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## Getting to Know Your Imagination - 001 Introduction: The Evils of Imagination

### **“Medameh”**

In the soul, there are certain *middos* which stem from our lower, animalistic layer (*nefesh habehamis*) of the soul, and there are also certain *middos* which stem from our G-dly layer (*nefesh elokis*). In between these two layers of our soul is a middle layer, which is also a major part of our soul, called *medameh* - to “resemble”.

In our mind, there are our actual thoughts, called *machshavah*, as well as our power of imagination, which is called *dimayon*. The Vilna Gaon<sup>[1]</sup> writes that our thoughts and our imagination are two different forces of the mind. These are the two general forces of the mind, and there are many details to them, but these are the two basic forces of the mind.

Besides for our thinking abilities of the mind, there is another factor that affects us, and these are the four elements in our soul - earth, water, wind and fire. Earth in Hebrew is called “*adamah*”, which can also be read “*adameh*” - “I will resemble”, a reference to how one has to use his *middos* to resemble the Creator. *Adameh* is the higher function of our power of *medameh*. Man is called *adam* because he comes from *adamah*, but he must eventually become *adameh* - resembling the Creator, through perfecting his character - instead of remaining at his initial level of *adamah*, earth.

Our avodah is to elevate the *middos* of our *nefesh habehamis* to resemble the *middos* of our *nefesh Elokus*. Man’s avodah is to use his power of *medameh* to “resemble” Hashem, through perfecting his character as much as he can. On a deeper level, man’s avodah is to elevate Creation and get the entire Creation to resemble the One Above; this is the higher aspect of *adameh l’elyon*.

The prophets were able to use their power of *medameh* to receive holy visions. They are the prime example of those who succeeded in using *medameh* to become *adameh*; they got their lower *middos* to resemble the *middos* of their *nefesh Elokis*, and therefore they were capable of lofty visions. Although we are not on the level of the prophets, we can still each reach our general goal of “*adameh l’elyon*”, according to our respective level.

### **How Medameh Relates to Middos**

*Medameh* also has the same letters as the word “*middah*” (character trait). This implies that *medameh* serves as a source for our *middos* - it serves to create new *middos* in a person.

In other words, in addition to the *middos* which stem from the *nefesh habehamis* and the *nefesh Elohis*, there are also *middos* which get created from our power of *medameh*. The *middos* of the *nefesh Elohis* are the 13 *middos* which the Torah is expounded with, and there are also 13 higher *middos* than these, which are the 13 *middos* of Hashem. These are our general *middos*. Our *nefesh habehamis* has *middos*, and our *Nefesh Elohis* has the higher *middos*, but in between these two layers of the soul, there is a middle layer, which is called *medameh*. The point of *medameh* in the soul is a source that produces a different kind of *middos* [this refers to imagination, which we will soon discuss].

When we think about what *medameh* is, generally we think that this refers to the fantasies which our mind is capable of – our various *dimyonos* (imagination). But the imagination is only one layer of *medameh*. The higher aspect of *medameh* is *adameh l'Elyon*, to resemble the One Above; the prophets reached the perfection of this level. The lower aspect of *medameh* is when our lower *middos* resemble our higher *middos*. Thus, the fantasies of our brain are only one part of *medameh*.

### ***The Problem of “Guided Imagination”***

Based upon these concepts, we can now understand the problem with “guided imagery” techniques, in which people use imagination to solve their various problems. This kind of therapy originates from non-Jewish sources, and it was unheard of that *Klal Yisrael* should ever make use of it. Let us examine what the problem with this therapy is, what the Torah approach is, and how we are *really* supposed to use our power of imagination.

The Torah approach in using the power of *medameh* is that we can get our *middos* to become perfected and thus resemble the *middos* of Hashem. But the secular world only makes use of the outer layer of *medameh*, which is the imagination; it does not involve self-improvement of our *middos*. Instead, this therapy uses imagination techniques in attempt to solve all problems in the soul. This is erroneous, because since imagination is only a part of soul, it cannot be used to solve all of the problems related to the soul. Instead of emphasizing character refinement and trying to change the animalistic *middos* a person is born with, the emphasis here is on how to use the power of imagination (using various methods of guided imagery) to try and solve all internal problems.

We must clarify when and where our power of imagination is supposed to be used.

