

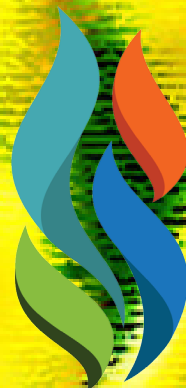
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FIXING YOUR [ANGER]

TORAH MANUAL TO FIXING TRAITS OF ANGER
UNEDITED TRANSLATION

V5

מכון
ארבעת
היסודות



DEVELOPED BY THE FOUR ELEMENTS INSTITUTE

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1 | *Despair Caused By Anger*

Introduction To Anger

Rav Chaim Vital writes that the element of fire is the root of the traits of conceitedness and anger. In the previous series, we merited learning about conceitedness, and now we will explore the trait of anger, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

Each of the elements contains aspects of all of the four elements, so when we are learning about anger, which stems from the element of fire, we will also see how there is anger that stems from earth-of-fire, water-of-fire, wind-of-fire, and fire-of-fire.

Each of these as well will subdivide into an additional four divisions [adding up for a total of sixteen different kinds of anger].

The Four General Kinds of Anger

- 1) **Earth-of-fire** refers to the “dry” aspect of fire. One of the main identifying natures of fire is its “dryness”. When anger stems from the “dryness” of fire, it is stemming from the dry “earth” aspect of fire. This is a kind of anger which ‘dries’ a person out as a result of getting angry.
- 2) **Water-of-fire** refers to a feeling of vitality that rushes into a person when he is angry. Sometimes when a person is angry, he feels a surge of power entering him. Vitality stems from water, so when a person feels a sense of vitality and energy as he’s getting angry, his anger is stemming from the “water” aspect of fire.
- 3) **Wind-of-fire** is when a person loses his sense of movement and direction (his ‘wind’), as he’s angry.
- 4) **Fire-of-fire** refers to an intense kind of anger that fills the entire being of the person. We find an example of this by Haman, when he realized that Mordechai wouldn’t bow to him:
“And Haman was filled with wrath.”

Those are the four general roots of anger. Let’s begin with anger that stems from earth-of-fire, which also subdivides into four types: Earth-of-earth-of-fire, water-of-earth-of-fire, wind-of-earth-of-fire, and fire-of-earth-of-fire.

The Four Kinds of Anger Stemming From Earth-of-Fire

- 1) **Earth-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person gets angry and it causes him to reach a point of despair.
- 2) **Water-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person gets angry to the point that he loses a drive to do anything. (Unlike in the case of anger stemming from “water”-of-fire, where a person feels good as he’s getting angry, in the case of “water-of-earth”-of-fire, the person feels the opposite: His anger causes him to lose his sense of vitality for anything.
- 3) **Wind-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person gets angry to the point that his “movement” is somewhat paralyzed, in the sense that other abilities of his soul become temporarily weakened.
- 4) **Fire-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person, in his anger, reaches a deep feeling of ‘destruction’.

This is the general outline of the concepts, and at this point, these matters sound closed and mysterious. As we go along, we hope to explain these concepts more clearly.

Anger Stemming From Earth-of-Earth-of-Fire: When Anger Breeds Despair

The first kind of anger we will explore is anger that stems from **earth-of-earth-of-fire**. When a person gets angry, the ‘dryness’ of the element of fire may activate the “dryness” of the ‘earth’ aspect in fire, leading to a feeling of despair (a trait rooted in earth).

Thus, **earth-of-earth-of-fire** is when anger leads a person to feel despair. There is also a general kind of despair which is rooted in the element of earth, but here we dealing with despair that results from anger, which is rooted in fire.

The Factors That Contribute To Anger

Firstly, in order to deal with this issue, we will need to understand what causes anger in the first place. There is an external reason that causes anger, as well as an inner reason.

