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Romemus: To Become Exalted

וקרנו תרום בישועתך We ask that the *Keren Dovid* (pride of Dovid) become exalted with the salvation of the future.

Hashem is "*rum al kol goyim*" - He is exalted above all nations, and the Jewish people reflect this exalted status. As we say in the davening of the festivals, "We are exalted above all languages." Dovid HaMelech in particular possessed the quality of *romemus* (to be uplifted), as we express in this blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, that the "pride of Dovid" should be uplifted once again in its full glory, along with the salvation of the future.

Let us think into the concept of *romemus* (becoming exalted), and then we can understand the meaning behind what we say here in this blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Shiflus: Low Self-Worth Vs. Humility Towards Hashem

For everything Hashem created, there is always an opposing power He created with it; for every good power that exists, there is an equally powerful evil force that can counter it. The opposite of *romemus*, to feel exalted, is *shiflus*, lowliness.

Shiflus (lowliness) can stem either from one's *nefesh habehaimis* (the lower, animalistic level of the soul), or from the higher part of the soul [our *Nefesh Elohis* the "Divine soul"].

Shiflus stemming from the *nefesh habehaimis* is the **evil** kind of *shiflus*, and it translates into a **low self-worth** of oneself. Ever since the sin of Adam, man was cursed that he will return to the earth. This was not limited to the curse of death. It is also meant that man is drawn towards the earth, towards the lowest element from all the elements, and this can make a person feel lowly about himself. (To be more precise, low self-worth is formed from two factors: through *shiflus* of the *nefesh habehaimis* in combination with the physical body).

On the other hand, the **holy** kind of *shiflus* comes from the higher part of the soul [our *Nefesh Elohis* the "Divine soul"]. This is the power in a person **to recognize his faults and feel lowly in comparison to Hashem**. From one's *shiflus*, one can feel how exalted Hashem is. When *shiflus* causes one to have this feeling, the *shiflus* is good and holy. A person can reflect deeply into how all souls are rooted in Hashem - even the greatest souls that ever existed - one can come to a healthy sense of *shiflus*, feeling small about himself because he begins to realize how great and exalted Hashem is.

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would say that most of the time when people have *shiflus*, it is not the holy kind of *shiflus*; it is usually stemming from one's *nefesh habehaimis*, from the element of earth, which causes a person to simply feel low about himself.

Romemus - Feeling Exalted

The power of **romemus**, to feel exalted, is the opposite of *shiflus*; it stems from the element of **fire** in the soul (as Rav Chaim Vital writes). But it can also be used for evil, when it manifests as **gaavah** (haughtiness). Just as fire seeks to rise, so can a person seek to rise and be higher than others, which is simply haughtiness.

How Holy 'Shiflus' Can Lead To Holy 'Romemus'

So *shiflus* can either come from the *nefesh habehaimis*, or it can be holy and cause one to feel the *romemus* of Hashem. When a person has the proper perspective towards himself, he feels his *shiflus* in comparison to Hashem, but at the same time, he realizes that he is a pure soul from above, "a piece of Hashem". Holy *shiflus* means that a person reflects on the source of his soul, Hashem.

Holy *shiflus* does not mean for a person to wonder if he is using his time properly, if he learned enough Torah, or if he's doing the mitzvos correctly. This is still being superficial. It is truthful of course to make this self-accounting, but it's not enough. The main part of reflection is to think into your Source where you come from, which results in asking yourself: "When will my actions reach that of my forefathers?" It is to compare your current level with where you have to get to.

Holy 'Gaavah'

There is also an opposite power we need to make use of: holy *gaavah*. This is by thinking into the greatness of one's soul, with intention to feel the *romemus* of Hashem. This is using one's nature of *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations) in order to get to *lishmah* (pure motivations), because at first a person wants to simply feel good about himself, but this can lead to the purer kind of self-worth, as long as one has an intention to reach the *lishmah* aspect in this.

There is also a higher way to use holy *gaavah*, which is to think into the holiness of one's soul and then realize that his soul is one with Hashem at his root, and from that realization, a person can keep ascending higher and higher in his growth.

We have explained two ways how to use *romemus* for holiness: through holy *shiflus*, or through holy *gaavah*.

