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[Home](#) > Tefillah - 153 Protecting our Souls from Harm

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## Tefillah - 153 Protecting our Souls from Harm

### ***Pikadon: Our Souls Are Entrusted To Hashem***

The blessing of *Modim* continues with thanking Hashem for His care over our life and our souls: **ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך - "And for our souls which are in Your custody."** Our holy souls are entrusted to Him as a *pikadon* (watched item), so to speak.

There are many meanings of the term *pikadon*. It can mean to be "counted", such as when Hashem counts the souls of the Jewish people. It can also mean to "remember", that all is known to Hashem and that He does not forget; so too, the souls of the Jewish people are always 'remembered' by Hashem and never forgotten, so to speak. But the simple meaning of it is that our souls are entrusted to Him, as the possuk says, *"In Your hands, my spirit is entrusted."* **"בידך, אפקיד רוחי".**

Hashem renews creation every day. Every day we are alive again because Hashem breathes into us life. Our souls go back to Hashem at night when we go to sleep, and "sleep is a sixtieth of death", thus, our soul is entrusted to Hashem every night and then we are renewed the next day by Hashem with life, after the "death" that we have undergone at night.

### ***Ensuring Protection For Our Souls***

The words here are about a matter that needs understanding.

Our Rabbis write that when a person sleeps, [parts of] his soul leaves his body. Where does our soul go at night? If one merits it, his soul goes to the Heavenly *mesivta* and learns Torah there. If a person lived the day correctly, he reaches greater comprehensions at night. Such a person made sure to keep his soul from wandering to places during the day where it shouldn't go, and he merits protection at night when he goes to sleep that his soul shouldn't wander around in Heaven.

But most people throughout the day - even those who learned Torah and mitzvos during the day - are not protecting their souls from wandering to places where our thoughts should not go to; when such a person goes to sleep at night, his soul floats around in Heaven, entering all kinds of places that are not holy.

For this reason, many dreams that people have, besides for being caused by what a person ate that day, can be frightening, because they are coming from impure places.

If one does not feel throughout the day that his existence is a soul, then when he goes to sleep, he is just going to sleep because he's tired and he because he needs to refresh. He is not aware that he is

returning his soul; maybe he knows it, but he doesn't feel it.

If a person feels his soul throughout the day, he knows that sleep means that his soul is and leaving his body. He is scared about where his soul is going; this is why some people do *teshuvah* before they go to sleep.

There is fear about where our soul is going at night. Our body is here on this earth when we sleep, but where is our soul? We calm ourselves by believing that our souls are becoming entrusted to Hashem, as the possuk says - "*In Your hands, I entrust my spirit*".

Anyone who cares for his soul is naturally afraid of what will happen to the soul at night when he goes to sleep. We are afraid of nightmares, but that is just the superficial part of the fear. We should mainly be afraid of our souls going to impure places at night.

Although there is a renewal to Creation when we wake up in the morning, our soul at night can be all over the place, entering areas in Heaven in which there are forces of evil and impurity. Just as there is a *ruach raah* (impure spirit) that comes upon our body when we sleep, so can there can a *ruach raah* on our soul, when it goes to places that are not pure.

Thus, before one goes to sleep, he needs to feel that his soul will be leaving his body, and be afraid of this; and then believe that he is being entrusted to Hashem. One has to live connected throughout the day to Hashem, in order to really feel this belief and merit the protection.

If not, a person cannot suddenly feel trusting in Hashem before he goes to sleep and believe that his soul will be fine. One has to already be living a life of " - על חיינו המסורים בידך - "Our lives are given over to You" from throughout the day, and then he can feel fine when he goes to sleep at night.

The more a person feels Hashem throughout the day, his sleep can continue the closeness with Hashem, and then he's literally in Hashem's hands even when he's sleeping. But if a person during the day is not connected with *ruchniyus* (spirituality) and thus he didn't make sure to protect himself from visiting certain "bad places", then even if he reaches a level of trust in Hashem before he goes to sleep, he is not actually connected with Hashem in his being - so he is not guaranteed protection when he goes to sleep.

