

## Sweet Dreams

‘Good night, sleep tight’, we wish to our loved ones as the darkness descends. The nighttime conjures up images of either blissful rest or nightmarish fears. We gaze up at the moon and stars and are overcome by the vastness of the universe. Who is watching over us? The well-known children’s poem, “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” reflects these feelings. While the first stanza has gained the greatest popularity, it is actually comprised of a number of verses. Interestingly, they are about the stars leading the lost travelers and lighting our rooms with their never-ending vigilance. “Then the traveler in the dark, thanks you for your little spark, he could not see which way to go, if you did not twinkle so. . . . For you never shut your eye, ‘till the sun is in the sky” (Wikipedia). We understand that it is not the stars themselves that wield this power, but rather the Creator who has fashioned them in just the right way to shine for us and give us hope.

Our night time ritual of saying Krias Shema Al HaMita has been a fascination of mine for quite some time. I am amazed at the capacity of the words and ideas to help us maintain a healthy state of mind. Oftentimes our sleep is delayed or interrupted by either thoughts of guilt or anger, or thoughts of the never-ending to do list that loops through our minds. What is the cure for this malady? Saying the paragraphs of Krias Shema Al HaMita addresses all of these issues and puts them all at ease! I offer here a very loose translation/explanation of the first verse of this Tefillah as a starting point of these ideas.

‘Hashem, I hereby forgive anyone who has angered me or sinned against me. Whether the offense be directed at my body, my money, my honor or all that is mine. Whether it be accidental or intentional, through words or through actions. Whether it be from this transmigration (Gilgul) or from another. And no one should be punished on my behalf. May it be your will that that I not sin again and not return to anger you or to do what is bad in your eyes. Whatever sin I have committed, please erase with your kindness, but not through tribulations or ailments.’

Wow. What a way to put our minds at ease. With this paragraph we perform a sort of cleansing. We start by ‘burying the hatchet’ and relieving ourselves of grudges. How often have we heard the advice of ‘never go to bed angry’. Why is this so important to our mental health? Mulling over past events, which, by definition cannot be changed, leaves us feeling hopeless and helpless. In an attempt to overcome these feelings, we devise plans in our mind to combat the wrongdoing done to us with more wrongdoing. This then poisons our minds and souls even more and disturbs the body’s ability to accept sleep. A more halachically based explanation for granting this clemency is that bearing a grudge is itself a wrongdoing and, as we prepare to have Hashem take our souls for the night, we are concerned that the scales of judgment not be tipped against us and that our souls will warrant to be returned to us in the

morning. This too, relaxes us, for in this way we remove the fear of death from our pillows. The Tefillah delineates all different scenarios as if to teach us that, no matter what great rationalization we think we have for our pettiness and anger, when the stars are twinkling, it is time to let it all go.

We see now how our guilt and anger are addressed in this paragraph. Now what happened to our to-do list? Look back at the words for a moment. We ourselves do not even know who all has wronged us or wished us harm. Even when we do recognize that someone has harmed us, we have no way of gauging their level of intent. The average ones amongst us certainly don't know where our souls or the souls of our associates have been in past. The only one that would know all of this is an all-knowing, omnipotent Being. If I am able to see this, then I can also understand that He is in charge of everything. That being so, I can certainly trust to hand over my list to Him for the night with the knowledge that He is the one that will make it all happen tomorrow.

We have only just begun our journey into this prayer of the night with the first paragraph. There are at least 12 more paragraphs (depending on how you count some of the single pesukim) filled with requests, instructions on how to lead our lives, pleasing words from Dovid Hamelech, Blessings, and the exaltation of Hashem. All of this is the power that we hold in our hands and heads as we drift off. Imagine the power we hold when we are fully awake! Let's sleep on it, and continue these thoughts another day.

Leah R. Adams, PsyD is a Psychologist in Private Practice  
in the Monsey area as well as the host of  
“Dr. Leah and You” airing Wednesdays from 1-2  
on JewishTalkRadio.com.  
She participates in some insurance plans  
and can be reached for appointments  
or speaking engagements at 845-661-8741.  
She loves to hear from you, and, after a good night's sleep,  
you can write to her at [drleahadams@gmail.com](mailto:drleahadams@gmail.com)

This article appeared in “The Front Page Magazine” on May 16, 2012.