Awakening The Purity Of Your Soul

There is also a deeper point involved.

When a person misuses *romemus*, it becomes *gaavah*. When a person misuses *shiflus*, he is too connected to his element of earth, and he feels simply negative about himself. When a person reflects deeply into his *shiflus* so that he can come to feel the *romemus* of Hashem, the point is not just to go from evil *shiflus* or evil *gaavah* to *romemus*. Rather, by thinking about how our soul is really one with Hashem, this can awaken us to want to lead a soul-oriented life.

So the point is not just to fix your *nefesh habehaimis* and give yourself proper self-esteem. The point is that by reflecting into *romemus*, you awaken the inner light of your soul, which is usually hidden from you (each person on a different level). Just to think about *romemus* for the purpose of trying to reach *romemus* will breed *gaavah*, and just to think about your *shiflus* will breed sadness and

laziness. The real and true reflection is two-fold: at the same time that you think into your *shiflus* and *romemus*, you need to awaken the fact that you are a soul that comes from Above.

So it's not two separate thoughts that you need to think into; rather, it's two sides of the same coin. It is to leave the perspective of the body and enter into the perspective of the soul. That is the true realization of *romemus*. The purpose of thinking into your *shiflus* and *romemus* is to awaken the deeper *romemus*, which is to realize that you are a neshamah and that you need to lead a life of neshamah. The nature of the body is to descend, and the nature of the soul is to ascend. By awakening *romemus*, you awaken your soul's yearning to ascend higher and higher to Hashem.

The Romemus of Dovid HaMelech: From Lowliness To Greatness

Now we will return to discuss what the *romemus* of Dovid HaMelech is, which we ask in this blessing of Shemoneh Esrei that it be restored. The *romemus* of Dovid HaMelech was a unique kind of *romemus*.

Avraham came from Terach; the name Avraham comes from the word *av ram*, the exalted father, because Avraham came from lowly backgrounds, yet he rose above all of it and became exalted.

Dovid HaMelech descends from converts, from Rus. He was ridiculed and disgusted in the eyes of people because of his questionable status. He also descended from Lot's daughters, who conceived through their father, an act of immorality. This added to the embarrassment of his lineage. Dovid comes from lowly backgrounds, but he was made exalted to become the king.

Dovid reached an even higher kind of *romemus* than Avraham. Avraham was fathered from other nations, from Terach, while Dovid descends from the even the fiftieth gate of impurity. Yet, from the greatest impurity, the greatest holiness can still sprout forth, and this is the most exalted kind of *romemus*: when the roots of the greatest impurity become transformed into holiness.

The Opportunity of The Current Generation

In our generation, we are in *ikvesa d'meshicha* – the footsteps of *Moshiach* – a lowly generation. Some of our *Gedolim* held that because we are in such a lowly generation, our *avodah* should be lighter, and not demand from ourselves to work so hard at trying to grow higher, and that working hard to grow will be trying to reach a level that is too high. Other *Gedolim* held that because we are in a lowly generation, far from the level of standing at Har Sinai, that means we are closer and closer to *Moshiach*.

We do not know when *Moshiach* is coming, because it is a matter of the heart, and matters of the heart cannot be revealed by the mouth. But our Rabbis wrote that as we draw closer to *Moshiach*, although we are not yet there, we are closer to its light, therefore, we can have an easier time connecting to the light of the redemption.

We are really living in a great contradiction. We live in much darkness of this exile, but the light of *Moshiach* is still shining greatly.

On one hand, there is *yeridas hadoros* (spiritual descent of the generations), and we are at the lowest state it ever was; "There is no day that is not more cursed than the one before it." At the very same time, we are close to *Moshiach*, and although we do not know when the redemption will come, we are close to its light.

Anyone who truly seeks Hashem can be in touch with this light of the future that has begun to shine. Not only in the future will the light of Hashem shine, but even now it shines. It is not fully shining, but

it is definitely beginning to shine. The *Keren Dovid* is beginning to become uplifted once again, and its first rays are starting to shine through.

The Sages state that in the future, Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath; its powerful light will judge the wicked and destroy them, and it will heal the righteous. That very light is beginning to shine now - thus, in our current generation, there is a tremendous mixture of light and darkness like there never was before.