### ***The Deeper Avodah: Bittul (Nullification)***

Besides for going to sleep and believing and living close to Hashem during the day, another thing a person can do to merit protection over his soul at night is to give over his thoughts, emotions, and actions, to Hashem.

Hashem gave us the power of *bechirah* (free will), and on a simple level, we use this power to choose. But we all have times in which we act foolish. Chazal say that "a person only sins when a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly) enters him." We can be afraid of that *ruach shtus* and then give over all our actions and emotions to Him, even while we are awake. This enables us to feel that we are not in control. When one accepts that Hashem is in control, He can believe that he is being entrusted to Hashem at night.

This is a rare level reached by individuals, and it is called *bittul* (nullification). *Bittul* can only be achieved when one is living throughout the day with Hashem, in his actions, feelings, and thoughts - upon which a person can feel nullified to Hashem. It is for a person to choose that "I am not in charge of myself- rather, Hashem is in charge of me". This can only happen when one makes sure that his deeds, feelings, and thoughts are aligned with the will of Hashem throughout the course of the day.

Most people are not living throughout the day with Hashem, and they only begin to think about

Hashem when they're scared at night before they go to sleep, hoping that they won't have a nightmare or that nothing will happen to them in their sleep.

### ***Preparing For Death***

Besides for this *avodah* of preparing for sleep, "a sixtieth of death", there is another point in time in which the soul leaves the body: by death.

A person who is concerned for his soul naturally fears sleep, because he is scared of what will happen to the soul at night. But we are even more afraid of death, in which the soul leaves the body forever, and is returned to Hashem.

Naturally, we fear death because we know that there is suffering that the soul goes through at death, which we may have heard about vaguely, and we choose not to think about this kind of stuff.

Only a few *tzaddikim* merited a blissful death, a "kiss of Hashem";<sup>[1]</sup> but most people, even *tzaddikim*, have to undergo a purification process at death, which involves death through the hands of the Angel of Death and other persecuting angels. There is also some *Gehinnom* to go through, before the soul can arrive in Heaven. Those who have learned *Reishis Chochmah: Shaar HaYirah* (*Maseches 'Gehinnom' and Maseches 'Chibbut HaKever'*) are aware of the details. But most people will never bother to learn those words, because most people are so afraid of these concepts that they would rather remain ignorant of them.

The truth is that in order to be prepared for death, one has to live life correctly - and then he'll be prepared properly for death when the time comes.

This is another kind of '*pikadon*' which takes place to our souls: when the time of death comes, our soul becomes either a *pikadon* to Hashem - or to the Angel of Death and to other persecuting angels and judgments which await the soul.

One who lived his life being close to Hashem and talking to Him, however, is close to Hashem as well by death. Rabbeinu Yonah writes that a wicked person is taken over by the forces of evil when he is dying, whereas a person who lived his life spiritually merits that his soul becomes bound up with Hashem.

In fact, even if a person learned Torah and did mitzvos in his life, if he did not live a life of closeness with Hashem, his soul will not suddenly merit to be bound with Hashem at death.

Even if he was deeply connected with Torah and with keeping *halacha*, and he had some *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven) too, still, if he did not live a life of *nochach p'nei Hashem* - a life in which Hashem's Presence is in front of him - then he is not bound with Hashem in his life, and neither will he be bound with Hashem when death comes. Such a person may have learned Torah well and he always made sure to do the mitzvos, but he did it all for himself! He never strived for a bond with Hashem during his life.

But if a person lived a life of Torah and mitzvos and he also made sure to purify himself on This World, through having more *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven), then he will be saved from judgment of the soul at death. But if a person did not strive for this, his soul is given over to the jurisdiction of the angels of judgment when he dies, and who knows what will happen to him then...

