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ותמגר ותכניעם

We ask in Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* (in the blessing of ולמלשינים) that Hashem should “humble” our enemies.

What does it mean to become humbled? There is an entire section in *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* about this topic, called “*Shaar HaKeniah*” (The Gate of Humility). The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes of three different levels of feeling humbled. The lowest level of being humbled is the kind of lowliness that even animals feel; in a human soul’s as well, a person might feel “lowly” about himself, but this is an animalistic kind of humility. It comes from *dalus hanefesh* – a lack of self-worth in the soul. It is present in the *nefesh habehaimis*, the animalistic layer of the soul, in any person, because it is similar to an animal’s lack of self-worth.

If a person become spiritually inspired, the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes, he can reach the ideal kind of humility, which is called *romemus hanefesh* - when his soul feels exalted. Finally, a person can reach the highest kind of humility, which is when a person feels nullified to the Creator, and this comes after a person reaches *romemus hanefesh*.

[When the wicked are humbled before Hashem, as we daven for in *Shemoneh Esrei*, they are not humbled out of a yearning for Hashem. They get humbled the hard way, through defeat, whereupon they feel lowly about themselves, just like an animal has no self-worth for itself. They feel lowly and subservient to the Creator, but it is not coming from the holy power of humility that the Jewish soul is capable of; rather, they become defeated, whereupon they have no choice but to feel humbled to Hashem.]

We will try to understand the difference between holy humility, which comes from *romemus hanefesh* an exalted sense of self-worth in our soul, and unholy humility, which is called *dalus hanefesh* low self-worth.

Proper Self-Worth Vs. Negative Self-Worth

When a person has *dalus hanefesh* – when he has a low sense of self-worth – this is a weakness present in the *nefesh habehaimis* in a person. It is when a person, as a result of becoming humbled, loses his self-worth. For example, if a person thought he could succeed at something, and then he failed, he feels humbled at this, but it can damage his feeling of self-worth. If he just walks around feeling lowly about himself, this is not proper humility, and it is simply a low self-esteem which

develops in his *nefesh hebeheimis*.

But the true kind of humility is a power of our *Nefesh Elokus* (the G-dly layer of the soul), which is when we are aware that in spite of our inherent human weaknesses, we still maintain our *romemus hanefesh* (feeling exalted that we are a pure soul). After all, everyone in Creation has faults; "*Borei Nefesh Rabbos V'Chesronam*" – "The Creator of many souls, and their faults." Hashem created everyone in Creation, so we all have faults. Yet, in spite of the fact that we can feel humbled from our faults, this does not have to destroy our self-esteem.

It is written, "*The heart knows the bitterness of its soul.*" We are painfully aware of our weakness, but, that's only one side of the coin in our life. The other part of ourselves is to realize that we are a soul, to have *romemus hanefesh* – to feel exalted at our self-worth, for we are a soul from Above. We can realize our own private self-worth, as well as the important worth of the collective essence of the Jewish people.

Man's Inherent Greatness - Gadlus Ha'Adam

A deeper aspect pertaining to this discussion is the following point.

Reb Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar (self-discipline) movement, had three main students: the Alter of Kelm, the Alter of Novhardok, and the Alter of Slobodka. Each of these students focused on one particular point as the basis of Avodas Hashem (service to the Creator). The Alter of Slobodka zt"l focused on the importance of the greatness of man, *gadlus ha'adam* – to be aware of how important we are. He said in the name of Reb Yisrael Salanter that the purpose of studying *Mussar* is to "uplift the broken-hearted and to give life to those who are crushed", and therefore, by becoming aware of our inherent greatness, we can achieve tremendous growth in life.

Most people do not really understand what *gadlus ha'adam* is, and when they try to implement *gadlus ha'adam*, they are really practicing *gaavah* (haughtiness). People often try to give themselves a feeling of importance, and they think this is called developing *gadlus ha'adam*, while they are really acting haughty. This is because most people are only in touch with the outer aspect of *gadlus ha'adam*, and not its inner meaning, and therefore, what they think of as *gadlus ha'adam* is really *gaavah* \haughtiness.

What is *gadlus ha'adam*? It is not just about knowing that we are a pure and G-dly soul. It is more than an intellectual awareness. It is to absorb the concept, deeply, and live by it. First we need to become aware of it at least intellectually, and then we can practically apply it to our life.

If a person doesn't really absorb the concept of *gadlus ha'adam* well, and he only knows of it faintly in his mind, then his entire *gadlus ha'adam* will only be imaginary. It will be like a tower floating on air, which comes crashing down. *Gadlus ha'adam* is when a person begins to separate himself from materialism a bit, whereupon he begins to feel his inner, spiritual world going on within him, and he begins to feel the light of his *neshamah* (soul).

When he feels that knowledge, it is not just to be aware that the Jewish people is the most exalted nation in the world, nor is it about knowing that the Jewish people are the holiest nation, or that we are great because we have an eternal connection with the Torah and with Hashem. Although these are all true and fundamental beliefs we have, this is not yet *gadlus ha'adam*. In order for a person to truly feel his *gadlus ha'adam*, he must reveal a recognition – a recognition that he can actually feel and sense – that his existence is a *neshamah*. It is to realize the reality of what our *neshamah* is.