The stronger a person has a *ratzon* (will) for something, the stronger his anger will be when his will is opposed. The weaker a person’s *ratzon* was, the less anger he will experience when this *ratzon* is unmet. A person is angry when he doesn’t get something that he wanted very badly, but if he didn’t want it so much, he is not as angry. This is the external aspect of anger: Experiencing an opposition to my *ratzon* will.

The second factor involved in anger, which is the inner reason, is when there is a lack of balance in the four elements of the soul. This is referred to as “boiling of the blood”.¹ A lack of balance in the soul’s elements will cause a person’s blood to boil quickly when he is angered, and the person becomes “One who is easily angered”.² This is not because his will has been opposed. It is because he is lacking inner peace, since his element of fire is not balanced with the other elements in his soul. This leaves him vulnerable to quickly explode in anger, as he is easily angered.

These are two very different factors that lead to anger: When a person’s will is opposed, and when the element of fire is not balanced properly by the other elements in the soul. When anger is stemming from the first cause, the anger will depend on the intensity of the person’s *ratzon*/will for something. If anger is stemming from the second cause, though, a person will be easily angered, even over something he doesn’t consider that important.

The solutions to each of these two kinds of anger will be very different. When anger is stemming from the second reason (a lack of balance in the soul), this anger is much harder to treat, because he has explosions of anger over anything that frustrates him. However, the more inner a person is, he usually is angered due to the first reason: Because his *ratzon* has been opposed.

When The Ratzon (Will) Is Opposed

For example, Reuven and Shimon might go through the very same exact situation, where Shimon stays calm and Reuven gets angry. Is Shimon on a higher spiritual level than Reuven, since he didn’t get angry? It is very possible that Reuven is more spiritual than Shimon. Reuven might have a far greater balance in his soul than Shimon and he doesn’t get angry so quickly, but a certain kind of situation might trigger Reuven’s anger, if it challenged a particular *ratzon* of Reuven’s which was very strong. (If Reuven’s *ratzon* is a holy *ratzon*, then it is an even more commendable kind of anger, and this is a separate discussion for itself).

If Reuven has a generally balanced soul throughout the day, meaning that he is constantly utilizing his potential in the right way (which is a sign of a balanced soul), his faculty of *ratzon* becomes strengthened with this. That will mean that there will be certain situations that oppose a strong *ratzon* of his, which will cause him to get angry. Others will not get angered at this very same situation, because they haven’t developed their souls as much, so they didn’t feel that their *ratzon* was attacked.

The best example we can use for this is Moshe Rabbeinu. The Sages taught that when one is angered, he is apt to make mistakes.³ The Sages learned this from Moshe, who got angry once, when his *ratzon* was opposed [at the episode of the Waters of Strife].⁴ A hint to this is that the word

¹ in Hebrew, “*resichas damim*”

² *Avos* 5:11

³ *Talmud Bavli: Pesachim* 66b

⁴ *Sifrei parshas Matos* 157

“Moshe” has the same *gematria* as the word *ratzon*.⁵ Thus, we learn from this that when a person has a strong *ratzon* for something and that *ratzon* gets opposed, there will be anger.

We have absolutely no comprehension of the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu, yet the Sages learn from Moshe about the nature of anger: Anger is awakened when one’s strong *ratzon* is opposed. Furthermore, it is explained by our Sages that Moshe was born in the month where the *mazal*⁶ of “*Maadim*”⁷ is dominant, and those born under the *mazal* of *Maadim* have a nature of bloodshed.⁸ Moshe was born with a nature to become excitable and angered at others, but he rectified this trait. His outer show of anger was actually a means of how his nature was rectified.

As great as Moshe was, there was still some “anger” on Moshe Rabbeinu’s level, which we cannot understand (we don’t understand his *ratzon*, and we don’t understand his anger), and the Sages learn from what happened with Moshe about the nature of anger: anger is awakened when a person’s *ratzon* is opposed.

Beginning To Fix Anger: Analyzing Which Kind of Anger We Have

Therefore, when we begin to learn about anger, one should ask himself: “What are the things that make me angry? What are the reasons and motivating factors that cause me to get angry?”

