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FIXING YOUR [CONCEIT]

TORAH MANUAL TO FIXING TRAITS OF CONCEIT

UNEDITED TRANSLATION
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Editor's Introduction

This is the fourth in the “*Fixing Your Middos*” series, an in-depth approach of how we can fix our *middos* that result from the four elements in the soul – earth, water, wind and fire. Based on the words of Rav Chaim Vital in *Shaarei Kedushah*, these classes provide us with an in-depth approach to improving our character, with focus on practical outcomes.

The previous three parts of this series dealt with our *middos* that stem from earth, water, and wind. In this series, we tackle the *middos* which stem from our element of ‘fire’, which is the root of the traits of **conceit** and **anger**.

Rav Chaim Vital wrote that the element of fire is the source of conceit, anger, control, grudges, honor, and hatred. The roots are conceit and anger, and the branches are the other traits mentioned. This series deals with the roots – conceit and anger. It also deals directly with the element of fire which fuels these traits.

The first half of the series explains the branches of the trait of **conceit**, with each class covering a different subdivision of “conceit”, while the second half of the series explains the how we fix the trait of **anger** and its subdivisions.

May the learning of this *sefer* help us access our true inner “fire” to rise higher in self-improvement and in serving Hashem, as well as to control our “fire” from sometimes getting out of hand, as it often does – so that we can truly ascend, riding our fire, to the higher dimension that we came from.

1 | *Conceit: Stable Growth*¹

The Element of Fire: Conceit and Anger

With the help of Heaven, we will now begin to learn about the element of fire in the soul.

Rav Chaim Vital, in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*, writes that the element of fire in the soul is the source of the traits of “*gaavah*” (conceit) and “*ka’as*” (anger). Those are the roots, and they have many branches.²

We will begin, with Hashem’s help, to discuss the trait of *gaavah* (conceit).

‘Gaavah’ At Its Root Is Holy

Our Sages taught that each of our *middos* (character traits) can be used for either good or evil. There is no *middah* that is entirely good or evil; every *middah* has a good use, as well as an evil use, *chas v’shalom*.

The holy root of the trait of *gaavah* is rooted in *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who exercises the trait of *gaavah* at times. In addition, the *Gemara* famously says that one should have an ‘eighth of an eighth’ of *gaavah*. (However, according to a different opinion of our Sages there, one should not have any trace of *gaavah* at all). So we see that there is a concept of holy and healthy *gaavah*. We also find that there is a *possuk*, “*And his heart was high in the ways of Hashem*”, and we learn from this that there is a healthy kind of *gaavah* that one needs to have.

We will soon discuss the negative and positive uses of *gaavah*, but first we will explain the very concept of the *middah* of *gaavah* itself. As opposed to just exploring what the ‘*middah*’ (trait) of *gaavah* is, we will explore the roots that are behind this trait.

Four Branches of Fire/Conceit

The four elements, in order from lowest to highest in the soul, are earth, water, wind and fire. Within each element are contained aspects of the other elements. First we will briefly explain the four branches of the element of fire, and then we will explore them in greater detail. Within the element of fire, there is (1) **Earth-of-fire**, (2) **Water-of-fire**, (3) **Wind-of-fire**, and (4) **Fire-of-fire**:

¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-001-conceit-unstable-ascension>

² *Shaarei Kedushah* 1:1. Additionally, Rav Chaim Vital there writes that the trait of *gaavah*\conceit branches out into the traits of (1) *kavod*\honor-seeking, and (2) *serarah*\control-seeking; and that the trait of *kaas*\anger branches out into the traits of (1) *kepaidah*\grudges, (2) *sinah*\hatred, and (3) *machlokes*\strife.

- 1) **Earth-of-fire** is the ‘stable’ aspect of ‘fire’; when one’s inner ‘fire’ is stabilized. (This is the outline; later we will explain this.)
- 2) **Water-of-fire** is when the ‘fire’ burns and sparks, which causes it to jump around and not stay in its place. This is due to two aspects: the aspect of ‘wind’, which is the source of movement, and also due to the ‘water’ aspect, which can ‘drag’ the fire, similar to the nature of water which drags things with it. Fire itself cannot exist when it stands alone; it needs something else to destroy, and then it gets stronger. It gets ‘dragged’ after what surrounds it, attaches itself and destroys it, and then it can continue to burn. This is all the ‘water’ aspect that is within fire.
- 3) **Wind-of-fire** is when the ‘fire’ moves either upwards or downwards, similar to how the nature of wind can move up or down. In the order of creation, Hashem first made wind (air) and then made water from it, and from water Hashem made fire. With regards to the human soul, water can only drop in a downward direction, fire can only ascend upward, while wind can move in any direction. Fire cannot ascend by itself; it uses the movement of the wind in order to ascend upwards. So the aspect of ascension in fire comes specifically from ‘**wind**’ of the fire.
- 4) **Fire-of-fire** describes the nature of fire itself, which is all about ascension. Fire, by nature, wants to ascend, to its source, which is in Heaven. Fire has been brought down from the Heavens onto this world, and it wants to go back to its higher source that it came from, thus, by its very nature, fire wants to ascend, upwards, back to where it came from.

The Branches of Earth-of-Fire

Now we will explore each of these in detail. First we will begin with **earth-of-fire**, which is when the ‘fire’ is stable. **Earth-of-fire** itself contains the other elements, so there is also: **earth-of-earth-of-fire**, **water-of-earth-of-fire**, **wind-of-earth-of-fire**, and **fire-of-earth-of-fire**.

Earth-of-Fire: The ‘Place’ Where We Currently Stand

Each person has a certain place where he stands on – both in the physical realm as well as in the spiritual realm. In terms of the physical, we all have a ground we are standing on: the earth we stand on, a valley, a hilltop, a mountain. We also have the ability to go higher from the place we currently stand on. In the spiritual realm – our soul – we also have a nature to go higher from where we

currently stand. This is what describes the nature of *gaavah* (conceit) in the soul: it is essentially the nature of the soul that wants to go higher.

This desire for ascension contains two aspects to it. There is the place we *currently* stand at, and there is the place we wish to *ascend* to.

Earth-of-Earth-of-Fire and Fire-of-Earth-of-Fire

The **earth**-of-earth-of-fire represents where we stand currently, and the **fire**-of-earth-of-fire is represents the place where we want to ascend to. So the ‘earth’ aspect of fire the point of *where we stand now*, and the ‘fire’ aspect of fire is *where we want to get to*.

Water-of-Earth-of-Fire and Wind-of-Earth-of-Fire

In order for us to understand **water**-of-earth-of-fire, we need to first explain what **wind**-of-earth-of-fire is. Wind is the idea of movement; the ‘wind’ aspect of fire is to move from the place where we are (earth) to the place we want to get to (fire). Water is the root of pleasure; when movement is stemming from pleasure, this gives some stability to the movement. (As of this point, we cannot totally understand this concept, but hopefully as we continue this point will become understandable.)

Now that we have described the outlines of **earth-of-fire** and the four branches of it, we can now explore each of them in greater detail.

Earth-of-Earth-of-Fire: When I Am Conceited With My Current Level

Let’s start with the lowest point, which is **earth-of-earth-of-fire** - where *gaavah* (conceit) manifests in the point where one currently stands at.

It is written, “*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, who will ascend to His Holy abode?*”³ There is a deep desire in our soul to move. It is also called “*ratzu v’shov*”, ‘running and returning’ – the nature of our soul is that it is always moving.

The lower use of this power is the ability to move from place to place, from one situation to another. The words of the *Vilna Gaon* are famous: “If one is not ascending, he is descending.” So not only are we always moving, but we are either growing higher or falling lower. We are always cycling back and forth between ascent to descent, from descent to ascent, and the cycle repeats.

Being that we are always ascending or descending, one must know exactly the place where he is at: “Am I currently ascending, or descending?” One needs to determine if he is currently in a

³ *Tehillim 24:3*

situation of spiritual ascent or descent. When one is not clear about this, he will lack stability in his soul.

To understand it better, being that we all have a place we are in, if a person does not know if he is ascending or descending, he is probably descending. Why? Compare this to the nature of fire. Fire continues to burn, but if there is no more oil to keep it burning, it becomes extinguished.

This illustration helps us understand the concept of the *Vilna Gaon*, that we are always either ascending or descending: If one identifies where his ‘earth’ is and where his ‘fire’ is, he is clear about where he stands (earth) and to where he wants to get to (fire); and he is clear about where his currently going (wind).

To further illustrate, Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven for 40 days. He was clear about where he stood before he ascended, so after 40 days, he was able to descend back from Heaven and come back to the earth. Similarly, in our soul, we must be clear about the ground that we stand on currently.

We are not talking about the physical ground you currently stand on; we are talking about the spiritual ground you currently stand on. In the spiritual realm, each person is standing on different ground. One must know the level of the spiritual ground that he is currently standing on – and to where he wants to get to.

(Right now we are not discussing the aspect of where one wants to get to, which is the ‘fire’ aspect of fire-of-earth. We will discuss that later (G-d willing). We are currently discussing the aspect of where one is currently at, which is the ‘earth’ aspect of fire-of-earth.)

Lack of Stability In Spiritual Growth

If one is not clear about the current spiritual level that he is at, he might identify himself with either one of two possibilities: either he will think he is at the level of ‘**wind**’ (of fire-of-earth) or he will think that he is at the level of ‘**fire**’ (of-earth-of-fire). Both of these are unstable kinds of spiritual ambitions.

1) **Fire-of-Earth-of-Fire** - He might think he is at the level of his ‘**fire**’ (of-earth-fire), as follows: If he has ambitions to reach certain spiritual levels, he will feel as if he is actually there, when in reality, he deluded himself.

When he eventually falls from his high level, this will feel very painful to him, because he will feel like he has fallen from the highest levels of heaven all the way down to the earth [at least according to his delusional perspective]. He will think that his actual level is found where his fire is – the heavenly levels he wishes to get to. Therefore, he is very pained when he sees that he has ‘fallen’ from his “high level.”

That is one possibility of what can happen to him, when he isn’t clear about where he stands. He might act totally delusional, convinced that he is on a high spiritual level, while in reality he is not.

All of us act like this to a certain extent, but only someone with a dominant amount of **fire-of-earth-of-fire** will act totally delusional, and he honestly believes that he lives on a Heavenly plane and that he is found there.

For example, if it is during *Yomim Noraim* and he is *davening*, he is the type to convince himself that he's actually found on all of the high spiritual levels he is aspiring to. Then a few weeks later, he feels like he has 'fallen' from his previously "high level" that he convinced himself he is on, which will, understandably, feel very painful to him.

2) **Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth** - The other possibility (when he lacks proper identification of his actual spiritual level) is that he will identify his current level as **wind-of-earth-of-fire**. Just as wind drifts through the air and moves up and down, so will he will become kind of 'afloat' in his spiritual progress, like a "tower floating in the air."

Although he is spiritually unstable, he does not feel it; he feels like he is moving, and that is enough for him to get vitality. He is not found 'above', nor is he is found 'below' - he is somewhere in between, reminiscent of the words of the Sages that 'the *beinonim*' ('average ones') are hanging between above and below."

You can see this in people who act very disconnected. They are not being truly spiritual, nor are they grounded on this earth.

This is a person who is nowhere; he's not grounded in any one place. It is reminiscent of the concept of "*Kaf HaKela*" (a spiritual form of suffering, in which a person feels like he is being flung all over the universe). There is no 'place' that he's standing on He has a great desire to go higher, yet he lives off of this very feeling of movement. It is coming from his dominant amount of **wind-of-fire**: his very movements towards spiritual achievements are making him feel inspired and full of vitality, but he is not actually getting anywhere.

It's very possible that a person will go on for 20 or 30 years and think he is growing spiritually, getting vitality from this, while in reality, he is not found anywhere, nor is he getting anywhere.

All of us have aspirations to grow higher, but a healthy soul is one who knows exactly where he stands, and he does not fool himself. He knows that he is not yet at the levels he would like to be on, but he also knows that he is trying. If he gets vitality from such spiritual movement, this is the desired situation.

But if a person is always in movement towards something and he isn't getting there at all, it is because there is a dominance of **wind-of-earth-of-fire** in his soul; there is a lack of stability to his movements. He is like a 'tower floating in the air' – he is not above, and he is not below.

In Summary

To summarize and conclude, **earth-of-earth-of-fire** is the point of the soul where a person identifies where he stands, before he attempts to go higher. We have said that there are two

possibilities in which one can be very mistaken about his current level: **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, which is when a person who deludes himself into thinking that he is totally spiritual, and **wind-of-earth-of-fire**, which is when a person is spiritually ‘afloat’, who is neither above or below; and he lives off of his constant movements that aren’t getting him anywhere.

‘Grounding’ Before ‘Ascending’

Now let’s explain this concept in clearer terms. The element of fire in the soul is the desire of man to ascend; we will give sharper definition to this concept.

The initial state of our soul is that it does not want to ascend higher. The initial state of the soul is to stay where it is, moving back and forth from the place where one stands, with a desire to return its original place. This is called the process of “*ratzu v’shov*”⁴ (“running and returning”). The desire to ascend higher is the *second* step that the soul takes, but its *first* step is to know its place and move back and forth there (without going higher), where it can keep forming a new ‘*ratzu*’ (desire) to wish to return to its place.

Thus, we can now understand better why there are people who become mistaken with their spiritual aspirations, either becoming deluded or becoming spiritually unstable. When a person is at “Point A”, let’s say, and all he wishes to is to ascend to a different point, to “Point B”, then why should he care about where is currently at? All he cares about is to ascend higher to another place, so Point A, his current level, is of no significance to him.

But if a person understands correctly how to ascend spiritually – which is by first realizing where one currently stands, before he seeks to go higher – then it makes a big difference to him when he knows where he currently stands.

We are describing a totally different perspective that one needs to have towards the entire concept of spiritual growth and ascension.

When a person doesn’t seek to be clear about his inner and spiritual dimension, to live in the ‘clear world’, then he does not care for the current level he is at; he just wants to go higher. He simply ‘knows’ that a person has to acquire knowledge of the whole Torah, that he must fix all the bad *middos* and acquire all of the good *middos* that can be acquired. Although this is all true, the person has a superficial perspective towards spiritual growth. He has no idea how to approach that which he knows about.

But when a person is clearer about his own inner world and he is in touch with it, he knows *where* he has to get to, but he also knows at the same time that he cannot get to it all at once. He knows that it is his aspiration to go higher, but he also makes sure that he is capable of returning to

⁴ “*rotzuy v’shov*”: the spiritual growth process, which is a cycle of “running and returning”: cycling back and forth between progressing and digressing.

his current level – he makes sure that there will be ‘ground’ he can return to when he descends from his lofty perch.

Spiritual Growth: Being Able To ‘Ground’ After We Ascend

In order to reach higher levels in spirituality, it is not in the same way that a child goes from first grade to second grade and then to third grade. When it comes to success in the physical realm, achievement means to keep ascending, and there is no concept of returning to a previous level. But with spiritual growth, in order for a person to ascend in the right way, he must be able to return to his previous ‘ground’, before attempting to ascend.

Therefore, before one attempts to ascend spiritually, he must make sure that he has prepared for himself a stable ‘ground’ – recognition of his current spiritual level – so that he can have a stable ground of growth.

The Danger of Too Much Fire In The Soul

If a person’s main element is fire, he is in danger. He is consciously focused all the time on how he can keep ascending, so he is in danger of losing all stability of the soul. This is because the current level he stands on doesn’t mean anything to him, and the level he wants to get to isn’t here yet. He has nothing to stand on at all; thus he has no stability to begin with.

The “next step” that a person wants to get to must be preceded by some stepping stool. Without the solid grounding of a previous level – without first ‘standing’ on it – a person never gets to the “next step” that he’s aiming for. When a person is unaware of this concept – for whatever reason – he attempts to go higher without a stepping stool beforehand, and he has not been built by any foundation.

It is troubling to us to see, but we see that there are people who strive for spiritual growth, with no solid ground they stand on. Without getting into the issue of not knowing where exactly they want to get to, the bigger issue is that they stand on nothing, so they are not spiritually stable.

There is a famous joke that says, “Nobody ever fell from the ground.” The concept we have been describing here is that all spiritual growth needs to have clearly stable ‘ground’ that precedes it.

We have so far described the concept - and now we will get to the practical applications of this concept.

Periods of Growth and Periods of Descent

Rabbeinu Tam writes in *Sefer HaYashar* that every person has periods of spiritual growth as well as times of spiritual descent. They are called “Days of Love” and “Days of Hate.” In a “good” period, the soul is functioning at its best, and a person is filled with inspiring deeds and feelings. During a “bad” period, a person feels closed up, and he loses inspiration.

Being that we all have dismal periods, *Rabbeinu Tam* suggests that we need to prepare for those times beforehand, as follows. During “Days of Hate”, you can’t perform as much as you usually can, but you can hold onto a previous level and take it with you, even as you’re in the “Days of Hate”.

To be clearer about this, we all have abilities that are within our nature to do, which we can use at any given time, even when we are going through a rough period where we feel a bit down. We usually don’t fall from the level of being able to use our natural abilities. But we also strive for more growth, which requires more exertion of our soul to reach. It is those areas we fall from when we are in a period of “Days of Hate”.

The Three ‘Grounds’

We mentioned earlier that the spiritual growth process is called “*ratzu v’shov*” (“running and returning”), a cycle in which we first know our level, then we attempt to ascend higher, we progress, and then we digress, repeating the cycle. There are essentially three points contained in the ‘*ratzu v’shov*’ process: first there is a stage of “*shov*” (retreat/grounding), then there is “*ratzu*” (aspiring/ascending), and after that, the cycle repeats, which leads to a new and higher “*ratzu*” (higher ascending) than before.

First there is the current stage we are at, which is the point of ‘*shov*’, the ‘ground’ that we retreat to after we pull back from growth. Then there is the point of ‘*ratzu*’, the aspiration to go higher than where we are at. And finally, there is the next point of ‘*ratzu*’ that is formed after we complete the first cycle of “*ratzu v’shov*” – the aspirations to go even higher than before.

Our point of “*shov*” is the ‘ground’ we currently stand on, our current spiritual level. It includes everything we can do that comes naturally to us. Our point of ‘*ratzu*’ is where we want to get to right now, from our current perspective what levels we would like to reach. These are current aspirations, but they are not within the grasp of our natural abilities, so they require exertion on our part to get to. Our higher point of ‘*ratzu*’, which comes to us after we complete an initial cycle of “*ratzu v’shov*”, is the higher aspirations that we strive for after we’ve achieved our previous goals.

In order to be able to spiritually stable, a person needs to be able to contain all three points at once, as opposed to dwelling one any one of these points. Without all of these three points together, there will be no stability.

If a person is consciously focused throughout the day in the highest point – the ‘*ratzu*’ that comes after through an initial process of ‘*ratzu v’shov*’ – then his mind is immersed in the heavenly levels he is trying to get to, and he thinks he is there. This will usually lead to becoming delusional.

If someone considered himself to mainly be living in the stage that is a bit above his current level – the point of ‘*ratzu*’ – although this is not acting as delusional as in the previous scenario, it is still being delusional.

But if someone is aware that he lives on the plane of his current level, he is aware that although he has aspirations to be better, he has not actually reached it yet. He lets his point of “*ratzu*” be as it is, recognizing that he stands on the point of “*shov*”, not “*ratzu*”. That is the idea of standing at the point of “*ratzu v’shov*” at once. This is the stable ‘ground’ he needs to be on, which we described earlier.

Someone who lives only from his point of “*shov*”, without a recognition of “*ratzu*,” is living in his aspirations, not in his current level. But if someone lives at the plane of “*ratzu v’shov*” – he knows where he has to get to, but he also knows where he currently stands. This is the ideal kind of situation which we described.

Recognizing The Lines We Don’t Cross

What happens when a person has a spiritual failure, in which he falls from his previous level? There are two kinds of falls from our level. Sometimes a person falls just a little bit from his previous level, but sometimes he falls totally from his entire level that he was previously in.

The first kind of fall is very common throughout the day. It is like an ongoing “Days of Hate” that a person goes through, within the day itself. The second kind of fall doesn’t happen so often, and it is only experienced from time to time. But it is still existent in every person’s life as.

One needs to recognize both of these parts of his life: his current level that he never falls from, as well as the higher levels that he falls from when he’s going through a dismal period.

One must know what his *natural* level is, the ‘ground’ that he stands on, and he must make sure that he never falls from that level, even when he’s going through a “Days of Hate” period. This is the idea that *Rabbeinu Tam* writes about, that a person must take with him certain levels that he will continue to keep to, even as he’s going through a dismal period in which he feels uninspired. So the ‘ground’ you must recognize is to know clearly the level that you never fall from – the lines you never cross, even when you’re feeling down.

In addition, a person must also recognize the level that is beyond him which he is aspiring to reach, and he should realize that he is not able to reach that level when he’s in a dismal period. The point is that he must make sure to have his level he falls back onto when he can’t grow as much – the solid ‘ground’ which he retreats to, when he falls.

(We have mentioned two kinds of ‘ground’ that a person must identify, but there is really a third kind of ‘ground’ contained within those two points that a person must also recognize, which we will later explain).

Recognizing Our Three ‘Grounds’

There are altogether *three* kinds of ‘ground’ that a person needs to recognize, in order to remain spiritually stable.

1. The first thing we must know is to differentiate between the things we always are able to do, no matter if we’re feeling inspired or not, with the things that we find that we cannot do, when we are feeling dismal.

How do you discern what those areas are? You can ask yourself what you do when your heart feels opened and what you do when your heart is closed. For example, on days where your heart is more open, you *daven* with more vigor, and on days where your heart is more closed, you *daven* with less vigor. But there is a minimum of prayer we do every day, no matter how bad of a day it is – for example, the *halachah* of concentrating when you say the first blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. That is the ‘ground’ we make sure to never fall from, even on a day where we don’t feel inspired.

So one must know the bare minimum amount of what he is capable of doing even as he is within a dismal period. This is one kind of ‘ground’ you need to discover in yourself.

2. The other kind of ‘ground’ is to identify the areas you are not able to do when you’re going through a dismal period. Those are areas that are not naturally within your reach, and that is why you have a hard time with those areas on days (or at times of the day), where you feel dismal.

3. After figuring this out, the next step is to ask yourself what you would do if, *chas v’shalom*, you were to go through a very traumatic period of your life, where you reach a point of feeling totally broken and empty inside yourself. Ask yourself what you would do if you would ever go through such a period, *chas v’shalom*. Which areas would you still be able to hold onto in your life?

To illustrate, there were Holocaust survivors who were able to hold onto certain practices and strength of character even as they went through the inferno of the concentration camps. They couldn’t be on the level they were at before, but they were still able to muster the strength to hold onto certain parts of their life and keep it going strong.

In Summary

In summary, these are the three ‘grounds’ you must identify in yourself:

(1) To know where you currently stand and where you want to get to (which we described earlier in this chapter);

(2) To know what kind of level you fall to, when you fall from your previous level (these are your strongest points you are able to hold on to, even as you're amidst a fall from your level).

(3) The level that you would fall to when you go through a very traumatic kind of fall, where you fall below even the normal kind of “Days of Hate” and you find yourself feeling totally broken - but there are certain things you are still capable of doing then. Know what those points are.

The third kind of ‘ground’ is the most difficult to identify. Ask yourself which natures of yourself you would be able to keep even if you were to go through a very hard time in yourself. This is referring to basic parts of your character which are contained in your *nefesh habehaimis*⁵; it is not referring to the deeper abilities that your *Nefesh haElakis*⁶ is capable of mustering.

To clarify, this is not either referring to which *mitzvos* you would feel like keeping and which of them you wouldn't keep, if you were to go through a very hard time in your life. We are obligated to keep the *mitzvos* no matter how bad of a mood we are in.⁷

What we are talking about is referring to the natures present in our *nefesh habehaimis*. If you were to go through a time in your life in which you would feel totally broken and empty, which natures of your *nefesh habehaimis* can you still exercise, and which parts of yourself are you not able to utilize? That is the third kind of ‘ground’ you need to discover in yourself.

All of this enables you to know the current level you stand on, which is the idea behind **earth-of-earth-of-fire**, the point we are discussing in this chapter.

In Conclusion

There is a nature of the soul to ascend which stems from holiness, and there is a nature of ascension that stems from the trait of *gaavah*/conceit. Before we address *gaavah*/conceit, however, we must know its nature, which is defined as the desire in the soul to ascend.

We have explained here the rule that all ascension requires firm and solid ‘grounding’ in order for it to be stable in the first place. We still did not yet explain what to do about the trait of *gaavah* (conceit), which can certainly be a problem even after one has learned how to solidly ground himself before he ascends. At a later point, we will explain what to do about the trait of *gaavah*. But first we must establish the very idea of the ‘ground’ that must come before that. That was why it was necessary to explain the nature of ascension first, before we explain how to rectify the trait of *gaavah*.

⁵ animalistic layer of the soul

⁶ “G-dly” layer of the soul

⁷ Editor's Note: To clarify, the Rav responded after the shiur to a questioner, that this shiur is only discussing the ‘failures’ in our Avodas Hashem, such as failures in our middos and in our enthusiasm of how we perform the mitzvos. The fact that a person falls and stumbles into a sin sometimes is a separate issue that is not related to the category of “Days of Hate”, and it is rather part of our general avodah of “A righteous person falls seven times and rises”.

We have described the concepts, and at this point, when we have just begun, much of it will sound abstract and unclear. But we have described here the point of **earth-of-earth-of-fire** in the soul – the idea of ‘stable ground’ that must precede spiritual ascension.

2 | *Conceit: Inner Satisfaction*⁸

Water-of-Earth-of-Fire

With the help of Hashem, we have begun to discuss the element of fire in the soul. We began by discussing earth-of-fire, which is when fire of the soul is stabilized. Here we will discuss the “water” aspect within earth-of-fire (**water-of-earth-of-fire**).

Water is the root of pleasure; when water is applied to earth-of-fire, the “pleasure” aspect can give stability to one’s fire. This is the outline of the concept, and now we will explain this more deeply.

The Three Roots Of Our Movements

The elements of wind, water, and fire are all moving elements, whereas the element of earth is heavy and, by its very nature, non-moving. Movement is rooted in the element of wind, but there are altogether three different kinds of movement.

One kind of movement stems from **wind-of-water**, and another kind of movement stems from **wind-of-fire**, and another kind of movement stems from the element of **wind** itself.

Wind-of-water is a kind of movement that drags a person after it. This was discussed when we learned about the element of water [in the series ‘*Fixing Your Water*’]. **Wind-of-fire** is a kind of movement that skips and jumps, similar to the nature of fire, which is jumpy. The element of **wind** itself is the root of directed movement, where one’s movements are guided and directed to where he needs to get to.

So there are three kinds of movement in the soul. If a person wants to know himself well, he needs to identify how he ‘moves’. Does he mainly move with a sense of direction (wind)? Is he moving because he is being dragged after something pleasurable (water)? Or does he move mainly through jumping and skipping levels (fire)?

All of us contain aspects of these three kinds of movement, but each person has one type of movement that is more dominant. One should try to see which kind of movement is most dominant in his life, which is second-to-most dominant, and which is third-to-most dominant.

⁸ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-002-conceit-lack-inner-satisfaction>

What Prevents Us From Moving?

After figuring this out, the next step is to see: to where do we move? Whenever we move, there are always obstacles in our way. One must know what's preventing him from moving forward.

When movement is stemming from **wind** in the soul, he is motivated to progress in a certain direction, but when he encounters doubts about which direction to move towards (and there are four directions, as well as above and below, which are altogether six dimensions), he is prevented from moving forward. Doubts can totally stop a person in his track, when a person's movements mainly stem from wind in his soul. There is opposition within the very four directions of his "wind".

When a person's movements mainly stem from **wind-of-water**, he is being dragged after something new or interesting, which steers away from his original direction and leads him towards a different direction.

Here we will discuss movement that stems from **wind-of-fire**, which is when one moves in a manner that skips and jumps. This is referring to a person who lacks orderliness (*seder*) in his life. Besides for this problem, there is a bigger problem that results. Being that the nature of fire is to destroy, a person with a lot of wind-of-fire in his soul will act destructive as he moves forward. He moves upward, like the nature of fire which ascends, but as he moves upward, he 'destroys' other points along the way, by disregarding their value.

Besides for the problem of skipping levels, he will 'destroy' parts of his life in order to be able to feel like he is going higher. In simpler terms, he misuses the power of *bittul* (nullification), by dismissing the importance of something, in order to feel like he's moving forward.

To make this concept simpler, in order for a person to progress and achieve, he needs to nullify his previous achievements, by realizing that it's not worth much, in comparison to where he has to get to. When it is at its most complete level, it is a nature of total disregard for anything a person has reached until now. It is like when Haman said, "*All of this is not worth anything to me.*"

When fire in the soul is very dominant, a person has a nature to disregard all previous achievements, in order to ascend higher. A person might think this way either towards himself ("If I don't grow higher, I'm worthless"), or towards others ("If they don't grow higher, they're all worthless").

When a person uses this very nature a lot in his life, he has a lot of movement. **Wind-of-fire** enables a person to move a lot; **fire-of-fire** is even more charged and it can get really unstable.

Nowhere To Land

What happens when a person's 'fire' weakens? He will feel like he cannot ascend at all, for now he has nothing to depend on. All of his movement came from fire in the soul. Since fire destroys, if fire

keeps destroying all of the previous levels one has gained, he will be left with no achievements to look back at, which would have motivated him to want to go higher.

This can be compared to a person who moves to a new apartment and he loses ownership of his first apartment. Had he remained the owner of his first apartment, he can still return to it when he wants. But if he gives away the first apartment, he is no longer the owner, and the new owner can do whatever he wants to the new apartment; he might knock it down, or he might simply refuse to resell it. When his original apartment is destroyed or otherwise inaccessible, he has nowhere to return to if he needs a place.

Fire in the soul is the nature to go higher and move forward, but it can only ascend if the previous level is destroyed. That is what empowers the fire to rise higher. But if a person has too much ‘fire’, he has no previous “ground” to fall back onto when he needs to.

In the previous chapter, we explained the concept of the cycle of spiritual growth, which is called “*ratzu v’shov*” (running and returning/retreating), that a person needs some level to fall back onto (*shov*/retreat), when he loses his desire to grow higher (*ratzu*/running/progressing). A person with too much **fire-of-wind** is missing the “*shov*” aspect in his “*ratzu v’shov*”. His “*ratzu*” aspect is built on fire, and the fire has destroyed his previous stage, so there is nothing left for him to return to. The fire has reduced anything he once had into a pile of ash, which is useless to him. The stronger the fire, the greater the destruction of the previous level.

When one inevitably retreats from his level and he finds that he cannot progress higher, where can he go now, if his fire has caused him to disregard everything he had previously? When he finds himself in retreat from progress, or when he goes through a real failure, where can he descend to, if he has nothing to hold onto from his past? All of his growth came through destruction of everything else he had, so he cannot get himself now to suddenly validate his previous level.

If a person does not have that much fire in his soul, the words here will seem strange. But someone with a lot of fire in his soul can identify very well with what we are describing here. Here is a simple example:

When a person is very motivated to know all of *Shas*, and he is really aspiring for this, the fact that he knows one tractate doesn’t mean anything to him anymore. Even if he finished one of the six orders of *Mishnayos*, it’s meaningless to him now, as he keeps moving to finish all of *Shas* and know it.

When a person is very aspiring, to the point that his previous achievements feel meaningless to him, he must realize that this is a problem: he has no stability in his spiritual growth. He has nothing to lean on for support when he will need it.

The Way We Build Ourselves

We explained that there are three kinds of movement – **water-of-wind**, **wind-of-wind**, and **fire-of-wind**. There are also three different ways that a person builds himself and grows. Every person, on his own level, wants to grow higher. (Those who are truly growing in a sensible and step-by-step manner are called *'bnei aliyah'*, and they are few).

When a person's element of earth is his most dominant element, he 'builds' himself step after step. When earth is misused, it manifests as laziness and lowliness. But when earth is used properly, it is the power to build oneself higher, step by step.

A person who mainly 'builds' himself through the element of water does not seek to build himself up. He seeks things that will pull him and give him satisfaction, so that he can keep connecting to what he is doing, and in that way, he motivates himself to go higher. He ends up being built in this way as well, even though he did not seek to actually 'build' himself.

If a person 'builds' himself through wind, he has a strong sense of direction in life. He sets a goal for himself and sets out to reach it, knowing that it will be reached at a much later point, but he keeps making sure that he's moving forwards towards it. He is always moving. Even if he gets stuck and he finds that he can't progress, he examines himself and sees how far he has come, and to where he has to get to. He will feel that he has still come closer to reaching his goal, and that is how he motivates himself to go forward when he encounters difficulty.

But when a person is mainly using his element of fire, he grows higher only because he destroys his previous levels. He is a very aspiring person, but the problem is that he always disregards what he has achieved until now. He has never learned how to make use of the elements of earth, water, or wind. He will nullify either his own past achievements or of others, which fuels his 'fire' that he uses to climb higher.

Unlike the other three elements, which involve building upon the past, the element of fire ignores any past gains and doesn't consider their existence. If the past has been nullified, there is nothing to grow upon now.

Fixing Fire – Through Water/Pleasure

Understandably, the element of fire can be fixed through making use of the other three elements - wind, water, or earth. We can use any of these three elements to fix fire, but the best option to balance out fire is through water.

Water is the natural opposite of fire, so it has the greatest chance of mitigating fire. (The elements of water and fire are compared to husband and wife, who are of opposite natures, yet they are rectified precisely through being balanced out by the other. The same is true for the 'couple' of earth and

wind, who are natural opposites, which each have the greatest chance of balancing out each other). So a fire-based person needs to learn how to make use of the element of water.

Fire destroys the previous level, as we explained. But even when a person destroys his past achievements, he can still remember some degree of pleasure he had, when he was at that level. Even if he no longer regards it as an achievement, there's no denying that he had pleasure then. He can always remember it, if he chooses to. This is because whenever we accomplish something, there's always a certain mark of pleasure (*'rishimo'*) that it leaves on us for the rest of our life.

Compare this to a child who grew up in a certain house and he has moved since then. Even if the house of his childhood is gone, he can recall many fond memories of it. He can remember doing things there he enjoyed. It is no longer here, but the pleasure of the experience remains, at least to some degree.

So the key is to recall the pleasure that one had when he had been at his previous level. Obviously, the pleasure isn't on the same level anymore as it used to be. But as long as a person enjoyed his previous level when he was on it, there is some mark of pleasure left from it, and the stronger the pleasure, the stronger of mark is left from it.

(The same is true in the side of evil: when a person enjoyed something that was evil, the mark of it is harder to get rid of, and it is thus more difficult and painful for a person to disconnect from the evil pleasure.)

Knowing How To Retain Pleasure From The Past

To illustrate, Shabbos is called the “source of all blessing” for the entire week. What does this mean? Simply speaking, all of the six days of the week are sustained through the *shefa* (Heavenly emanations) of Shabbos. But the deeper understanding is because Shabbos is a time of *oneg* (pleasure). Even after Shabbos is over, there is a mark of pleasure left from it, which can be continued into the rest of the week.

Most people, when exiting one kind of situation, enter another kind of situation, which is completely different than the previous one, seeing no value in whatever was experienced until now. But the deeper way to look at our changes in life is to retain the pleasure from our past experiences. This power to experience is essentially the power of *oneg* in our soul.

The more a person lives an external and superficial kind of life, if his dominant element is fire, he bases his achievement on destruction of previous stages. The problem is that he will have nothing to hold onto and return to when he finds himself in a stage of non-growth. But if a person lives an inner life, he deeply *lives* the current level he is at. He has the *oneg* to connect to whatever stage he is at. Even when he moves to a higher level of achievement, he retains the pleasure of the experience and continues upon it.

When a person doesn't know how to balance his fire, his fire will burn up even his *oneg*, and he won't enjoy anything in his life at all, not even the fact that he has destroyed all his previous levels. If a person reaches this point, it will be his downfall. This is a power that is mainly used when a person is doing *teshuvah*, where he must disregard the pleasure he had from evil; this is part of the rectification process. But we can also use this power for holiness, by properly integrating the elements of fire and water at once.

On one hand, a person must not be complacent with his current level, thus he must seek to be on a higher level than before. He must use his element of fire and destroy his previous level, by not remaining complacent. But he must not destroy everything of the past. He must be able to hold onto the pleasure he had from his previous level, and continue to grow higher, as he holds onto the pleasure of the previous level.

For example, when a person first gets married, there is a certain pleasure he had. Later on in life, when it's 20 or 30 years later and he remembers what it was like in the beginning of marriage, he is aware that his life now is very different. He has raised several children, *Baruch Hashem*, and he even has grandchildren now. He is very far from the beginning of his marriage. What does he remain with from those earlier years? He can remember the pleasure of it.

If we ask a person if he wants to go back to the first year of his marriage, some will answer "Yes", and some will answer "No". But any person can remember the pleasure he had then, and he can return to that pleasure whenever he wants. Now his life is different and his situation is very different, but does that mean that nothing remains of the first years of his marriage? He can recall the pleasure of that period in his life, even though the situation now is totally different.

This doesn't mean that he should wish to go back in time; after all, none of us would want to remain unmarried and have no children. But just because you're far past that stage now doesn't mean that the pleasure of that stage is meaningless to you. So you can always return to the pleasure of the previous situation, even though you cannot go back in time.

This is how we integrate the elements of water and fire at once. You can want to go higher from your current level, but you should make sure to recall the pleasure you had in your previous level.

This integration process is mainly meant to be used by one whose main element is fire. If someone's main element is earth, water, or wind, he needs an entirely different approach than the one described here.

In Summary

If one's main element is fire – and surely if he has a lot of **fire-of-fire** – he is very aspiring, and he tends to be jumpy in his aspirations. He will act this way both in his physical side of life as well as in his spiritual areas. It is mainly manifest in his spiritual areas.

This kind of person is always destroying his previous levels. Without using **water-of-earth-of-fire** (the subject of this chapter), his movements are jumpy and with no stability, but even worse than this is that he has nothing to hold onto from before. He has no ‘ground’. He will have a very difficult time when he finds himself back on a lower level.

Those with a lot of earth, water, or wind have an easier time when they fall, relatively speaking. But someone with a lot of fire suffers a lot when he falls from his level. He has destroyed all his previous levels, so he has nowhere to fall back onto. However, as we are saying, this suffering can be mitigated if he recalls the pleasure of the previous level. This pleasure can give him vitality in the current situation he’s in.

Proper Ascension

Until now, we explained what a person needs to do when he falls from his level. But now let’s talk about what he has to even as he’s in a period of growth.

If he has a lot of fire in his soul, and he is not balanced, that means he is constantly seeking to go higher and higher – which means that he is constantly destroying his previous levels. What will happen to him?

If he is being truthful about his growth, the destruction takes place within himself. But if he is doing so out of conceit, he is using this power for evil, and he will ‘destroy’ others. In either situation, if there is a very strong fire in the soul, he is always destroying. This will mean that he has nothing to hold onto, even on his current level. Such a person has no place at all to stand on.

In the previous chapter, we discussed the problem of being delusional when it comes to spiritual growth, where a person has no ‘ground’ to return to when he falls. Now we are dealing with a separate issue: even if he is not delusional, and even if his fire is not being used for the purposes of conceit over others, it is still detrimental if his fire is too strong.

This is because the nature of fire is to be destructive. Not only does he disregard his past level; he is disconnected even from his current level.

These are people who ‘destroy’ themselves from within themselves – the power of their own soul is unleashed on them. There are some people who have so much fire in their souls that they are striving for the highest levels of perfection, and although they are being very destructive in essence, their strong amount of fire enables them to shoot very high where they reach their goals. But others do not have so much fire to get to the perfection they aspire for, so they end up unleashing destruction on themselves along the way as they use their fire.

When that happens, the person uses his ‘fire’ so much that he becomes ‘dried up’ inside, and he comes to feel terribly sad, empty, and full of despair. His strong amount of ‘fire’ has caused destruction within himself.

Why Are There ‘Oivdei Hashem’ Who Are Sad?

Practically speaking, this happens very much with people who are very aspiring “*Oivdei Hashem*”, those who are very serious when it comes to improving in their service towards *Hashem*.

We are not speaking about the problem of becoming conceited. We are speaking about the inner fire in the soul that causes a person to ascend very high in his *Avodas Hashem*, which can indeed aid him to go very high; that there is a danger to it, when it is very high.

This is a kind of person who really strives for perfection and he is actively aiming for it, and he definitely is soaring higher, but just because he is reaching higher levels, that won’t save him from terrible feelings of sadness. He will live his whole life without any *simchas hachaim* (joy of life).

It doesn’t make sense. Why should he be so sad, when he is clearly reaching higher levels than before, and he grows much more than most people? Why does he keep feeling empty inside himself when he has so much to be happy about?

But as we explained, it is because his own fire has not only destroyed previous levels, but it has destroyed even his current level. So he does not derive any satisfaction at any given point of his life. He has no *menuchah* (serenity), not on This World, and not on the Next World (but not in the same way that a true Torah scholar has no *menuchah* on either world).

The way he is fixed, as we said, is to use the element of water. A person needs to be able to derive pleasure from his current level. This doesn’t mean he should be complacent with his current level. He should wish to go higher, but he must realize that for the time being, he is found on the current level he is at, and that being the case, he needs to enjoy it.

Deriving Pleasure From Every Situation

This makes use of opposite abilities in our soul (fire/ascension and water/pleasure) at once. How are we able to do so? It is because our soul, by its very nature, needs pleasure. “Man was not created except to have pleasure.”

On a higher level, the deepest pleasure is to experience the pleasure of knowing Hashem’s existence, and *Shabbos Kodesh* is a degree of this kind of pleasure. But if a person never gets to that deep pleasure, does that mean he can never know of any pleasure at all? In whatever situation a person is in, he must find how he can get pleasure out of it. There is pleasure to be found in any situation of your life; try to look for it.

So although a person should never be complacent in his current situation, that doesn’t mean he shouldn’t enjoy it. A first grader must try to get to second grade and then to third grade, and he must not wish to be held back, but at the same time, he can enjoy his current grade. So too, in our own soul, we need to learn how to derive pleasure from any situation we are in.

Who Should Use This Solution, and Who Should Not

This solution is meant for someone who has a dominance of fire in his soul. If someone has a lot of water in his soul, that means he easily finds pleasure, and if he uses the solution given here, he will become too much of a pleasure-seeker, which is the opposite kind of problem than the one we are describing. (In the side of holiness, that power becomes endless *d'veykus* in Hashem, where a person cannot part from this endless pleasure of basking in Hashem's existence).

So the solution we are saying here should only be used by someone who has a lot of fire in his soul, who is always seeking to grow higher. He must learn how to get pleasure somehow from his current level.

Enjoyment As We Learn Gemara

Here is a simple application of the concept.

A person is learning a *sugya* of *Gemara* (with *Rashi* and *Tosafos*), and then he comes up with a certain explanation on what he's learning. Is he deriving any pleasure as he's learning?