That is *gadlus ha'adam* – it is when we become aware of the greatness of our *neshamah* within us.

It's very possible that a person keeps all the mitzvos and with strict adherence; and he learns Torah and even has *chiddushim* in Torah...but he is unaware that he is a *neshamah*!! He can be totally oblivious to the light of his soul, in spite of the fact that he lives very religiously. He does wonderful things in his life, but in a way, he resembles an animal's way of living, because he hasn't revealed his greatness of a human being. He might possess some good *middos* and he may be a very positive kind of person (we all possess certain good *middos*), but he's still missing the main recognition to have in his life. He is living life through his body - and not through his soul.

I am not talking about people who aren't religious. I am speaking even about people who keep Torah and mitzvos, who live a Torah lifestyle. A person might keep the entire Torah and mitzvos, but he can be lacking a *deep, inward connection* with the Torah he learns and keeps. He doesn't feel that he is a *neshamah*!

There are basically two kinds of ways for a person to live life, and they couldn't be more different from each other; the difference between them is like the difference between the sky and the earth. The real way that our life is supposed to look like is to realize that our body is merely a container that holds our soul; Hashem breathed into us a *neshamah*, His own "breath of life", and that is who we are. The fact that we have *seichel* \intellect does not define our essence; even non-Jews can have *seichel*. Our feelings are not either who we are, even though feelings are wonderful. Our *neshamah* - our soul - is who we are.

We must understand that a Jew's life, inside, is supposed to be totally different than people who do not keep Torah and mitzvos. This is not about learning *Mesillas Yesharim* or *Chovos HaLevovos* for 30 minutes every day; it is about **recognizing what our inner essence is**. If we recognize what our *penimiyus* is, we will live an inner kind of life.

There are some people who live their life very humbly, and they are always feeling nullified to others and to Hashem, but they are missing of *gadlus ha'adam*. That is one kind of negative extreme. Others have the opposite problem: they are always aware of their *gadlus ha'adam*, but often their *gadlus ha'adam* is just *gaavah*.

True humility, the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes, can only be reached after a person has *romemus hanefesh* - when he realizes that he is a *neshamah*, and thus he feels exalted, in a healthy and constructive way. When a person doesn't realize he is a *neshamah*, even if he acts very humble, it is not true humility, but rather a negative feeling of low self-worth, which stems from the *nefesh habehaimis*.

When a person identifies himself as a *neshamah*, he has *romemus hanefesh*, and then the sense of humility he feels can bring him to do *teshuvah* for his sins, but with a healthy outlook. Instead of becoming broken and defeated, he is spurred on to improve himself and do *teshuvah*, because he realizes his true self-worth.

Inspiration Vs. Inner Recognition

In today's generation, there are people who wish to really serve Hashem, in an inner way. If we meet up with such a person a few years later, though, we might discover that the person stopped seeking growth, and instead he just takes life as it comes, and his *Avodas Hashem* was just some idealistic thing of the past. He never matured in his spiritual situation. The truth is that there are only a few people who really mature in their spirituality as their life continues. People get a little inspiration every here and there, and that's where all their *Avodas Hashem* starts - and ends. What is the reason for this?

Inspiration is wonderful, and in fact, we know that inspiration has a special power to wake us up when we are spiritually asleep. That is the Avodah of Elul, in which we must awaken ourselves from our spiritual slumber. But even the best inspiration cannot help you for the rest of the year. Sometimes we feel inspired, and sometimes we do not feel inspired at all. Our *Avodas Hashem* cannot depend on “inspiration”.

Inspiration can help us **begin** to serve Hashem, it can “awaken” us, but it cannot do more than that. After we become inspired, we need to build our inner world, through **recognizing** it. The Chazon Ish says that a person can merit to feel the reality of his inner world so much that his very mind is enjoying it.

When a person seeks to build his life through inspiration, this is the natural course which the *nefesh habehaimis* takes, and it is superficial. It doesn't help a person really grow in his *Avodas Hashem*.

How does a person recognize the inner depth to reality? It is when a person realizes the purity and holiness of his soul. Upon attaining that perspective, a person will be able to avoid getting too frustrated from his failures, as it is written, “*A righteous person falls seven times and gets up*”, because he realizes the greatness of his soul.

Our body conceals us from the light of our soul. It is very possible that a person is always involved in *Avodas Hashem*, but his body is getting in the way of his soul, because he still identifies himself as mainly being a body. We need to remove the barriers upon our soul – our body – and reveal that we are a *neshamah*. And from recognizing that we are a *neshamah*, we can come to recognize the greatest recognition possible – to recognize Hashem.

This cannot be reached through our mental powers of our *seichel*/intellect, nor can it be reached through inspiration or emotion. It is rather a recognition (*hakarah*).^[1]

^[1] To develop the power of “*hakarah*”\inner recognition, see **Getting To Know Your Individuality #09: Developing Inner Recognition**.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/tefillah-106-defining-proper-self-esteem>