This is referring to the mixture of the Erev Rav souls in our generation, which confuse people and bring great darkness upon a Jew's soul. There are Jewish souls being burned up every day, because the light of the future is beginning to shine in our generation, and it is the light that burns the wicked in the future; it is already starting now. But that very light, when accessed by *tzaddikim*, uplifts them and heals them.

A Jew in this generation who makes sure to disassociate himself from the wicked and this world of falsity, as much as he can, and he chooses to live a life of truth, he will be able to access the light of the future which has begun to shine, the *Keren Dovid*. In this lowly generation, there is a unique opportunity.

The Rabbis compared the final generations to a person wandering through a dark path in the wilderness between two cities. The further he travels from the first city (a hint to the beginning of time, when we are at the apex of perfection, and once again when we stood at Har Sinai and we reached perfection), the darker the path becomes, but the closer he gets to the next city (which represents the redemption), the more his path begins to become lit up.

So while we are certainly in a lowly generation, and the light of the future is burning up the wicked, at the same time, it is also healing the righteous - in other words, although we live in much darkness, we have the opportunity, if we choose to live a life of truth, to get in touch with the light of the future redemption. As the days go on, the descent of the generation increases, but the righteous are able to access the light of the future more and more - and become healed through it.

The higher *romemus* was reached by Dovid HaMelech; the Gemara^[1] states that Dovid is called the head of the Avos. He reached a *romemus* that was higher than even Avraham Avinu.

The light of the future will be revealed fully in the future, but part of it is revealed even in our generation. A person can find Hashem precisely from his predicament, when he finds himself in a narrow strait. Today we are like in one big "*Bein HaMitzarim*" - we are in between narrow corners, in between difficulty and difficulty, in between waves and waves of darkness which continue to crash around us. And many Jews are falling with it, *rachmana litzlan*. But if someone truly seeks Hashem in this generation, he will indeed find how Hashem is close. On one hand He is so hidden, but at the same time, He is very revealed, if we truly seek Him.

Thus, there are two facets to this generation. On one hand, our avodah is very small in comparison to the previous generations, thus, less exertion is required. But at the same time, this generation needs to seek Hashem, to find how He is everywhere.

If someone only tries to work on the second part of the avodah of this generation, it won't be enough. Our avodah is like Jacob's ladder, which is footed in earth and its head is in the heavens. There is a ladder of growth we need to climb, so we must realize that we are footed on this earth; our body is on this earth, which is currently in the 50th Gate of Impurity. Therefore, we need to work on ourselves slowly but surely. But at the same time, we must realize that our "head is in the heavens" - in our mentality, we must feel *romemus*, a yearning of our heart to come close to Hashem. If someone

doesn't feel that *romemus*, he will probably fall with the rest of the generation.

So on one we need to take upon ourselves small resolutions that can help us grow, so that we can avoid the impurity of this world, but at the same time, our mind and heart should be connected to Heaven - we need to live with the higher *romemus*, to feel that we are not here on this world; only our body is here, but the essence of our existence needs to be connected to Above. We cannot live on this world and at the same time hope to lead a life of holiness. The only way is to feel *romemus*.

Until the current generation - without getting into when exactly in history it began - the avodah resembled Avraham Avinu, to be exalted above the nations. But nowadays, our avodah is not only that, but it is more: we are closer to the uplifting of the Keren Dovid, so we need to use the higher *romemus*.

So a person needs to realize his body is on this world, do all the mitzvos and practically avoid all the tests to our spirituality, but at the same time, our soul has to nurse its vitality from its Source. We need to feel connected in our soul to what it means to have *romemus*, to feel connected to what the holiness of the Jewish people is, to feel connected to the *romemus* of Hashem.

To live only with *shiflus* resembles a slave's mentality. To live only with *romemus* is *gaavah*. The true way to live is to harmonize both *shiflus* and *romemus*: to recognize one's own *shiflus*, the *shiflus* of this generation, the *shiflus* of one's bad *middos* and negative tendencies, and at the same time, to realize the holiness of our soul. It is unhealthy for the soul if a person dwells all the time on his *shiflus* that stems from the *nefesh habehaimis*. One can think about his *shiflus* in order to better himself, but the main focus should be on living with Hashem's existence in one's life.

[1] Moed Kattan 17a

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