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The Ongoing Miracle: Our Renewal Each Day

ועל ניסך שבכל יום עמנו - “And for Your miracles each day You perform with us.” One of the miracles Hashem does every day is that He returns to us our soul, as we said earlier in this blessing; **ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך**. We thank Hashem every day for this when we say *Modeh Ani*. It is a miracle that our soul returns to us every day.

Why is it, indeed, that Hashem designed it that way, that every day we go through this miracle of ‘dying’ at night when we go to sleep, and then we are renewed with life the next day when our soul is returned to us?

Ever since the sin, man was cursed with death. When we go to sleep, it is a degree of death, as our Sages say. Why is it this way? Why do we need to undergo a degree of ‘death’ each night when we sleep?

Our Abilities of ‘Tzelem’ and ‘Demus’

Hashem created us *b’tzalmeinu u’kedemuseinu*, “in Our form and in Our likeness.” Man has two aspects in himself: the fact that he was created “*b’tzelem Elokim*”, in Hashem’s image, so to speak, and the fact that he was created in the “*demus*” (likeness) of Hashem, which enables him to come to resemble Hashem. The *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* elaborates upon these concepts at length.

To understand these concepts on a simpler level that applies to our personal souls, our aspect of *tzelem* is our power of ‘*atzmiyus*’, to be “ourselves”, to reveal our sense of individuality [for holiness], and our power of *demus* is our power of ‘*medameh*’, to resemble. These are two fundamental aspects in man: our *tzelem\atzmiyus* (power of individuality), and our *demus\medameh* (power of comparing ourselves with others).

Our *atzmiyus* (holy individuality) is the power to be who we are; the power in each person to be himself, to reveal his unique and individual strengths. Chazal say “Therefore, man was created individual”. No person is like another; we are each unique. That is one aspect of ourselves: our aspect of individuality. For this reason, every person’s *avodah* is different than the other.

But on the other hand, we also have an innate aspect of *medameh* - to compare ourselves. The higher use of this power is to be *medameh* ourselves to the ways of Hashem, so that we can come to ‘resemble’ Hashem in our own way and our own level. But when our aspect of *medameh* is not used for this reason, it will be used for lower purposes: to compare ourselves with others, whereupon we

are influenced by how others act and think.

These are our two aspects which we are created with: we can each uncover our own individuality, and we also compare ourselves with others. We are meant to fuse both together, because using one of these aspects without the other will prove detrimental.

Imitating Others

When we are children, our power of *atzmiyus*\individuality is usually not accessed yet, but our aspect of *medameh* is very much in use. A child is subconsciously comparing himself to his parents and wants to be like them, so he copies them and he imitates them. This is not by chance. It is a nature in the soul.

As a person gets older, he begins to get stubborn and he learns how to stick to his own ways, and he begins to taste of his individuality. But he still wants to very much imitate others whom he feels is correct to imitate, so his *medameh* is still very active and dominant.

If his sense of individuality has been developed in a healthy way and he learns how to understand his unique strengths, he will know how to avoid imitating others and not be swayed after bad influences. But if he hasn't developed his sense of individuality yet, his *medameh* is dominant, and he will be swayed after how others act and think.

He will follow the trend of society, and *medameh* will completely take him over. He will copy various traits and behaviors he sees in others. In this way, the person makes himself into a 'mixture' from so many different behavior patterns that he has picked up from others. He becomes a mixture of other people, and he does not become himself.

As one begins to mature, he wishes to reveal a sense of individuality for himself, to get to know his real strengths, to understand who he is, and what his purpose is. He will wonder about this and seek to find it. However, often the discovery of one's actual strengths is very hidden from himself. He might feel very inspired from his surroundings and thus gain aspirations to grow spiritually, but it is usually coming from *medameh*, from comparing himself to others, and not from himself.

A child uses *medameh* to copy his parents, and he has no individuality yet. What will happen to a person when he gets older and he becomes a teenager\adolescent\adult, and he has not yet uncovered a sense of uniqueness about himself? How will he grow spiritually? He will gain all of his inspiration from the surroundings, but since he has no individuality of his own, his entire growth will be through comparing himself with others and trying to copy them.

People copy others in various ways. One might copy his teachers, or he might read stories of *tzaddikim* and get very inspired, so he will copy their ways and the various things they did. The more a person reads and hears stories of *tzaddikim* and sees the actions of others who are great, he will get very inspired and become idealistic, but along with this, he will compare himself to them and only seek to copy them exactly.

In doing so, he ignores his actual strengths and his unique purpose on this world, and he never thinks or clarifies to himself what Hashem wants from him as an individual. He is not being himself - he is copying others. Although he is inspired to be better and he is copying the *Gedolim* - whether they are *Gedolim* of the past or present - the problem is that he's connecting to "a world which is not his".

When a person doesn't know what his own unique strengths are, he thinks that his self has to be shaped by who he compares himself to. He shapes his '*tzelem*' according to the '*demus*' he compares himself to. In doing so, he mixes up the abilities of '*tzelem*' and '*demus*'. He wants to be unique and

to be himself, but he thinks that copying others will reveal his true self. That is his mistake.