One needs to see if he is being angered by situations that attack his *ratzon*, or if his anger is being caused by a lack of balance in his soul. Those are the two possibilities. The difference between these two sources of anger is vast, and they each need to be treated very differently.

The first source for anger, an attack on one’s *ratzon*, is reminiscent of the “anger of a Torah scholar”. The Sages state that if a young Torah scholar is angered, it is the “fire of Torah” which has angered him.⁹ Elsewhere the *Gemara* says that even so, a Torah scholar needs to be cautious with his anger, or else he will come to make mistakes as he’s angry. The *Gemara* also says that “*Kohanim* become angered easily.”¹⁰

However, if one’s anger is simply stemming from a simmering feeling of anger which makes a person’s blood boil, this is a lowlier source of anger, which stems from the animalistic, unrefined parts of the soul, and it requires a more basic kind of fixing [which will not be discussed here].

5 The word *נישה* is equal in value to the number 346, because *נ* is 40, *ש* is 300, and *ה* is 5, plus the word itself is counted as 1, adding up to a total of 346. The word *רצון* is equal to 346, because *ר* is 200, *צ* is 90, *ו* is 6, and *ן* is 50, adding up to 346. (Editor’s Note: There is a rule in *gematria* called “*am hakolel*”, that a word itself is counted as 1, thus the word *נישה* is still equal in value to the word *רצון*.)

6 astrological sign

7 Mars

8 Talmud Bavli: Shabbos 156b

9 Talmud Bavli: Taanis 4a

10 Talmud Bavli: Bava Basra 160b

Summary of the Two Sources of Anger

In summary, there are two root sources of anger (which branch out into many other kinds of anger, but these are the two roots):

(1) Anger that stems from an unmet/opposed *ratzon*. (2) Anger that stems from the “boiling of the blood”, a lack of balance in the soul, of which Chazal describe in the term, “One who is easily angered.”

Earth-of-Earth-of-Fire: Despair Caused By Anger

Returning to our topic, the anger that stems from **earth-of-earth-of-fire** – this is a kind of anger that causes a person to feel despair.

When a person’s *ratzon* is unfulfilled, what happens? There are different reactions. One kind of person will feel, “There is no such thing as despair.¹¹”. He won’t give up on his ambitions and he will keep wanting his *ratzon*. Others, however, while not getting upset at their unfulfilled *ratzon*, will still sink into a frustrated state of despair.

When a person realizes that it will take too much hard work to attain what he wants, either he will despair, or, he will feel first anger. This is what we are dealing with here: the anger will cause him to feel despair.

How does this happen? It is because anger awakens the ‘dryness’ of the element of fire in the soul. The ‘dryness’ essentially means that he loses his feeling of vitality in life. This is what the Sages mean that when a person is angry, his soul leaves him.¹²

The temporary loss of the soul, which happens to the person as he is angry, will mean that one loses his source of vitality (his “*mekor chaim*”, or his “*chiyus*”). The soul of man is called “*nefesh chayah*” (spirit of life), from the word “*chiyus*” (vitality, or life-giving energy), and when one “loses his soul” as he’s angry, he is really losing his source of vitality in life. He is left as a body with no soul. The body is made from the element of earth, so he is plunged into a ‘dry’ place where there is no real vitality.

The anger has activated the “dryness” of the soul, and now the person is wallowing in a dry and parched space. Now what will he do? Either he will give up on what he wants, which is a partial kind of despair, or, he will react with a heavier kind of despair which is more destructive. There are people who, when they don’t get what they want, become totally enraged, and they consider all of their life worthless at that point, because of something that they wanted and didn’t get.