One kind of person mainly learns the *Gemara* for the purpose of becoming clear in what is written there. This kind of person mainly uses his element of earth, which is the idea of stability and security. Another kind of person learns the *Gemara* with the intention of getting the general picture of the *sugya*. He is mainly using his element of wind, which is movement and direction. Another kind of person learns the *Gemara* mainly to have *chiddushim*. This kind of person is mainly using fire, which is always renewing itself.

Whichever of these is your main style of learning, though, you need to also learn how *enjoy* a thought that you say on the *Gemara*.

(If a person is on a higher level, he enjoys every word of the *Gemara* he learns, simply because it is the words of our holy Sages. He has great love for the Torah). Even if a person is not on the level of such love for the Torah, he can definitely learn how to enjoy any thought he says on the *Gemara* (on condition that is truthful). This is besides for trying to get to the truth of what you learn; although that is also essential, you need to simply enjoy the beauty of a true Torah thought.

Sometimes a person is learning the *Gemara* and he really wants to be clear about the information and to get to the truth, but then he gets depressed as he's going along, because he's frustrated. Doesn't the Torah 'gladden the heart'? Where is the happiness that Torah is supposed to bring? But it's because the person does not know how to enjoy the words he is learning.

I don't mean that you should sit there for 5 minutes in every word you learn and hold onto the enjoyment. But you just need to simply enjoy something truthful about the *Gemara* that you say.

Seeing The 'Nekudah Tovah' (The Positive Point)

That concerns the spiritual side of life, but we also need to know how to have pleasure in the physical. When it comes to the physical and external aspects of life, this concept is more delicate, because if you learn how to linger with the joy of physical desires, it will harm you spiritually. So we are not discussing how to enjoy food and other physical desires. (The only time where we find that we are supposed to enjoy food is on *Shabbos Kodesh*, when we have a *mitzvah* of *Oneg Shabbos*).

We are rather speaking about situations of our life that we find unpleasant: let's try to find pleasure even in those situations.

We have all gone through many situations in our life – some of them were easy and pleasant, and some were difficult. We can easily recall the pleasure we experienced in the good times we remember. But there is another kind of pleasure we can find: in any situation, you can find the '*nekuda tovah*', a positive point, to think about. Don't just 'see' the *nekudah tovah* in every situation – learn how to derive enjoyment from it.

This is general advice for life, but it is especially applicable to one whose main element is fire. One needs to derive enjoyment from both the external side to his life (his various situations that he is placed in), as well as the spiritual side to his life (such as in his Torah learning and times of prayer). If a person has a lot of fire in his soul, he must make sure that he knows how to derive pleasure.

Again, we are not referring to the enjoyment of physical desires, but to learn how to enjoy the various situations of our life.

In Conclusion

Getting used to this trains the soul to derive pleasure from any situation, which provides us with a degree of calmness and satisfaction, at the same time that our inner fire demands that we go higher. Using this advice helps us weaken the fire a bit, providing it with stability so that it doesn't get out of hand.

This is how we use our **water-of-earth-of-fire** for holiness: to use the power of pleasure as a way to give stability to our fire.

3 | *Conceit: Knowing Your Aspirations*⁹

Introduction

Previously, we explained the points of earth-of-earth-of-fire and water-of-earth-of-fire. Now we are up to discussing the ‘wind’ aspect of earth-of-fire, but in order to understand it, we will need to understand how the ‘fire’ aspect (of earth-of-fire) works.

Fire-of-Earth-of-Fire: Our Point of Aspiration

Fire-of-earth-of-fire is the “*ratzu*” aspect – the part in us that wants to proceed to the next spiritual level and go higher. But when it is not balanced properly, one’s aspirations are not clear, and the person’s inner fire will send him into all kinds of directions, without any clear goal in mind.

[There are three kinds of “*ratzu*” in the soul which you need to know about and identify in yourself, and to be clear about what they are:]

1 - How You Act When You Feel Inspired.

Sometimes we are elated and growing spiritually, and sometimes we are not. These are called our periods of ‘Days of Love’ (growth) and ‘Days of Hate’ (descent), the concept first brought in *Sefer HaYashar* of Rabbeinu Tam, which we explained in the previous chapters. That is one kind of ‘*ratzu*’ we must be aware of and determine: what we are like in ‘Days of Love’, when our ‘*ratzu*’ aspect is active. It is how we are like when we are in a period of growth; which element of the soul we are drawn towards using, in order to achieve our goals.

This is not referring to what your “mood” is. That is but a very generic description (and it is a product of street language). We are referring to knowing which point of the soul shines the best as you’re in a period of growth and you feel inspired to achieve and progress.

When you’re doing well in your spiritual growth, it means that your ‘earth’ aspect of fire is balanced, helping your fire be stable, directed, and guided, towards a certain goal. It is helping you get to where you need to get to – such as where you need to get to in your Torah learning, knowing how your *davening* should look like, knowing how your good *middos* should look like, etc.

2 - What You Are Actively Working To Acquire.

A second kind of ‘*ratzu*’ you need to know – besides for knowing your current level - is to know which level you are currently aspiring to reach. In addition to the points you are good at as you are

⁹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-003-conceit-knowing-your-aspirations>

inspired, which points are you working at to acquire? What is the next stage that you are currently aiming for?

Jumpiness

If a person doesn't know this, he will end up skipping around a lot from one point to another. One day he might decide he will go through an entire *sefer*, sitting there by his *shtender* and learning it, seeing various points that he needs to improve in. Then a speaker comes and delivers a speech, and now he's really into what the speaker is saying, and he decides to work on other areas of improvement. Then he hears another speaker, or another speech about a different topic which he knows he has to improve in, so he turns his focus on something else....

His problem is that he keeps losing focus on any one area of improvement, because he's not clear about where he wants to get to. He needs to be able to focus on one area at time and not jump around so much.

Even if he were to hear about certain concepts that are new to him which he knows he could use improvement in, and even if he discovers weaknesses in himself that he never heard about before and now he really feels a need to fix those parts of his personality, he has to know how to put those topics on the side for now, and keep the focus on what he's currently involved in.

A more subtle point about this is that he must also not mix together two different areas to work on at once.

3 - Heading Towards The Purpose of Life.

A third kind of '*ratzu*' one must know and be clear about is to know your greatest aspiration in life, when it comes to spiritual growth. This is the depth of what it means to be a *ben aliyah* (spiritually growing person). It is to know: "Where am I heading in life?"

For example, if you would live for 80 years – and we all hope to get to that ripe age, with Hashem's help - where do you want to be 'holding' then? You need to conceptualize how you would want to look like then, how your spiritual level will be like. Then you need to ask yourself: "Am I *directing my life* towards how I would want to look then?"

If one doesn't think about this, then he spends his whole life in *hesech hadaas* (having no mind)! One must be *very clear* about to where he wants to get to at the end of his life.

When a *yeshiva bochur* is young, he is prone to imagining things, having totally unrealistic aspirations. He might wish to ascend to the highest levels possible and be close to the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. He might base this on the words of the Rambam that it is possible for a person to become as righteous as Moshe in his generation.¹⁰ But when we get more older and we mature somewhat, we become more realistic, and our fantasies are not as dominant as when we were younger. When we hit

¹⁰ Brought in Kovetz He'aros of Rav Elchonon Wasserman z"l

that maturity stage, it is then upon us to then think about where we would like to get to in life, and be very clear about it.

(It is not suggested for younger people to reflect about this. It is meant specifically for people who are older and who have matured in life).

The Level Beyond

When a person is reaching his goals that he sets out for himself, he can uncover even greater levels, which he never even fathomed that he can reach. A new ‘gate of wisdom’ opens to him at that point¹¹. But this only happens when a person learns Torah with tremendous *mesirus nefesh* (sacrifice) and he’s serving Hashem with all his soul’s energies.

Clarifying Your Three Points of Aspiration

In summary, there are three points of ‘*ratzu*’ (aspiration) you need to know and clarify to yourself.

The first step is to know what your goals are when you are doing well. The second step is to be clear about the next level you’re trying to acquire now. The third step is to be clear about the purpose of your life.

If one is not clear about these three points – especially the third step – he will never be able to reach his goals and aspirations.

Knowing What You Want

It’s not enough for this to simply read *sefarim*. That is what you want to acquire, and all the words of our Sages are absolutely true, but it might not be true for your current soul level to work on.

When a person is not familiar with his soul’s abilities, he does not know the first stage, and he might think he’s at the second stage because he knows that what he is supposed to want. He reads in *Mesillas Yescharim* that the purpose of life is *d’veykus* to Hashem, and that this is the purpose of the Torah and *mitzvos*, but he is only aware of this superficially.

One must know what he wants out of life – all of the three levels we described. We need to learn about it from the words of *Chazal*, but along with it, we need to recognize those matters within our own soul.

¹¹ *Igros Chazon Ish*

Of course, the words of *Chazal* are the total truth and they don't need our approval. But we need to internalize those matters in our soul, and in order to do that, we need to make sure that we are working on the levels that are right for our own soul level.

When one isn't sure about this, he decides that he must want certain goals because he has heard that he is supposed to want it, without considering if he's working on a level that's inappropriate for him to work on or not.

For example, there was a Rebbi who had 30 boys in his class, and he said to them that they must all do exactly the same thing that he suggested. 30 boys are each very different from each other, with different soul levels and different energies, yet they are all being told to work on the same exact thing? Clearly, it will not work for everyone, because each boy in the class is at a different level and each have different capabilities and strengths.

To Know Where You Are 'Holding'

The first step of the clarification is to know where *you* are really holding in your *ruchniyus* (spirituality); to know, clearly, what your current soul level is. This requires awareness of your soul's abilities.

Without this awareness, a person doesn't really know where he is 'holding', and he has a very superficial definition of it. He might think he is 'holding' on the page of *Gemara* he is learning, or at which point of his *davening* he is 'holding' at, or how much *chessed* he does. Although these are all truthful points to know about, they are superficial definitions. The real issue is *where your current soul level* is at.

You cannot discern this every second of the day, but you can feel what it is in the general sense: where you are generally holding, in your *ruchniyus*.

Example – When You Find It Difficult To Exert Your Mind In The 'Sugya'

For example, if a person is exerting himself to understand a certain *sevara* (logical explanation) in the *Gemara*, he can discern if his soul wants to exert itself, or if it is having a hard time. If he sees that he doesn't have the energy to exert his mind in the *sugya* as much as he's used to, he should understand that it is currently a period of "retreat" (*shov*), and that it is not a time where he has the strength to ascend (*ratzu*). Coming to that conclusion, he can push off the exertion for a different time.

Someone with a lot of energy to exert himself in Torah is able to always exert his mind in Torah, and this idea will not apply to him. But if a person does not possess great mental stamina like this, he will experience times in which he simply cannot exert his mind as much as he's normally capable of

doing. When such a time comes, a person needs to discern this, realizing and accepting that this is his current spiritual level, and to save his energy for later.

Developing A Natural Awareness of Your Current Level

This all comes from listening deeply to the soul, where one can discern where his soul level is. The more elevated and spiritually refined a person becomes, the more he will be able to discern his current level at any given moment of the day. Even if one cannot sense it all the time, he can still get himself to be generally aware throughout the day of his current soul level.

We have described this concept briefly, but it has described a very inner kind of life. It is a life of awareness of oneself all the time. Just like you can be aware that you are in Jerusalem or Tzefas and you don't need to think about it, so can you become aware of your soul level without having to think about it. It can come to you naturally, with the more you refine yourself and become attuned to it.

At the beginning of *davening* as well, you can tell if you're in a stage of "*ratzu*" or "*shov*" right now, and based upon that, you can expect to know what kind of *tefillah* you will have. The same is true with learning Torah and with interpersonal relationships and with all other spiritual areas. It is to know and discern where your current level is: Do you feel that you have the strength now to ascend to higher levels (*ratzu*), or do you feel that you don't have that energy right now (*shov*)

This is the concept of a balanced kind of **fire-of-earth-of-fire**. When this point in the soul is not stable, a person jumps around between one level and another, based on the current situation.

Such a person will *daven* good if he had a good coffee before *davening*, for example, but if he didn't, he feels like he can't have a good *davening*. His sense of spiritual growth doesn't come from within – it comes from outside stimuli. The more internal a person becomes, the more he listens to his soul, and he can know where he is currently holding.

This concept has been described briefly, but it encompasses our entire life. It is describing an awareness that must accompany us throughout each day. It enables a person to quickly discern what his current soul level is at any given time, but as a natural sense, without having to think deeply into it. It becomes a natural kind of self-awareness to your current level.

Knowing Your Goals

The second kind of '*ratzu*' is to know what you're trying right now to acquire.

For example, when you are learning a *sugya* of *Gemara*, you are clear that you want to get to know the *sugya*. There are different levels of clarity when it comes to this. Some people are not sure if they should learn all the *Rashi* and *Tosafos*, and even those that do aren't sure if they should also see the *Maharsha*, *Maharam*, the other *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* until the *halacha l'maaseh*. They

simply go with whatever direction they are taken in, and there is no exact place where they want to get to. (Some are exceptions, but most people have a problem when it comes to this). The sensible way to go about it is to be clear about where you need to get to.

When it comes to learning a *sugya*, at least it is clear to many people about where they want to get to. But when it comes to matters of growing in *Avodas Hashem*, there are a lot of people who wish to grow in their *ruchniyus* very much, but they have no idea what exactly they need to acquire. People say they want to acquire a ‘*lev tov*’, or an ‘*ayin tovah*’, or “*ahavas Hashem*”, or “*yiras Hashem*” – but there is often no exact goal in mind.

This is a problem. One should know exactly what he is trying to acquire. Then he can look back and see if he’s really grown in it or not. But if he has never become aware of what he is trying to acquire, he cannot know if he’s ever worked on himself in the first place.

How you acquire those levels is the next step and a different issue. The first step is to know exactly *what* you are aspiring for. For example, are you working mainly on acquiring love for Hashem or fear of Hashem? Are you working to fix the trait of conceit or anger? Whatever it is that you really want to work on, first *become aware* of what exactly you want to work on.

This is the first step you must be clear in. Without first clarifying this, there is no order to your *avodah*, and you work on one area and then another area each day, with no *seder* (order). There is supposed to be a *seder* to our *avodah*. (Working each day of *Sefiras HaOmer* on a different *middah* is therefore not recommended, because it lacks a *seder* of *avodah*).

You might realize that you need to instead work on different areas, and that you made a mistake. If so, you can then reevaluate your priorities. And you should also know that it takes at least *a few weeks* to work on any one area of improvement!

That is briefly the second stage one needs to know regarding his spiritual aspirations: to know, clearly, the goal that he is trying to get to.

The Third Clarification: The Purpose of Life

The third thing you need to know is: what the purpose of all our life is – and if you are heading towards it.

We all know what it is, but it is not clear to us if we don’t reflect about it often. If we ask a person what the purpose of life is, we often get different answers. One person will say, “To do the will of Hashem”, and another person will say, “To learn Torah.” There are other answers too that people say.

But we must know that knowing the purpose of life is not acquired through a little bit of thought about it. Anyone who is mature needs to clarify what it is. He can do it himself or with friends. Then he needs to make sure he is directing his life towards it.

This is the general “*ratzu*” that must envelope our life. After clarifying it, it doesn’t mean you won’t go through any failures or difficulties just because you know what it is. But when you are in touch with this point, you can direct your entire life towards reaching it. You need to think about it all the time. It must always be in front of your eyes and you must always be actively working towards it.

Clear Direction In Your Life

The next step after that will be to think about *how* you can reach it and to know if your path of *Avodas Hashem* is leading you towards it.

Some people, when asked about the purpose of life, will answer, “To know the entire Torah.” But *no one* knows what that means. Is there anyone today who knows the whole Torah?! Does anyone today know all of *Tosfeta*, *Sifri*, *Mechilta*, all the writings of *Rashbi*, and *Mechilta D’Rebbi Yishmael*? It is not clear to us what it means to ‘know all of Torah’ is, and in *Halacha* as well, it is not clearly defined.

If anyone is asked how he will finish the whole Torah, what would he answer? Does it depend on following the words of the Sages that one should increase his Torah learning and ask Hashem for mercy? The words of the Sages are true, but we do not know how exactly to apply this. Some people have a plan of how they will do it. But each person must know clearly where he must head towards in his life. He must ask himself from time to time if he is getting closer to the purpose of life.

In this way, a person’s ‘fire’ is granted stability; it becomes more guided and directed towards reaching a certain purpose, as opposed to becoming jumpy, random, and unpredictable. The ‘fire’ in the soul, when it is directed towards the goal and purpose of life, becomes lasting and permanent, helping a person ascend levels in spiritual growth, on a regular and daily basis.

The *Gemara* says that “many tried to do like Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, but they did not succeed”. There are many reasons given for this, but along the lines of our discussion, it can be explained because many people are not clear about where they want to get to, namely, the three kinds of “*ratzu*” (aspiration) that were described here.

Instead, there are superficial definitions of acquiring high levels, knowing all of Torah, doing a lot of chessed, etc. These generalizations are very not clear to people, so people don’t know what they want when they aspire for these things, and it is almost definite that they will not reach their goals, with such a perspective.

The Difference Between Conceit and Fantasy

So the **fire-of-earth-of-fire** in our soul needs to be guided to where we want to get to.

When it is left unfixed, it becomes *gaavah* (conceit) in all kinds of changing forms. One day a person will feel conceited in one area, the next day he will feel conceited in a different area. Usually, this comes from his fantasies, though; he thinks he has acquired high levels. In those cases, it is not actually *gaavah*, but *dimayon* (imagination).

A real *baal gaavah*, by contrast, is someone who knows his actual qualities and he feels conceited about them. To begin fixing it, he needs to use **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, stabilizing his fire – to know, clearly, where his current level in *ruchniyus* is.

When **earth-of-fire-of-earth** is left unfixed, it becomes a kind of *gaavah* that keeps changing based on various outside factors, which means that it is really a branch of *dimayon*. The person fantasizes that he has acquired high levels, because he is very jumpy in his progress. This is an unstable kind of ‘fire’ in the soul and it is not actual *gaavah* (conceit); it is *dimayon* (fantasy).

When the fire is more stable – meaning, when one is directed towards trying to acquire certain goals, but he feels conceited with all of this, here it is real *gaavah*, and not a *dimayon*. The trait of *gaavah* can be fixed through acquiring the trait of humility.

In either case (*gaavah* or *dimayon*), one must know clearly the three kinds of ‘*ratzu*’ are: what his current level is, what is the next level he is working now to acquire, and what the purpose of life is that he needs to be heading towards (which he must always be cognizant of).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: *How can a person know what his current level is, being that our inner world is so hidden from us, and our level keeps changing?*

A: Part of the solution to this lies in having a Rebbi. *Chazal* say to “make for yourself a *rebbe* (teacher), and be removed from doubt”. When choosing a Rebbi [to guide you in matters of *Avodas Hashem*], either choose a Rebbi who has the general picture (*‘hekef hakelali’*) about life, or, choose a Rebbi who has already traversed the particular issues that you are struggling with.

But in addition to this part, there is also your own “inner teacher.” Man’s *avodah* is to internalize his mind’s knowledge about truths, into his heart. As it is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart.*” A person’s brain/mind is considered to be like the inner ‘teacher’ of man, which gathers all the appropriate knowledge about life and sees it (aware of it intellectually), and the ‘student’ within him that accepts the teacher’s information, is the heart.

With some people, their problem is that their brain and heart cannot understand beyond a certain point, and this shows where that they are not yet holding at that level. Others have a

disconnection between the heart and brain, which means that they know a lot but they don't act upon their knowledge. This problem is referred to by our Sages in the statement, "One whose wisdom is greater than his actions." Others do have an integration between their mind and heart, but even so, their mind is aware of more knowledge than what their heart has internalized, so they are still not holding at the levels which they know of.

But if a person is always seeking to internalize his mind's knowledge into his heart, before the mind has seen enough knowledge, although this is also an imperfect kind of *avodah*, such a person is still closer to acting upon those levels he knows about. It is not yet perfect, and he will still need to ask advice from another who can guide him to reach higher levels, or, he can get to those levels within himself and be able to reach those levels accurately, to some extent.

Q2: Does reaching the purpose of life depend on your soul's personal energies, or does it depend on simply knowing the words of Chazal about this and directing ourselves towards it?

A: In the words of our Sages we find many different opinions about what the purpose of life is. We can simply understand it as another argument of our Sages, such as how Beis Hilel and Beis Shamai argued. But the true way to understand it is that all of our Rabbis agreed that the purpose of life is to become attached to the reality of Hashem (*d'veykus*). It is just that there are several ways to get to this closeness, and the issue was, where to put the emphasis.

To be very general, there are three root paths, based on the three pillars of the world: Torah, *avodah* (prayer) and *gemilus chesed* (kindness). Some *neshamos* in *Klal Yisrael* mainly become close to Hashem through Torah, some mainly connect to Hashem through *tefillah*, and others are mainly connected to Hashem through *chesed*.

When it comes to how *Klal Yisrael* should act as a whole, it is Torah that must be the emphasis: the main way which *Klal Yisrael* connects to Hashem is through Torah. (On a deeper level, even the pillars of *avodah* and *gemilus chassadim* are included in the path of learning Torah, because everything in the universe ultimately comes from the light of the Torah.)

But when we deal with the 'branches' of our *avodah*, here, there is a dispute in the words of our Sages, about where to put the emphasis. We see that the sage Ben Azai and others would only learn Torah and do almost nothing else. We find that the sages Abaye and Rava were very involved with *chesed*; they were the ones that said that one should learn Torah and do *gemilus chesed* as well. The entire issue is: which *levush* (garment) do we mainly 'wear' in order to attach ourselves to Hashem?

The answer depends on each person's individual soul root, and there is no *sefer* that can write the answer to this issue. If you do find a *sefer* that gives an answer, you should know that the answer is based on the author's personal soul root. You can have a very holy author of a *sefer*, but that does not mean that everyone must follow his path; even if other great people agree that the author is holy and a 'reliable' teacher. Of course he is a 'reliable' person; we aren't questioning that. But he's 'reliable' only for those who share the same soul root as his. One needs much inner clarification, as well as a lot of *siyata d'shmaya* (heavenly assistance), in order to find the path that is meant for his own soul.

In any case, the goal of life is clear, according to all of our Sages and Rabbis: the purpose of life is to reach *d'veykus* with Hashem. The only issue is, which *levush* (garment) of *d'veykus* one needs to use. It depends on each person's unique situation, and it needs a lot of hard work on a person's part in order to get to.

Q3: *Why should a person ever ask another for advice, if he can just discern his own level?*

A: If I have understood your question clearly, the answer is as follows. Although *Chazal* say that we must have a Rebbe, this obviously does not mean that we need to have a Rebbe for every last nitty-gritty issue that comes up in your life. Should a person spend the whole day on the phone trying to get through to his Rebbe whenever he has an issue? Obviously, there is some kind of deciding that each person needs to do, *himself*, without having a Rebbe at his side.

But the issue is: How indeed does a person know if an issue he's facing is one that requires a Rebbe to answer, or if he should decide it on his own? This is a fine line that one must figure out himself - and there is no *sefer* that can define the rules of this.

Basically, the more a person matures in life, the more he can decide on his own without having to ask a Rebbe for an answer. If a person is not that mature in life, either he will always decide quickly because he is immature and he does know how to really think properly, or he is a kind of person who will have to ask a Rebbe a lot for advice. Those are the two options that he will always find himself with.

Every person ultimately has situations where he will have to decide, on his own, how to act. These include the various situations throughout the day which force you to decide what to do, or, the situations where you have no idea how to decide on, yet even so, you have no choice but to make some decision. There are always situations which force us to decide on our own where we can't ask anyone else. All of us go through such situations, some more and some less. So although we must have a Rebbe, there will always be situations where we have to decide on our own, and there is no Rebbe to ask.

When it comes to such situations, where we are forced to make a decision, we can decide using the power of *daas*. Our *daas* is actually a point above our own soul. We must use our *daas* and decide on things. Although we cannot ever be sure about our decisions, we have no choice sometimes, and we must decide. But if one makes sure to act more and more with purer intentions, he is granted more Heavenly assistance (a light of Hashem that guides him) to get to the truth.¹²

¹² For more on the power of *daas* and how it relates to making decisions, see *Getting To Know Your Thoughts_08_Connecting To Your Decisions*, and *Fixing Your Wind_013_Bragging Part 1 – The Need For Approval*; see also *Utilizing Your Daas_02_Deciding*.

4 | *Conceit: Knowing Your Way* ¹³

Wind-of-Earth-of-Fire: Moving Towards Your Goals

With the help of Hashem, we continue here to discuss the element of fire. We are currently up to discussing **wind-of-earth-of-fire**. Previously we dealt with **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, which is the power to be motivated towards the goal of life. **Wind-of-earth-of-fire** is about *how we move* towards our goal.

It is the concept of having a “*derech*”, a way, of how we get to our goal of life. The goal of life is the same for all of us, but the “way” to get there is different with each person. There are many valid “ways” to get to the goal of life.

Many Paths of Serving the Creator

The Jewish people, when we left of Egypt, consisted of 12 *shevatim* (tribes), and there were three different sections that traveled through the desert, with each section having its own place; none of the groups mixed with the other groups. This was not coincidental. It was a symbol that although we were all traveling together in the same place and heading towards the same goal, we each have uniquely different paths.

In addition, when the sea was split for us and we traveled through it, the Sages state that there were 12 paths going through to the end, with each tribe having his own path. The miracle of the splitting of the sea was for everyone, but within this general miracle, there were 12 different paths.

At the splitting of the sea, it was clear to each person which tribe he belonged to; each person knew the *derech* he had to go on. That was the case back then, when the inception of the Jewish people began, after we left Egypt. After the Torah was given and after we entered Eretz Yisrael, there was still a division of 12 tribes, and each tribe knew his way. But after the wicked king Sancheriv came and mixed up the nations of the world, we lost our lineage, and now nobody knows which tribe he stems from. *Kohanim* know where they come from, but even *Kohanim* sometimes are unclear about where they come from.

So we don’t know which of the 12 tribes we each come from. Even more so, a person is unclear of what his inner *avodah* (way of serving the Creator) is: which of the 12 tribes represents his unique path of *avodah* that is meant for him to take.

The *Arizal* said that there are many “*nuschaos*” (texts) of *tefillah* that have appeared throughout the generations, and this is because there are several paths based on each of the 12 tribes. Superficial

¹³ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-004-knowing-your-way>

people think that there's only one correct "*nusach*", and that all other *nuschaos* are incorrect. But we have a tradition from our Rabbis that there are many different *nuschaos*, for each tribe had its own *nusach*. Nobody knows which *nusach* is his real *nusach*, because we don't know which tribe we come from. But even if we would know which *nusach* is for us, we still don't know which of the 12 tribes our own personal *avodah* is rooted in.

These are just examples. The point is that we don't know which path we are rooted in, and therefore, we are unclear today of which path we need to go in, what the order of our *avodah* should be.

This is yet concerning the 12 general paths found in the Jewish people which are rooted in the 12 tribes, but there are even more divisions after that. Our Rabbis teach that there are 70 souls who went down to Egypt, so there were 70 divisions who branched out from the original 12, meaning that there are 70 unique paths of *avodah* that are contained in the 12 roots. The Jewish people actually consist of 600,000 souls, and *Chazal* say that each person thinks differently.

Besides for the fact that none of us know where we are rooted in the general sense, there is an additional factor that adds to the lack of clarity. There are 12 paths of *avodah* based on each of the 12 tribes, yet there is no one *sefer* that explains to us what the *avodah* of the tribe of Reuven was, what the *avodah* of Shimon's tribe is, what the *avodah* of Levi's tribe is, etc.

So we don't even know what the *avodah* of each tribe is. There is no *sefer* which explains to us how to go from point A to point Z in our *avodah*. There are a few *sefarim* which are written in an orderly fashion, such as *Mesillas Yescharim* and others, which explain to a person how to go from one step to the next step in his *avodah*, but even these *sefarim* are written in a general format, which do not specify the details of any one path.

So forget about the fact that we don't know the paths of all 12 tribes. We don't even know even one path of any one of the tribes!

The Lack of a "Derech" In Avodas Hashem In Today's Times

There is much knowledge we have in our hands about the details of *avodah*, but there is no *derech* that shows us how to go in order. Many of us know a lot about *Avodas Hashem*, but does anyone have a *derech* within all of this information, knowing how to apply it and what the order of the steps should be?

Most people do not even know of even one existing *derech*. If you ask someone who belongs to a certain 'sect' of Judaism, and you ask him what his *derech* is, you will not get a clear answer. People give all kinds of superficial definitions, and based upon this, they form the basis of their way of life.

I meet all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. I asked a person once, "What are the main points that your place emphasizes?" He started to think hard and wonder about it. He was in that place about 30 years, but he had never thought before about this.

If a person is in a certain place for many years and trying to “serve Hashem” there in that place, but he doesn’t even know what his *derech* of *avodah* is, he might gather a lot of knowledge about different aspects of *avodah*, but it’s all just a “generalized” kind of knowledge that’s outside of him and not a part of him. Although all of this knowledge that he is aware of can be true, it is still superficial knowledge to the person, because the person only knows about these things in the general sense and he does not relate to it personally.

It’s possible that a person has lived his entire life and he is of a certain ‘type’ of Jewish community or way of life, yet he never clarified what the *derech* of *avodah* was in the place that he lives in that he’s involved with. The definitions of *avodah* he knows of may be true and correct, but he is only aware of them in terms of general information, and not more than that.

What results from this ignorance? People are not being able to recognize and be familiar with even *one* solid approach in serving Hashem; they are not even sure of the very “*derech*” they are taking. When asked what their “*derech*” is, they might answer that they are a “*talmid*” of a certain *Rebbi*, or that his father or grandfather is of a certain type of Judaism, and that this is his *derech* as well. If this is true, then it’s wonderful. But the question is: Does a person really recognize well the *derech* of *avodah* in the place he’s found in?

In most cases, the answer is “No”. People are mostly aware of the superficial layer of the *derech* they are taking, and they are not really in touch with it.

Thus, even when a person really wants to a *ben aliyah* (growing, spiritual person), this is not enough, because many times a person does not even know his *derech*. The *derech* he is currently taking is something he has never clarified; he doesn’t know if this is a *derech* that will bring him to the goals he wants to reach. Yet he might even spend his whole life involved with such a *derech* even though he has no idea what it is. Compare this to a person who travels from Jerusalem to Tzefas yet he never thought about the roads that get him there, and he is only aware of the direction to get there but he has no idea how to get there.

I am not talking about a person who simply doesn’t care about how to grow in his life; our words here are talking even about someone who really wants to serve Hashem, who spends much time and energy at his *derech* in life, and he is the type to be really bothered if he is not reaching his goals. Just because he is bothered at failures in his *Avodas Hashem* doesn’t necessarily mean that he has a *derech* of *avodah*. He might be heavily involved all the time in a *derech* that he has no idea of, and he spends so much time and energy at it, yet he has never even clarified what the *derech* is!

Mixed Up

Going further with this, even if a person is involved with a certain *derech* in the place where he is, there is no person who is so insulated and restricted to the exact *derech* he is taking. He’s accumulated lots of knowledge from all the different places he has learned in and spent time in, before marriage and after marriage, and he has read certain *sefarim*.

Basically, each person has accumulated a certain amount of knowledge about life and *Avodas Hashem*, and if one tries to somehow incorporate into his own life all of the information that he has come across, this is risky. When questioned if he is acting correctly and if his approach is proper, he will defend himself; sometimes he will be right, but sometimes, he is not.

Often a person will mix together different paths of *avodas Hashem*, and in fact, sometimes he is mixing together paths of *Avodas Hashem* that are totally in opposition of each other. He never understands any of these ways of *Avodas Hashem* that he's mixing together, therefore, he doesn't see the depth of the contradictions he is forming.

If one properly understands a *derech* in *Avodas Hashem*, he might know how to harmonize it with other paths of *Avodas Hashem*. But if one never understands the first path and he mixes another path of *Avodas Hashem* into his way of life, he does not know what he is doing, and he will be forming contradictions in his way of life.

When one lives most of the time with an unclear path of *Avodas Hashem*, he will attempt to combine all the information he has learned about, and the result will be some "new" path of *Avodas Hashem* that no one has ever heard about. (It's like building a private altar). Eventually, he will find himself broken, realizing that he was severely mistaken all his life. If this doesn't happen, he will go his whole life with a mistaken approach in *Avodas Hashem* and in how to live life, and he will end his life that way, having spent his entire life in misconception. The words here are not describing some distant place in the world that lacks a solid *derech* in *Avodas Hashem*; we are describing issues which most people face.

Most people do not clarify what their *derech* is in *Avodas Hashem*, and when people do feel a desire for spiritual growth, the tendency is to borrow ideas from here and there and put them together. (Understandably, there are others will not add on anything at all to their *derech* if it something that did not come from their tradition). But either way, many people are not clear in what their *derech* is, and when a person wants to really grow and to become a *ben aliyah*, he finds himself without a *derech*, and in desperation, he combines many different approaches together, in the hope of growing in this way.

He takes the risk, and there is no guarantee he will succeed. He thinks that he was basically successful until now, and that is what he basis his decisions on. He will live his whole life with a *derech* he has formed for himself which he has no idea of.

All of this misguided thinking stems from an impaired use of **wind-of-fire-of-earth**. On a simple level, wind-of-fire-of-earth is used for evil when a person is conceited, after having built a solid approach in life that is a recognized *derech*. But here we have described a step that must be traversed way before that problem: when a person builds for himself a *derech* which is not even a *derech* in the first place. It is a *derech* which is non-existent and it cannot last.

Developing A Solid Path

The proper way to approach our life and our *Avodas Hashem* is entirely different than the above one mentioned until now. It will feel like a longer path, but you will see that if you do traverse it, it actually ends up taking less of your time, in the long run of things. The superficial approach mentioned until now is a quick and impatient path which ends up taking longer than expected – and even more so, it’s not even a ‘path’ to begin with.

When we learn a *sugya* of *Gemara*, all of us to a certain extent have a certain path as we learn the *sugya*. We start from the beginning of a *sugya* and we get to the end, we learn the *mefarshim* (commentaries) along the way. Some people have a hard time with learning more than one approach in the *sugya*, so they will only stick to one approach, whether it’s the approach of Reb Chaim, Reb Shimon Shkop, or Rav Naftali Trop; others are able to be more expansive and they can absorb more than one approach towards the *sugya*. Either way, it is understood by most sensible people when learning a *sugya* that there is a certain path, a “*mehalech*”, from beginning of the *sugya* until its end.

The same concept needs to be applied to matters of *avodah*. We must become clear in a path of *avodah* just as much as being clear in an approach towards a *sugya* of *Gemara*. So just like you have a *mehalech* in a *sugya* of *Gemara* which you are used to sticking to, so must you stick to a certain *mehalech* when it comes to your *Avodas Hashem*. We all understand that to understand a *mehalech* in learning *Gemara*, it is not acquired in one day. It is very vast, so it requires years and years of exertion in Torah study. So too, when it comes to having a path in *avodah*, you need to exert yourself to clarify what your path should be.

Now, there is an obvious difference between exerting yourself in learning *Gemara* and exerting yourself in matters of *Avodas Hashem*. When it comes to learning *Gemara*, the ways of thinking are already well-known, and each *beis midrash* has its own *mehalech* they’re following. But when it comes to the different paths of *Avodas Hashem*, the matters are not arranged in an orderly fashion, so it’s more difficult to research. It is thus more difficult to clarify a path in *avodas Hashem* and gain a *mehalech* in it.

Yet, even so, you still need to try as hard as you can to know what it is, and discussing it with others can help for this. Learn these matters in a way that you find yourself with a *mehalech* in your *Avodas Hashem*, as opposed to just gathering details and facts.

Steps 1: Know Your Current Path

(1) To start, begin becoming familiar with the “*derech*” in *Avodas Hashem* that is of your type that you belong to, or of the community you are found in, or of the *beis midrash* you currently learn in, or of the *beis midrash* you grew up in.

Step 2: Recognize Some of The Other Paths

(2) The next step is, that besides for being familiar with one path of *Avodas Hashem*, you need to become familiar with other approaches of *avodah* as well that exist. Obviously, you cannot totally understand other approaches, but at least have some minimal recognition of them.

Ignorance

If we ask different people what the approach of the *Vilna Gaon* was, what the path of the *Baal Shem Tov* was, and what the path of the *Rambam* was, we will get different answers! People are often not familiar at all with any one approach: not the way of the *Vilna Gaon*, not the way of the *Besh"t*, and not the way of the *Rambam*. At best, there are people who can tell you some of the faults of each of these paths of *Avodas Hashem*, and based upon that, they build all kinds of arguments about it. But they are often totally ignorant of any one path of *Avodas Hashem*.

First of all, one must understand that each of the paths of *Avodas Hashem* of previous generation are each a valid “*mehalech*” (path) and totally based on the words of our *Chazal*, whose greatness we cannot fathom. Therefore, each of the existing and paths of *Avodas Hashem* are all vast and deep. But although they are all very deep ways, each person can have some connection to any one of these paths, according to his respective level. Each person needs to know the *mehalech* he grew up with, and after that, he should get to know some of the other *mehalchim* that are in his surroundings.

This is a learning process that takes time and research, and it needs to be discussed with others, so that one can keep refining his understanding of these matters. One has to know the existing paths of *Avodas Hashem* no less than how he must know other parts of Torah, which requires understanding and discussion with others. The point is to understand what a path in *Avodas Hashem* is, and it is not merely about collecting random pieces of knowledge.

When a person gets to that point – when he has absorbed a certain path of *Avodas Hashem*, and he is aware that there other paths as well – he approaches his learning of the words of our Sages with a clearer perception. Instead of viewing the information as random details that are dispersed from each other, he tries to see how the dots connect to form a certain path. This doesn't mean of course that he'll always fully understand what he learns each time. But he'll at least be able to understand the general path of the information, as opposed to seeing random details.

When it comes to learning *Gemara*, one must be able to write lengthy discussions on what he's learning. So, too, *Rabbeinu Yonah* wrote that “one must write lengthy discussions on fear of Heaven”. (He didn't just mean ‘fear of Heaven’; he meant all spiritual areas). The point is to learn of the existing paths of *Avodas Hashem* and to be able to build upon that information.

Included in this, as we said, is to recognize other paths as well, in *Avodas Hashem*. The more a person becomes familiar with other paths of *Avodas Hashem*, the better he will know his own path. There are no exact guidelines that can be given for this, but each person according to his abilities can get to know his own path of *Avodas Hashem*, as well as a little more than that.

I can't say exactly how much "a little more" is, because with each person it will differ. Just like we cannot define clearly how much a person has to learn in the *Gemara*, so too when it comes to *Avodas Hashem*, it cannot be clearly defined how many different approaches one must learn about it. It will depend on each person.

But the common denominator between all people is that all people need to recognize the path in *Avodas Hashem* one is taking, as well as some of the other paths that exist.

Step 3: Know Your Unique Path

(3) After this step, the next step is for a person to try to recognize which path in *Avodas Hashem* is the one that is meant for his own soul to follow: the path in *Avodas Hashem* that is designed according to his own soul root.

Until now, we were discussing that one must get to know the path he is taking, but now we are discussing a different point: one must get to know the path in *Avodas Hashem* that is meant for him to take.

How can a person know it? The clearer that a person has become about the different approaches of *Avodas Hashem* **and** he is also in touch with his own soul, the combination of these two factors together can lead him towards knowing what his unique path will be.

The Ger Who Became A "Gerrer Chassid"

I remember from my younger days in *yeshivah* that there was a student there who converted to Judaism. At his wedding, he was dressed like a *Gerrer Chassid*. He continued to live like a *Gerrer Chassid* and to associate himself with *Gerrer Chassidus*, etc. At some time later, I met up with him and I decided to ask him: "Why did you want to be a *Gerrer Chassid*?"

He said to me, "I remember once, when I was in Russia, the first time that I saw Jews. I saw people dressed in this type of clothing, so I knew that this is what I have to be." He became a *Gerrer Chassid* because that's the first type of Jew that he saw, so it was his first impression of Jews, and that is what moved him to become a *Gerrer*.

The fact that he converted was wonderful; it surely came from a truthful place, from inspiration from Heaven, and perhaps from merits of his ancestors. But who says that he took the right path in *Avodas Hashem*? Just because he saw others wearing this type of clothing means that he must wear it also? Why should his first impression of Judaism dictate the exact path he must take in life? He could have become a Jew without becoming a *Gerrer Chassid*.

It's very possible that a person bases his entire path in *Avodas Hashem* and his way of life upon a certain point or thought which was really not stable. Others have a problem in which they do not think at all; they are born into a certain community and they never think about what their path

should be; that is where they live and that is where they are buried. But the opposite problem of this [which we are addressing] is when someone bases his entire life on a certain foundation that was not substantial.

To illustrate further, there is another story that brings out this point. Reb Chatzkel Levenstein *zt"l* would always speak about *emunah*, as is well-known. Once he said that he suspected himself of ulterior motivations in this, and that it did not stem from a quest for *emunah*. He remembered that he had once been very moved by a speech from Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l* in Radin, where Reb Yeruchem spoke about *emunah*. If so, he said, he suspected that his speeches about *emunah* were motivated by his first impression of Reb Yeruchem, rather than coming from a quest for *emunah*.

He was a person who was very purified in his inner being, yet he suspected that his entire *Avodas Hashem* is based on some personal impression, which he deemed as an ulterior motivation. If Reb Chatzkel suspected himself, what should *we* of this current generation say, when we are not even clear about any one path of *Avodas Hashem*...?

In Summary

The clarification process is, as we said: one must know recognize the different paths of *Avodas Hashem*, and then he must clarify which path is meant for him.

As this becomes clearer, one also needs to *daven* to Hashem for help, that he be guided to find the true path that's meant for him to take.

Superficial Growth Vs. Inner Growth

A person who is superficial will make this clarification too quickly, confident that he's clear in his path of *Avodas Hashem*, but all the changes he will make will be external and superficial. He might change his entire external situation, such as what he wears and which type he dresses like, and he might move from his community and blend in with the other type that he now associates himself with.

But if a person is more internal, he knows that the main changes take place in one's inner world, which is hidden from plain sight. He can make some external changes of course, but most of the changes will be taking place on the inside of himself, not on his outside. There will be changes in how he thinks, in his *middos*, in his inner *avodah*. Slowly but surely, he will become clearer about how he must serve Hashem.

At some point, he will be able to direct himself to which path of *Avodas Hashem* he should take, and through getting to know his soul more and more, he can know which aspects of other paths can be integrated into his own path, and which points should not.

Clarity In Your Path

At the beginning of one's way as he begins to serve Hashem, it is impossible for one to know how to integrate various aspects of *Avodas Hashem* into the current path that he's taking. But the clearer he becomes, he can know which aspects can be integrated into his own path, and which aspects should not be integrated into his path. One needs to be concerned all the time if he is seeking a clear path.

