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FIXING YOUR FOCUS

TORAH MANUAL TO IMPROVING CONCENTRATION



DEVELOPED BY THE FOUR ELEMENTS INSTITUTE

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01 | LACK OF MOVEMENT

In this volume, we shall examine the power of the soul to “focus.”

Just as with any other ability in the soul, the ability of focus contains many levels within it. A considerable number of tzaddikim¹ throughout the generations would place great emphasis on the soul’s power of focus and how to reach the epitome of balancing and repairing this power. Understandably, they dealt with higher and loftier levels of focus.

In contrast to the above, we will only be dealing with the levels of focus that are closer to the reach of most of us. Emphasized will be practical insights for those who will be reading this volume.

Concentration Is Improved Through Working With The Four Elements of Earth, Water, Wind and Fire

Difficulties with focus or concentration can be worked upon through understanding how to work with the four elements of the soul, which are earth, water, wind, and fire – as explained by Rav Chaim Vital, in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*.

Each of the four elements contains aspects of all the four elements, so there are a total of 16 general roots that exemplify each element. In the element of earth, there exist all the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. In the element of water, there is earth, water, wind and fire. In the element of wind, there is earth, water, wind and fire. In the element of fire, there is earth, water, wind and fire. Each of these can lead to a different root of difficulty with concentration.

Thus, there are many reasons that cause lack of focus, and it can never be blamed on any one particular reason. There is always a root reason that is causing it – one of 16 possible root causes, which we will explain individually. In many cases, there are often several other reasons that “accompany” the root reason. So there are 16 general “root” reasons that cause difficulty with concentration in addition to other accompanying reasons. (Each of these 16 can subdivide further as well!)

We will begin by learning about difficulty with concentration that stems from the element of earth, in particular, with “earth”-of-earth.

Earth-of-Earth: Internal “Heaviness” That Is Total

Earth has several properties. To name a few, it contains dryness, coldness, hardness, and heaviness. The traits of laziness and sadness stem from the “heaviness” contained in the element of earth, as Rav Chaim Vital writes.

“Earth”-of-earth is the total level of this “heaviness” in the soul, and it can also be a cause of difficulty in concentration. In many people, difficulty with concentration is because they have much “earth-of-earth” in their souls.

¹ In the classic Chassidic and Mussar sefarim

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When earth-of-earth is perfected, a person can stay heavily focused on what he is doing [and he will be productive]. When earth-of-earth is left undeveloped and unrefined, a person will just stay in his place and he won't budge from there, where this nature becomes impaired [leading to unproductive behavior].

Examples of Impaired "Earth-of-Earth"

1. There are people who can sit all day in the *Beis Midrash* learning Torah, and it seems to onlookers that such a person must be "one of the 36 hidden *tzaddikim*", but the truth can be that it's simply his personality to stay where he is and not budge from there. If this kind of person would be working in a store, he would sit there all day long too. It happens to be that he has chosen to sit all day in the *Beis HaMidrash*, but it's simply his personality to sit all day where he is. Therefore, his ability to sit all day in the *Beis Midrash* is not a result of a high level of righteousness. It is simply a personality to stay in place.
2. Another example of this is that there are people who won't get up to get the *sefer* from the shelf when they need it. When writing *chiddushei Torah*, such a person may write "The *sefer* is not in my hands to check", as the Chazon Ish wrote about himself; but in this person's case, he is just fooling himself, because he really can go get the *sefer* easily [and he's just being lazy]. It's really just a few feet away from him. But he has a problem of staying in place and not budging from there, and he convinces himself that it's too hard for him to get up and go get the *sefer*.

This is all the evil, impaired use of "earth"-of-earth. It is the habit of staying in the same place and not budging from there.

Why Impaired "Earth-of-Earth" Leads To Difficulty In Concentration

In contrast, when this power is used for holiness, it becomes an ability to heavily concentrate on what one is doing, saying, feeling, or thinking. But the evil, impaired use of **earth-of-earth** causes difficulty in concentration. Why? Especially if we are explaining that **earth-of-earth** is in essence an ability to stay heavily focused, why would the impaired use of **earth-of-earth** lead to difficulty with concentration? If anything, shouldn't it keep a person very focused on what he is doing, since it is a power to stay in place?

The answer to this is as follows. Man cannot really stay in one place for too long, because this Creation is always moving. The constellations are always moving, the earth is constantly in movement, and the same goes for the body – it is always moving. Even the guards in Buckingham Palace move - they will move very slowly, or they will wiggle their toes or some other part of their body, but they have some movement. No one can stay unmoving for too long. This is true about the body, soul, and the power of thought in the mind – the body always needs to move, the soul always need to move, and the mind always needs to move.

"Earth-of-earth", when left unrefined and undeveloped, will cause a problem that even when a person needs to move and he's aware that he needs to move in order to do a certain action, he will not move quickly to do it, and he may not even move at all to do it. He will feel the need to do the action and he knows that he needs to move from his place in order to get that thing done, but he won't actually do it.

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Why doesn't he act? Because the heavy amount of **earth-of-earth** in his soul is keeping him in place and shackling him down. He really needs to get up and go get the *sefer*, but he doesn't get up. He will feel a need to go relieve himself, but he doesn't. His soul needs to move, but he won't satisfy this need for inner movement.

When a person gets used to always stifling his need for movement, what does all this cause? It becomes an internal "war" within his own soul forces, between his need for movement and his nature of staying in place, and there will be much clashing inside him. He will then feel like he needs to move even more, which will lead him to becoming hyper, so that he can relieve all of the buildup of internal stress that has piled up. As time goes on, his need for movement will become suppressed, and at a certain point, he will feel restless. Then he won't be able to concentrate that well, as a result.

There are some people who have much **earth-of-earth** in themselves, so they have a nature to be more unmoving, but later they become the opposite of this nature, becoming very hyper and all over the place, crashing into people around them and knocking over things and breaking them. This happens because they were so used to suppressing their movements that eventually they become restless, and then they lose control over their movements altogether. As a result, their movement becomes hyper. They will feel an impulsive need to move around.

This kind of person might seem to onlookers as a person who has a lot of "wind-of-wind" in his soul – the nature of fast movement - but in reality, he has much "**earth-of-earth**" in himself, the very opposite of how it seems.

This nature can manifest in action, and also in speech, and in emotion, and in thought. These people have a very hard time concentrating on any one thought, because they have become stormy inside, due to all of the inner contradictions that have piled up inside themselves.

Repairing Internal Paralysis, Step 1: Times of Quiet Every Day

Now that we understand the problem, let's see what the remedy to this is. One should only use the following remedy if his dominant nature is **earth-of-earth**. Since there are many different causes of difficulty in concentration, each particular issue requires a particular solution, which will be detrimental to use in the other cases.

If one recognizes that his dominant nature is **earth-of-earth** (as for how to figure out your dominant element, that is a separate discussion for itself), generally speaking, **he will need time of quiet every day, to just be with himself. He should disconnect from the world during this time**, and turn his phone off. He can **listen to himself and hear the movements in his soul which want to express themselves**. If he has no quiet time for this, he won't be able to listen to his soul. He must have this quiet time, and then he can listen to himself. This will be the beginning of how he can start to calm down.

(This particular advice is not only needed for one who has problems with concentration. It is also recommended for couples who want to achieve marital peace; each of the spouses needs quiet time every day, with just being alone with themselves, and to listen to what's going on inside themselves. One also needs it for his own self, to become in touch with himself, in solitude.)

One should take a few minutes a day of quiet, to reflect like this. This is not a time to make self-accounting. The point is to simply become calm in the soul, a far more basic step, which calms even the "animal" level of the soul. It is not either a time for prayer, learning Torah, or *hisbodedus*. The point of this is totally different: just to simply relax, so that one can calm the soul. One can eat or drink something light, in order to create a relaxed atmosphere.

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Getting used to this gives a person quiet time every day to recognize what inner calm is. Then one will be able to notice the storminess in his own soul: his need for movement which has become suppressed.

Repairing Internal Paralysis, Part 2: Light Movements To Get Things Done

After some time of practicing this (progress will not happen right away), the next step will be, to try to act upon the need for movement when he feels it, even though he is initially reserved about doing it. One should try to lightly perform what needs to be done. It is recommended that he try this only with something that is easy to take care of, and not with something that's too hard for him to do; he should not try to change so drastically and always act upon every desire for movement.

If he is not sure if he can go do what has to be done, he can try simply leaving his own “*daled amos*” (direct space), or he can just go do anything, so that he moves a little bit from his place. This gets him used to doing things and actualizing the desire in his soul for movement, helping him become more productive.

Again, he should not try to make drastic changes. He should just lightly act upon the desire for movement when he feels it, and do just do small things that he initially feels opposition towards doing.

Step 3: The Goal – Improved Concentration

If one gets used to this a little bit, he will be able to see that he has become calmer inside himself. He will suddenly feel that his concentration has become better and that he can better listen to himself, and he will no longer feel so chaotic inside - to the point that he finds himself able to concentrate and focus in his thoughts on something.

In Summary

In summary, the first step is to have a few minutes a day of quiet time, of disconnecting from all the noise in the world. This is necessary for any person, not just a person who has problems with concentration. This is advice that can help most people. [For men,] there is always a danger that practicing this will lead to wasting time from Torah study, and this is something to be concerned about. Notwithstanding this issue, most people still need this quiet time every day, in order to learn how to become calm and relaxed inside themselves.

The second step is that when a person feels the desire to perform a certain action, he should try to force himself to take care of it. If he is doubtful about if he can do it or not, he should move in a different way, such as by walking out of his *daled amos* (four cubits), or by doing something else, etc. The point is that he should not stifle the need for movement.

Slowly as one gets used to this, he will become liberated from the heaviness of “**earth-of-earth**” that has been shackling him in place, and instead, his “**earth-of-earth**” will become refined and rectified. This will also lead to an improvement in his ability to focus, because when **earth-of-earth** becomes refined and corrected, it aids in focus and concentration, as explained earlier.

We have explained this only briefly, and it takes months of work of practice, in order to feel changes. But when one does feel the changes, it will give a total overhaul to one's life. It will feel to a person like a redemption taking place inside himself, for he has previously been tied down in place, and now he is setting himself free from all of those inner confines.

02 | MINOR DISTRACTIONS

Concentration Problems Stemming From Water-of-Earth: Easily “Dragged” After Distractions

We have begun, with *siyata d’shmaya*, to explain how problems of concentration stem from each of the four elements. Previously, we studied “earth”-of-earth. Now let’s see how problems with concentration can stem from “water”-of-earth, and how it can be fixed.

The element of earth in the soul ties a person down to where he is, for that is the nature of earth – it weighs things down. The “water” within earth is when one is “dragged” towards aspects of earthiness. Here we are not dealing with the general element of water, but with the “water” that is part of the element of earth, where a person is lightly “dragged” away (like water), from concentrating on something. He quickly loses track of what he was thinking about, as he is easily dragged after something on the side of his eyes that caught his vision. A person may be “dragged” after these things and then may lose his thought process.

Examples

- 1) For example, if a person is sitting in a room and he catches sight of an attractive looking object, and he is easily “dragged” after looking at it. He quickly spaces out and he stops concentrating, then he returns to what he was concentrating on, and returns to examine the object of interest, repeating the cycle.
- 2) He gets distracted by some noise in the room, such as a fly buzzing around. Then he re-focuses, gets distracted again by the noise, then returns to focusing; and the cycle repeats.

We can bring more examples as well, but the point is that there are small distractions that prevent a person from concentration. We aren’t talking about cases of majorly losing focus. We are talking about a small distraction, which stops a person’s thought process, making a person think about something else instead.

This is not the same thing as simply spacing out and daydreaming, where one doesn’t catch himself until much later. Here we are talking about small distractions, where a person loses focus for a few moments, then returns to what he’s thinking about, and the cycle repeats. Although the degree of distraction is small and he’s not majorly losing focus, the problem is that these moments of distraction can happen multiple times, in quick succession of each other.

Two Negative Outcomes of Being Easily Distracted

The first problem here is that a person **loses his ability of consistency**. “The secret of holiness is consistency”², and when a person has constant interruptions, he loses the consistency of thought.

But a more serious problem here is that when a person gets used to being easily distracted, his thought process develops interruptions, and his thoughts will “skip”. Not only is he losing focus, but **his very thought process will become jumpy**. His thoughts will jump around from one thought to another.

Jumpiness In The Mind

We need to understand that almost all people have this problem of “jumpiness” taking place in their thoughts all the time. A person can try taking a few moments to watch his thought process and see how fast his thoughts jump from one subject to another. Most people cannot remain focused on one kind of thought for more than 20 seconds! The thoughts are usually jumping from one subject to another, before returning to the previous subject.

For example, when a person is in a car and he’s looking out the window, he does not take his mind off the road in front of him, but he can definitely lose awareness of the fact that he is driving in a car. After a few seconds, his mind will regain awareness of the fact that he is driving, then he thinks about something else, and the cycle repeats.

Usually, the shift of the focus isn’t that noticeable, so it is relatively easily for the person to return to what he is thinking about. But the fact is that the thoughts have still jumped. It can be compared to a person looking at one place with his right eye, and another place with the left eye. When a person does this, his thoughts are really jumping from one subject to another.

You cannot think of two different thoughts at once. So how does a person think of so many things at once? It is not really happening all at once. Rather, the shift of the thoughts happens so quickly that it doesn’t register in the mind as different thoughts.

In most people, their thinking process is somewhat jumpy. As to the degree of this jumpiness, and the nature of these thoughts, that is something that varies with each other person. We can say that this is true with almost all people. **This fact is the root of all problems that are focused-related.**

If the thought process in most people would be orderly, with one thought leading to another thought on the same subject, a person would be far from the issue of losing focus. But because the thoughts in most people are usually jumping from one subject to another, lack of focus is commonplace. It causes the entire thought process to be jumpy. (The power of ‘jumpiness’ (*dilug*) is also found in the side of holiness. In the future, Moshiach will “jump” and “skip” over the mountains and hills. But here we are explaining the downside to the power of *dilug*/jumping: the jumpiness of the mind.)

Even if there would be no external factors present to steer the mind away from what it is thinking about (there is no such thing of course, but even if theoretically it was possible), there would still be problems with concentration, due to the nature of jumpiness in the thoughts of the mind. Since the thoughts tend to jump from one subject to another, even a small distraction can activate this jumpiness.

We have explained that this stems from **water-of-earth**. For this reason, a person may be distracted by an interesting looking item that is in the room, or by a fly that is buzzing around, and his thoughts will quickly jump from the subject at hand to thinking about the distraction, then he will go back to thinking about the original subject, then back to thinking about the distraction, etc. It is all an extension of this nature of jumpiness in the mind.

Earlier Roots of Mental Jumpiness

If we look into the earlier roots of this problem, it begins in childhood. A child is easily distracted by anything we wave in front of his face. He can be playing with one toy and a second later he is playing with another toy. As a person gets older and more mature, he can learn how to stay focused, but in childhood, in the beginning of the mind’s development, there is jumpiness and a lack of orderly thought. There is also a deeper reason for this: when

the power of thought hasn't been developed yet, it is of a superficial nature, and therefore it is naturally less orderly and less capable of focus.

Distractions Come From Outside The Mind and From The Mind Itself

If the above has all been understood, we can now proceed to the following.

Getting deeper into this matter: there is a person's **mind** itself, and there are also **external factors** which influence the mind's thoughts. The **mind** itself may have an issue where it cannot focus for too long on one matter, and therefore it will jump to another thought. In addition, there are **external factors** which cause the mind to be "dragged" away from what it is thinking about.

External factors which prevent concentration are essentially the problem of impaired **water-of-earth**: small distractions that are coming from the external surroundings of a person. Going deeper with this, small distractions do not only come from external surroundings of a person. They are actually coming from the **mind** itself.

A person's inner essence, as we know, is not just one single force. (If it would be just one internal force, a person would shine the light of his "*Yechidah*" so strongly that it would reveal the Individual One of the world.) The inner forces of the soul are many. There are 70 root forces in the soul, as the Vilna Gaon describes. In addition to this, we have the many thoughts of the mind that a person thinks about. So there's a lot taking place on the inside of a person.

How many thoughts does a person think, since he is born? There are thousands and millions of thoughts. If we would add up all of the thoughts that people have thought of since the beginning of time, it would be endless. It is well-known that thoughts, even after they are over, still remain; the thought leaves behind an imprint of it. Understandably, some thoughts will leave behind more of an impression than other thoughts. Every thought, even after it is over, will remain as a potential force, though it is no longer active.

Therefore, something may trigger the once-long-ago thought to be released from its potential state and to make its appearance again. It may become activated through a sight, through some imagination, or through smelling something that reminds him of that thought, etc. Once the old thought is awakened again, a person loses focus on his current thought and he will focus on the old thought. This creates *hesech hadaas* (removal of awareness).

As mentioned, our power of thought in essence cannot think constantly of the same thing, at least not in the current state that we are in, where we are no longer in the state of Adam before the sin, where the thoughts of the mind were able to focus constantly on nothing but total truth. Ever since the first sin of man, the mind is possessed with "many calculations", meaning, a myriad amount of thoughts taking place. This makes it impossible for our mind to only think of one thing, and therefore we keep thinking of different thoughts. So in our current nature, our thoughts cannot focus on one matter for that long.

In addition to this factor, there are also the emotions, which there are also many of, ever since the first sin when man deviated. The many emotions in a person can also breed *hesech hadaas*. For example, whenever a person is saddened, or whenever he is joyous, he will think very much about what he's sad or happy about, and he loses his focus of what he was thinking about beforehand.

These can be small, distracting kinds of thoughts of feelings, which are enough to cause a person to have *hesech hadaas*. We are not even talking about major disturbances, such as sudden tragedy, G-d forbid, or other events which disturb a person's mind so much that he cannot think or focus properly for the time being. Even a small

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thought or a small feeling can be enough to make a person lose focus on something. There is a huge amount of them available in the psyche of a person, so there is an endless amount of opportunities for a person to lose focus on what he was thinking about.

It is only natural for a person to have *hesech hadaas* as soon as he starts thinking about a certain thing or as soon as he's feeling something which distracts him a little bit. Again, this is true even about very small distractions.

For example, when a person goes to an hour-long *shiur*, for how long can he focus his thoughts on what he's hearing about? How much does he space out while listening? Many times a person asks a question in middle of the *shiur* when the same question was asked half a minute ago. He didn't realize that the question was just asked because he wasn't listening. I am not talking about a conceited person who doesn't care to listen to what others have to say. A person simply loses focus and he does not even hear what people around him are saying.

It's All Normal

So, there is an endless amount of distracting thoughts and feelings that can cause a person to lose focus on what he is thinking, which is called *hesech hadaas*.

Much attention is being given today to the subject of people who have problems with focusing and concentration. The logic of it is: If a person loses focus only minimally, relative to the average attention span of other people, that's nothing to be concerned about, but if the loss of focus is extreme enough to cause anyone to have a *hesech hadaas*, this is considered a "problem" with the person. But the truth is that the problem does not begin with the person who has it. It is a natural outcome of the structure of the soul in every person! (There is certainly an inner work to learn how to increase the focus of the thoughts, but this is one of the most challenging inner tasks).

In Summary

In summary, when there is a dominance of **water-of-earth** in one's soul, the very structure of one's soul is always skipping between thoughts, to the point that one cannot concentrate for that long on something. Just like a person cannot stay in one place for too long without moving, so is a person with a nature of **water-of-earth** unable to stay focused for that long, and he will have to 'skip' out of his place. He will immediately have *hesech hadaas* and become involved with something else. He will become externally involved with other things, and his mind will wander to thinking about any other thoughts on his mind, or to any strong emotions he is feeling.

An Additional Factor Which Can Prevent Focus – Reading Into Others' Thoughts

As you may have realized by now, we haven't even addressed any of the extreme issues that people may have with focus and concentration. We are only speaking here of what the average person goes through.

An additional factor which can stop a person's focus, which is rare and experienced by very few individuals, is when a person is constantly "picking up" the thoughts of others in his surroundings and absorbing them.

Normally, we are not able to read another person's thoughts, and we can only sense what other people are doing and saying. But there are some people in the world who have an ability to sense the thoughts of others. This may be coming from the spiritual ability of *ruach hakodesh* (the holy spirit), which is a very high spiritual level. Or, it may

just be that the person was born with an inner sense for this, which is nothing spiritual, for we can find even non-observant Jews or gentiles who have been born with this ability.

Either way, though, when people are able to sense others' thoughts, their minds are full of the mental chatter of everyone around them – and they cannot focus because of all the information that their brain keeps absorbing.

Developing The Power of Focus

We need to know: What is the way to live, ideally, so that we can prevent these issues with focus?

In addition to the problems we have described here, there may be other factors as well which are contributing to the issues with focusing, but here we will explain what the general outline is, of what we need to do, in order to living a life of being able to focus better. It is a broad matter, and we will explain it briefly. There are two parts to it.

1) Strengthening The Power of Thought - Via Focused, In-Depth Torah Learning.

Through **developing a strong power of thought**, it becomes easier to stay centered in the mind.

To illustrate, if a person never learns Torah, and he is only involved in a certain activity or work in his life, such as if he is a carpenter or a repairman, his ability to think is very limited, because all he thinks about is what he does. In contrast to this, if a person learns Torah every day, especially if he is immersed in it and he learns in-depth, he is always building his mind and his power to think. He will be able to focus much better.

The basis of developing the power of focus – here we are not addressing the general public, but *bnei Torah* specifically, who are involved in learning Torah in-depth every day – is **to build the power of thought through in-depth Torah study. Only in-depth Torah learning can accomplish this**; learning in a manner of *bekiyus*, though, which is certainly wonderful, will *not* build the power of the mind to focus.

In order to begin developing the power of focus, one needs to get used to thinking about a particular Torah thought. One can think about a particular question, or an answer. Getting used to this is also a way to **purify** the mind.

One needs to train himself to concentrate with his mind on a Torah thought – *softly, and not in a way which strains the mind* (which certainly sounds like a contradiction, but it is possible). One can start doing this for a minute, then gradually increasing it to 2 minutes, then 3 minutes, etc.

A person needs to acquire the power of analytical, deep thinking in Torah (*iyun*). This ability, *iyun*, enables a person to stay firmly established in a thought and it centers his mind. The less a person develops his power of *iyun*, the weaker his power of focus will be; in contrast, the stronger one's ability of deep *iyun* is – with emphasis on both aspects of deep and *iyun* – the more one will be able to focus.

There are different ways of learning with *iyun*, and this merits its own discussion. But here we have just laid out the outline: one needs to get used to deep *iyun* in his Torah learning, to be able to analyze and think into a particular Torah thought, and this is the basis of building the power of focus. This is the power that enables a person to remain attached and focused to whatever he does. It is like the glue that attaches things in place. One needs to get used to analytical, in-depth thinking into a Torah thought.

This should certainly be done when you are in front of a *sefer* in the *Beis Midrash*, but a large part of developing the power of thought is acquired when a person is walking through the street. This also aids a person in guarding his

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eyes from seeing anything inappropriate. To implement this idea, one should take a particular Torah thought with him to think about when he's walking through the street. This trains one's soul to get used to deeply thinking into the thoughts of the Torah, and this is the basis of how we can develop the power of true focus.

2) Awareness of Subtle Thoughts and Emotions

Most people are not that **aware** of what they are thinking or feeling. Constantly, there are thoughts and emotions passing through us, but not all of us are aware of them. You can ask a person, "What did you just think about?" and he says, "Nothing", and you can ask him, "What did you just feel like?" and he also says, "Nothing." On paper, it sounds as if he is dead – he is not thinking or feeling anything!

But we know that this isn't true. Every person – with almost no exceptions - is certainly having thoughts and feelings, every moment. But people are usually aware of their thoughts only if the thoughts are particularly tangible, such as a fantasy, which can feel very strong. The same goes for emotion – people will usually feel their emotions only if the emotion is particularly strong and tangible. Subtle, refined feelings are usually not perceived in one's awareness – the more subtle the feeling is, the less a person will be consciously aware of it.

What happens because of this? There are people who lose their focus because they have begun to think about something, which led to another thought, and then another thought – but the person is not even aware of what he was thinking. If he is not even aware of what he is thinking about, how can he ever focus?

If he knows what he's thinking about, like if he's thinking about a question or an answer, then he is aware of what he's thinking. But if there are thoughts quickly passing through his mind, it is difficult to be aware of them, since they are coming so quickly in succession of each other. The same goes for emotion – if a person experiences several emotions very quickly after each other, he won't be aware of these emotions.

These quickly passing thoughts or emotions are actually a cause for *hesech hadaas* – where the mind loses focus. If he is asked why he suddenly lost focus, and he doesn't know why, someone may tell him, "Maybe you need to see a psychologist – perhaps he will be able to straighten out your mind a bit." But the true reason of why his mind keeps losing focus is not because there is something wrong with his mind, but because of the inner emotions and thoughts that are quickly passing through him, which he isn't aware of.

Since he isn't aware of the quickly passing thoughts and emotions, he won't even know what the source of the problem is. Not only will he be at a loss of how to solve this issue – he won't even be aware of the source of the problem. If you want to know the true source of the problems with focus that most people have, it is for the reason we just mentioned.

We must emphasize that we are not addressing here the more severe issues with focus. Here we are addressing the "average" struggle with focusing which applies to most people. In most people, there is a subtle problem with focusing which stems from their inner thoughts and emotions that they aren't aware of, which are deterring their focus on an unconscious level. They aren't aware of where the issue is stemming from and that is what further exasperates their issues with focus.

Sadly, most people are born like this, and that is also how they end life. For their entire life, they erroneously think that their minds simply cannot focus that much, and in the best situations, they recognize that it is not an extreme problem and that they are still considered "normal". Therefore they never deal with the issue, because if it's normal, it is not something to make an issue out of....

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The truth is that most people are not even using 10% of their mind - as is well-known. Simply speaking, we can say that this is laziness. While that is true, another reason is because the mind is constantly jumping to other topics to think about, the person doesn't learn how to focus his mind, and he comes to accept that he does not have a strong power of thought, and that his mind is just "the way it is" and that he cannot develop it further.

Gaining Subtle Awareness – Through Entering Your Inner World

The *avodah* (inner work) which we can do to counter all of this, is, briefly, as follows.

The more a person enters his inner world, the more awareness he will develop, of his thoughts and emotions. In order to acquire these two abilities, of "mental awareness" and "emotional awareness" – one will need the following two factors: (1) Firstly, one must be able to "**view oneself from the outside**". (2) Secondly, one needs the ability to have "**inner quieting**".

(I am not speaking here of the basic level of awareness, which is on a far lower level. Here, I am coming to explain a higher level of awareness.)

The first ability mentioned, the ability to "view oneself from the outside", is an ability to view yourself from "outside" of yourself - as if you are an "onlooker" towards yourself. Just as you can see another person and observe him and you get to know him from this "outsider" perspective, so can you look at yourself from an "outsider" perspective, viewing yourself from "outside" of yourself. This ability is also known as the "*Chayah*" level of the soul.

The second ability mentioned, "inner quieting", is attained through living a generally calm life. The more a person is inwardly calm, the more his spiritual awareness is raised and he can feel subtler things, whereas the more "noise" a person lives in, the less he can identify with subtleties.

Observing Yourself From "Outside" of Yourself, Amidst The Quiet

In order to attain mental and emotional awareness – which are both subtle – a person needs the above two abilities, "viewing oneself from the outside" and "inner quiet." Generally speaking, the ability of mental awareness (becoming aware of your thoughts) is developed through "viewing oneself from the outside", whereas emotional awareness (becoming aware of your feelings) is mainly developed through "inner quieting".

Through these two abilities together, a person can sit in a calm, quiet place, and then amidst the quiet, he can observe himself from outside of himself. From amidst his inner quiet, he can observe his own thoughts and feelings.

Every person has thoughts and feelings which can become consciously revealed, and some thoughts and feelings which will always remain hidden from his awareness. How much thought and feeling will be revealed, and how much of it will remain hidden? That will depend on how much one raises his awareness level to his thoughts and feelings, which is the concept we are mentioning here.

The more a person gets used to "listening to himself", from amidst the quiet and from using the ability to observe himself from "outside" of himself, he can reveal a whole new state of being. He will discover himself as a new person, and he will not be the same person he recognizes from before. Until now he had been recognizing only the coarser layers of his existence. When he enters the quiet and he begins to observe his own thoughts and emotions from outside of himself, he will discover entirely new thoughts and emotions in himself which he did not know about from before.

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He will wonder, “Is that me? That is not the person I recognize as myself. I am a whole different person than what I thought I was!” But the truth is that nothing has really changed. It is just that now the person is starting to see and feel what he did not previously see and feel.

When one reaches this point, he will become much more aware of his thoughts and feelings, so he will feel even the thoughts and feelings that are very subtle.

Heightened Awareness Leads To Control of the Mind and Stronger Focus

As a result of this heightened awareness, one will also gain much more control over his mind. (It is like a person who passes through a place where he is not allowed to think about Torah, who can immediately stop his thoughts as long as he has even a little bit of fear of Heaven. The more a person gains a heightened awareness, the more he can control his mind). It will then be easier for him to avoid *hesech hadaas*, both in his thoughts and in his emotions; and, as a result of that, he will be able to remain **focused** in whatever he is doing or thinking right now.

Focus Leads To Success In Torah Learning

With a well-developed ability of focus, a person greatly increases the *qualitative* level of his living, as opposed to the “*amount*” of accomplishments, in his life.

Two people can be sitting and learning the same words of the *Gemara*, with the same commentaries of *Rashi*, *Tosafos* and the *Rishonim*. At the end of the hour, one of them is much more successful. It seems that he is just smarter and that he is blessed with an ability of comprehension. That may be true, and indeed, he may have been blessed with a gift to easily comprehend his learning. But an additional factor is that he has developed his ability to focus, so that he can remain focused in his thoughts on what he is learning about [thus he is successful].

Minor Problems with Focusing vs. Major Problems with Focusing

To review and emphasize, the subject of this lesson, which is **water-of-earth**, is not relevant to any major problems with focus. Here we are speaking about a subtle level of focus, and that is what **water-of-earth** is about.

The more major problems with focus stem from the general elements of water, wind and fire. We are currently discussing the average person, who doesn't have major problems with focus. When the average person meets him, he will not be able to tell if he has any problems with focusing. However, as we have explained here, there are subtle issues with focus which the average person may have. It is still in the range of "normal" because, as we know, normal is relative, with regards to how normal other people are.

Thus, the concept we have described in this chapter is not addressing any of the major focus-related issues which are more extreme. The lesson of this chapter is for the average, "normal" problems that people have with focusing, and it can apply to every person, on varying levels.

When one develops the idea of subtle focus which we have explained in this chapter, he will be able to avoid the small distractions which can easily deter the mind, such as in the examples mentioned in the beginning of this lesson: A fly buzzing in the room or an object in the room that catches a person's attention, etc. With the ability of inner focus, it will be very easy for a person to avoid these distractions.

Most people are easily deterred by any small thing that distracts them. We can often see this in children when they become distracted by the smallest reason for distraction in the room – their eyes quickly dart to the object of attention and they lose focus. This is because they haven't yet developed an awareness to their own thoughts, so they easily have *hesech hadaas* from what they are in middle of thinking about. When any person lives without the ability of awareness to his thoughts, the smallest thing can distract him, as long as it is even remotely interesting, causing him to have *hesech hadaas*.

How is this problem dealt with? With children, we know that we can distract them with something else, such as by telling them an interesting story. We can distract their minds by showing them something interesting, or by getting them involved with some other activity, etc. That advice can certainly work, but the purpose of this lesson is not to come and give advice of what to do. Each person can come up with his own advice of what works. But these techniques are only about how to take care of the specific problem at hand, and do not address the problem at its root.

As it was explained here, the more a person has strengthened his power of focus, he can easily deal with any small distractions so that they won't divert his attention.

Bothered By Small Distractions

Small distractions are really more complicated to understand, but we will try here to briefly summarize and finish explaining this issue.

When a person has developed his inner power of focus, on one hand, while he is able to remain very focused, on the other hand, he becomes very aware of subtler thoughts and emotions. What will happen when a subtle thought or feeling begins to bother him? This is stemming from **water-of-earth**. Will it disturb him, or not?

There are contradictory forces contained here. On one hand, he has developed a strong power of focus. A small distraction is a problem of focus that stems from **water-of-earth**, which is a light form of distraction, but which he

can easily avoid. However, he has also developed an ability to be aware of very subtle thoughts and feelings. So if there is a small noise or disturbance in the room, he will be easily bothered by it!

Generally, if a person is unable to steer his mind from a small disturbance, this may either stem from an impaired ability in the soul, or it may stem from a rectified ability of the soul. A person may be unable to take his mind off anything that deters him, even the smallest disturbance, if he is a person who is never focused. He is not able to sense anything subtle, so he never learned how to focus, and since he is generally unfocused, the smallest thing can deter his focus and cause him to have impaired *hesech hadaas*. On the other side of the coin, we have a person who is very focused, who is able to sense very subtle thoughts and feelings, since he has a very heightened awareness – but that will mean that he can be easily be disturbed by even the smallest thing.

So if a person loses his focus due to a small disturbance, this may either because he has an undeveloped mind – which is to his disadvantage - or, it may be because he has a strongly developed mind, which is a quality.

“Ohr Makif” (View From The Outside) and “Ohr Penimi” (View From The Inside)

In subtler terms, this matter will depend on one’s soul root. There are two kinds of people – those whose souls are rooted in the view of “*ohr makif*”, (lit. “enveloping light” – a worldview which is connected with the “outside” of a person) and those who have a soul root in “*ohr penimi*” (lit. “inner light” – a worldview which stems from within the person).

A person with a soul root of “*ohr penimi*” lives very internally, and he is not bothered by outer stimuli. He can be in a very noisy place yet he doesn’t feel any of it. He can *daven* or learn Torah with concentration even when he’s standing in middle of a noisy marketplace (as the *Gemara* discusses). Another kind of person is no less spiritual and internal than this, but since he has a soul root of “*ohr makif*”, a perspective that is connected with the outer surroundings, he experiences what takes place outside of him and therefore he can be bothered by things there.

Thus, you can have two people who are both on a high spiritual level, but one of them is bothered by disturbances in his surroundings, and the other is not. The person with a soul root of “*ohr penimi*” can sit and learn Torah even when the surroundings are noisy, whereas the person with the perspective of *ohr makif* feels disturbed. The person with a perspective of “*ohr penimi*” says, “Why are you bothered even a bit by what’s going on around you? Just concentrate, and learn.”

Is he right? Should a person not be bothered by anything? The answer to this is that it depends on different soul roots! For the person whose soul is rooted in “*ohr makif*”, he has no way to completely ignore anything he is disturbed by even small disturbances. This is not possible, because his ability of “*ohr makif*” makes him very aware of the surroundings and everything that’s happening within it.

What can he do? He can try accessing the view of “*ohr penimi*” that is within him, for the time being, because he surely has some level of “*ohr penimi*” in his soul. “*Ohr penimi*” is the ability to be very centered and focused within yourself, cut off from all outer stimuli, whereas “*ohr makif*” is a view that comes from one’s surroundings. But if a person’s soul root is “*ohr makif*” and he tries to ignore any disturbances he notices outside of him, this can still be most difficult for him. The only thing he can do about this is to think about the concept of “*Ain Od Milvado*”, “There is nothing besides for Hashem” - simply speaking - and then he can disconnect from everything around him.

In Conclusion

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In summation, we have spoken here about the issues of small distractions to focus, which stem from **water-of-earth**. We have described an inner way of how to deal with small distractions, which is that the more a person strengthens his power of inner focus through developing his ability of subtle awareness, he will be able to easily deal with small distractions.

However, we have clarified at the very end of this lesson that this is only if a person was born with a soul root of “*ohr penimi*”, so he can easily access his nature of remaining centered amidst disturbances. If a person mainly experiences “*ohr makif*”, though, he is easily bothered by outer stimuli, so it will be very difficult for him to mentally disconnect from even small disturbances.

A person whose soul root is in “*ohr makif*” will usually seek a quieter, calmer environment, so that he doesn’t become disturbed from his surroundings. But this is not possible in the world we live in right now, where we are found in the depths of exile. Yet, even amidst all of the noise, it is still possible for such a person to remain focused and not to be bothered by the surroundings, as much as he possibly can.

When a small disturbance comes his way, we explained that either he can try to concentrate on the view from the “*ohr penimi*” that is in him, which will give him an ability to be somewhat disconnected from everything around him; or, by concentrating on the simple meaning of “*Ain Od Milvado*” – so that he can thereby escape all of the external disturbances he is faced with.

03 | PROBLEMATIC MOVEMENT

Wind/Movement and Earth/Stability

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are continuing here to discuss the power of focus. We are now up to discussing “**wind**”-**of-earth**. As mentioned, the element of earth is the element of stability, establishing something in place. Wind is the very opposite of this - it is a moving element, and it causes things to move. When the wind moves something, it moves it out of its place. This is the antithesis to earth, which keeps something in place.

Man Is Comprised of Body/Earth and Soul/Wind

The Vilna Gaon writes that although all of Creation is composed of the four elements, the elements of fire and water belong to the spiritual realm, whereas the elements of wind and earth are of the physical realm. The element of water (pleasure) represents *Gan Eden*³, whereas the element of fire represents *Gehinnom*⁴. Heaven is a combination of fire and water⁵, and so are *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* both in Heaven. The elements of wind and earth, though, are elements of the physical world. Man, the root creation, was created from the air and the earth. Hashem fashioned man’s body from the earth, and formed the soul from “wind”, from “*ruach*”, for man is called a “*ruach memalelab*”, a “talking spirit”, who received a “*nishmas chaim*” (breath of life) from Hashem. Thus, man is comprised of the elements of air/wind and earth, whereas Heaven is a combination of the elements of fire and water.

Wind-of-Earth – Restrained Movement

“**Wind-of-earth**” is when there is restraint within movement. When the wind is moving too much – when it is moving more than is necessary - stability is lost, and the element of wind dominates the element of earth. But when the wind is moving as it should, it is stable, and here, the element of earth (stability) is dominating the wind. When earth overpowers the wind, the wind is weakened. However, when this happens, this may also cause opposition from the wind.

When wind is not moving as it should be and it is not being kept within its proper boundaries, when it is not finding its place, the potential of the wind is not being utilized, and there is a buildup of tension in the wind. Eventually, the result will be that the wind will come back in full force, in a way that totally knocks over the earth. That is the outline of how “wind-of-earth” works. Now we shall examine this further.

³ Paradise

⁴ Hell

⁵ The Hebrew word for “Heaven” is “*shomayim*”, which is a combination of the words “*aish*” (fire) and “*mayim*” (water).

Wind In The Soul – The Need For Movement and Noise

The three active elements are wind, water and fire. These three elements are discussed throughout *Sefer Yetzirah*, which is entirely based on the understanding of these three elements. The element of earth is not explained explicitly in *Sefer Yetzirah*, but some of the commentaries explain that it is also hinted to in the text of *Sefer Yetzirah*, albeit not openly.

The *Sefer Yetzirah* ends with a statement that “The element of water pulls, the element of fire illuminates, and the element of wind creates noise.” Wind therefore contains two aspects. There is the wind itself, and there is also the “noise” of the wind - which results from the movements of the wind. In terms of our soul, this will mean that our element of wind is the root of inner movement, and it is also the root of inner noise.

Applying this practically, it means that it is impossible for a person to stay too long in a place without moving. A person is always moving, and he always has a need for some movement. Sometimes a person actually moves from one place to place another, sometimes he will travel long distances and sometimes only short distances, and even when he is staying in place, he is always moving, because there are parts of his body which are moving slightly. We cannot restrain ourselves from moving, because we cannot exist without movement.

In addition to this, since wind also contains noise, we also cannot live in a state of total silence. We need some level of noise, some disturbance or challenge, taking place. Since wind is always in a state of movement, and the movements also cause noise, this will mean that just as a person always needs to be in movement, he will also need some noise.

If a person would have no noise at all and everything would be still, this is death. With death, the “wind” of a person, his soul, is returned to G-d; he loses his “wind”, and he also loses all noise. When people go to a place where everyone is completely quiet, they will often express: “The atmosphere here is dead. No one is talking here – it’s dead over here.” The dead do not move, and they also do not have any noise. In contrast, when a person is alive, he always needs some movement, and he always needs some noise. One cannot exist with no movement or no noise – he must always have a degree of both.

Here is an example of this. Even by the giving of the Torah, of which the Sages state that “A donkey did not bray, a bird did not chirp” – there was still some noise in Creation. What noise was taking place then? The Ten Commandments which Hashem spoke then. There is always some noise in Creation. If there is no noise in Creation, the Creation cannot survive!

Even when everything around you is quiet and your ears do not hear anything, there is always some noise which you are not aware of, because since the world is always moving, there is always noise that results from this. Movement and noise always go together.

Knowing Our Personal Needs For Movement and Quiet

We have described the concept – now let us see how this applies to us practically.

The general element of earth is the force of unmoving stability, whereas the element of wind is the force of movement. What, then, is “**wind-of-earth**”? It is when movement is stable. When one’s element of wind is balanced, he will have the right amount of movement he needs, and the right amount of noise he needs. If one has too much wind, he will have a strong amount of movement and noise. If his wind is weak, he will not have enough movement, and he won’t have the little amount of noise he does need.

Every person also needs a certain amount of quiet. When a person is experiencing too much quiet, he feels empty from this, and he will feel a need to move and act. He may indeed be missing the element of wind, and he will need to learn how to get it. Or, he may possess wind in his soul, but he is in a place which doesn't motivate him - so he will want to leave that place. If he would go to a different place which he finds more suitable, he wouldn't feel a need to move away from it.

This is a subtle matter to know. We can also say that **wind-of-earth** is the most subtle and delicate from all of the elements. From all of the four elements, the wind is the lightest element. It is so light that it cannot be grasped. Since wind is the most delicate of the elements, it contains much subtlety. Every person needs some movement, which is the element of wind. The only issue is how much movement a person really needs. It is very difficult to know this, because it is a subtle matter to determine, just like the subtle and delicate nature of the wind.

Most people will not identify with this concept at all, because they are involved throughout the day with many different activities, much more than their actual energies can handle, so they do not consider how much movement/action they really need, and where to stop. People today are working a crazy amount of hours every day from morning until evening, in order to earn livelihood, and they do not take into account how much action and movement their personality can really handle.

Instead of catering to the soul, people today are catering to the demands and needs of the body, of whatever the world demands of a person, and that is how most people determine how much they need to do. Not only is there a penalty placed on man to make effort in order to earn livelihood (as the *Chovos HaLevovos* says) – to exasperate things even more, people are pursuing all kinds of desires for this world, which are spiritually harmful.

In our inner world of the soul, the amount of movement that each person needs is not based upon how much you need to take care of when it comes to external, worldly affairs. Certainly a person needs to take care of what is absolutely necessary, and this will not be detrimental to the soul. But the basis of our living needs to be in accordance with the particular amount of movement that our soul needs. No two people are the same and no two people think exactly alike, and so too, every person has a different amount of movement which he needs. One needs to move based upon how much movement his soul really needs.

There is a general amount of movement which we all need, and there is also an individual need for movement, which depends on each person's particular soul. For example, there are some people who, by nature, are not able to sit and learn Torah all day. Their personality is that they need to move around more.

In children as well, we can see that they have different needs for movement. A person can have two daughters, and one of them is fine with cooking, baking, cleaning, and doing the laundry, without feeling a need to step out of the house for anything, while the other daughter is the one who needs to do all the shopping for the home, because she is more outgoing by nature, and it is difficult for her to stay for too long in one place.

Knowing Your Nature of Movement

One needs to determine: Is my need for movement usually within one place, or do I have a need to move more from one place to another? This is a fundamental part of our nature which we need to become clear about.

If one has a need to move from place to place and he forces himself to stay in one place for too long, his life will feel unbearable. Every person contains the four elements in his personality, with one element being the strongest, an element which is second-to-strongest, an element which is third-to-strongest, and the element which is fourth-to-strongest (his weakest element). But in certain instances, a person may have two elements which are each very

strong. If a person has a strong element of earth and his next-to-strongest element is wind, or vice versa, he suffers greatly, because he is living all the time with a strong inner contradiction.

The truth is that a person suffers whenever he has two strong elements which are of a contradictory nature to each other, and he will have a more complex kind of personality.

If a person's strongest element is earth and his second-to-strongest element is water, he will manage fine; of course, there are always difficulties which every person needs to deal with, but generally speaking, he will find it easy to manage his own personality. But if a person has a strong element of wind and an element of earth which is almost as strong as his wind, or vice versa, or if he has a strong element of fire with an element of water that is almost as strong as his fire, or vice versa— he will have strong inner contradictory forces, and he suffers inwardly from this. If such a person attains a balance in his soul, he will reach a high level of self-perfection, because he will be able to contain opposite forces within his primary personality.

In a large amount of cases where a person has two strong elements that are contradictory of each other, though, there is a lack of balance between the elements. This is applicable to one who has a dominant nature of **wind-of-earth**, which contains contradictory elements. Such people usually have a strong amount of wind with an almost equally strong element of earth, or vice versa, and they will have an inner contradiction in their very personality.

People like this feel as if they can never settle down in any place. When they sit down, they feel a need to move around, and when they move around, they want to take a break. It is like the suffering of "*Kaf HaKela*". Wherever they turn, they cannot find a place for their soul to settle in.

If Your Primary Element Is Earth, You Still Need Movement

Firstly, a person needs to figure out if his primary element is earth or wind. Here in this lesson, we will not discuss a person whose primary element is wind; we hope to address this in a later chapter, with the help of Hashem. Here we will discuss a person whose primary element is earth.

Even when a person's primary element is earth, he will still need movement. This is **wind-of-earth** – the need for movement even within one's primary element of earth/stability/non-movement. He has some need for movement, and he cannot stifle this need. We aren't even speaking about a need for physical movement, but of an internal need for movement.

Recognizing Your Different Kinds and Amounts of Movement

A person's inner work here is to learn how to recognize: (1) The different **kinds** of movement that he may need, as well as (2) The different **amounts** of movement he may need.

Giving Outlet To The Need For Movement

If a person is moving too much, this will deter his ability to focus. If he is moving too little, he will not be calm, because he is stifling his need for movement, and the element of wind within his soul will want to assert its need to move. His power of movement will remain in its potential state and it won't be utilized, and this will make him tense inside, and he may not even be aware of the reason that he isn't calm. In certain cases, this will cause a person's need for movement to explode outward, and he will feel an overwhelming need to move around a lot. It is because he has stifled his need for movement.

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If he has a strong element of earth, he will think that he must always stay in place and that he doesn't need to ever move. He will become stiff and stoic, not looking out of his four cubits, never budging from his own space from day until night. It might seem that his behavior is aligned with his personality of earth, which stays in place. While he is right in the general sense about this, he is ignoring a certain detail which he must ultimately deal with – his element of wind, his need for movement, which he must learn how to give outlet to.

Practically speaking, if a person's main element is earth, he must learn how to identify his "wind" – his need for movement. He will need to know what specific movements and actions he can do which will give outlet to his need for movement.

For example, some people need to fulfill their need for movement by pacing back and forth, within the four cubits of their space, when they are learning in the *Beis Midrash* (as if they are saying *Tefillas HaDerech* in the *Beis HaMidrash*). They need to move back and forth, from place to place. Others feel like they are moving just from moving their hands. Others get this feeling of movement just from turning their face to look at something.

Forced Body Language or Learned Habits

This is a subtle point to understand, because one needs to get to know the movements which he is used to doing – which may not be aligned with his true personality - as well as the movements which are truly aligned with his personality. Not every movement that a person does is aligned with his true personality – a movement may be forced or mechanical, and not natural. For example, when a person is playing with his *tzitzis* or moving it back and forth, either he is doing so calmly and naturally, or, he is doing it in a forced, unnatural manner. This is a subtle thing to identify.

Much of the movements that people do are not natural, and they are rather a result of nerves - even if they have long ago gotten used to these movements and body language. For example, a person may have the habit of stroking his eyebrows or his hair, and this is not necessarily his own natural body language, but a habit he picked up from others, which he has gotten used to.

Others may be doing so because it makes them feel like they are moving, and in such a case, it is giving outlet to their need for subtle movement. In others, it is an expression of stifled movement. The person may have a need for movement which is not being met, and it is being expressed outward through certain unnatural movements or body language, which the person eventually becomes used to doing habitually, after moving in this way so many times.

There are instances where a person becomes very used to certain kinds of habitual movements and it is hard for him to accept that this has become his own behavior. If the habits are disrespectful or annoying to others, he may cease these habits, out of *derech erez* for others, because it doesn't look nice. But in many instances, the person has gotten used to the habits so much that they have become his forced, mechanical movements which he does unconsciously. In this case, his true personality is trapped in a state of inner imprisonment, because his movements are forced and they aren't his own, and his soul is trapped within these habitual, unnatural movements.

As an example, some people have holes in their skin, because they have the habit of picking at their skin and removing it. They may be more consciously aware of their habits, or they may be less consciously aware of it. This is also problematic behavior with regards to the laws of Shabbos, and this is a separate discussion for itself.