This is what happened to Haman: “*And Haman was filled with wrath.*”¹³ After that transpired, what happened? He said, “*All of this is not worth anything to me.*”¹⁴ He reached a point of total

¹¹ Rav Nachman of Breslov said, “*There is no such thing as despair in the world.*”

¹² Zohar II 182b

despair. After that point, his anger was re-awakened, and now he was bent on taking revenge on not only Mordechai, but on the entire Jewish people. But before he hit that point, his anger had caused him to reach a state of total despair, a feeling that his entire life was worthless; only later did he realize that he can still get what he wants. That state of total despair which he fell into was due to an extreme ‘dryness’ of the soul that has been awakened by his negative ‘fire’.

When ‘dryness’ in the soul is awakened, it causes a person not only to despair from a personal *ratzon* that he has, but to enter into a general state of despair, where his entire life feels worthless. This is the kind of despair that results from anger.

Discerning The Extent of the Despair

Therefore, when one is angry, one should try to discern to how much of an extent his feeling of has become, by mentally asking himself: “Am I upset because I didn’t get something I wanted, and that is why I have given up on it? Or I am so upset at this so much to the point that I feel like everything in my life is worthless?”¹⁵

Any sensible person is aware that there is also an “in-between” level between these two reactions: A person might not come to feel that everything in his life is worthless, and he might not either give up totally on a particular *ratzon* of his that has been opposed, but he still might come to give up on other *retzonos* he has, as a result of his despair that is induced by the anger he feels.

Three Levels of Despair Caused By Anger

In summary, there are altogether three different possible reactions of despair that can ensue when a person is angry:

- (1) A person in his anger might come to despair over a particular *ratzon* that he had wanted, and this is “partial despair”.
- (2) He might come to feel a “total” level of despair, where he feels like everything is worthless, because his *ratzon* has been opposed/unmet.
- (3) The “in-between” level is that he might come to give up on other areas as well that go beyond the particular *ratzon* that has been opposed.

13 Esther 3:5

14 Esther 5:13

15 In response to a question in middle or this class, the Rav explained: All anger stems from a contradiction between the reality and the will of the person. If reality shows the persons that his will cannot be reached, the result is frustration\anger.

Analyzing The Third Possibility

Now let's analyze a deep point. In the third possibility mentioned above, where a person in his anger comes to feel despair over other things that he wanted as well, why did he react so intensely? It must be that the person's very *ratzon* was attacked, being that he wanted something very badly and he didn't get it. He feels like his entire *ratzon* has taken a hit, and that is why he will come to feel a despair over other *retzonos* that he has.

Of course, when we analyze this objectively, we can understand that this is a very illogical and negative reaction to the situation. But this is what he's thinking: he doesn't isolate the particular *ratzon* from his other *retzonos*, and therefore he comes to feel that an attacked *ratzon* of his will mean that he cannot attain any *ratzon* at all. Despair over one *ratzon* of his therefore causes him to feel despair over all of his *retzonos*.

Why, indeed, is he unable to make the distinction between one *ratzon* and the rest of his *retzonos*? If he has reacted in this way, he needs to make the following deep inner reflection, as we will explain.

When We Don't Know What We Want

Whenever a person wants something, most of the time, we do not know what we even want.

For example, a person wants a good *shidduch*, but he might not know what he's looking for. He is looking for certain qualities in a spouse but that doesn't mean he's sure of what kind of spouse he really wants. Another example: when a person is looking for a certain *Kolel* to learn in, he is looking for "a good *Kolel*", but he does not know exactly what he is looking for.

When a person is looking to buy a house, does he know exactly what he wants in a good house...? When a person wishes that he could have nachas from his children, does he know what he wants from his children...? It is no wonder that a person will become angry when things don't work out for him in these areas - he has no idea of what he really *wants* in the first place.

A person does not become unclear about what he wants as he's angry. It doesn't begin when he's angry - it begins before the anger. He doesn't know in the first place what he wants. Meaning, what he really wants is cloudy and unclear to him.