At first, one must remain with the current path of *Avodas Hashem* that he is found in, and he should do so with *temimus* (unquestioning faith), but as time goes on, he should keep clarifying what path he is on and what it contains. As a person gets older and he matures, he can become clearer of which path in *Avodas Hashem* is meant for him to take.

There were only a few individuals who merited finding a new path in *Avodas Hashem* that they had never traversed beforehand. But it wasn't from a lack of knowledge of other paths or from confusion. To the contrary: because they were so clear about *Avodas Hashem*, they knew how to find a unique path that was meant for their soul. But these were only rare individuals who merited this, and we are not speaking about this here.

'Orach': Finding Your Unique Path

Earlier in this chapter, we spoke about the 70 root paths of serving the Creator, which further split into 600,000 paths that are each parallel to the 600,000 souls of the Jewish people. In other words, there are general paths which all Jews must traverse, and there is also a concept of an 'individual' path that each Jew can find – a path that is private and unique only to the one who traverses it.

The *Vilna Gaon* said that there is a concept of a "*derech*", a "path", which can either be a general path that all Jews traverse, or it can be a private path; and there is a level called "*orach*", a "way", which applies to any person, no matter who he is.

When one is truly serving Hashem, he will eventually reach his own "*orach*", which is his unique way that no one else will know of. It will not be learned from his *rebbe* (teacher) and it will not be taught to him by his father; and it is not the way that his son or student must follow. It is the path that is uniquely meant for him, which is not meant for others. But in order to reach one's own "*orach*", he must traverse all the previous steps that were described here.

Reaching one's own *orach* will mean that he has reached his own individual essence. This is a very subtle point to describe, because it is not reached through rebelling or contradicting one's teachers. It is rather a subtle form of originality that is developed within the paths that one has received from his teachers, who taught us the words of our Sages.¹⁴

¹⁴ See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts*, chapter 002 (*Building Your World of Thought*)

The common denominator between all people is that every person needs to be aware of what the paths of *Avodas Hashem* are; and to be in touch with one's own soul; and to know what his path in *Avodas Hashem* must be.

After all those steps have been reached, one can then know what his unique path in *Avodas Hashem* is. If one does reach his unique path, he fulfills the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*: “The foundation of piety and the root of inner work is, for a person to know what his duty is in *his* world”. Everyone has “his” own inner world, a unique path of *Avodas Hashem* that only he can reach. He merits to be unique both on this world and in the Next World, and he is the kind of person who merits to serve Hashem with a complete and pure kind of *avodah*.

5 | *Conceit: Knowing Your Capabilities*¹⁵

Water-of-Fire: ‘Dragged’ After Spiritual Jumpiness

With the help of Heaven, let us continue to discuss the element of fire, and the main trait which stems from fire, which is *gaavah* (conceit). Until now we explained about **earth-of-fire** and its four divisions. Now we will progress to discuss the kinds of *gaavah* which stem from **water-of-fire**.

(We must emphasize this again, as in the past, that there is far more to *gaavah* than merely feeling conceited towards others. *Gaavah* (הוֹאֵה) comes from the “*ge’us*” (גֵּוֹהַ), a nature in the soul to be higher. *Ge’us* can manifest as the negative trait of *gaavah*, but it is essentially a nature in the soul to go higher, whether for good or for evil.

Thus, much of what we are discussing in these classes is not about the actual trait of *gaavah* itself, but about the very nature of it, which is called “*ge’us*”; it has many applications.)

Water-of-fire is the nature in a person to become ‘dragged’ after the ‘fire’ in the soul. Fire jumps from its place and doesn’t stay where it is. Water gets dragged after things. When a person is getting dragged towards jumpiness, it comes from water-of-fire.

This has four divisions: earth, water, wind and fire. First we will describe these briefly and then in detail.

Four Types of Water-of-Fire

- (1) **Earth-of-Water-of-Fire** is when a person ‘jumps’, but in an orderly manner.
- (2) **Water-of-Water-of-Fire** is when a person has ‘jumped’ in a ‘dragged’ manner.
- (3) **Wind-of-Water-of-Fire** is referring to the nature of the ‘jumpiness’ itself.
- (4) **Fire-of-Water-of-Fire** is where the ‘jumpiness’ leads him to: a higher place than before.

I know the words here sound closed and mysterious. With the help of Hashem, we hope to go through each of these concepts in detail, one by one.

¹⁵ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-005-knowing-your-capabilities>

'Kefitzah': Jumping Levels

To be general, every person has the point of “*ratzu v'shov*” (running and returning) in himself; there is the point of “*ratzu*” and the point of “*shov*”. (On a more subtle note, there is the point below our “*ratzu*” and the point below our “*shov*”. We discussed this in earlier chapters.¹⁶)

Besides for this point in the soul, there is also the point of “*dilug*” (skipping), or “*kefitzah*” (jumping), in our soul. This refers to the ability in ourselves to access levels that are normally above us. Sometimes a person can jump to a level that's a little above himself, and sometimes he can jump to a level that is way above himself.

Sometimes a person imagines he is at those levels, and this is all a *dimayon* (fantasy); sometimes it is coming from *gaavah* (conceit), in which he feels that he is on a very high spiritual level and thus he thinks that he's eligible for those higher levels. These are negative uses of the ability of *dilug* (or *kefitzah*). But in essence, *dilug/kefitzah* (jumping) is the power to access a level that is above his normal level.

Every person has a *set* place where he identifies as “this is where I am”, but at times, he can go above his normal level. When a person goes above his normal level, he cannot stay there for that long. He can stay there for a little bit of time, but soon after, he returns to his normal level.

How can we see it manifest? We can give a few examples where we see it.

To illustrate, a person is riding on a bus from Yerushalayim to Meron, which can take 2-3 hours, or he's on a flight from Israel to Europe, which can take 4-5 hours. Or, he's flying to America, which can take 12-15 hours. He might enjoy the trip very much, but would he be able to live permanently on a bus or plane? He can stay on it for a few hours, but not longer. We can be there for some time, but then we go back to our normal place. People even go to outer space, but they know that it's not a place to live there.

When a person goes on a vacation with his family, he can stay in that place for a few days and even enjoy it, but he knows that he cannot live there all the time.

Another example: a person learned in a certain yeshivah for many years, and then he gets married, and he finds a new yeshivah to learn in. If it was going good there, why should he leave? He's been there for many years and he succeeded there, so why should he move from there? The answer is, it was good to be in that yeshivah for a certain amount of time. At a certain point, he must be able to move on to a different place. If he stays in his place and he can't get out of there, he will suffer, because since our soul is going through changes, it might not be able to adapt anymore to the surroundings. Our nature changes and our needs become different.

The point we see from this is that there is a place in ourselves that can live a certain way for a certain amount of time, but it must not become the norm. There is a point in our soul which is capable of living in a different place and lifestyle, for a certain amount of time. It is good and healthy

¹⁶ In *Fixing Your Fire* _01 and _02

to be able to live differently for some time. However, it is only good to do so for that amount of time. It doesn't obligate us to change our lifestyle for the rest of our life.

So besides for the fact that our soul is always progressing and returning from progress (*ratzuy v'shov*), our soul is also able to live in a different mode than the norm, for some time; but we must understand that it's only for a certain amount of time, and not more than that.

It is a power in our soul to go above our normal bounds, but this is a power that must not be used too much, or else we break our healthy boundaries. The temporary break from our boundaries gives new meaning to our normal boundaries, and that is the gain of this power.

The Festivals Vs. The Rest of the Year

Now let us apply this concept more practically.

We have the festivals, and we also the high holy days of the year, in which we feel more elevated during the rest of the year. These are times where we go above our normal bounds. However, most people are not able to live with that level all year round.

When it comes to the festivals of Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos, not everyone identifies with the holiness of these times. But when it comes *Yomim Noraim*, when Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur are approaching, every Jew feels a bit of elation during these times. It is brought in *halachah* that one should be stringent not to eat bread baked by a non-Jew during this time of the year, even if he normally eats it during the rest of the year. In other words, these are times of the year where we act above our normal level.

A person might think, "Okay, so that if is what we are supposed to do, then let's be that way during the entire year as well, not just during *Yomim Noraim*." If a person can do it for the rest of the year, that's wonderful. But if he finds that he can't, it shows that it is not his normal level to act like this.

Another example: a person stays up learning the whole night of Shavuos. He might feel, "Why can't I do this during the rest of the year as well?" He is full of idealistic aspirations. Then he *davens Shacharis* and *Mussaf* and struggles to stay awake, he gets back to his house and he falls upon his bed, and sleeps for several hours until the meal. That shows that he can't stay up a whole night learning for more than one night a year.

We see from this that the high levels we live with on the festivals cannot be the exact way to live during the rest of the year. It is good for the time being, but it is not a basis of *avodah* for the rest of the year.

On the festivals, there is a special spiritual light that helps us reach higher levels on the festival, but after the festival is over, the light is gone. It can certainly inspire a person to reach deeper into himself during the rest of the year, but he definitely cannot be on the level of the festivals during the rest of the year.

When a person doesn't understand this point, he does not know he really is and what his actual capabilities are. It is not a mere mistake; he will have a total misunderstanding of who he really is, and it will cause him to become conceited, as he tries to work with levels that are way beyond what he can do right now. It can cause much confusion in his soul. It also breeds delusions.

Here is another example. On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, a person *davens* a longer *Shemoneh Esrei*. He realizes how wonderful this is and he would like to do the same during the rest of the year as well. He will find that sometimes, when his soul feels more opened, he will be able to do this. But he will find himself in times where his soul is closed, and it feels to stressful to *daven* a long *Shemoneh Esrei*.

The Two Sides of Our Life: Seder (Routine) and Dilug (Jumping)

So one must know his natural capabilities and his normal schedule, which is his point of *seder* (order) in his soul, and he must also be aware that there is a point of *kefitzah* (jumping) (or *dilug* (skipping)) in himself, where he can jump levels at certain times. One must learn how to act when he's in a period of *dilug*: the rules of *dilug* are different than the rules of one's regular *seder*.

When one properly understands the nature of *dilug* in the soul, he has a better understanding of his times of elation, and these times are then given more orderliness.

How To View The Festivals

Many people have a hard time with the day after Yom Tov, because it can feel like falling from a high spiritual plateau to the daily routine of life. They have the same feeling when it's a day after a wedding or after an inspiring time, where they felt themselves soaring to higher spiritual levels, and the next day they find themselves back to normal routine. That's one kind of spiritual pain.

But there is a deeper kind of spiritual pain which is experienced by those who are very serious about their *Avodas Hashem*: they have a difficulty with their very times of spiritual elevation that they experience on Yom Tov. Thus, they are nervous about Yom Tov. Why? Because they are deeply aware that they are entering sublime territory that is way above their comprehension.

(If a person views Yom Tov as a "gift from Hashem" as it's called, he won't have this problem, but when he does not have this understanding, he instead views Yom Tov as a 'high spiritual state' that he must enter, naturally, he is afraid of such a thing.)

There's another way to live that's entirely different which would solve the above problem. Anyone who is serious about his *Avodas Hashem* needs to deal with this point somehow: We must know that the spiritual light which is present during the festivals give us the power to carry over a little bit of into the rest of the year as well.

Although we cannot be on the level of the festivals during the rest of the year, the festivals are able to deepen our already existing qualities and raise the bar a bit. It is not coming to make us change our *avodah* entirely. Rather, it's enlightening us to further pursue and deepen our already existing spiritual levels.

The Festivals Can Strengthen Your Torah Learning

For example, if a person is immersed in Torah during the rest of the year, the festivals can help a person raise the bar in his Torah learning.

It is not only Shavuot and Simchas Torah which gives a person a stronger power of learning Torah. The festival of Sukkos can also do it; when you read Koheles on Sukkos, you can realize how futile the world is (as Koheles says), and that in turn strengthens your desire for Torah learning.

On Pesach, which is the time of our freedom, we can realize the statement of *Chazal* that "there is no free person except a person who learns Torah." The festivals come to strengthen a point in you that's already active. Rosh HaShanah and Purim can also accomplish it.

That is the sensible way to view the festivals, but most people have a different attitude about it. When we enter a high spiritual time, such as *Yomim Noraim*, we realize that it's a higher level than our normal place, and can feel like an exile. It makes a person feel like he's imprisoned from his regular routine.

So not only is it hard to deal with the "fall" after *Yomim Noraim* ends; it's hard to enter in the first place, because it feels imprisoning, for we are entering higher levels.

Frustration On Simchas Torah (and afterwards)

Here is another simple example. On *Simchas Torah*, anyone who has learned a little Torah during the year will feel some joy on this day as he's dancing by *Hakafos*. He feels elated after each *Hakafah*. But he's feeling deep down, "Why can't I love the Torah this much during the rest of the year as well?" He feels an inner contradiction in himself.

Others experience a different problem: they enjoy *Simchas Torah* and they rise to high levels of loving the Torah on this day, but the day after *Simchas Torah*, they find themselves back to routine, and they wonder where all their high levels went.

Obviously, this frustration is not experienced by those who don't live an internal kind of life. Such a person doesn't even feel the changes, and he has no problem making the transition from *Simchas Torah* to the next day. But the more a person is sensitive to his inner spiritual world, the more he can feel the difficulty, of making the transition between the festivals to the normal routine of the year.

Lessening The Frustration

What, indeed, is the correct way to go about it? A person must be aware that before the festival, he will not feel as elevated, and that the festival will elevate him, and after the festival ends, he will go back to the regular routine of the year. In other words, he must know beforehand that it will be like this.

This is not because a person should simply despair from trying to acquire higher levels and to avoid the pain of the disappointment. It is because one must be aware that we simply cannot be on higher levels all the time. We can be aware that the elevation we feel on the festivals is temporary, and that it is not meant for the rest of the year to be on this level.

The point is to become aware that there's a part of ourselves that can jump to higher levels, but that doesn't mean we need to stay at those higher places we jump to. In this way, when the festivals end, instead of feeling a great fall from our level where we feel like we've fallen flat on the ground, we can fall away lightly from it, which will lessen the impact of the fall.

Before, During, and After

This concept is not only applicable with the festivals. It is an inner perspective towards living life, which applies to all aspects of spiritual growth.

Another application of it is when it comes to getting married. On the day of a person's wedding, he feels elated. The wedding is filled with holiness and aspiration. The next day, the newlywed returns to routine. But instead of feeling frustrated at this sudden transition, he should make himself aware from beforehand that there will be a point of "before" the wedding, and "after" the wedding, and the wedding itself.

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended to Heaven for 40 days, where he resembled an angel, and he did not touch food or drink, but then he came back down, where he continued to eat and drink. If a person were to try fasting 40 days, he would be a sinner, because he is endangering his life. Similarly, *Klal Yisrael* was told to abstain from marital relations for three days, to prepare to receive the Torah. These were high levels that a person normally cannot do.

One must be aware that the higher levels we can reach are only for the time being, but after that, we need to return to routine, and there is nothing wrong with this, for it is supposed to be this way.

Two Kinds of Seder (Giving Order)

When a person understands this concept well, he knows that the times in his life where he has extreme growth are but temporary periods in his life, and it does not obligate him to act extreme during the rest of the year. Rather, we have a certain routine we follow during the year, which is our

normal “*seder*” we follow. The other “*seder*” in ourselves is a time where we jump to higher levels, and our behavior during those times of jumping are *only* meant for those times.

We must give another example of the concept, because this is a very important aspect in our life which, when not understood, can cause much frustration. Sometimes, it happens in a person’s life that he is taken out of his normal *seder*. What does a person do when he’s on the go, or when his life is throwing him around from place to place, and he can’t keep to his normal *seder* of life?

There’s actually a *seder* of going about things even in a time where there is no *seder*. This is not referring to the concept of knowing how to utilize your time to its fullest when you’re learning in your normal *seder* in yeshivah. There’s an idea of knowing how to give *seder* to your life even when you’re not found in your normal *seder*. Besides for your normal *seder hayom* (schedule), you should know how to utilize the time of being outside *seder*. This is another kind of “*seder*”.

So a person has two abilities of *seder*: his normal *seder*, and knowing how to give *seder* to himself even when’s not in his normal *seder* (such as by knowing how to maximize his time). These two abilities must not be confused with each other, because then a person will seek how to maximize all his time during his *seder* itself, which will actually cause him to lose his ability of *seder*. Rather, a person needs to have the ability of *seder*, and outside of *seder*, he must know how to maximize his time, which is another kind of *seder*.

As an example, there is the normal *zman* (time) of the year, and then there is *Bein HaZemanim* (off season). During *Bein HaZemanim*, there is certainly a *seder* to it. It is not the regular *seder* of the year, but it is a kind of *seder*. One must know how to properly utilize his *Bein HaZemanim*. There is regular *seder* a person needs, and there is another kind of *seder* a person needs: how to maximize all of the times that are outside of the normal *seder*.

A person should have a regular *seder hayom*, but he also needs to know how he will act during *Yomim Noraim*, where he acts differently than his normal *seder*. Each of these do not have to invalidate the other.

In Summary

Earth-of-water-of-fire is about setting proper limits and bounds to ‘jumping’ spiritual levels. In this way, when we do have times of jumping higher in spiritual growth, we can do so in a sensible manner.

Retaining Inspiration From The Festivals

Until now, we explained how to go about the times in which we jump to higher levels, and how to properly approach them. Now we can understand the following deeper point.

If our high spiritual levels we reach on the festivals and *Yomim Noraim* are just temporary times of inspiration, then what do we have from it afterwards? There is usually some mark that it leaves on us. But we can understand it now more deeply: we are able to access those levels somewhat even during the rest of the year. We have our normal limits, and we also have a place in ourselves where we can re-experience those higher levels we saw during the festivals. And in fact, we can go there regularly.

For example, Yom Kippur is day where we stand before Hashem all day in prayer and in service to Him. We resemble the *Kohen Gadol* then, where he entered the Holy of Holies to do the *avodah*, which was only on Yom Kippur. But although it was once a year, that doesn't mean that the levels of Yom Kippur can only be experienced on Yom Kippur. When we become elevated on Yom Kippur, we really gain a power to be able to go back to it somewhat and to have some connection to it, even if it's in middle of the ordinary days of the year.

Some Insights Based Upon This Concept

During the prayers on the festivals, we ask of Hashem, **והשיאנו ה' אלוקינו את ברכת מועדיך לחיים ולשלום** we ask Hashem to become uplifted from the festivals. There are many explanations of this prayer, but along the lines of our discussion, it is implying that we have a place in our soul which can regularly re-enter the inspiration of the level of the festivals, and we can live on that level, at times.

Now we have a new understanding in the statement of the Sages, “I have seen *b'nei aliyah* (those who grow spiritually), but they are few.” It means that a person has times of spiritual ascension, where he can live higher, and not because he has jumped there, but because he can regularly return to it.

Connected to a Level Beyond the Current Level

Absorbing this concept enables a person to regenerate his spirituality even as he's going through a time where he's not particularly growing higher in spirituality. This is because he retains the ability to go higher, and because it's already imprinted onto him, he can return to it even as he's amidst his routine. Although right now he is on a lower level than during the festivals, he is still remaining connected to the higher level, and he can re-access the elation.

One can still retain a deep connection to higher spiritual levels that he experienced, even though he's not there right now. When a person does not recognize this place in himself, he is too grounded. He is too tied to his current level. Although all our souls are rooted in Hashem's Throne of Glory, a person is not always consciously aware of this, and without believing in his connection to higher levels, he is stuck to his current level. He feels like he has no connection to higher levels right now.

But when a person understands that there is *seder* and there is *dilug* throughout the year, he knows how to return to the higher levels he reached through *dilug*, even in the midst of the ordinary days of the year.

Without developing *seder* in the soul, a person jumps from one area to another area, and he lacks balance in his *Avodas Hashem*; he has random ups and downs from his level. But when one has *seder*, he can enter higher levels during the normal routine of the year. Although he knows that the levels of *Yomim Noraim* are higher than his normal level, he can still be open to it during the midst of the year.

Delusion Vs. Connection To Higher Levels

He will be able to hear about higher levels and about higher worlds, and instead of feeling that the words are way above his head, he will feel connected to the words. He can know that he is not actually on those levels, yet he still feels somewhat connected to those levels, and he is still interested in hearing about those levels. Not only do his ears perk up when he hears about those higher concepts, but he can even practice them on some level and be found on that level, to some degree.

Without this ability, a person will think that it's entirely delusional to hear about higher concepts. But the truth is that we always have some connection to higher levels even when it's during the regular course of the year.

We can hear about those levels during the rest of the year and draw vitality from it, and he will find the strength to continue. If someone is delusional, he will attempt to actualize the high levels he hears about, which are totally beyond his current level. He uproots himself totally from his current level, and he is acting delusional.

But if someone is sensible, he knows that although he is no longer on those high levels he hears about, he still retains a connection to it, thus he always feels open to those higher levels.

Understandably, this ability in a person requires wisdom on one's part for a person to know how much he should enter into the higher levels, but the point is that his soul should always be open to higher levels. When done sensible, this does not make a person delusional; to the contrary, it helps a person remain with his high aspirations, and even more than this is that it enables a person to relive those high levels.

As an example, in Kelm, there was a practice that for every ten days following Yom Kippur, they would make a self-accounting and see if they were still keeping to the resolutions they made on Yom Kippur. This wasn't just a means for them to see if they were keeping to their resolutions. It was because they were reliving Yom Kippur, through their souls.

In Conclusion

A person will find himself encountering higher levels during the course of the year, like when he hears of matters that are above his current level, and he needs to know how to approach them properly.

If he lacks inner orderliness in his soul (*seder*), he will jump from level to level, which will make him delusional. If he has *seder*, he finds it difficult to jump to higher levels. But when one knows how to have both *seder* and *dilug* (when he knows how to apply *seder* to *dilug*), he can hear of higher levels even though he knows that he's not there right now, yet he can derive vitality from the temporary jump.

Soon afterwards he should return to his normal level, now that he is revitalized by the higher levels he has relived. He can know how to derive inspiration from the higher levels he hears about even though he's not actually there, in a way that doesn't cause him to become delusional.

He has strongly developed his power of **earth-of-water-of-fire** in the soul - the power to build and direct the jumps in his spirituality. He takes the jump, and then returns to his original place.

This describes the life of those who are of the *bnei aliyah*.

6 | *Conceit: Handling Inspiration*¹⁷

Water-of-Water-of-Fire: Getting Dragged After Spiritual Jumpiness

With the help of Hashem, we continue here to discuss the element of fire, the root of the trait of conceit. We are currently discussing **water-of-fire**, which is the source of the nature in a person to be dragged towards jumpiness in his spiritual growth. Here we will discuss in particular the aspect of **water-of-water-of-fire**, which is when a person is very excited to grow to higher levels, and his excitement ‘drags’ him into the jumpiness.

This topic, excitement, is a very broad and multi-layered subject when it comes to our *Avodas Hashem*.

Step-By-Step Growth Vs. Acting On Inspiration

There are basically two ways to live a spiritual life of serving the Creator.

One way is to build ourselves, step-after-step, brick after brick. The Sages said that Torah scholars are called “builders” of the world¹⁸, and on an individual soul level, this refers to the ability to build ourselves, step-by-step. That is one way to grow: through building ourselves step-by-step, stage after stage. Another kind of growth is where a person grows spiritually through excitement and enthusiasm.

The word for “enthusiasm” in Hebrew is “*hislahatus*”, from the word “*lahat*” (churning), alluding to the “*lahat hacherev hamishapeches*”, the “churning sword of fire”, which guards the path towards the Tree of Life. This hints to us that although *hislahatus* (enthusiasm) can be a springboard for spiritual growth, it can also be as dangerous as the “*lahat hacherev hamishapeches*”.

The first way (building) is the ideal path and sensible path to take, in which a person can build himself step-by-step. The second way (excitement) is making use of **water-of-water-of-fire** in the soul - and it will mean that a person is building his life based upon how elated and excited he feels.

What will happen as a result of trying to live life through excitement and elation? There are people who base their entire lives on excitement - they need excitement in their spiritual pursuits, on a set and daily basis. It might be excitement in one’s Torah learning, *davening*, *chessed*, or in other aspects of *Avodas Hashem*. This kind of person needs to feel excited towards everything he does; he feels that excitement and enthusiasm is the key to a spiritually complete life.

¹⁷ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-006-handling-your-inspiration>

¹⁸ *Berachos 64a*

We must know very clearly that although excitement and enthusiasm certainly have a place in our life, we have to properly define its use and keep to its rules, for we cannot allow it to get out of hand and take over our life.

The Pros and Cons of Enthusiasm/Inspiration/Excitement

Excitement helps us become open towards something, so it is certainly a point we can use to start serving Hashem with. A person gets inspired, and for some time he keeps his inspiration and he improves, but after some time, the inspiration wanes. Inspiration is good to get you started, but it will not be enough for the rest of the year. After inspiration, we need to know how to build our own program for growth.

Rosh HaShanah is called “*Yom Teruah*” (day of awakening), which is from the word “*hisorerus*” (inspiration), for the *shofar* awakens us from our spiritual slumber. Why can’t we be this way during the rest of the year as well and always have this awakening? It is because inspiration cannot take up every day of the year. It is good for a day or two, but afterwards, we must be able to build himself, and the inspiration won’t be enough for this.

It is a good way to begin the year, for it helps us get ignited. That is why we have *Rosh HaShanah*: it is a day to awaken ourselves, and to start off the year with this awakening. But after we do get awakened, what are we supposed to do – keep awakening ourselves again and again? We need to get up and go serve the Creator!

But many people make the mistake of thinking that life is supposed to be a constant re-awakening of inspiration after inspiration, with no program for built growth. With this attitude, people erroneously think that constantly looking for inspiration is a way to live life.

Learning Torah Requires Calm Intellect, Not Emotional Excitement

When it comes to the area of our *davening* (prayer), there is more of a place for inspiration. A person may have a very inspiring *davening*, which awakens his emotions to serve Hashem better.

But if a person learns Torah in a way that he has to always get inspired from his learning, it will be very hard for him to acquire the subtle intellect that is needed in learning Torah. He will find that his mind cannot break down the subtleties and nuances of the *Gemara*.

Why does this happen? It is because he is so full of inspiration and emotion (both from his other areas of *Avodas Hashem*, such as his *davening*), which causes his heart to dominate over his intellect, and the intellect weakens from this.¹⁹

¹⁹ See *Tefillah #0107 – Balance In Your Avodas Hashem*

Although a person must get *chiyus* (vitality) from his learning, a person needs the ability of *machshavah* (thought) in order to learn Torah, and it has to a kind of thinking that is settled and capable of subtle mental analysis. If a person is learning Torah and his heart's emotions are more powerful than his intellect, his power of *machshavah* (thought) will be very limited, and he won't be able to think properly and correctly as he's learning.

How To Use Inspiration

Inspiration is good for the beginning of something, and it can also be used every here and there, but only if it is used in its proper limitations. However, even when we do use inspiration properly, it should still not become the basis of our *Avodas Hashem* (service towards the Creator).

Indeed, we will certainly need to make use of the power of inspiration, especially when we begin something. We all need renewal. There is also a need to awaken ourselves as we're in the act, so inspiration also has its place for the rest of the year as well. But that is only if it's being used in its proper limitations, and not if it is becoming the basis of our *Avodas Hashem*.

Many people think that *Avodas Hashem* must be built entirely on inspiration. Firstly, we need to get rid of this notion - by knowing that it's not true. Life is not built on inspiration or excitement.²⁰ Excitement can get us started and it can even be awakened during the rest of the year in how we act, but it must never become the basis of how we act.

This will come as a total change of perspective to anyone who is used to thinking otherwise. Just as in the physical world we cannot build something through inspiration, only through building it step after step, so too when it comes to spirituality, we need to build ourselves, and inspiration and excitement alone won't build us.

As we know good and well, people are inspired on *Rosh HaShanah* when they hear *shofar*, but soon after, the inspiration is gone. Many people are acting entirely upon inspiration during the days of *Yomim Noraim*, and when *Yomim Noraim* is over, the inspiration is over, and all of their improvement disappears with it.²¹

Water-of-Water-of-Fire: Dragged After Inspiration

The point described until now is what happens when there is a dominance of **water-of-fire** in the soul in general. Now we will explain how the particular aspect of **water-of-water-of-fire** and how it plays a role in this problem, enlarging the issue even further.

²⁰ See *Bilvavi_ Part 6_ Chapter 001*, and *Tefillah #0119 – Building Yourself Vs. Inspiring Yourself*, see also *Rosh HaShanah_025_Changing Our Thoughts*

²¹ See *previous chapter (Fixing Your Wind_05_Knowing Your Capabilities)*

When a person bases his life on excitement, he is usually dragged after anything that inspires him. This comes from a use of **water-of-water-of-fire**, which is the nature to get ‘dragged’ after jumping in spirituality. This is not a mere tendency to simply get dragged after one’s emotions, but to get dragged towards areas of spiritual growth.

We will provide a few examples of how we can see this.

Example 1: Inspired By Tzaddikim Or By Righteous Acts

Let’s say a person goes to a certain place where he saw as certain Torah scholar or *tzaddik* (righteous and G-d fearing person) whom he was very inspired from. He is totally in awe of this great Torah scholar or *tzaddik* and he wishes he could be like him. If he is very idealistic, he might attempt to copy the exact behavior of the *tzaddik*, because he wants to be on the level of the *tzaddik*....

Or, a person reads a biography of a *tzaddik* and he in awe of him, and he very much wants to live exactly like that *tzaddik*, so he attempts to copy in his own life all that he has read about this *tzaddik*. A person reads and hears much about high spiritual levels, which are all true words, and his soul is inspired. He is so inspired that he attempts to act upon these levels he hears about and reads about.

If one examines himself deeply, though, he would see that this is totally the opposite of a true and inner kind of life, because he is really acting superficial in his attempts to copy others. He is not acting out of his true self.²²

Solution: Analyzing The Inspiration

If one wishes to change from the above patterns, the first thing he must realize (whenever he feels inspired) is to try to discern what exactly is inspiring him. This helps him name exactly what it is that is inspiring him. Now he can proceed to the following thought: “Just because I am inspired right now by this person or story I read, does that mean it has to become the exact way I should my life, and that I need to do exactly what that person did...?”

As an example of what we mean, just because you see someone do an act of great *chessed* and you were very inspired by him doesn’t mean you should try to do what he does. Just because you someone learning Torah and you were inspired by him doesn’t mean you should now do exactly like him. You can let yourself feel the inspiration, but that doesn’t mean you should immediately attempt to copy exactly what you have just witnessed.

Compare this to an alarm clock. An alarm clock wakes up people in the morning. It wakes up one kind of person at a certain time of the morning, and it awakens another person at a different time of

²² See also *Tefillah* #0154

the morning. The common denominator between all alarm clocks is that they all wake people, but that doesn't mean it wakes up all people in the same way.

So too, inspiration works differently for each person. The things you see in others which inspire you aren't always meant for you to copy into your own life, because your personal soul is not necessarily designed for what you are trying to 'download' into it.

So there are two changes of perspective which are needed. First of all, ask yourself what exactly is it that you are being inspired by; and then ask yourself if it's good for you to work on. The second part mentioned is a bit more subtle. Let yourself get inspired, absorb what's inspiring you, but when it comes to implementing it into your own life, you don't need to act exactly upon this inspiration.

Example 2: Inspired By A Eulogy

To give another example of the problem, let's say you are by a *hesped* (eulogy), and you are very inspired by the mournful and tearful eulogy that the speaker is giving. The speaker is crying and others around you are also crying, and you feel very emotional from this; you then become so inspired that perhaps you start feeling that you must now make a complete overhaul on your life, and live exactly by the ideals that the speaker is saying about the *niftar* (the deceased).

Naturally, most people will get inspired for some time after attending an emotional funeral, and this is fine and it is to be expected. But it is unusual for a person to totally change his lifestyle from a moving *hesped* he has heard, and if one does so, it is resulting from the imbalance in the soul that we are describing (too much **water-of-water-of-fire** in the soul). There are some people who will decide after hearing the eulogy to imitate exactly the words that they heard about the deceased, because they think that it has to affect their entire way of life now.

The reason why this is detrimental is because the way of life of the deceased person is not necessarily the exact life you need to live. When a speaker gives an emotional *hesped* and he cries, and he gets the crowd to cry as well, the tears are surely truthful, but that doesn't obligate the crowd to imitate exactly what he is saying about the deceased person.

When Emotions Dominate The Intellect

Let's bring out the point stronger. When a person lets inspiration take over, it is really because his emotions are dominating his intellect, to the point that it dominates almost totally, and it overcomes the rational mind. Emotions are reactive, and it doesn't break the matter down properly and sensibly.

To be clear about this, we will mention a different point, in order to have a more complete understanding of our current subject: there are really two kinds of emotion. One kind of emotion is a reaction: where one becomes emotional and his emotions take over, and his emotions fail to break

the matter down and he doesn't get to properly analyze the situation. Another kind of emotion is deeper: it can discern something. A "discerning" kind of emotion is not a mere reaction, and it can break the matter down into different parts that you can analyze.

Women usually have more emotion than men – in two ways. Women are generally more emotional in the sense that they react emotionally to a situation, women also have more of a discerning kind of emotion, a sense of intuition for something. This is the "extra *binah*" that women are blessed with, which they use to discern the spiritual level of a guest who comes to the house. However, most women are only in touch with the kind of emotion that is reactive and not intuitive. The "extra *binah*" which women are blessed with is usually hidden.)

So there is a kind of emotion which is "emotional" and reactive, and there is another kind of emotion which is discerning and intuitive. Here when we are discussing the disadvantage of getting emotional, we are not speaking of the discerning kind of emotion, but of the reactive kind of emotion.

When a person is always acting upon his inspiration, the problem is that he's letting his emotional reactions take over, and he won't be able to properly take apart the matter in his head. If he sees that a certain great or holy person lives a certain way, he will try to do exactly like him. He will try to download all the inspiration he sees and hears and practically implement it into his life. This is the danger of inspiration.

The Power of Da'as (Analysis)

When someone is always getting powerfully inspired, he needs to have a strong amount of *daas* (mental power) to control his inspiration from taking over too much.

This is not just because he needs to put a leash on his inspiration from getting out of hand. There is more of a reason why a person needs to make use of the power of *daas*. It is because our inspirational feelings are not capable of seeing the greater picture of the facts, while the power of *daas* can break down a matter into subtle nuances, showing the person which areas he can implement into his life and which areas he should leave aside.

When there is a balance between mind and inspiration (or intellect with feeling), the inspiration/feeling can be helpful to a person, as the person is clearly aware of what he can do and what he cannot really do. But in the usual case, the inspiration is a bit too much, and it ends up causing damage.

The inner way to approach life is to have one's *daas* in control, so that his **water-of-water-of-fire** (inspiration) doesn't get out of control. One needs to break down a matter and see the areas he can work on and the areas he should leave aside, and only after he has done that can he allow his inspiration to take him places.

Waiting Upon The Inspiration

Now that this was explained, we can get down to the practical outcomes of this concept.

In the beginning of one's way, he is usually very inspired, and his emotions are usually more dominant than his mind. What, then, should he do when he gets inspired? Should he follow his inspiration, or should he instead be suspicious of it and leave it aside?

He should wait a little bit and not act upon it so quickly. Then at a later point he should re-examine his inspiration, and he should think about acting upon it or not. He can now have a more 'unbiased' approach towards the situation, and perhaps he will now see the situation more sensibly. Because he has given himself a break between the inspiration and taking action, he has become less emotional in the interim, so now his mind is working more properly and it can break down the matter better.

Obviously, there is a disadvantage to using this approach, because if you put a hold on your inspiration, there's a good chance that this particular inspiration will fade with time and then it will be gone. However, if we take the other option and we just follow our inspiration as soon as we are inspired, it is almost always going to result in misguided idealism. This is usually what happens with those who are beginning to serve the Creator and they are full of inspiration to do so.

Therefore, it is better to put a hold on something that inspires you, and then re-examine it at a later point, to see if it's for you to work on or not.

As we said, you need to be prepared for the possibility of losing the inspiration altogether. It will be difficult, because in the beginning of one's *Avodas Hashem*, a person is full of inspiration, and it is difficult to put our mind over our emotions and to not act upon the inspiration so fast. But it is still better in the long run when we know how to weaken the hold of inspiration upon us.

Inspirational Speeches: What Do We Do With All of Them?

This concept is very relevant throughout various stages of life. A *yeshiva bochur* starts out in *yeshiva*, continues into *beis midrash*, and eventually into *Kolel*, where he hears many speeches of inspiration, continuously absorbing many words that cover many, many different aspects in matters of *Avodas Hashem*. What should a person do with all that he has absorbed? What do we do with all of this inspiration?

First of all, whenever it comes to inspiring speeches, you should know that it is impossible to speak to a gathering of people about a certain point that will apply to everyone who attends. Being that each person is at a different level, it is not possible to hear a speech that will apply exactly to everyone there. When it's a one-on-one discussion, a person can be told of a point that applies to him in particular, but if it's a lecture being given to the public, it will not apply in the same way to each person.

Sometimes it will apply more to one kind of person there and less to another person there. Even if the point being spoken about in the lecture is applicable to the people there, it is not necessarily the time to work on this particular point.

This is true even if the speaker has intentions for the sake of Heaven. He is speaking about a particular point or a personal feeling he has, either because he was asked to speak about this point or because he has read or heard about it, or because it's his personal project to speak of this particular topic; either way, he is addressing a gathering of people, and each person in the crowd is not holding at the same spiritual level.

So what is the point to be gained from all of the inspiring lectures that people go to? If the speech is about a certain point which they all want to hear about, it is clear what the purpose of the speech is, and there is more of a gain to this kind of speech. But if people come to a series of lectures and each of the speakers is speaking about a different topic, or if one speaker speaks about many different topics in one speech in the span of an hour and a half, it is impossible for a person to absorb these speeches and gain from this.

If a person comes to these speeches and he feels generally inspired by all that he has heard, without focusing on any one point that was said, in the usual scenario, he will get the up the next morning as if nothing changed in his life.

But when someone seeks truth, he can realize that it's impossible to grow from any of these speeches. Because even if it was a truthful speech and even if the speaker was a prominent and truthful person, that doesn't mean that the points spoken about in the speech are for each person to work on right now. If it's a series of speeches, it's surely impossible to implement so many changes in one's life on so many different topics.

The Two-Step Solution

1) Thus, in the beginning of one's way, he must know how to leave aside inspiration and not act upon it so quickly.

We don't mean that he should push off his inspiration to the point that his feelings have turned cold, but he should definitely push it off for a bit of time that allows him to gain control of his *daas*. This way, he can let his *daas* take over and examine the situation, breaking down the matter and seeing the areas that he can work on and the areas that he cannot work on.

2) After a person gets used to this and he's reached the point where he has grown spiritually, the next step will be to examine what exactly is inspiring him, whenever he experiences inspiration.

He will find himself being inspired instead to *pursue truth*, and that is what mainly motivates him now whenever he finds himself inspired. When he comes across 10 different points of inspiration, he will be able to demand truth from himself, as opposed to the 'garments' of inspiration that it comes in.

In Summary

In summary, there are two steps that must be traversed.

At the beginning of one's way, one must be able to put a hold on any inspiration that comes his way, and give himself the time to examine what exactly he can do and what he can't do. This will allow his power of *daas* to be in control over his emotions.

After he has gotten used to this, he will be able to always examine the root of the inspiration, whenever he finds himself getting inspired. He will be able to strip away the outer layers of the inspiration and see the root behind it, because he is motivated by truth.

This is a description of a kind of life where a person builds himself. It enables a person to use inspiration in the proper and sensible way.

Using Inspiration Properly

If one tries to cut off his power of inspiration entirely, and instead he attempts to only follow the cold and rational intellect (and indeed, the *seichell*/intellect is called “cold water”) and he attempts to guide his life in this way, this will not either be successful. The nature of inspiration cannot be stifled. Being that man is pulled after the element of earth, man tends to be lethargic and sleep-like, so he needs an awakening from time to time.

It is just that we need to be inspired in a way that we really get up from the earth and shake off the dust, and then to build upon that. As we explained here at length, our life cannot be built on inspiration alone; we need the power of *daas* which builds us. We need our *daas* to be in control, so that our inspiration doesn't get out of hand. When our *daas* is in control, our inspiration will awaken us in a more guided and balanced manner.

Based upon the above, whenever a person feels throughout the day that he can use some inspiration, like if he feels himself slackening off from Torah study, he should make use of the two-step plan that was laid out here. First he should awaken his *daas* and remind himself of his obligation of Torah study, and now that his *daas* is in control, he can now attempt to awaken his emotions and to let himself feel the inspiration.

Learning Mussar With Passion and In-Depth Analysis

Now that we have said the outline, we can discuss another practical outcome of this topic.

In the recent generations, there became a need to learn *mussar* (ethics). Reb Yisrael Salanter said that learning *mussar* requires “lips on fire, with a mournful voice to awaken man.”²³ Learning *mussar*

²³ *Ohr Yisrael: Iggeres HaMussar*

with passion and emotion is only one part of *mussar*. The other part of *mussar*, Reb Yisrael Salanter said, is to learn the matters of *mussar* in-depth, as if it's a *sugya* of *Gemara*.

To illustrate, if you have ever learned *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*²⁴, you know that it's not a kind of *sefer* that makes you get emotional with a mournful voice. It is a *sefer* that contains deep wisdom - a *sefer* of "*daas*".

One part of *mussar* is to use the analytical power of *daas*, and the second part of *mussar* is to make use of emotion. But most people who learn *mussar* only know of the 'emotional' part of learning *mussar*, but the "*daas*" part is usually unheard of.

This had led to a grave mistake about the study of *mussar*: people think that *mussar* is for people who don't like to think deeply and would rather take a more emotional path. The *Mesillas Yesharim* hints to this misconception in the beginning of the *sefer*, where he wrote that very smart people made the mistake of thinking that *mussar* is for unlearned people who cannot learn deep wisdom, thus they engage in emotion and weeping.

Of course, when Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote the *mussar* requires passion and emotion and a mournful voice, he never implied that it doesn't require in-depth study; but for some reason, people thought that *mussar* doesn't require in-depth study and that it only requires emotion, thus many people felt that *mussar* is only for emotional people who can't study Torah properly.

The proper way to approach life, and when it comes to learning *mussar* especially, is that our *daas* should be in control over our emotions. We also need to inspire ourselves as we learn *mussar*, learning it passionately and with a mournful voice.

As an example, if one is learning a *mussar sefer* such as *Shaarei Teshuvah*²⁵, where each paragraph discusses a different topic, he needs some wisdom to decide which parts need to be learned in-depth and which parts need to be learned with passion.

The main path of our Sages was to put their main focus on immersing themselves in the study of Torah, in the discussions of Abaye and Rava in the *Gemara*. That was where they mainly focused their *daas* on. There were some of our Sages who mainly immersed themselves in matters of *avodah*, *hilchos de'os*²⁶, and *Agadta*²⁷. Rav Wolbe *zt"l* wrote²⁸ that his teacher, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l*, was mostly immersed in matters of *Agadta*.²⁹ However, this was not the main path traversed by our Sages.