The Detriments of Copying Others

What happens when a person bases his *Avodas Hashem* entirely on copying and imitating great people, and he doesn't try to be himself?

One of the two things will happen. Either the person will become very stubborn in copying those whom he imitates, certain that he is right, and this is because he thinks that he is being himself. He will not want to change, and he will stubbornly persist in his ways. He will act this way until the day he dies. When he comes to Heaven, he will be told that everything he did was *shelo lishmah*, not for the sake of Heaven.

Or, he will compare himself with great people and seek to work on higher spiritual levels that are not yet for him to work on at this point of his life. He will be full of aspirations, but he doesn't actually get there. The possuk says, "*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy abode?*" The first part of the possuk is referring to those who 'ascend,' those who seek to grow higher in their spirituality, who can be very idealistic. But the second part of the possuk says, '*Who will stand*' - this refers to those who actually get to 'stand' with Hashem, those who can remain at their level and not lose their inspiration.

What will happen when a person is always imitating Gedolim and other people whom he wants to copy, and he realizes one day that he is not yet at that level? The realization will be very painful to him, and often he will become very sad and broken. This is because the person doesn't try to be himself.

Chazal say, "Who is wise? One who recognizes his place". One has to be 'himself'. Although we also have to go in the ways of others who are good, we still have to be our selves too.

How To Properly Gain From Reading 'Gedolim' Biographies

The power of *demus*, comparing ourselves, is certainly a power that helps us become inspired from others, which provides us with much enthusiasm to grow. But the problem with copying others - even to copy *Gedolim* - is that we don't know which behaviors are meant to become a part of our true personality, and which behaviors are only meant for those people who practiced them.

It is only through clarifying one's actual strengths that one can have the sensibility to know what he really should copy, and what he shouldn't copy. When a person is clear about what his actual strengths are, and what his limitations are, then he will be able to read stories of *tzaddikim* wisely and be able to discern what to imitate, and what he shouldn't imitate. But he can do so in a way that is not through comparing himself to the *tzaddikim* and merely copying them; he can do so in a way that he uses the inspiration to act from within himself.

The power of *medameh*, to copy and imitate others, is essentially what takes a person out of his world and puts him in 'a world that is not his'. The Mishnah in Avos state that desire, jealousy and honor take a person out of the world; if you think about it, all of these traits are fueled by *medameh*, the habit of comparing oneself to others.

If a person knows how to use *medameh* for holiness, he knows how to ignite his own inner fire when he gets inspiration from the outside. But generally, most of the inspiration that one receives from the outside does not cause a change that comes from within. Although a person can read stories of *tzaddikim* and gain tremendous inner fire to grow when he reads about them, he must be aware that he needs to be *himself*. He must know what he can do, and what he cannot.

When a person lives like this he lives in a 'clear world'. He will be himself, not others. He will do what is good for *him* to do - and not what is good for *others* to do.

Comparing ourselves and copying others takes up a big part of life. Why? It is because there are two kinds of avodah: to serve Hashem based on influences that come from the outside, and to serve Hashem from within ourselves.

When our Avodas Hashem is being ignited from outer factors, we are inspired, and the inspiration can fire us up and cause us to act better, but often it does not last. People find it easier to serve Hashem based upon inspiration that comes from outside of themselves, because it is closer to the soul to work with. But it often does not lead to an inner change.

Therefore, when we get inspiration from outside factors, such as when we read stories of *tzaddikim* and we observe them, we need to properly evaluate which parts of what we read and hear is meant for us to work on, and which parts are not meant for us to try to do.

Practically Speaking

Practically speaking, in order for one to grow spiritually, he will first get his inspiration to grow from using the power of *medameh*, comparing himself to his surroundings and trying to imitate others who are role models to him, and to try to imitate the ways of the *Gedolim*. This is how a person usually begins to improve in serving Hashem.

But at a certain point, one must come to discover his individuality and get to know his unique strengths; what he is especially capable of, and what he isn't. Then he must remain with that, and slowly but surely to lessen the amount of how much he is copying others who are great. One can still copy and imitate great people, but it should get less and less as times goes on, for the person has begun to act more from his true self.

Imitating Society

In more recent times, there is much confusion of how to serve Hashem. The nature of *medameh*, besides for being used to compare oneself to *tzaddikim* and to our role models, is also becoming very manifest in how one imitates his surroundings.

Most people are influenced by others and think like society. The words of the Rambam are well-known: a person is pulled after friends and surroundings, and in how they think. The Rambam famously writes that if society is evil, one must go seclude himself in a private room so that he won't be influenced. If it is even worse than that, he has no choice but to go to the desert.

If a person doesn't go to the desert today and he remains with society, he is definitely being influenced. Today, the influence of society is much more powerful than it used to be. If one chooses to dwell in society today (it's a separate issue of why we don't all go to the desert today, when it is apparent that we really should), he is going to be influenced.