When this unclear and cloudy *ratzon* is opposed, he is not even sure of what his *ratzon* is, and he gets angry that this *ratzon* has been opposed, when he is not even clear of what it is, in the first place. So he is not either clear about what is opposing him.

Even if one is intellectually aware that his will is being opposed, he does not feel in his heart any clarity of what his *ratzon* is. That being the case, when this unclear *ratzon* of his is opposed, the opposition is not touching upon his actual *ratzon*.

Irrational Explosions of Anger

All the more so does this apply in a case where anger is not stemming from an opposition to one's *ratzon*, but because of the second reason we listed above, which is due to the "boiling of the blood". This anger is merely an explosive reaction and it will depend on a person's natural temperament, and it has nothing to do with one's faculty of *ratzon*. In the scenario, the opposition surely isn't touching upon his *ratzon*, because his anger is simply a reactive, angry explosion.

To illustrate this kind of anger, we can see it in children when they get upset. A child is upset at his sibling for taking away his toy and he's raging about it, and you try giving him a different toy in order to placate him, and he doesn't want to take it. You give him a bigger and better toy than the toy that was taken from him, yet he still doesn't want to take it. He is acting very irrational, because logic would dictate that if you're giving him an even better and more enjoyable toy to play with, the whole cause of his anger should vanish. But the child is still angry and he will not take any other toy you give him, even if he knows it's a more enjoyable toy to play with than the one that was taken from him.

This kind of anger is not being caused by an opposition to his *ratzon*, because if it was, you would be supplying his *ratzon* by giving him a better toy. This anger is not about getting what he wants. It is simply an angry tirade which is totally illogical and it is temporary insanity, where a person doesn't feel anything sensible at the moment, and he's not even aware of his *ratzon*. He loses sight of what he wants and he simply becomes enmeshed in anger.

When the child is not angry and he is calm, and we ask him which toy or candy he'd prefer, he would of course want the one we are offering to him. But as he's actually angry, it is as if he can't feel anything, and he loses his logical senses. This is because the anger in this scenario extends far past the factor of unmet *ratzon*.

We can see that even when children get older and they are more mature, they might still retain this kind of anger, where they have explosions of anger that cannot be rationally solved, and it's simply a "temper" issue. During the time of this kind of anger, a person actually loses awareness of all of his *retzonos*, and he's not consciously focused on trying to attain his *ratzon*; the intense anger silences his entire *ratzon*, because it has penetrated into all of the soul's layers.

Sometimes it is a temporary loss of the senses, and sometimes the rage will last longer. This will depend on how intense the anger is. If the anger is very strong, it can extend way past the unmet *ratzon*, shaking up all of the layers of the person's soul. This is obviously a negative and destructive kind of anger.

Fixing Anger Caused By ‘Partial’ Despair and By Unclear Ratzon

Let’s understand clearly that when a person is not clear what his *ratzon* is, he will feel much more opposition when things don’t go his way. If so many things can oppose him, this is much more harmful to him than the anger itself, because he is in a much more vulnerable state to opposition.

The beginning of the *avodah* to fix anger (this is a general approach to fixing anger, but it applies even more particularly to the particular kind of anger we are discussing, which stems from earth-of-earth-of-fire), is: To attain clarity of what exactly we want. That way, there will be a decrease in the situations that anger us, because when we are clear about what we want, the only situations that will get us angry will be situations that directly oppose our *ratzon*, and we won’t be getting angry at every situation where we feel opposed.

This is based upon the concept of “living in a clear world” (*olam barur*). It is an *avodah* to train ourselves to live in a “clear world”, to clarify what is taking place in our own inner world, where we become aware of what we really want.

In addition to this clarification process, there is an additional clarification to make, after we find ourselves getting angry. During the time of our actual anger, we cannot think rationally, for the Sages state that when a person is angry, all wisdom leaves him.¹⁶ There is no *yishuv hadaas* (calmness of mind) when we are angry. Therefore, we have to wait until the anger subsides a little, and then we can think calmly into what caused us to get angry, why exactly we felt opposed.