Either way, with regards to us, one must make sure that his *daas* is mainly focused on *Gemara*, and he must inspire himself in learning *mussar*, and in addition, he must have *daas* in learning

24 "Duties of the Heart", authored by Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pekuda, 11th century Sage

25 Gates of Repentance, authored by Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerondi, 10th century Sage and Halachic authority

26 "Hilchos De'os" (lit. "laws of knowledge") refers to the subjects of the inner workings of the soul and serving the Creator.

Refer to "Rambam: Hilchos De'os"; see Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part II, Chapter 2.

27 Homiletic sections of the Gemara, which focus on areas of Jewish thought and self-improvement

28 Sefer "HaAdam B'Yikar", authored by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe *zt"l*

29 Reb Yeruchem Levovitz's *sefarim* are *Daas Chochmah U'Mussar* (2 volumes), and *Daas Torah* (5 volumes).

mussar as well. In fact, one should have more *daas* in his learning of *mussar* than the inspiration he has.

Most people do not know how to apply their power of *daas* to learning *mussar*, and they only know about the emotional/passionate part. For this reason, many people have been learning *mussar* for many years, yet they have barely changed. Of course, we cannot say that they didn't change at all. But they didn't change much, and they didn't get to the desired result of learning *mussar*. It is because they are only using the power of inspiration (*hisorerus*) when they learn *mussar*, and they are not using their power of *daas*.

Balancing Our Passionate Prayers

Water-of-water-of-fire, the source of inspiration and emotion in the soul, is also directly related to the power of prayer, which awakens the emotions of our heart.

There are two ways in which we can pray. The higher form of prayer is when a person prays earnestly, from the depths of his heart; and if he is more purified, he feels like he's standing in front of the King, talking to Him as if he is talking to a friend, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* says. This is the deeper and higher source of prayer. Most people, however, are praying from a lower point in themselves: from their emotions and feelings of inspiration.

When prayer is only stemming from emotion and inspiration, one has to be careful not to get pulled in many directions after the inspiration. During the 19 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*, one has to make sure that he doesn't get pulled emotionally after all the different directions he's *davening* about. There must be a particular direction he is headed towards.

One advice for this is to concentrate on one blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* a day and put all of one's energy into that particular blessing. If one were to put all of his emotional energy into all 19 blessings with equal fervor, he will scatter himself inside. He needs to focus on one blessing, one direction, and put all his energies there, and for the rest of *Shemoneh Esrei*, he should focus on that particular point as well.

This idea can be said of the entire *davening* as well, from the morning blessings until the end of *davening*, which can be an overwhelming emotional journey as we find ourselves praying about all kinds of points, which sends us in all kinds of directions. Therefore, although we must certainly pour out our hearts to Hashem, there should be one point we are directing ourselves towards.

In Conclusion

In this way, we use our **water-of-water-of-fire**, our ability to inspire ourselves and fire ourselves up for Hashem as we serve Him passionately, but in a way that our intense emotions are not causing

us to become scattered inside. Instead, our *daas* can be in control of our emotions, and our emotions and mind then become unified together in our service towards Hashem.

This is the ideal way of a person who wishes to truly serve the Creator and desires closeness to Him.

7 | *Conceit: Hyperactivity*³⁰

Wind-of-Water-of-Fire: Unstable Movement

With the help of Hashem, we have merited thus far to discuss the element of fire. Currently we are up to discussing **wind-of-water-of-fire**.

Fire is the root of the nature to ascend, and **water-of-fire** is when a person is jumpy to ascend and thus he gets dragged after the jumpiness. **Wind-of-water-of-fire** is when the movements of this nature (water-of-fire) become too rapid, resulting in unstable movement.

When this particular nature becomes extreme, a person will find it difficult to sit in the same place for too long, and he feels a need to move all over the place. On a more subtle level, it manifests as some kind of inner anxiousness, where a person finds that he cannot concentrate properly.

This is a very common problem, and in today's times, there all kinds of psychological terms for it. In the more extreme cases it is called "hyperactivity", and if it is less intense, it is diagnosed as lack of concentration [A.D.D.] - with all kinds of medications that are prescribed.

When it comes to this problem (hyperactivity, or lack of concentration), it can be applied the verse, "*There is no house which does not have a corpse in it.*"³¹ In any case where it cannot be identified exactly what is causing the disturbed movements, people are very quick to name it – and to prescribe medication accordingly - when in reality, this is not necessarily the solution.

We will analyze this matter, beginning from the lower, simpler aspects of it and continuing into the higher, deeper aspects of this problem. It is a complicating matter to address, because it involves several aspects of the soul.

1. Lack of Concentration Rooted In The Physical Body

Our physical body is comprised of the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. This is not referring to the four elements found in the *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul); it is referring to the body itself, which also contains the four elements. When the elements are out of balance, this is the root of all physical problems found in the body. To emphasize again, it is the root of all of *physical* problems in the body – simply put.

³⁰ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-007-hyperactivity>

³¹ This verse was said pertaining to the plague of the firstborn in Egypt.

[The makeup of the body is affected by various factors that have shaped it.] Our Sages say that a person's body receives elements from his father and mother³². This is the way Hashem's wisdom has decreed that our body be designed.

Some people have unstable movement simply due to the particular makeup of their physical body. The physical elements which comprise the body (earth, water, wind and fire) can be affected either by the way it has been born, or it can be affected by the foods a person eats; it can even go as far back to a baby nursing from its mother. These factors can all contribute to an imbalance in the elements of the body, resulting in unstable and extreme movement.

For example, if a child has gotten heavily used to eating very hot and spicy kinds of nosh, we all know that this gets absorbed into his body, and it can cause him to act wild and hyper. He resembles the fiery, hot flavor of nosh he is always eating.

But a more extreme example of it is when people (usually far from a Torah lifestyle) who, G-d forbid, take certain substances, which greatly affect the movements of their physical body, causing them to act unstable.

In summary, there are unstable movements which are rooted in an imbalance in the physical body, and it can be very possible that unstable movement is coming from this source.

If this is the case, the remedy is obvious: **to assess the body and re-balance its elements**. This can be simply determined, either through blood tests, or through examining the daily diet of the person.

That all pertains to unstable movements that stem from the makeup of the physical body; it is the least extreme of problems related to unstable movements, because since it is physical in its nature, it has physical remedies, thus it can be treated naturally.

In many people, a lack of concentration and unstable movement is in fact rooted in their physical nature. It is because much of the food that people eat today contains ingredients which previous generations never dreamed of eating. It has actual detrimental effects on the body. The reality is that all people today are consuming dangerous foods, and the only issue is how much.

So before anything else, when treating hyperactivity, a person needs to first assess what he's eating, and to see what he can do to eliminate harmful foods from entering his system; as well as to see which kinds of foods he should be eating instead.

2. Lack of Concentration Rooted In 'Nefesh HaBehaimis'

Let's progress to a deeper kind of problem related to unstable movement: when it is coming from the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer of the soul).

³² Niddah 30a

The *nefesh habehaimis* in us contains all of the *middos* (character traits) that are possible, and with each person, the makeup shows up differently. There are many abilities present in the *nefesh habehaimis*, but when there is one particular aspect that is overly dominating the other aspects of the *nefesh habehaimis*, it creates a certain degree of inner turmoil.

Understandably, we need to see which particular aspect is dominating and how it's affecting the other abilities of the soul. But the point is that most of the problems related to lack of concentration are rooted in a dominance of one of the aspects of the *nefesh habehaimis*, which has produced inner turmoil.

(Here we are not discussing the *nefesh habehaimis* itself, though; here, we are discussing what *results* from it when it is imbalanced.)

Of course, there is no *nefesh habehaimis* today which is completely in balance. But it used to be that people were aware of how to work to improve it. In previous generations, people were more aware that the *nefesh habehaimis* in us must be trained and improved. The way of *avodah* of all our great people was to deal with the *nefesh habehaimis* as the root of all problems, as opposed to focusing on the various problems which result from an unfixed *nefesh habehaimis*. The focus was on the root, not on the branches and results.

But in today's times, people are turning to modern psychology for all of the answers, which focuses on the various problems that result from an unfixed *nefesh habehaimis* - but without trying to get to the root. Modern psychology brings up all of the various ugly problems that result from the unfixed *nefesh habehaimis*, without trying to treat the problems at their root.

Not only is the root not dealt with, but each of the negative aspects of the soul are deliberately exposed, with all kinds of methods to expose the problems, based on what the 'biological experts' say - an area that is absolutely full of *tum'ah* (spiritual impurity) to a Jew's soul. When a Jew learns about how to treat the problems in his soul based on non-Jewish psychology, this greatly harms the holiness of his G-dly soul.

3. A Noisy Lifestyle

A third root cause for lack of concentration, which is very prevalent in our times, is coming from the noisy and chaotic lifestyle which people have gotten used to and learned to live with. This has gotten more extreme than ever, now that so many people are connected all the time to technology, where they are constantly flooded with information and noise. It is not possible for a person to be serene and concentrate with all this noise around us.

When such a flood of information enters the brain, it is impossible for a person to properly concentrate on his studies and especially on his Torah learning. Educators can all relate to how it is very hard to teach Torah to children who are connected to technology, whose heads are flooded with all kinds of information. In fact, even as a *rebbe* is teaching his class, the cellphone is going off in his

pocket. How on earth are the children supposed to remain concentrated on their studies with all this noise?!

When the phone keeps buzzing in our pockets, there is never one moment of *menuchah* (serenity) in our life. Aside from the problems this causes in our Torah learning, it is simply a disconnection from an emotionally and mentally healthy life. It doesn't allow for even our *nefesh habehaimis* to live healthily.

For this, there is only one solution. We must disconnect as much as possible from all of these noisy gadgets, and choose to live a calmer life, as much as possible, and disconnect from the world around us.

Of course, we cannot disconnect from our surroundings completely, for this is impossible. But we must try as hard as we can to disconnect, each of us on our own level. It would take great wisdom of life to know how much exactly we need to disconnect from the world and how much we can connect to the world around us, but we must still try as hard as we can to have some disconnection from all the noise of the world.

4. Lack of Concentration Rooted In Weak Mental Abilities

A fourth source of lack of concentration is when a person has weak mental abilities. This kind of person has a hard time concentrating ever since he was born, because his very power of thought is weak.

Our mental abilities are called *chochmah* (“wisdom”; simple thought), *binah* (“contemplation”; deeper thought), and *daas* (awareness; connecting to the knowledge). The power of *daas* is essentially the ability in a person to be connected in his thoughts to something. When one's power of *daas* is weak, he has a hard time concentrating on something, because he has a hard time connecting to a thought. Even if one has strong *chochmah* and *binah*, if his *daas* is weak, he is not a “*bar daas*”, thus he will have a very hard time concentrating.

Sometimes this is simply due to the physical makeup of the person's brain itself (*mo'ach*), and sometimes this is due to weakened mental abilities (*mochin*) that are present in the brain. In either case, the *avodah* of this person is to learn how to develop the power of thought. The problems with concentration can then be worked on at a later point, but the first step is to build the power of thought.³³ This will be the root of the solution, and it will make the rest of the work much easier, after accomplishing this.

Others find that they cannot focus on their goals, even though they badly want a certain goal or achievement. However, this problem is not stemming from the brain, but from the [spiritual] heart, which is the root of the power of *ratzon* (will). [Therefore, lack of motivation is not a mental issue, but a heart issue.]

³³ Refer to *Getting To Know Your Thoughts*

When a person has a hard time focusing on attaining that which he wants, it would seem that the solution is to get him to want it more, so that he will become more motivated. The truth is, however, that a person cannot be taught how to have a desire for something. If we could know how to get people to want something, we could change the entire world. But this is impossible. Only when a person already has a *ratzon* (will) can you work with him to further increase his *ratzon* and motivate him (and even then, it is difficult), but if a person has no *ratzon* for something to begin with, you cannot get him to have a *ratzon*, no matter how much you get him to concentrate on it.

Therefore, it is pointless to tell a person who has a hard time with focus and concentration that “If you’re not achieving, it’s because you really don’t want.” This is not always true, because he might want very badly to improve, and it his weak mental abilities which don’t allow him to concentrate.

If a person cannot concentrate because he was born with a weak mind, you cannot get him to concentrate, no matter how much you try to force him to. Even if you get him to want to concentrate on a goal, he will simply have become trained to do certain actions with no thought. He doesn’t want what he is doing, and even if he does it, it is done without thought.

You can try to help a person slowly reveal his power of *ratzon*, but when a person doesn’t have a *ratzon* right now, it is impossible to get him to concentrate. It is not because he doesn’t want to improve. It is because his mental abilities are weak and are thus not powerful enough to allow him to expand upon his will.

5-6) Lack of Concentration Rooted In Mental Jumpiness and Scattered Thoughts

There are others who have a different problem: their thoughts skip around a lot. This is called *dilug* (mental jumpiness). With others, however, the thoughts are simply scattered around (*pizur*).

In the ideal situation, a person’s thoughts are orderly, and they see things clearly and objectively. When there is a lack of clarity, the person feels suffering (like the ‘suffering of Iyov’). But when a person’s mind is jumpy, his thoughts quickly skip around from one thought to another.

For example, a person might read one line of Gemara, skips the next line, and reads the next line. If he is very bright and talented, he might come up with a way to connect the first and third line, even when there is no connection between the two lines of Gemara. A different problem is when there is simply *pizur* (scattering) in the thoughts, which is something else.

In either of these cases, the problem is not stemming from a lack of concentration. It is stemming from the particular way that the person’s mind works.

In order to figure out where the lack of concentration is coming from, one should observe where his thoughts wander to [as he’s in the midst of spacing out]. If he discovers that his thoughts are jumping all over the place and skipping information, the solution is to start giving order to one’s thoughts.

Alternatively, the eyes play a big role when it comes to our mental abilities. The eyes of wise people are termed as *'einei haeidah'* (eyes of the congregation), because *chochmah* (wisdom) is revealed through the eyes. Therefore, a person can work with his eyes to increase orderliness in his thoughts.

In the first method (giving orderliness to thoughts), a person should slowly begin to giving minimal order to his thoughts, and he should deliberately do this slowly, so that he can get used to the idea of *seder* (order) in his thoughts.

In the second method (working with the eyes), a person can try making sure that his vision doesn't skip things; for example, when reading the Gemara, he should read the first line, then the second line, then the third line. He should keep his finger on the place to help for this. This is not merely a way to make sure one doesn't forget the Gemara. The purpose is to train the eyes to focus, whereby the mind's power of concentration becomes improved.

One who has a problem of *dilug* in his thoughts needs to slowly train his thoughts to have more order to them. He should start with small areas and then he can eventually try it with larger areas. He should take a small section of Gemara and keep his finger on the place as he reads the lines, reading them consecutively, with his eyes focused on the place he is reading.

When lack of concentration stems from *pizur* (scattering) in the thoughts, the solution is different than with *dilug*. (Sometimes the problem of *pizur* in the thoughts is developed from being lax when it comes to keeping the *mitzvah* of *Bris Kodesh* (personal holiness), which results in a scattering of the mental abilities.)

Whatever the cause is for the *pizur* in his thoughts, the thoughts needs to be gathered together, reminiscent of how the exiles must be gathered together from all ends of the earth.

One way of how a person can do this is to learn how to make a summary of what he has just done, after he has finished an act. For example, when learning Gemara, a person should make a mental summary of everything he just learned. This trains a person to get used to gathering his thoughts together.

This is not limited to making a summary of what has learned at the end of the *zman* or at the end of a *sugya*. The more a person gets used to summarizing what he learns, he will find that he has become naturally better at gathering his thoughts together.

An alternative approach (to improve one's mental abilities) is for a person to get used to visually focusing on one point for a certain amount of time. Since the eyes are connected with the mind, learning how to focus with the eyes can increase the focus of the mind.

For example, try to focus on a certain point in space for 20 seconds straight, then try to do it for 30 seconds, then 40 seconds. We have described this concept briefly, being that this is a very broad matter.

7) *Lack of Concentration Rooted In The ‘Nefesh Elokis’*

Until now we have spoken about the possible sources for lack of concentration which stem from the lower aspects of our being: from the body, from the animalistic layer of the soul, from surroundings, from weak mental abilities, from mental jumpiness, and from scattered thoughts. But there can also be a deeper source for lack of concentration, which stems from our *Nefesh Elokis* (G-dly layer of the soul).

There are people who have a hard time concentrating because part of their *Nefesh Elokis* is already revealed somewhat, and this might strain the lower parts of the soul, resulting in a lack of concentration.

For example, there are people who feel such a strong love for Hashem that it totally dominates their soul, and the soul becomes thrown out of balance from this. The person will find himself having bursts of love for Hashem, which will cause him to lose orderliness to his soul, resulting in unstable movement of the soul. The lack of concentration will also affect other areas in his soul, and then he will find that he lacks concentration in many other areas as well.

This is just one example, but the same idea can happen with regards to any of the soul’s abilities, as long as there is an imbalance in the soul. With most people, the *Nefesh Elokis* isn’t revealed, so it usually doesn’t play a role in a person’s lack of concentration. But with people who are already in touch with their *Nefesh Elokis* ever since they have been born, they might experience a lack of concentration, due to the very presence of their revealed *Nefesh Elokis*.

Modern Psychology and Therapy Cannot Treat the Jew’s Divine Soul

When this is the case, going to a therapist or psychologist cannot help, because the knowledge of secular psychology does not address the *Nefesh Elokis* (G-dly soul, or Divine soul) of a Jew. Therefore, there is no proof that can be drawn from secular research [about A.D.D.] to a Jew’s life. A gentile will never even begin to understand that a lack of concentration [A.D.D.] can be stemming from a Jew’s *Nefesh Elokis*.

To give an example, one of the aspects of the *Nefesh Elokis* is, “*My soul thirsts for G-d.*” The lack of concentration might be coming from this place in the soul when it is out of balance, like if a Jew is yearning to become closer to Hashem very much, to the point that he suffers inside from this, and his soul becomes imbalanced from the yearnings. Or, the problems might be coming from other points of the *Nefesh Elokis* that are out of balance. But a gentile has absolutely no knowledge about the *Nefesh Elokis* of a Jew, no matter how much he knows about the soul.³⁴

³⁴ To learn about how we can give balance to our *Nefesh Elokis* (and also improve our *nefesh habehaimis*), refer to *Getting To Know Your Feelings*

Misunderstood Souls

In these individual cases, in which the lack of concentration stems from an imbalance in the *Nefesh Elokim*, these people find themselves in a deep inner exile; an exile within an exile in themselves. They have nowhere to turn to for help, because modern psychology doesn't address it and doesn't know anything about it. Nobody can even begin to understand their problem.

There are so many young children and teenagers who have problems with concentration, and their parents don't know what to do with them and how to get to the root of the issue; the people around them don't even have a basic knowledge of the problem. These kids and teenagers get thrown around between yeshivah and yeshivah, between one institution and another, and the people who work with them cannot get down to the reason of why these kids have such a hard time focusing and concentrating.

Often, the educators who are appointed to work on them are lacking even a basic understanding of the issue, trying all different kinds of therapy on them which doesn't work, without getting down to the root of the issue. As time goes on like this, the child or teenager is left bewildered and frustrated, having tried all kinds of therapy and medication, to no avail. His poor soul gets thrown around and twisted all over the place, and he suffers amidst all of this. And nobody understands what the problem with him is.

The Problem With Medication

We must know that all of these medications prescribed today to fix problems in concentration all have one common dominator: they are all weakening a person's soul abilities. The person's soul suffers as medication is applied to him, in the hope that his problems with concentration will be weakened and thereby healed. The rest of his soul is sacrificed in the hope of healing the disorder with concentration, besides for the other physical symptoms that it causes.

We have so far seen that there are six sources for lack of concentration, yet modern therapy always uses one general approach to solve it [namely, medication], without trying to explore the root.

Medicine today is being applied to solve problems in the soul in the same way that the body is treated. With the body, medication is prescribed based on which part of the body is hurting, and the medicine weakens part of the body so that the other parts of the body will get healed. So too, medication is being applied to a person with issues in his soul, as if it is a physical problem and nothing more, and this harms other areas of his soul in the process.

Someone told me recently that there is a certain university where, in order to apply, the students were told that they must take "ritelin" (the drug which is usually given as medication for A.D.D.), so that they could be able to concentrate on their studies! They are viewing "ritelin" as a basic part of their diet, as if it's bread. They are being deadened while alive - all for the sake of learning how to concentrate on their studies in school.

We must return to the way things always were, to the ways of our Sages of the past. Of course, there are always cases which need medication, and it has always been so, even in the past. But when there is a problem, we need to identify where the problem is coming from; with regards to lack of concentration, we have listed here several possible causes for it.

We must determine where exactly it is coming from, and this is indeed challenging to figure out, and it requires *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly assistance). When we identify the source of the lack of concentration, most of the remedy will involve mainly working with the source of the problem, whether it is coming from the body, from the *nefesh habehaimis*, and from the other reasons mentioned here.

Understandably, there are extreme cases which certainly require medication, but in most of the cases where a person lacks the ability to concentrate, we should determine the exact root of the problem (using the seven reasons listed here), and then use the particular solution that applies to it.

In Conclusion

This has all been described very briefly. There are many more details that branch out of this discussion, but these words can serve as an opener and as a representation of the general picture.

8 | *Conceit: Loss of Normal Routine*³⁵

Fire-of-Water-of-Fire: Extreme Jumps

With the help of Heaven, we continue to discuss the element of fire; currently we are discussing water-of-fire, and we are up to discussing **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

Fire is the root of ascension, and the ‘water’ aspect of fire is when the fire/ascension is jumpy. We can see this as well from the nature of physical fire and water when they meet, whereupon sparks ensue and the fire jumps and skips around. **Fire-of-fire-of-water** is when one jumps *to a higher place* than where it was before, due to the extremity in the movement of the fire.

We can relate to this from situations in our life where we suddenly jump to a highly charged emotional state. Sometimes we do this by choice and sometimes we are simply thrown into such situations against our will: our movements become extreme and jumpy.

For example, if a person suddenly has a joyous occasion, he might become full of extreme emotion, and he will do things that are not normal because he has become so emotional. He will exhaust his soul in the process as he makes heavy use of his soul’s energy; his **fire-of-water-of-fire** becomes dominant.

In this case, one has not chosen to enter the situation, and he rather finds himself placed in such a situation against his own will. But in other cases, a person will deliberately choose to enter a highly charged emotional state. For example, when a person is *davening*, and he is pouring out his heart as he *davens* with emotion, he might become so passionate that his soul actually becomes imbalanced from all of the movement and enthusiasm that he’s dragged after.

1) Loss of Seder (Orderliness)

In the earlier lessons, we explained the concept of *ratzu v’shov* (running and returning). The *ratzu v’shov* concept must be especially applied to situations of **fire-of-water-of-fire**, where a person becomes very emotional.

Whenever we become very emotionally and spiritually excited, we have to make sure that the excitement isn’t causing us to go too far past our normal point of “*ratzu*”. As it was explained, there are levels of *ratzu*; there is a point of *ratzu* that is within your reach and a point of *ratzu* that is above your normal level. Whenever you are excited, you have to make sure that it is not going too far past your normal point of “*ratzu*”, or else your soul will become exhausted from all of the energy it using, because you will be going way above your normal capacity.

³⁵ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-008-loss-normal-routine>

Why is this so? It is because there is a normal *seder* (order of routine) that Hashem wants the world to run in. When a person lives properly, the concept of *seder* is central to his life. A person has to make sure that he is not taken out of his normal *seder*, and if he is, he must make sure to get himself back to it, or else he will get thrown out of balance.

Some people do not like the idea of *seder*. Even if they exert themselves in areas of Torah and are exceptionally bright and talented, they do not have *seder* in their life, and instead they live according to their own rules, rather than conforming to an established system. Such a person intentionally digresses from the normal *seder* of life and he feels that this is actually the way things need to be. He feels that always having to conform to an established *seder* every day is placing him into a confine that stifles his soul and that it doesn't allow them to fully utilize his potential.

But if one is familiar with the words of our great teachers concerning the matter of *seder*, and especially the works of Kelm, which greatly emphasized the importance of *seder*, he is aware the concept of *seder* is one of the most central aspects of life. When we keep to a specific schedule every day, it is an external form of *seder*, and the purpose of it is to bring us to reach an inner kind of *seder* within ourselves. Thus, external *seder* is a tool that helps us get to inner *seder* - which is the purpose of the entire idea of *seder*.

The more a person keeps to external *seder* every day, the more he can arrive at inner *seder* within himself, and with this, a person receives greater and greater clarity of the inner and spiritual dimension. In contrast, when there is inner confusion about one's inner world, everything seems foggy and unclear.

Seder is needed in the simple sense in order to make it in the physical world, by sticking to a normal schedule. But its inner use is to give orderliness to our soul's abilities, which enables us to live with inner clarity and sharp awareness towards life.

Thus, when a person is having extreme spiritual jumps, his soul is going through extreme kinds of movements, and he being taken out of *seder* as he does this. It is then very hard to return to one's normal *seder* afterwards.

The Detrimental Effects of Summer 'Bein HaZemanim' Pastimes

To give an example, the summer is spent with all kinds of trips and activities - and usually these are very extreme kinds of activities. Then the boy or girl returns to yeshiva or seminary in Elul, and it is very hard to get back into routine and concentrate on their studies. They are back to *seder* after they have been on vacation, where they experienced all kinds of extreme movement [both external and internal], and it is very hard for them to get back into a normal *seder*, when they have just been taken out of it for such an extended period of time.

This is particularly a problem with summer *bein hazemanim*, as opposed to the breaks of Pesach and Sukkos. The *bein hazemanim* of Pesach is filled with busy preparations, and people are helping out in their homes; and *bein hazemanim* of Sukkos is still fresh after *Yomim Noraim*, so there is some

seriousness in the air. But the summer is a time where many people leave the entire idea of *seder* entirely, as they engage in all kinds of activities and pastimes that completely take a person out of the normal routine of the year. It can make a person lose his entire sense of normal *seder* in life.

Obviously, Hashem wants us to have *bein hazemanim*, where we take a break from the normal *seder* of the year, and we need to have times of the year where we take it easier. But we have to make sure that the breaks we are taking are not too extreme.

If the break would be a slight divergence from the normal *seder* of the year, it would be fine. But when the break is an extreme movement away from the regular *seder* of the year, it is very hard to get a person back into the normal *seder*. A person can lose his entire *Yomim Noraim* because of this. But it is not just a problem that affects *Yomim Noraim* – it is a problem that affects all year round.

There are always times in our life where we go through more extreme kinds of movements, because that is the way Hashem has designed our life. But it is our responsibility to make sure that the extremes aren't so dramatically extreme.

I'm not even talking about the falls from *ruchniyus* (spirituality) that people have during *Bein HaZemanim* by running after so much *gashmiyus* (materialism). There is a more subtle problem: the nature of *Bein HaZemanim* is largely different than how a person behaves during the rest of the year, and it can entirely throw a person out of balance in his soul. It causes a person to lose his idea of normal *seder*.

So besides for the spiritual damage that a person may incur during *Bein HaZemanim* (depending on what kind of activities he pursues), there is also a danger of losing the entire structure of the soul that a person has worked so hard on during the year to build.

Although we are inevitably placed in situations which cause us to move out of our normal *seder*, and there are always extreme situations in our life, we have to make sure that it shouldn't be too extreme. When it comes to prayer, a person might become too emotional and extreme that he finds it hard to return to the normal *seder* of life afterwards.

Avoiding Extremities and Returning To Routine

If a person will do something which he knows will take him out of his normal *seder* and make it very hard for him to return to *seder*, he should consider it forbidden to do.

To be clearer about this, even *before* a person engages in activities that are not of the regular *seder*, a person must know how he can return to his normal *seder* of life afterwards. The *Rambam* says that a person is only allowed to interrupt learning Torah for a mitzvah only if he can calmly return to his learning afterwards. We learn from his words that one must make sure not to get taken out of routine, and if he does have to leave routine, he must know how to get back.

There will always be times where we are thrown out of routine, but we must try to make sure that they won't be so extreme, so that we will have an easier time returning to routine afterwards.

2) *Loss of Thinking*

There is also another issue with **fire-of-water-of-fire** (extreme and jumpy movement): When a person acts extreme, he loses his calm state of mind and he cannot think properly.

Learning Torah on a regular basis and living a life of Torah thought enables a person to live life like a true Torah scholar, which builds and develops his power of thought. But when a person's **fire-of-water-of-fire** becomes dominant, he has bursts of extreme action, and this in turn weakens his mental powers; he will find that he cannot think properly afterwards.

The world is driving towards this direction, even though it is so detrimental to our minds. Many people like to pursue extreme action, which dulls the mind. It is all a heavy use of **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

This is unlike the nature of most desires. With most desires, it is the pleasure which is being sought; this stems from the element of water. But here we are talking about the enjoyment in people to pursue extreme actions which completely dull the senses, where people lose their senses entirely. This is not pleasure for the sake of pleasure (water), but a pleasure in the loss of the senses, where a person temporarily loses his mind. This is the idea of **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

When people go on a ride in an amusement park and they become dizzy, they are temporarily losing their minds, forgetting where they are. This is a pleasure in a loss of the senses, not a mere desire to seek pleasure. It is a much more extreme pursuit of pleasure, because the whole point of such activity is to engage in extreme movement that makes a person lose his ability of thought. If he reaches the point where he can't think straight, he finds this pleasurable!

Even if a person never gets to a point where he loses his power of thought, a life of pursuing extreme activity does not allow a person to live a life of exertion in Torah and to have clarity in one's learning. A person might go to certain places during *Bein HaZemanim* which make him lose his power to think, and he doesn't even know what's so bad. This is besides for all of the immodesty and other spiritual problems of going places during *Bein HaZemanim*.

So if one wants to gauge his use of **fire-of-water-of-fire**, he must make sure that he never pursues activities which make him lose his *daas* (mental awareness). If one truly wants to live an inner life, he must make sure to avoid situations which would make him lose self-awareness, and he should consider it forbidden to enter such situations.

In general, a person must make sure never to lose his *daas* (awareness) when it comes to the areas of Torah learning and prayer. We need *daas* in order to learn Torah, and when we *daven*, we need to be aware that we stand in front of the King. But besides for this, we need to always retain our *daas* even as we go through various situations of life; we must make sure that we are not engaging in activities that cause us to lose awareness. As long as an activity or experience is extreme and it causes us to lose awareness, we need to stay away from it.

3) *Loss of Inner Calmness*

There is also another issue with **fire-of-water-of-fire**: extreme movement causes a person to lose any inner calmness (*sheket*) which he has acquired until now.

Most people anyways do not have *sheket*, so they cannot relate to this problem. But there are some people who have reached *sheket*, which is a great inner treasure that a person has to guard heavily from losing. Extreme movement causes a person to lose his deep, inner *sheket*. This is because our inner world thrives on this ability to have deep, inner *sheket*.

The more internal a person has become, the more he has a world of deep and inner *sheket* within himself. *Sheket* does not mean that a person doesn't exert himself in Torah or that he's lazy and passive. It means that he is truly an "*ish menuchah*", "a man of serenity", and real serenity is not lethargy or laziness, but someone whose actions never take him out of his inner calmness. Even if he temporarily loses his *sheket* as he's doing something, if he can quickly return to his *sheket*, he is greatly in touch with his inner world.

In contrast, the more superficial a person is, he has no *sheket*. This is why wicked people, who live for the desires of this world, also have no *sheket*. (Understandably, there is no inner world for them to lose in the first place). The more inward that a person becomes, the more his life is built on deep, inner *sheket*. There are levels and levels within *sheket*, because a person can keep uncovering a deeper inner silence in his life as he grows in this inward space within himself. *Sheket* is the tool that one needs in order to reach a deep connection with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Sheket is also an ability that greatly sharpens and refines one's mental abilities. It seems that our mental abilities become sharpened and refined only through heavy use of our brain, such as engaging in *pilpul* (give-and-take discussions on the *Gemara*) which sharpen our power of understanding in our Torah learning. *Pilpul* is but one of the ways how we can refine our intellect; there is another way which is inner and subtle – the power of deep *sheket*, the inner calmness of the soul.

If you look at the *sefarim* of the Chazon Ish on *Shas* and *Shulchan Aruch*, you can see how he reached very refined understandings, which he merited to understand through great "*avanta d'liba*" (heart understanding), through his ability of deep inner silence that he uncovered. As is well-known, the Chazon Ish would lie down in a bed and cover himself with a blanket, and deeply concentrate, where he would produce his amazingly subtle Torah thoughts and conclusions. (We do not mean to imply that everyone should practice this, but the underlying concept of it remains true for everyone.)

Of course, the mind can also be sharpened through *pilpul*, but *pilpul* alone will not be the complete picture. *Pilpul* is but the external part of sharpening the mind. The inner source of comprehension is when there is a deep inner silence in the soul. It is the most subtle area in one's soul.

Maintaining Inner Calmness

When one is used to living a lifestyle of *sheket*, he makes sure to avoid things that take away his *sheket*.

Obviously, this is not referring to any of the 613 *mitzvos*; one must do all of the *mitzvos* whether he is calm or not. And a person must do anything that will otherwise endanger a person's life, even if it causes him to lose his entire inner world. The concept of keeping one's *sheket* only applies to matters which are not obligatory. When it comes to those areas, one must only do them if he can keep his *sheket*; if he will lose his *sheket*, he should not engage in those acts.

For example, how much *chessed* should one do each day? Should he devote a tenth of his day to *chessed*, as the Chasam Sofer said, that one must give “*maaser*” (a tithe) off his spirituality for others? Should one do as the Chofetz Chaim, who spent a third of his day doing *chessed*? It is very hard to know how much *chessed* exactly one needs to do each day. But based on our discussion here, it is safe to say that as long as doing *chessed* will not take you out of your inner calmness, you can engage in such *chessed*; and if pursuing *chessed* will make you somewhat anxious, you should not engage in that act of *chessed*.

We have explained that a dominance of **fire-of-water-of-fire** causes a person to lose his *sheket*. Engaging in movements that are extreme and loud is a total antithesis to the concept of *sheket*.

If a person is superficial, he doesn't feel this disturbance, because he does not have *sheket* to begin with. Only in extreme cases would he feel the loss of his *sheket*; for example, sometimes a person walks into a wedding where the music is so loud that he cannot hear anyone's voice even if his friend is yelling at him at the top of his lungs. Maybe then it will bother him, but even then, not everyone is bothered by the loss of *sheket*. But the more a person has become more inward and refined, he is bothered by loud noises and extreme jolts which take him out of *sheket*, and he will naturally avoid any acts which make him anxious.

So, how should a person go about using **fire-of-water-of-fire**? Earlier, we addressed how it is used for evil. But even when a person is getting excited for holy reasons, one must know how to go about this properly, or else he becomes thrown out of balance. As long as a person can hold onto his inner calmness when he does something (or if he can at least return to his calmness soon afterwards), he may engage in such an act. If not, he should not involve himself.

As we said, most people do not have *sheket*, so they don't feel the disturbance of losing their *sheket*; they don't feel like they are losing anything when they go through extreme jolts. But there are people who do have *sheket*, and they must know how to guard it.

If a person has reached some degree of *sheket* in his life but he doesn't know how to protect it, when he goes through a situation where he is taken out of his calmness, what will happen? Any of the ‘noise’ he experienced will be brought into his regular routine. As an example, there are people who find it hard to return to their routine after they have just experienced a personal *simcha*. It is a dominance of **fire-of-water-of-fire**, which throws a person out of the routine of life.

There are also people who feel a need to go on a trip every day after completing part of their daily routine. Sometimes this is needed for the health of the soul, because if a person constantly feels a need for relaxation whenever he commits himself to a routine, it might be a sign that his soul is greatly in need of finding inner peace. In other cases, the need for vacations and trip might simply be stemming from a desire to run away from normal life.

So the ideal way to live is, that after one goes through extreme movement, he should return to his *sheket* and leave all the ‘noise’ he experienced. Whenever **fire-of-water-of-fire** dominates, we need to return to some degree of *sheket* afterwards so that we can return to the routine of life.

As for the amount of **fire-of-water-of-fire** which one may allow himself to enter, this depends on how much *sheket* a person has reached. In general, the less *sheket* a person has reached, the more he should avoid extreme situations which awaken **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

Inner Silence: The Key To A Deep Bond With the Creator

However, even more so, we must know that *sheket* (inner calmness) is not the final purpose of life. It is a tool to reach something even deeper: a bond with the Creator. The inner world thrives on a *kol demamah dakah*, a “soft, subtle sound” – a world of inner silence – and from there, a person can reach *d’veykus* (connection) with Hashem and His Torah.

When a person is superficial, he thinks that *d’veykus* to Hashem is reached through a passionate *davening*, and that *d’veykus* to Torah is achieved through heated and lively arguments with a *chavrusa*. But the more internal a person becomes, the more he understands that the inner world thrives on the quality of one’s inner silence; because inner silence is the tool that brings a person to a true, precise, and refined bond with Hashem and His Torah. Thus, *sheket* (inner silence) is not the purpose; it is a step in the process to reach a deep bond with Hashem.

When a person has reached a deeper bond with Hashem from his *sheket*, he will find that **fire-of-water-of-fire** not only removes him from *sheket*, but that it removes him from his *chibbur*, his deep bond with Hashem [which is enabled through *sheket*]. If a person feels deeply connected with Hashem from his *sheket* but he also has a strong dominance of **fire-of-water-of-fire**, he might feel like he has no place on this world whenever he loses his deep inner silence. He knows and feels very strongly that life is about deep connection to Hashem and His Torah, and when his connection is taken away when he loses his inner silence, he feels like his life is not a life.

That is why the more inward that a person becomes, he is able to give up much of this world, so that he doesn’t lose his *sheket* and his deep bond with Hashem. The *Ramchal* writes in *Mesillas Yesharim* that a person must stay away from anything which distances him from his bond with Hashem; that is all regarding a person who is *beginning* to become more spiritual. But if a person has *already become a more inner person* and he lives the inner world, he makes a deeper introspection: anything which takes him out of his world is avoided. He disregards anything that takes him away from his inner silence and deep bond with Hashem.

There are even some people who are so strong in their bond with Hashem and Torah that nothing can deter them and take them out of their routine. But most people aren't as strong as this, and when they lose their *sheket*, they become very disturbed by it and they feel like they have lost their deep bond with Hashem. As long as a person lives the inner world, he must know how to return to *sheket*, and on a deeper level, to his inner and silent point of *d'veykus* with Hashem.

Maintaining Composure (For Those Who Have Reached Deep Inner Silence)

However, as we explained earlier, there will still always be inevitable situations which take us out of regular routine, where we go through extreme movement. We need to learn how to calm ourselves during such situations so that we don't get thrown around emotionally too much which damage the normal routine of life.

For example, when we go through a *simcha*, like finding a *shidduch*, or experiencing the birth of a child, or if an ill child recovers – these are all extremely joyous episodes of our life in which we will usually become very emotional. It can get to the point where the emotional excitement of such situations can completely take us out of routine, and then we find it very hard afterwards to get back into the normal routine of life. What should we do in the aftermath of such situations?

The more inner that a person has become, the more he will be able to take his mind off of the new situation around him, for he can always remain connected to his inner point of calmness (and if he has reached the depth of the calmness, he has reached a deep place of connection with Hashem).

Most people have a hard time doing this, because most are not strongly built in their inner world, so when they become emotional, their emotions overtake them completely. But the more a person has lives with inner calmness, he is not so reactive to new situations of life - even when he hears good news, he knows how to contain himself and he doesn't get overly emotional.

It is hard to say something like this, but, when Mashiach comes soon and people hear of the news, what will be the reaction of people? Most people will become delirious with excitement. But those who lived in the inner world truly awaited Mashiach, because their entire lives were directed towards this revelation. Therefore, they will not be so reactive to the news, because they don't ever lose their inner calmness and their deep feeling of connection with Hashem.

Of course, the good news will feel good (as the Sages say, "Good news fattens the bones"), and there can be no better news than the coming of the redemption; but the truly spiritual people at that time won't become so emotional when they hear the news, because they know how to stay connected to their inner point of calmness - a deep place in oneself where he feels a deep bond with the Creator. This kind of person is able to maintain himself when he hears of new things, even when he hears about Mashiach coming, without losing his inner calmness: his deep bond with Hashem.

Returning To Calmness, Then Returning To Routine

Practically speaking, whenever a person hears or reads news that excites him and it makes him become very emotional, he must try as hard as he can to return to his inner silence, and after he has returned to that calm state, he can then hear the news again, but this time, he hears it from a calmer place in himself.

It is essentially a use of the power of *hesech hadaas* (removal of the thoughts) from the news or events one had heard about, and to instead concentrate deeply on one's inner point of silence. The point is not to ignore people who tell you news! The point is to regain your calmness and then listen to the news from a deeper and calmer place in yourself.

As we said, most people cannot relate to this, because most people are not in touch with their innermost point, and certainly not the point that they can disconnect from news and meditate on their inner point.

Therefore, most people, after hearing news or having gone through a very emotional event in life, will need to do the following: One must **not** immediately return to his normal *seder* of life, amidst all of the 'noise' that has just entered him and still occupies his psyche. Rather, after hearing news or going through a deep emotional experience, the first thing he should do is compose himself, and reconnect to his inner silence as much as he can, by silencing his soul (through concentrating on his inner place of calmness), and only then should he return to the routine of his life.

There is no exact amount of time that can be given for this time to regain self-composure, but the point is that there must be some time where a person silences his soul and then returns to routine.

In summary, there are situations Hashem places us into where we become emotional and we aren't strong enough to remain with our inner calmness; this is the case with most people, who are not able to remain so connected to their inner point as they go through extreme experiences or emotions. We must make sure not to return to routine right after this, and instead, we should first compose ourselves and calm our soul. After one calms himself, he can then return to the routine of life after having regained his *yishuv hadaas*.

If one does not do this, he brings in all the noise of the world he hears about into his normal routine of life. It can take a few months to get back one's calmness if one does not do this. But if one has calmed himself a bit after the 'noise' that has entered him, he is able to go back into routine from a calmed place in himself.

In Conclusion

We have explained here that **fire-of-water-of-fire** is the nature in the soul to jump to emotional extremes, to the point where a person is taken out of the routine of life. This particular nature of the soul has always been an issue in people's lives, but in our generation, where extremities are much more common than they were in previous times, it is a matter which plays a very big role in our life.

Earlier generations also had to deal with **fire-of-water-of-fire** in their souls, but in today's generation it is much more dominant, because people today are connected to the world, seeing and hearing everything that goes on in the world today - a constant source of emotional excitement that can take a person out of his routine. So it is a very relevant matter in today's generation.

9 | *Conceit: Holding Onto Growth*³⁶

Wind-of-Fire: How We Move and Progress

We have merited thus far to discuss the element of fire, which is the root of the trait of *gaavah!* conceit. We have so far discussed earth-of-fire and water-of-fire. Now we are up to discussing **wind-of-fire**.