If one spent his life connected with Hashem, he is connected with Hashem as well in death. The Ramban writes that the truly righteous are connected with Hashem at death just as much as when they lived. If a person lived his life apart from Hashem, death is no different. If a person lived his life

with Hashem, then at death too he is with Hashem, and the connection is never severed.

Living a life of closeness with Hashem essentially means to live a life of speaking with Hashem “like how one speaks to a friend”<sup>[2]</sup>; it is to live a life of “*Shivisi Hashem L’Negdi Tamid*” (“I place Hashem before me, always”); to live a life of *nochach p’nei Hashem*, facing Hashem. If his life was spent *nochach* with Hashem, than at death he merits to see the *Shechinah*, as our Sages state. “*They serve Me in life, they serve Me in death.*”

This is the meaning of the words, **וְעַל נַשְׁמוֹתֵינוּ הַפְּקוּדוֹת לָךְ**, “Our souls are entrusted to You.” A person does not like to think about death and what will happen then. But one day, Hashem takes our soul from us. There will come a day where we have no control; when we are *mufkad* (given over) to the *pekidim* (messengers) of Hashem. Our free will on this world is essentially *to choose how we will leave the world* - when the time comes.

### **Three Times In Which Our Soul Is Entrusted To Hashem**

We have said that there are three points in time in which we are a *pikadon*.

The first time applies to all people - this is the fact that we are a *pikadon* each day when we go to sleep. In this, the *avodah* is to prepare for it throughout the day by feeling our existence as a soul and thus be cognizant to protect our thoughts from wandering to improper areas.

A higher level than this is for one to give up his day as well to Hashem: giving ourselves up for Hashem during the day, choosing to feel completely nullified to Him in all of our actions, emotions, and thoughts. This is the level of *bittul* (self-nullification) which *tzaddikim* are capable of. In this level, one makes himself into a *pikadon* to Hashem through his own power of free will.

The highest level is to prepare, throughout our life, for the time of death itself; that we make sure to live of *nochach pnei Hashem*, so that at death we will become *mufkad* (entrusted) to Hashem alone, as opposed to becoming entrusted to the various “*pekidim*” (appointed messengers) in Heaven.

### **The Highest Level**

If one made sure to live correctly, a life of closeness with Hashem, he has nothing to fear at death. He has good angels created from all his deeds, and there are no destructive angels awaiting him. But even more so, because he lived a life of closeness with Hashem, he is entrusted into the hands of Hashem Himself at death, not to any angels, so he has nothing to fear, because He is in the best hands possible.

One who leaves this world and is *mufkad* in the hands of Hashem, has reached the highest level of *tzaddikim*. Most people, though, have to go through judgments as their soul makes its journey towards Heaven, because they do not merit this.

The Sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai said that all his life he waited for death because he wanted to meet Hashem. He connected all his life with Hashem and he wanted to meet Hashem Himself in all His glory.

When a person lives a life like this, he is not judged by the Heavenly court, but by Hashem Himself. What’s the difference? Oh, there’s a big difference. The Heavenly Court judges based on *din*

(judgment) alone. Hashem, though, is *Avinu Av HaRachaman*, our Merciful father, and if one is in His hands, He receives endless mercy.<sup>[3]</sup>

Thus, in order for one to prepare himself for death, he must live a life of *nochach pnei Hashem*. Such a person can be prepared every night to give his soul to Hashem, but even more so, he prepares himself for the day in which his soul will be taken completely.

### ***In Conclusion***

**ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך** - "Our souls are entrusted to You" - the more we connect to Hashem throughout the day, the more we enable ourselves to become entrusted to Hashem at night.

If we live life in which the knowledge of this is always present in the backgrounds of our minds, we can reach the more complete level of this closeness with Hashem, when our time comes to leave this world - whereupon we will be able to complete the final rung in our bond with Hashem, connecting to Him eternally and completely.

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<sup>[1]</sup> The Talmud says that these were six tzaddikim: Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Mesillas Yesharim*

<sup>[3]</sup> For more details, see ***Tefillah #097 - The Best Advice On Meriting A Good Judgment***