If these guided-imagery techniques would only be viewed as a part in the equation of self-improvement, there would be a point in considering these kinds of therapies. But in the way that this kind of therapy is used in the world, it is being used a way to replace the words of our Sages in how we work with our soul. Throughout all the generation, people would work on their *middos*. But the secular world of therapy is using imagination as a way to get rid of problems, placing emphasis on imagination alone, throwing away the part of self-improvement on our *middos*.

Of course, if someone is suffering from his delusions, this need to be fixed [and later we will explain how to do it]. But do not think that using the imagination is everything. It is not the way of our Sages. There are ways of how we can use our imagination for holiness, and there are indeed many levels how to use holy imagination. But if we want to succeed at inner work with using imagination alone, this will not make us into better people.

### ***“Medameh” As It Applies to the Mind and the Heart***

Now we will explain the problem in greater depth.

If people would be aware that imagination and *middos* are two distinct areas in the soul, there would be no assumption whatsoever to use the imagination to fix the *middos*. The imagination and the

*middos* would be seen as two separate parts of the soul, so improving the imagination would not be seen as a solution for fixing *middos*. The reason why people are making the mistake of using guided-imagery is because our imagination itself stems from both the mind as well as the *middos* [therefore, people erroneously think that improving the mind's imagination will also solve the *middos*].

In slightly different but sharper terms, imagination is rooted in the mind, and *middos* are rooted in the heart; and our heart as well contains another source for imagination. Our mind can imagine things that are either evil or holy. Our heart can also imagine things, and it uses the *middos* present in the heart to fuel its own kind of imagination.

If our power of *medameh* \imagination would be entirely in our mind and it wouldn't be coming at all from our *middos*, nobody would consider using the mind's imagination to fix the *middos*, for the imagination and the *middos* would be seen as two separate studies. But the fact is that our *medameh* resides in our heart as well, and our heart is also the source of our *middos*. Therefore, people think that imagination can be used to solve *middos*. It makes sense, but it is a mistake, for as we said, using imagination alone cannot replace the age-old avodah we have to work on our *middos*.

It is written, "And you shall know today, and you shall place it on your heart." We have an avodah to internalize the knowledge of our mind into our heart. If the imagination would be used to internalize the brain's knowledge into the heart, perhaps this would be fine; but the problem is that usually a person will remain with the "knowledge" level and he doesn't get to the "internalization in the heart" level. But even if this would be possible, it still cannot work, because imagination cannot fix our *middos*, as we said.

We have briefly explained what the problem is with using imagination in therapy. It is a problem that is now beginning to fool even b'nei Torah; it is like some "new way" that people have found in which the words of Chazal are being abandoned and replaced, in the hope of trying to improve the entire soul.

### ***The Imagination and the Middos in the Heart***

To say it briefly, there are two parts to our heart. Our heart has the ability to imagine. This is referred to as being "wise of heart", and in more subtle terms, "a heart that understands." Our heart also has *middos* present in it. The fact that our heart imagines things is only one aspect of the heart. The *middos* of the heart can also become expanded by the imagination [for good or for bad].

For example, whenever a person wants something, Chazal say that "One who wants a hundred wants two hundred." Why does a person want more than what he currently has? It's really stemming from imagination. He has a will for something, and his imagination comes and expands that will. He fantasizes about the two hundred dollars; that's one factor. He also has a will for it, which is another factor, and this is simply the trait known as *taavah* (desire). Both of these factors can become influenced by the **imagination**, which will feed the desire and the fantasy.

### ***The Lower and Higher Uses of 'Medameh'***

We will now review our avodah in how we use our power of *medameh*. Now that we have listed the many uses of *medameh*, we will take a look at what the beginning level is to work with, and to where we are supposed to be leading towards.

Man is called *adam*, from the word *adamah*, earth, and alternatively, from the word *adameh*, which refers to the *adameh l'elyon* aspect. When man remains at his initial level of his undeveloped *nefesh hebeheimis*, he resembles the lowly earth, *adamah*. If he uses his imagination for holiness, he uses his aspect of *adameh*. A higher use of *adameh* is if he gets his *middos* to resemble the *middos* of the

*Nefesh Elokis*. An even higher aspect of *adameh* is to resemble the 13 *middos* of the Torah, and the ultimate level is to resemble the *middos* of Hashem. This is general map of *medameh*, beginning from its lowest use to its highest use. [Thus, there are many levels in how we can sanctify our power of *medameh*].