Wind-of-fire is about the movement and direction of the element of fire. Fire naturally moves in an upward direction; the movement itself of the fire is the ‘wind’ aspect of the fire. There are four branches of it: **earth**-of-wind-of-fire, **water**-of-wind-of-fire, **wind**-of-wind-of-fire, and **fire**-of-wind-of-fire:

The Four Branches of Wind-of-Fire

(1) **Earth-of-wind-of-fire** is when one can *stay permanently* on the level he ascends to. This is described in the verse, “*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy abode?*”³⁷

The desire in the soul to ascend in spirituality comes from wind-of-fire in the soul, for it is the movement aspect of fire/ascension. Hence, when one can stay permanently (earth) in the place that he moves towards (wind) and ascends to (fire), this ability comes particularly from earth-of-wind-of-fire.

(2) **Water-of-wind-of-fire** is when one is *enjoying* being involved with movement. A person who has a lot of **wind-of-fire**, without enough “**water**” in the wind-of-fire, often does not have any peace of mind, because he is always striving to go higher, and this can make him somewhat anxious. For example, if he is a teacher and there are no children around available to teach, he cannot be calm, because he feels like he always has to be in movement, and he is being deprived of it. But when one has access to his **water-of-wind-of-fire**, he is able to enjoy any movement of growth, even if it’s only a minimal amount of growth.

(3) **Wind-of-wind-of-fire** is the nature of constant movement. Some people experience growth only for a certain amount of time, and then they return to routine; they experience a temporary period of inspiration, where they get up in the morning with excitement to set out on their day. But when someone has a lot of wind-of-wind-of-fire, he has constant movement and growth.

³⁶ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-009-holding-growth>

³⁷ *Tebillim* 24:3

Someone with a lot of wind-of-wind-of-fire is a person who never has rest; he is always moving and growing. A true Torah scholar reaches this ability; “Torah scholars have no *menuchah* (serenity), not on this world and not on the next.”

(4) **Fire-of-wind-of-fire** is when a person is often moving in an upward direction and he is growing, but with extreme jumps in his level. To give an example of this, some people have a nature to want to break rules. In whatever they do, they seek how to transcend the limits and rules. It doesn't matter how; the point is, to break the limits. If this kind of person is in a setting where certain rules and limitations are laid down, he will look for ways in which he can somehow not keep to the rules. If he is in a *beis midrash* setting, he is the type to say Torah *chiddushim* which no one else would say, just so that he can veer from the norm.

Earth-of-Wind-of-Fire: Permanent Growth

We have laid out the four branches of wind-of-fire. Now we will go through each of them in detail, in the order of earth, water, wind and fire, beginning from “earth”-of-wind-of-fire.

Earth-of-wind-of-fire, as we said before, is the ability to stay permanently on the level that one ascends to.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the normal process of spiritual growth is called “*ratzu v'shov*” (running and retreating) – there is a cycle of ascending, descending, ascending, descending, etc. The question is: How much time can a person keep his ‘*ratzu*’ (progressing) stage going for? How much time can a person keep his growth going, before he descends back to ‘*shov*’?

The more a person has grown spiritually, the amount of “*ratzu*” in his life is increased, and in contrast, the amount of “*shov*” in his life is decreased. But there is also another level: where one can get his stage of “*ratzu*” to become more permanent in his life. This is the depth of the verse, “*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy abode?*”³⁸

There is a similar teaching, on the verse, “*The heavens are for Hashem, and the earth was given to man*”, that the earth is given to people to transform the earth into the heavens, and then new heavens await us after that. This is also describing **earth-of-wind-of-fire**: to turn the Heavenly level he has reached into ‘earth’ - into permanence.

We will soon explain how a person can accomplish this. But the basic outline of this concept is for a person to expand his point of ‘*ratzu*’ to the point where the gains of his ‘*ratzu*’ stage have become more permanent in his life.

³⁸ *Tehillim* 24:3

1) *Knowing If You Are In Place*

Whenever a person grows spiritually, the question is if he is really there or if he's acting above his level. Often a person cannot last permanently in his growth because he is acting above his level; he isn't in his proper place to begin with, thus he is not called one "*who will stand in His holy abode.*"

This is the first thing one needs to ask himself, before he attempts to make his growth more permanent: "The higher levels that I am ascending to - is this my true point of '*ratzu*? And am I able to live with this level on a more permanent basis?"

If the answer to this is "yes", then the next step is to try to figure out how to actualize it. The next step will be to attempt to make the growth more permanent, but first, one has to make sure that he has given thought to this, to be sure that he's in the proper desired area to begin with.

This is necessary to think about, because we see that when a person loses focus of the area of his newly achieved growth, it is very easy to fall from that level, which in turn causes a person to have a *hesech hadaas* (removal of focus) from the areas that he is striving to grow in. The reason why this happens is because there are many barriers in Creation that prevent our spiritual growth and throw us off course from there.

Besides for the various physical and material issues of life which prevent us from getting further, there can even be certain acts of *mitzvos* which make us lose focus of what we are mainly working on to acquire. When it comes to Torah learning, jumping around between different parts of Torah can take away the focus on the current area of Torah we are learning, which prevents us from being in our rightful place.

The point is that there are many things which cause us to have a *hesech hadaas* (removal of focus) from the place we are supposed to be standing in. For example, in middle of learning a *sugya* of *Gemara*, sometimes another *sugya* will come up, and people will get very involved in it and discuss it, leaving the current *sugya* entirely, in favor of this new interesting topic. Often it is a topic completely unrelated to the current *sugya*, and it causes people to lose their focus on the actual *sugya* that they are trying to learn.

Although it's still called exertion in Torah if one learns in this way, the person is losing focus of the place he is supposed to be standing in. On an external level, it also causes a person to lose his focus and it hampers his ability to concentrate. But the real problem is that a person will never be able to stand in his rightful place with the more that he is impulsive like this.

One needs to be inwardly aware of where his *proper place* is right now. If one is not aware of what his true place is right now, he will easily get caught up in other areas and veer off track, and he won't even realize this until much time later; and then it will suddenly hit him and occur to him that he has gone off track.

We can see that when a person is capable of very strong concentration, he finds it disturbing to get involved with other topics. The idea we can learn from this is that one needs to be able to *stay in place* and not lose sight of his current goal. If he finds that he can indeed *stay in one place* at a time,

this is the first step in being able to hold onto the spiritual achievements and growth that one has gotten to.

2) Awareness To Your Growth

Another point needed (in being able to keep to your level of growth) is: one has to really know if he is involving himself something that is really meant for him to work on or not.

Often a person is not clear if he is succeeding at a certain spiritual endeavor or not. We might ask someone involved in a certain spiritual task if he is feeling the growth of it, and the response is, “I have no idea.”

A person should therefore check himself from time to time (at least once a day) and see if he is concentrated on the spiritual task that he is involved with. Others are more self-aware and they don't need to do this. But if one does not have that much heightened awareness throughout the day to his spiritual level, he should at least check himself once a day and see if he's connected to what he is doing. The more a person checks himself like this, the closer he is to staying at his levels of growth.

3) Expanding Upon Our Growth

Another point to consider is that after a person has had a period of spiritual growth, he should make sure that he is still retaining his gains. Life gets stormy and all kinds of ‘winds’ can come and take away what we have gained, and for this reason, we have to keep expanding upon our previous gains, in order to hold onto them. One needs to keep deepening his perception of his spiritual gains, and it is not enough that a person already ‘knows’ about it.

For example, if a person was doing *chessed* every day for a half hour, he should not remain satisfied with the external acts of *chessed* that he has done. He should know what the depth of *chessed* is and keep uncovering more depth to it. Our main growth takes place in our *pnimiyus* (inner world). If one is drawn to doing *chessed*, he should learn each day about what *chessed* is and deepen his understanding about.

This is a very inner and fundamental approach towards living life, but it is a kind of life which is very hidden from most people, even from people who are involved in inner *avodah*.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l* once said that he spent half a year preparing a *mussar* discourse. This doesn't mean that it took him six months to come up with the right words. It was because he lived his teachings for at least half a year before he taught about it.

The point is, to keep expanding upon our inner world. This was the way of life which our *baalei avodah* [those Gedolim who explained to us about *pnimiyus* (the inner dimension) and how to serve Hashem] lived with.

However, know that this is a very subtle matter. There were two very different paths of our previous *Gedolim*. Some of our *Gedolim* mainly spent their life immersed in *Gemara* in-depth, and therefore they had less time to delve into matters that deal with *pnimiyus*. Other *Gedolim*, such as Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, mainly spent their time immersed in *Aggaddah* (homiletics) and in matters of Jewish thought, and thus they had more time to learn about *pnimiyus*. (However, this is certainly not the main path which most of our *Gedolim* took; it is not our main *mesorah* (chain of tradition) which our *Gedolim* taught. The main path taken by our *Gedolim* was to be more immersed in *Gemara* in-depth than in matters of *pnimiyus*.)

To give a practical example of expanding upon our inner world: if a person takes on various small resolutions on Rosh HaShanah, the point of these resolutions is mainly about the change of perspective that results from keeping the resolutions, and not the resolution itself.

4) Feeling The Exaltedness of The Growth

Another point involved with holding onto a period of growth is that a person needs to feel the exaltedness (*romemus*) of the higher level that he has ascended to. One needs to feel how it has made him more exalted, and realize that he is now on a higher plane than before. We see that this is true from the fact that when one loses that feeling of exaltedness, he usually falls from that higher level, because he has never tasted the exaltedness of it yet (This is a use of the point of “*ratzu*”, and not “*shov*”).

This is also known as the concept of “*gadlus ha’adam*” (greatness of man): it is for a person to live in a more exalted state. When this concept is misunderstood, it can lead to *gaavah* (conceit), which is not at all *gadlus ha’adam*. On a deeper note, though, “*gadlus ha’adam*” is really a form of *gaavah d’kedushah* (holy conceit). One can use the feeling of exaltedness as a tool to live more in the higher state he has achieved.

5) Disconnecting From The Past

Another point needed for a person to be able to hold onto a period of growth is: a person needs to cut himself off totally from the previous level he was on. For example, often a person can grow and become more spiritual, but he still yearns to return to his old nostalgic ways. He might miss the place he grew up in, or his old items he used to own. People often have nostalgic memories of the past. With many people, a large part of the present is spent being immersed in various thoughts and memories of the past.

Rav Dessler would say that only the present moment is worth thinking about, and that any thoughts of the future or the past are in the realm of fantasy. People feel very connected to their past. We see this on a more extreme level from some people when they get older, like when they are nearing their seventies or eighties, and they never want to think of the future at all [living in denial

of the fact of death], and they prefer to dwell in their memoirs of the past. There are old people who will spend all of their final years writing down the memories of their past, and all they will talk about with people are their past.

This problem can exist in our own spirituality as well. For example, if a person has reached an entirely new perception towards his *davening*, he might still yearn for the pleasure he used to have in his previous level of *davening*, where his perspective was not as mature. He is immersed in his past and he's not able to be fully involved in the present. The way to solve this problem (of being too connected to the past) is, as Avraham Avinu was told by Hashem: "*Go from your land, from your birthplace, from the house of your father, to the land which I will show you.*" There is a deep power in the soul to leave the past behind, *totally* - and to begin again anew.

One should use this power sensibly, of course. If one goes overboard with this ability, he is always forging new beginnings, and he might become rebellious against his fathers and teachers who have taught him properly. But when used sensibly, this is an awesome inner power in which a person can keep disconnecting from the past which holds him down. When people cannot disconnect from their past, they stay forever in the place where they are, and they feel like they cannot part from it. For example, some people feel that they must live their whole lives in the community that they were born in and grew up in. They think they must live there forever, simply because it was the place where they were born in, and that is where they live for the rest of their life. They will never consider living anywhere else leaving their own community and their own *shul* which they grew up around, and they feel like they must stay there their whole life. That is where they are born and that is where they are buried.

Some people will also never move from the house they live in. If the family gets bigger, the house will simply be made bigger to accommodate the growing family. If that can't be done, it feels like exile to the person... All of these are examples of an inability to disconnect from the past. The concept that was described here in this chapter is the opposite idea of this: a person can develop a power to disconnect.

But the more a person has truly grown spiritually, he can disconnect from everything in his life in one moment. This is also the quality that all our true *Gedolim* possessed, and it is a power that we all inherited from Avraham Avinu. A Jew has the power to renew himself and totally pull away from his past, where the past no longer affects him. It reveals an entirely new dimension to a person, and he gains a glimpse of a higher world. The person will discover that it is actually the nature of the soul to disconnect from the past.

In Conclusion

It has been explained here how one can stay at the higher levels he has reached, which is described in the verse, "*Who will stand in His holy abode?*" It was explained here how one can reach a higher point in his *avodah* and stay there. When one does reach it, he will find that the higher point has become simple to him, and now there is a new higher point to reach.

10 | *Conceit: Enjoying The Present Moment*³⁹

Water-of-Wind-of-Fire: Gaining Pleasure from Spiritual Movement

We continue here with the help of Hashem to discuss the element of fire, the root of the trait of *gaavah* (conceit). We are currently up to discussing **water-of-wind-of-fire**.

Fire is the nature to ascend, wind is the movement of the ascension, and **water-of-wind-of-fire** is the “pleasure” aspect of upward movement. It is when a person finds pleasure in any degree of movement, even slight movement. We will explain.

When there are large amounts of upward movement in a person, this is considered very enjoyable to a person. For example, if a person felt that he has gained a large amount of clear knowledge or that he has tremendously grown in spirituality, this feels enjoyable.

If a person is learning a *sugya* of *Gemara* and he comes to understand a certain point in the *sugya*, this doesn’t always feel enjoyable, because it’s a very small amount of clarity. If he would receive a clear understanding about a large percentage of the *sugya*, though, this would feel very satisfying. But if he is only receiving clarity on a very miniscule detail of the *sugya*, he won’t feel that much enjoyment at this.

This is true when it comes to exerting ourselves in Torah study, and it also applies to spiritual improvement. If a person feels that he has greatly overcome a certain negative trait of his, this feels very satisfying. But if a person only saw a small amount of improvement, this does not provide him with enjoyment. There are many more examples that illustrate the concept, but we have picked upon two very common examples where this idea applies: when it comes to our Torah learning, and when it comes to self-improvement.

Small signs of success don’t mean that much to a person, and thus they don’t provide a person with enjoyment. Why are we like this? It is because we naturally compare our small successes to our big successes; therefore, we don’t often see value in our small successes. The small success, in comparison to the big success, isn’t worth much to us. Therefore, a small amount of success (whether it’s in our Torah learning or in areas of self-improvement) doesn’t provide us with satisfaction.

The Value of Small Details

This is really a form of *katnus* (“small-mindedness”, or immature mentality): when a person only seeks the *katnus* (smallness) of a “small” thing, so he doesn’t attribute importance to it.

³⁹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-010-enjoying-present-moment>

When it comes to learning Torah, this can be a problem, when one doesn't bother to try to understand the "small" points in a *sugya*. It affects his understanding of the *sugya* if he overlooks certain small details or if he doesn't bother trying to understand them. And when it comes to inner self-improvement, it is detrimental when a person overlooks small points and ignores them.

What will happen when a person overlooks the small details? Since he doesn't see the importance of the smaller details, he will skip them and try to move forward and progress. Sometimes a person can notice that what he originally thought of as small and unimportant has ended up being an important detail that he overlooked.

Many times, a seemingly small detail ends up being a very important detail: for example, when learning a *sugya* of *Gemara*, what originally seemed like 'just another' small detail of the *sugya* was really the root that the entire *sugya* is built on; a change of understanding about that detail changes around the understanding of the entire *sugya*.

We have mentioned so far two drawbacks that result from overlooking small details. First of all, overlooking small details causes a person to have an incomplete understanding of the subject and do a half-baked job. Secondly, the small detail which seemed unimportant might turn out to be a very big detail that is not 'small' at all.

Additionally, there is a third drawback that results from it: skipping over details causes a person to lose his ability of *seder* (orderliness). When a person is only interested in big areas and not in small areas, he gets used to skipping. It damages his ability of *seder*.

Appreciating 'Small' Details

How, indeed, should a person view details?

When you see a detail in and of itself, it is viewed as a "small" detail. But when you think about this detail in terms of how it relates to the bigger picture, the detail gains greater importance. For example, if you are looking at a piece of a machine as just being the mere piece that it is, it appears to be some "small" thing. But when you view it in relation to the rest of the machine, you realize that the machine can't work without it, and now this piece gains much more importance in your eyes. It is no longer a "small" detail to you.

Thus, when we view details in relation to the bigger picture, we can then realize the importance of each detail. Most people see details as just "details", without seeing how the detail is part of a bigger picture - and that is why people don't usually see the importance of a certain detail. In any detail we come across, we really cannot know how important it is, when we think of how it relates to the bigger picture that it is a part of. But even though we cannot know how important it is, it is definitely of value.

A second thing to consider is that the detail is only small when you view its external and superficial appearance. But when you consider the inner dimension of something and the concept behind it, you will discover that there is nothing small in Creation.

If someone sees only “small” things in Creation, it means that *he* is small-minded. The more greatness and depth he sees in Creation, the bigger *he* is, and that is why a *Gadol* sees the depth of everything in Creation. You can discover an amazing amount of depth in even the “smallest” thing you come across. The world in front of you is not simply a physical Planet Earth – it is Hashem’s world which He created; thus it is very, very deep.

Seeing The ‘Havayah’ of Each Detail

On a deeper level, each detail is its own *havayah* (existence). This is very deep power of the soul. The Vilna Gaon wrote that when learning *Gemara*, one should be so immersed in it that he is not aware of anything else in the world other than the page of *Gemara* in front of him. This is essentially using the power of being immersed in the reality of a detail. This is a “G-dly spark” of *havayah* in the soul: to see the *havayah* of each thing.

Normally, we see random and dispersed details. But if we see all the details as part of one *havayah*, we have unified each detail into one piece. This is a spark of Hashem’s oneness contained in the soul, where the soul can see the oneness of all the details and how they all combine to form one *havayah*.

Thus, seeing big and small things means that a person doesn’t see things in terms of *havayah*. If he would realize that each detail in Creation is all part of one *havayah*, he would never see “big” and “small.”

For example, when a person learns a *sugya*, he might think that certain details of the *sugya* of *Gemara* are “small” and that they are of no relevance. But when learning a *possuk* in Chumash, is there such a thing as a small *possuk*? *Chazal* say that even the *possuk* of “*Aluf Timna*” is equal to studying the entire Torah. When it comes to a *possuk* of Torah, we can all understand that there is no such thing as a small *possuk*. It is clear to us that each *possuk* of Torah is the word of Hashem, and that each *possuk* of Torah has its own *havayah*.

This is a deep and subtle concept. When one is aware of this concept, he realizes that every detail in a *sugya* of *Gemara* is its own important reality. There are no “bigger” or “smaller” details in the *sugya* to him. In areas of self-improvement, he is aware that there are no “bigger” or “smaller” areas, because he is not comparing.

Those with a dominant element of earth in their souls might not have an easy time digesting this concept. They might feel like it’s a form of lethargy to think this way. But it is really a deep power in the soul, and it is the quality of *menuchah* (serenity) found in a true Torah scholar. The depth of *menuchah* (mainly manifest in a Torah scholar) is that he can see the *havayah* of each thing he comes across.

When one has this perspective as he's learning Torah, he can reach an awesome level of *d'veykus* with Hashem, because instead of seeing random details, he is always directed towards the unification of the details.

The simple level of this is the words of the Vilna *Gaon*, that a person is so focused on the detail he's learning about in Torah that he is not thinking about anything else. But the depth of it is to be immersed in the reality of each detail. For this reason, a person can spend a lot of time immersed in a particular detail of Torah.

Obviously, this power must be used sensibly, because life is not long enough to spend so much time immersed in each detail; we have a *mitzvah* to try to know the whole Torah. But we should at least make use of this power minimally, by being able to spend a large amount of time studying a particular detail.

As mentioned, though, this concept is a high level of perception which is usually above the reach of most people.

Seeing The Detail As Part of a Greater Whole

Now we will add on another dimension of understanding: the power to be immersed in a detail is essentially the power to be immersed in a greater goal of where you want to get to. You can see the detail in relation to where you want to get to, thus, you see the importance of the detail, because you are aware that the detail is needed to get to the goal.

As opposed to just seeing the detail as an important detail in and of itself to study, you can see it as more than that: you can see the detail as something that brings you closer to your goal – whether we are dealing with Torah study or inner self-improvement.

The depth behind this concept is, the Mishnah in *Avos*: “From where did you come from? To where are you going?” One must know where he came from, to where he has to get to - and where he is found right now. This is a concept that must envelope us all the time. A person must know: “To where do I want to get to, and where am I found now, in relation to where I have to get to?”

This thought causes a person to have deep self-introspection on all aspects of his life. Without making this self-introspection, a person might grow spiritually, but he will have times where he falls from his growth, and he is not even aware of it, because he doesn't remember where he stands.

The very fact that one is aware of his growth and movement enables him to live and experience the movements of his soul. When one is spiritually growing but he isn't even aware of it, he is not growing as much he could be; his lack of awareness means that he is sort of complacent with the fact that he's in a general period of growth.

Enjoying A Detail of the Present Moment

Now we come to the main point of our discussion, where we are describing the idea of **water-of-wind-fire**: when a person finds pleasure in even a small amount of [spiritual] movement.

Finding pleasure in your spiritual growth doesn't mean that you are satisfied with the fact that you are generally growing higher. It means that you can find pleasure in any detail in your growth that you come across, and you are focused on it. You will find that you can stay immersed in a detail, because it is pleasurable.

For example, learning *Gemara* requires enjoyment. When a person is superficial, he can only learn the *Gemara* if he's finding enjoyment in the current *sugya* he's learning, and as soon as he's not finding it enjoyable, he continues to the next *sugya*. But the more inner that a person has become, he knows how to enjoy any particular point in the *sugya*, and he can stay there for a while, taking in the pleasure, like a person sucking the juice out of an orange.

However, we should mention that there is a danger in using this power. It can cause an increase of *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations). Additionally, if a person spends too much time on a particular detail of Torah, he won't get to see the rest of the Torah, and we don't have that much time on this world to spend time on all the details of Torah.

But when this power is used properly and sensibly, a person is able to derive pleasure in any detail he's involved with. He can stay immersed in the current *sugya* of the *Gemara* simply because he's enjoying it, without feeling the pressure of having to continue to the next *sugya*. He wants to stay in the current *sugya* and he doesn't want to continue to the next *sugya*, not because he hasn't finished it yet, but because he wants to savor the enjoyment of what he's learning right now.

In Conclusion

When one is missing **water-of-wind-of-fire** in his soul, he is missing the ability to be focused on a detail, which means that he never really lives the present moment. When he is involved with "small" things, he is thinking about something "big" he has to get to, which means that he is not living in the present.

By contrast, when one is able to appreciate a detail that he's currently dealing with, he lives the present moment.

On a deeper level, this gives a person the ability to come to have *d'veykus* in the absolute *havayah* of Hashem. The more a person makes use of the power to be focused on a particular detail in the present moment (and to derive pleasure from it), the closer he is to the revelation of the reality of Hashem. He is in touch with the present, with reality in front of him. Thus he is much closer to the ultimate *havayah* (Reality) that there is.

This is the power of **water-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul: the power to have true pleasure, in holiness.

11 | *Conceit: Burnout*⁴⁰

Wind-of-Wind-of-Fire: Constant Upward Movement

We continue with the help of Hashem to discuss the element of fire, the root of *gaavah* (conceit), which is the nature in the soul of *aliyah* (ascension). Currently we are discussing the “wind” aspect of fire (wind-of-fire), which refers to the movement, or motivating force, of ascension. In particular, **wind-of-wind-of-fire** is the consistent nature of movement.

As we have said many times in the past, “Torah scholars have no *menuchah*, not in this world and not in the next world”, because they are always in a state of upward movement. The nature in the soul to have constant upward movement is **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul.

Three Scenarios of “Burnout”

Generally speaking, we find three scenarios of people who have lost their wind-of-wind-of-fire:

1) **Teenagers.** Teenagers often are idealistic and they want to progress in life; this might be spurred on by jealousy or it may come from pure motives, but either way, teenagers usually go through a period of idealism. But many times this idealism is short-lived; it begins in the teenage years and ends when the teenage years are over.

Teenage idealism is usually extreme in its nature. This is because a teenager usually does not have *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind), so there are still traces of childish immaturity even as he’s growing higher. Their wind-of-wind-of-fire will be accessed to a very high degree. But this fire usually dies down in midst of the teenage years.

2) **Tekufos\Periods.** Another example of it, which is very common, is found with many people who have “*tekufos*” (periods) in their life – periods of growth, and periods where they don’t grow. The periods of non-growth are not necessarily referring to a *yeridah* (fall) in one’s *ruchniyus*; rather, it refers to complacency.

For example, in the beginning of the *zman* (season) in the *Kolel*, some people are full of a feeling of renewal, and they learn passionately and excitedly, full of vigor, goals, and motivation. But as the *zman* comes to an end, this passion loses its momentum by many people in the *Kolel*. By the time it’s “*sof zman*” (the end of the *zman*), there are some people who feel totally burnt out.

3) **Complacency Due To Previous Achievement.** A third example (of weakened fire), which affects a smaller percentage of people, is when a person feels that he has achieved most of his growth already, and he becomes complacent with himself. We are not talking about someone who hasn’t

⁴⁰ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-011-burnout>

done anything in his life yet he's convinced that he is successful. We are talking about someone who has indeed achieved in his life, and he has become complacent with his situation, so he stops trying to grow.

Although it is wonderful for a person to have achievements in life, there is no way for a person to assume that he has reached the purpose of his *avodah* on this world. There is *always* more room to grow in life. Torah scholars have no *menuchah* in this world because there is no such thing as stopping to grow.

(On a deeper note, there is a very deep point in the soul which is connected to Hashem in complete *d'veykus*, which is described in the words, **הבוקה ודבוקה בך**, “*Embedded and attached to You*”⁴¹; this point of the soul is already at the state of perfection, so it doesn't have to grow. But the external layers of our soul require movement and growth).

There must always be more growth. Sometimes a person is growing and then he gets burnt out along the way, but sometimes, a person is growing and he simply becomes complacent with what he has already achieved. For example, if a person wrote a *sefer* on a certain area of Torah, although there is an advantage he has of deriving great pleasure and serenity from this achievement, it can become his very downfall, because it can make him complacent.

If a person becomes complacent, he might be so satisfied with himself that he stays on that level until the rest of his life, never seeing a reason to change. He feels like he has reached “his” place in life, and he stops seeing the need for spiritual growth. He loses his **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

These are the three general scenarios of people who stop growing in life.

1) Why Do Teenagers Lose Their Idealism?

Let's begin with the first example: teenage idealism, which is often short-lived. Understandably, it is not only teenagers who encounter short-lived idealism. There are older adults who also have temporary periods of idealism that come and go. But it is more dominant with teenagers, so we will discuss this matter as it pertains to teenagers.

We must know that in most cases, the reason why a teenager loses his idealism is not because he has simply become burnt out, but because there was never a *seder* (order) in his *Avodas Hashem*. There is much to say about this, but we will mention only the fundamental points here, and briefly.

Unrealistic Aspirations

First of all, there is the problem of unrealistic aspirations. Often, when a person becomes full of aspiration in his teenager years, he will take on certain goals that are beyond his mental capacity. He

⁴¹ Recited in the *Hoshanos of Sukkos*

sets high pedestals for himself that are naturally impossible to reach, according to his natural strengths.

The truth is that our spiritual achievements do not come naturally to us, and they are entirely a gift of Heaven. When a person sees that he's not getting the Heavenly assistance he needs, he becomes broken when he discovers this reality, so he goes back to his original routine.

So the first thing one needs to do is to make sure that his aspirations are realistic. Many teenagers (as well as adults) become frustrated when they aren't reaching their aspirations or high spiritual levels that they wish they could be on, and often these are unrealistic goals.

To say it in more subtle terms, although each Jew must strive to become holy and reach self-perfection, one must know clearly the difference between a level that's within his natural reach with a level that can only come to him as a gift from Heaven.

If a person is hoping to receive growth as a gift from Heaven and therefore he is praying to reach a certain spiritual attainment, there is nothing unstable with this; it is praiseworthy and it is wonderful. But if a person cannot make the distinction between a level that's within his normal reach and a level that requires Heavenly assistance to reach, he thinks he can reach high levels through his own natural abilities, and he will be met with failure and frustration. It is a sure path towards failure, and sometimes it can even cause a person to become totally depressed.

So one has to be able to set realistic aspirations for himself. The truth is that it's hard to say what's considered a realistic aspiration and what isn't. It is a very subtle matter. One needs to consult with a very wise person who can guide him according to his abilities, who can explain to him what he is capable of and what he isn't capable of.

Just because a person sees that others were able to reach certain spiritual attainments does not mean that he can do the same. Others have different abilities than you do. In addition, high spiritual levels are entirely a gift from Heaven, and they are not attained through our regular abilities; so one must not think that his exertion alone will get him there. Even when a person does exert himself and he receives higher levels, it is still a gift of Heaven when he succeeds; it is never through one's own natural abilities. One can pray to Hashem to get it.

Lack of Guidance In Avodas Hashem

Another reason for short-lived idealism, where people lose their desire to grow, as we mentioned above, is when people are very not clear about what the *seder* (order) is in *Avodas Hashem*. Instead, many people are into tidbits of advice and ideas which are culled from the many *sefarim*, and think that this is a way to serve *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. When a person eventually sees that he is not successful as he takes this path, he becomes broken and full of despair, and he takes a step back from being into *Avodas Hashem*. He loses his **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

The reason why this doesn't work is simple. There is no way to succeed with a path that is not grounded on any one solid approach! But people aren't aware of this, and then they aren't aware of the errors they are making. Then for some reason, they lose their ambition in trying to improve. It's because the path they took was never a valid path to begin with.⁴²

In many cases, a person tries a path in *Avodas Hashem* which is not a valid path. We can write entire *sefarim* that explain all of the errors people are making in their *Avodas Hashem*. The errors and the misconceptions are not small mistakes; they are major! There was a lack of understanding to begin with about which path to take in life.

People might even spend months and years involved in a certain way of *Avodas Hashem* that proves detrimental. There are people who have harmed their physical health or have had to take pills because they have gotten into all kinds of mistakes as they embarked on a certain path in *Avodas Hashem* that wasn't for them.

(We should mention that when one serves Hashem totally *lishmah*, he has special assistance from Heaven to be raised from all of his failures and be brought onto the right path. But usually a person does not serve Hashem *lishmah*, so there is a lot less *siyata d'shmaya* (Heavenly assistance), and a person is easily led to make mistakes.)

The result from this is that a person becomes upset that others saw success and he didn't. Then he loses his aspirations to grow, he stops learning Gemara in-depth eventually and he's satisfied with just *Daf HaYomi*, and perhaps he'll have a *halacha seder* each day and an *iyun seder* in his day, but he is no longer learning nearly as much as he used to. He's waiting for a miracle to happen. Perhaps he wants Hashem to send him a *tzaddik* to come to him in a dream and teach him the secrets of Torah, as Shlomo HaMelech, and then, he'll know the Torah....

This loss of aspiration doesn't come from making mistakes in one's *Avodas Hashem*. It is because there was a mistake in his very path to begin with. There was no way for him to succeed from the start, because he had no clear *derech* (path) and *seder* (order) to his *Avodas Hashem*.

When it is finally explained to him all the mistakes that he made in his life, he says, "Nu, my son will hopefully get it right and he'll make it up for me." He's already lost his own drive in life, so he's hoping that his children will rectify his mistakes. It is very hard when we hear people say such statements, in which they have given up on their own life, when they realize the mistakes of their past.

We see that any *baal teshuvah* has basically completely changed over his entire life and he has started a new beginning for himself; so too, those who were raised *frum* in the Torah world also need to know what it feels like to become a *baal teshuvah*, and start their life over again.

⁴² Refer to Fixing Your Fire #004 – Knowing Your Way

Rectifying The Past Requires Individual Guidance

So far, we have explained two reasons why people lose their drive to grow in life. One reason is due to unrealistic aspirations, which are met with frustration; another reason is because the very path that the person took in the first place was unclear and it lacked guidance, which leads to major mistakes in life, frustration, and a subsequent loss of motivation to grow.

We cannot give a general solution to these problems, because in order to rectify these issues, each person as an individual will require his own private solution, based on his unique personality and circumstances.

If you feel that the issues here describe your situation in life, and you have a family with teenage children, you should be attentive to the concepts spoken about here until now. It is our responsibility to try as much as we can to pay attention to these issues, to make sure that our children should have a clear path in their *Avodas Hashem* from the start - so that they don't get into major problems later on in life.

2) Why Do People Lose Their Drive?

Now we will address the second reason of why people lose their drive to grow. This is when a person enjoys a period of growth and then he loses his momentum to grow.

Sometimes this has to do with the personality of a person, and sometimes it is caused by external factors and surroundings. At the end of the *zman* in *yeshivah\Kolel*, you can hear people say, "It's the end of the *zman*" – they feel like they have lose their drive.

The solution to this problem is two-fold. There is an external part to the solution, and an inner part to the solution.

External Renewal

The external part of the solution is for a person to find points of **renewal** in his life. Every person can find something in his life that provides him with renewal. I can't tell you which kind of renewal it should be and how much you need to make use of it, because it depends on each person's personal situation. But the general idea of it is that each person can find areas of renewal in his life.

We really cannot live without renewal. "There is no *beis midrash* that does not have a *chiddush* (novelty)". In our own inner world as well, we cannot survive without renewal. Our external situation as well requires some kind of renewal to survive. Find something that makes you feel renewed. This applies to both your physical side to life, as well as your spiritual side to life: you need to find renewal.

However, you must first make sure that it doesn't damage your inner stability. If your renewal is stronger than your stability, the renewal will overtake your soul and then it will be detrimental. It will be based on thin air. If you already have inner stability, though, you can seek renewal. There must be an equal balance between the "same old" stability in your life with the renewal in your life.

It is written, "עוד ינובון בשיבה, דשנים ורננים יהיו" - the *possuk* is saying that when *tzaddikim* become elderly, they are still full of energy and vigor, *hiranenus*, just as when they are young. Renewal leads you to have *hisranenus* – a renewal in the same old things. There can be a renewal in one thing which causes a person to feel a renewal towards the same old things he is used to.⁴³

One doesn't have to find renewal in something he's currently involved with; he can find anything to give him renewal, which provides him with a renewed feeling towards the same old things he was used to. For example, if a person wants to finish a tractate in the Talmud, he usually picks another tractate to learn than the one he is learning. This can help a person find renewal in his life, and then it can even spill over into what he's currently learning.

If one does not have the stamina to finish tractates of the Talmud, he can try skipping to another chapter in the tractate, and if this is still too much, he can at least try learning different *sugyos* of Gemara, one after the other. But it should be emphasized that in order for this renewal to work, must do this for the sake of renewing himself, and not merely for the sake of trying to finish a project.

It doesn't always have to be a renewal in one's Torah learning; it can be renewal in the physical parts of his life. But when we try to draw renewal from the physical side to our life, it should be done sensibly of course, and it should not be pursued addictively [or else we have traded one problem with another].

It is more recommended for a person to seek renewal from an area outside of the current area he's involved with, because if a person is looking for renewal in the current area, his focus on renewal might make him lose concentration on what he's doing and takes away his inner stability. We usually need to get renewal from some area that is outside of the current area that we are involved with. The renewal we gain will satisfy our soul's need for renewal, and then it will be able to find renewal in the "same old" things.⁴⁴

Inner Renewal

The additional part to the solution is to awaken inner renewal within ourselves. Although it is important for us to get renewal from external factors, the main renewal we need is inner renewal.

⁴³ See also Tefillah #043 – Finding Renewal

⁴⁴ For more on "renewal", see Tefillah #043 – Finding Renewal; and Fixing Your Water_019_The Desire For News

Inner renewal is the essentially the power behind **wind-of-wind-of-fire** which we are discussing. Most people have not have not revealed that much inner strength from within their soul, and therefore, they aren't either able to awaken inner renewal from within themselves.

Inner renewal is when a person is able to constantly begin again anew, in whatever situation he is in. Hashem renews the creation every day, and there is a deep power in our soul to feel this inner renewal. But the external layer of our soul cannot grasp this secret of renewal. It can only identify with the continuity of Creation: the fact that time is always continuing before us.

The external layer of our soul does not identify with the idea of the renewal of Creation; it can only understand the outer dimension of the world, which includes past, present, and future – the continuum of time. For this reason, people feel dry inside themselves, thus they seek renewal. But the soul isn't satisfied with external renewal; it is only satisfied with inner renewal.

When we stood at Har Sinai, we were told by Hashem, “*Remember the day where you stood before Hashem at Horeb*”, and the Sages learn from this that we were being told, “Today you are standing at Sinai; view each day as if you are coming to Sinai, and it should be in your eyes like new.” This describes the deep power of our soul to see renewal. It is a very subtle concept to define, and reaching it is even more subtle. It is the power that lies in **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul.

When one cannot see past the continuity of Creation, he does not see any renewal of Creation, he becomes dry inside his soul. But when a person has the deeper perspective towards Creation that there is nothing which stays the same, and that it is always changing every moment – even the chair and table you saw in your house this morning is not the same chair or table anymore – this gets him used to the perspective of renewal. It starts with realizing how the Creation in front of you is always changing.⁴⁵ This helps you leave the perspective of continuity and enter the perspective of renewal.

For example, when you meet a good friend after 30 days where you didn't see him, the *halachah* is to make the blessing of “*Shehechyanu*”. Why? It is because he has changed since then; he is new. If you see him the next day, you don't make a *Shechyanu*, because you don't see him as new. But the truth is that everything in Creation is constantly changing, and the changes are too small that you don't register it. You can get used to the idea that each thing you come across today is not the same thing you saw yesterday.

Here is a very simple and practical example, which applies to when we learn Torah. When we start to learn a *sugya* on Sunday and then we learn it again on Monday, the natural perspective is to see it as a continuity of the day before. But there is a whole new perspective we can have: each day, we are starting again, from a new place. But didn't you already learn these words of the Gemara yesterday? If you think that you are merely reviewing yesterday's learning word-for-word, this is the antithesis of renewal. One needs to understand that today's learning is totally new from yesterday's learning. Anyone who has learned a little Torah knows that there are new things discovered each day in one's learning.

⁴⁵ Refer to *Nefesh HaChaim – Shaar III*; for further explanation of this matter, refer to the adaptation of the Rav's *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part II, Chapter Three*

The Creation is always changing, and it is just that the changes are so small that we don't see it. But it's really changing every second. When one is aware of this concept, he can keep refreshing his understanding towards the same thing. This is because what you see today is different than what you saw yesterday; it has gone through changes since then.

When a person remains confined to the way he has been used to thinking since he was a child (which is called "*katnus*"\small-mindedness), he can only see the same old thing each day. But the more a person has matured spiritually, the more he can keep changing his perspective towards something. The more a person absorbs the perspective of renewal, he will find that he can keep refreshing his understanding towards something, starting again from scratch.

Renewing Your Lens On Life

Firstly, we need to absorb this concept at least intellectually, because it is a subtle concept to understand. Then we need to see it as a new perspective entirely towards life in front of us.

One who lives with this perspective is always full of inner vitality; he is truly alive. Whereas others still live in the same old and dry perspective towards life, a person who lives with the renewal concept undergoes a massive change in his soul, from beginning to end. It is hard to describe this with words.

When a person lives with renewal, he sees his friend one day and he sees him as an entirely new person the next day. To illustrate, you can get to know a person today in a way that you didn't know yesterday, and you discover more things about him, which gives you a different perspective towards him. Even if you don't get to know him more today, he has undergone some changes since yesterday.

A 20-year old is not the same person anymore when he is 25, and he is not the same person anymore when he turns 30 and 40. Just because you don't know this person doesn't mean he hasn't changed since 5 years ago, even if you can't see changes on him. (People don't even know themselves totally, so why should they assume that they know and recognize another person?)

Even though we see that there are people who don't seem to change even after they have gotten married and they go on to live their life, and it seems that some people simply stay the way they are until they die, this is all a superficial perspective towards people. The more inner that a person becomes, the more he realizes that nobody remains the same. Everyone goes through changes; Creation is always changing.

This perspective totally changes a person's view on life. Again, as we said before, this cannot be fully described in the word. It is to see a new world each day upon getting up in the morning; to see the renewal of Creation and live with it. It also provides a person with a feeling of inner renewal, which is essentially the soul's ability of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

This nature in the soul is not simply a nature in a person to be ambitious. There are people who do not ever give up on the pursuit of honor and money, and this is certainly a spark of the power of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, but it is not the inner use of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. The inner use of **wind-of-wind-of-fire** is when a person believes in the constant renewal of Creation.

When one has revealed the depth of his soul, he finds it natural to make use of the **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. It is really the deep nature of the soul, and it only needs to be revealed outward from its hidden state. When one penetrates into the depth of his soul, he reveals this simple nature in his soul, **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, which propels him to have constant upward movement.

Of course, a person is always affected by his physicality, and he will still have free will to choose between good and evil. But he will have succeeded in revealing the nature of his soul of constant upward movement. In order to get to this point, one has to get remove his attachment to physicality and reveal his soul.

3) *Why Do People Become Too Complacent?*

We mentioned a third scenario of why people lose their drive to grow: when a person feels like he has already achieved in his life, so he becomes somewhat complacent and he remains at that level he is on, for the rest of his life. The truth is that were indeed some *tzaddikim* who reached a certain point in their *Avodas Hashem* where they didn't have to keep growing past that point. But most *tzaddikim* are constantly in a state of growth.

The reason why people become complacent is because they are really viewing their existence as being part from Hashem. Without being connected to the purpose of our life – to actively strive for more and more closeness with Hashem – a person will feel fine as long as he has seen that he has had some spiritual growth, and he'll feel that it's okay to stay at his current level. But when he puts the purpose of life in front of him at all times, when he views his life in relation to how he must get to the reality of Hashem, he will then see life differently.

As long as a person is stuck inside the view that comes from his own private existence, he is seeing life from that perspective and even his goals in *ruchniyus* (spirituality) will always be about what "I" need to accomplish, and he fails to see the purpose of it all. Either he will end up in despair as he tries to grow to higher achievements, because he has trusted his own limited understanding; or it will be because he simply isn't reaching his goals. Either of these situations will make him give up at some point from any more desire for growth.

It's possible that a person has learned a lot of Torah and he has fulfilled many acts of *mitzvos* in his life, and perhaps he has even taught Torah to others and he has thereby greatly benefitted others – yet he, himself, might be remaining at the same level, for his entire life. Even if he has helped others grow, it is still very possible that he is not growing past his current level. His growth begins and ends there, and that is what he remains like, until the day he dies.

There is another way to live entirely; a much deeper perspective towards life: when one puts Hashem in front of himself at all times, he is connected to endlessness, and then he is never complacent. Hashem is endless, and therefore, our bond with Hashem is never complete; so our task in life is never done.