This comes from the aspect of *medameh*, to imitate others. The more a person is around others, the more he is *medameh* himself to them, and he gets more and more influenced. Today, the lifestyle of the generation is very far from the past, from the way it was when we stood at Har Sinai; as time goes on, the further and further we are from the level of standing at Har Sinai. Therefore, the influences of society are only becoming worse.

If a person doesn't develop a sense of holy individuality for himself, he will be affected by the changes of the surroundings, and then he gets confused, between what he must do and what he knows he

shouldn't do.

The *dikduk hadin* (adherence to keeping Halacha) has taken a troubling decline in the last couple of years, but in addition to this, the whole lifestyle of the generation has changed for the worse. And when one is not connected to using his higher aspect of *medameh*, which is to imitate the ways of Hashem, then he will inevitably be taken over by the lower use of *medameh*, which is to imitate people.

Avoiding Society: The Power of Holy 'Sleep'

Hashem takes our soul from us every night when we go to sleep, and then He returns it to us. When we are asleep, we are away from the harmful surroundings of this world; our soul goes back to Heaven at night, where we enter a pure place.

When one knows how to be separate from surroundings and he is in touch with his true individuality, his act of going to sleep is a holy use of the power of *medameh*, because his soul is not imitating society around him, and then his soul is prepared to go back to its Source at night, amidst that purified state. When a goes person to sleep like that, he receives even greater purity from his Source, so that he can go back down to the earth when he wakes up and be truly renewed, and he is better equipped to avoid the influences of society.

In this way, he becomes holier when he goes to sleep, and his sleep becomes transformed into a holy act that empowers him with even more holiness for the next day.

In fact, if one achieves this holy kind of sleep at night, it is said [in our *sefarim hakedoshim*] that he can even reach a level of prophecy when he sleeps. It is a time in which a person can become spiritually elevated. This is because during the time sleep, the person is away from surroundings and then he connects to who he really is - his holy and pure Source.

But when a person is not trying to avoid the trend of society's influences upon him, it can be applied to him the statement of Chazal, "One should not think lewd thoughts during the day, or else he comes to be contaminated at night."[\[1\]](#)

When one just goes to sleep at night without any awareness of what sleep is about, he goes to sleep in the same way that an animal goes to sleep, and his sleep brings him down from his *daas*. That is why he loses his *daas* when he sleeps, and the forces of impurity can take hold of him.

But when one knows how to go to sleep in an inner way - when he is aware that sleep means that his soul will now be going to Hashem - his sleep becomes an opportunity to leave the materialism of This World. Going to sleep with such a mindset purifies a person as he is sleeping.

Sleep is actually a means to detach from society and become renewed the next day, and then the person is much closer to his true self, and to the power of *medameh l'elyon*, of resembling Hashem. The more a person separates himself from following society, his sleep becomes holier, and his sleep serves a way to disconnect him from this world as he sleeps, whereupon he receives greater sanctity to be able to survive the next day's influences of society.

In Summary

Most people do not know how to make their sleeping holy like this, but one who is very motivated to work on this knows what it is. This is only reached by one who actively lives a very inner kind of life, in which he knows how to make his sleep into a holy act; it is preceded by a day spent on avoiding influences of society.

Most people should be able to relate to the first part that we have explained earlier: that one should clarify his individuality, and he should imitate his role models as well, and as it was explained, there must be a balance between these two powers.

However, many people don't actually get to even this first level (clarifying your unique strengths, along with imitating your role models and Gedolim in a sensible manner), and therefore they surely won't get to the second part (sanctifying their sleep). But if someone does succeed in getting to the first part, he is much closer to getting to the second part.

In either case, a person's *avodah* is always to be 'himself', to know who really is and what his real strengths are.^[2] If one accomplishes that, he can then be inspired from others in a way that he will still know how to be 'himself', as opposed to just copying and imitating others.

In Conclusion

ועל ניסך שבכל יום עמנו - Hashem performs miracles for us every day, the main miracle being the fact that He returns to us our soul every day and that we can be renewed, so that we don't have to be swayed by society around us.

The deepest of miracles that Hashem does for us every day is that a person can live in this generation in which there are so many evil influences, yet he does not necessarily have to follow it. It is when he separates himself from the influences, and in turn, he receives holiness from Hashem each day when we wakes up, so that he can continue to avoid those influences - and to instead live a life where he is always cognizant of Hashem's Presence in front of him.

^[1] Kesubos 44a

^[2] For more on the concept of holy 'individuality' (*atzmiyus\yechidiyus*) as explained according to the Torah approach, see also ***Tefillah #010 - What Our Matriarchs Revealed***; and ***Tefillah #049 - Reaching My Unique Holiness***; and ***Tefillah #052 - Asking For Understanding In Torah***; and ***Tefillah #0127 - Turning Against and Turning Over***. See also ***Fixing Your Water #011 - Solving Impulsiveness***, and ***Fixing Your Wind #07 - Craving Social Acceptance***.