of the disability patients

experience comes from anxiety, depression and distress.... One must deal with psychological distress before the very things that can improve health can be effective.... There is an increasing consensus that the angry, hostile Type-A individual is more likely to have a heart attack.... One can cut one's risk of future heart attack in half by making an effort to change behavior.... If you're thinking about something that's making you angry or stressful, think about something else.... Make a conscious effort to make music daily. Hum a tune while you walk. Whistle while you work.... Go out of your way to put some humor in your life. Not once in a while, but routinely" (Robert E. Kowalski, *Eight Steps to a Healthy Heart*).

Today's second major killer in advanced countries is cancer. An American cancer surgeon who has championed the power of positive attitudes and a fighting spirit in the battle against disease writes:

"We don't yet understand all the ways in which brain chemicals are related to emotions and thoughts, but the salient point is that our state of mind has an immediate and direct effect on our state of body.... The onset and course of disease are strongly linked to a person's ability and willingness to cope with stress.... If a person deals with anger or despair when they first appear, illness need not occur.... The simple truth is, happy people generally don't get sick. One's attitude toward oneself is the single most important factor in healing or staying well. Those who are at peace with themselves and their immediate surroundings have far fewer serious illnesses than those who are not.... We can change the body by dealing with how we feel. If we ignore our despair, the body receives a 'die' message. If we deal with our pain and seek help, then the message is 'Living is difficult but desirable,' and the immune system works to keep us alive.... When a doctor cures cancer or some other disease without ensuring that the treatment addresses the patient's entire life, a new illness may appear. Since everyone is subject to external changes, truly effective treatment must get a patient to become the kind of person who can live comfortably and happily in spite of such stresses" (Bernie S. Siegel M.D., *Love Medicine & Miracles* p.28).

The simchah workshop

Rebbe Nachman once spoke at length to a group of his followers about the importance of being joyous, and then said, "Now you have something to make you depressed!" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #155). All this talk about the ten kinds of melody and fervent devotion may well leave us feeling further away than ever from simple heartfelt joy and zest for life as we contemplate the problems we face and the negativity within us. How often do we look at ourselves and feel as if "the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint; from the sole of the foot to the top of the head, nothing is sound - only wounds, bruises and festering sores!" (Isaiah 1:6).

Never is this more so than when illness strikes. Many people facing serious

illness feel as if a sword is pointed at them. As they wonder whether they will live or die and if they will ever again be able to lead a normal life, they are often overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, fear, guilt and anger. The negative aspect of everything looms so large that anything positive seems to wither away into nothingness. Often people know all the right things they should be doing to rally and fight their illnesses, yet they find it impossible to summon the motivational power to do anything! Even the most basic everyday functions seem to require far too much effort, let alone finding the good points and rejoicing in them.

Rebbe Nachman well understood the vicious cycle of heaviness and depression that weighs people down:

"When a person's limbs are heavy with depression, this in turn weighs down on the vital spirit animating the heart, which becomes even weaker. The heartbeat becomes weaker, and then the limbs become even heavier. And because the limbs become heavier, the heartbeat becomes weaker still. And so the cycle continues, until the person's soul goes out of him, God forbid" (Likutey Moharan I, 56:9).

How are we to break out of this vicious cycle? Rebbe Nachman continues:

"Through a deep, heaving sigh one can bring new life to one's spirit, restoring the heartbeat to health and saving oneself from depression. And then the pulse returns to normal in all the limbs..." (ibid.).

The very sigh of sorrow and yearning is itself the first step to redemption. For in the words of the Baal Shem Tov: "When a person recognizes the wounds of his heart and the sickness of his soul, this knowledge itself is his salvation, and this is what heals him, unlike when a person lacks all such awareness and does not realize that he is spiritually sick. Then there is no remedy for his mortal malady" (Keter Shem Tov #25).

Rebbe Nachman's idealized portrait of the joyous Simpleton should not lead us to imagine that only someone who instantly tastes goodness in all things at all times is following the path of simchah, while those struggling with problems and difficulties, negativity and depression have failed. The "music-player" is faced with "bad air" as well as good: it is out of the darkness and evil themselves that he salvages some good. According to Rebbe Nachman, this is the very key to composing the melodies that bring joy and healing.

The point is not to deny our negativity or pretend that our problems and difficulties do not exist. Rather it is to search carefully for more positive ways of viewing them. Even while feeling the pain and constraints of one's situation, one must ask what benefits they may bring, even if those benefits seem very slender and distant. One must learn to reevaluate oneself. Instead of judging oneself primarily in terms of looks, personality, academic, social and financial achievements and the like, one must learn to value one's rock-bottom faith in God, one's yearning for connection with Him, one's basic honesty, desire to help others and so on.

The search for the positive requires time. It should be one of the main components of the hisbodedus that Rebbe Nachman urged everyone to practice regularly. Hisbodedus could be called the workshop of simchah and healing. It is the time to search deeply into ourselves and sift through our conflicting thoughts and feelings in search of the good. We must believe that God is so great that even the lowliest of His creatures are very dear to Him. Even our faltering efforts to carry out His mitzvot are most precious. If we are beset with problems and difficulties, we must have faith that God has sent all of them only out of love, to help us make amends for wrongdoing or to challenge us to rise to our greatest spiritual heights.

Rebbe Nachman recognized how hard it is to attain true spiritual joy, and he therefore emphasized the importance of simple, practical ways of keeping ourselves happy. When he spoke about the ten kinds of melody, he meant not only an exalted pathway of spiritual devotion but also actual song. "Get into the habit of always singing an inspiring tune. Even if you can't sing well, you can still inspire yourself with a melody sung to the best of your ability. The loftiness of melody is beyond measure" (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom #273). The Rebbe urged his followers to sing many zemirot on Shabbat and festivals, and, down to earth as ever, he added: "Even a simple family man can make himself happy with tasty food such as fish and good soup" (ibid. #155). From this we can learn that we need have no hesitation about using permitted physical pleasures to keep ourselves in good spirits.

Innocent jokes and light-heartedness are all part of the path of simchah. "It seems impossible to achieve happiness without some measure of foolishness. One must resort to all sorts of foolish things if this is the only way to attain happiness" (ibid. #20). And if all else fails: "If you are disturbed and unhappy, you can at least put on a happy front. Deep down you may be depressed, but if you act happy, you will eventually be worthy of true joy" (ibid. #74).

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[BACK TO WINGS OF THE SUN HOMEPAGE](#)

[AZAMRA HOMEPAGE](#)

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