(On a very deep note, there is a deep place in our soul which is already connected with Hashem and it is completely serene, and therefore it doesn't need to grow past this point, because it is already at the very endpoint. But the rest of our soul requires ascension, growth, and striving for more closeness with Hashem. Until the year 10,000 (which will be the perfected state of Creation), there is no soul which will ever reach total closeness with Hashem (on its external layer). The perfection of the year 10,000 is contained in the deepest part of the soul which is already fully connected with Hashem and thus it has total serenity. But the external layers of our soul are bound to the rules of the time preceding the year 10,000, and therefore, our soul (its external layers) ultimately requires more and more growth.)

Thus, the more a person is aware that his soul requires constant growth, the further away he is from becoming complacent.

Holy Stubbornness

The Vilna Gaon said that a “stubborn person is successful.”⁴⁶ There is an *avodah* we have to stubbornly persist for more and more growth in our *ruchniyus*. Some people were born with natural stubbornness, which comes from **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul), and they can naturally channel their nature of stubbornness towards spiritual ambition⁴⁷. But even if a person wasn't born with natural stubbornness, he can live a life in which he is never complacent from more growth, because a person can keep demanding more growth from himself; for we are never done in our life's task.

The Inner World: To Live Above Time and Space

The biggest tragedy in life is when people lose their **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. It is the depth behind the statement of the Sages, “The wicked in their life are considered to be dead.” This is not only referring to the wicked, but to the wickedness in the soul⁴⁸ which doesn't want to improve itself and it doesn't strive to go higher.

When one doesn't have constant aspirations to grow higher and improve, it doesn't matter if this is at the beginning of the *zman*, the middle of the *zman*, or the end of the *zman*. One who is tied to “*zman*” is trapped in the “garments” of this world, for time is a garment that wraps around the

⁴⁶ *Gra: Sifri D'Tzneyusa: Hakdamah*

⁴⁷ See *Tefillah #0144 – Always Serving Hashem*

⁴⁸ refer to *sefer Tanya*

world, and being limited to time confines a person to a superficial dimension which he never grows past. He has no inner world to live in; he is instead bound to time. When a person has an inner world to live in, it doesn't make a difference to him if it's the middle of *Tamuz* or if it's the first day of *Elul*. He lives constantly in the inner dimension of life. When one is connected to the inner truth each day, he lives with a sense of purpose in his life. He knows where he is heading towards and for what he was created for; he is aware that life is about constant growth.

Surely there are times where we fall from our level and we stumble, and we have weaknesses in our personality which can hamper us, but that shouldn't change our perspective that life is always about constant growth.

Strengthening Yourself Each Day

This concept was actually described only briefly. It describes the point of **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, and it is the motivating force of our entire life. All other parts to our life are but details of this root power of spiritual movement. **Wind-of-wind-of-fire** must be in constant use. Each day we need to be in touch with it and awaken it. If we ever see that we are slackening off from growth, we need to re-awaken ourselves with this power. Remember that there is a purpose to your life which you are heading towards, and make sure that your *Avodas Hashem* has order to it and that you are being guided properly.

Don't ever despair; *never, ever despair!* How can you allow yourself to despair from reaching your place in eternity? Just because life contains difficulties shouldn't cause you to give up from reaching your purpose in life. It is the most foolish and insensible thing in the world for a person to give up from reaching one's purpose in life, which he was created for!! He would be giving up all of his eternity, just because he finds life hard. This is the worst kind of *katnus* (small-mindedness) and *shiflus* (low self-worth) possible! Some people have a more difficult life than others, and others have it less difficult. But the common denominator between all people is that there is no justification for giving up on reaching our purpose of life.⁴⁹

In Conclusion

The more a person is a *bar daas* (sensibly thinking person) and he has learned how to settle his mind each day, he accesses his **wind-of-wind-of-fire** and strengthens it. When one is making use of this root power, it is then that his *Avodas Hashem* can truly begin, and it is then that he can try his hardest and *daven* to Hashem for success. Of him it can be applied the statement of our Sages, "If someone says to you "I toiled, and I found", believe him."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Editor's Note: There is a wonderful sefer written by a recent tzaddik, Reb Asher Aryeh Freund zt"l of Jerusalem, on how we can knock away at the voice of despair inside ourselves and constantly grow higher: see sefer *Imrei Asher: Michtavim*.

⁵⁰ *Megillah 6b*

12 | *Conceit: Individuality*⁵¹

Fire-of-Wind-of-Fire: Unusual Movement of the Soul (Veering From The Norm)

With the help of Hashem, we are up to discussing **fire-of-wind-of-fire**, the source of unusual movements [of the soul]. It is essentially a desire to diverge from the normal rules. There are both evil and positive aspects of this nature.

First we will learn about the evil uses of this nature. When this nature in the soul is used for evil, a person veers from the normal and desired system that he is found in, and he behaves in an extreme manner.

Possible Causes of Veering From The Norm

Sometimes this is because the person as a child was already acting differently than others, and when he gets older, his extreme nature becomes more fully revealed (unless he attains a balance in his soul). But other times, it is because the person's soul makeup contains more **fire-of-wind-of-fire** than the usual, and therefore he does not conform to the normal rules and bounds of life. Even if he does conform, he only does this on an external level, but deep down, he is drawn towards acting a bit different from others.

In many cases, this is usually stemming from the negative trait of *gaavah* (conceit). The trait of *gaavah* can cause a person to want to act differently than others, so that he can stand out as a unique individual. This will cause him to perform actions that are extreme, in order to gain attention and awe from others. In all of his acts, he is trying to stick out somehow.

Examples

To give a simple example of this from the physical world, you can have a person who buys interesting looking furniture, just so that his furniture should look different from others'. A person might also dress very differently from the normal style than how others dress. The point is that he does not 'go with the flow'. He always wants to stand out somehow and be noticed; he wants others to see his individuality.

When a person has a lot of **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in his soul, he will perform certain extreme and over-the-top actions, in order to be noticed and to appear unique. In more extreme cases of this nature, there are some people who will do anything to get attention, just so that people should know

⁵¹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-012-individuality>

who they are, because they have a deep wish to be known and remembered. For example, there are people who will donate many books with mention of their name on the front page of the book, so that the whole world can see their name and remember who they are.

Another example: A person might speak in public and then throw in some of his own formed beliefs about certain topics, because he wants to be noticed for his individual opinions. His opinions may be totally off-base, yet he wishes to let others know what his personal opinions are, because he very much wants to be noticed as an individual.

Although a person might not be consciously aware why he likes to offer his opinions so much, it can still be coming from a dominant amount of **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in his soul, which is causing him to think ‘out of the box’ too much, and it’s all because he doesn’t conform to the normal way of thinking. In certain cases, he might fight the system around him and show others why his beliefs are correct, and explain why the normal system of thinking is incorrect.

In whatever the scenario, he always thinks very differently than how others think; he does not want to accept a normal way of thinking. His erroneous beliefs can show up in his conversations with others, and it can also show up in his entire demeanor. There are some people who have a lot of *gaavah* and therefore they always have to do differently than others, just for the sake of simply being different than others. This affects them in the areas of action, speech, and thought; they are always trying to be different.

As an example, you can have a person learning in the *Kolel* who always has to invent razor-sharp *chiddushim* (novel Torah thoughts) in the *Gemara* which no one has ever heard of. If he finds that there is another *sefer* who has already stated his *chiddush*, he actually becomes melancholy for a few days from this. He suffers from the fact that he hasn’t come up with anything that is truly different and unique; he wants to be the sole inventor of his creative ideas.

The truth is that he should really be happy that his *chiddushim* were already stated by others, because that proves the validity of his *chiddushim*; and if he is the only person in the world who has stated his *chiddushim*, he is probably mistaken. Yet, he doesn’t think that way.

We can give many more examples of how this problem shows up in the various areas of the soul. The point is that it is a problem in which a person thinks that he must act differently than others, or that he must speak differently than others, or that he must think differently than others – or all of the above – in order that others should notice his uniqueness.

Differentiating Between Conceit and Non-Conformist Nature

Fire-of-wind-of-fire in the soul is not necessarily the same thing as the trait of *gaavah*/conceit. It can simply be a nature in one’s personality in which he likes to do things differently.

If a person is acting differently from others solely for the sake of being different from others, then it is definitely a serious case of *gaavah*. But others do things differently simply because their

personality is rooted in this particular aspect of the soul, and therefore, they are naturally drawn towards doing things differently from others, because their thought patterns do not usually follow the norm. This is what we are dealing with in this chapter.

When *gaavah* is the motivation, the person will manipulate his own thoughts and force himself to think differently and to do things differently, in order to appear different and unique from others. But when it is coming from a dominance of **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, a person will naturally think/do differently than others, because it's part of his very personality to be this way: he feels that his individuality must be noticed by others.

Reaching Your Own Individuality

The further a person is from his true and inner self, he follows the crowd, because he is not in touch with his own individuality. His actions will closely mimic the actions of others. By contrast, the closer a person is to himself, his actions, words, thoughts will be more unique (and on a more subtle note, his true self and existence will have been discovered). It is then that the contrast of his behavior against others can be more noticed.

The Sages say, “Just as all faces are not equal, so are all *d'eos* (ways of thinking) not equal.” Each person contains a point of individuality which is unique only to him and to no one else in the world. We can find in each person some kind of unique point.

The further a person is from his actual self, the more he seeks to imitate and copy others. We know that although each person has hands, feet, a nose, mouth, and ears, the face of each person looks different. The reason why Hashem made us this way is to show us that each of us has a unique individual aspect that no one else has.

The further a person is from his true self, the more he ‘resembles’ others, for he has not yet reached any individuality of his own. The closer a person to his true self, his true existence is more exposed, and you can then see the contrast of his personality in comparison to others. Therefore, the more a person is really in touch with his true self, he uncovers more uniqueness in his actions, speech, and thoughts. He will do things differently from others, his words are different from how others speak, and his thinking patterns are different from others.

As mentioned earlier, some people think differently from others because they have a lot of *gaavah*, which is evil; and others think differently from others because their souls are rooted more in the aspect of **fire-of-wind-of-fire**, and therefore it is their very personality to do things differently than others. But the true and holy reason why we should do things differently than others is because since Hashem made each of us different from each other, we each have our own individuality.

The more a person has revealed his true self and he is acting more from his true self, his uniqueness will become more apparent in how he acts, speaks, and thinks.

Individual Conclusions When It Comes To Learning The Gemara

Here is an example, when it comes to learning a *sugya* of *Gemara*. Before a person discovers *chiddushim* in what he is learning about, he needs to summarize what he has learned, beginning from the *Gemara* and the opinions of the *Rishonim*. One kind of person will summarize the *Gemara* in a way that copies everyone else's conclusions, and another kind of person will summarize it according to his own unique intellectual abilities.

In fact, although the words of the *Gemara* and the *Rishonim* are the same to each person, each person sees different things there and understands the words differently. This is a well-known fact. The reason is simple: each person has a different soul makeup and therefore each person has his own unique understanding of things.

Fire-of-Wind-of-Fire: The Power To Reveal Individuality

The more a person has uncovered his true self, the more he uses the nature of **fire-of-wind-of-fire** [for holiness]. When a person is acting from his true self, his individuality begins to shine through in how he acts, speaks, and thinks.

Revealing **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul is a major overhaul to one's inner world. It reveals to a person what the unique individuality of his own soul is.

Not everyone is in touch with their individuality; there are people who are totally out of touch of their individuality. If they are asked about what their individuality is, they will think that this means their own children, their age, and the various possessions that they own. Although all of these are uniquely this person's, it is a very superficial aspect of the person's individuality. It does not say anything about the person himself.

Others are a bit more in touch with themselves, and they identify their uniqueness based on the job they work at or something they are talented at. These are certainly points that show how the person is unique somehow, but it still does not make them appear that different from others.

Many people do not know how they are somehow unique from others. The age of a person, the amount of children he has, the amount of *sefarim* he owns, and the size of his house are not that unique about the person; these are all external and superficial factors, yet many people view these factors as part of their uniqueness.

Sadly, most people end their life having based their individuality on superficial comparisons to other people (One kind of person was perhaps more conceited than others, another kind of person had the biggest temper, and another person was more gluttonous than others – yet even these negative character traits are found by many others!). When this is the perspective, a person has lived his entire life very far from his true self.

All people – without exception – need to be aware that they each have an individual and unique soul. There is the general and collective soul of the Jewish people, but each Jew contains a private

soul which is unique only to him. A person's uniqueness needs to become more apparent in all that he does. The more a person has grown spiritually and he has gained more inner maturity, his individuality is more apparent in everything he does, whether it is his actions, his words, or his thoughts; his uniqueness is revealed.

We are not referring to a desire to stick out and be noticed by others, which stems from *gaavah*/conceit. Rather, it is the concept of holy individuality, where the person's true self is revealed in his life, which will mean that his uniqueness is more apparent in how he acts.

Identifying Your Strongest Point

In order for a person to uncover his individuality, first, a person needs to identify his greatest quality. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz said that it is worse if a person doesn't know his qualities than if he is ignorant of his weaknesses.⁵²

The very first step of self-awareness is for a person to be aware of his strongest point. The next step is to discover one's greatest weakness. In between those two points, you also need to fill up the "map" that's in between, but this is the starting point.

Basic Self-Awareness: The Things You Like

If one cannot find his strongest point, he should at least try to discover which things he likes and enjoys most; like what he finds himself mostly pulled after. Although this is a very minimal degree of self-awareness (which stems from the lowest aspect of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*), it is still a beginning step towards self-awareness which is very important. When people aren't aware of this basic knowledge about themselves, they live in total denial of their soul's abilities.

A person should ask himself what he mainly enjoys. Examples might include an affinity for music or art. If one grew up in a strictly Torah environment where nothing except Torah was allowed into his life, he might be in denial of what he is pulled after, but he is not being honest with himself. He is denying his soul. Surely there must be limitations placed on how much one pursues a hobby outside of Torah learning, but to deny the feelings that one enjoys is detrimental to the soul and it causes much internal damage.

These are natural desires which stem from the *nefesh habehaimis*, and it is a very basic part of self-awareness, although it doesn't tell us everything about the person. The more important part of becoming self-aware, though, which we are mainly discussing in this chapter, is for one to discover his strongest point/greatest quality.

⁵² *sefer Daas Torah, parshas Bamidbar*

Being Honest With Yourself

When it comes to knowing your greatest quality, you need to know if it's a general aspect about the soul which all people have, or if it is an aspect that is unique only to you. (On a deeper note, you can always discover something unique in yourself about even the most general qualities in the soul.) First discover the strongest general quality about yourself, and then find a unique point in it which pertains only to you.

We should point out that that many people make a mistake when they try to discover their greatest quality, and they will conclude that their greatest quality is something that they *want* and deeply *aspire* for, convincing themselves that this is truly their greatest quality, because they know that they are “supposed” to want it. But you need to know *what your actual greatest quality is right now* - not what you *would like* to acquire. A person might push his own individuality into the closet, convincing himself that his true individuality is contained in a different point that he would like to identify himself with!

I must repeat and emphasize this point, because it is a very common mistake that people make, when misunderstood.

Beginning To Know Yourself

In order for a person to reach his *unique* best quality, first a person has to discover his *general* strongest quality. Understandably, it is easier for a person to discover his general quality than to discover his unique quality, as long as a person has a bit of self-awareness; because most people are aware that they are good at certain things, to some extent. But when it comes to discovering one's unique quality, this part is more difficult.

If a person can't discover anything nice about himself at all, this is a sign of poor self-awareness, and such a person will surely not be able to discover his greatest quality. When a person is at least a bit self-aware, he knows that he has some qualities and some weaknesses, on a general level and without breaking it apart into subtle details.

It takes easily *at least* 20 hours of reflection to know even this, which is a very general kind of knowledge. When a person has this general self-awareness about his soul's qualities and weaknesses, he can then begin to think what his *general* best quality is. Anyone who has minimal self-awareness can discover it.

After that, the next step is to try to figure out one's *unique* strong point, and this part is difficult. In order to discover one's unique strong quality, there are two ways to identify it: there is a way to identify it from the 'outside', and there is a way to identify it from the 'inside', as follows.

Observing Your Unique Strong Point From The ‘Outside’

Identifying it from the ‘outside’ is perhaps a bit easier to do. A person can see it by thinking into his *general* best quality and how he utilizes it in particular. From studying how it works in particular, a person learns about his own unique inner workings that are empowering his general qualities.

To illustrate how this works, sometimes a person can learn about himself from studying others. Although this will not give him the complete picture of himself, it can give him some indicators that lead him to more discoveries about himself.

So you can take a general strong point of yours and study how it is particularly manifest in your life, and this can teach you about some unique strength that you have in yourself. Since this is a view from ‘outside’ of the unique quality you possess, it is but the external part of the job; now let’s discuss what the inner part of this is, which is the main part of the *avodah* here.

(In general, in every *avodah* that we learn about, there is always an external aspect and an inner aspect that we need to do. The external part of the *avodah* is always needed, but the main part is always the inner aspect of the *avodah*. Although the inner aspect of the *avodah* is more important, there are some people who cannot use only the inner aspect, and they need to make use of a more external aspect. Therefore, we always have to mention the external aspect of *avodah*. The amount of energy that each person needs to put into the external part of the *avodah* and the inner part of the *avodah* depends on each person).

Observing Your Unique Strong Point From The ‘Inside’

In order to recognize your uniqueness, you need to get a glimpse of a more inner place of yourself than knowing your qualities. Reaching the inner and subtle part of yourself requires the following factors: a general disconnection from materialism⁵³, and uprooting your personal worst *middah*.⁵⁴ This leads a person to attaining a certain degree of **inner silence** (*sheket*) in the soul.

The first part, disconnecting from the world, does not mean that you should become a totally disconnected person from this world. It just means that you should be able to disconnect from being immersed in what goes on in the surroundings and all of its ‘noise’. If you can disconnect from this very noisy world by having times of disconnection from the world every day, you gain a general balance in your soul.

However, it will still be difficult for you to feel a deep tranquility in your soul at this point, if you haven’t yet uprooted your personal worst *middah*. Each person has a particular bad *middah* which doesn’t let him concentrate on his inner world as long as he hasn’t yet uprooted it. Therefore, the next step is to attempt to calm that bad *middah* that is getting in your way, by attaining balance in

⁵³ Refer to *Practice of Hisbodedus_020_Disconnecting From Materialism*

⁵⁴ Refer to *Getting To Know Your Soul*

the soul, through knowing how to use the soul's other abilities that can balance out the nature of the weakness.⁵⁵

For most people, this leads to a state of inner calmness. However, in some people, their souls are full of so much inner turmoil that they won't be able to work on this point. Therefore, I will emphasize here that the words here can apply to *most* people, but not to *all* people.

Most people, upon disconnecting from this material world, and after having worked to uproot their personal worst *middah* (they have calmed it through attaining a balance in the soul), are able to reach a very stable place in the soul, which provides a person with a certain degree of inner calmness. Touching upon that quiet place in oneself opens up an entirely new world in oneself.

Menuchas HaNefesh – Serenity of the Soul

Most people have “inner noise” in themselves (and with some people the noise is out in the open), more or less, and therefore they lack self-awareness of the inner place in the soul. The more a person has disconnected from the pull towards materialism and he has also calmed his worst *middah*, he is calmer inside himself, and he merits a degree of *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of the soul) within.

There are people who get all their *menuchas hanefesh* from utilizing all their time to learn Torah, (as it is written, “*And he saw that menuchah was good*”), and although this is of course praiseworthy, what would happen if this person were to be taken out of the *beis hamidrash* and he has no *Gemara* in front of him? Would he be at peace? He had *menuchas hanefesh* when he was learning Torah in the *beis midrash*, but not right now. Although it was commendable that he had *menuchas hanefesh* as he learned Torah, that experience of *menuchas hanefesh* does not always bring a person to the deepest place in the soul.

The epitome of *shleimus* (self-perfection) is for a person to attain balance in his soul and to reach a state of inner calmness (*sheket*)⁵⁶ from this. One who reaches this (which is only the first step) has the basic source of *menuchas hanefesh* which serves as the “solid ground” for all of his *Avodas Hashem* onward.

To review, this ‘solid ground’ means that one must disconnect from being tied to the materialistic world and to calm one's personal worst *middah* (through balancing the soul). This leads a person to a general degree of *menuchas hanefesh*.

⁵⁵ Refer to *Getting To Know Your Soul*

⁵⁶ For more on the topic of “*sheket*” (inner calmness), see *Fixing Your Fire_08_Loss of Normal Routine*

Adinus (Inner Refinement) and Dakus (Subtlety)

The next step, after reaching this point of *menuchas hanefesh*, is to traverse yet another layer in the soul, which will require inner refinement of the soul (*adinus*) and subtlety (*dakus*).⁵⁷

The less sensitive a person is to the concept of becoming more spiritually refined, it will be very difficult to enter deeper within himself. One needs to be able to hold himself back from indulging in physical pleasures in order to be able to do this. One needs to try this first with food, by avoiding heavy and thick foods, and by slowly detaching from all other forms of indulgence in materialism.

With the more a person attains inner refinement from this, he enters deeper into his soul from the serenity that comes along with this, and then he can feel and listen better to the subtleties of his soul. This is the inner world of the soul which is hidden from almost all people.

The first step is to reach *menuchas hanefesh*, which is the basis of entering deeper. The step after that is to reach *adinus* (inner refinement) and *dakus* (subtlety). Just as there are things in the physical world which are refined and unrefined, so does the soul contain layers which are more refined than other layers. In order to enter the deeper parts of the soul, one needs to acquire inner refinement.

Understandably, most people only know of the more gruff layers of the soul and they remain at that level. The few people who do reach the inner silence and who reach *menuchas hanefesh*, from there, they are slowly able to feel the subtle and refined areas of the soul. Those subtle discoveries about the soul open up an entirely new world to a person. It shows a person great qualities in the soul, and it also shows a person the deepest subtleties of our human weaknesses.

If someone isn't prepared to work on himself, he should not try to enter that place in the soul. But when someone seeks truth, he is very motivated to discover those subtleties. He will discover things about himself that he never would have fathomed; it feels there like a convert entering Judaism.

Our *Gedolim* (and all great people who taught us about *Avodas Hashem*) were constantly in touch with this inner place of the soul, which greatly magnifies the depth of our human weaknesses. It is a place in the soul which most people would not like to know about. The more a person enters the subtler areas of his soul (after reaching inner silence and *menuchas hanefesh*), he becomes more aware of deep truths of his own soul, and he gains a brutally honest view of himself. He becomes aware of what's going on in his soul, down to the subtlest areas.

A person can reach it through deep reflection on himself, but it is experienced as more of a natural and simple sense, because the person has become more subtle and refined. Just as you can tell if the food you are eating is hot or cold, sweet or sour, so can a person reach a kind of deep self-awareness where he senses what's going on in his soul. Most people do not enter this deep part of themselves, unless they notice something glaring about themselves; and as a result, most people remain unaware of the subtleties contained in their souls.

⁵⁷ The concepts of "adinus" and "dakus" are also mentioned in *Fundamentals of Middos Improvement_01*

Holy Individuality

When one is acting from that deep place in himself, his individuality manifests in all that he does, because he is truly in touch with himself. The deeper a person enters into himself, the more unique he will become, until he eventually reaches the deepest part of the soul, which is where his true uniqueness is found.

This causes his **fire-of-wind-of-fire** to become second nature to him. Instead of acting out of *gaavah*, out of a desire to stick out and be noticed, he will be acting from a deep place in the soul, which simply reflects his true individuality and uniqueness.

Others who see him might not understand him, and they might suspect him of acting out of *gaavah*. They might wonder, “Why does this person always have to act differently than others? Why does this person always think differently than others?” But it is because they are misinterpreting what they are seeing. They are mistaking the person of acting out of *gaavah*, while in actuality the person is using the **fire-of-wind-of-fire** for holiness, which uncovers a person’s true individuality.

This is the meaning of the words of the *Mesillas Yesharim*, “A person must know his obligation on his world.” Each person has “his” personal obligation on this world, unique only to him. Most people are not in touch with their own inner world, and they are instead living in the world outside of them.

When a person lives superficially and he is out of touch with his own inner world, he might learn Torah, do all the mitzvos and make sure not to commit any sins, but he never reaches his personal obligation on this world. He is generally living life correctly, but he is not fulfilling his personal *avodah* on this world. The more a person penetrates into his own inner world, he is closer to “his” obligation on this world. His uniqueness will be more manifest in his life, and it will be easy to tell him apart from others, because his uniqueness is shining through.

This all describes the point of **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, the source of uncovering one’s individuality, which is the depth of the soul, depicted in the words of our Sages, “Therefore, man was created individual.” As our Sages explain, it was not only Adam at the beginning of Creation who was created individual; each soul contains an ‘individual’ aspect. One who reveals the point of individuality within his soul – releasing it from its potential state into its active state – is one who truly reaches “his” obligation on this world.

As we explained, the evil side to **fire-of-wind-of-fire** is when one veers from the norm simply because he wants to stand out from others and to appear different from others. But when this power is reached correctly in the way we have described, it becomes holiness, and the person will be activating his true, inner potential.

In Conclusion

Hashem created 600,000 souls in the Jewish person, and each soul has his own unique “world”, his own unique task, and his own unique way, of serving Him. When all of the 600,000 individual parts become connected together, this results in the formation of the complete “*klil tiferes*” (beautiful blend) which all of the souls of the Jewish people will form. When each person’s true ‘individual’ aspect is revealed, all of the individual parts will come together, and this will form the completion of the *Kneses Yisrael*, the collective whole of the Jewish people.

13 | *Conceit: Source of Identity*⁵⁸

Fire-of-Fire: Ascension Based On The Destruction of Previous Levels

With the help of Heaven, let us now continue to learn about the element of fire, which is at the root of *gaavah* (conceit).

Fire is all about destruction; fire destroys anything that it is in its way. This particular nature of fire, destruction, is the “fire” of fire.

Fire-of-fire subdivides into four possible scenarios: the aspects of earth, water, wind and fire that are all within fire-of-fire. We will go through each of these in the order of lowest area to highest area: earth, water, wind, and fire.

The Four Branches of Fire-of-Fire

- (1) **Earth-of-fire-of-fire** refers to the “nullifying” aspect of fire (*bittul*/nullification). When we nullify something [such as *chometz* before Pesach], we say “Let it be nullified and disregarded as the dust of the earth.” Earth is considered to be unimportant, worthless, and nullified in our eyes. When one wants to go to a higher level than the current level, he first has to “nullify”/destroy the current level; this is the “earth” of fire-of-fire.
- (2) **Water-of-fire-of-fire** is a desire to go higher when one is no longer deriving pleasure (water) from his current level. His motivation for pleasure propels him to progress to the higher level, and this is the “water” aspect of fire-of-fire.
- (3) **Wind-of-fire-of-fire** is a desire to go higher when one wants to experience new kinds of movement (wind). When a person feels that he has finished the movements of the current level and now he feels ready to go on to the next level, this stems from the wind/movement aspect within fire-of-fire.
- (4) **Fire-of-fire-of-fire** refers to the actual destructive nature itself of fire.

At this point, these concepts will sound very closed and mysterious. We hope with the help of Hashem that as we go along that these concepts will become understood.

⁵⁸ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-013-conceit-source-identity>

Earth-of-Fire-of-Fire: Nullifying The Previous Level

As mentioned in the past, the element of fire is all about ascending higher. **Fire-of-fire** refers to the destructive nature of fire, and **earth-of-fire-of-fire** specifically is where a person ‘destroys’ his previous level, because he now sees it as worthless and important; “like the dust of the earth.”

In simpler terms, it manifests in the soul as follows. As long as a person feels that he is aiming for a higher and more heavenly level, the current level is deemed as the more earthly level. But if the heavenly level now seems like it is the ‘earth’ to him (he now has higher aspirations than before), a person no longer sees the importance of the previous level, and now he aims for higher levels. (Indeed, we are taught by our Sages that the *avodah* of a person is to “turn Heaven into earth” and then strive for an even higher Heaven than before).

Evil Conceit: Belittling Others In Order To Feel Higher

This power (*bittull*/nullification) can be used for either good or evil. It is evil where a person doesn’t see the importance of the previous level and his disregard for it doesn’t cause him to aspire higher.

The desire for ascension is at the root of *gaavah*. How does this work? In actuality, the “earth” aspect of fire keeps a person from moving past his current level (for earth causes permanence), but when a person sees that others are on a higher level than him, he cannot stomach this, so his conceitedness causes him to disdain and to disregard them as worthless, which provides him with a feeling that he is “higher” than others. In reality, though, he has not actually gone higher - he has remained exactly where he was before.

This is essentially what lies behind the trait of *gaavah*: [evil] *gaavah* is about destroying/disdaining others in one’s mind, for the sake of feeling higher than them.

Holy Conceit: Striving For Higher Levels, Regardless Of Others’ Level

By contrast, the holy way to use the power of “nullifying” is, that instead of me nullifying others in order to feel that I am on a higher level, I can realize that it is time for me to progress to a higher level than the previous level, regardless of how this will relate to other people. I can demand from myself aspirations to grow higher from my current level without trying to nullify others in the process. This causes the “**earth**” aspect of **fire-of-fire** to activate a strong upward movement.

Summary

We have explained here the fundamental difference between evil *gaavah* and holy *gaavah*. The trait of *gaavah* is evil when one is not actually going higher from his current level and he has no

desire to improve, and as a result, he disdains others in his eyes, so that he can feel like he is going higher. In contrast, *gaavah* is holy when I simply want to go higher from my current level because I am dissatisfied with my current level.

Evil Conceit: A False Sense of Identity

Let's go deeper into what lies behind *gaavah*.

There are basically two different ways in which we can view the world. When a person has *gaavah* (conceit), it is really a corrupted sense of identity towards oneself, in which a person determines his own self-worth based on how he compares to others. He compares himself to others, sees that he is indeed doing better than other people (at least when it comes to certain areas), and comes to feel conceited from this.

(When one is busy comparing himself to others all the time and that is how he evaluates himself, it's very possible that he suffers from feelings of low self-worth, which is negative *shiflus*, a sense of lowliness; or, he has the opposite problem: he is conceited. We are discussing here the second option: when constant evaluation of oneself in comparison to others leads to *gaavah*).

So *gaavah* (conceit) is essentially when one identifies his sense of self-worth and importance based on how he compares to others. He looks at others and he thinks, "Where do they stand, and where do I stand?"

This is his root perspective, and it can lead to either evil or holy *gaavah*. If it leads to evil *gaavah*, a person will disdain others and stay complacent with his current level. If it leads to holy *gaavah*, he will be propelled to improve himself, as we explained above; included in this is "jealousy of scholars" (holy jealousy), where a person feels jealous of others' achievements and he is inspired to improve because of this.

The common denominator between all of these scenarios is that the person evaluates his own level based on how he compares to others. This mentality can be very damaging to oneself - let us explain why.

When a person is using the holy kind of *gaavah*, he strives for higher levels of growth regardless of this will relate and compare to other people; his concern is purely that he should acquire the higher level he is striving for. When a person is using the power of *gaavah* for evil, he is busy examining others and wondering how he can be on higher levels than them.

For example, Reuven sees that his friend Shimon is on a higher spiritual level than he, and he is tossing and turning at night in his bed with anxious thoughts about this, wondering how he can be more like Shimon. He is "examining" Shimon in his mind and scrutinizing what his spiritual level is, and if he's on a higher level than him or not. He also "examines" his friend Levi's level, trying to evaluate what Levi's level is, in comparison to his own level. He is busy agonizing over these kinds of thoughts, and then he asks himself, "And what level am I on...?"

The Truthful Perspective Towards Spiritual Growth

The inner perspective for one to have is entirely different. The inner perspective of the soul does not look at others in order to determine its personal level; it looks at things on a purely objective level of simply: “Where do I have to get to?” without wondering how this will relate to *others*.

The ladder of growth which Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair describes, which is explained in *Mesillas Yescharim*, is: “Torah brings a person to *zehirus* (watchfulness), *zehirus* brings a person to *zerizus* (zeal)”, etc. Our focus needs to be on aiming for higher levels of growth, and it makes zero difference if you see *others* who are on a higher level than you or on lower level than you. The point is not to become better than those around you; that should not be the issue. The entire concern should be about if you are truly the acquiring higher levels that you need to get to.

When a person has a truthful perspective, his concerns are: “What are the steps of growth that have to be traversed? What is the order of steps I will need to take? What is the current level I am on, and which of the higher levels can I work on currently acquiring?” And when he sees that there is more work to be done and that he hasn’t yet gotten to the finish line, he seeks to go higher than the current level.

This positive kind of sense self-evaluation is all a use of **earth-of-fire-of-fire** when it is used for holiness. It enables a person to have a deeper perspective, in which he is not concerned about how he compares to the spiritual level of others. It is when you are motivated to grow to higher levels simply because you know that there are more levels you can reach. How others are faring makes no difference to one’s actual growth.

The Way We Evaluate Ourselves

From the simpler perspective, we are busy analyzing other people and on what spiritual level they are on, and we just make sure not to disdain them. As the *Mishnah* states, “Do not judge your friend, until you are in his place” – and as the Kotzker famously explained, “You will never be in his situation, therefore, don’t judge him.” However, although this is true, the person here is still evaluating his own level based on how others are doing, which is not the truthful perspective. It is this erroneous attitude which lies at the core of understanding the trait of *gaavah*.

We can also see this in children. A child does not have a truthful sense of identity towards himself. A child evaluates himself based on how he compares to others that he sees. Children like to do what other children enjoy doing and mimic their surroundings. A child will often measure his own self-worth based on how the other children in his grade: “What grades are they getting? How good is their memory?” And based on that, he will consider himself as either successful or as a failure, because it will entirely depend on how others are doing.

The further a person is from his own individuality, the less he experiences himself, and instead he is experiencing all of that which is outside of himself: other people. Often this childish perspective remains in most people, and deep down, the person identifies based on how *others* are being affected.

Besides for the problems that this mentality in the person causes, it is a detrimental mentality at its very root. In order to have a truthful and inner perspective, we need to see the actual reality (*havayah*) of something, and we cannot define its reality based on how it relates to others in our surroundings.

The Sages said, “Therefore, man was created individual.” The root of how we view reality is from the part of our soul that is ‘individual’. We must love others, but we also have our own individuality. The ‘individual’ aspect of our being sees reality through our own “I”, and it doesn’t measure the reality based on how others are viewing it.

This inner perspective is the root of rectifying *gaavah*, and it empowers a person to stop nullifying other people in his eyes and to instead focus solely on the higher levels he needs to acquire.

The Problem of Talking About Other People

We have outlined the root perspective which one needs to have. Now we will explain how it can be applied practically.

The *Gemara* says that it is forbidden to speak of another’s praise to others, because by speaking of his praise, the person will also come to speak disparaging remarks about the person. Besides for the simple reason which the *Gemara* says, there is also a deeper reason that is not mentioned in the *Gemara* (as is well-known, there is a rule that the *Gemara* reveals only one of the reasons for a *halacha*. There are always more reasons behind the *halacha* which the *Gemara* does not bring). The deeper reason for why it is forbidden to praise a person to another is, because talking about another person takes a person away from his own inner world; it makes him less inward as he turns outward from himself to discuss others.

When someone talks *lashon hora* (evil gossip) about another person, it is really a sign that he is far from his own self. Speaking *lashon hora* is to abandon one’s own self and to instead involve himself with others in his surroundings.

This is true whether he simply wanted to talk about the person, or whether he began by praising him and he ended up talking negatively about him, or whether he began the conversation to begin with in order to speak negatively of him (G-d forbid). In either case, a person talking *lashon hora* has always abandoned his own personal world, and he has involved himself with the world beyond the borders of his “I”. Once a person starts talking about other people, he has left his “I”, and this can eventually lead to the evil outcome of speaking *lashon hora* about another.

It is indeed difficult for a person to put a stop to the habit of talking about other people. In the world we live in and recognize today, it is the nature of people to talk about others and to discuss them. The *Gemara* says that there are few people who sin with adultery, many people who steal, and that all people speak *avak lashon hora* (“the dust of gossip”): conversations that are apt to lead to *lashon hora*. The reality of speaking *avak lashon hora* envelopes our world - and if only it would stay at that level and not become actual *lashon hora* itself.

We live in a world in which almost every person talks about everybody else in his surroundings. We are born into a world where it is natural to talk about other people; which really means that we are born into a world where people are constantly leaving their own selves, by always talking about other people's lives. There are levels and levels to how much people talk about other people, but in any case, the accepted attitude in the world is to talk about others; sometimes in front of the other and sometimes not in front of him.

That being the case, since a person is so used to talking about other people, he is experiencing his life based on how he perceives what others say and think. A person tends to have a sense of self-worth based on how he thinks *others* view him; he will think according to how *others* think; and he becomes involved with *others'* lives, leaving his own individual world behind him as he does this. It even becomes the very way he lives life.

Let's take for example a person who is not immersed in the world of Torah and in learning it; even someone who makes sure to strictly adhere to all of the Torah. Let's examine his conversations. How much of his day was spent talking about other people? Forget about if he spoke *lashon hora* or not, or how much he praised others and how much he spoke negatively others; that's a different issue. How much did he speak about others? A very small percentage of the conversations are *not* about other people (and we can apply the rule of "nullified by a sixtieth"); most of the conversations were spent talking about other people.

If we can change this long-standing habit of human nature, we have the root of change that is needed in order to rectify *gaavah*.

Again, we will emphasize that it will be difficult, because we are used to growing up in a world that naturally does not think there is anything wrong with always talking about other people. Changing this habit will feel like uprooting the very lifestyle that most of us grew up with and grown comfortable with (may Hashem have compassion on us that this has become our normal situation), so it will indeed be a difficult task for us to change this habit.

Superficial Sense of Identity

In our generation of *ikvesa d'meshicha* (the footsteps of *Moshiach*), there are many different "groupings" of Jews, like different flocks of sheep that follow their own herd. Each sect of religious Judaism today follows its own community and its own ways; how does each group look at the other group? Sadly, it has become 'justified' in the eyes of each group to speak negatively of other types of Jews, and it has even become deemed as an obligatory '*mitzvah*' to do this! Living life in this way places a person into a state of constantly comparing himself with others and to evaluate his own level based upon his level of judgment.

We can give an extreme example of this problem, which all people are familiar with. There are those whose entire level of *Yiddishkeit* is based on a comparison with the level of the irreligious and the secular. This type of person feels that he is on a very high religious level, simply because he is not

a “*Chiloni*” (irreligious Jew in Israel) – even if he doesn’t say so. For example, he sees all the signs which warn us to stay away from the wicked people that rebel against the widely accepted views amongst religious Torah Jewry, and therefore he thinks that he is basically doing very well, compared to all those wicked people he reads about.

Going further with this, even within the observant Torah world there are controversies about certain people, and there are some people who believe that it is a *mitzvah* to speak harshly against those people and to totally destroy them, and they feel that certain people are deserving of the death sentence in *Beis Din*. Such a person feels that he is a very good person, compared to all of these wicked people that must be condemned. It becomes his perspective with which he lives life with.

It shows that he has no sense of identity of his own. He draws his entire sense of self-worth from the fact that he is not a wicked person who deserves to be belittled, shamed, and destroyed. He derives vitality from this. It’s very possible that when he eventually has to go upstairs to Heaven one day, he will find out that his entire level of *Yiddishkeit* was entirely based on how his view of others who were below his religious level - and that this was his entire source of vitality in life.

This might sound a bit too far-fetched at first when we hear this, but we must know that a large percentage of people who keep the Torah and the *mitzvos* don’t have a genuine sense of identity, and they are instead getting their entire feeling of self-worth from the fact that they aren’t irreligious or that they aren’t as bad as certain people.

Judging Those Who Are Greater Than Us

That is all with regards to how the religious may view the irreligious, but let’s go further within the observant realm, of how we can see this nature manifests: there is a nature to judge others in our own surroundings.

The Chazon Ish said that a very important part of our life is to observe the wise people of the generation (the *Gedolim*). This has become second nature especially to *bnei Torah*, to scrutinize and analyze what greater people say. But although it is true in concept, it can get out of hand, making us become too analytical of every detail of every word of a *Gadol* that we come across, to the point that it is apt to make us judge people who are much greater than us.

If it was merely the *halachic* ruling of the *Gadol* that people are discussing and talking about, there is some room to validate this; after all, it is the way of Torah to analyze every word we come across. But that is not what often happens. When people question the words of a *Gadol*, they usually end up evaluating the *Gadol*’s level and how he compares to other *Gedolim*. It is no longer a purely intellectual discussion about a *halacha* at hand; it becomes personal. There is this tendency to always “evaluate” a *Gadol* in comparison to other *Gedolim*.

There are people who always have to state their opinions about people who are far greater than them, in knowledge and breadth of Torah, in *Avodas Hashem*, and in *dikduk hadin* (strict adherence to follow *halachah*). This kind of person, from his narrowed and immature perspective, thinks that

he is gifted with Heavenly assistance to evaluate people who are greater than him and determine their level. In fact, he will even look to expose faults in great people, and he will think that it is a *mitzvah* to speak negatively against them.

If one thinks he is far removed from this perspective, there is a good chance he is fooling himself when it comes to this. We are living in a generation in which this kind of behavior pervades the air; we grow up in it. In the more recent years, a child being born into the current generation is like a *tinok shenishbah* (“captured child”) with regards to this aspect, because he doesn’t know any better, when he grows up in a generation like this which is missing respect for great people.

When one gains his sense of self-worth through destroying others in his mind (whether he reads about those people or whether they are people in his close surroundings), he has no authentic self-worth. His entire “I” is built upon his negativity towards certain people, and with the more he ‘destroys’ people in his mind, he is further and further from his own “I.” This is a painful fact of reality that most people can recognize in today’s generation.

1) Stop Talking About People

If we want to change this superficial attitude and we want to have the correct perspective, we will need to make the following resolutions.

The first thing we need to do, which we began to mention before, is that we need to stop talking about people - period.

This doesn’t mean that from now on and until forever, you will never be able to say another person’s name ever again, and it doesn’t mean that you cannot mention the name of a sick person whom you are *davening* for in the *Refoeinu* blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*. Of course we do not mean that. A sensible person understands that we cannot change instantly in one day, especially not extreme changes. It is no different than any other resolution you make; take on realistic changes.

For example, when you have a conversation about someone, just try not to mention any names. Never mention the name of the person you are talking about.

Of course, in certain pressing situations, you have no choice. But as a usual course of action, try your utmost not to mention any names of people, in your conversations. If you have to talk about a certain situation with others and it involves other people, stick to talking about the *situation*, and not the names of people that are involved.

To practically work on this, make a simple resolution that for three times a day, when you are with others and you feel an urge to talk about someone, you will resist the urge and you will not mention the name of the person you are talking about. Slowly but surely as you get to this, you will no longer want to mention others’ names in your conversations. It will become more and more distant to you.

As a person gets used to this, he will realize that he is less involved with trying to figure out other people. Instead, he will find a more inner world in front of him than what he was used to. He will find that he is no longer interested that much in giving his opinions about people, and from discussing people altogether.

