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Good Imagination Is To Expand, Evil Imagination Is To Invent

Our power of *medameh*/imagination comes from word “*adamah*”, “earth”. Earth nurtures something to help it grow. Earth is the element that brings the other elements to their potential. The earth does not produce new things – it merely takes something and expands it so it can grow.

This shows us that our imagination, which is rooted in the element of earth, is not meant to produce **new** information; rather, it is meant to take something that already exists and to **expand** upon it, bringing out the **potential** of a concept. This is the ideal purpose of imagination: it can serve to bring out the potential of a certain idea, when we imagine ourselves to it.

But our imagination becomes evil when we exaggerate the information and make up something totally new from it. This is when a person uses his imagination to come up with totally new information, instead of expanding it.

Therefore, when a person compares things in his mind, if his imagination is merely expanding upon the information, then this is the holy kind of imagination. But if one’s imagination is producing something totally new through comparing, then the imagination is evil.

Evil imagination involves comparing oneself to another person, while good imagination involves a person expanding upon his own potential.

Two Different Attitudes About Our Middos

This also explains the difference between imagination which stems from the *nefesh habehaimis* (lower, animalistic layer of the soul) and the imagination which stems from our *nefesh elokis* (higher, G-dly layer of our soul).

The *middos* of our *nefesh elokis* are rooted in Hashem; for example, our quality of *rachamim*/mercy stems from the *rachamim* of Hashem. The *middos* in our *nefesh elokis* are not regular *middos* – they come from Hashem; they are a continuation of Hashem’s *middos*. Our avodah with our *nefesh elokis* is to continue the *middos* of Hashem – they are not just “*middos*”, but they serve to reveal Hashem through the *middos*.

(Man was created “*kedumeseinu*”, “in our image” – this represents the *middos* of Hashem which exist

in our *nefesh elokis*. Man was also created “*b’tzalmeinu*”, “in our form”, which represents the powers of the mind.)

This is how our *nefesh elokis* uses the power of *medameh*: to view my *middos* as a revelation of Hashem’s *middos*, because I am exercising good *middos* in order to get my *middos* to resemble Hashem’s *middos*.

But our *nefesh habehaimis* uses *medameh*/imagination to produce “new” *middos*. This applies to both our good *middos* and bad *middos* coming from our *nefesh habehaimis* – it is a kind of *medameh*/comparing which produces in a person *middos* that are new.

All of the *middos* that come from our *nefesh habehaimis* are based on *medameh*. They are not simply *middos* per se, but they are entirely created from *medameh*, and this is true for both good and evil. When a person compares himself with good, this will result in good *middos*, and when a person compares himself with evil, he will act evil.

This is why Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that our main task in *tikkun hamiddos* is to uproot our imagination. It is because of all the *middos* that come from our *nefesh habehaimis* are based upon our *medameh*/imagination/comparing.

By contrast, the *middos* of our *Nefesh Elokus* is to reveal our true potential – to reveal from within ourselves the *middos* of Hashem. When we use *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis*, we are using *medameh* to compare ourselves with someone else – or with a concept – and from that we act. The resulting *middos* from this will always be based upon *medameh*, and thus they do not reveal the true potential of our *middos*. Only using the *middos* of our *nefesh elokis* will reveal the potential of our *middos*.

How To Access the View of the Nefesh Elokus

When we use the *middos* of the *nefesh elokis*, it is that we are continuing the *middos* of Hashem. We do this by drawing forth to ourselves the *middos* of Hashem. A person can access this power by taking any of the good *middos* and to feel towards it: “This *middah* is not coming from me; it is coming from the *Ribono shel Olam*, and I am drawing it upon me.”

By contrast, our *nefesh habehaimis* has the attitude that any *middah* we have worked on to acquire belongs to us: “I have acquired this good *middah*.” Our *nefesh habehaimis* doesn’t attribute our *middos* to be a continuation of Hashem. All of the good *middos* that result from our *nefesh habehaimis* are thus all with an underlying attitude of “Mine”, and this is really a deep kind of *gaavah*/arrogance.

Our real *middos* are accessed only when we use the *medameh* of our *nefesh elokis*, which is to feel that all of the *middos* come from Hashem. It is to have an attitude of, “Even my good *middos* don’t come from myself. They come from Hashem; all of my good *middos* are a continuation of Hashem’s *middos* which I have drawn forth.”

Fixing The Middos of Our Nefesh HaBehaimis

How can we fix our *nefesh habehaimis*? We need to use *medameh*/comparing by getting our *nefesh habehaimis* to resemble our *nefesh elokis*. This is when a person feels that none of his *middos* can be attributed to himself.

This is one of the general ways of how we fix our *nefesh habehaimis*. One of the ways is through using our *ratzon*, such as by getting our *ratzon* of our *nefesh habehaimis* to have the *ratzon* of the *nefesh*

elokis. Another way is through getting our seichel/intellect of the *nefesh habehaimis* to resemble the seichel of the *nefesh Elokus*. But another way of how we fix our *nefesh habehaimis* is by getting its *middos* to resemble the *nefesh elokis* – and the way to do this is by feeling that none of our good *middos* have been acquired by ourselves. They are from Hashem.

Without this attitude, all of our good *middos* are full of *gaavah*, because we would be attributing the achievement of good *middos* to ourselves.

The *middos* of Hashem are poured down into our *nefesh elokis* through what is called *hishtalshelus* (the spiritual “chain”[\[1\]](#)), and we can get our *nefesh elokis* to carry over its understanding into our *nefesh habehaimis*, as we said.