This is an example of mechanical, unnatural movement that is strong, which gains a particular hold on a person. The movements are not his own – they are forced, and they have been learned and acquired through habit – a result

of his **nerves**, and not his true movements. Each person has his calmer kind of movements, each on his own level, as well as some movements that are simply being performed out of nerves.

In Review: Three Kinds of Unnatural Movement

To review, there are several kinds of movements a person performs:

- 1) There are movements done out of habits which were acquired in childhood, where a person is unconsciously imitating certain movements and body language he has observed in others, which he has deeply absorbed. Or, certain events in his life caused him to acquire a different and unnatural kind of body language. In either case, these are not the person's true movements.
- 2) There is also a kind of movement which a person performs simply because he has habitually gotten used to these movements when he needed to move, and he continues to perform these habitual movements, but only out of nerves. These are also not his true movements.
- 3) In others, all of their movements are being performed out of nerves. Their movements stem from inner tension. In this case, even when a person's movements are true to who he is, the subconscious motivations behind his movements are not. **This kind of person will have major difficulty with focusing/concentration.** He is full of inner tension. Deep down, he is not in an emotionally healthy state. His unnatural movements are a recurring pattern stemming purely from his nerves.

Identifying Your Movements

When a person does not have a quiet space in his soul to go to, he will have a hard time dealing with the issue we are describing here. Why? It will be very difficult for him to identify if his movements are his own, or if they are simply stemming from his nerves. In most scenarios, he won't be able to identify if his movements are authentic or not. He has become so habitually used to these movements amidst all of the stresses of life that he is found in, which has caused him to develop a certain unnatural body language, to the point that he does not know if his current body language is his own or not, and where these movements are stemming from.

Practically speaking, then, a person will need to find some quiet time (each person has some quiet time of the day on some level), and during this quiet time, one needs to analyze where his various bodily movements are stemming from.

The elementary stage of this, when studying any of your bodily movements, is to wonder: Do I need to move in this certain way, or is it an unnecessary movement? From amidst this quiet reflecting, one can begin to identify where his various movements are stemming from.

Inner calmness is necessary for this. From the inner calm, you can slowly begin to recognize the source of your movements. When you discover your unnatural body movements, practically speaking, the first step is now to simply become **aware that these movements exist**, and then, the next step is to become **aware where your movements are stemming from**.

In the first step, you are becoming aware of these movements in the first place. Often you can tell a person that he just did a certain thing or that he moved himself, and he denies it: “I did this? I really moved in that way?” He is totally unaware of certain movements. A person may have a reflex to something and he is not aware that his body physically reacted to something. When someone points it out to him, that is when he may finally discover his own habits. Thus, the first step is for one to simply become aware of his movements.

After that, a person needs to find quiet time and have some inner calm, to see if he is currently acting out these movements. In more extreme cases, a person may discover that there may be certain movements he performs which have become a part of his nature, and that he has almost no control of these movements, because he is doing them unconsciously.

In summation, when you have quiet time to have calm reflection, the first step is to become aware of your various bodily movements, and after that, to become aware of the reason and motivation behind these movements.

Countering Your Unnatural Body Movements

An idea that might help for this is to take half a minute, or a minute or two, in which you don't do those movements. Then you can slowly become aware of the reason that is causing them. This is but a small, external kind of advice.

The more inner advice, however, is to recognize how the movements are stemming from issues in the soul. The unnatural movements are an external expression of the lack of order in the soul – meaning that your **inner movements of the soul** are not moving correctly. The unnatural external movements are but a product of issues in the inner movements of the soul.

The root way to counter this issue is to begin to move in a more genuine way, in the way that is true to who you are, depending on the situation at hand. When you slowly get used to performing the movements which are more natural to you and which are the necessary kinds of movement which you need, your soul gets its proper need for movement, and then it is calmed.

Lack of Inner Calm Prevents Focus/Concentration

Most people are not calm inside themselves as they are amidst their various bodily movements, and this is because the movements which they are doing are not true to who they are. In most cases, a person is moving his body too much, or he is not moving it as much as he needs to. As a result, the movements are not aligned with the soul's needs. There is a lack of balance between the elements of wind (movement) and earth (non-movement), and the result is a soul that is not calm.

When that is the case, a person cannot concentrate and focus on anything. Anyone can clearly identify with this – when you are very calm, you can focus very well, and when you do not feel calm inside, it is difficult to focus. A large amount of issues with concentration and focus stem from a general lack of inner calm in the person. (To emphasize, this is a reason for **some** of the issues with concentration - **not** all of them): When one is performing certain bodily movements which are not true to who he is, to his personal soul.

Finding Enjoyable, Calming Movements

Therefore, a person should identify movements he **enjoys**, and which are also **calming** to him. These should not be movements which cause him to be stressed in any way, even if he enjoys doing them. After one finds what those movements are, he should make sure to **practice** them.

Each person can find different movements which calm them. Some people are calmed by walking from one place to another, whereas others become stressed by this. It is also a matter which is subject to change, depending on the particular time and situation a person is in. As a person gets used to this, he slowly acquires awareness of which movements are calming to him.

To give some examples, one person may be calmed by moving his arm in a certain manner, while another person finds it calming to move his arm in a totally different manner. Another is calmed by sitting in a certain position, and another person finds it calming to sit in a completely different position. There are all kinds of bodily movements, whether through the feet, hands, face, or the rest of the body's movements, which a person can find enjoyable to do. By practicing them, one slowly acquires these enjoyable movements.

This is the first step. We have not yet discussed how much movement one needs to do – that will be the next step. The first step is to get used to movements which you find enjoyable to do. This will bring some level of change to your body language. How much change it will bring, will depend on the particular situation.

The mere act of practicing these movements which you find calming can bring an overhaul to the body's habitual movements, which eventually influences the state of the soul. Examples may include rubbing the forehead back and forth, lowering the face forward or backward, etc. There are all kinds of movements – it is a wisdom and a work to be learned.

An Observation Into the Life of the Chazon Ish

Here is an extreme example of this concept [but which brings out the point very well]: The Chazon Ish would often lie under a blanket [on a bed], in order to attain a deep level of concentration for learning Torah.

Any normal person, if he would be told that someone practices this, would think that the person must be mentally ill. But if he would hear that the Chazon Ish practiced it, he would nullify his thinking, in deference to the greatness of the Chazon Ish. If we are not talking about the Chazon Ish, though, and instead we are talking about the average, normal person, no one would even fathom of doing such a thing.

Even if someone would try it, he would probably fall asleep as soon as he is underneath the blanket. So in practice, this is not something you should try. But what we can learn from this is that one may have to go to very far lengths in order to do certain movements which he finds calming. I am not suggesting that you should place a blanket over your head while you are in the *beis midrash*. (There are some people who do this...!) The idea is that you should be open to trying certain movements which you find calming.

The Chazon Ish was asked about why he practiced this. He said that it was because when his eyes open, all of the visual stimuli he is observing are scattering his thoughts. When he is underneath the blanket, he does not see anything, which silences all of the stimuli around him, and his mind can then be totally focused on what he is thinking about. This is a deep point, and any person should be able to try it on his own level and see if he is gaining from it.

Calmly Becoming Aware of Your Movement Needs

The above example was of a more extreme nature, and it was chosen intentionally [in order to bring out the idea], but one can also find more common kinds of movements which he finds calming. For example, one might find that when he places his hands on his forehead, he is able to concentrate better. There are other examples as well, of common movements which one can find relaxing and which make it conducive for focused thinking. The point is to get used to these calming movements, and to thereby identify movements which you find suitable for you to do.

After getting used to practicing these movements, you will notice that these movements calm you. Then, from your state of calmness, you can then better recognize how much of these movements you need. It is a cycle: You get used to certain movements which calm you, and after you become calmed from those movements, you can now better recognize which movements are suitable for you to do, as well as how much of these movements you need.

Eventually, you can reach a point where you know when to stop in the middle of the movement, because you know that you have given outlet to your need for movement and you don't need any more. To an observer, it might look like you have become overtaken by a new thought and that you are no longer thinking about what you were thinking about before. But if one is truly connected to his inner state, he will know how to respond to his need for movement when he feels it, and, vice versa - he will stop his movements as soon as he realizes that he is no longer enjoying the movement or if he feels disturbed by it.

Directing The Soul's Movements

This all takes place at a rapid pace. It can be compared to the awareness that a person has when he is driving a car down the highway. He is rapidly making all kinds of decisions, using his judgment of when he should switch lanes, what he is allowed to do and what he is not allowed to do, etc. Just like a person driving a car can make so many fast decisions like this, so can a person direct his own soul at a rapid pace.

When you are driving a car, you need to be very focused, aware of the car on the right and the car on the left, etc. There is constant movement, and you need to be aware of it, so your mind needs to be very connected to the situation at hand.

There are people who become very stressed when they are driving, and sometimes even a passenger in a car will become very anxious when the car slows down too quickly. Many times, this is due to the general soul makeup of the person, or it may stem from feeling stressed from driving or from simply being in a car. Some are inwardly anxious all the time, and others simply become nervous from being in a car.

Others, though, find driving to be calming – it feels no different to them than when lying on a bed. The highway and the car doesn't jolt them from their calmness at all. One person may become anxious from driving, even yelling sometimes, whereas another person is completely calmed from the very same situation. Just as we can imagine that a person may drive a car for several hours straight and he remains calm the whole time, with the mental composure to control all of his movements, so can a person calmly guide his own soul, directing all of its movements, with the same precision.

Just as with driving a car, where there can be mistakes and accidents, so can it happen that a person makes mistakes sometimes with his soul's movements. However, in a car accident, the results can be fatal, G-d forbid. But when it comes to directing the movements of the soul, even if a person makes mistakes sometimes, he can simply steer his soul in the opposite direction and move on.

A person can acquire a general state of inner calm (the element of earth). He will have some need for movement, and he will give outlet to his need for movement, moving as much as needs. He may make mistakes sometimes and move too much, but he can quickly correct himself and cease the movements, reverting back to his normal need for movement. He can acquire an awareness of which movements are productive for him, as well as which movements are too intense or otherwise detrimental to him.

An Observation Into The Life of Rav Shimshon Pincus zt"l

Earlier, we mentioned that the Chazon Ish would be calmed through the movement of laying underneath a blanket, where he would contract his entire body and mind into one space. There is also an opposite kind of movement than this, which may also calm a person; the following is also an extreme example of it.

If you have ever read about the life of Rav Shimshon Pincus zt"l, you can notice that he spent a large part of his life traveling in a car. He lived in the southern part of Israel and he would often travel to the north, and back and forth. In order to do *chessed*, he would often give rides to people on Erev Shabbos after the last bus had left, and he would drive to the bus stop to pick up anyone who had missed the last bus. He lived in Ofakim, so he would take anyone who needed a ride to Ofakim. However, it was not limited only to people who needed rides to Ofakim. If someone needed a ride to Jerusalem or to Bnei Brak, he took them there also.

Simply speaking, we can say that this was an act of *chessed*. But any sensible person knows that Rav Pincus was a very levelheaded person. If Rav Pincus wanted to simply do *chessed*, he could have found many other ways to do *chessed*. Why did he specifically do *chessed* for people by giving rides for those who needed to travel long distances? There is a story elsewhere where Rav Pincus said about himself that he was once learning with a *chavrusa*, and when he came across a difficult question which was bothering him, he told his *chavrusa* that he needs to think about it - by taking a trip in his car. He explained that when he drives a car, he feels like he is moving, and this calms his soul, and then his mind can think even more clearly than when he is sitting in the *beis midrash*.

This was also the way he lived his life in general. Once he came to deliver a *shiur*, and he arrived a bit early. He was asked to come inside the building so that the people there could greet him, but he didn't want to. Then they said to him that he can at least come into the *beis midrash* and learn there for a few minutes, until the time of the *shiur*. He said, "No, I can also learn outside."

Without taking apart all of the details of this story, we can see here that there was a certain way of life which he lived. He realized that his soul had a particular need for movement, by being in a car on the road. Perhaps he was calmed from the actual movement, or perhaps it was because he found it calming to look at scenery, and other subtle factors. Most people, understandably, would not feel that this kind of movement calms their mind.

The Chazon Ish attained a calm mind in the exact opposite manner than the above, by climbing into a bed, placing a blanket on top of him, and shutting out all light. That was how he acquired his power of focus. Rav Pincus, however, took an opposite approach. He had a different soul makeup, and it was of a more stormy nature. He attained focus in his mind in the exact opposite manner, by placing himself in a state of movement and driving long distances with his car, which he found calming for his mind.

The Idea To Take From This

Of course, life is complicated, and it is not realistic to implement such a practice. If a child is having a hard time concentrating in class, and he tells his teacher that he wants to get onto a bus and ride it for a half hour so that he can settle his mind, we cannot agree to the child's request.

We cannot say what the solution will be in every possible situation. But we need to understand the very concept behind these practices mentioned, and we should try to implement the concept as much as we possibly can, within the reality we are in. We need to open our minds to see the possibilities of different kinds of movements, which may be far-fetched, but which are ultimately beneficial for us to practice.

If the average person would need to calm his mind by getting into a car and driving down a fast highway, and in this way he is able to think more clearly and learn Torah better – if he were to do this, we would be quick to say that he is acting like an ignoramus. Certainly, we are not recommending that most people do this. It would be destructive behavior. A person would have to have an unusual ability of mental composure and focus in order to do this, from the moment he leaves the *beis midrash* and afterwards, when he is the midst of driving.

Only individuals can do this; we only mentioned the example of driving in order to illustrate the concept, and we do not mean that it should be practiced. We cannot live in such a way. But we do need to acquire an inner expansiveness, an openness, to see how we can provide ourselves with movements that calm the mind.

Building a Life of High-Quality Focus

When one absorbs this concept and he is increasingly becoming aware of the movements which he needs – the specific movements which he finds calming, as well as the amount of how much of these movements he needs – he will become calmer from this, and in turn, he will recognize better what his true needs for movements are. When living in such a way, a person will live a lifestyle of deep focus/concentration. It is a long process to get there, as we have mentioned here, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

This will not solve major issues with concentration, however. In this chapter, we explained the power of focus which we can draw from our soul's **wind-of-earth**, which is a more basic power of focus. Understandably, if a person has major issues with focusing and concentrating, he may also be helped by what we have explained in this chapter, but that is not the purpose of this lesson. Here, the purpose is how to build our life correctly from the start. From there, we can also solve issues; but the actual purpose of this lesson is how we can build a life in which we have a high-level quality of focus to begin with.

In summation, a large amount of problems with concentration/focus stem from improper movements, which are not aligned with a person's particular soul and needs. This was always true, but in our generation, it is especially applicable.

The Reality In Our Generation

As an example, an *avreich* who learns in a *Kolel* in Jerusalem may have to take a bus from where he lives, which is far out, in order to get to the central bus stop in Jerusalem. What is the bus like? If it's not the seventh level of *Gehinnom*, it's only the sixth level. Everything is jumping, everyone is pushing into each other, people are getting off and coming on, the men are here and the women are there, and there are all kinds of noises, and the sounds coming from phones. By the time our *avreich* arrives at his morning *Kolel*, he has gone through a half hour or an hour of movements that are really unbearable to his soul, way more than what he is meant to handle.

Hashem has placed us into this world, with the reality that it entails, and we have to endure it. But as much we can, we need to try to move in a way that is aligned with our soul's needs for movement, relatively speaking, and it is impossible to do it perfectly.

In Conclusion

The more a person's movements are aligned with the particular needs for movement which his own soul needs – with emphasis on the needs of his particular soul, and not merely on the general need of the soul for movement – he will merit, to some degree and on his own level, a calm state which allows him to have true focus.

04 | INTERRUPTIONS

“Fire-of-Earth” – Suddenly “Spacing Out”

With *siyata d’shmaya*, we will continue here to learn about the power of focus.⁶ Now we will discuss issues with concentration/focus related to “**fire**”-of-earth.

The element of earth is naturally stable and permanent. In contrast, the element of fire is a jumpy element. The nature of fire is that it does not stay where it is – it jumps and skips from its place. Earth in the soul is the nature to be firmly established in place, to be orderly and structured, step after step. The nature of fire in the soul, by contrast, is to jump and skip between one step and another, with no orderly structure.

What is the relationship between the power of focus and “**fire-of-earth**”? All people experience it, and many times. A person is in middle of thinking about something, and suddenly, a different thought pops in.

Two Reasons Why A Person Keeps Spacing Out – Lack of Interest Or Strong Imagination

In some cases, a person was not really that interested in thinking about whatever he had been thinking about – either it wasn’t intellectually stimulating enough for him, or he wasn’t emotionally drawn into the thought – so naturally, he will “space out” from these uninteresting thoughts, and he will begin to think about others. Generally, when a person feels connected to whatever he is involved with, his thoughts about it will be focused and his mind won’t wander as much. By contrast, **the less he is connected with what he is doing or thinking**, the weaker his focus will be on it.

Another scenario of when this happens is when a person has a **strong imagination**. A person may have a strong imagination for any of the following reasons: (1) Either his intellectual faculties are weak, which in turn causes his imaginative faculty to be more active; (2) Or, he is being lazy and he doesn’t want to think that much, which causes his intellect to shut down and instead his imagination takes over.

Either of these factors can cause the imagination to dominate. When a person’s imagination is strongly active, naturally, his mind will skip from one thought to another. The imagination will imagine something and then it will imagine another thing, and then another thing, and the mind becomes jumpy from this, skipping from one topic to another.

So there are two general issues which cause a person to “space out” in his thoughts and to get involved with other thoughts: Either he is not that connected to what he is involved with, which will cause his mind to wander, or, because he has a strongly active imagination, which causes the mind to be jumpy.

Fire-of-Earth: Temporarily Spacing Out

⁶ In Hebrew, focus\concentration is referred to as “*ricuz*”, or “*his-rak-zut*”.

In this chapter, however, we will deal with a subtler issue. We will be discussing a person who is indeed connected to what he is doing, and who is also not dominated by a strong imagination. Even so, he may have a problem of spacing out and becoming mentally involved with other thoughts. This is **fire-of-earth**.

If the thoughts would be coming from the general element of fire, the thoughts would be very intense, similar to the boiling hot nature of the fire. In this scenario, a person is totally spaced out from what he is involved with, and his thoughts become completely involved in something else. An example of this would be a person who is given one hour to learn a certain page of *Gemara*, and within that hour, he spaces out for almost the entire hour, thinking about other things. The little bit of thinking that he spent on the page of the *Gemara* in front of him is “nullified to the majority” of the time, which was spent on other thoughts.

In many cases, though, a person is indeed thinking about what he is involved with and he feels connected to it, for the most part, and even so, there can be sudden thoughts that fall into his head, which steer away his focus. This generally happens to every person. A person is involved with something and he is thinking about it, and suddenly he is thinking about something else. His thoughts have “flown” elsewhere. This temporary “spacing out” in his thoughts is essentially the impediment to focus which we are discussing in this chapter: **fire-of-earth**.

With **fire-of-earth**, there is certain stability (earth) as well as mental jumpiness (fire). The person stays attached to what he is doing and his mind is not spacing out the entire time (unlike the scenarios listed earlier). At the same time, there is also an element of fire here which causes the person’s thoughts to jump and skip to different topics. The person digresses from what he is in middle of involved with, getting involved with different activities or thoughts that have no connection to what he was in middle of doing or thinking. His thoughts suddenly take a different direction.

If a person’s fire is stronger than the earth in him, this sudden turn of thoughts will happen more often, and the amount of spacing out will also last longer. If one’s earth is stronger than his fire, he will space out less, and even when does space out, it will last for a lesser amount of time. Almost anyone, without exception, can relate to this phenomenon where the mind suddenly wanders to think about something else.

The Desired State: Consistent Thought

When the thoughts wander, the first problem that this causes, which is simple to understand, is that the person is now wasting his time. Usually, when a person begins to space out, it is not about a Torah thought or any thought related to inner *avodah* (service). It is usually a thought about something mundane and worldly.

However, there is also a more inner problem that results from spacing out.

The entire secret of inner success in life is the ability of consistency. In the words of a letter of the Chazon Ish: “The secret to holiness, is consistency.” The power of consistency can be manifest in action, in speech (speaking constantly of the words of Torah), and in the power of thought. **Consistent thought**, with most people, is almost non-existent. The Ramchal, in the final chapter of *Mesillas Yeshtarim* which discusses the level of *kedushah* (holiness), describes *kedushah* as “A person who does not stop thinking about the existence of the Blessed Creator, and of his service to Him.” The Ramchal explains that this ability really cannot be reached through human nature, for the nature of the human mind is that it tends to think about other things. In order to remain in a state of constant connection to the Creator, the Ramchal says that one can only reach this level as a “gift” [from Heaven]. It is not reached through our human faculties – it is a [Heavenly] “gift”.

When one receives this “gift”, he has a constant **mental** connection to the Creator. (A separate matter is what exactly a person should constantly be connected to – either to the Creator, or to the Torah). At this level, a person’s mind never wanders to other topics.

This is a state of constant mental connection, and it is the perfected level of **fire-of-earth**. When one’s element of earth is completely rectified, he rises from the lowliness of the earth (specifically, **earth-of-earth**) and he reaches the ultimate level of stability and permanence – constant connection to that which is meaningful – which is the perfected state of the element of earth. This is the absolute level of focus and, as the Ramchal says, a person can only receive it as a “gift” from Heaven.

The simple understanding of why this level is a “gift” is because a human being is limited, whereas the Creator is unlimited, a human being cannot reach this level of constant mental connection on his own, but by attaching himself to thoughts about the Creator, he receives the “gift” from Heaven to have the constant mental connection.

While this is true, there is also a deeper understanding of this. It is beyond human ability to have constant thought, where the mind never wanders, because the jumpy nature of **fire-of-earth** prevents a person from remaining focused all the time on one thought. Although there is an aspect of permanence here which comes from the element of earth, the fire is also a factor here, which causes the thoughts to jump and skip between one topic and another.

Spacing Out & Wasting Time – A Loss of Stability

Thus, when a person sometimes spaces out and he begins to think about other things, not only does this cause him to waste time, but there is something even worse – it causes a person to lose his sense of stability and permanence. The more superficial that a person is, the more he lives in the realm of action and speech. The more inner that a person is, he lives more in the world of thought and will. He will also take care of what he needs to and he will speak when he has to, but he will mainly be involved with his thoughts. The Zohar says, “*adam da machshavah*” - “A person is thought.” A person who lives inwardly is living in the inner world of thought. On a more subtle level, the root of thought is the subconscious will, which is motivating the thoughts.

An inner kind of life is when a person is connected, on a stable and consistent basis, to his inner world. The more internal that a person becomes, the more inner his thoughts will be. However, when he spaces out every so often, his time is wasted, he stops being consistent in what he is doing, and he is also removed from his own inner world. This is the ruination caused by **fire-of-earth**.

Most people, after they space out and they begin to think about all kinds of thoughts about the world, also have a hard time when trying to return inward. As for the level of consistent thought which we mentioned above, this is too difficult for most people to reach, because it is a “gift” from Heaven. The first issue caused by spacing out – wasting time – is a problem that all people can relate to, because they can see that they lose time from spacing out. The second issue caused by spacing out - losing consistency – will only bother a few individuals, who would be disturbed by the loss of consistency and who would be willing to work on this. Most others, however, would not be able to deal with this issue. The issue of wasting time, which is the most common issue that people can relate to, is when a person leaves his inwardness and he turns outward.

Spacing Out Causes A Person To Turn Outward

Most people have more of a connection to their outside, superficial layer of life, in comparison to the inner layer of their life. There are also some people who, *Rachmana Litzlan* (may G-d have mercy on them) have almost no inner level to their existence – their inner state is completely desolate. Here, though, we will address those who do have an inner world of their own, and who realize that the inner world is much cleaner and purer than the world on the outside.

The inner work here, for such a person, is to realize that spacing out and thinking about various worldly thoughts will cause a person to leave his own inner world, placing him on the world outside.

Compare this to a person who wishes to guard his eyes from seeing anything improper. If he is in his house, his eyes will not see anything improper. But if he goes to the window and he looks at the streets, and certainly if he sticks his head out the window and he looks even further, he will see whatever he sees – everything that is taking place in the streets. In the same vein, when a person is found in his own inner world, he is protected; he is in his own private space, his own “four cubits of *halachah*”, but when his mind begins to wander and think about other things, he opens himself to the rest of the world, with all of the improper thoughts that are found in it.

As an example, we are all familiar with what happens when people sleep and they have dreams. The imagination roams free and the person may think about anything in the world. This is a separate issue which we will not discuss here, but it is also particularly relevant to our current discussion: when a person opens up his mind to think about the world, **he loses his ability to be focused.**

How Technology & Connection To The Media Impairs Focus

A fundamental example of this is the use of media today, which people have access to through various means of technology. Besides for all of the worst levels of spiritually harmful material that it brings a person to, it presents a major issue to a person’s entire power of focus and concentration.

It used to be that a person would sit in his house and his eyes were very limited in what they could see. He saw whatever was in his house, and that was it. In the beginning stages of technology, a person could now become connected with other people in the world, leaving behind his own life in order to become involved with others’. The technology of today, though, allows a person to keep reading and absorbing various bits of information, one after the other.

All of the material found in the world today is collected into one place, and the person views all of it as he scrolls down the screen. Every moment, the person’s mind is jumping from one topic to another – every moment, his mind can jump anywhere, all over the world. **This is a *total* antithesis to a person’s power of focus.**

In the past, if a person wanted to read a certain topic or about something happening far away, he would open a book and do some research, until he felt fairly educated about the subject. Today, even if a person is not actually researching information at every given moment, he can access the entire world in one moment, reading all information available on every possible topic and anything taking place in the world.

Where does this place his soul? It spreads apart the soul and scatters it all over the place. Even when a person is trying to think about something related to his own inner world, he can still be found on the outside world, once he opens his mind to think about everything else taking place in the world. The jumpy nature of his **fire-of-earth** can turn his mind all over the place.

In previous generations, the nature of **fire-of-earth** was always the part in a person which causes a person to connect outward to the rest of the world (back then, the world was far purer than it is today), and to leave his own inner space, which also meant wasted time and a loss of stability. But in our current times, a person's **fire-of-earth** has far more negative implications, because today a person has a far wider range of access to the entire world. It causes an almost total loss of self-control, an endless amount of information pouring into the mind – as endless as all of the stars in the galaxy.

We need to understand that in recent years, people are growing up with a lifestyle which is the total opposite of the very concept of the ability to have any inner focus. The entire way of living today has become a total contradiction to an inner kind of life (which we have been trying to explain in this chapter).

The more a person can disconnect himself from all that goes on outside in the world, the less of a problem this will be. This does not only mean that a person must avoid any involvement with [reading about] heresy, and the three cardinal sins, and all other inappropriate material that exists today – that's a separate topic. One who allows himself to become involved with such sins is, simply speaking, a wicked individual. Rather, here we are referring to the need of forming a disconnection from subtler forms of connection to the world.

If anyone wishes to live genuinely today, he must disconnect himself from what's going on in the world today. Even for those who must be connected to the world today in order to take care of themselves, i.e. those who go to work in order to make a living (this is actually not so simple, and it merits a discussion for itself, but we won't get into that here), this should only be limited to the actual time of the day which demands it, but otherwise, for the rest of the day, a person should feel that he has nothing to do with it!

Without this attitude – which is what happens to most people – a person will fall into the simple reality of our times, irrelevant of what we have said here about **fire-of-earth** – in which one is constantly open to the entire world and all that takes place in it. When that is the case, nothing that we said here will be of help to them.

In the lives of most people, **fire-of-earth** does not play that much of a dominant role. This is not due to a person's nature, but due to the simple reality in our times. The very fact that a person today can be open to the entire world and all that goes in it, and he immediately connects to the news and media as soon as he is a bit bored or just plain curious – as soon as he does this, he has lost his entire power of focus.

Thus, the first step [to gain the power of focus] is to disconnect from the world, completely. Even in situations when a person does have to be involved with the world (which needs serious contemplation, because not always is there a genuine need to be involved with it, even when it seems like there is), one needs to limit this to the actual time in which he needs to be involved with the world, but for the rest of the day, one must not allow himself to be open to the world at every moment.

Here is a simple example. Even a cellphone, which a person likes to keep checking and answering, does not have to always be on every moment.

There are some people who are on a very high level of *chessed*, and such people need to have their phones on all the time so that they can always do *chessed* at every possible opportunity. Understandably, however, this is not the case with most people.

In most cases where people are answering their cellphones at every moment, in middle of *davening* and in middle of learning, what does it stem from? **It really stems from lack of inner calm and inner quiet, as well as a lack of being focused.** Why would a person answer absolutely anyone who gives him a buzz on his cellphone? Even if he

doesn't immediately answer, he will look to see who called him and wonder if he should pick up or not. In either case, he is constantly allowing himself to be open to the entire world.

A person can be alone in his house, yet he can be connected to the entire world [via the means of technology]. Although it's better to be alone in his house than to be in the street, his constant involvement with the world will keep chipping away at his power to focus. **If he has any capability in his house that can connect to the wide expanse of the media today, he is totally uprooted from any focus.** Even if he is less connected with the world [he doesn't have access to internet and media] and he is simply answering his phone all the time to anyone who contacts him, this is still not a way to live.

We should understand that even when a person turns off his phone by *davening* and the like (this is commendable, and it is an achievement, *Baruch Hashem*, because not everyone merits to do even this), what happens when a person has finished *davening*? He immediately checks his phone to see whatever he has missed. On a "soul level", it didn't help that much that he shut off his phone for *davening*, because his soul is still connected to the rest of the world.

Baruch Hashem, he has reached the understanding that he shouldn't have his phone when he is in Hashem's place, and if only everyone would even reach this level. But he still hasn't yet disconnected his soul from the world. His soul is still found in the outside world! He has a bit of *derech erez* (respectable manners) for the honor of Hashem, he has respect for the *beis midrash*, respect for the congregation, and respect for the *sefer Torah* – but, for all practical purposes, he has not disconnected his soul from the outside environment of the world. Deep down, he still feels connected with the rest of the world, even as his phone is off – and he has only temporarily paused from it.

Is this better than nothing? Of course it is. But it will still not have much of a positive effect on his soul.

Step 1 – Quiet Time Every Day of Disconnecting from the World

Where should we start, in order to fix these issues?

If the situation today would be like how it was 20 years ago and earlier, there would be a lot more we should really work on, in order to fix these issues. But what can we do, in the current reality which we live in today, in which it is impossible to make such drastic changes? In most people today, the nature of **fire-of-earth** has simply undergone a change [due to the pervasive environment which we live in today]. The very least that a person should do about it is to set aside some time every day, in which he completely cuts himself off from the rest of the world. He should simply disconnect.

In our generation, there is a very common occurrence of those who keep their phones on within direct reach of their beds, so that they can always be able to answer it as soon as it rings. A person today can be working in Israel and in the Israeli time zone, and when he is done work, he is now working in another country's time zone. It is common today that a person simply "has no time". When a person lives like this, he loses the bare minimum of focus which he needs.

The basic idea which a person needs is to have certain time of the day in which he is simply cut off from the world. This is **besides** for the time in which you are sleeping, or *davening*, or learning Torah.

(If only we could say that there's a person today who never answers his phone while he is in the middle of learning, or when in middle of a *shiur*. When a person is sitting by a *shiur* and his phone goes off, everyone is disturbed by it. Then the person even has the audacity to answer his phone in middle of the *shiur*, disturbing the Torah learning of everyone around him – and in his mind, it's as if everyone else has dropped dead. If we wouldn't see it with our own eyes, we wouldn't believe that there's such a thing, but this is the simple reality today - nothing new. Before we even consider the issue of respecting the *beis midrash* and respecting other people, the whole lifestyle is just crazy and totally upside-down.)

Every person needs some time of the day in which he is disconnected from the world. And the truth is that this idea is only scratching the surface of the real improvement that needs to be made when it comes to these issues. The truth requires much more than this. But this is the bare minimum of what any person needs to do today: to have some quiet time each day, of disconnecting from the rest of the world. This is not a time to go to sleep, *daven*, or learn Torah. It is a time in which you simply have quiet, in order to get used to a life without connection to the rest of the world.

Without this quiet time each day, there's nothing else a person can do in order to fix the issues with focus that stem from **fire-of-earth**. The nature of **fire-of-earth** is the root of jumpiness in the mind which happens every so often, where the thoughts in the mind simply jump to thinking about other thoughts. But as we have elaborated upon here, in our current times, this problem doesn't happen 'every so often' – rather, it has become the normal situation for a person's soul, to be generally unfocused. When that is the case, it is most difficult for a person to attain the subtlety described in this lesson.

Step 2 – Feeling Connected To What You Are Doing

As explained, **fire-of-earth** is the nature of subtle jumpiness in the mind between different thoughts.

As mentioned earlier, the more that a person focuses on whatever he is involved with - by **enjoying** what he is doing – the less his mind will jump to different thoughts. Thus, the first step is that in whatever you are doing, you need to have a desire for what you are doing.

Let's consider the following example. A person comes to a *shiur* where he can hear a Torah lesson. Why did he come to the *shiur*? Perhaps he came in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of learning Torah. He is doing so in order to fulfill his obligation of having fixed times for Torah study. But does he feel connected to his Torah learning? It is possible that he always makes sure to complete the *Daf HaYomi* by the end of the day, *Baruch Hashem*. If he is asked a few questions on what he has learned that day, it's possible that he doesn't know any of the answers. Still, at least he heard words of Torah, and he went to the *beis midrash*, and he will be rewarded for it. When he finishes his learning, he continues with the rest of his day.

A person cannot be genuinely focused on his Torah learning, when he lives like this. He is not really involved in his own Torah learning; he is not connected to it.

There is a fundamental rule for all of life, and to describe it briefly: **In whatever you are doing** (except for the things that come up which you simply need to take care of), **you need to feel connected to it!**

A person might be learning Torah but he is not that connected to his learning. A person might be teaching Torah to others, and he is not that connected to what he does. To counter this, the least a person can do is to try to do an act of *chessed* for others and to feel connected to this act of kindness. In general, people need to feel inwardly

connected to what they are doing, and to act out of a place of inner connection to what they do. The more that a person practices this, the more his soul will indeed connect to that which he does.

This is the basic step which is needed, in order for a person to attain the power of focus.

Step 3a- Identifying Where Your Thoughts Wander To

Even more so, when there is jumpiness in the mind, there are two factors which one needs to learn to identify.

The first thing to identify is: **Where do your thoughts wander to?** Understandably, sometimes the thoughts wander to one place, and at other times, the thoughts wander to a different area, and at another time, to something else. One should therefore take a pen and paper and write down where his thoughts wander to. After practicing this for 20 times and much more, you should be able to slowly identify where your thoughts wander to. Of course, there can be many different possibilities. But you can at least become familiar with the kinds of thoughts that your mind generally wanders to.

Generally, a person's thoughts will wander to one of the following two kinds of thoughts:

- 1) **A kind of thought related to one's external environment**, due to something that a person saw, or heard, etc. Dealing with this issue will depend on how much one can control his thoughts when encountering any external stimuli. (If one is on a higher spiritual level, he can also train himself not to look at things in his surroundings, which cause his mind to wander).
- 2) In most cases, however, **a person's mind wanders due to deep desires and wishes that he has**. The deep desires of a person can be expressed on a subconscious level when his mind wanders to think about those areas. (If the thought is not related to a particularly strong desire that he has, it can simply be because he is bothered by something, such as something about his bank account, etc.)

So the first thing to identify is where the thoughts generally wander to.

Step 3b-3c - Identifying The Cause For the Transition of the Thoughts

The second thing one needs to identify, when his mind wanders, is to see: **(A) Where exactly is my mind right now?** After this, there is a third thing to identify: **(B) What caused the original thought to diverge into this new thought?**

We will explain briefly how this works. When you identify where your thoughts have gone, generally, it is either due to an external factor in the environment, such as something you have seen or heard, or, it is due to some activity you are involved with, which you have a desire for. If you see that your mind began to wander to think about something which you have a particular desire for, the inner work here is to uproot those desires (to know how to do this requires its own discussion).

Dealing With the Root vs. Dealing With the Symptoms

As long as a person has not yet uprooted his deep desires that are causing him to space out, he cannot deal with the issue of spacing out, because he hasn't yet dealt with the root of the issue. The fact that his mind spaces out is not the root of the issue - it is just the result. We must deal with the root reason that is causing the mind to veer off track: the deep desires and wishes of a person.

When people have difficulties with focus and concentration, they may take pills. What can this be compared to? It's like a person who is addicted to candy, so we tie him down to his bed, so that he won't be able to move and get any candy. True, we have prevented him from getting to the candy, but we haven't dealt with the root of the issue.

It's the same when we want to deal with the issue of spacing out. It won't be enough if we simply identify where the thoughts have wandered to. That is but a result of the issue. What we mainly need to figure out is: what the deep desires and wishes in the person are. We first need to figure out the main reason which is causing the mind to space out, and only then can we attempt to deal with the issue of spacing out.

The Relationship Between The Will and The Thoughts

Anyone can discover that this is the simple reason which causes his mind to sometimes space out and think about various other thoughts: His mind will wander to think about something he deeply desires.

The *Gemara* (in Tractate Succah) says that the feet will naturally take a person to where he wants to go. On a deeper level, the same can be said of the will, which steers the thoughts. Thoughts are called a "flying bird", but they are powered by the will. The thoughts will therefore "fly" to the desires of the will.

That is why a major part in dealing with issues of focus is to discover what a person wants. When a person wants something badly, that is what causes his mind to wander and to think about those things. Therefore, the more a person discovers what he wants, the more precise his thought process will become - his mind will 'stay in place' more.

So, when we want to improve on focus and concentration, a large part of the process involves getting in touch with the deep desires contained in our will. This is a way to deal with the issue at its root. It is particularly relevant to the issues with focus that stem from **fire-of-earth**, which is a more subtle kind of losing focus, but it is also true in general about all issues with focus.

Returning The Thoughts After Spacing Out

We also explained that a person needs to identify where his thoughts have wandered to. Let's explain more about this now.

When the mind wanders to think about other thoughts, it is really a way of disconnecting from where you are. But if you learn to identify where your mind wanders to, it will greatly lessen the amount of disconnection (though not totally). Why? Because as soon as you identify where the thoughts have wandered to, you can now easily return to your original thought. It is like when a person gets up from his chair to do something and then returns to his chair. Although he has uprooted himself from the chair, it is only temporary, and soon he returns to sitting in the chair.

In this way, even though the mind had become disconnected from the original thought, at least the disconnection won't be total, because the person quickly returns to what he was originally thinking about. Here, the

‘fire’ doesn’t have complete control over his ‘earth’. Although the fire still overtakes the earth, the earth is able to return things to their original place.

In order for a person to return his mind to his original thoughts, he needs to be somewhat aware of what he had been thinking about originally.

Sometimes a person can be talking for a long amount of time, and then he says, “So, what was I talking about...?” He needs to be reminded what he was in the middle of. This may also happen when a person is in middle of a *shiu* and suddenly an argument erupts, and everyone is talking, and a person may then lose focus on the actual topic at hand. But it also happens simply when people are talking with each other for a while, and they forget what they were originally discussing.

But if a person trains himself to immediately return to his original thought – whether he is in the middle of talking, or even when he is the middle of thinking about something, which is what we are currently discussing – then even when he does occasionally space out, it will not be for that long, because he can quickly stabilize his mind. His “earth” can quickly take over the “fire” and bring the mind back to its original place.

Identifying What Caused The Mind To Space Out

The third thing to identify, as mentioned, is to examine: What caused my thoughts to think about something else?

1) Factors In The Environment: If it happened due to an external factor in the environment, then the solution is more obvious – one needs to avoid, as much as possible, those things he is seeing or hearing which can distract him.

2) Bothered By Something: If a person discovers that he has “spaced out” because his mind is heavily bothered by something, this is a broader issue to examine. In some situations, we may be able to lessen the busyness in his life which is bothering him, and in other situations, we may be able to change a person’s attitude towards the things that are bothering him, which would mitigate his stress.

3) Imagination: However, what is particularly relevant to our topic, focus, is that it is generally the **imagination** which causes one thought to suddenly jump to another thought. The imagination will link together two different thoughts, mentally “comparing” them with each other and deeming the two thoughts as similar. When that happens, a person will suddenly start thinking about something else, while he is in the midst of thinking of another thing.

If a person is the type to strongly imagine, his problem with losing focus is rooted in imagination, and not in **fire-of-earth**. A strong imagination causes the element of fire to dominate on an extreme level, where the person’s thoughts are generally unfocused, and lacking in consistency. We have discussed imagination elsewhere,⁷ and here is not the place where we will discuss it. Here, we are speaking about a subtler form of losing focus.

When one’s thoughts jump from one subject to another, it is a mental comparison between two similar topics. If the thoughts wouldn’t be similar, the mind wouldn’t jump to those thoughts. If the new thought isn’t about something similar to the topic of the first thought, what caused the mind to jump to this new thought? It can only be because the thoughts are about something similar.

⁷ Refer to *Getting To Know Your Imagination*

The mind quickly makes a similarity between the thoughts and jumps to the new thought. Then the person becomes involved with another thought, completely unrelated to the first thought, once his mind has made the transition from the first thought to the second thought.

What is the solution to this issue? How can we get the mind to become more consistent in the thoughts?

Using Earth/Consistency To Stabilize Jumpiness (Fire) In The Thoughts

When this process of “spacing out” into other thoughts stems from **fire-of-earth**, the problem is that the mind is jumpy. Since the problem here is rooted in the element of fire, the solution will lie in the element of **earth**, which has the consistent nature to counter the jumpy nature of fire. In such a case, a person needs to keep awakening his element of earth, which will stop the ‘fire’ in its tracks.

1) One way to use the element of earth (when it comes to regaining focus) is to **return to what you were previously doing or thinking**, before you began to do something else or space out. That is one way to awaken the power of consistency (earth).

2) A second way to use earth/consistency is by **identifying what caused your mind to veer off track, and then, to allow your mind to connect to the “similar” thought that your mind has begun to think about** – as opposed to connecting your mind to an unrelated thought which your mind has jumped to. In this method, you are connecting to the aspect of consistency that can be found even within the jumpiness of the mind.

This is a subtle idea: You identify the *consistency* that is within the changing process of the thoughts. In this way, you can train your soul to become used to the *connection* between the different thoughts which caused the mind to think of the new thought, rather than identifying with the disconnectedness in the thoughts which has caused the mind to think of the new thought.

When a person gets used to practicing this, he slowly strengthens the element of earth in his soul.

Gaining Control Of Your Thought Process

When one traverses all three steps described here, he will slowly be able to feel that there is a lot less jumpiness in his mind. The amount of times that he spaces out will be less, and even when he does space out, it will be for a noticeably shorter amount of time. Even more so, he will find it easier to return to his previous thoughts. He will attain a stronger power of focus.

As long as there remains a possibility of spacing out and getting involved with other thoughts, it is difficult for a person to be strongly focused in what he is involved with. The mere fact that his mind can easily space out into other thoughts, is already a disturbance to his focus. The easier it is for his mind to space out into other thoughts, the harder it is for a person to stay consistently focused on what he is doing.

We can compare it to a tree with weak roots in the ground. A strong wind can uproot it from the ground, whereas a small wind will not uproot it but it will still bend it to and fro. Similarly, if a person’s mind is easily ‘blown around’ by different thoughts, his mind will become disturbed by particularly bothersome thoughts, and if the thoughts are not that bothersome and they are only a bit distracting, they may not take his mind over completely, but they will be enough to disturb his thoughts. In contrast to this, if a person has worked on the steps outlined in this lesson, his mind will be able to hold strong and not become easily distracted by other activities and thoughts.

When one works on the steps outlined here, and he is also a more internal kind of person, he can set aside a considerable amount of time and watch the consistency of his thoughts. He will notice that in the amount of time given, his mind normally would have spaced out into other thoughts, but now that he has worked on the steps here, his mind has become more focused and his thoughts will generally be more consistent.

This is like a “redemption” of the thoughts within the very “exile” of the thoughts, because it offers a noticeable amount of consistency in the thoughts amidst of all the jumpiness of the thoughts. The mere fact that the mind tends to jump from one thought to another, is an “exile” to the thoughts. But when one strengthens his element of earth, as explained in this chapter, he will greatly increase the consistency in his thoughts. This is a “redemption” to the thoughts, and it is also a form of redemption to the soul.

Summary & Conclusion

In summary, these are the steps which one will need to traverse, in order to increase his focus. Firstly, one should disconnect himself as much as he can from our outer world [social media, news, etc.], which is responsible for a constant disturbance to the mind’s thoughts. The connection to media outlets today must certainly be avoided, and one must try to avoid even the “lesser” connections to the world, by setting aside quiet time every day, where one disconnects from everything going in the world, so that he can at least have some time of the day where he experiences focus.

Secondly, one needs to gain control of his thought process. This contained three steps. (1) One needs to identify which kinds of thoughts his mind tends to think about. (2) One needs to return his mind or his actions to his previous thought/activity. (3) One should consciously identify the transition from one thought to another.

When one lives in this way, he will have great consistency in his mind. This is not to say that he will never lose focus at all about what he is thinking about, but he will become considerably focused - enough that he will be able to identify which thought caused his mind to veer off track, and he will be able to easily return to his original thoughts. In this way, he builds his soul’s power of **consistency**,⁸ as well as his soul’s power to have **order**.⁹

Consistency and orderliness, together, can slowly develop a strong power of focus in the mind. It will be a more inner power of focus, and a place in his soul which is more consistent.

Fire-of-earth is a power in the soul which most people in our generation are far from using. Whatever we have explained here is but a way to return to the simple situation which used to exist, a number of years ago. From that point onward, one can learn how to lessen the minor distractions which causes jumpiness in his thoughts - in their amount, in their quality, and in their consistency, which allows one’s soul to remain focused in its place.

05 | CONSECUTIVE DISTRACTIONS

Water/Dragging – The Antithesis To The Power of Focus

With *siyata d’shmaya* we continue here to explain the power of focus/concentration. Until now we explained four problems related to focus which are related to the soul’s element of earth, which were earth-of-earth, water-of-earth,

⁸ kevius- consistency

⁹ seder - order

wind-of-earth, and fire-of-earth. We will now explain problems with focus which stem from the element of **water**, and in this chapter, we will explain specifically the problems with focus related to the “earth” aspect of water.

The element of water, in general, is an element that drags things with it, just like any running body of water. Water pulls and drags things down its course. The nature to become “dragged” after anything is the total antithesis to the very idea of focus, as we can see for ourselves clearly and simply.

Focus is an ability to be stabilized and concentrated in one thing, remaining in place, whereas the nature of water is that it does not stay in one place. Water does not stay within boundaries; it will not stay constantly in one place. Water by nature is always spreading outward. That is why water, the element that drags things with it, is also the source of desires (*taavah*), which is an outcome of this nature to become dragged after things.

Thus, to become “dragged” after anything is a total contradiction to the soul’s power of focus. That is all true about the element of water in general, and now we will explain specifically the aspect of “earth” within water.

Earth-of-Water: The Power of Focused Movement

Earth-of-water, when rectified, can keep water bounded. A person who repairs his “**earth-of-water**” element will be able to limit how much he becomes dragged after something. He will be pulled towards something, but only slowly and with proper boundaries. Such a person will be able to have proper “expansion” – with proper limitations and boundaries. His soul will be able to stay focused and in its place.

When a person has a stronger amount of earth in himself and not that much water, he will be too constricted. He will never want to expand – which means that he will find any change to be difficult, because he does not know how to expand past his current place. In contrast, if a person has a strong amount of water, he can easily expand and he is flexible with change.

For example, if a person has a house full of children and it is time to renovate his home and break down the walls so that he can make more rooms in his home, he may have a difficulty with doing this, if he has too much earth in himself and not enough water. It doesn’t even enter his thoughts to break down the walls. Until he gets really desperate where he feels that he can’t live anymore with such tight space, he doesn’t think of any possibility of expanding his home.

In contrast to this, a person with more water in himself has no problem seeing what he can do to make his home bigger and he is flexible to making the changes. “Why not?” is his thinking, and “If not, it’s possible for us to move.” With a strong amount of the element of water, a person can easily spread past his current bounds and expand.

Perfect Focus Is Not Possible

“**Earth-of-water**”, in its rectified form, is the ability to expand, but sensibly, with limitations. However, **earth-of-water** can also hamper a person’s of focus somewhat, because the person deep down is busy thinking, “Maybe things can be different? Maybe we can move from this house?” This is a minor disturbance in his focus, though, because he is making sure not to spread past his bounds too much. He is placing some limits on his idea to expand. He will not just move to any place. He is just aware that there is a possibility for him to expand his horizons a bit.

The truth is that there is really no way for a human being to fully concentrate on one thing alone. The only One who can do this is the *Yachid* (Individual One) of the world, Who is called “One”. What, then, is the power of focus in a human being?

The entire ability of a person to focus is an ability to somewhat limit one’s inner movements, both in their frequency and in their nature.

There is a well-known concept about our inner world that every person needs to “run and retreat” (*ratzu v’shov*) between different modes in the soul, and the very idea of this is a deterrent to the power of focus. Indeed, if any of movements are too intense, or if they are too frequent, it will be difficult for the person to focus. And if a person is always inwardly moving in different directions, this creates “scattering of the soul”, which is worse. All of these factors do not allow a person to remain focused.