We must therefore know what kind of “*medameh*” we are dealing with and how to use each kind of *medameh*, and what its limitations are.

For example, a person is learning Gemara. Although learning Gemara is learning about the *middos* of the Torah (because there are thirteen *middos* contained in the Oral Torah, which explain the written Torah) and this is a kind of *medameh* that his mind is accessing, this won't necessarily refine his heart's *middos*, because he is only using one aspect of *medameh*.

Thus, whenever we use any of the function of *medameh*, we have to know to where and when it applies. Even when we use *medameh* correctly, we must also be aware that it is only a part of something bigger, therefore, there is never a use of *medameh* that can be used to solve all problems in the soul. Anyone who attempts to use *medameh* as a way to solve everything in his life will therefore never be successful.

There are people who have used guided-imagery therapies to get past their problems and indeed, they have succeeded in healing themselves. These people were going through rough mental or emotional problems, and they used various techniques of guided imagery to heal themselves of inner anxiety. It seems that these people have gained in doing so – after all, before they used this kind of therapy, they were suffering, and after using this therapy, their problems vanished. But anyone who used this kind of therapy made a mistake. It was a method that improved their power of imagination, but ultimately, it did not improve their *middos*. It did almost nothing to change their *middos*. The *nefesh hebahaimis* of a person continues to remain unchanged as it was before, with all its undeveloped *middos*.

### ***Imagination Exaggerates The Middos***

Reb Yisrael Salanter writes in his *Iggeres Hamussar* as follows: “Man is trapped by his intellect, but free in his fantasies. His imagination can lead him to wherever his heart desires.” These words tell us everything we have to know about [a Jew's] self-improvement, and where we need to begin.

What is the understanding of these words of Reb Yisrael Salanter? He is not simply telling us that we need to get started with something general like “working on our *middos*.” Rather, he pinpoints our problems at the root: “man is trapped by his intellect, but free in his fantasies. His imagination can lead him to wherever his heart desires.” In other words: what does imagination do to us? It comes and exaggerates the proper limits of our *middos*.

We will explain. Earlier we explained that there are three sources of our *middos* – our higher *middos* are the *middos* of our *Nefesh Elokis*, our lower *middos* are the *middos* of our *nefesh habehamis*, and the middle layer between these two layers is the point of *medameh*, which serves as a third source for *middos*.

For example, a person gets a *taavah* (lustful desire) to gorge on a certain food. Besides for the actual desire for the food, a person is also imagining that he needs to eat the food. The person's imagination comes and exaggerates the desire, blowing it up more than it really is. The actual desire to eat the food was minimal, and it came from his *ratzon* (will), a force of the mind. But the power of imagination blows up the desire and exaggerates the initial desire for the food.

Thus, each of our *middos* consists to two factors, as we explained until now: the actual *middah* in

question, which stems from our *nefesh habehamis* – which has its normal bounds – and the imagination, which comes and expands the particular *middah*. Thus, imagination comes and expands a *middah*.

### ***Sadness Caused By Imagination***

In the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned that imagination stems from the element of earth, for the word earth\ *adamah* is related to the word *medameh*\imagination. The element of earth is also the root of the trait of sadness. A very large percentage of one's sadness actually stems from the imagination. A person wants something; his imagination comes and exaggerates his desire. If not for imagination, the desire would only be minimal, and it wouldn't bother him that much. But imagination exaggerates the want. The person wants something more than what he really needs, and this is the cause for sadness.

Here we come to discovering the root kind of sadness that a person has.

One kind of sadness stems from our element of earth. This kind of sadness belongs to the group of the other negative traits in the soul, such as anger, arrogance, idle speech, desires, laziness, etc. These different traits stem from the four elements of the soul. Besides for this kind of sadness, however, there is another kind of sadness, which is produced from imagination. We will return to discussing this, with the help of Hashem, in the final two chapters of this *sefer*.

### ***Imagination Exaggerates The Middos***

To repeat again, the *middos* consist of the desires of our *nefesh habehamis*, as well as *middos* that stem from our imagination.

It is hard to discern in ourselves where our *middos* are stemming from. For example, when a person feels a desire for something, is it coming from actual desire, or is it really coming from an imagined need? If the desire is coming from the actual power of desire in a person, then understandably, the solution lies in fixing the desire, but if it is coming from imagination, the desire will vanish when the imagination is dealt with. There is a very big difference between the two motivations.