2) For Those Who Learn In Yeshiva/Kolel

Now we will take this idea and expand upon it.

Imagine if people would learn Torah in-depth as much as they analyze and discuss people in-depth; they are both the desire to get to the truth. If a person is very interested and curious to know about certain pressing issues of our times - which involves the understanding of opinions of other people - he can spend time on this during *Bein HaZemanim* and do his research then. But during the *zman*, one should avoid getting involved with any issues of *machlokes* (disagreements).

During the *zman*, one's entire focus should be on his Torah learning during all of his regular learning sessions. Unless there is a pressing issue of *halachah* that must be clarified and cannot be pushed aside, one must not discuss any of the issues of our times that involve discussing other people. If you want to do your research on an issue of our times, leave it for *Bein HaZemanim*. Even then, you will need a lot of *tefillah* and *yishuv hadaas* (calmness) and cautiousness to make sure that you don't cross any lines.

To summarize, the first step of change is to resolve not to mention names of people in our conversations, and the second step is not to discuss topics or issues that involve other people. Throughout the day, you need to only be involved in what you must be involved in: three study sessions of Torah learning, and a session for *mussar*.

Disconnect From The Generation

With the more a person gets used to this way of living (understandably, it is because the the external changes lead to internal changes), he will begin to feel that he has detached himself from those who live in this generation. It has become more necessary than ever, for our own spiritual survival, to feel disconnected from those who live in this current generation.⁵⁹ As a person gets used to being disconnected from the world, by not discussing what goes in the world [and remaining focused entirely on his Torah studies], he will find that he is not that interested in what goes on in the world today.

It is a very high spiritual level if one were to totally disconnect from all that goes in the generation; it would take a lot of long and inner hard work, but long before reaching that level, as a

59 Editor's Note: This is a central theme of the Rav's talks. See Derashos #0103 – Surviving Spiritually; and Tefillah #0148 – How To Survive The End of Days; and Tefillah #0150 – Descent of the Generation

person gets used to being disconnected from the generation today, he begins to see the world from a calmer and quieter place in himself. And then he will begin to realize the stark reality that is happening to this generation: that people in this generation are quickly losing both This World and the Next World, all of their eternity, in the blink of an eye. With the more a person feels disconnected from this generation, he begins to feel his pure “I” as it is. This is not the ego, but the “I” in its pure form – the soul. The more a person exposes his true “I”, he will find it *naturally* difficult to speak about others.

In the beginning stages, where a person has simply resolved not to speak about others, he is not yet in touch with his pure “I”, and he is rather performing external actions that can eventually cause inner changes; at this beginning stage, it is not yet within his natural level not to talk about other people. But as a person grows used to not talking about people, and he makes sure not to involve himself with the controversial issues of our times that involve other people, he slowly becomes more and more disconnected from this generation - which puts him in touch with his own inner world.

Upon reaching that point, he will *naturally* find it difficult to talk about other people. Not only will he will feel less interested; he will feel like he is leaving his inner world when he talks about other people, and that is why it will feel very unappealing for him.

Stop Being A Judge

Now we can understand the depth of “Do not judge your friend until you are in his place.” There are many explanations of this matter, but one of the explanations of it (which is the one relevant for our discussion here) is that you should not be a “judge” over other people. After all, who appointed you as the ‘judge’ over others, to give judgments on them? Even if a person has received *semicha* (a Rabbinical graduation certificate) for becoming a *dayan* (judge to serve in a *Beis Din*), that doesn’t give him the right to ‘judge’ others. The more a person reaches his inner self, the more he realizes that there is no place to judge other people. We see that Hashem metes out judgment to people. The Torah says that there are curses that befall people who commit certain sins, and the entire people had to answer “Amen” to each curse. We must accept Hashem’s will, for everything He does is good. But the simple nature of our soul is not to judge others; it is not busy thinking about other people. It is concerned only for what truth is.

Holy Earth-of-Fire-of-Fire

With the more a person is disconnected from the generation and he is instead in touch with his inner world, this rectifies his previously impaired **earth-of-fire-of-fire**, which had been providing him until now with a false sense of identity, by nullifying others in his mind - in which he was not actually growing higher from his current level.

When a person gets used to the above resolutions and he has become more in touch with his own inner world, he is no longer busy thinking about other people. It is the holy way to use **earth-of-fire-of-fire**.

When a person is using his **earth-of-fire-of-fire** for holiness, he is involved with learning the words of our Sages on a regular basis, and he sees a “clear world” of where he has to get to (climbing the ladder of growth described in *Mesillas Yescharim* that we mentioned earlier). It makes no difference to him how others are doing, if they are doing better than him or if they are worse off; this doesn’t concern him. Even if thoughts about others come to him, he is aware that we really cannot know the true level of another person anyway.

Thus, he becomes totally far-removed from any “comparing” kinds of thoughts with others. He has entered a totally different mindset which does not measure growth in comparison to others.

This is the holy use of **earth-of-fire-of-fire**, which enables a person to constantly demand from himself a desire to grow higher to the next level. When thoughts about others come to him, he immediately recognizes the fallacy of this. Although there is a rule of our Sages that “Jealousy of scholars increases wisdom”, it is explained elsewhere in the works of our Sages that “Jealousy makes the bones rot” - even if it is holy jealousy.

We have described here a kind of life that enables a person to realize the meaning of “Therefore, man was created individual.” When one realizes the meaning of his own individuality, he has an inner world that he has built for himself, and he becomes capable of reaching “his” obligation on “his” world, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* states.

Genuine Love For Others

The more a person becomes in touch with his inner world, his individuality, his true “I”, he is able to relate to others in a more genuine way and to connect to others Jews out of pure *ahavas Yisrael* (love of Jews).

This is a totally different kind of life than the way the world looks like right now. In today’s world, most of the connections that people have with each other are spiritually damaging, and the few connections that are not harmful to us are usually lacking love.

But if one traverses the path here, he is on the path towards revealing true love for others. At first, he will feel that detachment from the world is making him into a cold and detached and unfeeling person, but eventually, he will be able to reach total love to others, as he continues to expose his true “I” with the more he remains disconnected from the rest of the world. It is only when a person reaches his true “I” that he can genuinely love others; the love for Hashem that he acquires, as his

inner world is revealed to him, will enable him to love *Klal Yisrael*, for love of *Klal Yisrael* is ultimately rooted in love of Hashem⁶⁰.

When he reaches that place of love in himself, it is of this place that it is written, “*Love conceals all faults.*” The love he will feel for others, in spite of their faults, will “bribe” him from focusing on their faults.

(Of course, even though this is true, a person must still make sure he doesn’t get too carried away with this concept and to come to love and connect to others who can harm him spiritually. There must be boundaries when it comes to how much we allow ourselves to love and connect with others, because if we don’t set boundaries, we endanger ourselves to getting pulled down with others who are too attached to the evil found on this world).

He will be looking at others from a place of love in himself that he has reached, instead of seeing their faults and judging them. Even if it happens that he notices the faults of another, his love for other Jews will enable him to overlook the faults he sees, for “*Love conceals all faults.*”

This is how **earth-of-fire-of-fire** is used for rectification/holiness.

⁶⁰ The source of this is in the words of the Zohar: “There are three crowns that are tied to one other: Yisrael, the Torah, and the Blessed One, are all one.” The Rav has quoted this concept in many places.

14 | *Conceit: Obligation & Pleasure In Judaism*

Water-of-Fire-of-Fire: Ascending Higher To Receive More Pleasure

With the help of Heaven, we are in the middle of discussing the element of fire. We are currently up to discussing **water-of-fire-of-fire**, which is the aspect of “pleasure” involved in spiritual growth.

We have mentioned briefly that **fire-of-fire** refers to the particular nature in fire to [cause a person to] ascend higher, and “**water**”-of-fire-of-fire is when the ascension is built upon pleasure. When that pleasure in the current level finishes, the fire then rises higher. This is **water-of-fire-of-fire**: If I lose pleasure in the current level and this causes me to want to rise to a higher level.

This is the power in the soul that enables a person to grow higher based upon how much *taanug* (pleasure) he has.

Clarifying Your Motivations of Why You Want To Achieve

This is a fundamental concept to know about for anyone who wishes to be a *ben aliyah* (a truly growing person). One must become very clear about what is personally motivating him to achieve: “Am I being motivated to achieve higher because I want more *taanug*? Or is there another reason motivating me?” One needs to examine himself well and clarify this with himself.

There can be four possibilities that are motivating the person: earth-of-fire-of-fire, water-of-fire-of-fire, wind-of-fire-of-fire, and fire-of-fire-of-fire. In the previous chapter, we discussed **earth-of-fire-of-fire**, which is when one grows higher because of *bittul* (nullification) of the previous level. Here in this chapter, we are dealing with another possible motivation: **water-of-fire-of-fire**, which is when one wants higher levels because he wants to experience more *taanug* (pleasure).

In the next two chapters, we will deal with another two possible motivations: **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, which is when one feels like he has used up all of his inner movements and thus he feels it is time to progress to a higher level; and **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, where a person rises to higher levels based on total destruction of the current level (a power that either be used positively, to stimulate personal growth, or a power that can become evil *gaavah*\conceit).

Here we will discuss the motivation for growth when it comes from **water-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul. If one comes to the conclusion that his need to ascend higher is based on a need to experience more pleasure, that means that when he loses pleasure in the current level, he yearns to grow even higher. This is the constructive use of this power. A person can keep finding pleasure at any level he

is currently at,⁶¹ and then when he loses the pleasure in the current level (either totally, or for the most part), he realizes that he has finished this level, and now he is ready for the next level.

But when this power is used in the negative sense, the need for pleasure becomes too dominant, and then the person will lose interest in wanting to grow to higher levels as soon as he loses pleasure in his current level.

This is the basic outline of the concept of **water-of-fire-of-fire**.

***“Taam”*: Finding A Sweet Taste In Our Yiddishkeit**

It is written, "טעמנו וראו, כי טוב ה'" - *“Taste it, and see, that Hashem is good.”*. In this verse of the Torah, we see the importance of having a **“taam”**, a “taste” – to “taste” and enjoy the spiritual.

In today’s generation, people involved in *kiruv* like to use this *possuk* to get people’s attention and draw in our irreligious brethren, showing them that Judaism is sweet and that it has a good **“taam”**; that it “tastes” good. This is in line with the words of the *Vilna Gaon*, who wrote that we need to give out sweets and candies to children as they are learning Torah, so that they will develop a good taste for learning Torah and become motivated for learning.

Here we come to a subtle matter. With children, or with people that are far from Judaism, when we try to draw them close to the Torah, what is it that we are trying to show them that has a good taste? Is it to show them that “Hashem is good”, as the *possuk* says....?

Often, when children are taught that Torah is sweet, that *Yiddishkeit* is enjoyable, they are simply pulled simply after the good “taste” of whatever we show them, but then they remain at that level, and then they aren’t that interested in seeing how “Hashem is good”. They are more interested in the good **“taam”** to be found in it - and not more than that.

When the idea of *taam* is overly emphasized, and the person whom we are trying to draw closer is given a **“taam”** in learning Torah and in *Yiddishkeit*, the problem is that it can make a person to become subservient to *taam*. He will want to pursue another *taam*, and another *taam*, and another *taam* - because all he is interested in is to have a **“taam”**.

A large part of the children growing up today are raised with the mentality in education that all of Judaism has a good *taam* to it. These children who grow up with this kind of Torah education will always want more *taam*, and more *taam*, and more *taam*, in order to enjoy Torah and *Yiddishkeit*; if they no longer find *taam*, they lose interest.

Why does this happen? It is because the *taam* was not seen used by them as a tool to see that “Hashem is good” as the *possuk* says, and instead, the emphasis was placed the **“taam”** is good, and not on Hashem. When they find *taam* in learning Torah and in *Yiddishkeit*, they connect to it because of the *taam* they find in it, but of that *taam* goes away, they lose their entire drive.

⁶¹ See *Fixing Your Fire_02_Inner Satisfaction*

This concept applies to many other areas as well. For example, there were those who said that Reb Chaim Brisker's approach in learning Gemara was meant to make a person have a *taam* in his learning, at no matter what level of Torah learning he is on, and that his approach of Torah learning is saving the new generation from losing interest in learning Torah. But the problem with this mentality is that because people are so used to "a need to have a *taam*" in their learning, that as soon as they lose that *taam*, their entire *Yiddishkeit* loses its fuel.

On a more extreme level of the problem, there are even people who lose their *taam* in their Torah learning, and then they stop keeping the entire Torah because of this!

Sometimes this happens because their entire lives were spent *melumadah* (by rote), so they never developed feelings for *Yiddishkeit* in the first place. As long as they maintained their fear of being punished and their fear of being ashamed, they kept the Torah; eventually the person loses this fear and he sees no reason to be observant anymore. But there is another reason why people throw off the yoke of Torah: it is because the person's entire *Yiddishkeit* was based on having a *taam* in it. Since the entire basis of his Judaism was *taam*, as soon as he loses his *taam*, the entire basis that kept him going until now has fallen away.

A child finds a *taam* in learning, let's say, because he was given sweets for every time he learns, so he is taught to have a good feeling towards learning. When he gets older, he needs a new reason to give himself true *cheishek* (enthusiasm), so he is taught how to sharpen his mind and how to come up with questions, so that his will can be active and so that he should continue to have a *taam* in learning. When he gets older, he no longer has that *taam* – and when he loses his *taam*, his entire life loses its taste.

This entire generation has been raised on the mentality of "*taam*" and is based on it. Aside for the many kinds of food available in this generation (which is another factor of why people lose their *taam* in spiritual areas, and we will not get into that here⁶²), there is another problem with *taam* in this generation: there is an attitude where people feel that they must have a *taam*, or else they are not interested. It is a generation which needs *taam*. The mentality is: If there is a *ta'am*, great; if there is no *taam*, forget about it!

This "need" for *taam* manifests both when it comes to a need for *taam* in physical pleasures of food [which makes people lose their *taam* in the spiritual], as well as the path of *Avodas Hashem* that a person takes in his life, which might very well be based on one's personal taste. Many people chose a certain path in *Avodas Hashem* only because they found a *taam* in it, not because they found *emes* (truth) in it. It is easy to find *taam* in something like *davening* with a lot of excitement and in living an exciting kind of life, because it is entirely external and thus it is easily accessible; whereas true, inner *avodah* takes a long amount of time, and it requires hard inner work and discipline, so it does not offer instant *taam*.

But we should understand that a large percentage of people are basing their *Avodas Hashem* on a need for finding a *taam* in it. These can be people who came from outside of our inner circles and

⁶² See *Tefillah #036 – A Generation Of Abundance and Fixing Your Water_05*

they entered into the tents of Torah, or they are people found in the tents of Torah who chose to base their lives on *taam* because they weren't finding themselves, or because they were searching for deeper meaning in life.

The need for *taam* in *Avodas Hashem* does not come from a search for “true good” as the *Mesillas Yeshtarim* says; it does not come from a search for truth. It is not even a need to find truth on one's personal level. Rather, it is entirely emotion-based, where the person is always pulled after his feeling of *taanug* (pleasure) that is found in *taam*. The generation today is built on *taam* and people have come to depend on it for success. When it comes to learning Torah, there is certainly a need for *taam* in it, but we have to be aware that there are two sides to the coin here.

Recently there was a meeting between certain people who are of influence to the generation when it comes to teaching Torah, where they discussed what kind of ideals a *yeshiva bochur* needs to leave *yeshiva* with. One of them said, “The point is not so that he should walk away with a lot of knowledge in Torah. The point is that he needs to feel like he has a clear method of knowing how to learn Torah.” Understandably, this is certainly a valid point, but is that all there is to it?

This approach is saying that it's okay if you don't walk away with that much knowledge of Gemara after having learned so many years in *yeshiva*; and that the point is to just have a clear way of “knowing how to learn”. How was this conclusion formed? It is probably because he has seen many students lose their interest in learning after they left *yeshiva*, because they didn't feel like they had a clear path of knowing how to learn, which in turn causes the *yeshiva bochur* to lose his *taam* in learning. When there is no more *taam*, a person loses all of his aspirations to know Torah.

This mentality is also formed because we know that in today's times, the influences of the streets are strong, and that the only way to counter the allure of outside influences is through developing a *taam* in *Avodas Hashem*. But if we take such an approach, we are basically ignoring the entire way of our previous Sages until now, in order to save people from losing their *taam*.

Since this is so, *taam* is seen as the important thing, and that means that *Yiddishkeit* today is based entirely on a need for *taam*. If one merits to sit and learn Torah, he is encouraged to find *taam* in his learning, and if he doesn't merit to stay in learning and he has to go out into the world, he is told that he needs to go to the *Beis Midrash* sometimes and regain his *taam* in learning, like to join a Thursday night *shiur* and to go to three *shiurim* during *Bein HaZemanim*. This is an approach based entirely on *taam*.

In the future, we will merit to have revealed to us all the *taamei HaTorah* (the reasons of the Torah), and it will be an existence of a true *taam* that is sublime. But in the current state of affairs we live in, if we build our lives entirely based on *taam*, it is very dangerous (to our sense of obligation in our *Yiddishkeit*) to us spiritually.

1) *Kabalas Ol Torah – Accepting The Responsibility To Learn Torah*

In contrast, there is a more genuine and inner way to live life. It entails for one to pass through the following three stages.

The very first stage one needs does not begin with the concept of the Vilna Gaon that one needs a *taam*. Here, we are describing the stages that are necessary in order to build oneself.

The first stage of building oneself is: *kabalas ol Torah*, “to accept upon oneself the yoke of Torah”. The very first stage one must traverse must not depend on having a *taam* or not having a *taam*. One has to simply accept upon himself that he is responsible to learning Torah, viewing it as an “*ol*” (a yoke) upon him that he must bear.

The “*ol Torah*” means that one learns Torah even before has found a *taam* in it. Expanding upon this point further, “*ol Torah*” means to learn Torah whether you feel a *taam* in it right now or whether you don’t. In terms of the soul, it means that you are learning Torah out of *kabalas ol*, and not because of *taam*.

If one has never begun his Torah learning knowing that it must begin with *kabalas ol*, he does not know that our life is based on *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven) and *kabalas ol malchus shomayim* (accepting upon ourselves the yoke of Heaven), and that we exist as servants of the Creator. Such a person’s entire observance of the Torah will be shaky, because he has never built for himself a solid foundation. A small little “wind” can come and knock him down, uprooting him from everything, because he was not fortified enough.

As we know, there are people who were raised fully Torah observant, and they fall prey to the *yetzer hora* very easily when they get older, simply because they are introduced to some new kind of pleasure that lures them. Their level of observance to the Torah all along had been based on finding *taam*, and as soon as they discover a new *taam* that is more alluring, they pursue that *taam*, and they will even forfeit their entire *frum* upbringing so that they can taste the new “*taam*” that have discovered.

Thus, it is clear that we cannot base on our lives on *taam*. It must not be our beginning point of our development. The very first stage of our personal development must be: the awareness that there is a Judge who metes out judgment, and that no action goes unnoticed by Hashem; the fact that we are subservient to Him - whether we want to or whether we don’t want to.

This must be the basis of our life. Upon that, we can progress to the second stage.

2) *Finding “Taam”*

The second stage is where we understand that although we are subservient to Hashem’s will, that doesn’t mean we are not allowed to have a *taam* in it, and that we should learn Torah all day with no enjoyment in it, and that we should do the *mitzvos* with no joy.

Firstly, though, we must make sure that we realize our obligation and our subservience to Hashem, and after we strongly feel this sense of obligation - and it must be a genuine awareness that there is a Judge for all our actions, (which includes a simple fear of punishment for sin, and that we must accept His will upon us) – only after that should we then seek how to receive a “*taam*” in areas of our *Yiddishkeit*.

There is blessing over the Torah each day we recite to find sweetness in Torah learning: “*Vhaarev Na.*” We must certainly reveal a lot of “*taam*” in our Torah learning, in *tefillah*, and in our *Avodas Hashem* in general. But this is all the second stage, and it must not be the first stage. **The first stage that builds our soul is to accept upon ourselves to do Hashem’s will, whether we feel like it or not; and when we have genuinely acquired this awareness, we can then progress to the next stage, which is *taam*.**

In this way, our soul has been built properly on a firm basis, and it is then ready to find appropriate *taam*. At that point, a person will be able to find *taam* in his *Avodas Hashem* in addition to his *kabalas ol*, so that even if he were to lose his *taam*, he still has his *kabalas ol Torah* and his *kabalas ol mitzvos* to keep him going. If a person has *kabalas ol*, he can learn Torah all day from morning until night, as much as he can, and his *taam* that he then finds in his learning can expand his Torah learning and enable him to accomplish much more.

Those are the first two stages one must traverse: first he must have a *kabalas ol* in his Torah, mitzvos, and *Avodas Hashem* [which entails a general fear of Hashem and a subservience to His will], and after that he can [and should] seek to find more *taam* in his *Yiddishkeit*.

‘Taam’ Without ‘Kabalas Ol’: A Life That Is Entirely Self-Serving

If a person’s entire motivation is to find *taam* and he has never yet gone through the stage of *kabalas ol*, that means he is acting entirely *shelo lishmah* (for ulterior motivations). The *shelo lishmah* will manifest itself in all areas of his life.

When learning Torah, he will only do it for the sake of finding a *taam* in it. For example, as soon as a new *Kolel* opens up that is offering more pay, he will be of the first ten people to join, because it essentially offers a new “*taam*” to his Torah learning. This is all because his Torah learning does not stem deep down from *kabalas ol*, but because he wants *taanug* or *taam*.

One who bases his life on *taam* can easily be uprooted from his observance to Torah one day if he loses his *taam* in *Yiddishkeit*. But on a general note, even if he does not get to that point *chas v’shalom*, his entire life is still being spent in a state of *shelo lishmah*. It will be very difficult for him to leave this kind of *shelo lishmah*, because he is so entrenched in it. By contrast, one who has first reached a *kabalas ol malchus shomayim*, a *kabalas ol Torah* and a feeling of subservience to Hashem, will be saved from a life that is totally *shelo lishmah*.

Of course, there are many levels to *shelo lishmah*, and we can always find traces of it in any person’s life. But at least a person can get himself to the point where his *Yiddishkeit* does not depend

entirely on *taanug\taam*, where his *shelo lishmah* does not dominate him entirely, when he has reached the point of *kabalas ol*. This is true even if his *kabalas ol* itself is *shelo lishmah*, such as if he is afraid of being punished for sins; because as long as he is not enveloped by the *shelo lishmah* of *taanug\taam*, he is for the most part saved.

This is not yet the complete rectification for his soul, but it is certainly the beginning that will save him from being entirely dependent on the *shelo lishmah* of *taanug*.

3) Constantly Deriving Pleasure From Torah

After one has reached the two steps (first *kabalas ol*, then *taam*), he can then work on a third stage, which will apply even more so the one who has a lot of **water-of-fire-of-fire** in his soul: to keep deriving pleasure from the current level he is at.

For example, when learning any *sugya* of Gemara, instead of just learning it superficially, one can try analyzing in-depth every matter he comes across, and to attempt to enjoy each part, seeing how all of it is “*Taste it, and see, that Hashem is good.*” The Sages compare learning Torah to an infant nursing from its mother, where it can keep finding a taste in the mother’s milk every time it nurses.

A person can keep feeling what he is coming into contact with and to feel the pleasure contained in it. When it comes to learning Torah, one can keep feeling the words and the depth that is contained in them, constantly drawing out the pleasure contained in the words. (Understandably, this applies only to learning Gemara *b’iyun*⁶³, not *bekiyus*⁶⁴.)

One should of course use this idea sensibly, and not spend all of his life immersed in one page of Gemara, trying to draw out all of the pleasure that can be found in it. Analyze what you are learning, from all of its angles, take apart all of the details – this enables you to find a *taam* in it. This gets you used to an ability to derive a deep *taam* from any part of Torah you are learning, and it also deepens your possibilities for *taam* in whatever you are currently learning.

When you learn a *sugya*, and you are done seeing the words of the *Rishonim* and the *Acharonim* you were supposed to see and you know what they say, now what? The more you have developed your ability to find *taam* in whatever you are learning, you can still find a *taam* in the same words of the Gemara and the Rashba, again and again, as you review the words when you think into them. You can think again into the same old words and keep finding new *taam* in it.

When you get used to this, you will discover that there was a wealth of enjoyment contained all along in the same old words, and thus there is no rush to continue to the next part of the Gemara. You discover that you can keep extracting the good taste contained in each part of the Torah. Most people keep “tasting”, but they don’t know how to experience the taste. They don’t know how to

63 *b’iyun* – in-depth analysis of Gemara, with emphasis on arriving at comprehension

64 *bekiyus* – a cursory reading of the Gemara

derive the *taam* out of what they are involved with. They take a little bite out of it and that's it – they never really get to savor the “taste” of it.

We can understand this better from the following example. When people come to a wedding and they see many kinds of food in front of them [i.e. by the smorgasbord], they go around tasting each of the foods a little bit, but because they only taste a little bit of each of the different dishes, they never really get to experience the full taste of any one dish that is there.

The idea we can take from this is that when it comes to learning Torah, one of the fundamentals is to be keep deriving an enjoyable taste from what one is currently learning about, again and again.

One who gets used to constantly extracting enjoyment from his Torah learning will be able to feel that any part in the Torah can provide him with *taam*, and he can keep connecting to it again and again. This increases the soul's power of *taanug* and it enables a person to find sweetness in Torah learning. But again, we must emphasize as we mentioned before, that all of this must only come after one has reached *kabalas ol Torah*, or else a person's entire life will be based on *taanug*, which is a detrimental way of life.

Discovering All The Flavors

An additional reason for this is because a person cannot connect to something properly unless he has experienced all of the enjoyment in it. “*V'haarev na*” is about sweetness in Torah learning, and it is rooted in the word *taaruvos*, “mixture”, because *taanug* requires an experience of many different kinds of *taanug* in something. When one has not found all the many kinds of *taam* that exist in something, his connection to it will be weaker.

Herein lays the secret of connecting to the Torah. When one is initially learning the *sugya* and he has reviewed it, and he is clear about it and he has arrived at the Halachic conclusions, he might feel like he is done with the *sugya*, and he wonders what is left for him to do. But if that is the case, it shows that he only learned the Torah superficially. In order for one to truly absorb his Torah learning, he must know how to derive pleasure from any part of his learning.

Evil Pleasure-Seeking

When this ability of deriving pleasure is not used in the spiritual sense and it is instead used for physical pleasure, it translates into *taavah*, an evil lust. People who seek to extract the pleasure in everything they are involved with can become the biggest *baalei taavah* (gluttons) in the world, always looking how they can get the most sensual pleasures out of This World. This is the evil use of **water-of-fire-of-fire** that we have described here.

If someone recognized a dominance of negative water-of-fire-of-fire in himself, he should refer to the series “*Fixing Your Water*”, where we explained how to fix the trait of desire. Here we were coming to explain the positive and holy way of how to use **water-of-fire-of-fire**.

Summary of The Three Stages of Spiritual Progress

To summarize, the three stages that one needs are: (1) *kabalas ol* (accepting upon oneself a commitment to Hashem’s Torah and *mitzvos*), (2) *taam* (deriving pleasure from Torah learning), and (3) a deeper ability of *taam* where a person is able to derive a *taam* from any area he comes across [in his Torah learning].

Beyond Taanug: Practicing “Lishmah”

However, if a person remains at this stage (knowing how to always derive *taam*) and he never goes beyond this point, his *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motives) will become very dominant. This is because he is focused always on deriving a *taam* in everything he comes across, and it will increase his *taanug* so much to the point that he will still now become dependent on *taanug*.

Although he is far better off than a person who has never reached a *kabalas ol malchus shomayim*, he will still feel that he depends on *taanug*, and *taanug* will become his attitude towards life, and if there is a void of *taanug* in his life, his original *kabalas ol malchus shomayim* will weaken, *chas v’shalom*.

Thus, after one has traversed the stages of *kabalas ol*, and then *taam*, and then deriving constant *taam* in his learning, he must now try the following: after one has learned the *sugya* and he feels that he can no longer glean any more *taam* from the *sugya* he’s learning, he should practice learning it purely *lishmah*. He has no *taam* right now in his learning, and even so, he should still learn Torah - *lishmah*.

If one tries to start out learning Torah *lishmah* before he has developed a *taanug* in his learning, he is usually attempting to jump levels. His *shelo lishmah* is more present in his conscious motivations, he doesn’t have *taanug* yet in his learning, so he is attempting to jump right away all the way to the level of *lishmah* [which will fail]. The sensible way to use *lishmah* is to use it only after one has traversed the three stages we described.

Water-of-Fire-of-Fire: The Power To Keep Deriving Pleasure

After a person reaches the third stage, where he has learned how to keep deriving pleasure in the same words of Torah he is learning, at some point he will lose interest in the current topic he is learning about, and he will want to learn something new. The current topic feels dry to him, because he feels that he has finished, and naturally, he will want to progress.

As we began to explain in the beginning of this chapter, this is essentially stemming from **water-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul: once a person stops deriving pleasure from his current level, he wants to go the next level.

But herein lies how we can actually rectify **water-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul. When there is a lot of **water-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul, a person wants to progress to the next stage because he has already drawn the pleasure from the current level, and the current level now seems dry to him. But now is when he can really use the power of **water-of-fire-of-fire** for holiness: by continuing to draw pleasure from the current level.

Practicing “Lishmah” In Your Torah Learning

To practically apply this concept [when it comes to learning Torah], when a person has reached the end of the *sugya* and he has seen all that he has needed to see, and he also enjoyed it and he is no longer finding enjoyment in the current *sugya*, he should try going back to the beginning and learning it again anew. He should do this even if he no longer has a *taam* in this *sugya*, for this is exactly the *avodah*.

Anyone who has tried this knows that it is one of the most difficult things to do.⁶⁵ This is because it is very hard to do something when you have no *taam* in it. But this is where the real Torah *lishmah* begins! If you learn it now even though you have no longer have a *taam* in it, you are beginning to learn Torah *lishmah*. One who tries to do this right away is trying to jump levels [which is not feasible]. But if one tries this only after having finished the *sugya* and after having derived considerable pleasure from it, he is doing this sensibly.

This is one of the meanings of “*mitoch shelo lishmah, ba lishmah*” - “ulterior motives leads to pure motives.” After one has derived pleasure from a current level and he no longer finds pleasure in it, he can then be enabled to reach the level of *lishmah*.

If he has already found a *taam* in his learning, now he can learn it *lishmah*, after he no longer sees a *taam* in it. By contrast, if he never found *taam* in it in the first place, then learning the *sugya* without *taam* simply stems from a slackening off from Torah and from laziness.

Conquering The “Taanug” Mentality

To conclude, we have laid out three steps that are all within *shelo lishmah*, and a fourth stage which involves *lishmah*. When a person has connection to all of these stages, he is somewhat connected to *lishmah*, and this will in turn prevent him from leading a life based entirely on *taanug*. It will become possible for him to deeply connect to what he does, and to thereby avoid the allures of the outside world, because he has found powerful *taam* in Torah.

⁶⁵ This is stated as well by the Chazon Ish, in Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish.

And at the same time, the *taanug* in his life will not either dominate him, being that he has attained a degree of connection to *lishmah*.

The Plan For Raising Our Children Properly

In the children growing up in this generation, we can see clearly that the emphasis of their education was based entirely on *shelo lishmah*. As children, they are offered all kinds of sweets and other incentives to learn Torah, so that they will develop a *taam* for learning Torah and hopefully become strong enough to avoid the negative *taam* of outside influences, but they were never trained in to develop a *kabalas ol*.

It is no wonder, then, that they have it so hard when it comes to avoiding the negative influences. They never developed a *kabalas ol* towards their *Yiddishkeit*, and that is why they fall so easily to the influences, which offer a different *taam* than the *taam* they are experiencing, and it is very alluring to them and it pulls them in.

If these children would have been taught how to first have a *kabalas ol*, and only afterwards to get a *taam* in their *Yiddishkeit*, they would have had a lot easier of a chance avoiding the negative influences of the outside. They wouldn't be dependent on *taanug*, and they would realize that life is not all about *taanug*, so they wouldn't fall prey right away when faced with any *taanug* that pulls them in.

We must begin training in our children for *kabalas ol* already at the age when they we start *chinuch* with them, which is when they are 6 or 7 years old, and we must not wait for after that, because then the battle will be much harder, for the child will have already been exposed to what goes on in the world, long before he has even gotten the chance to develop properly and be fortified against it.

But what usually happens is that by the time the child is already 6 or 7 years old, he has already received so many sweets, candies, and various forms of *taanug* and he has almost no sense of *kabalas ol* at all. I do not mean to take away the importance of giving sweets to them, but in most cases, the child is missing *kabalas ol*, either completely or for the most part, by the time he is 6 or 7, after having been raised on a completely “*taanug*” mentality.

At that point, it will be very hard to discipline him and to teach him what we want to teach him, and then we will have no choice but to keep providing him with only *taanug*; and this leads us to the problems described earlier. Anyone who is aware of this knows that this problem has contributed to much spiritual destruction in this generation.

In contrast, the proper way of development is to first ingrain the child with a sense of *kabalas ol*. After that, we must make sure he has plenty of *taanug* in *Yiddishkeit*. Those are the two steps we can teach to young children, and there is a third step in our development which can usually be taught only to teenagers\adolescents, who have reached some level of mature *da'as*: to train them with the ability of always being able to draw forth pleasure from their current level.

It is the third stage is where a person finds the gateway to a true life. There he realizes the meaning of “*Taste it and see that Hashem is good*”, and how it not referring simply to how the “*taam*” is “good”, but to how *Hashem* and *His Torah* are what we call “good”! This is the point where a person connects to truth, and at that point he is genuinely connected to Hashem.

Conclusion: Revealing A Degree of “Lishmah” In Our Life

One who traverses these three steps described is one who will reach a connection to the level of Torah *lishmah*, and then true understanding in Torah is revealed to him.

By contrast, if he doesn’t reach it, he might write tens of volumes of *sefarim*, but he remains at the level of *taanug* alone. *Baruch Hashem* he has merited to learn Torah and he has become very brilliant, his mind has become very sharp and he has merited to produce many novel Torah thoughts, through discussing Torah with his teachers, friends, and students - but it is all based entirely on *taanug* alone. What might happen? If his *taanug* in learning Torah would somehow be taken away from him, even for a few moments, his entire drive to learn Torah is in danger, and he might stop learning Torah altogether! Even if it seems to everyone else that it would never happen to this kind of person.

One who reaches the third step touches upon *lishmah*; he reaches “the life of truth implanted within us” – the true *d’veykus* in Hashem and in His Torah.

15 | *Conceit: Aiming For Perfection*

Wind-of-Fire-of-Fire: Seeking Perfection

With the help of Heaven, let us continue to explain the element of fire. We will now discuss **wind-of-fire-of-fire** [growth based upon movement].

Wind-of-fire-of-fire is essentially what the *Mesillas Yesharim* describes in the term, “*mevakshei hashleimus*” – those who seek self-perfection. There are different levels of the nature to seek perfection; we will start to explain the lower uses of this nature and then explain its higher uses.

Materialistic Perfection

In the physical and material world, there are people who seek to have perfection in their life, because they want their situation to be as best as can be, as perfect as can be. This is actually stemming from the “**earth**” aspect (of wind-of-fire-of-fire).

An example of this is the kind of person buying a piece of furniture and he wants it to be as perfect as possible. Or, there is a person who will draw a picture and he wants it to come out perfect. Or, when he is building his *sukkah*, he wants it to look perfect. There is a nature in some people to seek perfection when it comes to physical areas.

In contrast, **wind-of-fire-of-fire** (and especially the “wind” aspect contained in wind-of-fire-of-fire), is a nature to complete and perfect something, covering all its aspects, which uses up all of the possible “movements” of what he is involved with.

Later we will discuss **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, which is when a person seeks to ascend to the highest possible point in something. But with **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, although there is a motivation in the person to ascend, it is more focused on drawing forth all possible “movements” from what the person is involved with.

The “earth” aspect of this is when a person seeks to complete something because he wants to see a finished product from what he is doing. The “wind” aspect of it is that a person wants to use up all possible energy and movement from what he is involved with. Since he is very driven, he will usually complete his work and see the complete results, because utilizing a potential will usually lead to actualizing the potential.

In the “earth” aspect (of wind-of-wind-of-fire), he is not so interested in using all up possible energy from what he is involved with; he just wants to see the completed results. But the “wind” aspect (of wind-of-wind-of-fire) wants to experience all the possible movements that are to be gleaned from what he is doing.

These are general outlines. Now we will go through this more in detail, beginning from the lower uses of this nature and continuing into the higher uses of this nature. Understandably, it is a nature that manifests both in physical areas as well as in spiritual areas.

Overly Focused On Completion Vs. Not Being Able To Complete

The “**earth**” aspect (of wind-of-wind-of-fire) is where a person seeks to do a perfect job in something because he wants to see the complete results.

When people aim for perfection, they might be acting beyond their actual capabilities, and they become unstable. A person becomes so involved in what he is doing that he completely abandons everything else in his life, in order to complete the project. He can't pull out of what he is heavily involved with and go do something else, until someone else comes and pulls him out of it, because he was so absorbed in what he was doing that he didn't even realize it.

The other possibility that will happen is that the person will give up from ever beginning anything until they finish what they are doing right now. There are people who will not begin to do anything else unless they completely finish what they are doing right now.

Of course, he will do what he has to in life and he will realize that he can't always do a complete job in everything he does, but as soon as he realizes that it is now time to begin something else that is important, he is angry at himself for not finishing his previous task, so he disassociates himself from beginning another task. This is a kind of person who seeks *shleimus* (perfection) so much to the point that he is working way beyond his actual energies.

Others have the opposite problem: they like to always begin new projects, but they almost never complete anything. Most workers in a company are able to begin what they do, but they have a hard time finishing the job. Most people have a hard time completing something, and even when there is completion, it is usually a half-baked job which does not look that professional, and it looks instead like an amateur did it.

So there are two different problems in human nature that are movement-related. One kind of problem is where a person has a hard time completing what he does, and another kind of person will be overly focused on completing the task that he cannot begin anything else [which is not as common as the first type of problem].

The Solution for a Person Overly Focused on Completion

If a person is the type to be overly focused on completing what he does, the solution to his problem is that he needs to think about how much time it is going to take up, and he should decide that if it will go over the time limit that he sets for himself, he will stop doing it, even if it remains incomplete.

After all, we really cannot complete anything on this world; it is simply impossible to always be able to do something perfect and complete. We say in the blessing of *Borei Nefashos* that Hashem created “*many souls, and their deficiencies.*” The entire Creation, in essence, contains deficiencies, so we must realize that we are dealing with an imperfect existence. The only perfect one is Hashem.

Shleimus On Our Own Level – Doing As Much As Our Actual Energies Allow Us To

However, there is a deep desire in our souls to reach *shleimus* (perfection), because there is a spark of the Creator contained in all creations. (We will speak more about this later). But in actuality, we cannot become perfect, because we are living in a creation that has been designed to be imperfect. If you think about it, nothing on this world is really complete.

For example, any object on this world is only considered to be ‘complete’ when you compare it with other objects that are broken, which makes the intact object look perfect and complete. Thus, *shleimus* on this world is a matter that is entirely relative. With objects, an object is only perfect and complete when it is compared with other objects, but in its essence, it is not perfect.

When it comes to performing work, what is considered a complete and perfect job, and what is an incomplete and imperfect job? It is defined based on the person’s particular energies. Thus, if a person cannot go beyond a certain level of capacity to do something, he has done a complete job when he has reached that limit.

From a deeper perspective, it is not his particular level of capacity which defines the job as complete or not, but the results. If a person sees results from what he did, he knows his job is complete.

Sometimes people have aspirations that are unrealistic and they go beyond their actual capacity to actualize them, because they are demanding from themselves a *shleimus* that they cannot reach. Others demand from themselves because they see that others are succeeding and producing results from their work, and this pushes them to work harder, like when a person has a business and he sees others in the same business who are producing better results than he, so he works harder at the job in order to have the desired results. He is working based upon his motivation to see certain results, and he is not working according to his actual capacity.

What defines *shleimus* on our own level? It is when we have used all our energy on something. That is where we reach the “completion” of something. Thus, *shleimus* on this world is all relative. An object is complete when you compare it to another object that is incomplete, and when it comes to our personal world, *shleimus* is based upon how much we have used our actual potential. This is based on our actual capacity, not based on how we compare to others.

In order to have a healthy sense of desiring perfection and completion in what one does without overdoing it, one has to reach a point where he has used up all of his energies on something, and then it is upon him to accept that he has done all that he can do in this situation, which is the degree of *shleimus* that he can reach.

Therefore, when a person is about to begin a certain task, since he does not know how much he will be able to complete it, he should make up beforehand that there will be a certain amount of time for how much he will spend on the job, and then when the time limit arrives, he should stop. Even if he is 100% sure when he stops that the job is far from complete, he must let go of it and now start something else.

That is the external part of the solution: figuring out how much time it will take for you to do something, and then stopping when your time limit arrives. Even if you realized that you made a mistake about how much time you thought it would take, it should not make a difference to you, and you should stop the task and go on to something else.

In addition to this, there is also a more inner part of the solution: You should be aware of the perspective towards *shleimus* that we described above, which is, that *shleimus* is defined by doing as much as your normal capacities allow you to. *Shleimus* is not about being frustrated that you haven't done a complete job and that you will now try to keep aiming to complete it. You can aim for perfection only when you begin to do something. Realize that only Hashem is perfect, and that humans cannot be perfect; you can only reach “perfection” on your own level, which is based on your own personal capabilities.

Of course, you might convince yourself that you really do have the power deep down to go beyond your normal capabilities. But this is a mistaken notion. It is very possible that you do have hidden strengths, but in your conscious state, those hidden capabilities are not accessible. You need to act based upon your already revealed strengths, and not based upon your deep hidden abilities that you may have; you need to act based upon your current level which you are conscious of. That is your normal capacity, and when you have done all that you can within your normal capacity, that is the *shleimus* that you can reach.

Summary of the Solution

To review, the first part of the solution is to set a certain amount of time of how much you will work on something. As you are working on your task, you can do as much as you can to get the job done, but as you do so, be aware that *shleimus* is not defined on having perfect results of what you are doing, but by how much you have used your actual potential in something.

As you get used to this kind of attitude when you work, you will find that you are becoming more serene from this. It will be a degree of *someiach b'chelko*, “happy with one's lot.”

The Solution For Those Who Have Difficulty Completing Tasks

So far, we have addressed the nature of those who are overly focused on *shleimus* when it comes to dealing with physical kinds of work. As we explained, most people do not suffer from this problem. (The ones who do suffer from it, though, have a lot of internal suffering from it.)

Most people are dealing with the exact opposite problem than the above: they have a hard time with finishing what they do. They would rather keep moving on to something else.