A lack of focus is when a person is doing too much inner “running and retreating”. However, the power to remain focused, when properly balanced, must also be in the form of “running and retreating”. We explained earlier that the element of earth is the root of the power to focus, but if a person has too much earth in himself, he will only want to be in the “retreat” mode, staying in his place and never budging from there. Therefore, a person needs to balance out his earth by deliberately “moving” in an opposite direction of where he wants to stay, so that he can allow himself to spread past his boundaries – with the proper balance.

It is not a healthy state for the soul if a person never budges from his place. The soul needs to move. The ‘healthy’ way to move the soul is when we have focused movement – the power which we need to acquire, which is a balance between focus and movement, whereas a less ‘healthier’ way of moving in the soul is when a person is ‘dragged’ towards something. In any case, every person needs to be able to move and become ‘dragged’, to some extent, so that he can be able to have the ability of “expansion”, to expand past his bounds somewhat.

If a person repairs his element of **earth-of-water**, this expansion will be sensible and with proper limitations. Although this still hampers the power of focus somewhat, we have explained that it is not really possible for a human being to be 100% focused on any one thing, so there is nothing wrong with this slight deviation from focus. It is also constructive and necessary for a person to do.

Impaired Earth-of-Water: Permanently Dragged After The Same Thing

We have so far explained what “repaired” **earth-of-water** is – now let us learn about “impaired” **earth-of-water**, the negative use of this power. Water is the element that drags a person towards various stimuli, and earth is the ability of permanence. **Earth-of-water**, when impaired, is when a person is “permanently dragged” after a certain thing.

Later we will explain about impaired **wind-of-water**, which is when a person is always pulled towards different things. But with impaired **earth-of-water**, a person is consistently being dragged after the same things.

There is somewhat of a “stability” in this dragging, which appears to be an advantage, because the consistence and stability of it allows a person to remain aware of where he’s being dragged towards. But it is also a disadvantage, because since the person is constantly pulled towards the same thing, it is a stronger kind of dragging, so it becomes addictive and difficult to pull away from.

It is written, “*A righteous person falls and rises seven times*”¹⁰— one kind of person will keep falling to a different sin each time, but another kind of person will keep falling into the same pit. Here we are talking about the second kind of person, which Chazal describe as “like a dog which returns to its vomit”¹¹, when a person is consistently dragged towards the same thing, each time.

Causes For Permanent Dragging

How does it happen that a person become ‘permanently dragged’ after the same thing, again and again?

In some people, it is because they have a strong amount of earth in themselves, so even when they are dragged after something, they are just being immature, like a child who is always being pulled after the same childish behaviors. An adult as well may be pulled after certain childish behaviors, especially if they are nostalgic, but this is really a form of gross immaturity, because he is acting like a child. So a person may become constantly dragged after the same thing again and again if he remains with an immature, childish perspective or orientation which he hasn’t yet grown out of.

Similar to the above, another reason which would motivate a person to become permanently dragged after the same thing is because there is a rule, “Habit becomes second nature.”¹² When a person gets used to certain habitual practices, eventually they become a “second nature” he acquires for himself, which he has gotten used to and which is now his natural orientation.

In the first scenario, a person is dragged after the same things again and again because he remains with a childish attitude towards life, so he is being immature. In the second scenario, the person is not being immature. He may be a very mature person, but he is dragged towards the same thing again and again simply because he has gotten used to it. These are very similar reasons, but they are different.

A person can become constantly dragged after the same thing, when he gets used to certain habits and certain lifestyles which cause him to lose awareness of everything else around him, as he is involved in those habits. For example, a person may become obsessed with his bank statements, always thinking about it whenever there is a chance. He gets used to thinking about it obsessively and it becomes his habit to think about it constantly.

Another example: What does a person think about when he’s in the restroom? It is forbidden to think about Torah there, and we won’t get into here if he can think about *emunah* there. What is he thinking about? Some people will obsessively think about the same things - their thoughts keep returning to these topics – their minds are always getting ‘dragged’ after the same kinds of thoughts.

Now with the advent of smartphones, the nature of the world has changed a bit and now people can keep viewing different things each time they use the restroom. But whenever a person has time to himself and he is thinking about whatever he’s thinking about, his thoughts may keep returning to the same thing, again and again. What causes this? Some people will think about whatever happened that day, where the thoughts are not consistent, but others will always think of the same things, again and again. Where does this nature come from? As mentioned, it can either come from habits which he has acquired, which has become his “second nature”, or it may come from childish immaturity.

¹⁰ *Mishlei 24:16*

¹¹ *Yoma 53b*

¹² *Sefer Ye’aros Devash 1:3*

Another reason of why a person may keep thinking of the same things, though, which we will be explaining more about in this chapter, is because it may be part of his “first nature” to keep thinking the same kinds of thoughts. This is a fundamental aspect of life to know about, which we will now elaborate upon.

Imbalances In The Soul Cause A Lack of Focus

To be brief about this, each person has his various good *middos* and bad *middos*. There are two powers related to our *middos* which can cause a person to have inner disturbances. The first cause is **the worst character trait** that a person possesses. The worst character trait of a person, when left unfixed, creates an imbalance in the soul, which causes a person to be inwardly disturbed. In addition, even **the best character trait** in a person can cause a person to feel inner disturbance, if it is too extreme. This also causes imbalance in the soul. When there is imbalance in the soul, a person cannot focus properly.

This is a very important concept to be aware of, and most people aren't used to thinking about it. A very large amount of problems with focus are due to the reason we are explaining here. When a person has a negative character trait, it explodes outward every so often. It may be anger or conceit, which stems from the element of fire, or it may be idle talk, which stems from wind. It may be desire, which stems from water, or it may be sadness or laziness, which stems from earth. Whatever the negative character trait is, it can “drag” a person into all kinds of directions.

Since each person has at least one unfixed negative character trait, more or less, it is bound to make its appearance, and when it does, a person will become ‘dragged’ by the negative trait, to whatever place it takes him. Besides for the evil of the negative character trait itself, which is a separate problem and which we are not dealing with here, it also causes a problem of “dragging” a person all over the place, which causes a person to lose focus.

Thus, the root negative character trait in every person is a big factor, and perhaps the central factor, in causing a person to lose his ability of focus. (This is besides for all of the other problems that the root negative character trait causes.)

To make things worse, if a person is very imbalanced in his soul, (which may very well be the case, since there are many forces in every soul, as the Vilna Gaon said that there are 70 forces in the soul¹³), a person cannot stay focused, whenever any of these imbalanced forces make their appearance. It is like having 70 robbers living inside your house! Can anyone have peace like this? Reb Yeruchem Levovitz said that a person contains a complete ‘zoo’ inside himself [referring to all of the negative character traits]. If a person would just have a ‘lion’ in himself, or just a ‘bear’ in himself, he would be able to restrain his animalistic forces within, because there would only be one problem to deal with. But there is a ‘lion’, a ‘bear’, a ‘snake’, a ‘scorpion’, and many other dangerous ‘animals’ there....

In summation, all of the inner negative character traits in a person cause a person to lose focus, and even the positive forces in a person can cause a person to lose focus, when they are imbalanced and when they are clashing with each other. When a person is lacking balance in his four elements, his fire and water will clash, and his wind and earth will clash. These inner contradictory forces within the soul do not allow a person to be calm inside. What is the result of this? An inability to stay focused.

Problems With Mental Focus Begin In The Heart, Not In The Mind

¹³ Gra on Yeshayahu 11:1

Thus, the problems with focus all begin with a lack of inner calm, which is more of an emotional and “heart” matter, rather than a problem with the brain/mind. When a person’s heart is not calm (due to the inner imbalances of the soul that are within it), his mind cannot either be calm. The result is a person who cannot focus.

Compare it the following. When a person is in the midst of a joyous occasion, and people are coming over to him to wish him a “Mazal Tov”, for how long can he stay totally focused during that time? He may be in a state of joy, but he cannot stay focused for that long. Often people misplace things when they are amidst a very joyous state, and they don’t remember much of the event, because they weren’t able to totally pay attention to what was happening, due to all of the joy they were feeling. The intense emotional state doesn’t allow for mentally focused concentration.

(In fact, this loss of mental awareness is what allows for complete joy– when the joy is so big that it takes over the person entirely, and as a result he can’t concentrate as much. The more joyous a person is and the less he is mentally focused, the more of a complete joyous state it is.)

Thus, whenever one’s inner character traits are imbalanced, a person loses his inner calm and therefore he won’t have the calmness to be able to focus. The mind and the heart do not function independently of each other – they are interconnected, and therefore the imbalances in the soul, which are in the [spiritual] heart, will hamper the mind’s ability to focus.

The mind and heart are each affected by the state of the other. The mind can influence the state of the heart, when one internalizes the knowledge of his mind into his heart. The heart can also influence the mind, from the state of the character traits that are in the heart. In addition to the evil character traits and evil desires found in the heart, the good and evil inclinations which reside in the heart also cause a lack of inner calm, because they are contradictory forces. These two warring forces are constant, the *Mesillas Yesharim* says. If the heart is not calm, how can the brain/mind be calm....?

There are some people who have a vast disconnection between their mind and heart. Their heart is like a “heart of stone”, they do not feel emotions, and therefore their minds can function very well, because they are never affected by emotions. Sometimes there is a kind of person who always appears to have *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind), who is always calm, peaceful, and serene, and who can easily have calm mental reflection. This appears to be a quality, but if we examine it truthfully, it can very well be because the person’s heart is dead from emotion, so he is left with nothing but a cold, rational intellect. His ability to have calm mental reflection is not a quality - it is a sign of a deep issue, of a hardened heart. If his heart would be a bit more alive with feeling, the person would see that the states of the mind and heart are interconnected, and he would see that it’s not that easy to have inner calm.

From the above, we can discover the inner reason of why many people have problems with focus and concentration – it is because they have a very emotional nature, a heart that feels deeper things, and their emotional turmoil causes them to have difficulty with focusing.

A person with this nature may go to a professional or a therapist for help, when the professional or therapist has more of a cold, rational nature and who is not that emotional, and the person hopes that the therapist will understand what is bothering him, but the therapist may not be able to understand what the client is telling him. Why not? Because the client is an emotional kind of person, and therefore more things bother him, so they think about their issues more and therefore they can’t concentrate.

We can say more about this issue, but the root of the issue is that the heart/emotions can affect the state of the mind. When a person has an unfixed negative character trait [which everyone has on some level, unless they have

fixed it], this is really an inner disturbance in the heart, and when combined with imbalances between the various character traits of a person which are present in his heart, it creates a lack of calmness in one's heart. Examples may include too much sensitivity, too much emotion, and any other imbalances within the inner forces of the soul, which are in the heart.

When the heart is not calm, the mind of a person will have a problem with concentrating/focusing. For example, if a person has a very emotional, hypersensitive nature, and someone makes a small comment to him which he finds a bit harsh, he may obsess over it for three hours straight and he won't be able to take his mind off the hurtful comment. Then he goes to the *Beis Midrash* to learn with his *chavrusa*, but he doesn't hear anything his *chavrusa* is saying, because he cannot stop thinking about the hurtful comment which he heard three hours ago. He is so insulted that he simply cannot take his mind off it. He may try to take his mind off it, and be more or less successful doing this. If he is not that aware of his inner state, he may be simply aware that his mind is confused right now and that he can't concentrate right now, because there is some kind of inner disturbance in him. He may think there is a "kelipah" (evil spiritual husk) upon him which isn't letting him concentrate. But it is really because he lives with a very active heart, which is easily disturbed on a deeper level by things that bother him, and therefore he cannot focus properly.

(In general, there are two kinds of people – those whose intellect are more in control, and those whose emotions are more in control. When one rectifies his heart/emotions, this is "A pure heart You created within me",¹⁴ but this is a very high spiritual level, which takes a long time to reach.)

On a deeper level, the difference between intellectual people and feeling people is because there are different soul roots. Dovid *HaMelech* and Shlomo *HaMelech* argued if wisdom is found in the brain/mind or in the heart/emotions. Dovid *HaMelech* said that wisdom is in the mind, whereas Shlomo *HaMelech* said it is in the heart.

One whose soul root is in "heart" (which also corresponds to "the moon", for the word "moon" in Hebrew is "levanah", similar to the word "lev", heart), who can also control his emotions through his mind, has the rectified state of the heart. This is a level of *Ruach HaKodesh* (the holy spirit). But if the heart is not rectified – which is the state of most people, for "The inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth"¹⁵ – what is the result? The heart will control the mind, and this will not allow a person to have proper mental focus.

In review of the above: In every person (unless his heart is totally dead from emotion and he doesn't have any active feelings), the heart contains some lack of inner calm, since every person generally has an unfixed character trait and imbalances in the soul. This hampers a person's ability of mental focus somewhat. In addition to this, those who have a very emotional nature, whose hearts are more in control than their minds, have an even harder time with focus.

Those with a more emotional nature have more active character traits, and that is also why they are often more sensitive to insults than others. Without getting into the details of this nature, their general inner makeup is that their hearts are more in control than their minds are. Therefore, their ability of emotion is more dominant than their ability of rational intellect. What is the result of this? In most cases, a person has not yet given balance to his internal forces which are in his heart, so he will not have inner calm.

For such a person, it is very difficult to attain proper mental concentration. Whenever he wants something badly, in most cases, his heart "runs" after the thing he wants and inwardly he is not calm. When that is the case, the heart

¹⁴ *Tehillim* 51:12

¹⁵ *Beraishis* 8:21

will control the mind, and since his heart is not calm, his mind will not either be calm. As a result, his mind cannot properly focus.

In Summary

We have so far explained the nature of impaired “**earth-of-water**”, which is when a person is being consistently “dragged” towards the same thing. It was explained so far several reasons which may bring about this nature:

- (1) A childish, immature nature which the person hasn’t yet come out of.
- (2) Habitual practices, which have become one’s “second nature”.

(3) “First nature” – he was born with a nature for this. It was explained that this is due to **imbalances in the soul**, a result of (a) the primary negative character in a person when left unfixed, (b) or contradictory forces within the soul (even when they are each positive natures), or, (c) having a more emotional nature, which prevents a person from proper mental focus.

Therefore, when a person is having problems with focus/concentration, we need to examine deeply what his inner makeup is like. It will not suffice to simply look at it as problem with “concentration” per se. We will certainly need to deal with the actual concentration problems, but in order to solve the issue at its root, we have to get to know what the person’s inner makeup is like. When we discover it, we are then much closer to discovering what truly bothers him, which is disturbing his ability to focus.

Giving Order To The Inner Forces of the Heart

Therefore, let’s understand the following important point. As long as a person has not yet given “order” (*seder*) to the inner forces of the heart (which is a huge amount of inner work, and a separate discussion for itself), one will not be able to reach proper mental focus.

In the event that one is able to focus properly, it may be because he has born with an exceptionally powerful mind, which some people are born wit. A person like this may be the type to become a professor and the like, which enables them to have strong mental focus. Or, he may be able to strongly focus because he does not experience that much emotion – his heart is ‘dead’ (we mentioned this before), and therefore, relatively speaking, he is never inwardly bothered by anything, so he has an easy time focusing (unless, of course, he goes through an extreme kind of experience which shakes him up and which awakens his emotions).

Anyone who is not of the above two exceptions will not be able to reach proper mental focus, if he has not yet given “order” (*seder*) to the inner forces in his heart. Thus, practically speaking, a part of our inner work in attaining the power of focus is built upon giving “order” to the inner forces present in our heart. The better a person can give “order” to the inner forces in the heart (this refers to our work with our *middos*, which is its own discussion and which we cannot explore in detail right now¹⁶), the better one will have a power to be focused in his thoughts on something.

Complete Focus – Concentration of Mind and Heart Together

If the above has all been understood, we can now proceed to the next step.

¹⁶ Refer to the Rav’s series of “Fixing” Your Earth, Water, Wind and Fire

There are two steps to traverse. In the first step, the emotions in the heart cause a disturbance to the mind, and don't allow the mind to focus. The work here, in general, is to give "order" to the forces of the heart, and as a result, the emotions will no longer disturb the mind from focusing. We have explained about this above. After this first step has been traversed, where the heart is no longer *disturbing* the mind, the second step is to use the heart to *aid* the mind's concentration.

Let us explain how the heart can actually "aid" the mind's power of concentration. It is clear to any sensible person that if the mind and heart of a person would be totally separate components that are independent of each other, he wouldn't be able to concentrate that much with his mind. If the mind and heart were completely separated from each other, a person would be inwardly "scattered", and he wouldn't be able to focus. But if the mind and heart are both concentrated on the same topic, one will be able to focus very well.

For example, if a person is *davening*, and his mind and heart are each concentrating on different areas, can he be completely focused? Clearly, he cannot be. **True focus is when a person is concentrated with both his mind and his heart on the same thing.** The more a person gives "order" to the inner forces in his heart, and in addition, he also **purifies** the heart, the heart becomes opened, and in turn, the more his mind and heart will fuse together.

(The mind is compared to man, and the heart is compared to woman, and just as man and woman are meant to fuse together to become one creation, so are the mind and heart meant to become fused together and to become one unit.)

When the mind and heart are fused together, they can both concentrate on the same thing together, and this greatly intensifies one's power to focus. This is the depth of how we attain a rectified, repaired level of the power to focus.

Becoming Aware of Your Subconscious Thoughts and Emotions

Even more so, there is also a deeper aspect here, of repairing our power of focus.

A person has many layers in his soul. The power of thought in a person contains two levels – simple thought, and deep thought. Within deep thought, there are many levels, as in the verse, "*Very deep are Your thoughts*".¹⁷ In the heart as well, where the emotions are seated, there are many layers of emotion, as we can all recognize. There are superficial emotions, and there are deeper feelings. The more superficial a person's emotions and thoughts are, the less quality his power of focus will have, and in contrast, the deeper one's thoughts and emotions are, the more quality his power of focus will have.

Here is where we come to the entire secret of the power of focus. If the heart's emotions are never integrated with the mind [if one is emotionally cold], this is a negative sign, of a person who is out of touch with his emotions. On the opposite extreme is one whose emotions usually overtake his mind and he is bothered by what he is feeling, one must repair this and achieve a balance between the mind and heart. What is the intermediate level between these two extremes (mind without heart, and heart without mind)? If one's thoughts and emotions are generally superficial, this person usually has difficulty with concentration. This is indeed why most people have problems with concentration.

Compare it to the following. A person can go to *daf yomi* and he can hear the *shiur* and the discussions of the people there, but it may be a very superficial level of listening, and he is connected to it on the same level of how he

¹⁷ *Tebillim* 92:6

is connected to his job. But when one deeply immerses himself in the Torah, he is much more connected to his Torah learning. A big part of acquiring the power of true focus is to penetrate into the depths of the mind and heart, and to fuse them together. When one lives with both deep thought and deep feeling, he will be a very focused person.

Until now we explained the positive side of this concept, and now we will see its negative use. There are layers within our powers of thought and emotion, and these deeper layers are essentially the area of the “subconscious”. A person may be consciously thinking of a certain thing, but in his subconscious, he is thinking of something else. What is the result of this? He loses his concentration. In his consciousness, he is thinking of one thought, but in his subconscious, he is really thinking something else. He certainly cannot remain focused, if he is thinking of two different **thoughts** at once.

A person can also have two contradicting **emotions** at once. For example, if a person is informed that his parent has passed away, on one hand he is sad and in mourning, but at the same time, if he is receiving an inheritance, he makes the blessing of “*Shehechiyanu*”. These are contradicting emotions, and they exist at the same time. This is because there are many layers within the soul, which will breed inner contradictions. These inner contradictions are actually a primary reason of why a person may have difficulty concentrating and focusing on something.

This is the case whenever a person lives superficially, and his thoughts and emotions are only superficial and never deep. Such a person will have contradictory thoughts or feelings taking place at once, which he may not be aware of, and which are really hampering his focus.

Understandably, most people will not identify this as their source of lacking concentration, and that is because they do not see a connection between superficial thoughts (and feelings) with problems of focus. However, that itself is an indicator that they are only using their superficial layer of thinking.

The more inner that a person becomes, and the more he works to understand his conscious thoughts and feelings, as well as his subconscious thoughts and feelings, he will better recognize his inner contradictions, and he can then see the root of his problems with focus. He will be able to recognize it from within, and not because he has heard of any definitions about this. He can first recognize this matter from hearing about it and understanding it, but after that, he can slowly recognize the matter from within his own experience. He can become aware of his superficial thoughts as well as his deeper, subconscious thoughts.

One cannot completely know what his subconscious thoughts are, and this is because the soul is incredibly deep and complex, and no one can ever know it perfectly. But with much inner work, slowly throughout one’s life, a person can still get very far into his conscious and into his subconscious.

That is how one can fuse together his superficial thoughts and feelings with his deeper thoughts and feelings, and this improves the quality of his power of focus. This is the ultimate, rectified level of the power of the focus, and this is also the key of how a person can become attached with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah.

The Deepest Solution To Repairing Problems of Focus Which Stem From Earth-of-Water

Based upon the above, we can understand the following point. We have come to explain “**earth-of-water**” in this lesson, but the concepts explained here are really more encompassing. Let us now complete this lesson and how we can repair problems with concentration which stem from “**earth-of-water**” specifically, the subject of this lesson.

Part of the reason of why a person may have a hard time focusing is because his thoughts are ‘running’ – and to where do the thoughts ‘run’ to? The thoughts ‘run’ to whatever a person is thinking about subconsciously. A person is not aware of this, because it is taking place on a subconscious level. This is really the depth of the problem behind impaired **earth-of-water**.

Now we have another reason of what causes a person to become consistently ‘dragged’ after the same thing again and again, in addition to the reasons mentioned earlier. It is because a person’s conscious thoughts ‘run’ to his subconscious thoughts, and the person is not aware of this process. That is what causes a person to think about the same thing over and over again. The person is not aware of what is taking place inside him, in his subconscious. His subconscious keeps pulling him to the same thoughts. This is also known as the “bribery” of the mind.

Most people cannot deal with concentration problems by doing the inner work which has been described here, and this is because it requires a huge inner overhaul, of many layers in the soul. To complete the picture here, one needs to understand what the root of his inner disturbances are. Therefore, whenever there are various thoughts bothering a person, he really needs to examine where the thoughts are ‘running’ to, and what the reason for it was (childish orientation, habits, or his nature). As a person gets used to this, he will slowly get to know his subconscious.

This is a long inner task to traverse, and not an idea which you can actualize so quickly. It is an understanding of how our inner workings are, of what is really causing our inner disturbances which prevent our concentration. **Earth-of-water** is the root of permanent disturbances in the mind, which really stems from one’s deepest subconscious thoughts.

This is the deep reason of why **earth-of-water** keeps ‘dragging’ a person towards the same activities/thoughts. The simpler reasons we explained before are also true (childish habit, habitual patterns that became his second nature, or ‘first nature’ which are due to imbalances in the soul) but the deeper reason is because of the subconscious, which ‘drags’ a person towards the same thoughts.

A person can get in touch with his subconscious if he has an ability of subtle feeling, and if he does not have this ability to feel subtle feelings, he can still discover his subconscious thoughts by noticing any random thoughts which suddenly pass through his conscious mind.

In this way, one can slowly do the inner work of getting to know his subconscious thoughts, and with much effort and inner order, a person can merit with *siyata d’sbmayya* to reach the depth in his thoughts and emotions and fuse them together. Then he can become a truly focused person, connected in both his mind and heart.

In Conclusion

There is where true *d’veykus* (attachment with Hashem) lies, for *d’veykus* is really an absolute kind of concentration and focus, which is the outcome of fusing together the mind and heart, our conscious with the subconscious, our external layer with our inner layer – all connected together.

06 | IMPULSIVITY

Water-of-Water: 'Dragged' Further and Further

With *siyata d'shmaya* we continue here to learn about the power of focus. In this chapter, we will discuss problems with focus which stem specifically from the “water” aspect within the element of water.

As mentioned earlier, water is the element which “drags” a person towards something, just as a stream of water pulls and drags things with it. The implication of **water-of-water**, then, is a nature that keeps dragging a person.

We will give several examples of this nature, but we should first know that if someone has a strong amount of **water-of-water** in himself, he will have a very hard time with concentration and focus, because **water-of-water** is a total antithesis to the entire idea of focus. This is because the power of focus is rooted in the element of earth, a stable element which stays in place, whereas the water keeps dragging a person away from his place, preventing a person from focus.

(The other elements can also deter a person's focus. When the element of wind is impaired, a person keeps moving from his place, and he cannot concentrate then; and when the element of fire is impaired, a person is jumping and skipping from place to place, which also makes him lose his concentration).

Water-of-water [in its impaired form] is thus a root cause of losing focus, because it keeps dragging a person. This will manifest itself in the three main “garments” of the soul, which are: action, speech, and thought.

1) Impaired "Water-of-Water" In The Area of Action

A) Pushing Off Things For Later - When it comes to the area of **action**, the person with a lot of **water-of-water** before he is about to do something will immediately push off doing it, and in this way, he ‘drags’ it away from him.

It is said that there are two kinds of people. The ideal [responsible] kind of person is one who does today's work today, and he doesn't push it off for tomorrow, whereas the irresponsible person does tomorrow's work today. The irresponsible kind of person is always pushing off things for later – for tomorrow, for after the festival, in an hour from now, etc. If he has no choice of pushing things off, then of course he will take care of it. But as long as he has the possibility to push things off, he will do so.

For example, as long as he sees that the dishes aren't piled up that high in the sink and it's still possible to use the sink, he won't wash the dishes today. If he needs to replace an item in his house which isn't working that good, he'll push off buying the replacement as long as the old item is working somewhat. He pushes off things for later, meaning that he is always ‘dragging’ the current situation away from himself. Unless this is impossible for him to do, he will act this way.

B) Caught Up In Various Activities - Another kind of this problem in the area of action is in an opposite manner than the above: When a person is in the midst of doing something, and he gets ‘caught up’ in what he's doing and he finds it difficult to stop whatever he's in the middle of. This problem can be manifest either in a physical activity or even in a spiritual pursuit (just because it is a spiritual pursuit doesn't mean he is acting correctly).

We will give some common examples of this problem. Many people – especially women - enjoy reading all kinds of books, such as storybooks, or novels, or collections of writings, etc. A person begins reading a book and he finds it impossible to stop in the middle. Now it's getting late, he has to take care of some things now, he has to go somewhere. But he's in the middle of the book, so he says, "Just another 5 minutes", or "Just one more page..." or "Just one more chapter."

There are others who take it further - they totally lose track of time while reading a book. They're not thinking that they have to get to the end of the book or to the end of the chapter or that they need another 5 minutes; they are just 'dragged' further and further into whatever they are reading. When this kind of person finishes whatever he was reading, only then does he close the book and goes to take care of whatever he has to do. A person like this never sets a limit upon his reading time.

Even if this kind of person does have some concept of placing limits on his reading time – for example, he plans to stop at the end of the chapter, or the end of the page, or to stop at 5 minutes later – the problem is that he will tell this to himself with every passing page, and each page leads to another page, and then another page, etc. In the end, he doesn't actually pull away from the book until he finishes it, even though he had originally planned to stop at a certain point.

There are some people who begin reading a book in the beginning of the night, and suddenly they notice that the clock says 3 A.M. The person gets up late the next morning and wonders, "How did this happen to me?!" But this is not an isolated incident in his life. His whole lifestyle is really like this, where he gets pulled and dragged after what he was doing and he can't stop, and he loses track of time. He simply has a difficulty stopping whatever he's in the middle of.

This will only be a problem for him when it's something interesting to him, however. If it is not that attractive and interesting to him, he would of course stop in the middle of it when he has to. But if he is very interested in what he is doing, he feels like he cannot stop in the middle and go take care of other things. It doesn't come easy to him to stop in the middle of what he's doing, and it requires a lot of energy for him to stop himself. So he is 'dragged' further and further into whatever he's in the middle of.

This problem is very common when it comes to the example of reading books and stories, as mentioned. We can also find more examples of this problem, but the point is that when a person is in the middle of doing something he enjoys and loves, he may find it too hard to stop in the middle. Sometimes it's not even something he loves that much, like if he entered into some activity and he gets caught up in it, and he finds it too hard to pull himself away from what he's doing and go take care of other things. To some degree, this is also due to laziness, which comes from a dominance of the element of earth.

In the first example we gave, this problem stems from a total dominance of **water-of-water**. In the second example we gave, which also stems from **water-of-water**, we can more specifically label it as "**earth**"-of-water-of-water, because it involves some "earth" aspect, laziness, within the nature of the **water-of-water** that totally drags a person into what he's doing.

As mentioned, we can give many more examples of the problem. It is a problem that can be manifest in any activity, pastime or hobby that a person enjoys doing. Some people love to build things, others love to sing, etc. Whenever one is involved in something he enjoys a lot, he may have a problem of finding it too hard to stop in the middle of what he's doing.

Impaired “Water-of-Water” In The Area of Speech

Now we will see how this problem is also manifest in the realm of **speech**.

This is a problem that is commonly found. Whereas one kind of person says few words, another kind of person can keep talking and he doesn't stop. It can be due to many reasons. It can happen when one is talking to a friend, or it can happen when a person is in middle of giving a speech, where the person just keeps talking and he doesn't stop, and when he is giving his speech, no one knows when he will stop.

It is like when the students came to their *rebbe* to tell them that it is time to recite the morning *Shema*. The person keeps talking, and it doesn't make a difference to him that no one in the audience is listening or that they are all waiting to *daven Maariv*. He has one more thing to say, so he has to finish saying it, no matter what. That leads him to talk about something else, and then something else. If he is a person who has a lot to say – or if at least he thinks he has a lot to say – he keeps continuing to talk, and perhaps he is confident that he has just one more thing to say and then he'll be finished. He is 'dragged' further and further into his speech and he will not stop talking.

There are some people who can keep talking and even if you give them a time limit of when they have to stop, they aren't aware at all when they go overtime. In some cases, a person can speak for a long amount of time in front of an audience because he imagines that everyone is waiting to hear him speak and that he is the only person they want to hear. Such a person is delusional. But there are others who can be aware that there is a time limit of how much they can speak in front of an audience, and they will even say openly “Just one more minute and then I will finish”, when they go overtime - but in reality, they are not paying attention to the time. He has to just say “one more story”, and from there, he becomes 'dragged' into talking about all kinds of other topics.

There are also some people who, when they start talking, they can keep going on and they lose track of the time. This week someone told me that his child came home one day a few hours later from school, and his worried parents asked him, “Where were you??” The child responded, “I was speaking with my friend.” The parents said, “But you normally come home at 5, and tonight you came home at 9.” The child said, “No, I started to speak about a certain thing, and then we started speaking about something else, so it became a whole conversation.” The parents said, “What time is it now?” The child wasn't even aware that the sun had set. He simply became 'dragged' along with the conversation.

This is also commonly a scenario with boys in a dormitory room, where they can get into a conversation before they go to bed and it can keep going for hours, because they get 'dragged' more and more into the conversation. Some people talk non-stop for a different reason – it is because they are bored and they feel empty, and they have nothing to do, so they can keep talking without stopping. But even if a person is the type to be careful to get up on time in the morning to make the first time for *Kerias Shema*, he still might get up late because he spent the night in a conversation that kept going, and he was 'dragged' further and further into it.

Similarly, there are some people whom you can start conversing with, and when you want to stop, you can find that it is very hard to stop talking to them, because they want to keep talking. You want to walk away already, and the other person says, “Wait, let me just finish what I'm trying to tell you.” The other is not prepared to stop the conversation so quickly – he finds it too hard.

There are varying levels of this problem, but it is common. Some people can keep talking and they don't give the other person a chance to talk, and they have a problem with being listeners. Others can be good listeners and they let the other person talk, but they can't stop in middle of a conversation.

Impaired “Water-of-Water” In The Area of Thought

This problem of becoming ‘dragged’ without stopping can also be manifest in the area of **thought**. A person may begin thinking of something and he becomes ‘dragged’ in his mind after all kinds of thoughts, with one thought leading to another.

For example, a person may be learning one *halachah* in the *Gemara* and then he is reminded of another *halachah*, so he begins to think about the other *halachah*, and that reminds him of a different *halachah*. By the time he is finished learning the *Gemara*, he has ended his thoughts in an area that is totally unrelated to the page or topic in front of him. He may turn to his *chavrusa* in the middle of his learning and ask him, “Remind me – what were we in the middle of learning about?”

The person becomes dragged from one thought into another related kind of thought, and then into another related thought. The problem here is that he is turning that which is “secondary” (*tafel*) into the “priority” (*ikar*), and the priority becomes secondary to him.

(This is not the same thing as when a person simply jumps from one topic to another (which is a nature rooted in the element of fire), where a person is suddenly reminded of something else related to what he is thinking about, and his thoughts digress into that topic.)

Although all of his thoughts will generally be related to each other, the problem is that they ‘drag’ him out of the topic he was thinking or talking about, and into a different point.

Others will sometimes get sidetracked from what they were talking or thinking about, and as soon as they realize that they’ve gone off on a tangent, they quickly re-focus and return to what they were first speaking about. A person may also need to bring up other points while speaking to an audience, in order to awaken the hearts of the listeners, and there are other valid reasons as well for digressing to another topic. But many times, a person starts talking about a certain thing and then he begins to think about something else which is somewhat related, and then another thing, and by the time he is finished speaking, it is far from what he began to speak about.

‘Dragged’ Within One’s Place

There are three dimensions: world, time, and soul.¹⁸ In all of these three areas, a person may become ‘dragged’ further and further into something.

When it comes to a certain place, for example, a person may keep expanding and renovating his house, like if his family is getting bigger and he needs to add on some space to his house. He measures how much space he will need to renovate, but then he ends up renovating even more than what he planned. This is an example of being “dragged” within the place he is in, because he keeps expanding it without any restraint.

Disconnected From Time

A person may also become “dragged” in the area of time, which is a very, very common occurrence.

There are people who never pay attention to the time. They come later when they call the taxi to pick them up, and they come late even to their flights. When they buy a plane ticket, it is doubtful if they will even make the flight at all, because they never come to the airport with enough time to make the flight.

¹⁸ *Sefer Yetzirah* 3:1, “*Olam* (World\Place), *Shanah* (Year\Time), *Nefesh* (soul).”

They come to the airport and hope that they can be switched to another flight, and sometimes the airport is kind enough to let them on to another plane, even though they find it embarrassing and nerve-wracking, and it troubles other people (maybe it is because they think that everyone else in the world should work around their schedule wherever they go). They simply have no concept of time. Even if they give a guarantee that they will come on time to something, they would need a blessing and a miracle for this to happen. By them, time is not defined as time - they view time as something that they should “try” to adjust their life to.

This kind of person usually has this problem in the area of going to sleep and waking up on time. The hours on the clock mean nothing to him. A person like this can go to sleep at 3 or 4 A.M. in the morning, planning to get up sometime between 8 A.M and 10 A.M. (Clearly they go according to the later *zman Kerias Shema*).

If you ask such a person, “Are you aware that you went to sleep at 3 A.M. in the morning?” He may respond, “I was planning to go to sleep already at 1 A.M.” What happened? He got involved with a phone call, and then other things suddenly came up. At 2:30 A.M. no one is calling him anymore (unless it’s a call from out of the country), so only then does he go to sleep. He becomes ‘dragged’ after different areas of his life to take care of, planning to “only” take care of “just” this and “just” that...

If you know people like this, you know that some of these people have turned their day into night, and their night into day! They become dragged after their own concept of time, and they abandon the time zone of reality.

Poor Time Management – Two Scenarios

There are two kinds of people who have this problem with time:

- 1) One kind of problem is **when a person doesn’t identify with the reality of time**. It is like a person who has a weak sense of touch or smell. He has a weakness when it comes to relating to time. If you ask him how much time has just passed, the answer he will give you is far from the reality. He doesn’t pay attention to the time as it passes. To him, the 24 hours of the day can seem like only a few hours have passed.
- 2) Another kind of problem is **when a person tries to do too much in a certain amount of time**. He thinks he can do everything that needs to be done in an amount of time which really takes much longer. If something really requires an hour of work, he will think that he can do it all very quickly, perhaps because he thinks he is very talented. He has a problem in that he does not know how to calculate how much time something will take.

The Problem of "Cramming It In"

Of course, sometimes a person cannot know precisely how much time something will take. Any job which involves physical work or carpentry can take much longer than expected, for all sorts of reasons. But many people simply try to do too much within a certain amount of time, when it is not realistic.

For example, a *chosson* (a boy who is engaged to be married) often tries to cram in a lot into his engagement period – he may have aspirations to try to finish *Shas* before the wedding, as well as *Shulchan Aruch* with the commentaries, and to also try to know *Tikkunei HaZohar* by heart. Are there any people who have succeeded at this? There were some rare cases, but with most people, this is totally unrealistic. Yet a person may think that he can somehow do it, and when he realizes at the end that he couldn't succeed at it, he wonders why not.

People of this type push their energies very far, way beyond their actual capacity, and they always feel like they are not succeeding. Erev Rosh HaShanah arrives and this kind of person feels that the year has gone by with absolutely no growth. Often they really have grown during the year, but they are not aware of it, because they have very unrealistic aspirations from themselves.

The problem of trying to cram in too much work within a certain amount of time is a common problem in many people. Many marriages suffer from this issue. The husband and wife make up a time where they will spend time with each other, and one of them is late because he/she got caught up in something, or doesn't make it at all.

People even miss taking care of basics because of this problem. I met a person a few weeks ago who is trying to get certain a degree so that he can earn a living, and he has to be in the place early in the morning. So that he shouldn't arrive late, he tries to leave his house every morning at 6:20 A.M. in order to make the bus. But he doesn't even make the 7 o'clock bus! And this is about something that a person considers very important.

Another example of this problem is when a person needs to go to a wedding of a relative, which he considers very important to attend, and he doesn't end up making it, and if he is asked, "Why didn't you make it? Wasn't this important to you?" He responds: "What was I supposed to do? I tried doing a bunch of things I needed to take care of, and I didn't succeed at getting them done with enough time to make it to the wedding."

This kind of person will feel that it is never his fault for being late or for missing events, because he thinks that he has done everything in his power. He has formed the belief that it is truly impossible for him to change these habits, because there's nothing else to do about it, and, after all, he does have to take care of whatever he was taking care of.

Where does this problem come from? It is due to any of the two reasons we explained earlier. It may either be because the person has no concept of time, or it may be because the person is trying to cram in too many things within a short amount of time, which is really much more than he can do. And if the person also has a nature to become 'dragged' into other things as he is the midst of doing something else, he will be constantly involved in a "world that is not his". He is in the middle of doing something, and he is not aware of the time, so he has a hard time stopping in the middle of what he is doing.

We should understand that there are those who, if they are *avreichim*, they never have a *Kolel* to go to; and if they work, they cannot keep a job. They never manage in any place they are in.

Sometimes a person like this becomes "his own person" who tries to survive somehow on his own. He may get hired for a job by people who don't really know what his habits are like, and he gets fired from there, and again he gets hired for another job, only to be told that he can only work there for half the time....and everyone who meets him thinks that he's working like any other normal person, and he seems to be fine and doing well. They don't

really know his true situation. Sometimes this kind of person may even resent others for the unjust “mistreatment” that is being accorded to him, because he feels that he deserves to be treated better, in spite of his habits...

This way of living will not work for anyone, because it is like trying to live in fantasy.

In Conclusion

The above is all a brief description of the problems caused by impaired **water-of-water**. Many people who have a dominance of this nature in themselves face much destruction in their life, because they do not recognize the limitations around them. We have so far explained how this problem can be manifest in the areas of place and time, and now we will briefly mention how it is a problem in the area of the soul, which is a subtler point to discuss.

Impaired Water-of-Water In The Area of “Soul”

Earlier, we mentioned that the problem of getting “dragged” and “caught” up in certain activities, the problem of impaired “**water-of-water**”, can be manifest in the areas of place, time, and soul. So far we explained how it manifests in the areas of place and time. Now we will explain, briefly, how this problem can manifest in the area of “soul”.

In the area of “soul”, the problem of impaired **water-of-water** is that a person will not know what his true limitations are. He might think that he knows his personality, but really he doesn't. As an example, a person may be a carpenter, and if he is asked what he does, he may say, “I only do it in special cases.” He is ‘dragged’ after a certain pastime and he is “confident” that things will turn out good, but this job does not suit his personality at all.

I once met an artist who was showing me his paintings. He said to me, “This is not really who I am. I can really paint much better than this.” He feels that he hasn't fully utilized his talent yet in this picture, and he feels he can do much better. He became ‘dragged’ into the pastime of art, when it is not really for him to do, and he keeps thinking that he can do better at it. A person like this, as well as in any other profession which doesn't suit him, is suffering inwardly, because he always feels like he has never found himself yet in a profession that truly utilizes his talents.

There are many more examples we can give, and we have tried to present here a general picture of the problem and how it manifests in different areas. We cannot provide an exact solution for each of these issues mentioned, but we will try to give general rules of what a person can do about this, to alleviate these kinds of issues.

Time Management: Leave A Little Earlier

Let's consider the following example, where a person has the problem of not being aware of time.

If a person plans to get to a certain place at 9 o'clock, he should seriously consider how much time it will take him to get there. He can check the GPS or the time on the dashboard of the car, and see at what time he left. He might notice that it will take him a half hour to get there. At what time did he leave? He may discover that he left at 8:35, and he is not the type to drive fast, so he knows he will be a bit late, but he figures, “What's so bad if I will come 2 minutes late?” He will even plan to leave the house at 8:35 to begin with, because he figures that he has enough time to get there, and he thinks there's nothing wrong with coming a few minutes late, so he takes his time a bit when he's getting ready...

The advice for this kind of person is that **he should resolve to *leave 30 minutes before the actual amount of time that he needs.*** Some people can take this even further and set an alarm clock so that they will remember to leave earlier. But the basic idea is that he shouldn't aim to leave at exactly the time he needs to leave, or after it. He should resolve to leave *before* that. If he has to be at a certain place by 9 o'clock and it will take him a certain amount of time to get there, he should leave *before* that amount of time. Even if he comes late, he will have gained by getting his soul used to the idea of limitations. He will train himself to the idea of sticking to certain boundaries which he doesn't try to override.

Although this kind of person believes that there's nothing wrong with coming a bit late, and especially because everyone else also comes late sometimes, he has what to gain by getting used to leaving to his destination before the actual amount of time he needs, because he will be training his soul to get used to the concept of sticking to certain limitations. He also learns how to move in the opposite direction which his soul wants to move in, by getting used to showing up a bit earlier to where he has to get to. It might feel to him like a waste of time when he arrives earlier and there is nothing to do, but it is actually not a waste of time – to the contrary, he is building his entire concept of time, by arriving earlier.

The Solution For Getting 'Caught Up' In Activities

We have so far explained how a person who has no concept of time can train himself to gain a concept of time. What should a person do, though, if he has the problem of cramming in too much activity within a certain amount of time, and because of that he becomes dragged into other things and this pushes him off schedule?

This kind of person thinks that he can keep pushing himself to do just a bit more, another thing and another thing, and that is why he tries to cram in so much work into a short amount of time. The advice for him is to try an opposite approach than what he is used to: He should try doing 10% or 20% less than what he thinks he is capable of doing.

At first, he may feel like he is wasting his time, by not utilizing his time as much to get more things done. He may feel that it's possible for him to do more than what he is doing and to make the most out of his time. But in truth, he is really not wasting his time, for although he is getting less done, he is gaining a bit more *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity) instead. He is also valuing the “quality” in his life more than the “quantity” in his life. But even without this gain, he is gaining in the sense that he is learning how to place limits on his activities and to be able to properly manage his time.

In summary, before starting to do something, the person should make up with himself that he will try doing 10% or 20% less of how much he thinks he can do – not more, and not less.

This advice we are saying is not only a solution for this particular issue we are discussing. When one practices it, it can slowly limit the entire nature of “dragging” in the soul, enabling a person to restrain himself from becoming ‘dragged’ after any of the activities that he previously couldn't pull away from.

Based on the above, if a person has the problem of losing track of time when he is talking and he has a hard time suddenly stopping himself in the middle, it will not work if he tells himself that he will stop in “Another 5 minutes”. And, if a person has the problem of not being able to stop in the middle of reading something, it is also not practical if he tells himself that he will stop at the end of one more chapter. This is because once a person follows the nature of becoming ‘dragged’, he is pulled after it almost helplessly and he won't be able to stop himself. Instead, the way to deal with this issue is by **setting a certain amount of time for yourself before you start, and to end at that time.**

If you keep telling yourself “Just one more minute” or “Just one more chapter” or “I’m just doing one more thing...”, it will never work, because since the problem is that you are dragged further and further after what you are doing, it will only become more uncontrollable with the more you allow yourself to become dragged and pulled into it. Instead, you need to set for yourself a certain amount of time from beforehand, and you should view that as the amount of time you will be spending on it.

In addition, besides for stopping at the amount of time you have set for yourself, we also mentioned that you should stop a little bit before that. For example, if you decide that you will stop what you are doing at 9 o’clock, you should really stop at 8:55. In this way, you gain doubly. You train your soul to get used to the boundaries which you have made for yourself, but even more so, you learn how to stop a little bit before the boundary arrives, so that you don’t even meet the actual boundary!

Example – Accepting Shabbos A Little Earlier

A good example of how you can implement this idea is on Erev Shabbos: to accept Shabbos a little bit earlier than the actual time.

In most homes, the atmosphere on Erev Shabbos is not calm, especially in the winter, when Shabbos is earlier. With many people, there is no difference when Shabbos is in the winter or in the summer – whether there is 4 hours left to prepare for Shabbos or even if there is 8 hours left to prepare for Shabbos, they are always busy with the preparations until the last minute of when they have to stop doing *melachah* (work). Whether you usually accept Shabbos 10 minutes earlier before sundown, or 20 minutes earlier, or 30 minutes earlier – it would be a good idea if you accept Shabbos 15 minutes earlier than your usual time. For example, if sundown is at 4:50 and you would normally accept Shabbos at 4:30 (which is 20 minutes earlier), instead, accept Shabbos at 4:15. (That will also mean that instead of cramming in all the preparations on Friday, you will be doing less on Friday, in order to be able to accept Shabbos earlier.)

The idea is that whenever you have a deadline for something when you must stop, you make sure to make the deadline a bit earlier, so that you will never even get near the actual deadline.

Understandably, we can give many more examples of the idea, but we have explained the main point, and from there you can come up with your own examples of how to apply this. In summary, the idea is to make boundaries for yourself, and then to extend the boundary a bit further, so that you can go turn yourself away in the opposite direction than the one you were being ‘dragged’ towards.

Even if one does not work on the ideas here perfectly, by simply trying to implement these ideas, he can still change his perspective, slowly. And, in addition, he will acquire the ability to go in the opposite direction of where he is being pulled towards, and in that way, he can counter his nature to become ‘dragged’.

The Power of “Contraction”

In different terms, when one learns how to move in the opposite direction of where he is being pulled towards, this is also known as the soul’s power of “contraction” (in contrast to an opposite power of the soul, which is called “expansion”).

When a person has too much **water-of-water**, he will keep expanding outward, with no ability to restrain himself. This person will need to develop the power of “contraction”, which will place some restraint on his power

to expand. One does this getting used to “contracting” (sticking to his boundaries and stopping even before it) instead of “expanding” (becoming dragged).

Let us explain a bit more, in order to be clear about how this concept works.

The simple solution to the problem of becoming “dragged” and losing track of time, is to simply establish boundaries for oneself. In order to counter the nature of impaired **water-of-water**, it would seem that we need to use the very opposite of this, which is **earth-of-earth**. However, this will not prove successful, because in order to establish boundaries in the first place, one needs certain inner strength to do so. When one’s **water-of-water** keeps expanding and causing a person to become so “dragged” into whatever he is doing, it is very difficult to stop. The person may want to stop his habits and he may even be prepared to make resolutions to improve his behavior, but it still won’t work, because he still gets dragged after what he does.

Instead, one needs to counter the movement of the soul which is dragging him, by creating an “opposite movement” to go in, which will go against the movement of the “dragging” that is caused by impaired **water-of-water**.

Gradual Change

This does not mean that a person will change all of his habits so fast and that he will never again have the problem of becoming too ‘dragged’ after what he is doing. A person may be 99% dragged after what he is doing, but if he can move in the opposite direction of the ‘dragging’ by even 1% (by setting a boundary for himself of how much time he will spend on something, and stopping a little bit before that actual time), he slowly develops the power of “opposite movement”, and he will be able to slowly counter his nature of getting ‘dragged’.

It is as the Rambam says, that in order to change any trait, one needs to first go in the opposite extreme of his weakness, in order to get to the “middle point” between the two extremes. The middle point is essentially where there is recognition of proper, balanced boundaries of the trait.

07 | LACK OF STABILITY

Wind-of-Water: Excited While Becoming 'Dragged'

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will continue here to learn about the power of focus. In this chapter, we will discuss problems with focus which stem from “**wind-of-water**”.

As mentioned earlier, one of the elements which completely oppose the power of focus is the element of water, which “drags” a person. When a person is pulled and dragged after something, he doesn't concentrate. “**Wind-of-water**” means that a person become excited, while becoming dragged.