We will repeat and emphasize that our *middos* consist of both our actual *middos*, which have their standard limits, as well as the imagination, which exaggerates the *middah* beyond its limits. When imagination exaggerates the use of each *middah*, it also causes destruction in the process.

What is the difference between *middos* which comes from our imagination, to the *middos* which come from our *nefesh habehamis*? The *middos* of our *nefesh habehamis* can be coming from either of the four elements – fire, wind, water and earth. The faculty of *ratzon* (will) is being used to exercise any of these *middos*: “I **want** to be haughty”, “I **want** to eat”, etc. Imagination, though, is to want something simply because I imagine it. With imagination, even when I want to give in to any of my bad *middos*, it is only because the *middah* in question is being widened past its regular uses and thereby becoming exaggerated.

Chazal say that the evil inclination only controls a person when he sees something. Why doesn't the *yetzer hora* take over through any of the bad *middos*, such as arrogance, arrogance, or desire? It is because when a person sees something he wants, he imagines how much he wants it. Here Chazal are telling us about the depth of *middos*: without the arousal of imagination, our *middos* wouldn't cause us to get into problems, because they would be left at their initial, restrained level.

It is the imagination which comes and abuses the *middos* of our *nefesh habehamis*. Without imagination, our *nefesh habehamis* would be fine. We would be able to use our power of *medameh* for

holiness, and get the *middos* of our *nefesh habehamis* to resemble the *middos* of our *Nefesh Elokis*.

We all have imagination in us. The question is how we are using it. Usually, a person is not drawn after self-improvement, and he does not initially express a desire to get his *nefesh habehamis* to resemble his *nefesh Elokis*. What happens? When *medameh* isn't being used or holiness, it serves to exaggerate the proper limits of each of the *middos*. We already mentioned the trait of desires as one example, but this is true as well for all of the other *middos*: imagination comes and exaggerates all of the *middos* present in the *nefesh habehamis*.

Two problems get created from this. First of all, the person will not get his lower *middos* to resemble the higher *middos*. In addition, the lower *middos* will be unrestrained, and they will continue to be used and ruled by the imagination. There will be two kinds of evil that are present in the person – imagination, and the *middos* which have been negatively affected by it. The imagination will use all of the various *middos* of the *nefesh habehamis* as its employers, expanding them and exaggerating them for evil uses.

Imagination expands; it cannot begin something. The other powers of the mind can begin information. The mind's power of *Chochmah* (Wisdom) is the knowledge that one has received from his teachers, and the mind's power of *Binah* (Contemplation) expands upon the original information and discovers new information. This makes use of imagination; the imagination compares information, but there has to already be information here to begin with in order for imagination to start. So imagination cannot begin a point; it merely expands upon an original point. Thus, imagination expands the *middos* of the *nefesh habehamis*; it does not directly produce any *middos* of its own.

Now we can understand why the evil inclination is aroused specifically when a person sees something he desires. If his eyes wouldn't see it, the imagination isn't awakened. When he sees something he desires, now imagination can come and exaggerate any of the bad *middos*.

### **How To Rectify The Imagination**

What is our *avodah* in fixing our *middos*? How do we especially rectify the trait of sadness, which is the main result of imagination?

First we must be aware that there are bad *middos*, as well as imagination, which abuses the limits of each of the *middos*. What then is our inner work here? It is a two-fold *avodah*. We need to fix our imagination and get it to become holy, and this will improve our *middos* with it. Along with this, we also need to work on our actual *middos*. When we work on both of these aspects – the imagination and the *middos* – we will achieve the complete rectification.

### **Fantasies of the Mind and the Heart**

We will add on another point in this which sharpens the discussion.

The lower aspect of *medameh* is that man comes from *adamah*, the earth. There are two levels within this. The lower aspect of *adamah* is when a person sinks into depression, since man comes from the earth, which is the root of sadness. This is the lowest aspect of *medameh*. A slightly higher level than this [which is still within the point of *adamah*] is when a person has fantasies. Some fantasies are stemming from the mind, and some fantasies are stemming from the *middos* in our heart.

We can see this from dreams, which are fueled by imagination. What does a person dream about? Sometimes we dream about things which our heart desires, and sometimes we dream about desires that we aren't even aware we really have. We dream about what we really want deep down, what our soul feels connected to. If we don't want something, we won't dream about it. Our imagination is

based on a previous thought, and that is what we dream about.