Reb Elchonon Wasserman had a yeshivah in Baranovitch, and he asked the Chofetz Chaim how to motivate the boys to finish the tractate of Gemara. This is a spiritual example of how not being able to finish is an issue that most people grapple with. In the world of action as well, most people have a hard finishing what they are doing. On Erev Shabbos as it's nearing sundown, people like to cram in as much work as possible that needs to be done, and if not for sundown, they would probably keep working.

When people keep beginning things and they never finish, this stems from an impaired wind in the soul. Obviously, the way to rectify this problem lies in awakening a desire for *shleimus*.

On a practical level, whenever you see that you have no more energy left to continue what you are doing, try doing just a little more. Maybe you can't finish what you are doing, but you can certainly do a little bit more.

Telling yourself that you will try to finish is not realistic for you, because you feel far from finishing. You might know intellectually that you need to finish, but your soul is not at peace with this. The practical way of getting yourself closer to finishing things is that whenever you feel that you can't do any more, you can try doing a little bit more. This weakens your despair at finishing, and now you will find it easier to continue what you are doing and eventually finish. If you keep getting used to this exercise, you will feel closer and closer to finishing every time you feel like you can't do more; you will feel that you are less further from the end than you used to be.

In addition to this, there is also an inner part of the solution: every once in a while, you should awaken the soul's desire for *shleimus*.

In many people, the demand for *shleimus* is hidden deep away in the soul, where it remains out of use. The truth is that *shleimus* is the desired point of all spiritual growth, as the Ramchal writes in *Mesillas Yesharim*. One needs to awaken it, on his own current level.

Through getting used to this two-part solution – doing a little more when you think you can't go on anymore, and awakening in yourself a desire for *shleimus* every once in a while – a person will then be able to proceed further in what he is doing and he will feel much less further from completing things. Through getting used to this, a person increases his chances of finishing.

We have explained here, briefly, of the different solutions for those who have the problem of starting things, and those who have the opposite problem, of not being able to finish.

Difficulty In Completing Spiritual Undertakings

Most people have an easy time beginning a new tractate of Gemara, but have a hard time finishing. Most people have an easy time making new resolutions to improve, but they have a hard time keeping to their resolutions.

People have difficulty with finishing their work, as we are from the physical realm. The advice for this, as we said before, is to awaken the desire for *shleimus*, as well as to move a little beyond your current limit. But when it comes to finishing spiritual work, we will need deeper advice, for the spiritual realm is incredibly complex, and surely the main area of spirituality, which is the Torah, is complex and deep to navigate.

Shleimus (Perfection) In Torah Learning

What is perfection in Torah learning? What does it mean to demand *shleimus* from ourselves when it comes to our Torah learning?

There is a superficial demand for *shleimus* in Torah, and there is an inner demand for *shleimus* in Torah; let us explain.

The superficial demand for *shleimus* in Torah is to wish to know the entire tractate, to wish to know all of *Shas*, to wish to know all of Torah. This is a desire to have something perfect and whole. It is a desire to know everything there is to know, in the Torah. After all, the *Rema* writes that a Torah scholar is defined as someone who can answer a question in most areas of Torah that he is asked about. If a person is learning a *sugya* of Gemara and he sees that he's missing some information he hasn't learned about, and he is pained, it is because he has this desire for perfection.

However, this is all an external, superficial kind of desire for *shleimus*. The inner demand for *shleimus* is what it means to have exertion in Torah learning and to immerse ourselves in its depth. It stems from the “**wind**” aspect that is in the **wind-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul. It is about deriving all possible kinds of “movement” (wind) from any one area of Torah.

Wind-of-Fire-of-Fire: Covering All The Possibilities – The Depth of Learning Torah With Iyun

If one only learns Gemara in a manner of *bekiyus* (a cursory reading of the Gemara), he is very far from this concept. But even if a person learns with *iyun* (in-depth analysis), he still might not know how to make use of the power we are describing here.

Most people are far from making use of this power. With most people, learning the Gemara with *iyun* does not go past: trying to understand clearly what it is written in the pages in front of them, as well as a desire that there be questions, answers, and also an understanding in the words of the *Rishonim*. Others have a need to say *chiddushim* on the *sugya*, and others want to produce a new *mehalech* (approach) in how to learn the *sugya*. There are many people like this in today's times, especially in many authors of *sefarim* today, who are motivated by any one of the above reasons.

The depth of learning Torah is totally different than this. The Sages state, “*Hafoch ba, v'hafoch ba, d'kulla ba*” – “Turn it over, and turn it over, for all is in it.” In other words, we can keep

plumbing into the depths of any one point of Torah in particular and keep seeing the many possible angles of it.

This is essentially the “wind” contained in the soul’s **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. It is not simply about wanting perfection. It is to draw forth all possibilities from one point.

When a person is learning more and more *Rishonim*, more and more *Acharonim*, and “more” and “more” thoughts on the *sugya*, although this is certainly commendable and it is necessary for a more complete understanding, a person might still be missing the point of seeing more depth. The purpose of learning with *iyun* is really to see all the possibilities in one point. You can wonder what the possible understandings are, what the differences between them will be, and you can keep doing this endlessly. The Torah is an “endless sea”.

This is how exertion in Torah looks like, when it is with the depth of *iyun*. What we are explaining here is that our *iyun* in Torah learning needs to be accompanied with a desire to see all the possibilities in any one point in Torah.

When you reach the point where you feel like you have mentally exhausted the entire *sugya* and you can’t see any more possible angles of understanding in what you are learning, only then should you cease thinking about this point in the *sugya* and continue onto the next point.

This power comes from the “wind” of **wind-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul, just as the wind can move in six directions and it covers every possible angle; wind represents the idea of covering all existing possibilities.

In most people, **wind-of-fire-of-fire** remains deep where it is in the soul and largely out of access. Therefore, even when most people learn a *sugya* of Gemara with *iyun*, and they are clear about the *sugya*, and even if they have a *mehalech* towards the *sugya* and even if they have *chiddushim*, there are still much more possibilities that could have been uncovered, had they made use of their **wind-of-fire-fire**.

As a result, the person remains satisfied with what he has learned and with the way he has learned it, and he is not interested in hearing other approaches to the *sugya*, even if they are truthful, because he favors his own approach over others’. As the Sages state, “A person prefers his own measurement more than the measurement of others.”

Even if his approach towards the *sugya* has left him with many unanswered questions, he is so satisfied and complacent with his own approach towards the *sugya* that it doesn’t bother him that there are still unanswered questions. As long as he feels clear about what he has learned, he is satisfied.

But those who seek *shleimus* in Torah will try draw forth all possible angles of understanding in whatever they learn, as much as they can.

Now we can understand the deep challenge that awaits those who seek *shleimus* in Torah and who exert themselves at comprehending their Torah learning. The Torah is “*longer than the earth and wider than the sea*”, and no matter how far a person has gotten in completing the *sugya* that he

has learned, all it takes is one thought he hears from another that he never thought about until now, which will make him re-think the entire *sugya* from the beginning. We can never cover an entire *sugya* of Gemara in all its angles. It is simply impossible, and anyone who thinks that it can be done does not understand that the Torah is endless.

When Shleimus In Torah Learning Causes Anxiety

When a person goes overboard, however, with the desire for *shleimus* in Torah (which means to cover all the angles of any *sugya*), he is likely to eat himself up after he finishes the *sugya* and he has tried to cover all its angles, and then he finds a ‘*shtickel* Torah’ he never saw until now, which makes him think that has never learned the *sugya* correctly. He becomes shaken to the core, realizing that he has never really learned the *sugya* as he should have, and that has missed even basic thoughts.

When one doesn’t properly understand how to use the power of *shleimus* in Torah and he is too obsessed with covering all the angles, he is misusing this power of the soul, and he will have a lot of grief from this.

When he discovers something he was never aware of about the *sugya*, there will be different reactions, depending on what type he is. If he is a *baal gaavah*, he will come up with a way to deny the new thought that he has seen or heard, which threatens his understanding of the *sugya*. Or, he will dismiss the question with a small, half-hearted answer. He can’t accept a lack of *shleimus* in his Torah learning.

It is written, “*Toras Hashem, Temimah*” – “The Torah of Hashem is perfect”. The Torah is endless, and no matter how we learn it, it is still “perfect”, meaning, there is still more to see in any *sugya* we learn⁶⁶. When one does not know what true *shleimus* is, his perception towards *shleimus* can be detrimental to his entire Torah learning.

True Shleimus In Torah Learning

But when a person merits to access the truth about life, he is aware of *shleimus* as the Ramchal describes it: “One who is *shaleim* (whole) in the holiness of Hashem.” What does it mean to become as perfected as the holiness of Hashem? Can a person become as holy as Hashem?? The Sages state that it is impossible to resemble the holiness of Hashem! What does it mean to be an “*adam hashaleim*” – a perfected human being? It means to reach the *shleimus* that you can possibly reach.

Thus, *shleimus* does not mean how perfected you are in comparison to others. That is not genuine *shleimus*. It means to be as perfected as *you* can become right now.

There are two kinds of *shleimus* in relation to yourself. One kind of *shleimus* is where a person reaches his *shoresh haneshamah* (soul root), and another kind of *shleimus* is where you reach as much

⁶⁶ As explained according to the Baal Shem Tov

as you can possibly reach, on the current level that you are on, covering all the possibilities that Hashem has given you, within your current bounds.

When one absorbs this perspective, he is able to seek *shleimus* in his Torah learning. If one is not aware of this point, he will have a hard time seeking *shleimus* in Torah learning, and even if he does awaken a desire for *shleimus* in Torah, it will feel enormously stressful. In order for a person to awaken this point, one must know clearly what the concept of *shleimus* is.

The desire for *shleimus*, which stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire** of the soul, is the purpose of all our *avodah*. One must be very clear what it is. We can each reach *shleimus* on the current level we are on, and that is called our *shleimus*. That is where we will find our *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind), and that is where we feel *someiach b'chelko*, “happy with our lot”.

The Evil of Perfectionism

Only Hashem is perfect (*shaleim*). So what does it mean that we can reach *shleimus*? The desire in our soul for *shleimus* stems from the spark of the Creator that is in our soul, which encourages us to transcend our human limitations.

But this power can be misused: if someone thinks he must be perfect, like Hashem – and he cannot accept it if he's not absolutely perfect – this resembles a subtle form of heresy! He wants to declare himself as a perfect existence, similar to how Pharaoh declared himself to be a god.

There is a demand in our soul to feel perfection, and this stems from the spark of the Creator that is implanted in our soul. But if we are using this power in the soul to wish to be totally perfect, this is *gaavah* (conceit), and it is a subtle root of heresy and idol worship.

Transcendence: Connecting Ourselves To Hashem's Perfection

It would seem that we should uproot the desire to be perfect, since it is the root of heresy. However, Hashem did not implant in us the desire for *shleimus* so that we should uproot it; He wanted us to use it correctly. How do we use it correctly? It is by recognizing that we humans are imperfect, and that only Hashem is perfect, and thus all *shleimus* we know of is relative.

How do fulfill our desire for *shleimus*, though, when we will never be perfect anyway? It is when we integrate our being with Hashem, and then we are connected to His *shleimus*.⁶⁷

This is, essentially, how we transcend. When a person views himself as an “I” that is apart from Hashem, he thinks that “I” have certain qualities and that “I” must be perfect. But when a person penetrates past the “I”, he truly demands *shleimus* from himself. The true demand for *shleimus* actually requires a person to leave the ego. This is a very, very deep point.

⁶⁷ For more on this point, refer to Tefillah #0122 – Perfection In Torah

In Conclusion: Yearning For Perfection, Even Though We Cannot Be Perfect

At the beginning of one's *Avodas Hashem*, one will not be able to awaken this desire for total *shleimus*, because it will only serve to make him anxious, as we have explained from the beginning of this chapter until now. But at the same time, one must not either deny the soul's demand for *shleimus*. Even though it is not realistic to reach total *shleimus*, it still stems from a truthful place in the soul, so one should not pretend that it doesn't exist, *chas v'shalom*.

Compare it to the Four Species when it is not yet Sukkos, or *matzah* when it is not yet Pesach. Just because you can't use it right now doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

The demand for *shleimus* (even before it can be actualized) is, on a deep level, the power in the soul that can bring a person to the purpose of Creation, where all will become nullified to Hashem and where His perfection will be revealed to all. Therefore, if someone *chas v'shalom* denies his yearning to know of *shleimus*, he is also furthering himself away from reaching the purpose of Creation.

Shleimus is deep inside us, even though we can't yet actualize it [especially at the beginning of our way], and we can definitely picture it to some extent and have a connection to it. It will feel painful to us that we cannot actualize it, but this is a beloved form of suffering to Hashem. It is our task to guard our yearning for *shleimus* until the time comes in the future, where the purpose of Creation will be realized, when we will be able to finally actualize our soul's demand of *shleimus*.

It is this point, which is the **wind-of-fire-of-fire** in our soul, which can bring us to all that we can possibly attain, which will be "*shleimus*" on our own level.

16 | *Conceit: Self-Transcendence*

Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire: Ascending Higher Based On Total Destruction

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are at the conclusion of discussing the trait of *gaavah* (conceit), where we will discuss the “fire” of fire-of-fire.

Almost no one accesses the point in the soul of **fire-of-fire-of-fire**. In some people, this nature of the soul is more revealed, but most people have no connection to it. There is certainly nobody sitting here in this room [where this class is being delivered] who has anything to do with fire-of-fire-of-fire. But we will discuss it anyway, so that we can at least have the merit to study it, and also because it is necessary to learn about it due to the other branching topics that are related to it, which are of relevance to us.

Fire-of-fire-of-fire refers to where a person *ascends higher* based on a *total destruction of the previous level*. When using fire-of-fire-of-fire, a person “destroys” everything he encounters – and when we say everything, we mean *everything* - and that is how he grows higher. The very ascension of the person is fueled by the destruction that precedes it.

Earlier we explained that one needs to be first become built properly (earth) and he must also have pleasure (water) in the previous level, before he ascends higher. Without being balanced by the elements of earth and water, a person has no *menuchah* (serenity). He is constantly found in the movement of ascension, and he is constantly destroying.

The Evil Use of Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire: Nullifying The Worth of Everything

When fire-of-fire-of-fire is used for evil, it resembles the expression of Haman, “*All of it is not worth anything to me.*” Everything he encounters is invalidated; it is all deemed worthless, because the person’s fire is constantly and very quickly destroying everything he meets. He has no inner peace, but even worse than this is that his dominant fire is always destroying and nullifying the worth of everything that he comes across.

If this power would be balanced with the element of earth, the person would not destroy anything until he has built himself properly beforehand, and he would climb his way upwards, step after step. But when fire-of-fire-of-fire is left unbalanced, it causes a person to deem everything he encounters as worthless, so he never gives himself the chance to build upon anything.

If someone’s soul is more rooted in fire-of-fire-of-fire, or if he was not born like this and he has developed this nature due to his various difficult circumstances in his life, his negative nature will eventually lead him into a state of total *yeiush*, despair. As soon as he encounters anything that might

provide him with enjoyment or with stability, he immediately nullifies its importance [and this leaves him with nothing but despair of ever getting anywhere].

Self-Destruction and Despair

When this problem is combined with the issue of lacking true *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven), the person allows himself to fall spiritually, and of this Chazal refer to in the term, “One who willingly destroys himself” (*me’abed atzmo l’daas*). These people commit a spiritual form of suicide, ruining their lives at the prime of their life. Then they end up in a state of total despair, giving up on everything.

Sometimes people go through short periods of depression like this and they lose control of their lives because their souls are generally unstable. This is all the more so when coupled with a lack of sufficient *yiras shomayim*. If a person would have even a little bit of *yiras shomayim*, he would never fall into these low states; at least not that easily.

When a person falls into extreme periods of depression and despair, it is “one who willingly destroys himself”. Even if it doesn’t get as extreme as total depression (and *rachmana litzlan*, this is unfortunately common throughout the world, and sometimes it is also happens to those who are within the *frum* and sheltered Torah world), a more common manifestation of this problem is when a person enters into a state of deep despair, and he feels very down. This is called *dikaon* (feeling crushed).

In more extreme cases of *dikaon*, a person lies in bed all day, and he can stay in his bed for weeks and months, feeling no reason to leave his bed or home. It is usually linked with other issues he may be going through, such as social fears, fears of his community, or endless other kinds of fantasies and delusions that may be bothering him.

When someone has a lot of fire-of-fire-of-fire in his soul, it is hard to get him to be hopeful about the future. Because he has so much fire in his soul, he quickly destroys any options of hope, so it is very difficult to try to infuse him with hope.

These are the two extreme outcomes of one who has fallen into this state of despair: he willingly destroys himself, *rachmana litzlan*, and even if he doesn’t get to the point of destroying himself, he will still enter a very deep state of despair.

Despair In Finding A Spouse

There are levels of how much one can despair. As an example, when it comes to *shidduchim*, (finding a spouse), if a person is in his thirties or forties and he hasn’t found his *shidduch* yet (for whatever reason that Hashem has decreed this; we won’t get into here if this situation is due to *bechirah* or not), he might become so full of despair that he feels like his whole life is “worthless”.

There are even people who throw off the yoke of *Yiddishkeit* because of this (*rachmana litzlan*), when they feel totally hopeless.

Of course, this is a difficult situation, and we pray that Hashem should help all these people that they should never come to that point of despair. But these people really need to re-evaluate their feelings of despair, and ask themselves: “Is it really true that my *entire* life is *totally* worthless...?” Just because one part of their life isn’t working out doesn’t mean make everything else in their life worthless.

Despair From Success In Torah Learning

Another example: it can happen that a person learning in yeshiva is going through a hard time, and he comes to the conclusion that his entire life must be hopeless, and that he will never succeed in life. Many times this is in his imagination and it is not the reality. Yet the person comes to feel hopeless about his entire life in general, because of one particular problem he is going through.

Others have this problem to a smaller degree: they give up on a certain part of their life. They don’t consider all of their life to be worthless, but they have given up on a certain part of life, convinced that they will never succeed when it comes to this part of their life.

Often it is conceit or jealousy which motivates people to embark on a certain endeavor, and then at a certain point they realize that their aspirations aren’t happening, and then they fall into despair. These aspirations were not realistic to begin with. But many times a person simply loses his aspirations even for his realistic goals, and then he falls into a crushing feeling of despair.

Here is a simple example we are all familiar with: the aspiration to know the Torah. We know that the Torah is endless, and it is impossible to one *sugya* entirely. A person might feel, “Everyone else can succeed in Torah, but I can’t.” He thinks that others are more successful because they have a better memory than he does, and that success in Torah learning is a gift from Heaven which he didn’t merit, and he feels that he cannot strive for more than his current level of understanding. He has completely given up on a part of his life: his Torah learning. He feels that he will never succeed in Torah learning any more than the way it is now, and he just continues on with complacency, thinking that Hashem will allow him to continue learning Torah for as long as he has the strength to. But he has given up on the desire to know the Torah better.

This is a partial kind of despair. He has not given up on his entire life; he has only given up on a part of his life, which is his Torah learning. Even if he learns Torah in-depth and even if has enjoyment in learning, he produces *chiddushim* and he has written *sefarim*, etc., he still might feel a sense of total despair when it comes to his Torah learning, thinking that he cannot get any further in knowing more of the Torah.

This is his fire-of-fire-of-fire at work, where his fire-of-fire-of-fire has caused him to “destroy” a part of his life, by giving up on it.

3 Options To Transcend Despair: Emunah, More Effort, & Taking One More Step Forward

The true perspective for one to have is that there is no such as thing as despair. Firstly, we must be realistic in our aspirations. If our aspirations are realistic, we have no reason to despair, for either of the following three reasons.

First of all, one can persevere in life with *emunah*. By having *emunah*, one can get by anything. An alternative method for success, Chazal say, is to have *yegiah* (effort). “One who says I toiled and I did not find, do not believe him. One who says I toiled and I found, believe him.”⁶⁸ As long as one tries his hardest (and this includes doing as much as his natural abilities allow him to, as well as a little bit beyond that), he is guaranteed to be assisted by Heaven to get to his spiritual goals. Along with this perseverance, one must also believe that all success in spirituality is ultimately a gift from Heaven, and not due to his own efforts.

These above two methods (*emunah* and *yegiah*) get straight to the root of the matter and they are both a deep and fundamental approach to getting rid of despair.

However, not everyone is on the level of mustering a high level of *emunah*, and not everyone has the resilience to persevere through difficulty, in the face of despair. There is a third, alternative path to take, which is easier to take. It does not solve the issue as deeply as the above two methods, but most people will probably need to use it in favor of the above two solutions, which require more inner strength of character.

This is the simple piece of advice that can help a person get past despair: No matter what stage a person is up to in his progress, even when he feels like he cannot do any more than he is already doing, he still has the power to **take one more step forward**. And that he is how he can keep persevering, a little step forward each time, until he eventually leaves behind all despair.

As long as one can access this belief, he can remove his negative **fire-of-fire-of-fire** from dominating him, and he transcends despair and self-destruction.

Practically Removing Ourselves From Despair

Thus, if one possesses a strong amount of fire-of-fire-of-fire (and everyone has some amount of it when it comes to a certain part of life, which makes us apt to have total despair in a certain area of our life), the solution is (besides for *emunah* and working harder, which are deeper methods that require a lot of inner strength of character): to take one more step beyond your current level.

However, before anything, first we need to determine if the person’s despair is a bad thing or not. There are some cases where it is actually healthy that the person has despaired. For example, if a person despairs from landing a certain position, maybe it is good for him that he didn’t get the position. In this case, it’s a good thing that he gave up on getting that position. So one should first

⁶⁸ Megillah 6b

think if giving up in his case is a healthy kind of despair or not. If a person can find reason that the despair is healthy, then there is no need to get rid of the despair.

But if a person has reflected into the situation and he realizes that his despair is unhealthy, the way he can come out of is by taking one more step than what he thinks he can do. If one tries this, he will succeed in leaving behind the evil kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire. In whatever frustrating situation a person finds himself in, he can try taking one more step forward past his current level.

How much he aspires to go forward is something that will depend on his personal level, but as long as he manages to take one more step forward even though he doesn't feel like it, he has for the most part left behind the detrimental kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire, and he is traveling in the opposite direction of despair.

Holy Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire: Unceasing Strength

So far we have explained what to do about the evil and detrimental kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire. Now we will discuss the *holy* use of fire-of-fire-of-fire in the soul. [Here we will deal with a “lower” kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire. Later in the chapter we will discuss a “higher” kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire].

There are those who have a revealed amount of holy fire-of-fire-of-fire in their souls either because they went through much suffering in their life, or because they grew up in a lofty, spiritual environment which enabled their fire-of-fire-of-fire to thrive.

Some others are born with this nature as a part of their personality; they are born with a tremendous push to strive higher. This nature to have a constant inner push will also come with a side-effect: it will mean that the person will have no serenity, not on this world and not on the next.

Others who see this kind of person cannot understand how a person can be so motivated in life and be such a powerhouse, and they struggle to understand his personality. When one observes this kind of person from a superficial perspective, he will suspect him of either being a huge *baal gaavah* (conceited person), or he will suspect of him of being motivated by extreme jealousy, or assume that the person is extremely honor-seeking. People cannot understand how a person can be so motivated to strive so high in life, so they will blame it on any of these negative traits.

But the true way to understand it is because there are some people who are simply born with an inner fire in themselves, which constantly burns and pushes them to go higher, and this fire knows no rest. It's not an issue of how well the person “chooses” to stay put or not; his inner fire is constantly burning, so it doesn't allow him to ever stay put where he is and just be satisfied.

A person with a lot of holy fire-of-fire-of-fire is never satisfied with where he is right now, and he is always seeking to push himself higher. The person is constantly “moving” inside of himself; he is not able to totally silence these inner movements and just try stay put.

This kind of person is always moving, and he is restless. Even if he does manage to stop moving so much, it would take a lot of exertion on his part to restrain himself.

The Disadvantage of Being Intensely Motivated

We should know the following, however. Some people have a constant fire-of-fire-of-fire in their souls that is always causing them to move, but their souls are generally imbalanced, due to the inner turmoil in their souls, which hasn't been sorted out yet.

This is a very difficult and complicated issue to treat, because these people are full of internal chaos in their souls, and their minds are flying all over the place, which makes it hard to stabilize them. These kinds of people might be able to get a lot done, but they become extremely chaotic as they are amidst doing what they do, almost losing their mind in the process.

Usually, these people are not successful in what they do, and although they perform a lot, they usually cannot produce any solid and lasting results from what they do. This is because they have no inner peace in their souls, and instead, they are acting from the extreme inner fire which fuels them.

This kind of person might be very creative and talented, but he cannot focus on any one point and carry through to the end. The person is guided by a sense of extremity which is motivating him to perform, but he is not able to live his life successfully, due to the general imbalance of his soul. He acts based on his anxious reactions, which sometimes can lead to good results, but usually the results are disastrous.

Three Scenarios of Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire

To review: some people have too much fire-of-fire-of-fire which causes them to develop extreme despair, as we mentioned before. In other cases, a dominance of fire-of-fire-of-fire can cause the person to become very ambitious in evil pursuits, and they cause much destruction to the world.

In others, fire-of-fire-of-fire causes them to seek proper and holy pursuits, but they are generally imbalanced in their souls, so they act in an unstable way, which causes even the good things they do to be done haphazardly. They act in an extreme manner and they act very opinionated about their unique ideas, and they will act very different than others. Even if it is stemming from a holy kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire in the soul, it is still an extreme and imbalanced way of living, and it does not represent the normal way of life as it should be.

If this kind of person manages to balance out his fire-of-fire-of-fire with the other elements of his personality, he will be a highly motivated person who receives constant inspiration from within himself, to keep achieving. These are the kinds of people who have constant *aliyah* (ascension) throughout their life, and they are special souls that are rare to find in our generation.

Gifted Personalities

When people read biographies or stories about these unique kinds of people, they might try to imitate them, only to find that they do not have the energies of these talented and unique

individuals. But we must know that the unusually gifted people of the world did not reach their achievements due to their free choice. They were simply born with a lot of fire-of-fire-of-fire in their soul, which pushes them very far to reach an unusual amount of personal growth or an unusual ability to benefit the masses.

When a person is born with this nature dominant in the soul, it means that he is blessed with many different kinds of abilities; he is gifted with a plethora of all kinds of different talents. He is not simply multi-talented in a certain area; he is talented in many different areas that are each distinct from each other. He is far more talented than many people in his surroundings, and therefore his entire behavior and thought patterns are very different from most average people. If someone envies this person's capabilities and he aspires to be like him, he will not be successful, because this is an unusual kind of person who cannot be imitated.

It is not necessarily because the gifted person contains a very lofty *neshamah* (Divine soul). Rather, it is because the personality of his *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul, or lower soul) is designed to think and act differently than others. We can find even non-observant Jews or gentiles who are also blessed with this kind of gifted personality. These are people who have very strong personalities, and no matter how much difficulties they go through, they never give up. This is the kind of person who can go through a Holocaust yet he emerges from it as strong as before, as if nothing happened. We can all recognize people who have very strong, iron personalities.

The common denominator between all gifted, strong people is that they are unfazed by problems, and they wonder why others fall apart and despair from difficulty. They have a hard time understanding why people are so fragile when it comes to dealing with difficulty, because they are so resilient and they see things very differently than how the average person sees things. It is because these people have a firm place in their souls which enables them to act and think differently than others.

Others who see this kind of person will have a hard time understanding his personality and how he is so strong, and anyone who tries to imitate this person will become frustrated, because he is trying to copy someone who has a vastly different soul makeup than what he has, which contains far more inner strength.

This kind of strong and gifted personality exists both in people who are secular as well as in people who strictly observe the Torah. It is a nature of fire-of-fire-of-fire in the soul, which can be used for either secular achievements or for holy achievements. It is rare to find this kind of personality, and those who do have it usually have some kind of instability in their personalities, due to their unusually high level of ambition and capability.

However, if this person manages to attain a balance in his soul, he can bring about unusual achievements, both on a personal level as well as on the communal and global level. His talents will not be able to be understood by other people of course, because he is far more gifted than anyone else in his surroundings. A person with a lot of fire-of-fire-of-fire in the soul comes across as a unique creation in and of itself, who no one else can understand.

So far we have explained the holy use of fire-of-fire-of-fire when it is directed properly. It can bring a person to unusual levels of self-perfection, or to unusual achievements which help build the world.

Inner Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire (Nefesh HaElokis): Quick Ascension

Now we will describe a point that is hidden, which is a far deeper point than anything discussed until now, about fire-of-fire-of-fire.

The soul's nature of fire-of-fire-of-fire is fueled by a cycle of destruction, ascension, destruction, ascension, etc. Some people have fire-of-fire-of-fire in their *nefesh habehaimis* alone, and this is what we described until now. These people are able to keep ascending higher after they 'destroy' their previous levels of achievement. They keep building upon the destruction of previous levels, and they never give up with their ambitions. When this power is perfected, such a person won't give up until he brings the world and all the people in it to the complete redemption. But there is also a more inner and deeper kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire, which stems from the *nefesh haElokis* (the "G-dly" layer of the soul, or the higher soul).

[We will refer to this as "higher" fire-of-fire-of-fire, whereas until now when we discussed fire-of-fire-of-fire that comes from the *nefesh habehaimis*\animal soul\lower soul, we were describing "lower" fire-of-fire-of-fire].

This higher kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire, which stems from the *nefesh haElokis*, enables a person to keep persevering, continuously, after destruction of the previous level; and to keep repeating the cycle.

This is not about a nature of how to be more successful in This World, and it is not about building and improving the world, nor is it about building one's own soul. [That would all be a use of lower fire-of-fire-of-fire]. The inner and higher kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire, which is in the *nefesh haElokis*, is the "*cheilek eloka mimaal*", a "portion of G-d above", and its nature is that it keeps shattering limitations. It keeps 'destroying', like a fire that keeps jumping out of its place. Anything it encounters, it destroys, and then it goes further, repeating the cycle.

Now we will say a very deep concept. The fire-of-fire-of-fire of the *nefesh haElokis* can keep 'destroying' until it eventually destroys everything. But we do not mean destruction in the same way we understand how fire burns up wood and destroys it, leaving it a pile of ash. Rather, the fire-of-fire-of-fire in the *nefesh haElokis* has a nature to 'destroy' anything in its path, and it can destroy very quickly, in the blink of an eye.

To illustrate the concept, if someone is struggling with a certain desire, it can take a long amount of time until he overcomes the desire, and he usually has to work slowly and in steps until he eventually breaks the desire. It is a struggle and it feels like fighting a war, for most people. But if a person has a lot of inner fire-of-fire-of-fire (of *nefesh haElokis*), he is so motivated to overcome this desire that he quickly overcomes it, 'destroying' the desire very quickly.

Unusual Maturity and Capability

One of the Sages [Rebbi Eliezer ben Azaryah] said, “I am like seventy years old.” In other words, there is a power in the soul to be mature and wise beyond one’s years, and this is aside from the concept of seeing success after putting in effort, where one receives the success as a gift from Heaven. That is a separate matter. Here we are discussing an aspect in the soul which can quickly ‘destroy’ and dismiss its previous steps, and then quickly stride towards success, like a fire which quickly moves after it has finished destroying whatever is in its path.

A person with this kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire is able to quickly traverse through certain parts of life and overcome the difficulties of life, long before his peers have traversed those parts of life. It is as if he has already gone through much of life already at even an early stage in his life, and therefore others are amazed at his unusual maturity and strength which goes beyond his years. When others speak to him, they sense that he has long ago traversed and gotten past the difficulties of life, which average people struggle with.

The *Sfas Emes* said that there are some lofty souls who are already born on a Heavenly level, and they are born wiser and more mature than their peers. But here we are speaking about something else: a strong amount of inner fire-of-fire-of-fire in the soul will mean that the person takes very quick strides in life. He learns faster than others and he gets further than others in a quick amount of time, where others take longer to develop. Compare this to a young child walking three steps, and an older child standing next to him who can cover the same amount of space with taking just one step.

A person with a lot of inner fire-of-fire-of-fire takes quick strides. This might manifest either in his intellect, in that he will be able to quickly absorb what he learns, or it might manifest in the abilities of his soul, which will mean that he keeps absorbing his abilities, ‘destroying’ his previous levels, and then quickly proceeding further.

We can see it manifest in some intellectually gifted students who are learning the very same material of Gemara as their classmates. While everyone else is struggling to understand the simple meaning of the first point of the Gemara that they come across, the one blessed with a lot of inner fire-of-fire-of-fire will very quickly absorb and understand the material, from one point to the next in quick succession, and he never gets stuck, whereas the average boy has to take his time in order to understand and absorb each point in the Gemara.

The Disadvantage Of Being Brilliant

Thus, when there is a lot of inner fire-of-fire-of-fire in the soul, it causes a person to take very quick strides, either in how he thinks or in how he uses his various energies.

Sometimes this comes with a negative side-effect: because the person ‘grasps’ things so quickly, he might overlook things in the process, and he misses certain points. This is because there is a rule that any quality will interfere with at least one quality in the soul. If a person is very brilliant and intellectually gifted, he probably also overlooks and skips over some details when he learns things.

In summary, if a person has a lot of inner fire-of-fire-of-fire, he absorbs quickly what he has to do\ understand and he also progresses very quickly. Of course, there are some things that will take more time for him to learn and progress in, but generally speaking, he is unusually bright and a quick performer and achiever.

“Total Destruction” - In The Side of Holiness and In The Side of Evil

When it comes to ascending the ladder of serving Hashem, which is like Jacob’s ladder, “footed in earth, and its head reaches the heavens”, a person with a lot of inner and holy fire-of-fire-of-fire quickly reaches the top rung of the ladder in Heaven, where he can ‘destroy’ all of Creation [we will soon explain more about this concept], by seeing the futility and worthlessness of everything, for he sees that he is above it all.

This is not referring to a negative kind of destruction and nullification, like when Haman said *“All of this is not worth anything to me”*, where a person considers everything to be worthless after he has achieved very high. We are referring to someone who has already traversed everything, and that is how he has ‘destroyed’ everything, in the sense that he has already gone through everything and he has climbed it all.

Fire-of-fire-of-fire is used for evil purposes when people come to dismiss the importance of others and they belittle and mock others. This is the negative trait of *leitzanus* (mockery), and it is an abuse of the power of fire-of-fire-of-fire. The truth is that when a person uses fire-of-fire-of-fire for evil purposes, he has never really gone through anything in life; he has no real maturity about life.

In contrast, when fire-of-fire-of-fire is used for holiness, the person is capable of a maturity and wisdom that makes him wise beyond his years, as one who has gone through much experience in life; not only that, but he reaches this maturity very quickly, because he has a soul that can take very quick strides and get much further than others.

Compare this to two people traveling to a certain country, and one of them takes a plane, and the other one takes a boat. They will both get to the same destination, but the one who takes the plane (who was ‘above’ in the air) gets there in a few hours, while the one who takes the boat (who was ‘below’) gets there in a few weeks.

Those who have a lot of holy, inner fire-of-fire-of-fire in their souls are those who somehow pass through all of life, and they pass it very quickly. And what happens when the end of this path is reached? They arrive at the ‘endpoint’ in Creation, where they can see that all of Creation is futile (and this is the holy use of Haman’s expression, *“All of this is not worth anything to me”*).

Our Sages state that all of Creation is contained in ‘one mere point’. It means that when a person reaches the endpoint of Creation, he can see how all of the universe is contained in one single point – the lower realms, the higher realms, everything. It is all contained in one single point, and eventually it will all be nullified [to Hashem].

Logically speaking, a person who reaches this space would feel a total state of despair, realizing that all of Creation is worthless and meaningless in the long term of things, and if this is the case, he falls into the ‘*chalal hapanuy*’ (the ‘empty space’) in Creation where he will feel nothing but emptiness and a sense that his existence is meaningless. This of course will breed a total level of despair.

But if one has a holy and inner kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire, he sees an entirely different perspective that transcends human intellect. It can be described as follows.

Holy Destruction: The Fire of Hashem

The Gemara says, “Fire eats fire.”⁶⁹ There are many interpretations of this line of the Gemara, but in relevance to us, the depth of this is: fire can destroy its own nature of destruction.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* explain that “evil destroys itself, from within itself.” This is also the secret meaning behind the words of the Gemara that the redemption will either happen in a generation that is entirely undeserving or a generation that is entirely worthy – when the generation is entirely undeserving of redemption, the amount of evil in the world will reach its peak, until the evil eventually destroys itself.

This is also reminiscent of the words of the Gemara, “Anyone who adds, subtracts” – the more evil that is added onto evil, the closer it is to its own destruction. This is a deep matter which we will not discuss further here, but this is the outline of the concept.

When evil destroys itself, it destroys something else as well: it destroys the very nature of destruction! This is the meaning of how “fire eats fire.” The true “fire” refers to the Hashem’s fire, so to speak.⁷⁰ The perfect and deep “fire” in Creation, which is Hashem’s “fire”, can destroy the very power of destruction. When destruction is destroyed, a person reaches total *menuchah* (serenity), realizing that there is nothing in Creation besides for Hashem (“*Ain Od Milvado*”).

The depth behind this matter is because fire keeps destroying, and it finds no rest. As soon as it destroys something, it is on to destroying something else. This is due to the nature in fire that wants to keep rising.

Reaching The Endpoint of Creation

When one reaches the ‘endpoint’ where he feels that everything is worthless because he has already risen above it all there are two possible reactions he might have.

⁶⁹ *Yoma 21a*

⁷⁰ *Editor’s Note: This may be because the Torah writes that Hashem appeared to Moshe as a “consuming fire” in the burning bush.*

If he got to this point using evil fire-of-fire-of-fire (meaning, his success in life is due to an unusual level of arrogance), he will enter into a state of absolute despair and a sense of emptiness, feeling that his existence is meaningless. He might come to heresy, becoming so haughty with himself that he thinks he is a powerful and godlike being, and this is what happened to Pharaoh, who came to believe that he was a god.

But when one using the holy kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire, he ‘destroys’ everything because he has traversed it all, and when he reaches the point of total ‘destruction’ of everything, he reaches the one point which can never be destroyed – the absoluteness of Hashem’s existence. It is the point of Hashem “was, is, and will be”.

In the future, Hashem will rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash* with a fire, and there will be wall of fire that protects it. This is referring to the holy and perfected “fire”, Hashem’s fire, the fire that is absolute and total which will ‘destroy’ everything in Creation. This reflects the words of the Gemara that ‘fire eats fire’, which will show that there is nothing in Creation besides for Hashem.

(This point in the soul is far removed from most of the generation, and we are only discussing this point so that we can complete our study [of the elements\traits of the soul].

The Deep Contradiction of the Soul: Containing Serenity and Action

When one has this deep and inner holy fire-of-fire-of-fire in the soul, he reaches an absolute level of *sheket* (calm). Reaching this point in the soul, however, will reveal a great inner contradiction in the person’s soul, as follows.

On one hand, this person has an inner fire that keeps burning, which causes him to keep progressing, dismissing his previous achievements, and immediately progressing further, with nothing stopping him. On the other hand, he is a kind of person who can easily connect to a deep inner serenity in his soul, the deepest state of serenity possible.

The State of ‘Ain Od Milvado’

All other levels of *menuchah* (serenity) besides for this are of This World, which does not allow for a complete inner serenity, due to its chaotic state. The *menuchah* that is attainable through a strong, holy, and inner fire-of-fire-of-fire is coming from an otherworldly dimension altogether.

This is because fire-of-fire-of-fire (when it is holy) destroys everything in This World, and then there is nothing left of This World for the person to experience, and the only thing left for him to experience is the reality of Hashem’s absolute oneness, the “day that is entirely Shabbos and eternal serenity”. It is the point where all of Creation is ‘destroyed’ before him, and all that remains is to recognize the simple reality of “*Ain Oid Milvado*” – the deeper dimension of reality, where we fully recognize that there is nothing besides for Hashem, simply speaking.

The *Nefesh HaChaim*⁷¹ describes at length of how to understand the ‘simple’ meaning of the “*Ain Od Milvado*” dimension. Here we have described a deep way of how to arrive at this perception. One way to get there is through *emunah*, and another way of getting there is through exertion to reach it, where it is received as a gift from Heaven. A third way of how to reach it is what we described here: to keep ascending, until a person reaches the point where all of Creation is destroyed before him, and when a person reaches that point, the simple reality of “*Ain Od Milvado*” is revealed to the person.

Upon reaching the simple meaning of “*Ain Od Milvado*”, the *avodah* of the person then becomes a process of “*ratzu v’shov*” (“running and returning”, or progressing and retreating), back and forth between the complete state of *menuchah* contained found in the state of *Ain Od Milvado* (where he has complete *menuchah*, which gives him the strength to keep progressing endlessly) that he has reached, and continuing to act from there. He will keep moving back and forth between serenity and action. He keeps ‘destroying’ all destruction and returns to the complete *menuchah* he finds in Hashem, and then he continues to progress from there.

This is a very deep contradiction of the soul. On one hand there is complete calmness, and at the same time, there is unceasing performance. A person who reaches this place in his soul has an entirely different kind of balance to his soul’s fire-of-fire-of-fire: he is balanced between serenity and action. His actions are subsequently balanced with serenity [because he can keep returning to a complete serenity] and his serenity is balanced with action [because his serenity provides him with more strength to keep progressing in his actions].

How To Balance Lower Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed a lower kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire [which is found in the *nefesh habehaimis*], and such fire-of-fire-of-fire needs to be balanced out with the other elements of the soul, namely, the elements of water and earth (and perhaps with a little bit of wind). The person will require some pleasure (water) and the ability to attain stability so that he can build himself properly (earth), in order to balance out the stormy nature of fire-of-fire-of-fire.

How To Balance Higher Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire

But when it comes to balancing out the higher kind of fire-of-fire-of-fire [which stems from the *nefesh haElokis*], the balance is [mainly] attained through moving back and forth between the states of *menuchah*\Ain Od Milvado and of performance (*pe’ulah*).

Of course, even higher fire-of-fire-of-fire needs to be balanced out with the elements of water and earth, because the lower aspect of his fire-of-fire-of-fire still requires a balance from the other

⁷¹ *Nefesh HaChaim*, Gate III

elements of the soul. But the main factor of the balance here will lie in accessing the *menuchah* that he derives from *Ain Od Milvado*.

In Conclusion

The words here have described very high spiritual concepts, and for whatever reason that Hashem has planned, He has arranged it that these words be said during the most spiritual time of the year [a few days before *Yom Kippur*]. Perhaps our ears will be more willing to listen to these words now that our ears have just been sanctified from hearing the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShanah*, which may have opened a little opening in our souls so that enables us to hear of concepts which are way above our current level.

Even if the levels here are above us, it was worth it for us to just hear these words, so that we can complete our understanding of the matters we are learning about and see a more complete picture.

If one is in touch with the point of the soul that was described here, he is connected to the true and perfected *gaavah*, the *gaavah* of Hashem which is perfect and holy – “the *gaavah* (pride) of *Yisrael* is *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*”; he becomes united with the *shleimus* (perfection) of the Blessed One.