In general, excitement is a nature which comes from the element of wind, and when a person becomes excited as he is being ‘dragged’ towards something, this nature stems from the ‘wind’ within the element of water – hence this lack of focus stems from “**wind-of-water**”. First the person is “dragged”, and then he becomes excited, about what he is being dragged towards.

Wind-of-Water – The Excitable, Childish Nature

This nature can be seen in all children. Children become excited easily about something and then become instantly “dragged” into whatever they are excited about. They hear a sound or a siren and they run to go see what the noise is about. They see a new game and excitedly run to go play it. “**Wind-of-water**” is a very dominant and revealed nature in children, and it controls the child almost completely, without any restraint.

When a person gets older and mature, in most cases, this nature still remains very much revealed – with some, more, and with some, less. We should know that there are also some people who remain with their childish state, which is called *mochin d'katnus* (small-mindedness), and this causes their “**wind-of-water**” to remain a dominant nature even in their adulthood. However, in all adults, this nature usually remains revealed, to some extent, and the only question is how much. The issue will depend on how much of an excitable nature the person had since he was a child, which will continue into his adulthood.

Example 1 – Always Buying New Sefarim

The following is an example of this nature, though it is not that common. You can have a person who keeps looking to buy new *sefarim*. He passes by the vendor of *sefarim* in the street [which they have in Israel] and he excitedly looks for new *sefarim* to buy and learn, perhaps *sefarim* on the *daf* of *Gemara* he is learning. It's as if he already finished the 20,000 old *sefarim* which are already available, and now he is looking for “new” *sefarim*....

Why does he keep looking for new *sefarim*? Apparently, it tugs at his heart. He keeps looking for new *sefarim*, or perhaps for a newer edition of an already published *sefer*, but he is not interested in any of the *sefarim* which are not new that he does not yet know.... because those *sefarim* are found everywhere. He is looking only for “new” *sefarim*. He starts to open the *sefer* and he looks at some of the pages, and he is amazed. He reads the introduction and a few words of the *sefer*, and he thinks to himself, “Wow! This is a *sefer* which I must buy, and which I must learn.” He buys the *sefer*, and that night, he learns the *sefer* before getting into his bed, and the *sefer* ends up somewhere on the floor...and he never looks at the *sefer* again.

Maybe he will look at the *sefer* one more time, or 2 or 3 more times, and he feels that it's a very prominent *sefer*, and he says, "Everyone must learn this *sefer*! My whole family must learn this *sefer*, and all of *Klal Yisrael* must learn this *sefer* from beginning until end." For some reason, he never fulfills this personal obligation. He continues to feel excited about the *sefer*, even though he has only read one thought in the *sefer*. Two days later, he doesn't even remember one thing in the *sefer*. He is done learning it, and it is placed on his bookshelf of *sefarim*, where it joins the "graveyard" of the rest of *sefarim* on his bookshelf....

A few weeks later, and he has long forgotten the new *sefer* which he had been so excited about, and now he sees another new *sefer* which he is excited about. Once again he feels that he is obligated to buy it. The new *sefer* discusses how to fix a certain character trait, or it discusses a certain *halachah* which many people are stumbling in and aren't keeping correctly, or it explains the wisdom behind the *mazalos* and the stars (which is mentioned explicitly in the *Gemara*, yet he is amazed that this new *sefer* has cited this particular *Gemara* which contains so much wisdom). He will always find another reason of why a new *sefer* is very important to learn....

He becomes very excited about the *sefer*, but he has simply become 'dragged' after his excitement towards it, because this excitement is short-lived. There are also some people who have never finished even one *sefer*, for this reason. They don't finish anything, for that matter – not the tractate of *Gemara* they are learning, and not any of the *sefarim* they buy.

Where does this problem stem from? It is because the person has a nature to become "dragged" after things and then he becomes excited about what's dragged after. Like the wind which comes and goes, his excitement is only temporary, and sometime later, his "wind" has ceased and he is no longer excited for the *sefer*.

Example 2 – A Marriage Based Upon Excitement

There is a kind of person who will always become excited about something else, each time. Here is a common example. In those circles where the boy and girl meet each other before becoming engaged, one of them may say, "From the moment we met, I felt that this was my destined mate from Heaven." Their connection begins with this excitement, and, as time goes on, the excitement eventually weakens, and they find themselves in need of serious help....

He had built the entire relationship based upon excitement, and nothing more. He had simply been 'dragged' after this excitement. Eventually, excitement goes away, and then the person is left with nothing.

Many marriages are based upon a feeling of excitement. When the excitement dies down, they may get divorced, because if there is no more excitement, they feel nothing towards each other. Even if they don't divorce, their marriage become very difficult and complicated, and they really wish they could get divorced; the only reason why they don't is because they don't want to become embarrassed in their social circle, or because they don't want to complicate the lives of the children, and they reason that marrying a different person may not necessarily work out better, etc. They had based their entire marriage on the original excitement they felt towards each other, and then one day comes where one of the spouses wonders to himself: "How could I have made such a mistake then, in deciding to marry this person?"

A Child With An Adult Body

A person like this remains very much like a child, even in adulthood. One's physical body may have grown, and his thoughts may have become more mature, but his very perspective towards life can remain the same as a child's, when he has a dominant nature of **wind-of-water**.

The abilities of the mind are called *chochmah* (wisdom), *binah* (contemplation) and *daas* (knowledge, or awareness). A child has very little *chochmah*, even less *binah*, and almost no *daas*, because the power of *daas* is a mental ability to connect information together, and a child cannot connect.

We must know how to apply the nature of excitement – where to draw the line with this nature, and where it should be applied, and how. First we will give the outline of it, and then explain it more in detail, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

Proper Excitement Is When There Is Awareness

The nature of excitement, if it is combined with the nature of becoming “dragged”, will mean that a person will not be aware of what is happening to him as he is in the midst of becoming excited. In most cases, in order for excitement to be constructive, it must be preceded with **awareness**. This can be achieved in either one of the following two ways:

- 1) One can have awareness before he becomes excited, meaning that a person is aware that he is about to excite himself (for example, if I am about to learn Torah because I love to learn it, or I am about to awaken a love for the Creator, I am aware before I do so that this will excite me).
- 2) Even when becoming “dragged” towards something out of excitement, if I immediately become aware that I have become excited, such excitement will be more balanced and it will not control me.

Awareness After Becoming Excited

The following is a fundamental example that illustrates this idea (of excitement followed with awareness).

Reb Yeruchem of Mir said that he had given many talks about the topic of *emunah*, and one day he suspected that perhaps this was all because he became excited from a talk about *emunah* that he heard when he was a child. He felt that perhaps he had become ‘dragged’ after this topic for all of his life, in his excitement. However, now that he had become ‘dragged’ in his excitement, he became aware of it, and now he suspected that he had been ‘dragged’ for all of his life, which is the excitable nature of **wind-of-water**.

Sometimes a person is ‘dragged’ after something because Hashem has decreed that this happen. This ‘dragging’ is beyond a person's control, and it is supposed to happen. However, one still needs to become aware of it after it happens. One cannot always prepare himself for all of the excitement he will have in his life. There will be many scenarios where he won't be able to enter the excitement with any awareness. Often there are scenarios where Hashem has directly brought the person into a situation of excitement, with no time to prepare for it, such as when a person suddenly sees something, hears something, or reads something which excites him. We can't make ourselves so rigid and make sure that we only become excited with preceding awareness. Rather, there will be certain situations where we will not become aware of the excitement before we become excited. When that happens, we need to become aware (after becoming excited) that we have just become dragged after our excitement. The very awareness itself will prevent the excitement from controlling a person.

Restrained Excitement

But even more so, the awareness to your excitement afterwards also enables you to provide **boundaries** to the excitement.

Without any awareness, a person becomes dragged after something, and then he becomes excited. One will keep becoming excitable whenever he is dragged after something, each time becoming excited over something else. If you know people with this nature, you can recognize well that they become very **unfocused** as soon as something distracts them and excites them. That is why there is a need for a person to place boundaries on one's excitement.

In Summary

In summary, excitement is proper and balanced either when a person has: (1) The awareness before getting excited that he is about to become excited by something; (2) Or, when one becomes aware of his excitement, after he has become excited.

In addition to this, we also mentioned that a person must learn how to place "boundaries" on his excitement, meaning that a person also needs to learn how to restrain his excitement a bit, so that it doesn't totally control him. This is a separate point and it merits its own discussion. This enables a person to become limited in his excitement, so that he won't go overboard in his excitement. It is essentially the power of *daas*, which is the power to remain connected in your mind to something, and the very essence of focus. In contrast to this, becoming controlled by excitement is the total antithesis to *daas*, because it is an absence of focus. The more a person builds his power of *daas*, the better he can counter the loss of focus when he becomes excited.

Thus, through the awareness beforehand that there will be excitement, or through awareness of the excitement after one has become excited, a person already gains a certain degree of focus.

Understanding The Role of Excitement In Our Life

Even more so, though, we should know the following: Where should a person draw the line when it comes to the power of excitement? What are the proper boundaries of becoming excited?

Excitement certainly has its place. Hashem created it, so it is certainly constructive, as long as it is kept within the proper boundaries. Only when something is not kept within its proper limitations does it become detrimental. There are certainly situations where excitement is required, in order for a person to feel connected to what he is doing.

I emphasize here that not every situation requires excitement – there are only a few which do. In the situations that do require excitement, a person needs the excitement in order to become *connected* in the first place, to what he is trying to do. Excitement should be viewed as a *path* that you can use *to start becoming connected* to something, which can eventually lead you to the *actual connection*. Thus, excitement should not be viewed as the actual connection itself. Rather, it is a temporary stage which you can use in order to get to a real, intrinsic connection to something.

When people try to connect to something without any excitement, they are only intellectually connected. The intellect is cold, so the connection will be cold. Although we need the power of cold intellect, which enables us to make rational decisions, it is not actually enough to aid us in our decisions. For example, when deciding whom you will marry, you cannot decide this through cold logic alone. If the decision to marry comes from the intellect alone,

a person will begin his marriage from his cold intellect and this is how we will continue into his marriage. How can any spouse live with such a person? Obviously, a person also needs excitement, a certain “warm” feeling, when deciding whom he will marry.

Thus, there is definitely a place for excitement. It is just that we need to understand its role. Excitement enables us to have a desire for something, which enables us to begin to connect to something. After that, however, we need to build the connection, and we cannot remain with the excitement alone.

The nature of excitement is rooted in the element of wind. The opposite element of wind is the element of earth. Excitement is the beginning of how we connect to anything, but then we need to build the connection. The power to build comes from the element of earth. Through working with our element of earth, we can then truly build our connection to something. We first begin to connect to something through being excited about it, but after that, we need to build and develop our connection.

Even after we build, we will still need a degree of excitement, to have a warm feeling towards what we are doing. However, the main aspect of the connection is through building it, which is a use of the element of earth. Wind, or excitement, enables us to have the motivation to get started. But then we need to mainly “build”, with the “building” being the primary aspect, and the wind/excitement only as an additional aspect.

When one instead tries to turn wind/excitement into his primary aspect and earth/building into a side aspect, this is like the child’s perspective towards life, for a child cannot build. We see that even when a child builds, he piles a few parts atop each other very quickly and then knocks it all down. Why? Because the child’s primary element is wind, and his “wind” can come and easily knock down any of his structure/earth. And in fact, the child even enjoys it when anything he builds is knocked down. This is really because the child has no concept of true “building”. Any amount of building which he does is easily knocked down through wind/excitement. This personifies a child. The more a person matures, though, the more he is able to “build”, and his connections to anything are more firm.

Therefore, before you are about to become excited about something and connect to it, you should just be aware that you are about to become excited. After you become excited, you should then “build” an actual connection to it. With the more you build the actual connection, you will become excited again, so keep “building”, then become excited, then “building”, etc. That is the cycle.

As mentioned, if the excitement is without any “building”, this is the perspective of a child, who has an immature perspective towards life and who doesn’t engage in real building. On the other hand, if there is no excitement, one will not have the drive to build. Therefore, one needs both aspects: a warm feeling of excitement towards what you are trying to connect to, as well as the ability to build.

The Effect of Weak, Temporary Connections On Us

Based upon the above, we can understand the following point clearly. The superficial way of living, which is the childish perspective towards life, is to connect only temporarily to something.

Throughout the day, we keep “connecting” outward to different things, but these are all temporary connections. We get up out of bed, which we had previously been ‘connected’ to, and now we disconnect from the bed. We put on our shoes, but later we remove them. We wash our hands in the sink, and soon the water is gone. We take a *sefer* off the shelf and then put it back, and we are no longer connected to the *sefer*. We get into the car and then we step

out of it. There are countless examples of this idea, where we keep connecting and disconnecting from the same thing.

Why is it this way? Why is it that we keep going through these various connections throughout the day?

Clearly, there are some things we are connected to only weakly, and some things which we are connected to more strongly. For example, if we have a towel by the sink where we dry our hands off, we regularly use this towel, but if there are only paper towels by the sink, we dry our hands with them only once and then they go in the garbage. We have almost no connection to it.

If we compare the different kinds of connections to things that we have throughout the day, we can learn about two different abilities in our soul to connect – the power to connect strongly, and the power to connect only weakly.

Which of these is a stronger, more dominant power in the soul? Although the power to connect weakly is only a temporary kind of connection, it is still being used constantly throughout the day, which makes it become a dominant nature in the soul. This causes a detrimental effect on the soul.

In this generation, we have many disposable items, which are used once and then go in the garbage. What is the depth behind this? It is because this generation has an attitude of having only a “one-time” connection to anything. A good example of this, as we mentioned before, is the attitude towards marriage which many people in our generation have. Many people today do not view marriage as a “one-time” use – in other words, they view marriage as something that they can have more than once....and it is really because the very attitude in their soul is to connect only weakly to something. The connection is built on excitement for something, which is temporary, so as soon as the excitement leaves, there is no more connection. Since we are so used to a “disposable”, one-time use for many things throughout the day, our soul gets used to having only weak, temporary connections to something.

Connection is really about permanence. On a deeper level, when one has *d'veykus* (attachment) to Hashem, he is really in a state of absolute focus. This is not a superficial kind of concentration, but a power of concentration which comes from the depths of the soul, the deep power through one which connects to Hashem with. In the generation we live in, though, people keep making use of a power of “connection” that is only temporary and fleeting, as opposed to a permanent kind of connection.

Another good example of this is the advertisements in the streets which are quickly replaced by new ones. Another example is disposable menorahs. You can add your own examples as well, which we all recognize, which have a one-time use and which are constantly replaced, like a flash of lightning. When people get used to using all of these ‘one-time’ connections, it slowly has an undesirable effect on the soul, and the soul will learn to have only temporary, weak connections.

If one has already developed his soul’s power to connect deeply to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and to Torah, he has a stable kind of connection in his soul, so even when he goes through countless connections that are weak and temporary, he will remain with this ability to have stable, permanent connection to something. But without this, the soul becomes controlled by all of the weak, temporary and fleeting connections that it experiences, and it won’t be able to have permanent connection to anything. When that is the case, it is then very hard for the mind to remain **focused** on anything, because the person does not know how to remain “connected” that long to anything.

Find Something Stable To Connect To

In order for a person to develop the ability of deep focus, one needs to develop a point in his life where he is deeply, permanently connected to something - and it should be something meaningful. In essence, all of our life is really one point that we need to focus on: the reality of Hashem. This divides into all the other parts that we need to focus on, which are the rest of the details to our life and our inner work.

First, one should choose a meaningful point to remain focused on. One can keep directing his focus on something meaningful until he reaches the point where he sees how all points are unified into one (*achdus elyonah*, “higher unity”, a state where all is one). This opens the ability in the soul to have deep, stable and permanent connection to something.

Here is a fundamental example of this idea. When it comes to the bond that parents feel towards their children, in many cases (not all of them, but many), the parents do not consciously feel a strong, deep connection to their children. Their love to the children is only awakened from some extreme circumstance, such as if the child becomes ill, or when there is a very joyous occasion, or when the parents greatly need the child to do something for them, which awakens their bond. But in the normal day-to-day relationship with the children, the parents usually have a superficial connection to their children. Parents will certainly do good things for their children, but most of the time, they are not inwardly connected to what they are doing for the children. Therefore, they will only have an external bond with their children, not a deep one.

Another example of this is when it comes to our connection to learning Torah, to Hashem, and to *ahavas Yisrael*. The connection that one must have towards learning the Torah, to Hashem, to all Jews in general, and even to his own inner circle of friends, must be both an intellectual and emotional connection. If we take a look at the world, though, how many people can we see who have even one permanent connection to anything in their life?

Earlier we mentioned the example of marriage, that even if a couple stays married together their entire life, that doesn't necessarily mean that they have formed a connection of permanence with each other. Even the bond that parents have with their children is usually weak. Often the parents become angry with their children, such as when the children do things against their will or when they don't listen to them, etc. On a subconscious level, the parent may be strongly connected to the child, but on the consciously revealed level, not only is there no bond with the child, but there are clashes in their relationship.

Where do people feel their strongest connect to, then? In some people, the strongest connection they know of is with their job – that is, if they know that they are well-liked there. But even this is not a permanent connection, because deep down, a person is afraid he might lose his job. So he does not have an absolute, permanent connection to his job; he just has a fear of being removed from it.

If a person would examine his life and see if there's anything he is strongly connected to on a daily basis, in most cases, he would see that there is no such area. If it does exist, it is probably for something detrimental, such as a connection to a certain physical desire, or to something which provides him with conceitedness or honor. To what is a person truly connected to? Usually, he isn't connected to anything! If he isn't connected to anything, then what will his soul be focused on....?

The soul's power to focus comes from an ability to have a deep, inner connection to something – both on an intellectual level, as well as on a more inner level.

In our times, there are many problems with focus and concentration. This problem always existed, even in previous generations, either stemming from a lack of awareness, or from involvement with many different responsibilities in life, but it can also stem from experiencing constant ‘connections’ to things which are weak and

unstable. That is unique to our generation. Today, a person goes through so much outer stimuli, one after the other, in quick succession. One moment a person is writing something, then he is in a conversation, then he is reading something – constant “connections” to different things – and all of these are temporary, weak, and fleeting, so they are not stable sources of connection. All of these things do not enable a person to truly be connected to even one thing.

This way of living (being constantly disconnected) is a total antithesis to the whole idea of focus. It has detrimental results on the entire spectrum of the soul. One of the noticeable results of this way of living is in how it affects a person’s ability to focus.

Practically speaking, what can one do about this problem? The truth is that only *Moshiach* will be able to come and solve all of the problems in our life. In the era of exile which we are found in, there are only a few individuals who can totally separate from today’s lifestyle, but most of the world cannot do this. The changing technology in our world has a very strong pull, and everyone, without exception, feels pulled after it. It is truly unbelievable, but it is the reality today! An advertisement appears and everyone is interested in whatever is being offered. Almost no one puts a halt to everything and says, “Enough. This has to stop.” In any case, though, every person needs to find at least one point in his one life where he will form a deep, permanent connection to. It can be a deep, stable connection to either Hashem, Torah, *ahavas Yisrael*.

The idea is that a person needs to find one fundamental area in life and then choose to connect to it, with permanence. Just having a stable connection to anything is already countering the detrimental lifestyle of today which hampers a person’s ability to focus. Slowly as time goes on, one can keep deepening this permanent connection to something, and he will acquire **a stable place in his soul which he can always be connected to.**

How Having A Stable, Permanent Connection To Something Improves Your Focus

This idea also improves the entire inner state of a person. **By developing a stable place in yourself where you are always connected to, you will gain the ability to be always focused.** As a result of developing this ability, **a person will also be able to re-focus after his thoughts or emotions begin to scatter his thinking. This is because he will have developed the ability to quickly return his thoughts or emotions to a stable place in himself, where he is always focused on.** (On a deeper level, one can keep returning to the root of his soul, which is the deepest place to focus on, but this is a very high level).

On a simpler and more basic level, a person can develop a stable place in himself which he is always connected to. As soon as he becomes unfocused, if he has developed some level of awareness (with *siyata d’shmaya*) and he is aware that he has lost focus, he will be able to quickly return his thoughts to the point where he normally focuses on. In this way, **one trains himself to quickly return to a state of focus, as soon as he becomes aware that his thoughts are wandering.** He goes from being scattered and unfocused, to being composed and focused, in a cycle. As time increases and he continues this cycle, his power of focus will slowly increase, and his loss of focus will slowly decrease.

Unless a person has a stable place in his soul which he can easily focus on, it will be most difficult for him to re-focus his thoughts as soon as his mind begins to wander. One who develops it, though, will attain a great balance in his soul, which will allow him to easily regain his focus, with *siyata d’shmaya*. This ability does not fix everything, but it will attribute much to the building of the soul.

Helping A Person Expand His Point of Stable Connection

There is also a deeper use of how we can actualize this idea.

Based upon what we have explained above, we can know another way, of how to help a person who has issues with concentrating and focusing. We need to discover: What area in his life is the person strongly connected to and focused on?

Every person has some area in his life which he is strongly connected to, at least on some level [even if it isn't deep and permanent]. For example, every person has someone or something he is happy about, or someone or something that he loves, which he feels a connection to. Once we succeed in identifying it, we can then magnify it and increase it, opening it further, so that we can activate it from its potential state. This will increase the person's power of focus as well, because it gives a person something he can greatly focus on.

This idea can also be applied to children, in order to help them concentrate better. Understandably, the more mature and the more aware a person is, the easier it will be to make use of this idea, because it can be explained to him and he will be able to relate to it. But even a young child can gain from this idea, when we expand upon the point he is already somewhat focused on.

This particular idea solves many other issues as well, not only issues with focus. Many times a person is lacking inner vitality to his life; he feels dried up inside, bored, sad, unfulfilled, and other negative states. But we can help such a person if we find a point in his life which he feels strongly connected to, and we can help him increase that point and help him become more focused on it, which will take him out of his inertia.

In general, whenever we help a person do inner work with his soul, there are two different methods. Either we can deal with the negative issues, or we can focus on the positive. When dealing with the negative issues, there are two ways to do this: Either through finding the area that will be the easiest and most practical for the person to work on and improve, or, through locating the most severe issue in his soul and getting him to uproot it as much as he can. The second approach is difficult for most people, and only a few individuals have the inner strength to do it.

The first approach, bringing out the positive, is an altogether different approach when working with the soul. It is like the statement, "A little light pushes away a lot of darkness."¹⁹ We can find the most positive point in the person's life and then magnify it further, so that the person will be focused on it, and then the light of this good will spread to the rest of the person's soul and improve his general inner state. With particular regards to our discussion, it improves a person's power of focus, when we find something he is already connected to and we help him expand it further.

Of course, not every point should be expanded and increased, because there are some things a person may like but which are detrimental to him. A person may be drawn towards certain negative acts which he finds enjoyable to do, and we do not want to help him increase his focus on such things. For example, if he enjoys hurting or bothering people, we should not help him increase his focus on this just because he enjoys it. But as a general rule, we need to find one positive area in his life which he feels somewhat connected to, and then help him expand this point further. In doing so, we begin to provide the person with an ability to create a balance within his soul.

In Summary and In Conclusion

¹⁹ Shem M'Shmuel parshas Bo

Thus, practically speaking, in order to fix [the problems with concentration and focus which stem from] the impaired element of “**wind-of-water**” – the excitement that follows after a person becomes ‘dragged’ after something, causing a person to become inwardly scattered and to have a “childish” perspective towards life – we will need to counter this by going in the opposite direction [of the excitement].

As mentioned, either we can be aware *before* we are about to become excited, that we are now becoming excited; or, we can become aware of the excitement, *after* we have become excited. Then one can choose to connect to the excitement or not, which places some restraint on the reaction of the excitement. And even in situations where we need excitement in order to connect to something, we then need to develop the connection, through building a more permanent connection to it.

Along with this, each person needs to find at least one fundamental area of his life where he feels connected to, and to expand it further. This enables a person to have an area where he can easily focus on. Whenever a person finds himself losing focus – whether his thoughts are in turmoil, or whether his emotions are in turmoil - he can become aware of the loss of focus, and quickly regain his focus by returning his thoughts to the area which he can easily and strongly focus on.

We mentioned that children can be helped by this method as well, even though they will not be able to work on this idea fully (being that their awareness level is lacking). We can find an area in the child’s life which he feels strongly connected to, and then help him become more focused on that area. This will help him improve his entire ability to focus, and it will also help him attain a balance in his soul in general. As a person gets older and he matures, he is able to become more aware whenever he loses focus. He will have an easier time regaining his focus, when he has a stable place in himself to always return his thoughts to.

08 | QUICK DISCONNECTION

Fire-of-Water: Quickly Connecting To Something & Then Quickly Disconnecting From It

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we continue here to learn about the power of focus. We are now up to discussing focus-related issues which stem from the element of “**fire-of-water**”.

As explained earlier, the element of water can “drag” a person. The “fire” aspect of water is when a person is “dragged” after something in a “destructive” manner, just as fire destroys. This is when a person is pulled into something for a temporary amount of time, because his connection to it does not last for long. In this scenario, a person is causing the connection to cease. We will explain this further.

Example 1 – Attending A Lesson & Quickly Dropping Out

A person may become ‘dragged’ after something but then he quickly pulls away from it. For example, a person may go to hear a *shiur* from a certain person, and he is so impressed and enthusiastic about the *shiur* that he decides to attend it on a regular basis. But after two or three weeks of attending it, he becomes disillusioned, and he is disappointed with it, feeling that it’s not what he thought it would be. He loses his esteem for it and he stops coming.

Example 2 – Befriending Someone & Quickly ‘Dumping’ Him

Another example: A person meets someone, begins talking to him, and as the conversation goes on, he connects very much with the other’s personality and he becomes enamored by the other person. He feels confident that he has found the “true friend” in his life.

Apparently, he had been searching his whole life for the person who would become his “true friend”, and now, he feels like he has finally found that true friend. His new “friend” has a very likeable personality, he is honest and he is trustworthy, and acts loving to all people. He finds that they have similar thoughts and views about life, and that they share a common language. After some time, however, the person who was the “befriender” slowly realizes, “Is that all there is to him? Eh, I could find someone better than this.” And he severs the connection.

Example 3 – Buying A Product & Quickly Losing Interest In It

In another example of this nature, a person sees a new product in a store window and he instantly likes it. He quickly buys it, without too much thinking about how much he really needs it or not. After some use of the item, he begins to feel, “It’s too hard to use. It doesn’t work as good as I thought it would.”

Quickly Destroying A Connection To Something of Significance

There are many other examples as well of this, in which a person enters into something without any awareness about it [and soon ‘grows out’ of whatever he connected to]. We addressed this point (of entering into something without awareness), in the previous chapter, but here we are discussing an additional factor, “**fire-of-water**”, in

which a person becomes enthused about something, is dragged after it without any thinking, and instantly connects to it. He will pull away from it just as quickly as he was pulled after it. Just as he was pulled towards it without doing too much thinking or reflection about it, so does he quickly destroy any of his connection to it, without giving that much thought about it.

If it was only a small thing that he slowly grew out of, such as a new table or something else which he has stopped enjoying, because he no longer finds it useful, that's understandable. But in other scenarios, a person may become 'dragged' very much after something when he had felt heavily connected to it, and suddenly he grows out of it, quickly 'destroying' his connection to it. That is more alarming.

The Destructive Nature

Just as fire is the element that destroys things, so does a person with a lot of fire in his personality the type to "destroy" whatever he encounters – not in the active sense, of course, but to act destructively with his mind, by immediately disregarding the worth of something. When meeting any person, he has the nature to immediately look for some fault in the other person. When looking at a house or a car that he wants to buy, he right away looks for something wrong with it.

In some cases, the person has rectified his nature of fire, and his nature of 'destruction' is used for holy purposes – he will always be unsatisfied with his current spiritual level, because he always seeks to grow to higher levels. But many times, when a person has a strong amount of fire in his soul, it is usually the negative side to fire: the trait of conceit. In others, their negative fire manifests as a nature to simply 'destroy' everything they encounter, because they feel inwardly empty inside, and this makes them sad and negative. Their negativity is manifest in how they immediately disregard the value of anything they encounter.

When a person has this nature to 'destroy', this can be manifest in how he thinks, speaks, and acts. As mentioned, a person may mentally 'destroy' others in his mind, by always finding fault with them and thereby disregarding their worth. A person may also have a nature of constantly speaking negatively about others, and these are people who regularly speak *lashon hora*, who often speak of anything bad they can find about others, expressing all of their negative views about everyone and everything. And, finally, a person may act out his destructive nature, by causing physical damage to others or by physically hurting them. In any case, though, a person with a strong amount of negative fire has a nature of constantly nullifying and disregarding the value of something.

The nature to disregard the importance of things is a product of the general nature of fire, but in this lesson, we are discussing specifically the nature of **"fire"-of-water**, which contains both aspects of water and fire. The nature of **fire-of-water** is when a person is only destructive towards the very things he connects to. This kind of person is not trying to destroy and disregard everything he encounters - rather, he has the specific problem of becoming drawn to a certain thing and quickly destroying his connection to it.

Losing Awareness

Part of the problem here is that he has become drawn after something/someone without being aware of it happening. Earlier, when we spoke about impaired **wind-of-water**, we discussed the problem in which one does not clearly see the reality, because he has temporarily lost awareness.

A person may be eating something he likes and he keeps eating it; he is 'dragged' into the act, more and more. Even if he wasn't aware that he is starting to overeat, if we stop him and we get him to think about what he is doing,

it may dawn on him that he is eating out of gluttony, and not out of a desire to sustain himself and keep healthy. A higher level of awareness would be if he becomes aware that he has become ‘dragged’ into the act of eating.

In another scenario, a person sees a certain product in the store, he is drawn after it, and he buys it. If you ask him why he bought it and if he really needs it, he may have the mature awareness to admit, “I really didn’t need it at all. I bought it simply because it will give me some enjoyment.” He is aware that he doesn’t need it and that he will not be using it that much. He may be well aware that it will only provide him with a good feeling for a very short amount of time. He is aware that he has become ‘dragged’ after it.

In the above two examples, the person is fully aware that he is becoming ‘dragged’ after something he doesn’t need. But most people, if they see an item in the store which they feel drawn towards and they quickly buy it, will not admit that they don’t really need it. They are convinced that they somehow need it. They ‘connect’ to it, and after some time, they grow out of the item that they liked so much, and they say that it is useless.

Every day, there are stories where people buy things they think are useful, and after some time they realize that they don’t need what they bought. These are both examples of not being aware that one was being ‘dragged’ after something. The person was so ‘dragged’ after something that he lost awareness of what was happening. After some time, the person will realize that he doesn’t really need the item, and he quickly disregards it. He will feel that the item is totally worthless and useless to him – ‘destroying’ it totally. This depicts the nature of **fire-of-water**.

How Quickly Connecting & Disconnecting Impairs Focus

Now let us see how this relates to our topic, focus.

Focus is a power in which one is in a state of remaining connected [mentally] to a thought. When there is connection to something, there is permanence. When one is not connected to something, he focuses on it much less. If a person is the type to think things through, he will first think before he connects to something, so his connection will be more precise. He will therefore be able to focus on it for a longer amount of time, because his connection to it is more solid.

But if he connected to something without first thinking it through, what inner process is taking place in his soul? He will connect too much to something, being ‘dragged’ after it, and he will soon realize that he was not being realistic. He quickly feels that he has no more connection to it anymore, ‘destroying’ it in his mind entirely. What nature does his soul learn to acquire from this pattern? As time goes on with these patterns, he learns how to connect, destroy, connect, destroy, etc. As a result, he ruins his power to remain connected to anything.

These kinds of people are the type who keep moving from apartments to another, who keep switching their jobs, who keep switching their *chavrusos* (study partners), and who keep switching - their wives! This is also the type of person who keeps replacing his *sefarim*, his music, his car, etc. They keep switching and replacing everything, because their problem is that they connected too fast to something, with excitement and without doing that much thinking beforehand, and soon after, they ‘destroy’ the connection. They come to view everything as disposable, with a one-time use. **This kind of pattern is the total opposite of what it means to stay focused.**

We mentioned that that this pattern of “quick connection, followed by quick destruction” can be manifest in the areas of thought, speech, and action. When a person is only mentally destructive to the things he is connected to, he is still somewhat connected to it, because he has only disconnected from it in his mind, and the thing in question is still in his possession.

For example, there are people who buy expensive homes near the ocean, who spend millions of dollars on these homes, as long as they have the means to do so. They go to the ocean one day and they take a sniff of the air there, and say, “Ah, this air is so pleasant.” They look into buying a home near the ocean, where they can always smell the pleasant air of the beachfront, and they immediately buy such a home. How many times does he visit his new home by the ocean? A few times, and then winter comes, and there’s no point anymore to visit it. After some time, though, he regrets his purchase, and he is disappointed. It wasn’t what he thought it would be.

For those familiar with these kinds of stories, they know that half of these beachfront homes are quickly up for sale again. The person who bought it had made an emotionally-based decision, without doing that much thinking, and soon after, he no longer feels his emotional attraction towards it, he has grown out of it and feels like he made a mistake.

Another kind of person will not sell the home, because he put so much time, effort, and money into it. Instead, though, he “mentally” destroys the connection he had with this new home, by thinking to himself, “I made such a huge mistake in buying it.” He ‘destroys’ it in his mind. Although he won’t try to get rid of the house by selling it, he no longer feels connected to the home, because he has mentally ‘destroyed’ his connection to it. If he verbalizes his upset about it and he tells others that he made a big mistake in buying it, he is “verbally” destroying the connection. Finally, he may destroy his connection to it in the active sense, by putting up his home for half the price he bought it for, because he is so disillusioned with it that he just wants to get rid of it already.

When a person has this nature, he is quickly replacing things, getting rid of them, and replacing them again. As we explained, this can be manifest in the areas of thought, speech, and action.

The Problem of Constantly Severing Relationships

In another scenario of this nature, which is a very important example that illustrates the problem, a person may suddenly sever his connection to a close friend of his. In an emotionally healthy scenario, a person gets to know someone and slowly becomes friends with him, as time goes on. But sometimes a person can become instantly connected to a certain person, connecting with him very fast, and therefore, he may also ‘dump’ him just as fast.

What is the result? A person like this becomes very disappointed with the entire world. He meets people, instantly connects with them, and then instantly grows out of them. For example, if he befriends someone who is known as a trustworthy person, the amount of trust that he accords him is way more than the amount of trust that should be coming to him. What happens, as a result? He will quickly lose trust in the person, and he will repeat the cycle in all of his relationships - so he will always be disappointed with the world.

Of course, every person experiences disappointment with others. We cannot totally trust anyone, because no one is perfect. That is the reality of living. But when a person has a strong amount of **fire-of-water**, he will suffer much more disappointment with others, because he instantly connects with certain people and then he quickly loses interest in them, which is an unending pattern of frustration and disappointment. As a result, his relationships with others become shaky and uncertain, because he feels like no one can be trusted. **And when he is amongst people, he will have a hard time focusing also**, since he is feeling so untrusting of them.

When it comes to marriage as well, this nature of **fire-water** can be very problematic. A boy may become engaged to a girl and at first he feels excited about her, but as the engagement period continues, he loses his initial excitement, to the point that he doesn’t really want to marry her. He talks it over with others and they tell him that he must get married to her. So he marries her. But in his mind, he has already severed the connection with her. Others will take it further: they will openly tell their spouses that they are now no longer interested in them. In this

scenario, the person is verbally severing the connection. Others with this nature have become very “experienced” with marriage – they are already in their fourth marriage....

Where a person keeps switching and replacing whatever he dislikes, and he keeps repeating the cycle, as time goes on like this, he loses his very power to connect. If he loses interest in his car, that’s a small issue. If he loses interest in his house, that’s a little more problematic. But if he wants to switch his family members and his close friends, and he severs his relationships with them, what happens? He loses his soul’s power to properly connect. He will lose the very concept of what it means to connect with others. He won’t have any ability to trust others, because he has no concept of connecting to them. Inwardly, his soul becomes scattered - and he will not be able to be that focused, as a result.

If he is a very inner and spiritual kind of person, he will despair from connecting to anyone on this world, and he will instead connect only with the spiritual, such as the holy Torah, and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, as well as a deep connection with his own inner self. He will at least be using his power to connect. Generally speaking, though, one who reaches a deep connection to himself, to the Torah, and to Hashem is not the kind of person who will traverse the problem we are describing in this chapter (because if he can reach such deep connections, he is not the type to have severed his power of connection in the first place).

In summary, there is a problem one may have in which he has lost his power to connect, because he has gone through a long cycle of always switching and replacing, which has become his very attitude in life.

Sensible Renewal

Others have a similar nature of always replacing what they like and enjoy, but for a different reason: they always need renewal. This kind of person always needs something new to keep him going. For example, there is a kind of person who, once every few years, will want to renovate his entire home – including everything in it. Everything in the house must be replaced.

Without getting into if this is sensible behavior or not, our point here is that there is a nature in some people to quickly switch and replace everything, simply because they need renewal. This does not come from a problem of destroying connections, which we discussed earlier, but from a different attitude: a need for some kind of renewal. Through replacing and switching things, that is how the person gets his renewal. For this person, it is not enough to replace his pants. Small replacements will not feed his need for renewal. He needs to switch bigger things in his life, in order to feel renewal.

However, as long as he does so with the **awareness** that he is trying to gain renewal – for example, if he keeps *davening* from a different kind of *siddur*, or if he is often switching the places where he *davens*, or if he is usually switching the type of clothing he is wearing – if he does so with the awareness that he is giving himself some renewal, this is a sign of a healthy soul.

Insensible Renewal

One should not go extreme with this idea, of course, and it is a subtle ability in the soul which should be used sensibly. If a person keeps switching and replacing things without any awareness that he needs some renewal, he will fall into the same problem which we discussed earlier, of a person who keeps destroying whatever he is connected to.

The problem we discussed earlier, **fire-of-water**, is when a person keeps ‘destroying’ whatever he was connected to. But here we are describing a similar power, which is not negative, when used sensibly: the need for renewal.

When one switches and replaces things with the awareness that he could use some renewal, and when he does so in a sensible manner, he will develop a sense of what he can remain with, and what he can throw away.

But, as mentioned, if this idea is not used sensibly, a person will keep switching and renewing things without any restraint, which is the same problem as the person who constantly destroys his connections. As an example, a person has a close friend for a long amount of time, and one day, he severs the relationship. Someone meets him and asks him, “Why are you no longer friends with that person? What happened between you?” He responds, “Nothing happened. There was no particular reason.” He simply grew out of his close friend and now he wants a new one. He has no awareness that he has a need for renewal, and he is not ready to admit that he needed to sever this friendship so that he could find a new one. He has the same problem as the person who keeps destroying his connections.

Fixing The Nature of Constantly Replacing

To practically fix this issue, we will once again make use of the solution that was explained in the previous chapter: (1) One needs to develop at least one area in his life which has a stable connection to. (2) Along with this, whenever a person wants to switch and replace something in his life, it should be done with **awareness** [that he is making a switch].

What should be his awareness? Firstly, as mentioned, he needs to already have one area of stable connection in his life. After this factor is in place, he will then become more grounded when it comes to his nature to switch and replace – with regards to people he is associated with, or when it comes to his own physical needs, or when it comes to various desires he has. Since he already has an area of stable connection in his life, he is strongly connected to something, so he will be somewhat balanced.

There are people who can jolt their entire life in one moment, when they are missing this balance. The following example illustrates the difference between a person who is balanced and aware, with one who is not, when it comes to this nature of switching and replacing. A person may be working at a certain job and he really wants to work at a different job, and in addition, he may also want to move to a different apartment. If he is a bit more balanced in his soul, he will be aware that if he leaves his job, it is unrealistic for him to leave his current apartment, and if he leaves his apartment, it is unrealistic for him to also leave his job. This is because he has the awareness that too many transitions at once will not allow his soul to be at any peace.

However, if he is a person who is lacking awareness in his soul, he makes quick transitions as soon as he can. He sees an ad for a new home and immediately is interested in buying it, and he starts making the phone calls. If a new job opportunity is presented to him, he is at the new job two days later.

What happens to him inwardly, if he goes through all of these changes in quick succession of each other? He does not process the fact that he is disconnecting from what he has previously been connected to. On an intellectual level, he may be correct in wanting to make those changes to his current situation (many times he is wrong, but let’s assume that he is indeed logical in wanting to move or switch jobs), but he cannot actually deal with these changes right now. Even if he really does need to move or find a new job, the fact is that he cannot make these changes all at once. Why? Because if he feels strongly connected to his job or to his home, he cannot disconnect from both of them at once. Maybe he will be able to give up either the home or the job, but he can’t do both at once. It’s too much for him.

Thus, the idea is that whenever a person does need to disconnect from something, it needs to be balanced with an ability to have a stable connection to something. Certainly, if a person has little self-awareness, all our words here will do nothing for him. But the more a person is living a more inner kind of life and he is interested in living a life

that is more precise with the truth, he will be aware of whatever he is connected to, and he is aware of any of the challenges involved in whatever he is connected with. He is also aware that there are things he needs to switch and replace. But when he makes any switches, he does so slowly and sensibly, and he does not make too many changes at once.

In contrast to this, when a person has not balanced this nature, he makes too many changes at once, without thinking of the outcome. In one period of time, he moves to a different home, he switches all of his children to different schools, each of his children are having problems, and soon, there is a lot of tension in the home, and he doesn't understand why. He may even have consulted with his Rav every step of the way. He asked his Rav if he should move, and the Rav said he should. He asked his Rav if he should switch his children's schools, and he was told that he should. He broke up the issue into many different points, each time asking the Rav about a specific point, and each time he was told that it's okay. The problem is that he didn't present the entire picture of what was happening. He only relayed the details, separately, but without presenting the totality of the situation. Then he finds himself in a difficult situation, even though he consulted with a Rav every step of the way...

This is a problem that happens often – when people are working with one particular issue at a time, without focusing on the bigger picture of the issue. Many times you can meet a person who has landed himself in a lot of trouble, and you can ask him how he got into such a situation. It is possible that he acted correctly for each step of the way, but the problem is that when all the steps add up together... had he known the outcome, he never would have taken even one of these steps. Even if he consults with a Rav for each step of the way when he made all of these changes – which clearly shows that he was acting logical with each step that he took – in the totality of the situation, he did not act correctly.

This particular point is really part of a separate discussion, but what is relevant for our current topic to know is, that this person has connected to too many things at once by making so many changes at the same time, like a convert joining Judaism, who is considered to be born anew. As a result, this person will not really be connected to anything.

In Summary and In Conclusion

Thus, the first part of the solution [for a person who quickly connects to something/someone and then quickly severs his connection – which is due to impaired **fire-of-water** in the soul] is for one to be **aware** of his connection to something, when he immediately becomes interested in it. And if he wasn't aware of what was taking place, he should now become aware that he allowed himself to become 'dragged' into it.

What should he become aware of? He should be aware of what he can expect, as well as what he should not expect, from whatever he is trying to connect to. In that way, he saves himself from being totally disappointed with the situation. Even if he becomes somewhat disappointed with whatever he has connected to, it will be a lot less disappointing, since he was already aware beforehand of the drawbacks. As a result, he will not 'destroy' his connection to it so quickly. For he will know: "What was I expecting here? What disappointment can I anticipate with it?" This is already the first step of the solution: when he learns how to initially connect to something in a more balanced way.

The second part of the solution, as mentioned, is that even when a person does switch and replace something because he has grown out of it, he first needs to identify areas in his life which he has a stable and strong connection to. He should also make the replacement with the awareness that he needs some renewal; and he should also make sure that he is not replacing too many things at once.

When one knows how to properly connect, he is then able to deeply focus – both in his thoughts and in his emotions. The more balanced and precise that one’s power of “connection” becomes, the higher quality of focus he can have. Of course, there will always be some situations where our connection to something or someone is severed, and this is due to Hashem’s will, which is not of our choice. But even in the situations where we choose to sever our connection to something, we need to do so in the proper and balanced way, as we have been explained here, with *siyata d’shmaya*.

09 | SCATTERED THOUGHTS

Wind – The Root of Pizur Hanefesh (Scattering of the Soul) and the Antithesis to Focus

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will continue here to learn about the power of focus. In the coming chapters, we will learn about focus-related issues which stem from the element of wind. This chapter will be specifically about the “earth” aspect within wind, but first we will explain about the element of wind in general.

It has been explained so far that the power of focus stems from the element of earth, which provides the stability that enables one to focus. Understandably, all of the elements are each able to contribute to the power of focus. But the main source of focus is in the element of earth, which has stability and permanence, establishing something in its proper place.

Wind is the element that opposes earth. There are two groups of opposing elements: fire versus water, and wind versus earth. Man’s body and soul was formed from the earth and the air (wind). There are four directions of the wind. The *Gemara*²⁰ explains that each of the winds move in opposite directions, so the winds are always clashing with each other.

A large percentage of problems with focus and concentration are due to what the *Chovos HaLevovos* calls as “*pizur hanefesh*”, “scattering of the soul”.²¹ This term describes the epitome of a person who is unfocused. The *Chovos HaLevovos* adds on that there was a blessing which people would give to their friends, “May the Merciful One save us from “*pizur hanefesh*”. In our times, we refer to this as the problem of being “unfocused”.

How is “*pizur hanefesh*” formed? The element of wind in the soul causes the element of earth in the soul to spread and scatter. The dust of the earth will stay in place as long as the wind doesn’t blow it. If water is poured on it, the dust will solidify and will stay even more in its place. The wind, though, will spread the dust of the earth and scatter it. So when the element of earth becomes “scattered”, it is due to the element of wind.

Thus, the element of wind is a contradictory force to the ability of focus. Within wind, there are aspects of all the elements, so there is earth-of-wind, water-of-wind, wind-of-wind, and fire-of-wind. We will begin with the “**earth**”-of-wind.

Earth-of-Wind: Consistently “Scattered”

Wind is the element which causes spreading and scattering, and in the soul, an impaired element of wind will mean that a person is inwardly scattered: he is spread apart between too many things at once. “**Earth**”-of-wind is when one is **consistently** ‘scattered’ - resembling the permanence of the earth.

There are two kinds of “*pizur hanefesh*” in our life – one of them which is inevitable [and which is not as damaging], and the other which is due to poor choice of habit [which is more harmful].

There is a universal “*pizur hanefesh*” which all people have to endure, which Hashem has placed us in: the reality of living. On a normal day, we wake up, go to *daven*, and then continue with our day, but sometimes, Hashem has

²⁰ Talmud Bavli: Tractate Bava Basra, Chapter II

²¹ Editor’s Note: For more about “*pizur hanefesh*”, refer to *Fixing Your Fire-Anger_011_Scattering of the Soul*

other plans in store for us. A person gets a phone call from the bank that he needs to go down there, or he gets a phone call from the school that his daughter needs to be picked up. There can be all kinds of situations Hashem places us in, which we didn't plan on. Although this also causes us to have "*pizur hanefesh*", it is not due to our own choice and it happens to come our way. [This kind of *pizur hanefesh* is not as damaging].

But a large part of the lifestyle today which we are familiar with involves a kind of *pizur hanefesh* which has become a regular part of one's schedule. Such *pizur hanefesh* stems from impaired **earth-of-wind**.

We will give a few examples of it, starting from examples from our world and continuing into examples which we are more familiar with.

Example 1 – Owning Businesses and Property All Over The World

A large amount of people who are financially well off usually own property in several countries. This is especially the case in our generation. Today, a person can be "here" yet he is really "there" – he may be living in a certain country, but his property is spread out between different countries. The very fact that a person can be living in one place yet have his property and assets all over different places, is already enough to scatter his mind to all four directions of the world. He will think about his property in one place and of his property that's in a different place, and this itself is *pizur hanefesh*, because he's 'spread out' all over the place.

Even more so, there are those who are so well off financially that they do not invest their money in any one particular business – rather, they own several businesses, in many different countries. A person today may live here but he has a business in Russia, another one in China, in the U.S., in Australia, in South America, and in Africa. Others who have even more money may have property all over the world, both real estate and moveable possessions, one for renting purposes, another one for sale, another for advertisement purposes, etc.

This way of living is also an example of *pizur hanefesh*. This kind of person may not consciously be aware that all of this makes his inwardly "scattered". He doesn't realize that he is really living life with an attitude of *pizur hanefesh*.

Example 2 – Owning a Supermarket

Even if a person does not own many different businesses all over the world and he is only involved with one business, he may have the problem of *pizur hanefesh* within the field he works in. For example, if he is in the food industry, how many different kinds of foods did he order for his store? If he owns a big supermarket, his mind is thinking about 40,000 different food products which he needs to have available in his store. How much can his brain process at once? How is his mind affected by this?

(If a person has a brain which doesn't remember anything for too long, then he won't be affected by this. But this is not the case with most people.)

I knew a *Kolel avreich* who went out to work after some time. One of the resolutions he made was that he won't remember anything from his work. It's impossible to say that he didn't remember anything, but he at least had the attitude that he doesn't want to remember any of the details involved in his workday. But the average person who is involved in a business has to remember all of the products in his store, especially if it is a kind of supermarket that carries every kind of item (except for pharmaceutical items). Besides for the large amount of information entering his head each week, he becomes inwardly 'scattered' from remembering all of the many products.