A Summary Of Our Avodah In Tikkun HaMiddos

To summarize, we must realize that all of our *middos* are a result of our power of *medameh*. When we have a good *middah*, it is because we have succeeded in resembling Hashem through our behavior. If we have a bad *middah*, it means we have compared ourselves with something evil, which resulted in the bad *middah*. So *medameh* is always the root of our *middos*.

This is really what Reb Yisrael Salanter has written about many times, throughout *Sefer Ohr Yisrael*. Anyone who is familiar with his writings knows about what is being said here.

Our avodah is thus two-fold. We have work to do with both our *nefesh habehaimis* as well as with our *nefesh elokis*. We need to access the understanding of our *nefesh elokis*, which is to feel that all of our good *middos* are essentially a continuation of the *middos* of Hashem, meaning, that when we exercise good *middos*, we are revealing forth the *middos* of Hashem that are inherent in our *nefesh elokis*. This is how we reveal forth the *middos* of our *nefesh elokis*.

As for our *nefesh habehaimis*, we need to improve it and fix it with the following attitude: We have to feel that even our good *middos* are not our own, and that they are not “our” achievements, because good *middos* can only come from Hashem.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q: If so - that every middah we have can only come from Hashem - does that mean that we do not really have rachamim (compassion) on others, but only if we are medameh (resembling) ourselves to Hashem, who has rachamim?

A: Very good question; this is a very fundamental question. However, all our *middos* really come from our *medameh* – we pick up good *middos* from others, because we compare ourselves to others. For example, we have *rachamim* towards others because we picked it up from somewhere, so we are comparing ourselves to what we saw, and that is how we act merciful. Many people act kind because they were simply raised in a home where kindness is practiced; but is that the only reason why we should be kind – because we were raised that way? This is a good example of how our *middos* are never intrinsic, but rather from how we compare ourselves to situations.

When we remain with our *middos* which stem from our *medameh*, although such *middos* can definitely help us open ourselves up to that good *middah*, still, we shouldn’t remain our entire lives with such undeveloped *middos*. Any of our good *middos* which we simply picked up from others are not intrinsic – they are just coming from our power of *medameh*/comparing ourselves to others, and therefore we need to develop our actual *middos*. So we cannot base our good *middos* in life on how

we grew up and what we learned from others – these good *middos* are just *middos* from our *nefesh habehaimis* - because we are simply comparing ourselves to others - and thus we have to develop our *middos* more.

Q: Doesn't our pull towards evil simply stem from the pull towards evil, and not from comparing ourselves to the evil middah?

A: All of the bad *middos* come from our *medameh* – we compare ourselves to those who we saw having the bad *middah*. A person who gets angry, for example, only gets angry because he saw someone else get angry, and thus he learns anger and picks it up from others. When a person has *gaavah*, although we call it “*gaavah*”, it's really a manifestation of *medameh*, and it's just being played out through *gaavah*. The problem with *gaavah* isn't stemming from one's *gaavah* – it's stemming from his *medameh*, which has caused him to learn and pick up *gaavah* from others.

The fact that there is a general pull towards evil is a separate issue, and it is not what we are discussing. We are discussing the cause for all bad *middos*. All bad *middos* are not simply because we have bad *middos*, but because we have compared ourselves to others who we saw that have the bad *middah*. Therefore, the solution to all bad *middos* is not to deal with the actual bad *middos*, but to uproot the power of *medameh*/comparing ourselves with others, which is the root cause of the bad *middah*.

Q: Is there any middah in our nefesh habehaimis which stands on its own and does not come from our medameh?

A: Yes, because there is a general pull towards evil – a desire for evil. Before Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, people had a pull towards evil, but we did not perceive our “I” as having any evil in it. After Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, imagination entered us, and now people start out life thinking that their actual “I” contains evil, because a person compares himself with evil, and thus he learns how to act evil.

Q: How can a person ever know if he is doing the right thing, since his entire “I” is perceived only through his imagination, and thus we never know if our motivations are coming from our actual “I” or our imagination?

A: There is no way to ever know if you're doing the right thing. (This is the concept called *safek d'kedushah* – holy doubt; we must always be in doubt about if we are doing the will of Hashem or not). For this reason, we have to keep purifying ourselves more and more – not only on a major scale, but on every last detail in our life.

In Conclusion

This is how we fix our entire *nefesh habehaimis*, the animalistic part of the soul: to recognize that our *middos* are not intrinsic. We do not – and cannot - have any *middos* of our own. Our bad *middos* come from our *medameh* – we have compared ourselves with others and picked up bad *middos* from our surroundings. The good *middos* we have are only *middos* that we learned from the way we grew up and from our surroundings, and therefore we haven't really developed the power of our good *middos*.

We gain good *middos* only when we “compare” ourselves with how we are supposed to act – the *middos* of Hashem. This is the good kind of *medameh* we can utilize, which will counter the evil kind

of *medameh* we have been utilizing until now.

The more and more a person recognizes this – not just to internalize this matter in his heart, but to let it penetrate into his animalistic part of the soul – the more he we will fix the animalistic part of the soul.

[1] As explained in the works of Maharal, Nefesh HaChaim and others, everything on this world is a microcosm of the Heavenly spheres, and since our physical earth cannot handle all of the spiritual radiations, the spirituality gets downsized more and more until it eventually reaches our physical earth, where it can take on a physical form. This concept is called “hishtalshelus” (the spiritual or Heavenly “chain”).

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-010-way-view-our-middos>