

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Beverly Greenhill, a”h
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Modeh Ani II – The Coexistence of Body and Soul

One of the topics appearing in the *parshah* deals with *Viduy Ma’aser*, a declaration that one has properly fulfilled the laws associated with tithes and their removal from his premises. Included in this statement is the assertion that “I have not violated Your commandments, nor have I forgotten” (*Devarim* 26:13). Forgotten what? The Mishnah (*Ma’aser Sheni* 5:11) interprets:

וְלֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי, לֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי מִלְבָּרְכָךְ וּמִלְהַזְכִּיר שְׁמֶךָ עָלַי.

“‘I have not forgotten’ – I have not forgotten to bless you and to mention Your Name (in conjunction with the separation of *ma’aser* [Rashi, *Devarim* (*ibid.*)]).” The Mizrahi (*Devarim*, *ibid.*) explains that this refers to blessing and praising Hashem as one separates the tithes of his bounty.

In truth, this idea is emblematic of this *parshah*, as the notion of *hakaras hatov* – recognizing and expressing gratitude to Hashem for the kindnesses He performs for us – is a recurring theme throughout. The *parshah* opens with the mitzvah of *bikkurim* (giving of the first fruits), which Rashi explicitly states is tied to the obligation to show gratitude (*ibid.* v. 3). This is followed immediately by the section of the *Viduy Ma’aser* (which we have already demonstrated to contain this element of thanking Hashem). The *passuk* (v. 11) further exhorts us to recognize the blessings bestowed upon us by Hashem: “And you shall rejoice in all of the good that Hashem has given you...” The seriousness of this obligation is highlighted by the extensive admonition that appears at the *parshah*’s end. After listing the severe punishments that will be inflicted upon the Jewish people should they disregard Hashem’s directives, a principal cause for the visitation of this retribution is identified by the *passuk*: “Since you did not serve Hashem Your G-d with joy and a good heart, from (experiencing) such bounty” (*ibid.* 28:47).

In keeping with this vital and overarching theme of the *parshah*, it would be fitting to contemplate some of the wonderful kindnesses Hashem bestows upon us on a daily basis. As such, we pick up here the thread begun last week, examining that very first miraculous blessing we encounter upon waking in the morning – namely, *waking in the morning*.

Elokai Neshamah

We previously discussed how, in fact, the return of the *neshamah* (soul) to the *guf* (body) is certainly not something to be taken for granted – especially in light of the sobering fact that not everyone merits it. As we shall see, it is not only the return of the *neshamah* for which we must feel and express our gratitude; even its retention within the body is no simple matter.

This we see from the text of the morning blessing known as *Elokai Neshamah*, in which is depicted the works of Hashem vis-a-vis the *neshamah*: אֱתָהּ בְּרָאתָהּ, אֱתָהּ יִצְרָתָהּ, אֱתָהּ נִפְחָתָהּ בִּי, וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי, וְאַתָּה עֹתִיד לְסָלָהּ מִמֶּנִּי, וְלְהַחְזִירָהּ בִּי לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא. “You have created it, You have formed it, You have imparted it within me, You keep it within me, You will at one point remove it from me and return it within me in the future.” The word selection in this passage is noteworthy. Whereas in the translation we find a recurring phrase – “within me” – in fact, the

words of the text vary. In the phrase, “You have imparted it within me,” the word “*bi*” is used; in the next phrase – “You keep it within me” – the word “*b’kirbi*” is employed; and in the following phrase – “and return it within me in the future” – the blessing reverts to the usage of the word “*bi*.”

This curious arrangement reflects the unlikely joining of two completely disparate entities of the body and the soul. The term “*bi*” implies more of a complete unification. Upon first entering the body, as well as in the future, pristine state, the soul is as one with the person, becoming part of his essence – it is *bi*. But throughout a person’s lifetime, it is a much different story. “*B’kirbi*” connotes more of a division, whereby one entity resides within another, separate one. Throughout life, as a person is immersed in materialism, the contrast with his *neshamah* is much more pronounced; thus, it merely lies “*b’kirbi*” (*Iyun Tefillah* [from the author of *Hak’sav V’hakabbalah*]).

But it is not simply that the body and soul have differing qualities; they are literally diametrically opposed. The body is a completely physical entity, while the soul is obviously of a spiritual makeup. Thus, the *neshamah* resists such a merger and *actually seeks to depart at the nearest opportunity*. There is only one force capable of retaining the soul within the *guf* throughout a person’s lifetime. This is the import of the words of this blessing – *v’Atah meshamrah b’kirbi* – we thank and praise Hashem, for it is You Who (constantly) holds the *neshamah* within the *guf*. Were this “pressure” relieved for a moment, G-d forbid, the soul would instantaneously flee (R’ Yerucham Levovitz, R’ Ya’akov Emden, cited in *Talelei Oros on Tefilah*, vol. 1, pp. 83-84).

Adon Olam

The wonders associated with the soul’s coexistence and interaction with the body are perhaps too numerous to cover exhaustively. One other aspect we will mention here, relating back to the *neshamah*’s return in the morning, is contained in the familiar *Adon Olam* prayer.

In his commentary to the Kabbalistic work *Sefer Yetzirah*, the Ra’avad reminds us about the soul’s activities during its (presumably temporary) sojourn outside while the body sleeps. Unconstrained by the confines of the *guf*, the unfettered soul is free to wander throughout the world – which makes the phenomenon of waking up in the morning all the more remarkable. That is, whenever one wakes up – whether “on schedule” or if woken prematurely by someone – he awakens immediately. It matters not where his soul was just a moment prior; even from the ends of the earth, upon arising, the soul is instantaneously readmitted into its bodily receptacle.

The *sefer Menuchah U’kedushah* adds that this may be the implication of the words of this paean. ... *וְעַם רוּחִי גִּנְדּוּ אֶפְקִיד רוּחִי, בְּעֵת אִישׁוֹן וְאֶעֱרָה. וְעַם רוּחִי גִּנְתִּי*... “I entrust my spirit to Him/When I go to sleep; and then I awake/And my spirit is (reunited) with my body...” These words reflect a most miraculous and instantaneous process. No matter when or how I awaken, there is no need to wait for its re-admittance; right away I find “my spirit with my body,” even if it was a world away.

Perhaps these few points, upon reflection, might somewhat enhance the caliber of our expression of gratitude, particularly when reciting “*Modeh Ani*” in the morning. Imagine what could be, then, if we were to focus on all the wondrous aspects contained in this morning miracle, together with the blessings we experience throughout the day and throughout our lives.