Example 3 – The “Pizur HaNefesh” In Most Lives: Too Much Information In One Day

If we reflect a bit, we can ask: how many topics a day are we involved with? We are involved with the spiritual and the physical, and we are involved with different actions, words, thoughts, and emotions. Our minds are processing a lot of information every day about so many different things. With every person, the amount is different, but every person is processing a lot of information every day.

As mentioned, some people are involved in several businesses. A person may have a certain job in the morning, another one in the afternoon, and a different job at night, and on Friday he has a different job, and in the summer he has an additional job. But even if a person is not spread apart between so many jobs like this, how many different things does he involve himself with each day? To say that the average person is not involved with more than 20 different things a day, is an understatement. We are not talking about involvement with big or major things, just the involvement with many different little things.

If we consider the very structure of our lifestyle which we recognize, we can see that it is built upon much *pizur hanefesh*. With some people there is more *pizur hanefesh*, and with some less, but the common denominator between most people is that their life is based upon *pizur hanefesh*. In some people, the *pizur hanefesh* is much more “built-in” as a regular part of their life – let us explain.

With some people, their problem of *pizur hanefesh* is due to a lack of focus; their minds are simply not focused. Others, though, are living a “lifestyle” of *pizur hanefesh* - because they have formed the belief that they need to live life in this way, and to keep “grabbing” as much as they can, to accomplish as much as they can in one day, etc. Indeed, the Sages state, “Grab what to eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”²² - but a person may misunderstand this statement by taking this quite literally (which, G-d forbid, is not the intended meaning of the Sages), by always trying to utilize all of the time of his life to its fullest, so that he can always gain from his time as much as he can, ‘packing it all in’ – but in doing so, he is making a big error.

As an example, a person might come to his Torah learning session in the morning and he brings 10 *sefarim* to keep on the table, and each of the *sefarim* are on 10 different topics. One *sefer* is on the *parshah*, another is a *Chumash* so that he can recite “*Shnayim Mikra*”, another is a volume of *Navi*, another is a volume of *Kesuvim*, another is a *Mishnayos*, another is a *Gemara*, another is a *Talmud Yerushalmi*, another is a *halachah sefer*... and he also brings four volumes of *Shulchan Aruch* with him, in order to learn two *halachos* from each of them. He may also bring him with a pamphlet of *Perek Shirah* and a “*Nishmas Kol Chai*” which he makes sure to say every day.

These are just examples, and there can be more examples of the idea. If a person is bringing 10 *sefarim* (and more) with him every day when he sits down to learn - from all of these 10 *sefarim*, where he is truly found? There is a simple answer: he is not really found in any one of them! If he’s ‘spreading himself out’ over so many different topics, he is really not in any of them.

Some people, however, really have the belief that they need to learn and review many different topics in one day, one after the other, so that they can be able to remember all that they have learned. There are a few who have succeeded at this, because they have been gifted with an amazing memory. But this cannot become a way of life [for most people], because it causes a person to be “spread out” all over the place. When one forms the erroneous “belief” that he must live life in this “scattered” way, in which he is spread out over so many different areas, this is an even worse form of *pizur hanefesh*.

1) Identify Where There Is “Pizur HaNefesh” In Your Life.

To counter the problem of *pizur hanefesh* (“scattering of the soul”), each of us must do some reflection, and discover the nature of our particular soul and to take note if we have any tendencies to become ‘spread out too thin’.

One needs to first know: **“Do I have a tendency to become ‘spread out’ over many different interests, or not?”**

If one discovers that he does have a nature to become ‘spread out’, he will have more inner work to do. If he does not have the tendency, he will still have to do some inner work, but it will be much less.

There are some people who, by nature, have more of a tendency to become ‘spread out’. They see a certain thing and they naturally become involved with it, immediately dragged and pulled after it. After some time, they may realize that they have become pulled into it, and they may disconnect from it. We discussed this nature in the previous chapter. Here we are discussing an additional factor of this problem: When a person, in the midst of being drawn towards something, becomes ‘scattered’ and spread apart between different activities. If one identifies that he has this nature, he should make use of the solutions in the previous chapter.

To briefly summarize, if one has a nature to become drawn after something and to become ‘spread out’ between different interests, his work is to train himself not to become pulled into things. This is what we spoke about in previous chapters (5-8). But now we are discussing an additional point: If one knows that he has the nature to become spread out between different interests, he should examine his day and see the areas in which he is too ‘spread out’ in.

2) Identifying Your Priorities of the Day.

Then, after figuring out the above, one needs to give some sense of order to his life, by asking himself: **“What is the number one priority in my life? What is second-to-most important? What is third-to-most important, fourth-to-most important, and fifth-to-most important, etc.?”**

Throughout the day, a person *davens*, learns Torah, sleeps, eats, etc. One should give a sense of order towards all of this and see which of them should be priority. This does not mean, of course, that one should cut out any of these and only do others which he deems more important. You cannot choose if you should eat instead of sleep, or vice versa, because we need each of these things in order to survive. Rather, what we mean here is that you should give an *order of priority* to the things you do throughout the day, by knowing what your main priority in life is, and what your second-to-most priority is, etc.

3) Knowing The “Musts” of Your Day.

After you know this, the next step is for one to know: **“What is really a “must” in my day, and what is not that much of a “must”?”**

This is not about knowing the pros and cons of each of the activities in your day. You may be able to find many gains in whatever you are doing, but that is not the issue here. You need to know which parts of your day are a “must” for you to do, and which things are not a “must” for you to do. What does this mean? If you learn Torah during the day, obviously, that is a “must”. How much you should learn, though, and how, is a different issue. But it is definitely a “must” for you to learn Torah.

If we take apart the rest of our daily schedule, we will discover that there are things we do which are a “must”, and there are also things we do which are not a “must”.

4) Identifying Your Central Aspect of the Day.

The next step is to deepen this reflection. We can each discover the point in our life which we spend our main energies on. It is for one to know: **Which area of my day, am I mainly immersed in? Which point in my day does everything revolve around?**

Some people do not have any “central point” to their day. They simply take life as it comes. They get up in the morning, wash their hands, make the morning blessings, go to *daven*, then they either go to learn Torah or go to work, doing whatever they have to do, but there is no central point in their day which everything else revolves around. If they have no central part of their day, they are much more likely to have *pizur hanefesh*.

Why? Either they are becoming ‘dragged’ after different things throughout the day, or, they still become inwardly ‘scattered’ within the act they are doing. In addition, in most cases a person is not totally focused on what he is doing, so his mind will be floating elsewhere. If one adds together how much he does, speaks, thinks, and imagines, throughout the day – he will discover how much *pizur hanefesh* he really has.

The ideal way to live, in contrast to the above, is that every person must have a central part of his day, which he puts his main energy into, and which everything else in the day revolves around. If one does not have this central point in his day, it means that the very basis of his living is lacking in focus.

Here is a fundamental example of this idea [for those who are learning Torah for the major part of the day]. If a *kolel avreich* has two sessions a day of Torah learning - for example if he is learning *halachah* in the morning and he learns “*bekiyus*” in the afternoon – the question he must know is: “Which one is the main part of my day?”

He may give a superficial response that his morning session is his main part of the day, and that his afternoon session is second-to-most important. But does he really mean it when he says this? If he does not have any point in his day which he views as the central part of his day, what will happen when he isn’t learning *bekiyus* or *halachah*? We all know what will happen - he will be daydreaming his way through all of the learning sessions. There is no central point in his day where he is anchored to, so his soul will be ‘scattered’.

In contrast, when a person does have a central part of his day, this provides stability for his soul. When it comes to that part of his day, he will be focused. When he will be involved with other parts of his day, it will be like a person leaving his home, and knows he will return home later. Unlike a person who is homeless, who sleeps in a different place every night, with no place to settle in, a person who has a home or place to live in has a base to return to. When he leaves his place, it is only a temporary leave from his home. In the same vein, every person needs a place in his soul where he can keep “returning” to.

Of course, it is impossible for a person to always live with that point throughout the entire day. A person cannot stay focused on one particular point or goal the entire day, even if it is a very exalted and worthy goal. For example, even if a person is learning Torah the entire day, he will still need to attend to his bodily needs, and he won’t be able to think about Torah then. Clearly, it is impossible for a person to be involved with the same point for the entire day. But one can still have a central point in his life, which his entire day and life revolves around. When he inevitably has to take leave of that point, it should only be a temporary leave, for the purpose of later returning to it.

This is what it means to live a life of focus.

In Summary of Steps 1-4

In summary, the first step of living a focused kind of life is to find a central point which your life revolves around, and to consider it the main part of your schedule. As explained, although you can't be involved with this "central point" for all of the day, because there are times where you inevitably have to leave it, it is still the point that you keep returning to.

5. Staying Centered.

If the above has been understood, we can now proceed to the next step: giving inner order to our souls, and thereby reaching a focused way of living. We shall explain what this is.

How many points can we be involved with throughout the day? How many different things can a person take upon himself to do? 3, 7, or 13 different things? The answer to this is very fundamental. There is no way to know "how many" things you can do. There is only an inner definition to this. **As long as you have the ability to leave your main priority of the day and you find that you are able to return to it and that you don't lose your focus on it**, that is the sign that you are able to sometimes take leave of the central point in your day.

This does not apply, of course, to anything which you are obligated to do according to *halachah*, which you must do no matter what [even if it causes you to lose focus]. We are speaking here simply of the very concept of how to build a proper lifestyle for ourselves.

To review, the first step is to find a central point in your day, which the rest of your life revolves around. The second step is that when you need to sometimes take leave of this primary part of your day, you are doing so on condition to return to it afterwards. You can become involved in anything else as long as you are still able to return to your central point of the day. What determines this? As long as you can remain focused on your main priority of the day and you can immediately return to it, to that extent, you can become involved with other things throughout the day. If you cross that boundary, it is "*pizur hanefesh*" (scattering of the soul) for you.

(This boundary is subject to change. Time and maturity can bring changes, and then you may be able to do more things throughout the day and be able to immediately return to the central point of the day.)

That is the definition of the amount of activities that you can or cannot do, throughout the day. This point is the deep fundamental way of how we can properly build our power of focus. This is not mere advice – it is rather the very structure, of how we can live a life of focus. It is how we can ideally develop our soul in a way that will allow us to be focused, in whatever we need to be focused on, in our life.

Our Ultimate Focus (Hashem and Torah) and Our Personal Central Point of Focus

We have laid out the definition, but this point can be complicated for a person to work on. Let us explain why.

All of us have a constant, stable place where we are connected to: namely, our connection to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and to our Torah learning. But if we want to figure out where the central point of our life is, this is not easy at all, to know. There is no one answer for every person which describes where we must place all of our focus on. Rather, each person needs to become focused according to his own level. After some time, a person's level can change, and then his focus can change as well.

Our primary focus should be on the purpose of life, which is to focus on our connection to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, which extends into our focus on Torah learning, and which then extends into our connection with the rest of the Creation. But when we try to figure out our central point of the day which we need to be mainly focused on, this will divide into two aspects [which we will soon explain] which we need to progress to and regress from, in a cycle.

At the ideal level, the root of our focus should be on Hashem and on the Torah. However, most people are not actually focused on this root. The highest level of focus which most people identify with is the central aspect of the day that they are involved with and which the rest of their life revolves around.

After we have understood the above, we can now proceed to practically implement this concept in our lives. We should bear in mind, though, that this concept is the basis of living an inner kind life, of being focused. If people would practice the concepts explained in this lesson, most problems with focus would be greatly mitigated. That is not to say that the problems would disappear completely, but they surely would be a lot less.

6. Practicing Focus In The Primary Area of Focus In Your Day

Now let us see how we can practically implement the idea in this lesson.

Every person needs to find an area in his life where he can become “focused” in. For example, if a person is learning Torah during the day, he should become aware that his focus is on his Torah learning. If one works for a living, he should become aware that his focus is in his work. In any case, in whatever one has decided to focus on, one needs to get used to “focusing exercises” in these areas. One needs to get used to practicing his focus, on the area which he is mainly involved with during the day.

A person cannot get up in the morning and immediately decide, “From this moment onward, I will be focused on what I do.” This is unrealistic. Instead, one needs to begin getting used to focusing on the area where he considers himself already focused in.

For example, if a person is learning Torah during the day, and he wants to implement this concept of becoming more focused on his Torah learning – which he considers as his primary aspect of the day that he is focused on – he should get used to having times of the day where he is consciously focused on his learning session. (On a more subtle level, there is also an additional aspect of focus here to consider: during the actual time he is learning Torah, for how much of the time is he focused and his thoughts aren’t wandering?) Even during the time where there is no *sefer* in front of him, he should keep returning his thoughts to whatever Torah discussion he is learning about.

At first, getting used to this focusing will require longer amounts of time, and as a person continues this exercise, it should be for a shorter amount of time. After practicing this for some time, a person can take this further and slowly increase his focus on the depth of understanding in what he is learning about.

If, for whatever reason, a person cannot be focused on Torah learning throughout the day – this is especially applicable for those who work for a living - then he should deepen his power of focus in other areas. For example, a person can take an important matter to think about, such as *emunah*, and practice focusing on it at different intervals throughout the day. During the time that he thinks about *emunah*, he should focus solely on *emunah*, on what it means, on verses of the Torah which describe *emunah*, on thoughts that are *emunah*-oriented, etc. The idea is that his thoughts throughout the day should revolve around *emunah*.

Similarly, a person may feel an affinity for doing *chessed* for others, and he can make this into the focus of his day. He can make sure to do *chessed* for others throughout the day, in order to keep his focus on *chessed*. And when he can't actually do *chessed* for others, he can still think about *chessed*, such as by thinking into the concept of *chessed*, (i.e. what defines an act as *chessed*), or by reviewing verses of the Torah which describe *chessed*, or by awakening his heart to the concept of *chessed*, etc.

There are more examples as well, but the idea here is that a person can decide upon a certain important point which will become the central focus of his day, and the rest of his day will revolve around that point. During the day, he should think about it often. When he gets up in the morning, he should think about it after he says *Modeh Ani*. As he is on his way to *daven*, he should continue to think about it. One should keep mentally reviewing the point that he considers worthwhile to focus on.

This usually has to be worked on gradually, and with mental composure, and calmly. If it is practiced in a pressurized manner, a person will be robbed of his internal life in order to gain from this *avodah*, and, understandably, he will not be successful.

So, practically speaking, a person needs to take a certain thought which he will think about often throughout the day, which he considers as the focus of his day; and he should see how the rest of his day revolves around this particular point.

The Obsession of Today With The News – A Lifestyle of "Pizur HaNefesh"

What is being described here is not a lifestyle which most people are familiar with. Here we have described a kind of life which totally contradicts the way of life which many people today are used to living. The words here have described an internal kind of life which is based entirely on having a **focused perspective** towards life. It is not about simply solving problems with focus (though, understandably, we also need to actually solve some of the issues with focus). Here, we are not coming to 'solve' problems with focus. The words here are rather about how to build a **kind of life which is already focused from the start**. When our life is built upon a focused perspective, many problems related to focus will never even materialize.

We have described here a fundamental way of living. As mentioned earlier, the kind of life which most people are familiar with today is a total antithesis to this. Here is a common example. When a person has a cellphone in his pocket, and he always answers it when it rings or buzzes, can he stay focused? Or does he lose his focus?

If he is trying to focus his day on doing *chessed* for others, then it would make sense for him to keep answering his phone, so that he can do his work of doing *chessed* for others. But even this requires a lot of sense on the person's part, because most people cannot stay focused when they live in such a way. In most cases anyway, *chessed* is not the main focus of a person's day. What will a person be focused on, then, when he is always answering his phone? Can a person remain with his power of focus, when he lives in such a way? Even more, usually people are not just answering their phones. If they have a phone, they will naturally be calling other people, and to listen to the news, etc.

As an aside, once we are on the subject of following the news, let us wonder: How much information does a person pick up, from hearing the news? When a person listens to the news for even 2-5 minutes, how much does he hear? How many different topics, and about how many different countries in the world? In just a few minutes, a person can lose his focus entirely. By the time he is done listening to the news, his power of focus has ended with it.

Let's also consider newspapers and magazines, which can contain an average of 50-90 pages in it, of different news and articles. There are some people who can finish several volumes of reading material of the news, by the end of the week. How many different topics are discussed in one newspaper? Today there are even separate papers for just one entire topic. There are some people who will not go to sleep until they finish the entire pile of newspapers and magazines of that week. What kind of life does this cause a person to have? It causes a person to be inwardly "spread out", between so many different topics. Yet, he may want to also *daven* afterwards with deep *kavanah* (concentration), *yishuv hadaas* (composure), and *d'veykus* in Hashem....amidst all of this *pizur hanefesh*! This is a lifestyle by, with its very design, is a sure recipe for *pizur hanefesh*, for being inwardly scattered.

The newspapers and magazines of reading material that are available, together with the news that one can hear, combined with all of the smartphones and various forms of communication where people can hear and text everyone – can any person be focused on even one important or spiritual thing throughout the day, when he is connected to all of these things?! Can a person like this remain focused throughout the day on any point that he considers to be his central priority, and to keep returning his thoughts to it, when his mind is processing so much information throughout the day and sending his mind in so many different directions....?

Forget for a moment about all the gossip, slander and lies which are found in all of the reading material of today. Even if it would all somehow be spiritual kind of material (which is oxymoron, because if a spiritual person is opening the paper to read, he is already no longer a spiritual person), even if would all be kosher (which is unrealistic today), how much *pizur hanefesh* does a person go through when he reads all of it? It scatters his soul all over the place, because he is processing all of this information about so many different topics. It is the total antithesis to the very perspective of an internal life!

Understandably, no one can disconnect from all of this completely. In the best scenarios, a person will still at least read the headings of the articles, so that he gets the picture from a few words. (How relevant these news headings are is a different issue, and it is also a compelling question to consider). But even this is the total opposite of the internal kind of life which have described in this lesson.

Living Internally – Remaining Focused On One Important Point Throughout The Day

In contrast to the above, what is the internal way of living? It is as we mentioned before: every person can find a point which he considers important and worthwhile to think about, and to think about this often throughout the day.

How much should he think about it? If he can return to thinking about it later, he can temporarily digress from it. But if digressing from it will mean that he never thinks about it again during the day, he should not digress from thinking about it. If he starts thinking about other things throughout the day and he feels that this is causing him to lose focus on his central point, he should try to re-focus on it and continue involving his mind with it.

Understandably, one will not always be able to implement this idea. When a person is in his home with his family, or when he is around other people, he cannot always remain focused on his central point. But the general structure here has been laid out: as long as one is in a situation where he is able to remain focused on his central aspect of the day, he should do so.

In Conclusion

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These words are about a fundamental way of living, a way to live an internal life, and with particular regards to the power of focus - because it is a way to live a “focused” kind of life. It is the fundamental path which will greatly mitigate problems with focus, as long as one develops this approach of living. Of course, there is also a separate inner work to do when it comes to the specific issues of focus, of learning how to focus the mind in the first place. But here we have laid out the fundamental way of living which builds the very structure of the power of focus in the soul.

10 | INNER EMPTINESS

Water-of-Wind: Dragged In All Directions

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will continue to discuss the power of focus. In this chapter, we will deal with how the element of **water-of-wind** affects focus.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the wind represents the antithesis to focus. The ability to concentrate on something generally stems from the element of earth in the soul, for earth stays in its place. This is very unlike the wind, which moves and spreads through all four directions. This is true about the element of wind in general, but **water-of-wind** specifically is when a person is “dragged” after his “wind” has “spread” him in all different directions. We will explain this further, with the help of Hashem.

Two Different Ways of Living: From The Inside or From The Outside

To give a general description, there are several orientations by which a person may be living his life and approaching it [to live “from the inside”, or to live “from the outside”].

The root, inner way of living life, as mentioned in previous chapters, is to be “orderly” (in Hebrew, “*mesudar*”, from the word *sefer/order*). A person may be an inner kind of person, yet he is not necessarily an “orderly” kind of person. This will hamper his inner development. Or, a person may be living inwardly, and he is also an orderly kind of person. This is the ideal state.

If one is more of an “internal” kind of person but he is not orderly, this will hamper his ability of focus. If he is an “internal” person and he is also orderly, this is the ideal state, and this kind of person will be very focused. Such a person will be able to utilize his potential, activating the potential from within him, and he will also be able to actualize his inner world in the external side to his life.

Another kind of person will live his life “from the outside”²³. He builds his inner world based on all the outer stimuli he receives. If one uses this ability for holiness, one will know how to gain from any of the “spiritual” stimuli that is available around him. But if he is not that spiritual and he is more drawn towards the outside, material world, he will instead seek various worldly desires, the *alma d'piruda* (the “world of separation”) – a world which is “scattered”.

Thus, there are two ways of living: “from the inside”,²⁴ and “from the outside.”

²³ In Hebrew, *m'bachutz pnimah* – “from the outside in”

²⁴ In Hebrew, *m'bafnim chutzah* – “From the inside out”

Living "From The Inside"

When one lives in the first way, living “from the inside” – and in addition to this, he also acts with **orderliness** and **precision** - he will be a very focused kind of person. In contrast to this, **if one does not act with orderliness and precision, he will have difficulty focusing, because his inner world lacks order to it.** He is scattered and spread apart on his inside. The amount of how much he will be inwardly scattered will depend on how much of an inner world he has acquired for himself [hence, if he did not develop his inner world that much, he will become more inwardly “scattered”, so he will have difficulty focusing].

Living "From The Outside"

If a person lives in the second way, living “from the outside”, and in addition to this, he is also orderly and precise – for example, if he has specific aspirations of what he wants to accomplish, whether in spiritual matters and even when it comes to material matters - since he is being orderly and precise about what he wants, he will be more focused.

Most people do not know exactly what they want. So, when they live life “from the outside”, what will happen? They will absorb into their system whatever is presented in the world outside of them. And what is found in the world outside? An endless amount of worldly desires. In addition, these desires scatter the person who chases after them. So when we combine a way of living “from the outside in” with a lack of precise aspirations, a person will try to absorb everything in the world outside of him, and since the outside world contains so many desires and so much information, one will become inwardly scattered [and he won’t be able to focus properly].

Most people are also not living “from the inside”. Only a few individuals in the world are living “from the inside”, because they are connected to the depths of their souls, to their very essence, each on their own level. **So most people are living “from the outside”:** they develop their inner reality based on the stimuli they absorb from the world outside of them.

(As an insight related to this idea, the *mitzvah* to light *menorah* on Chanukah is from the entranceway of one’s house, so it is “from the inside out” – “*m’bafnim chutzah*” - with the *mezuzah* to the right of the entranceway, as a spiritual protection that no negative outside stimuli should enter within. This is along the lines of the above concept).

Living “from the outside in” causes a person to become inwardly scattered, and this state increases with the more that one continues to live his life this way. What happens? A person receives his vitality from the “scattered” world around him, and he keeps absorbing it into his system, and this increases the scattering inside oneself.

Emptiness (Water-of-Wind)

There is also another factor which may complicate things further, for the person who lives “from the outside”: when one has an impaired “**water-of-wind**” in his soul. This is when a person becomes like an “empty void” (in Hebrew, “*chalal*”), meaning that he is empty on his inside, and the way he lives his life reflects his inner emptiness. This kind of person certainly does not live “from the inside” and with inner orderliness, and neither does he live “from the outside” at the same time knowing precisely what he wants. Impaired **water-of-wind**, when it dominates, causes a person to simply become “**dragged**” after outer stimuli, which he then uses to keep himself busy and preoccupied with. And he may just remain on the outside of himself, on the external and superficial layer of life, never developing his own internal world.

Three Detrimental Scenarios of Living

Let us be clearer about what we mean.

The first level of this problem is that a person is inwardly hollow and empty; he has an internal void, devoid of any inner content, so he is actively involved all the time with trying to fill his inner emptiness.

In contrast to this, an inner way of living is where a person has a richly developed internal world of his own, full of inner content, and this is expressed outwardly as well, and he utilizes his potential inner forces. He realizes the individuality of his soul, of his own inner world, and he actualizes this potential.

The second level of the problem is when a person lives “from the outside”, which is the total antithesis to the aforementioned way of living. When one lives totally “from the outside”, he relates to his inner world based on his external side of life, always absorbing all of the outer stimuli in the world into his inner system. If a person absorbs spiritual stimuli from the outside, this is better, but if the person is absorbing the stimuli of the material world into his system, it will be like the statement, “One who wants a hundred, will want two hundred”²⁵, which is clearly detrimental.

This kind person feels empty inside, but he is always trying to fill this emptiness, by filling himself with various kinds of content - whether spiritual, or material. Slowly, he absorbs more and more content into his system, ranging between the spiritual, the mundane, and that which is harmful to his spiritual state. However, this person will at least have some kind of content in his system (unless he is only absorbing material that is totally harmful to his spiritual state, which is equal to having no content at all).

But there is also a third scenario of living, which is worse than the above: where a person is totally empty inside, **and he isn't doing anything to fill this emptiness.** If you ask a person what his aspirations are in life, and he claims that he does have aspirations, this is a good sign, because even if he lives “from the outside”, at least he is able to be clear about what his aspirations are. But if the person is passive about his response, it shows that he has no aspirations in life. What happens when a person lives with no aspirations? With no aspirations at all, he never gets anywhere in life and he never gains anything at all.

If one lives “from the outside”, we explained earlier that he still may have his aspirations in life, even if he is not clear about what they are, and although he is simply “grabbing” onto whatever spirituality he can, at least he is putting some inner content into his system. He may have aspirations of becoming a Torah scholar or a *tzaddik*, or, if he is not spiritual, he may be materialistic and he wants money and various desires, etc. But at least he has an aspiration for something. Here, however, we are mainly coming to discuss someone who lives with no aspirations at all. How does this kind of person survive? He lives with an empty void inside him, and he is dragged after various stimuli around him, and it is never about trying to bring some content into himself. Anything he does is simply so that he can get rid of the boredom which gnaws away inside him.

A person may be interested in something which causes him to gain money or prestige, or he may want a more spiritual form of honor, or any gain of some sort. Whatever the case, at least he is entering the endeavor in order to gain something, even if he is not exactly sure what he will gain. But here we are speaking about a person who is empty from any inner content, and he is not interested in trying to get any form of content. Even if we get him to enter some endeavor, he would be simply following some emotional attraction he may feel towards it. If you ask

²⁵ *Koheles Rabbah* 1:13

him afterwards what he gained from it, he says, “It was a way to kill an hour.” He has no concept of trying to ‘fill’ himself with any content.

Example 1 - Emptiness In Children

Most people do not have this total level of emptiness, but you may notice this emptiness many times in children who are not enjoying school, who have “no taste for learning”. Slowly as time goes on, the child has a hard time with the school, with the teachers, and with the parents. He simply has no pleasure in whatever he is learning. The child then becomes bored from morning until night, or from the afternoon and onward.

A young child cannot find a job to work in, so if he isn’t learning anything, what is there for him to do? Nothing! Where is he found, then? He isn’t found anywhere. He has no inner world of his own yet, and he is disconnected from his external surroundings as well, so he is not even absorbing anything from his surroundings. Not only is he missing an inner world of his own to get vitality from - he can’t even get vitality from the superficial side of his life! He is found within an “empty void” inside himself. He will be “dragged” after any stimuli attracting him.

This “empty void” comes from the element of air/wind, and one will be “dragged” after external stimuli due to the element of water. Hence, when a person is dragged after anything that attracts him because he is inwardly empty, this is a problem that stems from **water-of-wind**, which we are discussing here.

In the example we gave of this problem, a child is not making it in school, he has no taste for learning, he isn’t getting along with his teachers and parents, and he has no aspirations for learning. What can we do to help this child? Some people will try to find a group of friends for this child. Others try to get the child to draw and paint. There are all kinds of pastimes which may help the child find his place, and indeed, there are children who have found their success in these pastimes and activities. But what if even that doesn’t work...?

The child wakes up in the morning and he feels like he has nothing to get out of bed for, because he is inwardly empty. If he finds something that temporarily relieves the emptiness, he goes towards it. Any form of noise or disturbance will greatly interest him, and he will be pulled after the outer stimuli - and that’s where he is.

Example 2 - Emptiness In Adults

We have explained that this problem is often found in children who aren’t enjoying their studies. But it is not found only in certain children - it is also found in some adults.

Even someone who “sits and learns Torah all day” may have a terrible inner emptiness and feeling of boredom, if he is sitting and learning Torah all day only monotonously and without feeling inwardly connected to his learning. He has no “taste” in his learning, and he also lacks structure to his learning. Why doesn’t he go to work and find a job? This may be due to all sorts of reasons. But the truth about his situation is that he is really a person who doesn’t have anything to do with his life! He gets up in the morning and he really has nothing to do.

Some people like this will wake up very late in the morning. Others will always get up on time because they have a stronger inner “wind” which moves them, so they will not sleep late, but even this kind of person can feel like he has nothing to do. He may fill up the time by chatting with others, or by catching up on the news – anything that “drags” him. He has a terrible inner void inside him – and he is not even searching of a way to fill it. All he is interested in is “how to kill time”, so he will be “dragged” after anything that is remotely of interest to him ...

Whether this problem exists in a child or in an adult, this is a situation where we can put up a sign that says, “Here is this where this person is buried”. A person who keeps going in this way has basically ended his life.

Example 3 – The Person Who Forces Himself To Work At A Job He Dislikes

This is also the common case with people who continue to work at a job that they don’t like. The person stays at his job even though he hates it, because he knows that he needs to support his family from it, so he forces himself to go to this job every day. With the more he stays there and forces himself to work there, his soul begins to feel empty inside, and he becomes “dragged” into that place even though it doesn’t suit his personality. In many cases, this also leads to melancholy, or overworking, or entering into all kinds of disputes with other people, and a host of all kinds of problems. But what is the root of the problem? It is because he is terribly empty inside himself.

The truth is that if most people would absorb the truth about themselves, they would also feel this emptiness. If you get to know the reality on this world, you can discover that there are many people who have all kinds of fantasies, which they fill their emptiness with. One person fantasizes about a nice home, another about a car, a third about family, etc. Many people do not have a real, spiritual source of vitality (*chiyus*) to live from. They are inwardly empty, and it is their fantasies which keep them going. What results from this? The results from it are very clear....

Example 4 – Older Adults After Receiving Their Pension

We spoke earlier of the common phenomenon of children and teenagers who aren’t succeeding in their schools, because they feel empty and terribly bored all of the time, and this lands them in all kinds of situations, as we can all recognize, *Rachmana litzlan* (may G-d have mercy). But this problem is also not uncommon in adults. An older adult gets his pension after many years of work, at the age of either 62, 65, 67 or so, and now he’s out of his job – whether his pension comes early or later – now what’s left for him to do? What does he do now from morning until night?

Some people are fortunate to have had a set time for learning Torah every day, and they continue to do so after they retire from their jobs, and sometimes they learn even more Torah than before. But if a person did not previously have an inner, spiritual world of his own, and he did not have a connection beforehand to any Torah learning, and now he is at a mature, older age – what does he do? In a better scenario, he finds something to involve himself with which will benefit others, such as donating a building, etc. He tries to fill himself with some kind of content that will benefit others in some way. But what if he finds nothing to do? He gets up in the morning and he simply has nothing to do!

What do older retired people do when they have nothing to do? They sit on the seats on the autobus and stare out the windows. Old people usually don’t have that much desires or aspirations for This World, so what are they left with? They are just empty inside, and they become dragged after anything even remotely of interest. If the telephone rings, the person immediately jumps for it, and if he misses the call, it really bothers him: “Who could have been calling me??” If he can’t figure out who called him, all day he will wonder with curiosity: “Who could have possibly called me...?” He has nothing to do, and he is subconsciously looking for various ways to relieve his boredom.

What is really taking place inside him? There is nothing there but an empty void, which causes him to move towards any stimuli in his outside surroundings, as long as it is even remotely of interest to him. Sometimes a person is interested in something in his surroundings because he is paying attention to his surroundings and he has some

feeling of value and importance for a certain thing - but at other times, he is interested in anything in his surroundings even when it is something completely silly, which has no importance.

Once I had an old taxi driver, and, as is the way of many taxi drivers, he began to converse with me about his life. He said to me, “You have no idea how happy I am that you hailed me down.” I asked him what exactly he meant. He said to me, “At my age, the fact that I can do something to help another person in any way, is what gives me the energy to live.” He said to me that he gets the energy to live from driving people to the airport, knowing that because of him people are making it on time to their flights. This is somewhat better than most situations – he feels like he has a reason to live because he knows he is helpful and useful to people. But there is a lot more to life than this, and it is so far from the truth! At least this person is deriving his sense of being alive from a positive source, but when one lives with this perspective, he has nothing of his own to keep him going. For every half hour or hour that goes by, he has to read something in the news, either something he hasn’t yet read or even something he already read – something, anything, to pass the time and fill it with anything.

With children, this problem of emptiness exists usually by those who have left “the system” - or even by those who are still in it, but who are floundering within it. With teenagers, it is the same case. With adults, the problem is found by those who have not found a taste in what they do – whether it is in their Torah learning or, if they are working, in their job – so they find themselves terribly bored.

And, as mentioned, the problem is more commonly found with retired adults who have already received their pension, who have nothing to do right now. Only a few individuals in their old age can find something of content to fill their time with. Most people in their old age find themselves with nothing to do. If you go to an old age home, what do you see there? They find someone to light menorah for them on Chanukah and sing songs to them, exactly as in kindergarten. (This is besides for the issue of returning to their child state, which is a separate point to discuss). They find nothing to do with themselves.

We should understand that this problem we are describing is usually not that relevant to most people when they are in the prime of their life. It is a problem that may exist in the people in your surroundings, and it is also a problem which may exist, *chas v’shalom*, in just about anyone who does not live his life correctly [i.e. when he lives life very superficially] who may reach such a pathetic inner situation.

Our Sages say something that takes this idea even further. If a person on This World wasn’t sufficiently connected enough with Hashem and His Torah, even if he would be placed in *Gan Eden* when he gets upstairs, it may feel like *Gebinnom* for him!

Why would it be *Gebinnom* for him? It’s because of exactly what we have been explaining here. He is placed in *Gan Eden*, and what is he supposed to do there? Should he learn *Gemara* for 2 or 3 hours (when he didn’t enjoy his learning on This World)? Then what?? Most people who leave work after they receive their pension aren’t able to sit and learn Torah all day, because they never got used to it from beforehand. They can be sitting with everyone in *Gan Eden* who are all being taught the greatest secret depths of the holy Torah, but since they never became connected with Torah learning, what is there for them to do...?

Repairing Water-of-Wind

This is the problem which stems from the element of **water-of-wind** which we described here – the root of inner emptiness. The person is empty inside and there is essentially nothing for him to do. The “void” itself comes from the element of air/wind in the soul, and upon this void, the element of water can “drag” a person after many different activities, because he has nothing to do.

It is possible to deal with the aspect of the impaired “**water**” – the nature of being dragged after various stimuli [by learning how to go against this nature of being “dragged”]. But the main part of the issue here is in the element of air/**wind**, where the empty void is coming from.

Every Person Experiences Some Emptiness

This “air”, this empty void (the *chalal*) which can become manifest in the soul, exists in every single person – and the only question is how much, and in what way. Every person has times in his life where he feels empty inside. A person can feel it whenever he is bored, like if he has 2 or 3 hours to himself after he is finished doing what he had to do, and he doesn’t know what to do with this time. But sometimes a person can just feel bored with his whole entire life in general, because he finds no “taste” [enjoyment] in living.

In either case, every person feels inner emptiness sometimes. The more superficial of a life a person lives, the less he knows how to fill his time properly. The more inwardly a person lives, though, he can feel a deeper feeling of emptiness – he feels a sense of nothingness with his entire life.

If a person is deeply connected to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, to His Torah, to the *neshamos* of the Jewish people, and to the depth of his own private soul, he has more of an “inner support system” which will greatly lessen his feeling of emptiness. This still cannot completely fill the soul’s inner void, but it can still fill it to a prominent extent.

The less a person is connected to his inner world, however, the more of a presence the inner emptiness will have, and as time goes on, it will only continue to worsen. This will not necessarily lead to the total level of emptiness which stems from **water-of-wind**, which we have described here, but the very attitude of the inner emptiness will still exist.

We need to deal with the impaired “water” aspect here, the problem of becoming “dragged” to different directions, as we explained about in the previous chapters when we discussed the element of water. We also need to deal with the “wind” aspect here, the empty void in the soul, which is found in every person to some extent.

When we learn how to fill this empty air/void in the soul, herein lays a key aspect of healing for all the areas of our life.

The Fundamental Question: Am I Connected To Anything Eternal?

Every person on This World will one day leave it, and go to the place that he will go to, according to the level he reached. When most people leave the world, do they have what to do in Heaven? They don’t. It is a huge, fundamental transition for the soul to go through. Even if a person kept all the *mitzvos* and did the will of Hashem, what is there for him to do in Heaven? In our own language, we say that a person on This World is always gathering “precious stones” and “diamonds” through his many acts of *mitzvos*. This is true, but what will a person actually do when he gets upstairs?

Any person who wishes to live a true, eternal life must prepare for it already on This World, by connecting himself to at least one thing that is not dependent on This World. This is not referring even to separating from the gruff materialism of This World. Rather, we are referring here to a connection to something which you will always be able to have, wherever you are, in any situation, time and place. To illustrate the idea, the Vilna Gaon said that every person should know one tractate of the Talmud by heart, so that wherever he goes, he will have something to review.

When a person's time comes to leave the world, and they are lowering his body into the grave, what is his soul doing then? If he was even a bit spiritual, he probably wants to leave the cemetery and go do more *mitzvos*. If a person lived very superficially, though, his soul will perceive that there is nothing for him to do. He doesn't have a body anymore, so there's nothing for him to do. But this is the perspective of the ignoramus. The situation has stayed the same as before, and it is just that now he is without his body. So, what he can do for himself now? Should he ask others to learn *Mishnayos* in his memory, to elevate his soul? What is there for him to do now...?

This is one of the most fundamental questions in life: To what are you connected? Are you connected only to things that are transient and which change? Or are you connected to a world that exists forever? Every person must examine himself and see: "Would I be able to continue if I would be severed from everything around me (whether through death, or anything else that causes a separation from the surroundings)? Do I have what to always lean on, to continue existing and surviving?" One person is in charge of a company, another person runs a certain place, and each person is doing whatever he is doing. One day the person will have to separate from all of this. This world is not forever. What happens to the person, after he has to leave behind everything on This World...?

The following is a fundamental example of the idea. Some people are very attached with their families, and they view their relationships with their family members as the basis of their life. What happens to the person when he leaves the world? Does he wish that he would be sitting with his entire family in *Gan Eden*? Any sensible person knows that it is unlikely for a person's entire family to be sitting in one place in *Gan Eden*, because they are all on different spiritual levels. A more internal kind of person would even view this as *Gehinnom*, because each member in the family is on a different level and they are not necessarily matching with his spiritual level. He cannot sit with them all of them in *Gan Eden* – that is not realistic.

To review again, the fundamental question that one needs to ask himself is: "Am I totally empty inside, or am I full of content inside?" We explained earlier about a kind of person who is totally empty inside, and we also explained about the emptiness that exists in every person to some extent. A person will usually have some inner content in him, and he also has a certain degree of emptiness in him. The only question is in the percentages of how much content he has, versus how much emptiness is in him, but both aspects are always present. The more emptiness a person has, the closer he is to being dominated by impaired **water-of-wind**. The less of an inner void there is in a person, the less he will be affected by impaired **water-of-wind**.

Herein we come to the depth of inner *avodah*.

Helping Children Who Feel Constantly Bored/Empty

If we are dealing with a child who feels totally bored and empty, the way to help him is to find some activity he finds interesting, and by that means, we should further guide him to get real, meaningful content in his life. Only after we provide him with an interesting outlet can we show him how to derive content from all that the "yeshivah system" has to offer.

This is a very sensitive point, because how can we provide a child with an outlet that will give him content, when he is not interested in his learning Torah, and he is only interested in other things? Indeed, this is a difficult idea to implement, but it is the true way to deal with the situation. We need to find something he can do which he is

interested in doing, and then we need to expand it for him²⁶, and at the same time we also need to set proper boundaries for his activities, so that he can gain in the best way from it.

This will not always work in the typical *yeshivah* school system [so we may have to find him a different *yeshivah* school which will be willing to implement this idea for the child].

Dealing With Boredom and Emptiness In Adults

An adult, however, will need to face his inner emptiness head on. He can do this by asking himself: “How should I live my life? What will cause me to become more “fulfilled” inside?”

In order for a person to examine this, he will first need to determine if he is mainly living life “from the inside” or “from the outside”. (As mentioned earlier, the more “inward” that a person is, the more he lives “from the inside”, whereas the more external he is, the more he lives “from the outside”.) If one discovers that it is neither of the two, and that he is instead dominated by an “empty void” in his soul which drags him towards any stimuli, it means that he is dominated by the impaired **water-of-wind** of the soul [as mentioned earlier, this means that he has no particular interest occupying him, and therefore he is pulled after all outer stimuli. The solution to this extreme boredom is for one to find something interesting that he can pursue, until he eventually fills his life with true content].

However, as mentioned earlier, every person will sometimes feel empty inside. What is the way to deal with this inevitable inner emptiness?

Once again, to review, these feelings of inner emptiness, when left untreated, can lead to the impaired element of **water-of-wind**, which is a total inner void. A person like this will feel bored when he is home alone, and he will want to relieve this boredom, for example, by eating whatever he finds in his house. He will be ‘dragged’ after all kinds of stimuli. This is the impaired **water-of-wind** in the soul at work – the void is coming from the air/wind in the soul, and the “water” in the soul is causing him to become dragged towards different things.

Upon feeling the emptiness, what should a person do about it? Some people, as soon as they discover the inner void in themselves, will immediately try to “run away” from it. If the house was dark, they will turn on all the lights in the house, or turn on the music in order not to feel alone in the house, and then nosh on some food, and then get busy with various activities that takes their mind off the boredom. The person might phone a friend or do any activity that removes his feeling of emptiness. But this is not dealing with the issue, and it is just running away from the truth.

What is the inner way to deal with the emptiness, when one feels it? The solution is *not* through “running away” to Hashem and to the Torah (as it would seem). That is surely the *purpose*, but it is not the *solution* to the problem.

When a person feels emptiness inside himself, he should realize that indeed, **this entire world is utterly empty. It is one big *chalal* (void)**! The simple truth about this world is that it is empty from any real content.

Besides for the spiritual light which Hashem sends into this world, everything here on this world is evil and empty. **The inner light of Hashem and His Torah revealed on This World is the only thing which can fill the**

26 Editor's Note: After this class, the Rav added on in response to a question regarding this point that “One should choose an activity for the child which is closest to the child's heart”, and he should choose an activity for the child that is “of the most refined nature possible that he can find.” The Rav also added on that “Not every case can be helped, because not every problem has a solution. [In those cases], all we can do is daven for help from HaKadosh Baruch Hu.”

void on this world. But we must first learn to view This World as a place that is entirely empty from any real, inner content.

1. Feeling The Emptiness

The first step is that one needs to first feel the emptiness within him, and upon feeling the emptiness, he should realize the simple truth that our world is really an empty, desolate place. Although it seems to us that this world is teeming with people who are going, traveling, working, and returning to places (and wasting their time too...) it is all like one big playgroup of children, all playing games with each other! There is really nothing here on This World! That is the truth about Creation, reality, and life.

2. Filling The Emptiness

After a person comes to accept this feeling of emptiness, the next step is to wonder how to fill it.

At first a person should know on an intellectual level, and then internalize in his heart, that this world is entirely an empty void, and that it only can be filled with the depth of life, which is:

- (1) Through deeply connecting to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.**
- (2) And to His Torah.**
- (3) And to the *neshamos* (Divine souls) of the Jewish people.**
- (4) And to one's private soul.**

One should recognize the emptiness on This World and feel it, instead of running away from it. One needs to experience the emptiness, to realize how this world is truly empty from anything. After feeling the emptiness, a person can then wonder how to truly fill it.

This kind of reflection is not meant to be a one-time kind of reflection, but something that needs to be constantly experienced, for anyone who lives an internal and truly spiritual kind of life.

Facing The Emptiness

Every person can feel an empty void in his soul, but most people never discover it, simply because they never pay attention to it. When a person does get some subconscious feeling of it, what does he do? He will probably get busy with some activity that takes his mind off this feeling of emptiness, so that he shouldn't have to feel the emptiness. Those who do feel their inner emptiness, in most cases, are terribly depressed and need a lot of therapy. Most people never feel their emptiness because they are always running away from it, and the few people who do feel it are usually depressed, confused, down, full of difficulties, etc. - as we can all recognize.²⁷

In rare instances, a person is very truthful with himself and he discovers this emptiness. How does he discover it? Because it is screaming out to us from every corner of the world! One does not have to sink to very low levels to feel it. We can feel it as a result of our very existence on this world. A person can sit and reflect with himself, and reach the truth, that indeed, this world is truly empty. You need things to live, you need a house and a dining room set and whatever you need, but even if you would have everything you need, you would still feel empty, for the soul cannot ever be satisfied.

When you feel the emptiness, you can fill this emptiness with “*Ain Od Milvado* (“**There is nothing besides for Hashem**”) - **even in the *chalal* (empty space) of the world.**”²⁸ From there, you can connect yourself to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, to Torah, to the *neshamos* of the Jewish people, and to your own private soul.

In Summary and In Conclusion

These words are not simply definitions. It is an inner journey which you will need to traverse, thousands of times! Why thousands of times? Because every time you are truthful with yourself, you can encounter this emptiness. **Identify the void, and then realize that this void will only be filled with a deep connection to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*²⁹, to Torah, to the *neshamos* of *Klal Yisrael*, and to your own private soul.**

If one tries to ignore this emptiness and he doesn't try to fill it, he will become dominated by the element of **water-of-wind** described in this chapter, which will drag him after all kinds of empty pursuits, depending on how much emptiness is really in him.

We cannot totally run away from the **water-of-wind** in us, because we will always have a physical body, which enjoys even empty pursuits. But our *avodah* is to make sure that **water-of-wind** (the empty void in the soul which drags a person towards external stimuli) is only a smaller part of ourselves, so that it shouldn't become the more dominant part of ourselves. In order to prevent it from dominating, we need to traverse the inner journey described here. This is not something you think about once, but something you must traverse thousands of times. This will lessen the **water-of-wind** in ourselves - although it will not take it away totally.

²⁷ Editor's Note: After the class, the Rav was asked about more extreme cases, such as a person who has been doing nothing for the last nine years except hanging out in his house and doing nothing there. The Rav responded, “This is more than a “problem” – it is a “parshah” (a complicated issue), which this lesson cannot help for, because this is a more extreme situation.... You should still try to find him an activity of interest to him which he can busy himself with. But if that doesn't work, not every problem has a solution.... Unfortunately, these extreme issues are quite common nowadays - they are not 10 or 20 isolated incidents. *Rachmana Litzlan*, these occurrences are increasing as the years continue.... There are many sensitive situations, and we cannot know in any situation exactly what to do. We can daven to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.... Life is complex, and surely there are very complicated situations where we cannot always find the solution to every aspect of an issue. We need to deal with these situations, and it is not always easy.”

²⁸ *Devarim Rabbah* 2:28. see *Nefesh HaChaim* 3:3

²⁹ refer also to *Derashos_048_The Void*

The experience of emptiness we can feel on this world is a part of all of our *avodah*. Either we will traverse it through the impaired element of **water-of-wind** in our souls, which will be detrimental to us - or we can traverse this emptiness in a holy manner, by recognizing the futility and nothingness of this world³⁰, and by filling this void with a connection to Hashem, to Torah, to the depth of the *neshamos* of the Jewish people, and to our own private souls.

That is how we can fill the “empty void” in ourselves, so that it shouldn’t activate the impaired element of **“water-of-wind”** in ourselves, and so that we can instead activate the very element of “wind” in the soul, in the proper way.

³⁰ As Shlomo HaMelech says in the beginning of *Koheles* (1:1): “Futility of futilities, says *Koheles*, it is all futility.”

11 | ALL OVER THE PLACE

Wind-of-Wind: An Inner Maelstrom

With *siyata d'shmaya* we continue here to learn about the power of focus. Here we are up to discussing issues with focus which stem from “**wind-of-wind**”.

As described in the earlier chapters, the element of wind is the very opposite of consistency and permanence. The power of focus thrives on the ability of the mind to stay connected and stable to the thought at hand. A strongly developed element of earth, the root of stability, is the main factor which contributes to the power of focus. Earth provides stability, but not always does it provide connection to something. The nature of earth is that it stays where it is. That is the power of stability. Wind, however, is all about movement. The wind moves in all the different directions.

Getting more specific, if a person has a nature which is mainly dominated by the “wind” aspect within the wind, it will mean that he has a personality to move a lot.

When this nature is perfected and it is balanced by the element of earth, such a person can grow very far in life. He will be a very productive person who gets a lot done, but he also has a stability provided by his element of earth, which enables him to be consistent in what he does. With a balance of wind and earth, he lives the ideal kind of life.

From a deeper understanding, he is also balanced between This World and the Next World, because as mentioned previously (see Chapter 3), a person is a mix of the four elements, the elements of earth and wind being his earthly aspect, and his elements of water and fire being his Heavenly aspect, as the Vilna Gaon writes. When one has a balance between his elements of earth and wind, he is balanced between his main elements on This World, and this is the ideal way to live.