(There is a higher kind of dream in which a person can have an outer body experience, in which the soul leaves the body and can fly away to other places, and the person uncovers a deeper kind of imagination. We are not speaking about this; here we are speaking about the basic kind of imagination.)

When we analyze our dreams, we can discover that there are two different things we dream about. We dream about things we already feel connected to in our soul, and in our dreams, we find ourselves expanding upon those wishes that we already have and identify with. But we also dream about things that are far-fetched from us, things that we do not feel connected to at all. Many times a person gets up in the morning and realizes that he just woke up from a dream, and he remembers bits and pieces of his dream, but he has no idea why he dreamed about such and such. The truth is, though, that he really wants those things he dreamed about, and those desires are just deep in his subconscious.

What is the difference between these two kinds of dreams? It is because our imagination can either be coming from our mind, or from our heart. On a more subtle note, imagination is always a combination of both the mind and heart factors, and the only issue is in the percentages of them – how much of the fantasy is coming from the mind, and how much of it is coming from the heart.

The inclination of man is called *yetzer*. We have a *yetzer tov* and a *yetzer hora*. The word *yetzer* comes from the word *tziyur*, to “fashion images.” Our *yetzer tov* is essentially a force in us that fashions holy thoughts, and our *yetzer hora* produces evil images in the mind.

The Sages (Sukkah 52a) state that in the future, the righteous will see how the *yetzer hora* is like a mountain, while the wicked will see how the *yetzer hora* is like a hair. In other words, the entire power of the *yetzer hora* is to use the imagination! The *yetzer tov* gives us a picture of reality, while the *yetzer hora* gives us a picture of the fake reality, an imagined reality. Both of our inclinations are using the power of *tziyur* – a mental picture.

So our brain can fantasize in one way, and our heart can fantasize in its own way. What is the difference? The brain merely imagines something, simply for the sake of imagining. But the heart’s imagination is connected with its *middos* and desires.

### ***The Two Parts To Our Avodah of Tikkun HaMedameh (Fixing Imagination)***

Thus, fixing our power of *medameh* is two-fold. There is imagination in our brain, and we need to get this to become holy. But in order to improve the imagination of the heart, it will not help to improve the imagination, because the heart’s imagination is stemming from a deeper source – the inner *middos* and *retzonos* (desires) which are fueling it. Thus, our avodah is to work both on improving our imagination, as well as on our *middos*.

In the world of therapy, the guided-imagery techniques are usually making use of the brain’s mental power. To a certain extent, the mind’s fantasies can become improved through this therapy. But this will not help to fix the imagination of our heart, which is being produced by the heart’s *middos* and desires.

Working to improve the mind’s imagination and to stop being delusional is therefore just one aspect of improving the imagination. The second aspect of improving imagination is by fixing the heart’s imagination, in which our inner desires and *middos* are present. If we merely try to use our brain’s power of imagination for this, it’s almost pointless, because the heart’s imagination and its desires and *middos* are interconnected.

## ***The Immature Heart's Evil Desires - The Main Cause For Sadness***

As mentioned in the beginning, the main evil result which imagination causes is sadness. Which kind of imagination causes it - the mind's imagination, or the heart's imagination?

Sadness is mainly coming from the heart's imagination. Chazal say that "one who wants a hundred, wants two hundred." When a person doesn't get what he wants, he is sad. Often a person is sad and he doesn't even know why he is sad. What is the reason behind this? It is because there was a desire that passed by for a fleeting moment in his mind, and therefore he is sad, because he didn't get what he wanted. It's not revealed to him in his conscious state, though, because he's not even aware that his heart really desires the certain thing. The brain never sleeps, and therefore, it receives the information coming from the heart's desires. Sadness results when the brain picks up the unfulfilled desire of the heart.

If a person merits to develop the power of his mind, his mind is able to think constantly about Torah and to be wrapped in closeness with Hashem, But if a person hasn't yet merited to develop the power of his constant thought, his brain's constant thought will remain at the level of imagination, and his imagination will lead him in his mind to all kinds of unsavory places, such as negative thoughts of sadness.

In Conclusion

This is the opening of the discussion which helps us get some 'picture in our heads' of what imagination is about. So far we have not yet addressed how to practically go about taking care of these problems, and we have only described the general picture of the avodah before us. The words of this chapter are the general introduction to the topic of imagination.

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[\[1\]](#) *Gra to Yeshayahu 11:1*

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