But if one has not properly developed his element of earth, and if he also has a strong amount of **wind-of-wind** in himself – with varying degrees – this is like an inner maelstrom. People who have a strong amount of **wind-of-wind** in their souls are found in absolute insanity. They are constantly moving and they are never calm; they have no *yishuv badaas* (settling of the mind). And, as an understandable result of this, **they cannot focus and concentrate**. Since they are always in movement, they are never focused on what they are doing.

Even more so, a person with this nature will often be involved in a certain activity but his mind is already thinking about the next thing he has to do. **In order for a person to be focused, he needs to be thinking about what he is doing**; his inside must be connected with his outside, meaning that his thoughts and emotions must be connected to his actions. But in many people, especially in those who have a dominant nature of **wind-of-wind**, there is an issue of doing something and simultaneously thinking about the next thing that needs to be done.

In some people, this is due to inner emptiness/boredom [see Chapter 10: Relieving Boredom and Inner Emptiness]. In others, it is because they have many different aspirations of what they would like to do. (We will soon address this, with the help of Hashem).

In either case, though, when a person is in the midst of doing something but his mind is thinking about the next thing he will do, firstly, he is inwardly scattered. He is doing one thing, but his mind is elsewhere, and this [temporarily] scatters his soul. The wind in his soul, which is dominating him, quickly moves him to the next

activity, while he is in the midst of something else. Even if he doesn't actually stop what he is in middle of doing, his thoughts will still be elsewhere.

As a result, many people like this usually have a hard time finishing what they start. They are doing one thing, but their mind is thinking about the next thing they have to do. If his mind is thinking about the next step, it is difficult for the person to be present in the here and now. When he is in the midst of doing something, he feels forced to complete it. When he is towards the end of something, he convinces himself that he has finished what has to be done. He has one foot in the first activity, and his other foot in the second activity which is now occupying his mind. Since he thinks that he has started to do the next thing, it is hard for him to finish what he's in middle of.

This causes a person to become unfocused. He is not present in whatever he does, because he is already thinking about the next thing. If he is basically finished what he has done, then it is not a problem if he starts thinking about the next thing. But if he is in the midst of doing something, and his **wind-of-wind** causes him to start thinking about the next thing and to start becoming involved with it, he won't be present in what he is in middle of doing right now.

And, as mentioned, if a person has a very strong nature of **wind-of-wind**, he is unfocused in general. A person with this nature is constantly "all over the place", always running from one activity to start another. If you know people like this, you can see that they often lose their thinking entirely while they are in middle of doing something. The person doesn't remember at all, or he is totally unaware, of what he did – he doesn't know if he did it at all, or if he began to do it and just didn't get around to finishing it.

Scatterbrained

A person like this is living a life that resembles *Gehinnom*. He completely forgets where he parked the car, he forgets if he made the deposit in the bank or not, he doesn't know at which time it was, etc. (In others, there is a similarly related problem, of always having doubts about what they did or didn't do.) This kind of person is generally not paying attention to what happened, what exactly was said to him, etc. Many times he doesn't really hear what was said to him, and instead he responds to others based on what he *imagined* what was said to him. It becomes the vicious cycle of his life.

People like this usually have serious problems in their marriages. It is hard to classify this as a "problem" in the person's marriage – because in this case, the marriage simply hasn't even started. The person has never really begun to build his marriage, because since he is never *present* in what he does, there is no one here to communicate with. He is living life like a bird flying all over the place. He mixes himself up, with the many different directions he keeps 'flying' in.

We do not only mean the results of this issue, such as the fact that he tends to forget things, doesn't pay attention to things, ends up causing damage to others, and other such symptoms. This is a total [mental/emotional] illness in the soul. Since the above is a deeper kind of issue, we will not discuss it here, as this is not the place to discuss it. Here in this lesson, we will speak about a simpler manifestation of this issue, which is easier to deal with.

Quickly Getting Things Done – But At What Expense?

The basic issue which results from impaired **wind-of-wind** is whenever a person is doing something and his mind is elsewhere. If we analyze this more subtly, it is a problem of "cramming it in" – a nature to perform very quickly, in order to get more done.

An example of this is when a person is in middle of a *sefer* and, while he is at it, he wants to finish more *sefarim*.

When a person wants to do things quickly so that he can get more things done, first of all, his work will be off-mark. Since he is focused on the next thing he wants to do, he is not fully paying attention to what he is doing right now, and he also will not be connected to whatever he is doing. These two factors – the lack of paying attention, and his disconnectedness – will both hamper his progress.

When one makes sure to do something slowly and patiently, he is connected to what he is doing, but when a person has to do many different things quickly, one after the other, he can't be connected all time to what he is doing. As a result, he won't be able to focus that much on what he is doing.

1- Managing Our Aspirations

Where does this nature come from, of trying to get things done quickly? Understandably, if someone's primary element is **wind-of-wind**, it is his nature to be this way. But there are those who don't have a primary element of **wind-of-wind**, and even so, they have a nature to do a lot of things quickly in order to get more done. What causes it?

One reason is due to **aspirations**. Many people have aspirations. They may have read about self-perfection and of the purpose of man, and they want to reach this purpose, *Baruch Hashem*. While a materialistic kind of person whose aspirations are for This World, such as wealth, honor, and other worldly desires - whose ambitions are spurred on because his jealousy of others' financial success, and the line – in contrast to this, one who is interested in the spiritual may channel his aspirations towards spiritual success.

If one is balanced, he understands that he cannot reach all his aspirations right now, and that it is a gradual, step-by-step process. But teenagers and adolescents will often be imbalanced when it comes to their aspirations, and this may continue into adulthood as well, where a person wants to “cram it in” as much spiritual attainments as he can.

When a person has so many aspirations, he may want to attain all of them, and he is impatient about it. For example, one may have an aspiration to finish the tractate of *Gemara* he is learning. This is a wonderful aspiration, but what often happens? Because he wants to finish it so badly, he flies through it without trying to understand it. He is consumed by the aspiration to finish a tractate and to make a *siyum* (celebration upon completion) afterwards. He will persevere in this goal with *mesirus nefesh* and his whole family is happy for him, they make a festive meal for him by his *siyum*, and they complement him for it, etc. His aspirations have caused him to quickly make his way through his goal....

We must know that this is impaired **wind-of-wind**, when done in an imbalanced manner. As for a person who has a general nature of **wind-of-wind**, that is a more severe issue. Here we are talking about a person whose main element is not necessarily wind, yet he is making a lot of use of impaired **wind-of-wind** in his life.

In another example, a person resolves that he will finish *Shas* (the Talmud) every year. There were definitely *Gedolim* who did this, but in order to do this successfully, one needs to go about in a very sensible manner. There are those who think that if they make sure to finish 7 pages of *Gemara* a day and they finish *Shas*, they will become a *Gadol* of the next generation. But in the next generation, he will not be called a *Gadol*, because this is not the meaning of true greatness. Although he is filling himself with content, even if he remembers all of it, if he flies through it so quickly, he has not really connected to his Torah learning from the depths of his soul. Not only hasn't he connected to it (by trying to finish it superficially), but he has never developed his level of understanding.

We do not mean *chas v'shalom* to belittle this practice of aiming to finish *Shas*, and certainly if he remembers it and knows it well, which, if only everyone could merit this. There are surely those whose souls are meant to pursue the goal of quickly trying to finish *Shas*, and we are not coming here to negate the value of this. As mentioned, there were *Gedolim* who did this, so it is obviously a valid approach. Rather, what we want to point out here is that the perspective behind this may be an incorrect way of living. The issue is: If a person can remain balanced while he is in the midst of such a goal; if he won't lose his inner stability, and if he can remain calm and serene throughout.

Of course, we do not mean that a person should sit with a cup of coffee by his *Gemara* and try to finish *Shas* like that. On the other hand, a person will not either be successful if he tries to pressure himself in order to finish the entire *Shas*.

Aspirations often cause a person to do way more than his actual capacity, placing a great amount of stress on his soul. A true aspiration is one that utilizes a person's potential. If the aspiration is not genuine, a person aspires for something which is unrealistic for him to reach, for it is way beyond his actual energies. Either it is a goal which cannot be actually reached, or it requires too much energy from him, and it is not a goal that will bring out his best.

Aspirations are a broad matter to understand, but to be brief, most people are not aspiring as much as they could be. They are not trying to accomplish as much as they really can. A small amount of people will aspire to be who they truly are. But **most "aspiring" people are not aspiring to be who they are! They want to be what they imagine they need to be.**

When one aspires to be who he truly is, this is a true aspiration. The only question is who "he" really is – and he will need to clarify this. That is part of his inner work. But in most cases, when a person has aspirations, it is beyond his actual capabilities. Even it is within his capabilities, it is not necessarily a goal that is meant for him to pursue. Aspirations can therefore awaken a person's impaired **wind-of-wind**, which causes his soul to "move" too much and to become overworked.

Aspirations are complex to understand, and it cannot be explained here in its entirety. But to be brief, a person's aspirations need to be thoroughly, deeply examined. There are general aspirations we need to have, such as the aspiration to reach self-perfection, and to do Hashem's will, which includes Torah learning, carefully keeping the mitzvos, fixing the character traits, etc. Those are the general aspirations which apply to every person, but the individual aspirations of a person need to be aligned with his unique personality. If the aspirations are taking too much energy from him, it is a sign that these aspirations are not for him to pursue, and they are an example of impaired **wind-of-wind**.

Therefore, a person's aspirations need to be thoroughly examined.

2 – Quality Vs. Quantity

Another reason why a person may have a nature to "do a lot of things quickly, in order to get more done" is because a person is placing more emphasis on **quantity** (in Hebrew, *ka-mut*, or *ka-mus*) than on **quality** (*ei-c'h-ut*, or *ei-c'h-us*).

Some people have souls that are more drawn towards quantity (*kamus*), whereas others have souls that are more rooted in quality (*eichus*). A person may read and hear many *shmuessen* (Torah lectures on ethical behavior and self-improvement) and *sefarim* of our *Chazal* and *Gedolim*, which is wonderful, but if he has a soul that needs more quality than quantity, he will not become that connected to any of what he hears or reads. He would be filling his life with quantity - not quality.

Even if one hears words of Torah all of his life from a certain person, the words may not be individually tailored to the souls of the one who hears those words. The one listening is absorbing much quantity, but he is not getting the quality which he needs, if his soul needs the quality more than the quantity. He won't be connected to all that which he hears, because it isn't for his personal soul, since his soul needs the quality more than the quantity. He also will not be able to have true focus, because he isn't connected to anything and therefore he doesn't have *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind).

Even more so, though, is that **a person whose soul is more rooted in “quality” will have a harder time with focusing.** In most cases, when one has more quantity than quality, this prevents a person from having total focus and concentration – even for those whose souls are more rooted in quantity. The very connection to quantity, as opposed to quality, already creates a lack of focus. Quantity comes from an external means, whereas quality comes from within, and that is why a person who mainly gets more quantity and less quality will be less connected to what he absorbs, whereas a person who gets more quality than quantity will have more of an inner connection to what he learns about.

If a person needs quality more than quantity, and instead of pursuing his soul's need for quality, he acts according to what he thinks is expected of him in society - which usually emphasizes quality over quantity - he is mainly pursuing quantity, as opposed to quality, and in most cases, he will not be that focused. Since he is involved with quantity and not with quality, there is very little focus he can actually have.

A Wind-of-Wind Person Has A Greater Need For Space

Now we shall address a deeper point. We have so far explained some extreme outcomes of impaired **wind-of-wind**, when people lose control over how they behave, and when they cannot manage their aspirations, as well as when people emphasize quantity over quality. There is also another outcome of impaired **wind-of-wind**.

The element of wind contains not only movement, but also space. Wind cannot move unless it has space to move around in. How much can one move? According to the amount of space he has. Most people do not move according to their amount of space they have, and instead, they move whenever they feel like it. A person with impaired **wind-of-wind** will want a lot of space so that he can move around a lot.

Movement is allowed to function only when it has “space” to move around in. The external aspect of wind is movement, while the inner aspect of wind is space. Most people just move whenever they feel a need to move. A person with a lot of **wind-of-wind** will therefore want a lot of space to move. For example, if one is in a yeshiva setting, the curriculum may not be for him, and he will feel a need to move more, so he can't stay in his place for too long and he needs to move around a lot. Simply speaking, he has a greater need for movement. But the deeper way to understand it is because he really needs more space. In order for him to move in the first place, he first needs to have his space.

Here is another example. Some people grow up in a small, narrow home, where there was tight space and everyone lived frugally, stuffed together in a small amount of space. If someone has more **wind-of-wind** in his soul, he needs more space to move around in, and when he doesn't have this space, he suffers. Such a person is not able to function properly when he is surrounded by ten children at once. He needs plenty of open space around him, so that his **wind-of-wind** can be given the space that it needs to blow around in.

If a **wind-of-wind** person meets a person with a nature of **earth-of-earth** and he explains to him that he is bothered when he doesn't have enough space, the **earth-of-earth** person will not understand the other's great need for space, and he will try to confine him by telling him that he needs to become more frugal and not be bothered by

a lack of space. But the **wind-of-wind** person will feel stifled by this argument, and he will feel that he has not been understood.

A **wind-of-wind** person needs to have his space, and if not, he cannot function properly, because his soul is structured differently than others. It is not simply a need to move more, which is the element of wind in general, but a need for more space, so that he can move around in the first place. Space itself personifies **wind-of-wind**. The **wind-of-wind** in the soul is the part of a person that needs space, and when a person has more of a nature of **wind-of-wind**, he has a much greater need for space.

The Danger of Finding One's Personal Space: The Scattering The Soul

The problem is that in the world we live in today, it is spiritually endangering for a person to find his “space” in it. A **wind-of-wind** person prefers to roam outside and be all over the world, and the world today is a spiritually harmful place. If one tries to find space for himself anywhere in the outside world today, he is open to the most undesirable elements possible. In addition to this, he would just be scattering his soul.

If a person has a nature of **wind-of-wind** and he does not lead a Torah-observant lifestyle, he is the type to ‘float’ all over the world, going anywhere and everywhere, in order to find his space. A more spiritual person than this will feel like he can move anywhere in the land of Eretz Yisrael alone. But even this would scatter his soul. If he would only seek quiet places, such as deserts and forests and other naturally secluded places, that would be fine, but the reality is that he will want to be all over the place. This will greatly damage his ability to focus.

The Wind-of-Wind Person Stays On The Outside and Doesn't Enter Inward

Going further with this issue, the nature of **wind-of-wind** [when it dominates] causes a person to want a different kind of movement altogether than the regular need for movement – as we shall explain.

Our Rabbis describe the concepts of “inner light” (*ohr pnimi*) and “encompassing light” (*ohr makif*). “Inner light” is when a person experiences a matter from within him, while “encompassing light” is when a person experiences a matter from the outside. A person with a lot of **wind-of-wind** in his soul usually experiences his viewpoint from “encompassing light”, as opposed to inner light, because **wind-of-wind** moves towards empty space, which exists on the outside of something and encompasses it.

Space surrounds, envelopes, and encompasses. A person with a lot of **wind-of-wind** in his nature is the type to be a patrolman of a building, a security guard, a watchman, and the like. He likes to stay on the outside of things. He'd rather observe than join in. He prefers to stay on the outside, so that he can have plenty of space to move around in, and the problem that results from this is that it scatters his soul.

Even more so, we find that when a person is more internal, he is more focused and concentrated on what he does, whereas if a person is always staying on the outside, his soul becomes opened to all outer stimuli, and the result of this is that his soul becomes scattered. He will also not be able to focus, as a result. His nature is that he tends to remain on the outside of a matter, and he will never enter inward into anything. His soul cannot be focused on anything, because he is opened to all of the different directions and all of the stimuli contained in it, which easily distracts him.

Such a person does not become involved and focused on what they are involved with, and instead they prefer to let their minds fly into different directions and think about everything else. His wistful nature of always thinking ‘out of the box’ may aid him in becoming a very creative person, and he may even become a very successful person.

But the danger is that he can broaden and widen his thinking so much that it will resemble the “widened soul” of the wicked Bilaam.

If one has this nature and it is left unfixed, he will have great difficulty with focusing. When trying to read words or sentences, his eyes are always darting to his surroundings. As soon as he tries focusing, his eyes automatically shift outward.

Repairing Wind-of-Wind: Giving The Mind The Space That It Needs

However, **although this kind of person has a generally hard time with focusing, this doesn't mean that something is something wrong with him. Rather, we must understand that his very inner makeup is designed to be like this. His soul is simply structured differently than most people.**

Children with this nature grow up to be adults who end up being fired from their jobs, because they don't stay focused, and understandably, others become frustrated with them. The child doesn't focus when others talk to him, because he needs to move around or focus his attention on something else. A parent or teacher may try tutoring him, in the hopes of getting him to focus better, and when the child isn't focusing or his eyes are darting elsewhere, the parent or teacher may yell at him: “Focus! Look at me when I talk to you!” But it doesn't help, because his very nature of **wind-of-wind** causes him to act this way. His nature carries into adulthood, and even as an adult, he cannot stay confined to any place, so he floats all over the place.

It is not because he has a wild imagination which doesn't let him focus. Rather, this is how he focuses! **He needs to progress back and forth between focusing, then leaving his focus, then re-focusing, and then repeat the cycle.** This is not a problem, it is just the way his soul is built. He needs to find his space so that he can “blow around” in it [giving outlet to his **wind-of-wind** which needs to move a lot], so that he can stay “outside” of a matter and surround it - **and after he finds his space to settle in, he can then come back into his focus. This is what he needs to do, in order to progress and understand things.**

Most people with this nature are usually creative, and they can succeed very well in their life. Others around them who deal with them will need to understand that a **wind-of-wind** person simply has a different way of focusing, so they should not become frustrated with those who have this nature. Those who are involved with them need to understand that a person with this nature does not have a problem, and it is just that his soul is designed with a different structure.

A person with the nature of **wind-of-wind** needs to look out from his *sefer*/book and then look at the sky, and then return to looking at his *sefer* or book, in order to concentrate. He needs that expansiveness, in order to find his space for his **wind-of-wind** nature to thrive.

Parents should be clear that if their children have this nature described here, it should not be viewed as a problem, and it is just that the child's soul is structured differently, so he needs to “space out” in order for him to focus properly. Such souls, in order to focus properly, need to go “outward” from their focus, where they can find “space” for their minds to float around in, and only then they can come back inward into their focus – whereupon they repeat this cycle.

In Conclusion

In summary, the **wind-of-wind** person needs a lot of “space” for his mind to go to, so that he can find the expansiveness that he needs, in order for him to return to his focus. That is how the **wind-of-wind** person can repair his generally unfocused nature, and that is what he needs, in order to succeed.

12 / Staying Goal-Centered

Fire-of-Wind: Movement Without Direction

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to discuss the power of focus. In this lesson we will discuss focus-related issues which stem from **fire-of-wind**. Wind is the force of movement, and fire, which we will explain more about in the coming chapters, is an unruly force which skips and jumps. Therefore, “**fire-of-wind**” is when a person moves unpredictably in any of the four directions.

When **fire-of-wind** is repaired through the element of earth/stability, one's movements are given direction. But when **fire-of-wind** is impaired, one's wind is moving him in a certain direction and his fire causes his movements to skip and jump, so he will keep changing directions.

To illustrate the idea, when a fire breaks out and people are trying to contain the fire, the firemen can predict where the fire will go, and slowly learn how to contain the fire. But if the fire is in a windy environment, there is no way to predict where the fire will spread to, because the wind can spread the fire in any directions. That is why outdoor fires can be very difficult to extinguish. The wind sends the fire in any of the directions and it is difficult to contain it anywhere.

When one's wind/movement is guided towards a certain direction, this is the stable movement of **earth-of-wind**, and when one's wind movement is churning in any of the directions with nothing to guide the directions of the movements, these movements are a result of **fire-of-wind**.

Now let us see how this affects one's ability to focus. When one's element of wind/movement is out of control, this will prevent him from being serene, as explained in previous lesson. However, it is still possible for a person to stabilize his movements, if he is guiding and directing his movements. But when one has impaired **fire-of-wind**, not only won't he be serene, but his soul also becomes totally scattered due to the many different directions of his movements.

The wind can move in any of the four directions, but as long as one's wind doesn't combine with his fire, his wind won't scatter him. But when one's fire combines with his wind [generally, fire and wind is a detrimental combination], the jumpy nature of fire causes his wind to 'scatter' him throughout all of the four directions. This destructive combination is the impaired **fire-of-wind**, which causes a person to move from one direction to another and then suddenly switch directions.

The Person Who Suddenly Switches His Direction, Goals, or Interests

Bringing this all down to a practical level, we find that when people make various switches in their life, some people will make only minor switches, whereas others will switch directions more drastically. Most people, if they are asked what they aspire for in life, will give general, superficial answers that are sparse, such as wanting to be happy, to be financially secure, and to have good children. But these are not defined as having goals in life, because they are very general, and they are things which all people want.

Others are more focused on attaining specific goals. A person may want to get a certain job, another wants to marry a certain kind of spouse, and another wants to own a house. These goals are more specific, and one with this kind of goal is much more focused on getting he wants.

When a person wants to get himself a job, can we say that this is called being focused, or not? Some people will want any job, as long as they can keep it. Similarly, there are those who will say that they want to own any kind of house, no matter what the house is like, as long as they can get a roof over their heads. In any of these scenarios, there is no specific goal, and it is just that the person is looking for something that gives him permanence.

Most people cannot name any specific goals that they want in life. Some people can get a little more specific with their goals, and a fewer amount can more precisely name what their goals are. But the actual amount of people that can truly name any specific goals they have, are very few.

When a person has many general kinds of aspirations, which are not specific goals, he is more likely to suddenly change directions in his life. If he has certain specific goals, the less likely he is to suddenly switch his goals. If he has many different general goals in life, it is more likely that he will suddenly lose focus on attaining his current goal and he will switch it for a different goal. He will start one project and suddenly moves onto a different one. This is impaired movement that comes from **fire-of-wind**.

When most people choose to make certain transitions in their life, the switch is not that major. For example, a person may have intended to go to a wedding, and instead he abandons the wedding and he goes shopping instead. This is not such a major switch of plans. (In some instances, though, this can be a serious issue, if a person leaves his house to take care of a certain errand and he is always changing his mind to do something else. We are not discussing such serious issues here.) Others, though, will make more extreme switches in their life. They change their major life goals, and they will make the transition very suddenly. They suddenly shift their thinking patterns, and as a result, they begin to pursue different interests than what they were doing until now.

When a person suddenly switches directions like this, it impairs his focus. He is not focused for that long on attaining a certain goal or interest, because he suddenly switches to a different goal or interest. He begins one project and suddenly starts another project, abandoning the first project. He begins to learn a certain section of *Gemara*, and a week later he's off to a completely different page of *Gemara*. Even if he doesn't actually make these switches, as long as he is prepared to quickly switch his plans like this so often, it damages his sense of stability and thereby impairs his focus, because he never wants to be permanently involved with anything.

That is all a description of impaired **fire-of-wind**.

Example – The Irresponsible Worker Who Will Take Any Job

Here is an example.

There are advertisements for people who are seeking jobs, and the advertisement says “Seeking Worker”, for all kinds of different jobs. Usually the people that take any job offer that comes their way are not that focused on what they want in life, and they have probably gone through all kinds of difficult circumstances in their life that have prevented them from seeking a job that is really more suitable for them, and instead they suffice for any kind of job. If a yeshiva student isn't succeeding in yeshiva and he finds himself “burnt out” of his studies, he is vulnerable to take any job that comes his way, whether it involves working for Torah institution or a more secular kind of job. In most of these cases, the person who takes the job cannot name any specific goals that he has in his life.

III · Fixing Your Focus

Often this kind of person is not on time to work, he doesn't have a set schedule throughout his day, he wastes his time at night, and he doesn't wake up on time. When he gets paid, he doesn't know how to budget properly and instead he wastes his money on frivolous things. He doesn't pick up his phone even though he knows that he has important phone calls coming to him and even though he is risking losing his job, perhaps because he thinks that even if he gets fired, he'll find a better job or a job that pays better....

There are all kinds of issues that can result from this irresponsible nature. This kind of person has no permanence or stability in his life. Their entire life lacks stability. Contrast this with a person who is pursuing the medical field, and he is studying for 7 years in order to become a doctor. He is much more focused than the person who takes any job that comes his way. He invests a lot of time and money into it, he works his entire schedule around this goal in order for it to happen, so he is generally more stable.

1. Leading A Purposeful Life: Having Goals

Hashem created this world for a purpose, and on our own level, are actions must be purposeful as well. The secret of success in life, and especially when it comes to becoming more focused, is to be purposeful in our actions. In whatever one is doing, one must always know the purpose of what he is doing, the goal of where he wants to get to.

Hashem has created our life on this world with a purpose to it, and that purpose should be the root of all our goals. We must be aware of it, because it is the greatest purpose of our life. After that, we should become aware of all other major goals in our life, which, although not being our main purpose in life, are still important. And after knowing what our major goals are, we must also become aware of what our smaller goals in life are. Whatever we are in the middle of doing, we must know the purpose of it.

The first thing we must consider, as mentioned, is the greatest purpose of our life. We should all think: What do we want to look like at the end of our life? How do we plan to get there? After that we should contemplate our other goals in life and how we plan on getting to them. And in whatever we are involved with at the moment, we need to think what the goal of it is, where we want to get to, and what the step after that will be.

Understandably, this kind of thinking will not be constructive for a person if he is delusional about his goals in life. With a dominant imagination, a person's aspirations and goals are unrealistic. But if a person is more truthful, he is more aware of his capabilities and his limitations, and he can be more realistic about his goals, so he will be able to think about his goals and how he plans to get there. This is the depth of the power of focus – it is about knowing exactly where you want to get to in life.

Of course, a person cannot be clear about any path he is taking in life, and he cannot know what will happen or how things will turn it out. In spite of this, a person still has the ability to become basically goal-oriented and he can know exactly where he wants to get to in life. The more a person thinks about "Where do I want to get to?", the less his soul will be scattered.

2. The Power of Returning to a "Beginning Point"

Additionally, there is another kind of thinking one can utilize, which is the true depth contained in the power of focus. [First we will outline the concept and then see how it applies practically].

Hashem created a point of *raishis* (the beginning), *acharis* (end), and the middle point which is between the beginning and end. In the beginning point and end point of Creation, everything is one unit, but in the middle point, which is between the beginning and end points of Creation, everything is scattered. At first, in the beginning state of Creation, Hashem was one and His Name was one³¹, and at the end of Creation as well, Hashem will be one and His Name will be one. Currently, we are in the middle point, which is called the *alma d'piruda*, the “world of disparity”, where everything is scattered.

Now we shall see how this concept applies to our own souls. In order for one to avoid the state of being “scattered” in his soul, he can either connect to his beginning point, the *raishis*, where everything is one; alternatively, he can connect himself to his end point, the *acharis*, where everything is one. If one is neither connected to his *raishis*/beginning or *acharis*/end, he is left in the middle point, where everything is scattered. In contrast to this, one who is connected to both his *raishis*/beginning and *acharis*/end is in a truly focused state, because he is strongly connected to a state of oneness.

Let us now see this applies to us on a practical level. Whenever we begin something, we begin with a small point, which can later expand into to become one-dimensional (length), two-dimensional (width), or three-dimensional (depth). The small point we begin with may later become “scattered”, after it has expanded into any of the dimensions. Therefore, every person needs to identify his “beginning point”, the point he began with, as well as his “end point”, the goal he is trying to get to. This is how one can navigate his way through the middle point, which is a scattered state.

In terms of our Sages, this is referred to as “Know from where you come (from a rotten droplet), and to where you are going.”³² Generally, to “Know from where you come” means that we come from a rotten droplet, as the Mishnah states, and “Know to where you are going” refers to our purpose in Creation. But this also applies on a more specific level in our own souls: “Know where you come from” is the power to return to a beginning point, while “Know to where you are going” refers to heading towards an endpoint (goal).

When a person begins pursuing a certain goal, and at some point he becomes “scattered” in a different direction, what can he do to re-gain his focus and get himself back to his original goal? Practically speaking, he should try to return to his beginning, by focusing on what he began to do. This idea applies in many different areas.

Here is an example when it comes to learning Torah. A person is in the midst of learning a certain part of the *Gemara* and suddenly he feels “lost” in the material. Either his mind feels foggy, or he feels like he doesn't understand or that he isn't absorbing it. What can he do? He should begin reviewing the *Gemara* from the beginning. By returning to the “beginning point” before all the “scattering” began, one regains his focus. When one returns to the beginning point of whatever he was involved with, he finds the depth of the power to focus.

In whatever a person is doing, every so often he should return to the beginning. A person can also take this concept further and give inner order to his soul, by setting aside some time in order to focus and concentrate on his life, from the earliest point he remembers, until the current day. Of course, one cannot remember every detail that transpired in his life. Rather, one can try remembering the general course of his life, from the beginning of his life until today. One can remember: “What was I like when I began my life, and how did I get to where I am today?”

31 *Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer*

32 *Avos* 3:1

This power of returning to the beginning provides a deep ability to focus/concentrate. This is one side of the coin, however – soon we will mention the other side of the coin to this. We have been brief in explaining about it, but it is **the root of focusing**: to keep returning to the beginning of what you were doing.

3. Connecting To Your End Point (Purpose/Goal)

The other side of the coin is the ability in a person to connect to his *acharis*, his end point. By reminding yourself of where you are headed towards, this also places you in a state of oneness, which thereby improves your focus, just as connecting yourself to a beginning point places you in a state of oneness and thereby improves your focus.

As mentioned earlier, there is the greater goal of our life, and there are also smaller, sub-goals of our life [which aid us in reaching the greater goal of our life]. Firstly, a person needs to clarify the main purpose of his life, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* states, that the purpose of life is for a person to become attached with Hashem. In addition to this, one also needs to be aware of the smaller goals of our life. For example, Shabbos is the purpose of the weekday.

One should therefore always be aware of his goals, in whatever he is doing. One should keep reminding himself what his goal is, and then see if he is heading towards his goal or not. If he sees that he has veered off course, he should re-align himself with his goal. This is what it means to live a life of focus. He is headed towards the main purpose of life, and he is also headed towards the various sub-goals of his life, which will aid him in reaching the main purpose of his life.

On one hand, one needs to keep returning to his beginning point, and on the other hand, a person also needs to keep returning to his end point, by reminding himself of his goals.

This lessens the “scattering” of his movements which is caused by impaired **fire-of-wind** in the soul, and in turn, he lessens the jumpy movements of his soul which had been sending him in different directions. **Fire-of-wind** scatters a person’s movements, and a person unifies his movements by returning to his beginning and end points.

4. Avoiding Drastic Changes Along The Way

There is one more point here which one needs, though, in order to repair **fire-of-wind**. The main purpose of life is to become attached to Hashem, and if one succeeds in focusing on this great purpose of our life, he is deeply focused on his root, but, practically speaking, is there a clear-cut way for a person to reach the state of attachment with Hashem?

There are people who have gone through so many different paths of serving Hashem since their youth, and every time you meet them, they have a new path, or they are looking for a new approach, in how to reach closeness with Hashem. They have no guidance, and they keep looking for new ways. If a person takes one certain path for a long amount of time, or even if he takes two or three different paths for a steady amount of time, this is a more stable approach. But the problem is when a person becomes “scattered” throughout so many different paths of serving Hashem. His goal is to reach his greatest purpose, which is to become close and attached with Hashem, but long before he gets there, he can become very scattered [and mixed up] throughout the many different paths he may take.

For this reason, we mentioned earlier that it is important for a person to have sub-goals in life. This lessens all of the “scattering” that takes place in the “middle point” between one’s beginning point and end point. However, this doesn’t totally solve the issue of becoming “scattered”, because it is still possible for a person to become “scattered” throughout the many different sub-goals he has in his life. So we will emphasize here that this is not a complete solution.

Therefore, besides for returning to one's beginning point and end point, one also needs to avoid making drastic changes in his life, in whatever sub-goal he is involved with. For example, if a person takes upon himself a resolution in order to get closer to his goal (where it is the main goal of life, or even a sub-goal), even if he discovers that he was in error about the specific sub-goal he was seeking, like if he has discovered a more truthful goal, he still shouldn't give up his current resolution. He should try sticking to his resolution for another 2 months, even though he realizes that he made it in error and that he had been making a major mistake in his *avodas Hashem*.

The gain of this is that he avoids making a drastic change in his life that would uproot his stability. In doing so, he maintains his stability. If he makes a major change in his path of *avodas Hashem* as soon as he realizes he was mistaken about something, the problem is that he will lose the idea of permanence and stability.

There is a power in the soul to always begin anew, but this power is only constructive when it is used correctly. There are people who will always start again anew, when it is too soon to do so. The power of starting anew is used constructively by a sinner who wishes to renew himself and do *teshuvah*, but as a general way of living, a person cannot always be starting again anew, because it scatters the soul, when one is always changing directions. It damages his stability, when he is always opened to drastic making changes.

Therefore, practically speaking, as mentioned before, a person should often return to his beginning point (reminding himself of how he began), his end point (reminding himself of his greater goal in life), and in addition, one also needs sub-goals, and one must be careful to avoid becoming "scattered" within his many sub-goals by not making drastic changes in his life too quickly.

How much time should elapse between one change and another? There is no given time for this. It may take 2 months, or 2 weeks, before one can implement a new change. But a definite rule for this is that a person shouldn't let his mood decide this. Even if he believes on an intellectual level that he needs to make a certain change in his life, he should not implement the change so quickly, and he should hold off on it for a bit of time. Otherwise, he will be so quick to make changes in his life and as a result, he will lose his sense of stability. There must be a certain amount of time that elapses between any changes he makes. So one must firmly decide that he will not implement any changes, even when necessary, until a certain amount of time elapses.

Of course, there are some exceptions to this, and sometimes a person may need to make immediate changes in his life. But as a general rule, one needs to resolve that he will not implement any major changes in his life, unless some time has elapsed.

The gain of this, as explained, is that he will save the stability of his soul, by not making changes so quickly. Even when he realizes he was in error about something, he must not make any changes until a bit of time has elapsed. As for the errors he has made - it is impossible not to make errors in life. At least by avoiding making changes too quickly in his life, he will maintain his soul's stability.

Maintaining the Soul's Stability Strengthens the Power of Focus

Obviously, the words here are only for a more internal kind of person. When a person lives without purpose, and he simply takes life as it comes and he lives by the desires of his *nefesh habehaimis* (animal level of the soul), most of the words here will not be relevant to him, because he lives superficially.

However, even if a person is living a life on the level of *nefesh habehaimis*, it is still possible to become goal-oriented and to become more focused. Stability enables a person to either succeed in his material goals or in his spiritual goals, because it makes him more focused. But if a person has no goals at all - neither material, nor spiritual

- he ‘moves’ in any of the directions, and even if he isn’t actually ‘moving’ in different directions, he has no permanence in his life. Since he has no stability, his soul is vulnerable to be pulled in any direction.

Know The Reason Of Why You Made Certain Changes

As mentioned earlier, in order to apply this idea, one must reflect about his beginning as well as his future. He must look back at his past and see where he has gotten to today, what changes he has made, and what the changes have caused in his life.

I met someone who had recently gone through a major change in his life. One day he suddenly stopped the major goal he was pursuing, and he changed courses entirely. I asked him how he came to such a change. He said simply, “I don’t know.” Others, when asked such a question, will either say that they don’t remember, or they will say it is because their life became more complicated and all kinds of factors came up, or that they found something better, etc. But some people will say that they simply don’t know why they changed courses in life – they simply don’t know the reason of why they made such changes in their life.

One must know why he had made certain changes in his life, whether it is a big change or a small change. Even if a person was used to drinking a cup of coffee in the morning, and one day he stops, he must know the reason of why he stopped.

One needs to see if the changes he has made were stable, or if they were unstable. If one realizes that he has made a change which has damaged his stability in life, he will act very differently and he will think twice before he makes another change.

Returning Fire-of-Wind To Its Root

This is also called the soul’s power of *teshuvah*, to “return”, in the inner sense, of “returning” to the soul to a life of stability. It is a “return” of the element of wind/movement to its root. **Fire-of-wind**, by its very nature, needs to be returned to stability, because it is an unruly force which often takes an off-course direction. One needs to return his “wind”, his movements, to their proper direction, by having more stability and permanence (earth) in his life.

Summary & Conclusion

In summary, one needs to keep returning to his beginning point, to his end point (as explained in detail earlier), and through being connected to these two states together, he stabilizes his movements of the soul, which makes him more focused. This repairs the unruly force of **fire-of-wind** in the soul.

13 | CONSISTENT SKIPPING

Fire: Dilug/Skipping

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing here to discuss the power of focus/concentration. In the coming lessons we will discuss focus-related issues which stem from the element of fire. This will include four subdivisions – earth-of-fire, water-of-fire, wind-of-fire, and fire-of-fire. First we will explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the relationship between the element of fire and the power of focus.

One of the aspects contained in the element of fire is that fire can skip. A fire can jump and skip from its place. The fire's jumpy nature (*dilug*) is the antithesis to the power of orderliness (*seder*). The power of focus is mainly developed through the power of *seder*/orderliness, which is a trait of earth.

(On a deep note, the Hebrew word for “secret”, “*sod*”, stands for *seder*/orderliness and *dilug*/jumpiness, which hints that when one has the balance between these two contradicting forces of *dilug*/jumpiness and *seder*/orderliness together, the result is a *sod*/secret.)

The root of the power of *seder*/orderliness is clear. Creation is designed in a certain *seder*, in an orderly manner. Hashem created the world in six days, one after the other, which is followed by Shabbos. The entire Creation runs on *seder*, an orderly system of time.

Hashem also created a power in Creation called *dilug*, skipping. This power will appear at the future Redemption, when the *Moshiach* will “*skip over the mountains, and jump over the hills*”³³ [it will be sudden]. Similarly, on the night of Pesach, when Hashem smote the firstborns of Egypt, He “skipped” over all the Jewish homes and only killed the Egyptian firstborns.

The power of “skipping” is therefore the mode which Hashem uses for the Redemption. But in the current period of Creation, Hashem runs the world through an orderly system, which is the power of *seder*. The power of *dilug*/skipping is manifested in the side of the holiness when it comes to Redemption, as mentioned above, and it is a holy ability in the soul only when balanced out by the power of *seder*/orderliness. Otherwise, the power of *dilug*/skipping becomes impaired. In essence, though, *dilug*/skipping is a holy power, as it is the secret behind the entire Redemption.

In our own souls, the power of *dilug*/skipping is present in our soul's element of fire. As mentioned earlier, there are four subdivisions: earth-of-fire, water-of-fire, wind-of-fire, and fire-of-fire. Therefore, we will learn about four kinds of *dilug*/skipping. As emphasized, there are two basic powers in Creation which are opposite from each other – the power of *seder*/order, and the power of *dilug*/skipping.

The Four Subdivisions of Fire/Dilug/Skipping

There is *dilug*/skipping which comes from earth-of-fire, water-of-fire, wind-of-fire, and fire-of-fire. This is a brief description of each of them, which we will slowly explain as we go along:

1. **Earth-of-fire** is when the skipping has a “structure” to it.

³³ Shir HaShirim 2:8

2. **Water-of-fire** is when the skipping comes from “dragging”.
3. **Wind-of-fire** is when the skipping comes from quick movement, such as when a person has a strong will to reach a certain goal or end.
4. **Fire-of-fire** is the very essence of the power of skipping.

While all *dilug*/skipping comes from the element of fire, it can either come from earth-of-fire, water-of-fire, wind-of-fire, or fire-of-fire. We will begin by examining *dilug*/skipping that comes from earth-of-fire.

Earth-of-Fire: Skipping In An Orderly Manner

When *dilug*/skipping stems from **earth-of-fire**, the skipping takes place in a “structured” manner.

As mentioned earlier, there are two opposite powers in Creation – *seder*/orderliness and *dilug*/skipping. When most people use the ability of *dilug*/skipping, understandably, they are not using the power of *seder*/orderliness at all. But it is possible for a person to skip in an orderly fashion. In fact, there is an orderly, organized way of how to skip properly, and if a person learns how to skip in an orderly fashion, he is using the inner essence of the power to skip.

Example of Orderly Skipping: The Various Combinations of the Letters of the Aleph Beis

Here are some clear examples of the idea.

The letters of the *Aleph Beis*³⁴ are arranged in a *seder*/order of 22 letters, beginning from the letters *aleph, beis, gimmel, daled, heb*, (א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת) etc. But our Sages list different orders of the *Aleph Beis* which does not follow the simple order, where instead the letters of the *Aleph Beis* are arranged in a manner where every other letter is skipped: *aleph, gimmel, heb, zayin, tet* (א ג ה ו ז ט י כ ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת) , etc. (This is not to be confused with a different system of the *Aleph Beis* which is called *אתב"ש*, *atbas*”h, where the skipping is done from the beginning letter all the way until the furthest letter from it). There are many orders of the *Aleph Beis* listed by our Sages, which includes every possible manner of skipping.

Hashem created everything through the letters of the *Aleph Beis*, which form words. The word *Beraishis* is a combination of a certain order of letters of the *Aleph Beis*, and this is not random, but a specific order of letters, where certain letters have been “skipped” in an orderly fashion to form the word “*Beraishis*”. The Torah which we have now, as the Ramban writes, is a combination of the letters of the *Aleph Beis*, which follows a system of orderly “skipping”.

There is an endless amount of “orderly skipping” systems within Creation. The letters of the *Aleph Beis* can be combined in countless different ways, where there are so many different orderly ways of how to “skip” over different letters. And since Creation consists of combinations of *Aleph Beis* letters, it follows that the entire Creation consists of an endless amount of orderly systems of *dilug*/skipping.

From a superficial perspective, one thinks that the Creation must run solely on *seder*, on an orderly system. According to that thinking, if something is skipped, there is a problem, and the skipping has caused only disarray. But from a deeper perspective, skipping is necessary as well. There are systems in Creation which follow the orderly approach of *seder*, and there are also systems in Creation which follow an order of skipping. So *dilug*/skipping is also a kind of *seder* – it is just not the normal kind of *seder*.

³⁴ The Hebrew alphabet, which includes the letters א, ב, ג, ד, etc

For example, when the letters of the *Aleph Beis* are read backwards, from the last letter to the first letter, this is also following a certain order - it is just not the regular order. The normal way to read the letters of the *Aleph Beis* is to start from the first letter, *aleph*, until the last letter, *tav*, and this is the normal “*seder*” of how to read the *Aleph Beis* letters. But if the letters are read backwards, although this is not the normal *seder* of how to read the *Aleph Beis* letters, it is still following a certain *seder*, albeit not the normal *seder*.

The Depth of Dilug/Skipping – Understanding Different Kinds of Thinking Patterns

So there can be *seder/order* which contains *dilug/skipping*. This concept has many applications, but let us see the following deep application of this idea.

People are generally used to seeing only one *seder/order* in Creation. The more constricted that one’s soul is, he will only be able to handle one *seder/order*, and not more than that. The more a person expands his soul, however, the more he will be able to contain several different systems of *seder*.

The Sages explained that Shlomo *HaMelech* was the wisest man in the world because he was able to understand even insane people. What is the meaning behind this? It means that he was able to understand the order of thinking patterns in a person who thinks in a “skipping” manner. There is a way to think in a manner of “skipping”, and it follows a certain orderly pattern, which does not follow the normal thinking patterns we are used to, and Shlomo *HaMelech* was able to understand it.

If only we could even know our own normal thinking patterns. Most people don’t even recognize their normal, orderly thinking patterns. But at least we can all understand that there is a certain orderly way of thinking. A person can learn a deep ability of recognizing more and more orderly patterns. Everything has an order to it. The wiser that a person becomes, he can perceive more and more orderly systems. This is the depth of the power of *dilug/skipping*. A hint to this is that the Hebrew word for mature, *gadol*, is a rearrangement of the same letters as the word *dilug*, skipping.

Dilug/Skipping In Our Generation – And How It Affects Focus

The light of *dilug* shines strongly in the current era of the End of Days we are in, where we are nearing the Redemption. This is because, as mentioned earlier, the power of *dilug/skipping* is associated with Redemption. The various advancements of technology today have made it possible for a person to skip between different letters of the Torah and find all sorts of hints to what will happen in the End of Days. There are many *baalei teshuvah* today who have returned due to these kinds of discoveries, which all come from the power of *dilug/skipping*. This is a holy use of *dilug*.

But there is also an impaired use of *dilug*. When people make too much of use of *dilug*, they lose their normal *seder/order*. They become accustomed to different thinking patterns which causes their mind to skip around a lot and ignore the normal orderly thinking patterns. **This is actually a major cause for focus-related issues which are more common today.** When the mind becomes very used to the power of *dilug/skipping*, the power to focus normally becomes impaired.

Problems with focus and concentration always existed even in the previous generations. But these kinds of problems have gotten worse in our times, and we have so far given many reasons for it, as explained in the previous lessons. Now we are adding another reason, a very inner reason. It is because since we are nearing the time of the Redemption, the light of “skipping” is particularly strong in our times, and even though it is in essence a holy

power, it can often be misused [such as when people become so used to “skipping” that they lose their normal thinking patterns].

We can give an example. How did people used to get around between places? Either they would walk by foot, or by riding a horse or a donkey, or by boat. But today, a person can take a car, a bus, or an airplane, and he is quickly at his destination. That means that a person can “skip” today from one place to another, in a very short amount of time. Certainly, it is not a total kind of skipping, because it does not take place instantly. But the means of travel today vastly shorten the amount of time it takes to get from one place to another, where a person skips a lot of time that it would have normally took in previous times.

Another example of *dilug*/skipping in Creation is when it suddenly rains, even when there are no clouds in the sky. The normal order of things is that the sky slowly builds up rain clouds and eventually it rains. But it can suddenly start raining, even with no warning. This is also normal, but it isn't following the normal order of things, so it is an example of *dilug*/skipping.

The normal order in Creation is *seder*, but Creation does not only consist of *seder*, it also consists of *dilug*. As another example, the *Gemara* says that there is no order of the verses in the Torah – the events of the Torah are not necessarily written in chronological order, and one verse in the Torah does not necessarily precede the next verse.

Some souls have a perspective which is mainly rooted in *seder*/order, and other souls have a perspective that is mainly rooted in *dilug*/skipping.

Different People Need To Learn In A Different Order of Steps

We have given many different examples of this idea, so that we can better relate to it. Now we will get to the practical outcomes of this concept.

In our times, there is much *dilug*/skipping. In the educational systems of schools today, all different kinds of teachers (some of them from *Erev Rav*...) with their various approaches are teaching their own curriculum, each with their own order of how they want to teach things. If a student isn't doing well with the school's curriculum, it seems as if he is behind in his development, as if he has some kind of learning disability. But who decides what the correct order of things should be? There is no one educational system that works for all schools, and that is clear. It is completely foolish for anyone to think that all schools need to have the same exact order of how they teach material, such as what should be taught in each grade, etc. This is like how the people behaved in Sodom, where each person had to fit into the same size bed, or else their feet were cut off or stretched until they fit.

There is no one order which works for everyone. Each person is his own world, and the order that works for one person is not necessarily the order that another person needs to follow.

Earth-of-fire is when skipping is done in an orderly manner. It is normal for a person to skip learning certain information, because it is a power in Creation, and if people would know how to use **earth-of-fire**, they would be able to relate better to those who aren't making it in the particular curriculum or order of material that they are told to learn about.

If one is aware of this power, he can become very focused with it, even though he is skipping, because he will be able to skip in an orderly manner. This is not to say that he won't have difficulty, because he certainly will have to deal with the particular order he is being presented with, and he feels like skipping through it. However, he can

certainly mitigate the difficulty, when he is aware of the power of earth-of-fire in the soul, which provides him with the ability to skip through information in an organized, orderly manner.

The difficulty arises when a person is not aware of his **earth-of-fire**, he won't know how to skip properly. Since he doesn't know how to use his power to skip correctly, he will skip in an unorganized manner. He will fail in the normal curriculum, and he doesn't know how to skip correctly, so either way, he is stuck. When he doesn't know which step comes after the other, he doesn't know what the structure should be, and he will feel scattered between all the information he encounters. And, as a result, he will have problems with focusing and concentrating.

Fixing The Problem of Habitual Skipping

The beginning of the solution to this will not be easy.

1. One needs to first understand and agree with the idea that there can be a different order of learning things, and that the normal order which he's familiar with is not necessarily the order he has to go in. This will be difficult to accept, but that is the first step one needs to pass.

2. The second step is that one has to realize that his thought process doesn't work in such an organized, orderly manner. He needs to accept that he doesn't have such a straightforward thinking process as others do. This will also be hard for him to accept.

3. After one has accepted the above two facts, the next step is for him is to notice his particular skipping patterns. He should become aware of what he tends to skip. For example, one can examine how he writes. When we read a letter, the sentences may connect to the next and it makes sense to us when we read it. But a person with the problem of *dilug*/skipping will write a letter and he will skip letters in his words, or he will switch letters for each other. So if a person has the problem with *dilug*, he can try examining how he writes and see how he skips or switches certain letters.

He easily switches letters when he is writing a word, and this is a subconscious deterrent to his power of focus, because if he habitually switches letters all the time, he cannot be truly focused. Why indeed does he switch letters for each other? It is really because his imagination is stronger, and the imagination easily switches various tidbits of information. It makes an erroneous comparison between two things and mistakes A for B, and B for A.

One should first identify which letters he normally switches and mistakes for the other. He may be switching certain letters that have similar shapes, like a letter with a round shape for another letter with a round shape, or one letter with a straight long shape for another letter with a straight long shape, and it is because his imagination quickly mistakes the two letters as being the same letter. One can slowly realize his pattern of switching certain letters for each other, and it is a wisdom to learn about, which takes subtlety. Certainly, it takes much *siyata d'shmaya* for a person to perfect this kind of awareness.

One should also become aware of how he skips in his own thinking patterns. One should become aware: "Is there a certain thought which I usually skip from to a different thought? What kind of thought do I skip away from, and what kind of thought does my mind tend to skip to?" Perhaps it is being caused by a memory from childhood, or some other trigger, that is causing the mind to skip from one thought to another. It could even be that he was born with a nature to skip like this, or it could be that he acquired it habitually. Whatever the cause, one should become aware of the letters he tends to skip or switch. One can try finding 10 or 20 different such scenarios. In this way, one identifies the different scenarios in which he does his "orderly" skipping.

4. The Understanding That Not Every Seder (Order of Stages) Works For Every Person

After one has identified his skipping habits, the next step is for one to realize is that a person cannot constrict himself to follow any particular kind of *seder*/order that exists.

Every person has the abilities of *seder*/order and *dilug*/skipping, and the only issue is how much percentage of *seder* and *dilug* each person has in his soul. Each person needs both of these powers, *seder* and *dilug*. It is clear that one needs the power of *seder*, but it is not as clear that there is also a need for a person to use the power of *dilug*.

How much *seder* does one need, and how much *dilug* does one need? How does one strike the balance these two opposite abilities? This is a subtle matter, because it depends on each person's particular soul makeup, so it will differ with each person. We cannot explain how one can attain this balance perfectly. But we can provide the following deep perspective which will help one attain the balance.

Earth is the element that provides structure, and therefore it is the epitome of the power of *seder*/order. The very opposite of earth is the element of wind, a moving element which lifts a person "above" earth and enables a person to operate in a different, higher system, where the rules are different. Everyone has an ability to go above the normal system of rules, his element of earth, and to operate on a higher level which doesn't have the regular rules. Everyone has his normal, orderly system which he operates in, as well as a different orderly system he can rise to, which doesn't have the same rules as his normal system. When one accesses it, he is in touch with the power of *dilug*/skipping, where he can above the normal *seder*.

In the language of the Torah, this higher mode of operating is referred to as the concept of miracles. A miracle is when a person is operating within a *seder* that goes above the normal kind of *seder*, with different rules to it – a whole different system, with rules that are different than the normal rules we are used to.

Therefore, the deep root of the power of *dilug*/skipping is not in the element of fire, but in the element of wind. The wind lifts a person above the earth, and that is exactly what the power of *dilug* does – it lifts a person above the normal system of rules which is *seder*, and it places a person in a different system. When the element of wind raises a person above his normal system of rules, his element of fire can cause him to rise higher within this newfound, orderly system of rules which he finds.

Every person has gone through many different kinds of *seder* in his life, from the time he is a child. He has gone through different stages of development and different schedules, each with their own specific *seder*. So even within the power of *seder*, there are already many different kinds of *seder* that a person has uncovered. If a person were to take a certain *seder* from a later stage of life and apply it to his childhood, he would be trying to operate on a higher level, and this would be *dilug*.

Therefore, the balance between *seder* and *dilug* lies in a previous balance, which is, to know how to balance out the many different systems of *seder* in his life, by not letting a more mature stage of development into a lower stage of development.

Many people have problems in their life because they became "overly mature" in a certain area of development already in their childhood, when their souls weren't really ready to operate at that higher level. The child recognizes that there is a more mature level he can be on, and he tries to behave on that higher level, when he is really too young for that level of maturity. Such children have the problem of *dilug*/skipping in their development, by skipping over their current *seder*/order, trying to behave on a more mature level.

Example 1 – Children Who Read Very Quickly

As an example, some children are used to reading very quickly. What happens when they get older? They have a hard time understanding things, because they have gotten so used to quickly skimming through information. In reading information so quickly without trying to absorb and understand what they are reading about, they tried skipping a stage in their normal childhood development. The adult's grasp, and the pace by which he comprehends, while certainly being its own *sefer*, is not the proper *sefer* for a child. It is instead *dilug* for the child, and the results are detrimental.

Example 2 – Skipping Important Words When Perusing A Sefer

When a person reads through *sefarim*, he must understand that it is a detrimental habit to skip words. A person may be impatient and he wants to skip through words or paragraphs so he can get to the conclusion of the topic, but this habit accustoms a person to a problematic kind of *dilug*, because a person will skip very important words.

When it comes to reading the more classical *sefarim* of older times, where every word was precise and carefully measured, it is not as common that a person will skip reading some words, but when it comes to reading the *sefarim* of our own times, often the author is repetitive for the sake of clarity, and a person will naturally want to skip all of the repetition so that he can get to the point. But this accustoms a person to the problem of *dilug*. He will keep using the power of *dilug*, which is detrimental. Although there is also place for *dilug* (as mentioned earlier), because it is a holy power in essence, one must know when and how to use it.

One should become aware of any “skipping” habits he may have. Often when a person is skipping from one topic to another, he consciously sense how his mind is veering away from the current point and skipping to a different point.

In Conclusion

We have mentioned here the issues with focus that stem from **earth-of-fire**, which is when one regularly uses the power of *dilug*/skipping, which is detrimental.

This problem – when people make regular use of the power of *dilug*/skipping, on a consistent basis - is one of the major causes of focus-related issues in our times. The general solution to this problem, as mentioned, is that not everyone can be made to follow the same exact orderly system. We are not living in Sodom [where each person had to fit in the same size bed, or else they cut off his feet or stretched his body to make him fit in].

We need to understand that each person has his own unique nature, his own unique way of developing, and accordingly, we can then provide a person with the particular order of stages he will need to follow, in order for his soul to develop properly – and along with this, we will need to discover the particular areas where the person can skip over the normal rules.

With this understanding, we can help a person attain a balance between his abilities of *sefer*, the normal orderly system of rules he must follow, as well as *dilug*, the ability to skip above the normal rules.

14 / Skipping Before Finishing

Water-of-Fire: Skipping in a “Dragged” Manner

With *siyata d’shmaya* we are continuing to discuss the power of focus/concentration, and now we shall discuss focus-related issues that stem from **water-of-fire**.

Fire, as mentioned previously, is the ability to skip. Water is the nature to become dragged. Therefore, **water-of-fire** is when a person is dragged from one point to a completely other point, in a manner of skipping.

Unlike earth-of-fire, where the skipping is done in a step-by-step manner, **water-of-fire** is when a person is “dragged” from one point to another, in no particular order, where he skips from one point to another completely unrelated point. This happens because he has no permanence. He isn’t focused on where he is, and therefore he can become dragged to a different point, skipping to something completely unrelated to whatever he was in middle of until now.

That is the outline of how **water-of-fire** hampers focus.

Four Different Ways of Transitioning From One Point To Another

Human nature, which Hashem has designed every person with, is that a person can get from one point to another. This follows the very design of Creation, where Hashem created the first day, then the second day, then the third day, etc. Every person goes through stages of transitioning from one point to another. There are four different ways of how a person can get from one point to another:

- 1) He may skip from one point to another point (fire).
- 2) He may go there in an orderly manner, following a certain order of steps (earth).
- 3) He may be dragged there (water).
- 4) He may move to there by directing himself how to get there, because he has a path of how to get there (wind).

Transitioning from One Point to another is a Deterrent to Focus

When one transitions from one point to another, he cannot be focused on his current point. Therefore, transitioning from one point to another causes a person to become unfocused.

Absolute Focus is only possible when there is a state of Oneness (The Future)

If there was only thing in Creation to be focused on, a person would always be focused, because there would be nothing to distract him from that one point. This will be the state of the future, when there will only be one thing

alone, when “*Hashem will be One, and His name will be One.*”³⁵ Hashem’s very oneness is the root of His Name which is One, and this oneness extends into all of the dimensions, from the most sublime level all the way until the very lowest point – which is the element of earth. Thus Hashem’s oneness is present even in the lowliest element, earth.

The future will be one point alone, and therefore it will be a situation of total, absolute focus, because there will be nothing to distract a person from his focus. But in the current period of Creation we are in, there are myriads of points, an endless amount of creations, and therefore in the current state of Creation, a person passes from one point to another, because there is always a different force which can distract him and deter his focus. This is the deep reason behind why a person loses his focus whenever he transitions from one point to another.

Although it is still possible for a person to attain focus even in the current state of Creation, one’s power of focus can never be on an absolute and complete level. This is simply because the complete level of focus will only be attainable in the future.

Our Power To Focus Is Only Within This World of Separation

In addition to the above factor, our world is called a “world of disparity” (*alma d’piruda*), where each point in Creation is separate from each other. Whenever we make a transition from one point to another, we are not unifying the two points, and instead, we are always separating from the previous point so that we can get to the next point. This is another reason why a person today can never reach a total level of focus. Any focus that we can have is only within this world of separation, so it is never a complete level of focus.

Therefore, our entire inner work when it comes developing our power of focus can only be within this world of separation: learning how to make a proper transition from one point to another. All we can do in our current state is to separate from one point so that we can get to another, and this is because our very perspective on this world comes from separation. So our task, when learning how to focus, is all about learning how we can focus within this world - a dimension of separation.

How Any of the Four Elements of Transitioning Can Affect Focus

As mentioned, it is possible for a person to transition from one point to another using any of the four elements – earth, water, wind and fire.

Through the elements of fire/skipping and water/dragging, it is clear that a person stops focusing on his current point when he transitions to the next point.

Through wind/direction, a person will be very focused only if he is clear about where he needs to get to, but if he isn’t clear, he will become distracted by a different point and he will lose focus. He may be clear about his goal, but the path to get there may not be clear. Even within the Torah, there are many different valid paths to take, all with the same goal, and one may not be clear about the path he is taking. This lack of clarity can cause a person to become scattered between different points along the way.

³⁵ Zechariah 14:9

Through earth, where a person is trying to get to another in a step-by-step manner, although he is being very focused, he may not know what to do. For example, when a person is trying to construct a building, and he needs to order the bricks and material, he may order too much, or too little. Although he has a step-by-step plan of how he wants to construct his building, he may not know what each step will entail. He may realize that he has made some mistakes, and then other things come up along the way, and this hampers his focus. So even though he is the type to follow an orderly, step-by-step approach, he will not always be able to decide what the next step should be.

It is certainly possible, though, that a person will know how to construct a building, and what all of the steps will be, from beginning until end. But when it comes to life itself, the element of earth cannot help a person plan out what his life will look like, and what each step should be. It is impossible for a person to plan out all the steps of his life, and with all their details. There is no such thing. Perhaps Moshe Rabbeinu or *Moshiach* could do this, but no one else can.

Since we cannot use the element of earth to plan out all of the steps of our life, we are either using the elements of water, wind or fire in order to make it through our lives. Since the power of focus is an earth-based power, and we are not able to use earth to plan out our lives (as explained above), we are not able to attain complete focus on this world.

How, then, can we repair our power of focus?

Step 1 – Finish The Current Task

Whenever we make a transition from one thing to another, there are several steps involved.

The first step involved is that when a person wants to get to the next step, he will want to quickly finish what he's involved with now, so that he can proceed to the next step already. This is the root of "skipping" which was mentioned earlier. When a person wants to proceed but he feels like he isn't finished yet, he might "skip" to the next point. He moves to the next point, using his element of wind, and the result is that he skips, which is the element of fire. There is first movement (wind) and later skipping (fire). When a person wants to finish what he's involved with because he wants to proceed already, the result is that he will skip.

What he really needs to do is to make sure he has finished the previous point. Many people have a problem of wanting to proceed to the next point before finishing the previous step. They find it unpleasant to remain in the previous step when they want to get to the next step already, so they skip the current step in order to proceed to the next step. Often a worker will want to get started on the next part of his job before finishing the first part of his job.

Instead, a person needs to finish what he has first started, before moving on to the next step.

Step 2 – Becoming Aware of the Skipping

If a person feels too impatient and he wants to get started on the next step already, then he may skip to his next step, but only if he is consciously aware that he is skipping and running away from his task. In this way, at least he creates awareness.

Step 3 – Do One More Thing Before Starting The Next Task

After that, one should try taking take of one more step in his current task, before moving on to his next task. This delay prevents you from being too impulsive when you skip to the next task.

In summary, we have so far said three steps to take, whenever you want to move on to another task: **1)** Try to finish what you start before moving on to your next task. **2)** Become aware that you want to skip to another task. **3)** Try finishing one more part of your current task, before moving on to the next task.

Allow Space Between Each Task

Let us add on an additional point: When you get a task done, you shouldn't immediately begin your next task.

The Sages state that there is a concept of “giving a space between each *parshah*”. When a person finishes a task and immediately starts another, he feels as if he is quickly skipped from one thing to another. Instead, the ideal way to go about all activities throughout the day is to allow some time to elapse before moving on to the next task. The gain of this is that he has created an interruption between his previous task and his next task.

This is not only an idea that should be used with regards to maintaining our focus, but it is the recommended way to act in general. One should always allow a space between each task he does. If a repairman or worker gets a job done, and he immediately runs to go take care of his next job, this is the exact antithesis of the very idea here. Instead, he should take a break. Any break will suffice, as long as it's a break – he can sit in a chair and do nothing, or drink a cup of coffee. But he must take some kind of break, before starting his next job.

In addition, if a person tells someone that he will come to him to help with something or to do some kind of repairs for him, he should tell the person that he might be a few minutes late than the time he is expected at. In this way, he allows himself to have a break from his previous activity and he doesn't feel so rushed to get to his next task. Here again the point is to create a delay, before continuing on to the next task.

Menuchah (Serenity) Between Tasks – Through Settling The Mind Before Continuing To Act

At first, when a person begins to implement these changes, he may feel like he's wasting his time. But any sensible person who understands the depth of this knows that this increases the quality of his life, because it enables a person to remain calm throughout the day and maintain his *yishuv hadaas* (lit. “settling of the mind”, or composure).

Reb Yisrael Salanter was asked that if a person only has a short amount of time a day to learn, should he learn *Gemara*, *halachah* or *mussar*? Reb Yisrael Salanter famously replied that one should learn *mussar*, because when he learns *mussar*, he will gain *yishuv hadaas*, and when one has *yishuv hadaas*, he will be calm and then he'll see that he has more time to learn.

This way of living, of allowing space between activities, is the antidote to the habit of skipping from one thing to another. When one pauses before starting his next task, he is avoiding the problematic behavior of skipping, and he maintains his *yishuv hadaas*.

Skipping comes from the soul's power of movement. It is not only a quick, rapid kind of movement, but a movement that lacks orderliness to it. By getting used to acting in an orderly manner – by refraining from skipping from one task to another, by making sure to complete a task before getting started on another one – a person improves his power of focus.

In this way, one's movements are calm, and this activates the power of *menuchah*, serenity. When one's movements are calm and he isn't rushing between activities, he can become greatly focused. *Menuchah* is not only for Shabbos, and it is not only needed for proper sleep. It is needed on a regular basis, as part of our life. One should strive to become an *ish menuchah* (a man of serenity), as Shlomo HaMelech was called.

Of course, we cannot attain the complete level of *menuchah* as we live on This World. The absolute level of *menuchah* will only be possible in the future. We live in a world of movement, which doesn't allow for complete *menuchah*. But even within this world of movement we live in, we can attain some degree of serenity within our movements – when we go about our movements calmly and by not skipping between various tasks. *Menuchah* must become a normal part of our life. We need to calm ourselves between taking care of different tasks, and in this way, we lessen the problem of “skipping” and then we become more focused.

We have described here a certain way of living, in which a person accustoms himself to performance then *menuchah*/serenity, and then returning to performance, repeating the cycle. Life must become an ongoing cycle of action, then *menuchah*/serenity, then action, etc. When one makes sure to calm himself before moving on to his next task, he avoids the detrimental habit of skipping from one point to another.

There is external movement, and there is inner movement. When it comes to physical movement, which is external, it is clear that a person cannot be serene if he is moving fast. The problem we have discussed until now is when one is in the midst of some physical activity and he skips to doing another activity, without having any calm break in between. But there is also inner movement, of the soul. Even if a person's external surroundings are calm and he has stopped moving, he may be not be calm internally. If a person doesn't feel calm inside and he starts taking care of another task, this is also a kind of “skipping” to another task, which is detrimental to one's serenity and focus.

So how can a person know when he can move on to taking care of another task? He should wait enough time until he feels sufficiently calm inside. When he feels that he has become inwardly calm, he has attained enough serenity to move on properly to his next task. This may be difficult for a person to determine, and in fact, most people cannot make this change in their way of living. But if you want to know the ideal way to act, this is the way. This particular point is the goal of all that we have said here, and it is this point which we want to get to.

This is like transitioning from one weekday to the next, through the serene day of Shabbos that is in between. One needs to first complete a task (which we can refer to as a “weekday”), then rest from the activity (“Shabbos”), and then start his second task. And on an inward level as well, one needs to first go through movements of the soul (which we can refer to as “weekday”) then access the serenity in his soul (“Shabbos”) and then return to the soul's movements (“weekday”).

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Wind-of-Fire: Skipping In Different Directions

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about the power of focus, and in this lesson we will learn [specifically about issues with focus that stem from] **wind-of-fire** [of earth].

As it was explained earlier, the element of fire in the soul causes a person to have *dilug*, skipping, which is the antithesis to the orderly power of focus. When a person's fire is active, it can cause him to skip any of the four directions. As explained in the previous chapter, a person is able to "skip" yet stay within the same direction.

When it comes to the nature of **wind-of-fire**, though, a person's fire will skip in different directions, just as the wind moves in all the directions. This is the general outline, and soon we will give examples of it, to see how this affects us on a practical level.

Example – Skipping Stages In The Maturation Process

Every person has stages of maturity in his life. Each person matures at a different stage of his life, and not everyone matures at the time. A child begins to eat on his own, to talk, to walk on his own, etc. Generally speaking, children will mature in stages, in a certain order. But there are some children who skip between stages of maturity. They are delayed and then they suddenly mature quickly, at a later time.

For example, some children aren't taking any steps yet, and suddenly they begin walking, to everyone's surprise. They were delayed until now, but when they eventually mature, they mature quickly and suddenly. In other examples, a child may not be talking much even though others his age are, and at a later time, he suddenly begins talking, or he suddenly begins to understand things better, when it had seemed previously that he was not a bright child. In another example, a child may be physically short, and it seems as if he is taking time to physically mature, but a few months later when we see him, we notice that he has grown much taller in only a short amount of time.

Maturation in most children happens slowly and in stages, through the years of childhood, puberty, and adolescence. In more recent years, children are maturing at a faster rate in how much they know and understand things, and this is due to the advances of technology, which enable a person to read and hear so many more things than what people were used to. It has been proven that this "early maturation" which is taking place in children today is actually damaging to them, in most cases.

There are some people who matured faster than most other children, due to some event in their childhood which had a particularly strong effect on them, and this caused them to quickly mature, making them become more motivated, or more serious, etc.

External factors can also cause early maturation. If a child had to switch schools, this can bring an early maturation, because he had no choice but to learn how to deal with this change, and this has made him more mature. Or, the child may have gone through a certain event in his life which caused him to suddenly and quickly mature.

However, when external factors are the cause for early maturation, although he has "skipped" over the gradual maturation process, it is only due to external factors, so the maturation is external as well, and it doesn't cause a

fundamental change in the soul. But there are others who did not mature due to any external factor or major event in their life. Rather, they went through an inner change where they suddenly felt more motivated and serious about their life.

For example, a 16-year-old or 17-year-old may suddenly feel that he is more motivated and more serious about life. Anyone can recognize a point in his life where he felt this maturity suddenly emerges. In most cases, this maturity happens as a slow, gradual process, which is not recognizable. In a few cases, though, this maturity takes place at a rapid rate, and the child/teenager will skip over the normally slow maturation process. His maturation is delayed, and suddenly at a later point, he matures rapidly. When this happens, his soul has “skipped” over many stages at once. Of course, when he matures rapidly like this, he will not completely mature all at once, but he will be generally drawn towards a more mature perspective.

External and Internal Changes In Our Life

There are two ways in how one’s soul may develop.

In our life, there are two parts – the external factors and environment which we are placed in, as Hashem has decided to place us in, and there is also our inner world of the soul, which is where we use our power of free will, to choose where we want to place ourselves.

Hashem places each person into a certain family, community and neighborhood, and that is where we grow up. Some people stay in the same environment their whole life, until their last day on earth. But most people expand beyond their given space, with varying degrees, some more and some less.

In addition to this, most of us go through changes in life, which make us change directions. Examples includes changing yeshivos, or changing one’s style of learning Gemara. Marriage is another major change in a person’s life. As for the place where one lives, most people usually will stay where they are used to, but there are some who will move out of their old neighborhood, out of their comfort zone where they were used to all of their old friends, and they move to a different community.

These are all external factors, however. What about inner changes? Most people do not go through inner changes, only external changes. When most people go through changes, the changes are usually due to external factors and they do not cause an overhaul to the soul. But a few others have gone through major changes in life, and because they have gone through these changes, they are able to succeed in life, because they have the ability to keep going through changes. The Vilna Gaon says that if a person is not rising, he is falling. The power to accept changes in life is a constructive power which facilitates growth.

Extreme Changes Can Jolt The Soul and Destroy Focus

However, changes are only constructive when they are not causing a “jolt” to the soul. If changes are causing the soul to feel “jolted” by the changes, it is detrimental for the person when he experiences changes in his life, because **the “jolt” to the soul felt by such changes can totally hamper a person’s ability to focus.** We will slowly explain more about this concept, in the continuing lines.

Those who are successful in their lives, who have gone through certain changes, were only able to do so because the changes weren’t that extreme. People may go through all kinds internal kinds of changes, without necessarily changing how they look on their outside. Sometimes it’s hard to tell a person has changed so much, because he

doesn't look like he has really changed, but it's very possible that he has changed a lot inside. Such changes are kept at a balanced level.

When a person decides to grow spiritually and to live differently than those around him, such as his family, these changes make him into a successful person as long as he has carefully thought about how he wants to change his behavior, along with prayer from the depths of his heart to Hashem for assistance. When those factors are in place, this is the basis of true spiritual growth. But when a person goes too far with his changes, he doesn't think too much about how to make the changes properly, so he may make extreme changes in his life which end up being detrimental to his soul.

All changes, even when they are done properly, are painful, but a person can mitigate the pain by carefully thinking about it beforehand. But if a person doesn't know how to do it correctly, he doesn't *daven* to Hashem to assist him in his changes, and as a result, any changes that he makes will not be truthful. In addition, he is having an emotional reaction to something, which motivates him to change a certain aspect of his life, but it comes from strong emotion, and not out of a search for truth. His changes aren't truthful, and understandably, the results of such changes will be detrimental.

Another issue is the pace of the change. When people make changes in their life, if the changes are done too quickly, this can also offset the balance in a person's life. Although change is needed in every person's life, they should not be done so quickly. Neither should too many changes be made at once. So if a person makes any changes in his life that are either too rapid, too extreme, or in quick succession of each other, such changes will scatter the soul and destroy any inner peace. And, with particular regards to our discussion, it will totally uproot a person's power to focus.

In fact, even if a person doesn't make actual changes, as long as he has a nature to readily make rapid or extreme changes in his life, his power to focus will still be hampered, because his entire stability is already shaky to begin with.

People with this nature are perpetually in a state of instability, because they are readily prepared to make extreme or rapid changes at any given moment. In some cases, this unstable nature can lead to mental illness. Even if he doesn't get to that point, he still won't be able to concentrate that well with his mind. Since he is ready to make such extreme changes in his life at any given point, he does not have a firm stability, so he cannot become focused on anything. As explained in the previous lessons, the power of focus is based on stability, which is rooted in a strong element of earth, so if a person is ready to make extreme or rapid changes in his life, his stability is shaken from the start, and this impairs his ability to focus.

On the side of holiness, there is also a power to readily accept extreme changes, for every day a Jew must await *Moshiach*, which will be a transformation to the world and the biggest change possible. As long as *Moshiach* hasn't yet arrived, there is stability in the world, in the sense that the world continues on its routine, but a person must await *Moshiach*, and that means that everything can change in one moment. But here we are speaking of the impaired use of this power to readily take on extreme changes. As we are explaining, as long as a person is the type to readily make extreme or rapid changes in his life, his focus is impaired.

Always Being Ready For Extreme or Rapid Change – An Impediment To Focus

We will give some examples from life, to bring out the issue.

Every person is born into a certain environment. Some people will stay in their environment and community for their entire life, and they will live and think like their surroundings, until their last day. Others change - they make a certain change in their life, either by identifying themselves with a different community or sect of Jewry than the one they grew up in, or they switch their *Rabbonim*, or they change their manner of dress.

It is possible for a person to make a stable kind of change in his life, and succeed. But let's say, for example, that a person suddenly changes his style of Torah learning. If he becomes happier and he feels more fulfilled from his learning, then it is a sign that he has made the correct change. But if he keeps changing his style of learning, and he is always searching for new approaches – whether in his Torah learning, or towards how to live life in general - this is problematic. When a person is always searching for a new approach, another new perspective, and another new way - he shakes his stability of the soul.

There is nothing wrong if a person is searching for more depth and meaning in his current way of living. But if a person is searching for changes and he is very open to change and he has a very independent nature, he places himself in a risky situation. For example, there are people who have lived in 15 different homes, or they have lived in several different communities, or they have switched their Rav countless times, or they have changed their style of dress many times.

Everyone who knows a bit about life knows such people. They keep going through “42 encampments”, starting over again and again. They keep changing not only their own lives, but the lives of their families as well, because their children are affected by their extreme, unstable, and shaky way of living. As an example, they keep moving to different communities, so they keep switching the schools of their children. Their children grow up confused, because they are constantly being tossed around from school to school, and they don't grow up with a sense of stability.

At the other extreme are those who never make any changes at all in their life. They are used to a certain way of living, in a certain community, and they prefer to stay that way their whole life, because they would rather follow the same routine. This kind of person never leaves his 'comfort zone'. The opposite problem than this is the one we are discussing: When a person is constantly making changes in his life.

The first problem with such a lifestyle is that he doesn't think about the changes he is about to make, and how it will affect others around him, such as his family members. But the deeper problem here is that he has no sense of stability.

In summary, if a person lives life through extreme changes, in most cases, his power of focus is damaged, even if he hasn't made the changes in his life and he simply has a nature to be readily prepared to make rapid or extreme changes.

The Balance Between Stability and Aspirations

What is the correct balance in life?

In the world which Hashem has created, we always have the power of free will to make changes. The simple use of our free will is to change our any improper behavior. But every situation we encounter must be approached using two different powers in the soul – the power of change, and the power of unchanging consistency. You must be able to live with the contradiction that the place which you are in now is the place which you need to maintain stability in, and at the same time, you should also be prepared that it can totally change.

In different terms, these are the contradicting powers of “being happy with one’s lot” (*someiach b’chelko*) and aspirations (*she’ifos*). This is a deeply contradicting experience in the soul. On one hand, you need to be happy with where you are now, and to accept your life’s situation as it is, even if it never changes. At the same time, you also need to be prepared to change everything in one moment. When one can contain both of these aspects at once, he has a strong stability which is balanced by an ability to change. This ability of balance is a deep power of the soul.

External Change Must Be Carefully Thought About Beforehand

Even more so, even when does need to make changes in his life, one should know that there are external and internal changes. External changes are sometimes necessary to make, and sometimes, they are unnecessary. But even in situations where it is necessary to make external changes, one must know that most of the time, external changes in life are not as important in life as internal changes.

We cannot say that they are not important at all, because making external changes can cause a person to make internal changes as well. But when making external changes, one needs to give careful thought about it beforehand. Before one is about to making a change in his life which will be noticeable to others, he must first consider how this will affect his family. When one makes a change in his life that can be easily noticed by others, the extreme change can be jolting to his soul, and in addition, it can be jolting to his family and children.

If a person doesn’t have a family of his own yet, and he far-removed from other people and he doesn’t care about how his changes will affect others, this matter will not be important to him. He will make any external changes he wishes to make and he doesn’t care what others will think. But if a person is married and he has children, he has a family which can be affected by his changes, and therefore he needs to realize the difference between external change and internal change.

Before making an external change, which can be noticed by others around him, he must first take into account how this will affect his family. If his family won’t be able to handle the changes he has made, he is being unfair to them, because they will suffer unnecessarily from his changes.

Most changes need to be kept at an inward, private level, and only a few changes need to be expressed outwardly. There are some people who go through internal changes and then they feel like they need outwardly show that they have changed. If they learn *chassidus*, they make it obvious that they have a passion for *chassidus*, such as by changing their manner of dress, etc. If they learn *kaballah*, they have to go outside of *shul* by *Kaballas Shabbos* [as was the practice of the kaballists]. The ideal way to make changes is that whenever one makes a change, it should be an inward kind of change, which is on a private level and not expressed outward. When people go through inner changes, they don’t have to outwardly show that they have gone through a change, and instead, they can keep the changes private between themselves and Hashem.

Part of the difficulty faced by those who didn’t grow up in a Torah environment, who later joined the world of Torah, is that that they feel a need to outwardly show the many inner changes they have gone through. There is certainly a place for this, but many of these people aren’t successful with such changes, and others have setbacks from it. External changes need to be made with subtlety, and in addition, they should only be made after thinking about it for a long time. It takes a very long amount of time until one can let his inner changes be outwardly expressed.

Here is an example. A person joins a certain kind of *Chassidus* and he becomes so inspired that he changes his manner of dress, so that he can identify himself with that specific *Chassidic* group. Sometime later, he becomes inspired by a different *Chassidus*, so he changes his manner of dress once again, to fit in with his new passion. Such a

person may change his manner of dress several times of his life. His common thinking, throughout all of his changes, is that he needs to outwardly express the changes he has gone through. When he makes it obvious to others that he has inwardly changed, the extreme change will be jolting to his soul, as well as jolting to others (unless he is the kind of person who is so far-removed from others that he doesn't care what others will think).

So, to summarize, when one makes any external change, it should be done carefully and sensibly, and only after a long time of thinking about it beforehand, before it can be implemented.

Internal Changes – Not Too Much At Once

As for internal changes, which are more important, most people cannot make too many internal changes at once. The only way to do so is by way of *mesirus nefesh* [lit. “giving over the soul”, intense dedication where one is willing to undergo self-sacrifice], an ability rooted in the element of fire in the soul. Fire has the ability to skip, and through *mesirus nefesh* which comes from the soul's fire, one can skip over the normal bounds. However, the Sages warned [that taking the path of *mesirus nefesh* is too risky, because]: “Many did like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, but nothing arose in their hands [they were not successful].”³⁶

There are two systems of order in Creation - the normal order, which is called *seder*, and the way of “skipping”, which is called *dilug*. The way of *dilug*/skipping is only for individuals to take, and it is not the way for most people. Even for the individuals who have the inner strength to take the way of *dilug*/skipping, they should only make extreme changes in rare instances, and not on a regular basis. (As for a small change, which is also a power that comes from “skipping”, this can be sometimes be done by any person on any level.) Those who try to “skip” too much, by making too many big changes in their life at once, will jolt their souls too much from the changes, and their focus will be impaired.

Wind-of-Fire: Quickly Changing Directions

However, sometimes when a person makes a change, it does not come from the power to “skip”, but from the soul's power of quickly changing directions, which is **wind-of-fire**. That is what we are coming to discuss in this lesson.

Changing directions causes an overhaul to the soul, one which is not always desirable. If a person keeps taking opposite directions in his life, this totally upsets the stability of the soul. **Wind-of-fire** is the ability in a person to quickly change directions, and it is manifested when one makes extreme changes in his life.

Example 1 – Switching From Zealotry To Unconditional Love For All Jews

Here is an example of this. Some people are raised in an environment where it is commonplace to show *kanaus*, zealotry, to be very outspoken and to take action against anything that is deemed to be evil in their eyes. They have the ideal that they must wage war against the wicked. One day, for whatever reason, a person raised in such an

³⁶ *Berachos 35a*

environment may suddenly abandon this ideal. Perhaps he feels that he is not on such a spiritual level to wage war against evil, or perhaps he is afraid of causing too much damage to others.

At a later point of his life, he may take the opposite direction of the one he was used to, and now he is suddenly preaching about *ahavas Yisrael*. Now he says that you have to love every single Jew. If he takes this very far, he might firmly believe in “*achdus* (unity) meetings” where Jews from all different backgrounds and beliefs should all sit around one circular table. He has changed directions completely. He used to wage war against sinners, and now he firmly believes that he must love every single Jew.

Although the Rambam says that a person must go the opposite extreme when trying to overcome a negative character trait, one needs great strength of soul in order to make such an extreme change, and to do so in a balanced manner. Most people, when they try to “go to the opposite extreme” by making extreme changes in their lives, will suffer terribly in their souls from such a shift of direction, and such suffering resembles *Kaf HaKela* (an intense form of suffering for the soul). They are constantly changing their beliefs. One day they strongly believe in a certain ideal and sometime later, they strongly believe in a different ideal that completely contradicts their previous one.

If a person didn't really love other Jews that much, and suddenly he becomes a very loving person who has great *ahavas Yisrael* towards all Jews, this should be alarming. It is too rapid of a change, and it can be jolting to his soul. Although there are a few individuals who can handle such changes, because they are capable of “skipping” over their normal bounds, through their power of *mesirus nefesh*, this is not feasible for most people. In most cases, a person cannot cope with his life when he regularly goes through extreme changes in his life.

More Examples of Extreme Changes That Jolt The Soul

Here are some more examples of extreme changes that can detrimentally ‘jolt’ the soul:

1. A person is learning *Gemara b'iyun* (in-depth) all day and now he suddenly switches to learning in a style of *bekiyus* all day, or vice versa. He was used to in-depth learning, and suddenly he realizes that he needs to amass more knowledge of Torah, rather than exploring it in-depth. So he starts learning 7 pages of *Gemara* each day, when he is not used to this at all.
2. Or, in an opposite scenario than the above, a person was used to learning in a style of *bekiyus* all day, and he realizes that he doesn't understand well enough, so he abandons his *bekiyus* and instead he will only learn *b'iyun* – one page of *Gemara* for 5 weeks straight.
3. A person suddenly changes the way of living in his home. Until now, he rarely employed punishment in his home, and he only showed love, warmth, and closeness. Suddenly he changes his approach, and now he is quick to punish and sternly rebuke his children when they do anything wrong. Now he is saying, “This is how my father was raised, and this is how my grandfather was raised. This is how it will be! Everything in this house will change, from this day onward.” Understandably, the children in such a home will be confused and bewildered, and they will wonder: “What changed?! What is going on?!”
4. Sometimes people keep moving to different homes or to different communities. They have a different reason of why they moved from each place. In one place, they didn't get along with their neighbors, or with their landlord, or with others in the community there, etc. They never stay too long in one community, and when they move to a new place, they do not know for how long they will be living there for. They might say that

their life of “always moving” is because Hashem has arranged their life to be this way, and they say that there are pros and cons to it, etc. But all these changes of location are jolting their souls.

In any of the above scenarios, there are extreme changes which are jolting to the stability of the soul, and they impair a person’s ability to focus.

The Balance Between Stability and Searching/Change

In contrast to the above, the ideal way to live is that a person needs to become balanced between his ability of stability and his ability to make changes to his situation. On one hand, one needs to be firmly and securely attached to his way of living, so that he maintains his stability (understandably, this only concerns a holy way of living which is accepted by the Torah’s standards), and at the same time, he must also search for changes.

At first, one needs to search for different paths to take. At a later stage, one needs to become more centered and stay on one path, but he must search for more depth and subtlety in his current path. He can then wonder if perhaps there is a different path which is more truthful than the one he is on. But even then, he must stay firmly attached to his current path, even if he is unclear about it, so that he maintains stability. One must search for more truth in life, all the while remaining firmly and solidly attached to his current way of living, so that he doesn’t lose his stability.

This is an inner way to live, and it is a life of a true *ben aliyah* (a spiritually growing person), in which one remains firmly and securely attached to his current path in life, while at the same time searching for more truth. (On a deeper level, one uses this power of stability to stay firmly attached to the Creator).

Living with such a balance between stability and change is the deep secret of those who are of the *bnei aliyah*. It is a balance of great stability in life, together with an ability to totally change over his entire life in an instant. (This power is used for evil when one throws off the yoke of Heaven, G-d forbid). One needs to be deeply and firmly connected to something, yet at the same time be able to switch it for something else, if necessary. When one has this balance of being able to have change and permanent stability at the same time, he is reaching the purpose of man.

16 | EXTREME SKIPPING

Skipping Back and Forth Between Activities: The Nature of Fire-of-Fire

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will now conclude our discussion about the power of focus/concentration. In this lesson, we will discuss focus-related issues which stem from **fire-of-fire** in the soul. As mentioned in the previous chapters, **fire-of-fire** is the soul's ability of *dilug*, skipping.

Every soul contains the [opposite] powers of order (*seder*) and skipping (*dilug*). The power to “skip” comes from the soul's element of fire. When someone has a strong amount of **fire-of-fire** in his soul, he will have a nature to “skip” a lot, and he will be weak when it comes to the ability of being orderly. In some cases, he has almost no orderliness at all, in his life. The stronger a person's fire, the more of an imbalance there will be, between his powers of *seder*/orderliness and his *dilug*/skipping.

When one has a strong nature of **fire-of-fire**, he usually has very little *yishuv hadaas* (lit. “settling of the mind”, or mental composure). He will be ‘scatterbrained’ when it comes to his actions, as well as in his thinking. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says of this nature, “May the Merciful One save us from *pizur hanefesh*, scattering of the soul.” This “scattering of the soul” can be manifest in the areas of action, thought, and speech.

Scattered Speech

“Scattered” speech is manifest in those who keep switching topics when they talk. Some people keep repeating what they are saying, or they mix in other topics which are irrelevant, and they are very unfocused in their conversations.

Scattered Action

An example of “scattered” action is when a repairman often multi-tasks between different kinds of activities, who has a nature to lose focus between his many different activities, due to a dominance of **fire-of-fire** in his soul. He will be working at something and then immediately start working on something else, without giving this too much thought, and soon he goes back to what he was originally doing. He becomes “scattered” between his many different activities that he keeps jumping into. At any given moment, he may be doing something else.

Usually, he is not conscious about his multi-tasking. In the cases where he is conscious of it, he may sometimes become frustrated and upset that he hasn't gotten a job done, and he will then think of himself as a thoughtless, unorganized person. In either scenario, he is always skipping from one kind of activity to another, before completing his first job, until he eventually returns to his first activity, then repeating the cycle.

Fire-of-fire is not just a nature to skip between activities. It is a nature to skip, and then go back, and to repeat the process. A person with this nature may do three or four different activities after starting his original activity, but he keeps returning to his original activity, as if he is going around and around on a Ferris wheel.

The nature of the fire in the soul, simply speaking, causes a person to jump from one activity before he has finished it. **Fire-of-fire** is when a person skips to the next activity and later returns to his original activity, then repeating the cycle. He will keep skipping back and forth between different activities, while he is still in the middle of the first activity of his day.

For example, a worker may take on too many jobs in one day, because he is afraid that he doesn't look professional enough. He will keep taking on other activities as he is in the midst his first activity, so that he doesn't lose his job. He is not merely jumping between different activities. He keeps going back to his original activity. Similarly, a person is talking and he keeps switching the topic, and then he returns to what he was originally discussing. He may wonder how he got involved in the other topics and he doesn't remember what he was originally talking about.

In summary, **fire-of-fire** is a nature to skip in a "circle" fashion. It is a nature to skip between different activities and to keep returning to what one started doing, as if one is going around in a circle.

"Grabbing" Onto As Much As He Can

Sometimes, those who have this nature are always living with the attitude of "Grab what to eat, for tomorrow, we die".³⁷ On a lower level, a person will have this attitude when it comes to physical matters, meaning that he is grabbing onto as much physical enjoyment as he can, because he is afraid that he might die tomorrow, *Rachmana Litzlan* (may the Merciful One save him). On a higher level, a person may have this attitude when it comes to the spiritual, to keep grabbing on to more and more spirituality, but without properly developing the soul. A person like this does not build his inner world.

There are people who connect very much to the saying of the Sages, "All that is in your power, do".³⁸ They grab on to as much as *mitzvos* as possible, because they want to grab onto as much spirituality as possible, but amidst the process, they misconstrue their priorities. For example, a person picks up the phone in middle of *davening* because he wants to do *chessed*. He certainly wants to grab the opportunity of *chessed* when it comes his way. Certainly there is a constructive ideal to "grab" opportunities of *mitzvos*, but only if this is done in a way that is balanced, and not if it is causing a person to lose his *yishuv hadaas*.

When a person keeps 'grabbing onto what to eat' when it comes to the spiritual, he jumps from one activity to another, and it becomes his very attitude towards life. Some people think that the main part of life is acting, whereas others view emotion as the main part of life, and others view thought as the main part of life. A person may make a *cheshbon hanefesh* regularly of how much *mitzvos* he did that day, but when he comes upstairs after 120, he may be shown that he has done millions of *mitzvos*, which makes sense according to his *cheshbon hanefesh*, but he will discover that all of these *mitzvos* were part of his external world, and that he has never built his internal world. When people are always trying to do several things at once, even *mitzvos*, this is not a truthful way of living. It causes a person to be scattered in his soul (this resembles the words of the *Gemara*, "His head is from Eretz Yisrael, his body is from Bavel"³⁹).

Taking this issue further, there are those who are involved with benefitting the community, in all kinds of organizations. There are generous people available to take phone calls from anyone who needs help, in all kinds of situations. Sometimes they are indeed very helpful to others. If a person has a carefully organized approach towards helping others, that is wonderful. But if a person can't be organized about it and he tries to take care of too many issues at once, what will happen? He tries to answer two or three phones at once, and to one caller he says "Just a moment, please", and to the other he says, "Just a minute", so that he can get back to answering the first caller. Since he is in middle of taking care of several issues at once, his answers to the caller aren't thought out enough,

³⁷ *Eruvin 54a*

³⁸ *Koheles 9:10*

³⁹ *Sanhedrin 38b*

because he isn't focused on the issue at hand. The caller can tell that the secretary is well-meaning, but the caller isn't actually being helped. In worse cases, the secretary is involved in this kind of philanthropy for the community because he wants to be honored by others for it, and he is really in it for the glory. But even in cases where he is well-meaning, although his intentions are good, he isn't actually being helpful to others. This creates the problem of "scattering" (*pizur*) in one's activities.

It is well-known that Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky zt"l was able to write two different *halachic* responses at once, while thinking of a third thing at the same time. This was an extraordinary ability, and there were only individuals throughout the generations who could multi-task like this, while maintaining their *yishuv hadaas* (mental composure). Many people have the problem of writing while they are talking. It makes a person used to a life of extreme multi-tasking, where a person skips from one thing to another.

Often a person with this nature has many different businesses and interests he's involved with. He skips from one topic to another and he becomes very scattered in his soul. Even more so, there are people who pressure their homes by taking on too much work and making the children do one thing after another, to do many activities within five minutes. They try to get as much done possible within short amounts of time.

When a person physically exerts himself and he is running but he cannot really take this amount of exertion, such as running to make the bus every day, this may be taking its toll on his "inner" health. Living in this way is like chasing a shadow. The person tries to do as much possible, doing "more and more" activities and getting "more and more" done. A person like this takes on many different jobs and activities, running from one thing to another. Sometimes a person thinks that this is called being energetic, enthusiastic, more alive, etc. But in truth, it is not enthusiastic or energetic. It is chaotic!

"Scattered" Thinking When Learning Torah

Going further with this issue, there are those who learn Torah with a "scattered" soul. Instead of learning one *sugya* of *Gemara* after another, they review some of yesterday's learning as well as the day before that, before starting today's learning. A person has a certain amount of time a day to learn Torah, and he might choose to stuff all of his learning sessions with many different kinds of learning – such as Chumash, Mishnah, *Gemara* and Navi - skipping back and forth between these studies. Nowadays, people are skipping around more than ever [in their Torah learning] between one thing and another.

The Remedy: Finishing What You Start

In contrast, the ideal way to build the soul – which is the antithesis to the jumpy, skipping nature of fire-of-fire - is to **always make sure that you finish what you start.**

To illustrate the idea, there were some people who would have the practice that whenever they came across a *sefer* and they started to learn it, they would make sure to finish the entire *sefer*. Of course, we are not saying that everyone needs to do this, but the point is that one should train his soul to finish what he starts.

Living A Life of Quality As Opposed To Quantity

An additional point here is that the nature of **fire-of-fire**, which is the root of the nature to skip over things, is really a wish to save time, by cramming in as much as possible. The person's belief is, "I want to save as much time

as possible”, and that is why he will skip back and forth between doing different activities. But by doing so, he is placing “quantity” over “quality”.

A person with a nature of **fire-of-fire**, in order to be remedied, has to realize that the gain of “quality” is far more important than the gain of “quantity”. **It is more important to get things done in the right way, than to get many things done if they won’t be done right.** This change of perspective will not only remedy the nature of **fire-of-fire** – it will also cause an overhaul to a person’s entire life.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that “A little bit which is pure, is better than a lot which isn’t pure”. A little bit that is done right is far better than a lot that is deficient. The *mitzvos* which involve action are usually about quantity, while the “duties of the heart” (called our *chovos halevovos*), our internal world, is more about quality.

Surely there is a gain to quantity, but quantity needs to be balanced with quality. Without quality, we can compare quantity to an empty container. In more mystical terms, “quality” is like the “light” which goes into our “vessel”, which is the “quantity” of our actions of *mitzvos*. Thus, the main aspect of our actions is the “light”, the “quality” of our actions, and when there is light/quality, our container/quantity can become a proper “vessel” that holds the “light” of the quality invested into our actions.

When we become more focused on gaining more “quality” to our actions, rather than on the quantity of our actions, we will demand more truth and orderliness in our lives. The more a person makes sure to have “quality” in his actions rather than “quantity”, even when he runs after doing different activities, he makes sure to be focused more on the quality of what he is doing, rather than on simply getting things done. He will then live very differently, vastly improving the ‘quality’ of his life. That is one example of living a life of “quality”.

Quality In Our Emotions and Thoughts

Going deeper with this, “quality” does not only pertain to the actions that we do. There is also a quality we can gain in our **life** itself.

When one has a superficial perspective, he places priority on action: on “getting things done”. If one has a more inner perspective, he is aware that it is more important to get things done in the right way. If he has an even more inner perspective, he knows that “quality” is **life** itself.

Life, itself, is about “quality”. Besides for improving the quality of one’s actions, one can also improve the very quality of his life itself, by placing more emphasis on quality than on quantity. Chazal state on the verse “*And the living shall take to heart*”⁴⁰ that “It is enough for him that he is alive”. What does this mean, “to be alive”? The real meaning of “life” is an inner reality, in which one places his priority on attaining a life that is focused on attaining more “quality”. A life of “quality” includes not only actions that contain quality in them, but also a quality in our **feelings** and **thoughts**, which enables a person to live a life of serenity, *menuchas hanefesh*. True serenity is not a false, “pseudo” kind of calmness - which is nothing but slothfulness – rather, *menuchas hanefesh* is a genuine serenity that has inner quality to it. When one has attained “quality” in his actions, emotions, and thoughts, and as a result he is more serene, this is what it means to live a life of quality.

Let us emphasize again that living a life of “quality” over quantity does not only mean improving the quality of our actions alone, but to live a **life** of quality, which includes a quality to our inner feelings and thoughts. Since we live in a “world of action”, a world which places emphasis more on getting things done rather than on inner

⁴⁰ *Kohel* 7:2

emotions and thoughts, it is only understandable that people will attribute value to “quality” with regards to their actions, but when it comes to emotions and thoughts, it is more difficult for people to understand the need for “quality” feelings and thoughts. But there is a whole world of “quality” to be uncovered in one’s inner world: in one’s feelings and thoughts.

Let us ask the following question. How many people have “quality” in their world of feelings? Only a few people, who can rarely be found. Most people are involved with the “world of action”. The “world of emotion” is experienced by most people only when they experience stress, nervousness, or lusts and various pleasures. The outside, superficial world today considers a “life of quality” to be a life in which one owns a big house, a nice car, and other niceties. This is a “life of quality” from the viewpoint of fantasy, though. From the perspective of our inner world, though, a “life of quality” is when one has **orderliness** in his soul, where he has **clarity** towards his feelings and thoughts.

What is a life of “quality” kinds of thoughts? What are the kinds of thoughts found in most people? If they are not learning Torah, their thoughts are about “what they need to do”, which is action, not thought. A few people are interested in philosophy and they like to gather knowledge, but generally, the thoughts they are involved with are false. An even smaller percentage of people are involved in their thoughts with Torah study, but even within this minority, how much quality is present in their thoughts? There are a very small amount of people who have quality in their Torah thoughts. How many people have quality in their feelings and thoughts together? That is an even smaller percentage.

One needs to have the attitude of “living a life of quality”. We can give an example of the difference between a life of imagined quality, versus a life of genuine quality. A person may want a nice big home, or a nice new car, and he might want it so badly that he will do anything to make it happen. He thinks that by doing so, he will be able to live the “quality” kind of life that he dreams of. But even if he does get the car or the house he wants, for how much time will he be enjoying it? First of all, he will have to do a lot of running around, always going back and forth to the bank, as he is paying off his loans. He will never get to experience the “quality” of all that which he has done.

When a person lives a more inner kind of life than this, and he is interested in living a life of quality, he is aware that a nice house and other comforts in life should be seen as tools which can be used to “expand the mind”, but not more than that. The Sages state, that there are three things which expand the mind: a beautiful home, a beautiful wife, and beautiful utensils⁴¹. But these things are only a part of a greater equation, and they are not everything. In order for any of these things to be beneficial for one’s peace of mind, they must be given proper balance, within the guidelines of the Torah (this is a separate subject and we cannot get into all of its details here).⁴²

A Change In Perspective

Through **living a life of “quality”**, a person gains an entirely new perspective on living life. As a result, **he will lessen the amount of how many actions he thinks he needs to do**. His actions will have more quality to them, and he will have a more settled mind when he does things. He will do things in a calmer manner. And it goes without saying that he will not be quickly skipping back and forth between different activities (in most cases). Instead of quickly jumping back to his previous activity which he was in middle of doing, he will **sit calmly with himself, gain composure, and reflect inward, returning to his inner self**.

⁴¹ Berachos 57b

⁴² Refer to ג פרק ג – דע את נשמתיך (Torah Way To Enlightenment_03_Seeing The Spiritual In Yeish-Material)

Instead of utilizing his time by ‘cramming in’ as much as he can, he utilizes his time by **making sure to give himself “breaks” between his actions**, so that he can **regain the experience of his inner world, which includes his thoughts and his emotions**.

The purpose of “taking breaks” between activities is not simply for the purpose of “taking a break” for its own sake, but for the purpose of **regaining one’s *yishuv hadaas*** (mental composure). After taking this refreshing break, one will perform more effectively when he returns to his work. In this way, one makes sure to take pauses between different activities, instead of ‘grabbing’ onto as much activities as he can. When a person is more interested in living a life of “quality” as opposed to a life of “quantity”, he would rather **experience** what he has done and “breathe” it in, as opposed to doing more without experiencing it. Such a person understands the true inner value that is to be gained from taking breaks and pausing between different activities, and not only doesn’t he view this as *b’dieved* (after the fact, and not the ideal way to start with), but as *l’chatchilah* (the ideal way to act).

When people always want to fill up their time and they never takes pauses between what they do, this is an erroneous way of living, and it is a form of exile to the soul.⁴³ Instead, the ideal way to live is to get things done and make sure to have time to take breaks between activities. One should perform what he needs to do, then stop, then he should return to performance, then pausing again, and repeating the cycle. When one lives like this, he his weakens the dominance of his **fire-of-fire**.

(However, if a person has an extreme level of **fire-of-fire** in his soul, to the point that he is bordering on mental illness, our words here do not apply to him. Such a person will need to be dealt with more extensively, because his soul is in need of much more inner order. We are not dealing with this here. Here we are dealing with those who are often doing a lot at once and they skip between different activities, even if these are spiritual activities such as doing many acts of *chessed* at the same time, and certainly if he is does a lot of multi-tasking when it comes to material matters.

The remedy of this nature does not mainly lie in changing how one acts, though that, too, is part of the equation. The root of the remedy here is by changing one’s perspective towards life. There will be a change in the way he acts, though, as a result of the change in his perspective towards life. The more one gets used to this change of perspective, the more one will live his life very differently than the way most people are living today.

The following is another example of living a life of “quality”. Most people, when they have to be somewhere at a certain time, will make sure to arrive on time or a little later than that, so that they can get more things done before they get there. Instead, a person can live very differently than this, and he can show up at an earlier time to events, so that he can have time to himself to compose his mind. He is not looking on how to fill up his time, and instead he is making sure to finish what he starts, and then taking a break so he can regain his composure, before moving on to the next activity. Living in this way greatly weakens the **fire-of-fire** from dominating his soul.

Not always is this possible. Some situations are more complex, and a person is not always able to regain his composure, before moving on to the next activity. For example, a *posek* (halachic authority) who sits in a *Beis Din* has to answer questions on all areas of Torah, and he has to be involved with several issues at once, when dealing with people. There is a difficulty contained in this, because often he has to quickly skip between different topics and cases. There are some people who should not take such a position, because the rapid transition between different subjects is harmful to their concentration, and there is a danger of rendering an inaccurate ruling. But ideally, in the average situation, one needs to avoid skipping between activities, and instead he must try to finish what he starts and then take a break before moving on to the next thing.

⁴³ Editor’s Note: Refer to the Rav’s series גאולתך 7, ע 87, “Getting To Know Your Inner Redemption”

In Summary

Thus, ideally speaking, one needs to lead a more organized kind of lifestyle, by making sure to finish what he starts, and then taking breaks between activities.

In this way, one will also be able to use his **fire-of-fire** in a holy manner, when he needs to, by shattering his normal boundaries, if such a need ever arrives. However, the general way to live life is not by constantly using the soul's **fire-of-fire**, even for holiness. Instead, the ideal way to live is by weakening the soul's impaired **fire-of-fire** in the soul, through making sure to live a more organized kind of life and taking breaks between one activity and another, as opposed to skipping back and forth between different activities.

This is the depth of the power of *yishuv hadaas*, the settling of the mind.

In Conclusion of the "Fixing Your Focus" series

We have merited here with *siyata d'shmaya* to complete the discussion about the power of focus. It has really been brief, and there are more details to say, as with everything else. I hope that at least some of it has been clearly understood, and that it has given you greater clarity on how to gain more focus, so that you can gain *yishuv hadaas* and thereby be able to live a life of "Who is one who is destined to the World To Come?"⁴⁴ - which refers to a world of *menuchah* (serenity), a life of inner *menuchas hanefesh*, at its root.

17 | CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter One – Focus-Related Issues Due To Lack of Movement*DESCRIPTION*

The particular element in the soul known as “earth-of-earth” breeds a nature of “heaviness”, which, in essence, allows for a person to remain “heavily” focused. Those who have a primary personality trait in their soul of “earth-of-earth” usually excel when it comes to focusing. This kind of person, by his very nature, is able to stay very focused on whatever he does. He is very focused on his actions. Emotionally, he can stay focused as well. He can be very focused on the words he is saying, and he can be very focused when he is having a thought.

THE SYMPTOMS

However, it may happen that his nature of “heaviness” gets too dominant, to the point that he ‘closes up’ and he doesn’t want to be physically active, and alarmingly so. Since every person needs to move and be active in order to stay sane, a lack of physical movement will upset the balance between his need for serenity with his need for movement. The more he holds back from movement, the more his natural movements will become closed up. An internal war will be created in his soul. His need for movement will be at ‘war’ with his dominant trait of “heaviness”, and his need for movement will want to strongly re-assert itself. Gradually as this continues, an internal contradiction and war will develop in his soul, between his need for serenity with his need for movement.

These internally warring forces will eventually become outwardly manifest in his life, by causing the person to rapidly transition from being overly serene and unmoving, to being overly moving and active. His need for action will explode outward, causing him to engage in movement that is chaotic, quick, and disorganized. A person in this state will act in a frazzled manner, without carefully weighing out his thoughts before he does something. He will react impulsively and without care. His inner contradiction (between his need for serenity and his need for movement) will create emotional turmoil within him, it will show up in how he talks, and it will also weaken the focus of his thoughts, to the point that he cannot focus at all.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

Step 1: The person needs to enter daily into a space where he can experience quiet and relaxation for his soul, with the goal of gaining the ability to “listen within” to oneself. To accomplish this, one needs to set aside a few

minutes a day of “quiet time”, to simply relax and settle the mind. To do this, one should cut himself off from all the noise of the outside world, by turning off his cellphone, and removing any other bothersome factors that can distract him. One should keep practicing this until his soul has gotten used to this, and he feels that he has a quiet, calm space to go to, as if he has discovered an entirely new and different world within him – in contrast to the noisy situations that he encounters throughout the day.

Step 2: During this daily quieting time, one frees his soul, to be who he truly is, to practice his normal movements and to also find serenity. Gradually a person will become aware of an idea of serene movement, which he had long ago forgotten about until now, due to the inner stress which was created from his internal contradictions. Even more so, he will begin to identify his soul’s natural needs for movement and the soul’s need for serenity.

Step 3: One will then be able to discern the deep inner contradiction which exists between his newfound awareness of these two contradicting natures of the soul: the need for serenity, and the need for movement. One will see how these two forces exist within him, and how his natural movements which he wishes to do are being prevented by the “heaviness” within that is dominating his personality. He will also identify an overwhelming need for movement, which has resulted from his suppressed element of wind [a result of the dominant ‘heaviness’ of his element of earth].

Step 4: One can then begin a process of weakening the opposition that he feels towards movement and action. Every time one wants to move or do a physical action, and he has decided that it is necessary for him to do this act, he should release his need for action, at least partially. If he decides that he doesn’t need to act right now, he should still try to move somewhat, and he should pick something easy to do, such as walking three steps forward. The goal of this is to train his soul not to push off any physical action, so long as he feels the need to act.

This process will gradually free a person from the inner stress that has been created from the opposing within his personality, of the need for serenity with the need for movement. The more that the person weakens the opposition between these contradicting forces within him, the more he will improve his power to focus.

Chapter Two – Focus-Related Issues Due To Minor Distractions

DESCRIPTION

The element of “earth” enables one to become stable and consistent, and these abilities contribute to one’s power of focus. In contrast, the element of “water” causes a person to become ‘dragged’ away. The “water” within “earth” enables a person to be stable and consistent in spite of having minor distractions.

THE SYMPTOMS

When a person is having quickly passing thoughts that are frequently occurring and which are light kinds of thoughts, even if they barely register within one’s conscious radar, or when a person is having frequently occurring emotions that are lighter in their nature, but which are somewhat bothersome to him, are all factors that interrupt the flow of one’s thoughts. Any mental or emotional distraction can cause this. When one has an imbalance in his element of water, his thoughts become dragged into thinking about a number of various disturbances and annoyances. This “dragging” creates enough of a disturbance to one’s thought flow, and in this state a person cannot stay focused in his thoughts.

This is a fundamental issue, and it is the main cause for the problems with focusing that our general is experiencing.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

The power of focus enables a person the ability to create strong, stable and consistent thinking patterns, to remain focused on one topic at a time. Therefore, one needs to gain the ability to focus on one important topic at a time. Along with this, one also needs to find the tool which can help him deal with any outer disturbances which bother one’s thoughts, which steer his mind away from thinking about the topic he’s trying to think of. The power to centralize one’s thoughts is essentially the power to think analytically, deeply and strongly. By getting used to concentrating on deep thoughts about Torah-related topics, a person will greatly strengthen his power of thought. The tool by which one can remove all outer disturbances is the inner self-awareness to one’s quickly passing thoughts, and to one’s subtle feelings. The very awareness to these subtle thoughts and emotions is the tool to remove them. This inner self-awareness offers a person the ability to control these light thoughts and emotions that quickly pass through his consciousness, and thereby decreases these bothersome thoughts and emotions, which in turn increases one’s power to focus.

Chapter Three – Focus-Related Issues Due To Problematic Movement

DESCRIPTION

The element of earth produces the personality traits of consistency and stability, so that a person can remain in place. The element of wind is the moving force of a person, which motivates him and moves him. The element wind in a person makes a person want to move and to experience noise. The “wind” within one’s element of earth will add a dimension of “movement” within one’s stable, consistent “earth”, resulting in an integration of movement and stability. The “earth” still dominates here, so one will be consistent with this nature, but with an added element of “wind” within his earth, he will also be moving. With the personality trait of “wind-of-earth”, a person will be able to move in a way that will not affect his ability to stay stable and consistent. If one’s main personality is “wind-of-earth”, one will move and perform fluidly. He will not move out of place, and instead, he will move and perform within the place he finds himself in.

THE SYMPTOMS

Every person has a need for movement, but each individual has certain movements which are tailored to his unique personality. If one is moving or performing in a way that doesn’t suit the needs of his soul (either by moving too little or too much), like if he is moving way more than necessary, or if he is having too much “inner” movement by experiencing too much drama or turbulences which are stressing his soul, all of this piles up, until he eventually loses inner balance in his soul. As a result, he begins to move in a way that does not fit his personality. He will move slowly or mechanically, and he has almost no control over these robotic movements that he has gotten used to habitually. His soul isn’t calm, and as a byproduct of this, his focus will weaken.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

To fix this issue, one needs to move in a way that is more genuine to who he really is, and to move in a way that corresponds to his individual needs. One needs to become familiar with his personal needs for movement: the kinds of movements that he needs to do, in order to feel calm. By “listening within” and quieting down, one can reflect on himself personally and identify which movements are not natural for him to do, and which movements are natural for him to do. Gradually, he will develop an awareness of what his personal movement needs are, and this awareness will aid him throughout the day, so that whenever he is about to do something, he will know if he needs to avoid such movement, or if perhaps he should minimize it. In addition, he will also develop awareness as to what his natural needs for movement are: the movements which calm his soul. Throughout the course of the day, with awareness and focus, one should train himself to exchange his mechanical, unnatural movements for his natural movements which calm him. Gradually one should keep this up, until “habit becomes second nature.”

This is how a person can begin to gain control over his movements and move and act in a way that is more aligned with his personality. When one attains a balance in his movements and he is moving in a way that is more aligned with his soul, he gains tranquility and calmness, and as a result his power to focus will revert back to its original strength, due to the element of “earth” which dominates one’s personality of wind-of-earth.

Chapter Four – Focus-Related Issues Due To Interruptions

DESCRIPTION

The element of earth enables a person to be consistent, and this is what fuels the power to stay focused. The element of fire causes a person to jump and skip. We can see this from the way physical fire is, which skips and jumps from one place to another.

In the nature of “fire-of-earth”, the dominant element is earth, so one with this nature will be organized and consistent in his thoughts, and he will know how to think in a step-by-step manner. But the element of “fire” here will cause a person to jump in his mind from thinking about one topic to another, due to the disorderly nature of fire. When one’s fire dominates and it upsets the balance in one’s personality, it causes a person to be jumpy in his thoughts and skip to thinking about other topics. This jumpiness in one’s thoughts becomes a pattern and creates disorganized thinking patterns. However, since the person with this nature still has an ability to be strong and consistent in his thoughts (due to his primary element, which is earth), even after he starts thinking about something else, he is able to quickly return his thoughts (relatively speaking) to whatever he has been thinking about originally.

THE SYMPTOMS

When the element of fire dominates, it removes a person from whatever he was thinking about and causes him to think about unrelated topics. This weakens his ability to focus. Three kinds of harm result from this “jumpiness” in the mind: 1) It wastes a person’s time, because instead of progressing and making the most of one’s time, one ‘spaces out’ and thinks about things that are worthless, as he floats along with his imagination. 2) It removes a person from any inner and deep thinking, by sending one’s thoughts into thinking about various nonsense of the world outside. This removes a person from his inner world and pushes him into thinking about the empty pursuits of the world

outside. And in most cases, it takes a lot of time and hard work afterwards to return one's thinking to one's inner world. 3) When the thoughts roam, it disturbs one's continuous flow of thought, and as a result, one loses the sanctity that can be gained from the consistency and consecutiveness of orderly thinking patterns.

There are three different scenarios which may cause a person to develop "jumpiness" in the thoughts: 1) When he lacks enthusiasm and connection in what he's involved with, which causes his heart (emotions) to be in another place than where his mind (thoughts) is. 2) External stimuli, such as seeing something or experiencing noises which distract the mind even momentarily, cause one's thoughts to roam. Emotional disturbances that weigh heavily on one's heart can also be a cause for steering away his thoughts, causing him to involve his thoughts in trying to come up with a solution to his issues. 3) Any negative desires, wants or wishes which are found deeply in one's subconscious can also rise up from the subconscious will and into one's thoughts, uprooting the person's thoughts from focusing on anything.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

STEP 1: First of all, when a person is regularly listening to the media and the news, through various means of modern technology, one weakens his power of focus, even if his mind isn't bothered by what he hears. There is much destruction which has been created from being connected to the world through the heavy use of the media and modern technology. So the very first step which is required of a person is to change his lifestyle and disconnect from anything that isn't part of the realm of holiness. Ideally, one should have an absolute disconnection from the media today. However, practically speaking, this would be like a "decree" that most of the generation cannot keep to, so we will suggest that a person should at least have a partial disconnection from media, by having some time every day in which he has no connection to media.

STEP 2: One needs to identify the main source that is causing his mind to be jumpy. One should write down a list of topics which his mind usually thinks about. If there are no external factors that are causing his mind to think about these topics, it is almost certain that his mind is being jumpy due to subconscious desires that he has deep down. By writing down the topics that one tends to think about, one is able to see what he is yearning for. After that, a person will need to do inner work with himself individually, by uprooting those negative desires and wishes which are hidden deep in his subconscious. This enables a person to 'dry out' the source of his jumpy thoughts, and as a result, the person will lose interest in the unwanted thoughts, and he will regain his natural focus.

There are also two additional ways by which one can strengthen his element of earth and thereby gain more consistency in his thoughts, so that he will have an earthen “wall” in his mind that will protect him from the jumpiness of the element of fire. One way is by training oneself to identify and remember whatever one was thinking about at the time that his thoughts began to wander to another topic. Identifying this ‘point of distraction’ will enable one to quickly return from the unwanted thought back to the desired thoughts. A second way is by training oneself to identify and remember the mental comparison that one made between one topic and another. When one realizes how his imagination led him to compare Topic A (the desirable thought) with Topic B (the unwanted thought), he will gain the ability to quickly return from Topic B (the unwanted thought) to Topic A (the desirable thought).

Chapter Five – Focus-Related Issues Due To Consecutive Distractions

DESCRIPTION

The nature of water is to pull and drag things along with it, and to spread out further. The element of water manifests in our soul as a nature to become pulled and dragged after something. Those with a primary nature of “earth” in their souls will be consistent and stable, and those who have a primary nature of “earth-of-water” will also have times where they become pulled after something, digressing from their stability a bit. Their primary nature of “earth” will restrain their dragging somewhat, so that they are not completely pulled after various stimuli.

THE SYMPTOMS

With regards to focusing, “earth-of-water” causes a person to be dragged after other thoughts, which divert his attention. He will keep being dragged after certain thoughts, and this will be a deterrent to his power of focus, because he forms the tendency to keep getting distracted away from what he is thinking about.

At its essence, “earth-of-water” is really an inner ability in the soul which is awakened on its own, to keep nurturing and maturing one’s thoughts from their raw state. That is why thoughts about the same topic will keep popping into a person’s mind, continuously dragging him away from his focus, where he finds himself become involved again and again with the certain topic. When the person tries to re-focus his thoughts, he finds that his thinking patterns have been interrupted, and he cannot succeed in re-focusing.

These are some reasons which can cause a person’s thoughts to become continuously ‘dragged’ after the certain thoughts: 1) He may still have an immature, narrowed perspective which has remained in him since childhood, and

due to his immaturity, he continues to think about the same things again and again. 2) He may have developed certain habits over the years which have caused him to develop a “second nature” to keep thinking about the same things. 3) It may even be his very nature to keep thinking about certain topics, and this is due to the primary negative character trait which he hasn’t yet uprooted from his nature, coupled by a general lack of balance in his character traits. 4) If one’s heart is full of stormy emotions, his intellectual abilities will be disturbed by this and won’t function as well. 5) One’s subconscious may be dragging his conscious thoughts to think about whatever he subconsciously desires.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

One should identify which of the above reasons are causing him to be continuously distracted after the same thoughts, and then deal with it accordingly. One should develop awareness and identify where his thoughts wander to, as well as identify the source that is causing his thoughts to wander.

If it is childish immaturity that is causing his thoughts to wander, one will need to graduate from his childish, narrowed perspective, and to go through a process of maturity. One should place boundaries on how much he allows his thoughts to become dragged repeatedly after the same topic, and in this way he makes use of his primary nature of “earth”, to stabilize his dragging.

If the continuous “dragging” of the thoughts is being caused by acquired habits, then just as habits were acquired gradually due to lack of self-awareness, so should a person understand that he needs to begin acting with self-awareness, and to gradually undo his habits and old thinking patterns, so that he can free himself from any unwanted habits and patterns.

If one’s thoughts are continuously dragged after the same topics due to a negative character trait that hasn’t yet been worked upon, or due to an imbalance in the soul, one needs to deal with that individual trait, by learning about the trait and how to repair it, and by acquiring a balance in the abilities of the soul.

People who are more emotional and sensitive have stormy emotions raging inside of them, which doesn’t allow their intellectual abilities to work effectively. They need to learn how to organize and balance their emotional abilities, and to learn how to quiet their emotions and calm down.

When subconscious desires are causing one’s thoughts to constantly wander towards certain topics, one should become aware that these recurring thoughts are reflecting his deep desires and wishes. To repair this, one needs to direct his will towards the true will of the soul, which is “It is our will to do Your will.”

The general idea of this chapter was to show that the way to repair our focus is through integrating our heart and intellect together, to integrate our subconscious with our conscious, to integrate our emotions and our thoughts, to call upon all of the abilities in our soul in order to become more focused. Ultimately, on a more spiritual level, this can lead us to the highest level of focus, which is *d'veykus* (the state of attachment) with Hashem.

Chapter Six – Focus-Related Issues Due To Impulsivity

DESCRIPTION

The element of water in the soul causes a person to be ‘dragged’ after things, just as we see with physical water, which drags an object with it and spreads it outward. A person with a primary element of “water” in his soul will naturally be “dragged” after various pursuits in life. “Water-of-water” in the soul causes a person to be “dragged” further after he has already been dragged. It causes a person to continuously be “dragged” with almost no control over himself, whether in the areas of thought, speech, emotion, and action.

THE SYMPTOMS

The power of focus enables a person to be involved with one thought at a time, one emotion at a time, and one action at a time. But when one’s main personality consists of “water-of-water”, he is constantly being dragged into different thoughts, emotions, or actions. He does not have the option of calming down his soul and getting himself to focus on thought or action at a time, and therefore, he cannot remain focused.

In this chapter we explained at length about the various detrimental effects of impaired “dragging” and how it affects all of our life, and how it creates difficulties for oneself and for those around him.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

The way to repair this issue consists of following of inwardly traversing a certain path in one’s soul, which will enable one to crush his uncontrollable “dragging” patterns. When one learns how to curb his “dragging” and he learns how to balance out this ability, relatively speaking, with the rest of the abilities in the soul, it will then be possible for one to create a place of inner silence in oneself. After one has acquired that space of inner silence, one can then work further to elevate his power of focus.

In order to curb one’s “dragging” patterns, one needs to establish proper boundaries upon his “dragging”, by creating alternate options of movement that can clash and oppose his dragging.

For those whose problem of “dragging” causes them to be habitual latecomers, they can create an alternate “movement” for themselves, a movement of “contraction” which will oppose the “expansion” of their dragging. One can work on this idea practically by making sure to always come a half hour earlier than when he needs to be there.

For those whose “dragging” causes them to become overly involved in various activities and losing track of time, it is suggested that they should set a specific time where they will force themselves to stop in the middle of their work. In no circumstances should they should not go over the time limit that they set for themselves. In addition, they should also try to stop about five or ten minutes earlier than the actual time that they set for themselves.

For those who try to take on too much work within a short amount of time, we shall advise them to stop after they have completed about 85% of their work. By stopping abruptly even before they have completed their work, they will be introducing a movement of “contraction” into their souls, which will balance out their overuse of the power of “expansion” (or “dragging”) in their souls.

Chapter Seven – Focus-Related Issues Due To Stability

DESCRIPTION

The primary aspect of the element of water in the soul is that it causes a person to become ‘dragged’. The element of wind produces movement and excitement. Therefore, “wind-of-water” is the excitement that one has after he has been dragged after something. If a person’s main nature is “wind-of-water”, he will be dominated by the nature to become dragged and excited. He will develop a pattern in his life where he is dragged after whatever excites him, and in addition, because he is excited, he becomes overly attached to whatever he’s excited about. But after some time, his excitement calms down and he grows apart from whatever he was excited about, and he begins to become ‘dragged’ after something else that’s new or which has a different emotional appeal to him.

THE SYMPTOMS

There are people who remain with an immature, childish perspective well into their adulthood. They live a lifestyle of being dragged after various nonsense, and after they become ‘dragged’ they become excited about something else that captures their interest. They keep repeating this cycle, of getting dragged after what excites them, then losing their excitement and being dragged after something else. This makes it impossible for them to focus properly, because they are always finding something that captures their interest, which excites them and makes them repeatedly lose focus.

The problems with focusing which our generation has is mainly stemming from an absence of being strongly and permanently connected to something. The modern lifestyle of today scatters a person's ability to be strongly connected to something. A person is constantly switching and replacing things, and he never remains connected to anything for that long. A person usually does not have any lasting connection to anything. Since the power of focus is fueled by the power to be permanently connected to something, the lack of connectedness will manifest in many people in our generation as difficulty with listening and focusing.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

Being that a lack of permanent, stable connection causes a person to lose his focus, our advice is that every person should enter deeply and connect himself to a point in *avodas Hashem* that is closest to his heart. If one feels that he does not have the ability to connect himself to Torah or to the spiritual, he can at least become connected with one of his talents. This creates a movement of “contraction” for the soul, which balances the overly “expansive” movements which cause one to be inwardly scattered and which harm one's power to focus.

After one has gained the ability to be strongly and inwardly connected to something meaningful (on a spiritual level, this can be a point about *avodas Hashem* or anything Torah-related, and on a mundane level, it can be about focusing on a talent that one has), this creates a central point for one to be connected to, which gradually trains the soul to become more focused. A person can train himself to become connected and staying focused on something, which will train his soul to get used to “contracting” and thereby becoming more focused. Whenever one's focus weakens and one's soul is becoming scattered, one can immediately direct his thoughts and emotions to the point that he has firmly connected his soul to [i.e. one of his talents]. Gradually, through getting used to returning to one's ‘focal point’ whenever one feels himself becoming scattered [or ‘dragged’] after something, one attains a balance in his soul, and the quality of his power of focus will improve.

Chapter Eight – Focus-Related Issues Due To Quick Disconnection

DESCRIPTION

The nature to become ‘dragged’ stems from the element of water, whereas the element of fire causes one to become destructive [to varying degrees]. “Fire-of-water” is a nature to be dragged after connections that are impaired. One with this nature will have a tendency to overly connect himself to something, in an imbalanced manner. Later the person feels disillusioned and he realizes that he attributed more value than necessary towards a certain thing. He becomes so disappointed at his discovery that he destroys any connection he had with it.

THE SYMPTOMS

In this chapter we presented three scenarios which can cause a person to sever his connection to something, where one becomes disillusioned with his connection to something and he is unable to stay permanently connected to anything. This shakes the entire stability of the soul and doesn't allow a person to focus.

One cause for this is an impaired nature of “fire-of-water”, which drags a person into a cycle of becoming excited and connected to something, then losing his excitement, whereupon his connection and excitement becomes ‘destroyed’, then becoming excited about something else, etc. A separate cause for this phenomenon is when one feels a need for renewal, which causes him to keep replacing things. A third cause is when a person goes through severed connections with others, which may cause him to become shaky in his connections, and he becomes more emotionally distant from others.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

The key to repairing these issues begins with developing awareness, in which a person understands and senses that he is shaky when it comes to connecting himself to anything. One needs to become more patient and not be so quick to sever his connection to something, so that he can strengthen his soul's power of connection.

To remedy the first scenario of the problem – when a person keeps going through a cycle of excitement about something, then losing excitement about it, then becoming excited over something else – this stems from impaired nature of fire-of-water-of-earth, and the way to repair this is by entering into any connection or excitement with awareness beforehand, as opposed to allowing oneself to be simply pulled after excitement. Additionally, even in the midst of one's excitement, one can delay his excitement a bit and think about what is becoming involved with. He should then think to himself if it's proper for him or not to pursue his excitement about something, and he should ask himself if he really needs this excitement (or relationship), what he will gain from it, and if it's realistic for him or not to follow his excitement. In this way, he will be forming a more stable kind of connection, as opposed to following his fantasies and excitement. His connections and relationships will become more stable, as a result of this kind of thinking.

When a person acquires awareness after a feeling of connection to something has been created, and he is disappointed and he regrets following his excitement, he needs to quell his desire to sever his connection. He should think about what caused him to make the mistake, and why he became overly excited about something. The more a

person gets used to this kind of thinking, the healthier his connections and relationships will become. He will be able to strongly connect to something, his soul will become more balanced, and his focus will be strengthened.

The way to remedy the other two scenarios of the problem (always replacing things out of a need for renewal, and experiencing severed relationships with others) is for a person to become aware of the areas (or people) he is strongly connected to. This will provide him with a sense of being strongly connected to something. One can gain his need for renewal by making minimal replacements in his life, with the awareness that he need some renewal, and by thinking what is appropriate for him to replace, and what is not appropriate for him to replace.

Chapter Nine – Focus-Related Issues Due To Scattered Thoughts

DESCRIPTION

The element of wind in one’s personality [when impaired] causes one to become ‘scattered’, whereas the element of earth enables one to be more consistent and stable. “Earth-of-wind” is a nature to be consistently “scattered”. One with a primary nature of “earth-of-wind” will have a tendency to become scattered and spread out between many different interests. When applied to spirituality, a person with this nature will want to amass a lot of learning material on many different subjects, within a short amount of time. In the material world, a person with this nature is the type to have businesses all over the world.

THE SYMPTOMS

The ‘scatterbrain’ nature stands in the way of focus. Focus is all about staying centered and consistent, and when a person is scattered in his soul, he scatters his energies, and he can’t stay focused. Scattering of the soul stems from being involved in many different conflicting interests. The lifestyle of a person with a nature of “earth-of-wind” is to be involved in a colorful array of different kinds of interests, which causes them to become inwardly scattered and spread apart. The reality of life in our generation is that it is a lifestyle which scatters a person’s soul. The information of the media, news outlets, and internet flood the brain with hundreds of different, unrelated topics, which scatters the mind and weakens one’s focus.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

Scattering of the soul is countered by being organized. One needs to live a kind of life which is focused and organized. One needs to revolve his life around a central priority of his day. It is suggested that a person write down a list of all the different factors he is involved with in his daily schedule. Then he should make a list of what his

priorities of the day are, in order of importance. One should then plan his day accordingly, revolving his schedule around his main priorities. One should remove any parts of his schedule which aren't necessary. The central priority of one's day should become a person's main focus. Throughout the day, one should slowly train himself, in a relaxed manner, to be involved in his actions and thoughts about the central priority of his day.

In general, this is the fundamental way to develop a focused way of living, but it is especially helpful for one who has "scattering of the soul", who can gradually become more focused with the more that he trains himself to this approach.

Chapter Ten – Focus-Related Issues Due To Inner Emptiness

DESCRIPTION

The element of wind, when left impaired, creates an "inner void" in one's soul. When coupled with the element of water, one will be "dragged" after different areas of interest, in order to fill the soul's empty void and to satisfying one's nagging boredom. This scatters the soul and destroys one's focus.

THE SYMPTOMS

The soul's "inner void" causes a person to feel empty, lonely and bored inside. These negative feelings feel painful when one becomes consciously aware of them. When one is unaware of these negative feelings, he will subconsciously attempt to quiet them by trying to do anything that will fill his time. However, although he keeps filling his time, he is not filling the needs of his soul. Also, he will go after empty pursuits which increase the scattered state of his soul.

Children or teenagers who feel inwardly empty will be dragged after the pursuits of the street and to spend time in the company of others who seem appealing to him. In an adolescent or adult, this inner emptiness will be manifest as a bad mood, such as sadness, nervousness, chronic complaining, depression, melancholy, etc. At an extreme level, these bad moods can eventually morph into destructive behavior, such as getting into physical fights with others. The emptiness and the boredom gnaws away at their soul, and there is no respite from it. Any attempt to fill the void in the soul, through using any of the vane pursuits of This World, cannot heal the soul. In particular, this scatters the soul and doesn't allow a person to stay focused.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

The purpose of the soul's inner void is so that a person will become clear that This World is entirely empty, and that the only way to heal the soul's emptiness is by giving it the spiritual light of Hashem and His Torah, and to be connected with the collective unit of the souls of the Jewish people, and to be connected to one's individual soul.

Whenever one senses the soul's inner emptiness, which crops up every so often, one should not simply dismiss it or try to take the mind off it. Instead, one should validate its existence, and reflect: "Why does my soul feel empty?" Then one can conclude that the reason for his feelings of emptiness is because he must realize that the reality is that our world is entirely empty, and that we need to feel this emptiness with a deep connection to Hashem and to learning his Torah (exerting ourselves in Torah study, amidst a settled mind), to the souls of the Jewish people, and to one's own individual soul. The more a person continues like this, the more he will quell the nagging emptiness in his soul, from a more focused kind of existence.

Chapter Eleven – Focus-Related Issues Due To Excessive Movement

The primary characteristic of the element of wind is movement. If a person's main personality trait is "wind"-of-wind, he is constantly moving. When he is balanced out by the element of earth, one's quickness to move will be coupled with organization, focus, and precision. But when a moving nature is missing the balance provided by earth, one will move too much, in a way that causes one to become scattered and chaotic. This can result in destruction for the soul.

The movements of the soul's element of wind are rooted in the empty space of the soul's inner void. Movement of the soul can only happen when the soul has its "space" to move around in. Just as a person needs physical space in order to move, so does the soul need space in order to "move". When one's main personality trait is "wind-of-wind", he has a bigger emotional need for expansion, space, and movement. In this lesson, we described the issues that can result from this, and how it is particularly detrimental to one's focus.

Impaired "wind-of-wind" in the personality damages one's focus in the following areas: 1) A person will be involved with one thing but he is already thinking about the next thing he has to do. 2) A person will want to cram in a lot of tasks within a short amount of time. 3) A person may develop unrealistic aspirations, aiming for goals that are not within his reach. 4) A person will place emphasis on the quantity of his actions, rather than on the quality of his actions.

Even if a person by nature likes to get a lot done (rather than improve the quality of what he does), if his personality is wind-of-wind, he will take on too much, beyond what his soul can actually handle. He won't be genuinely connected to what he does, and as a result he will lose focus. 5) He has a need for expansion, which will cause him to become overly involved in all kinds of different interests, which will scatter his soul and ruin his focus. 6) He will be curious to see what is taking place in his external environment, so he will not be focused on progressing with his own life.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

The above issues stem from an imbalance in one's element of wind, which means that one is missing "earth" in his personality. By becoming aware of the above issues, one has begun the remedy to these issues. The issue of quickly becoming involved with other topics or pursuits is a result of disorganization and lack of structure in one's power to perform.

One needs to organize and give order to his tasks, by leaving a "space" between his tasks – by taking a break in between his actions. One needs to become aware of the need to be focused while doing something and of the need to remain focused from the beginning of the task until he is finished.

We explained that it is more important for a person to place emphasis on the quality of his actions, rather than on the quantity of his actions. This increases one's power to focus. Even if a person by nature is more into getting a lot done rather than on improving the quality of what he does, it is still upon him to align his actions properly with his true talents, and not to overdo himself. And for those who have high aspirations, they must be aware that they can only aspire to release their existing potential, and they should not try to be outdoing themselves.

For those who have difficulty concentrating when they are learning - because they like to gain the general picture before delving into the details – our advice for them is to become aware of the soul's movements of contraction and expansion. When one identifies that his soul is "contracting", it is a time to increase actions that require them to focus.

When one feels a need to expand, he should allow himself to relax and "space out" as necessary, in a way that won't be damaging to him (such as by staring into the sky), and after that he should return to focusing.

Chapter Twelve – Focus-Related Issues Due To Constant Switching

DESCRIPTION

The power of movement, in general, is a trait of the element of wind. Wins can move in any direction. “Fire”-of-wind causes the wind to move in different directions (since fire is a jumpy element). In the personality, fire-of-wind manifests as a nature to change courses. When one’s personality is mainly fire-of-wind, if this nature is left impaired, a person will be imbalanced when it comes to being consistent, organized and stable. When a person lacks stability, he will lose his ability to be consistent, and as a result, his focus will weaken.

THE SYMPTOMS

If a person hasn’t yet clarified what his purpose on this world is, he will be lacking spiritual goals, and although in the material world he may be living with purpose, in the spiritual world, he is not. He is living without aspirations, so he has no direction in life, and he will just be following his gut feeling of the moment. This is living at the animal level of the soul.

This lack of centeredness causes a person to live without awareness, to acquire skewed thinking patterns, and to act quickly without thinking enough beforehand. Whenever he begins anything, there is a good chance that he will suddenly change courses and become involved with something else. The fact that he is merely prepared to make such changes is already enough to ruin his focus on the moment.

In worse cases, a person like this loses all sense of inner stability. No one will want to hire him for a job, because he is known for his habits of losing his focus and switching to something else. An *avreich* on his way to *Kolel*, with this personality, will decide to suddenly go *daven* at a *kever* of a *tzaddik*, without thinking about the repercussions of this. His readiness to suddenly change courses is a habit that ruins his stability and consistency, and he cannot keep up any consistency in anything he does. As a result, he also cannot focus properly – neither when he thinks nor when he is doing something.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

The basis of success of life in general, and especially when it comes to staying focused, is the ability to set clearly defined goals, and to aim for them. So a person needs to become aware of the general goal of life, as well as his personal goals. The general goal of life (closeness to Hashem) needs to be subdivided into several stages throughout our life, working on one stage at a time, to the extent that our souls can currently handle. In order to stay focused on our personal goals, we need to set a goal and think of how we can get there, and how much time it will probably take. In this way one receives stability and consistency in his soul, which provide him with the strength to stay

focused. Any time a person decides to pursue a new goal, he should first wait a bit of time, so that he can settle his mind first and then pursue his goal more logically, first thinking it through.

Focus can be drawn from one's "beginning point" and also from one's "endpoint", but it cannot be drawn from the "middle point", because that is where all the scattering takes place. Throughout pursuing one's goals, one should keep reminding himself of his "beginning point", reminding himself of the goal that he set out for, which will help him stay focused on his current goal and not get sidetracked into other pursuits. A deeper way to use one's "beginning point" is to reflect on where a person has gotten to today since childhood. This enables one to "return" all of the "scattered movements" of his soul back to structure, stability and consistency.

Chapter Thirteen – Focus-Related Issues Due To Lack of Orderliness

DESCRIPTION

The element of fire in the personality causes a person to skip. "Earth"-of-fire in one's personality will cause a regular, set pattern of skipping. Those who have a dominant element of "fire" in their personality will have a nature to skip and to try and bypass the orderly progression of things. This is expressed both in their jumpy thoughts and actions. It is likely that a person with this nature will not have regular thinking patterns. The nature to skip can also be given some order, so there is a way for a person to develop an orderly, organized pattern of skipping.

THE SYMPTOMS

One of the main qualities needed for focus is the ability to be organized, a trait of earth. Skipping is a trait of fire, a disorderly element, thus, skipping prevents a person from focusing.

When a person is not aware of his strongest, unique quality, especially if he was discouraged by those in his environment, he will be led to think that something is wrong with him, that he has a thinking disability, etc. He is 'labeled' with inaccurate descriptions, and this bothers him and further hampers his ability to focus. Even when a person is aware that he has a nature to skip things, in order to be successful at focusing, he needs to be given some kind of orderly system when he is learning. Without a system that will work for him, he will not be able to stick to the system that he is in, and he will skip from one topic to another (or one thought to another), and he will not be focused.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

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Step 1: It is upon the person to recognize and accept that his nature of “skipping” is not a problem, but a nature, which Hashem has designed. Therefore, one should understand that there is also a “system” for skipping. One can learn how to “skip” while sticking to a system that will work for him, and then he can become more focused. Instead of feeling like a failure when he encounters a system that doesn’t work for him (for example, when he is struggling with learning any material according to his school’s curriculum), he should deal with this situation calmly by finding a system that will work for him (i.e. he should learn the material using a system that will work for him personally, as opposed to using the standard curriculum), in a way that will allow him to stay focused and to attain clarity in his learning.

Step 2: We explained two practical ways on how to apply more “organization” to the nature of skipping. One way is to examine one’s writing and to notice any letters that he tends to skip. One should try to think of why he skips certain letters, becoming aware of his “skipping” patterns. Another way is to write down one’s thoughts, and to notice any thoughts that skip to other thoughts. A person should notice where his mind tends to jump to, and then to become aware of why his mind tends to jump to those particular topics. One will gradually discover a pattern of skipping in his thoughts, and he will see that there is some orderly system to it.

One can then use his nature of “orderly skipping” (after becoming aware of the pattern in his skipping) by providing himself with a system that will work for him, which will enable him to use his nature of skipping. In this way, he turns his “issue” of skipping and mental jumpiness into a talent and an ability that he can use to help himself with. One also gains from this an ability to hold onto the flow of his thinking patterns while he is doing something. Gradually as one continues like this, he will sharpen his ability of “orderly skipping”, until it becomes natural to him, which will result in a greater degree of focus.

Chapter Fourteen – Focus-Related Issues Due To Lack of Calm Movement

DESCRIPTION

“Fire” in the personality causes a person to skip, whereas “water” in the personality causes a person to be “dragged” outward. Skipping prevents focus, and when coupled with a tendency to be “dragged” after other interests, it becomes increasingly more difficult for a person to focus. When a person is focused, he can be consistent and stable in what he does, and he is less likely to get ‘dragged’ into distractions. But when a person loses focus and organization, because his nature of “skipping” (fire) is causing him to become “dragged” (water) after distractions, he is more vulnerable to become pulled after anything that piques his curiosity and after anything remotely stimulating in his surroundings.

THE SYMPTOMS

We explained that our very existence on this world entails that we are constantly transitioning between one area of interest and another. However, this reality can also cause us to lose our ability to stay focused, since we are essentially “skipping” all the time from one topic to another. When a person gets used to the habit of not finishing what he starts, he increases the soul’s nature of “skipping”, and this is also detrimental to his ability of focus.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

In order to repair the issue of “skipping”, we explained several ways of living by which a person can keep transitioning between different areas in life, in a way that doesn’t ruin his focus. One needs to become aware of the general purpose of life and to set goals on how he can keep coming closer to the purpose of life, and to revolve his daily schedule around this. This makes it easier for a person to avoid become dragged after other interests. One also needs to be able to deal with any unexpected changes that can disrupt him from pursuing his goals in life.

In general, one should make sure to finish whatever he starts. He should push himself to finish. If a person is doing something that he feels he won’t finish, he should become aware of his difficulty in finishing and try to see how much more he can do, and then he should try to finish as much as he can, before stopping. The very awareness will give more stability to his soul and put some restraint on his nature of skipping. Even after a person has come to the conclusion that he cannot do anymore, he should try to take one more step forward, before completely stopping. In this way, a person mitigates the difficulty of continuing. One should also take a break between finishing one

activity and starting another. This space of interruption allows for a person to calm the soul's movements. Before beginning the next activity, a person should wait a bit, so that he can have more energy to act.

Through living in this way, a person is “moving” through life correctly and with a settled mind, which puts restraint on the soul's nature to “skip”, and thereby a person's power to focus is strengthened and improved.

Chapter Fifteen – Focus-Related Issues Due To Jolting Changes

DESCRIPTION

The element of fire in the personality enables one to make changes, whereas the element of wind enables one to move. The nature of “wind-of-fire”, when left impaired, causes a person to switch directions in life, in a way that is not balanced. Examples of this include a person who makes changes too quickly, or any changes that are extreme in their nature.

THE SYMPTOMS

Many times, a person will make significant changes in his life, in a way that is not balanced. It is only safe to make changes when one's intentions are pure and for the sake of serving Hashem better, but when a person makes any changes due to external, superficial reasons – for example, if his changes are motivated by jealousy, desires, honor, conceit, or boredom, or from being too reactive to what one has seen or heard – any changes borne from these emotions will usually lead to error and pain. Even when one's changes are motivated by true, pure reasons, they must not interfere with those around him, or else he loses more from the changes than whatever he gains from his changes. Also, if any of his changes can be noticeably seen by others, his changes will bother those around him and elicit negative reactions from others. Any external (noticeable) change also does not improve his soul that much. Therefore, any external (noticeable) changes will be detrimental to him. Even when one's changes are truthful and he has carefully thought about making these changes, if there are too many consecutive changes, this will be jolting to the soul.

When a person makes unhealthy changes in his life, he will also lose his focus. Even if he has not made actual changes and he merely has a nature of readiness to change, he will not be able to focus well, because his readiness to change is shaking the stability of his soul.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

Changes can be damaging to the stability of the soul and weaken a person's ability to focus. However, too much stability causes a person to be "grounded" that he cannot grow any further from where he is. For this reason, a person needs a balance between the abilities of change and stability. On one hand, a person needs to be very balanced and stable in the way he is living. At the same time, a person also needs to be prepared for changes and to be open to growth.

The power of change can be used by a person to find his unique place in serving Hashem and to keep searching for more and more truth, and to reveal more depth within one's path of *avodas Hashem* that he is on. After a person is aware of how to properly use the power of change, he can use the power of change in a balanced way which will enable him to grow and improve. Since there are many different paths to arrive at the purpose of life, and it is difficult for a person to know precisely what the truth is. Therefore, a person needs to pray from the depths of his heart to the Creator that he be guided to the truth and to find the proper path for him, the path that is aligned and attuned with his personal soul.

"Prayer accomplishes half", and therefore the other half is a person's efforts. Therefore, before making any changes, one needs to first think it through, and to examine his motivations in making this particular change.

He should examine if his desire to make the change stems from a search for truth, or if it is perhaps stemming from faulty character or any self-serving motivations. And when one does make changes, one should strive to make inner changes, which are only known to him and Hashem, as opposed to external changes, which are noticed by others. And, in order for a person to maintain his soul's stability, he should not make too many consecutive changes, nor should he make extreme changes. Any changes that a person makes should be introduced gradually.

Chapter Sixteen – Focus-Related Issues Due To Extreme Skipping

DESCRIPTION

The element of fire enables the nature to skip. "Fire-of-fire" causes a person to skip to another point and then skip again, coming back to the same point again and again, but with no structure or order. Those who have a personality of "fire-of-fire" are often "skipping" in their emotions, thoughts, words, and actions. This kind of person is disorganized by his very nature, which also causes him to be unfocused.

THE SYMPTOMS

The impaired “skipping” of the “fire-of-fire” nature causes a person to be unorganized in the areas of thought, emotion, speech, and action. The person’s thoughts keep being interrupted by other thoughts. The person’s emotions are a pot of disarray. He is unclear when he speaks, because his disorganized thoughts are expressed in his speech. When it comes to his actions, he is clearly disorganized, in a way that is obvious to everyone.

Examples include those who try to service the community’s needs in a completely disorganized manner (taking several phone calls at once and putting people on hold all the time, then forgetting what the first caller was calling about), those who try to keep “grabbing” onto more opportunities and *mitzvos*, and those who live for quantity rather than quality.

The underlying factor between all of these types of people is that they are all “cramming in” as much as possible, because they emphasize doing “more” and “more”, as opposed to improving the quality of their actions. They become used to a lifestyle of being involved with many different pursuits which places them in a situation of perpetual skipping, where they will have to skip from one activity to another, and this scatters their soul. Their power of focus will also weaken as a result from this way of living.

REPAIRING THE ISSUES

The root of the issues here is because the person places emphasis on quantity rather than on quality: actions over innerness. Repairing this issue starts with a change of perspective. One will need to learn of the need to live a life of inner quality, and to establish this as a regular part of his life and one of his main goals. A life of inner quality entails:

Acting in a way that allows one to maintain a settled mind (*yishuv hadaas*) and to have serenity (*menuchas hanefesh*), to organize one’s emotions and flow of thought, and to derive pleasure from being connected to his inner powers. To the degree that one acquires this change of perspective, a person will change the way he lives his life, and eventually this change of thinking will also filter down to the way he talks and acts.

One should examine the entire way that he is living. If one discovers that there are parts of his daily schedule which are pressurizing and stressful, he should avoid those actions. One needs to create a daily schedule which allows him to have some relaxed time every day for himself, so that he can quiet his soul, settle his mind, and regain his serenity.

A fundamental rule for life is that a person should never do more than one thing at a time. Under no circumstances should a person be doing a lot of actions at once.

In whatever a person is about to do, he should first know how much time it will take. He should then begin to it, with intention of finishing what he starts, and he should not skip to doing anything else while he is in the middle of the first thing. One needs to have times every day of relaxing his mind, and organizing his thoughts, and reviewing what he felt that day and what has done that day, so that he can begin to experience his inner world and thereby experience his very life itself.

The purpose of this is to become serene and thereby re-gain the power to stay focused. One can keep doing actions to the extent that it isn't removing his calmness nor harming the quality of what he does. This change of perspective towards living removes the detrimental habit of "skipping", thereby enabling a person to become more orderly, which in turn increases his power to stay focused.



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