A person will get to know himself very well from these reflections. He will get to know what he wants, and he will realize that what thinks he “wants” isn’t that important to him as he had originally thought. It is just that when we are raging, we lose our senses and we cannot think clearly, so we aren’t able to realize that it’s not that worth it to get upset over.

Ask yourself what exactly you want, and after you have been in a situation where you got angry, ask yourself what exactly opposed you. You will see after this that a certain percentage of the anger will cease when these situations keep reappearing. This doesn’t mean you will never get angry again during these situations, but you will see a percentage of the anger go away, and your anger at these situations will be lessened, and the difference will be noticeable.

Another thing to ask yourself is: “How much do I want this thing that I want?” Usually, the cause for sudden explosions of anger in a person is when his actual *ratzon* has been opposed. Sometimes a person is aware of his actual *ratzon* before the anger awakened it, and sometimes it is anger that awakens the person’s intense *ratzon*. Either way, a person usually has an intense angry reaction when his actual *ratzon* is opposed.

Sometimes a person feels that he has been wronged by another person, and he gets a little upset, but he doesn’t get very angry. Then the same situation presents itself to the person again, and this time he’s a bit angrier than last time. Each time it happens, his anger gets stronger, and he develops a more intense kind of anger towards this situation that did not always bother him so much. It was

¹⁶ Talmud Bavli: Pesachim 66b

because he didn't really process what happened to him the first time, and slowly it dawns on him as time goes on about how he has been wronged, he absorbs what really transpired, and now he is angry at this situation when it takes place again. He wasn't aware of his *ratzon*, and now he has become aware of his *ratzon*.

The anger feels sharper with the more a person becomes aware of his *ratzon* that is being opposed. When he is aware of his *ratzon*, combined with the awareness that his *ratzon* has been attacked, he will feel anger. If the *ratzon* isn't attacked, he won't get angry.

Therefore, becoming aware of one's *retzonos* can decrease the situations that test his anger, limiting his anger only to situations that oppose his *ratzon*. This is the first step: clarifying what one really wants. The second step is to figure out how much you really want it.

In the second step, you will discover something simple that you never thought about until now: You do want it, but not as much as you thought. You will realize that the anger you feel in situations that test this *ratzon* of yours is not matching up to the intensity of the *ratzon*, so your anger at these situations will decrease.

Example of Mitigating Your Anger

Here is a simple example of how we can work on this: You are waiting at the bus stop, and the driver doesn't make the stop for you. (Stories like this happen every day). Your natural reaction is to get angry. If a person has unrefined character, he will open his mouth and express his anger. If he is a bit more refined, he will remain silent and not show any anger, but he's fuming over what has just happened and he's thinking about the loss that he now faces. But instead of getting angry, he can simply try thinking: "Why didn't the bus driver stop...?"

We do not know anything about the bus driver. Perhaps he's in a rush to get somewhere, and we view him as just a worker who has to do his job. We don't recognize this bus driver, especially because we're in a world where everyone treats each other as strangers, and we might view him as a person who has nothing to do in his life other than be a bus driver. So if we don't recognize this person and why he didn't make the stop, why should we get angry at him? He probably had some reason why he didn't make the stop, and we have no idea. Why should we let ourselves seethe over this?

Of course, you had a *ratzon* to get onto the bus, and this *ratzon* has been opposed. But you can calm this *ratzon* by telling yourself that it will only take a few minutes to wait for the next bus. In other words, you can measure how much you really want this *ratzon* to materialize. You will see that although you had the *ratzon* to get onto this bus, it is not as important to you as you thought, and it is definitely not worth getting upset about. Thus, although anger is activated even when a minimal *ratzon* of ours is opposed, we also have the ability to lessen its intensity and its frequency, when we become aware of our *ratzon* and how much we want the *ratzon*.

Certainly, anger can stem from “boiling of the blood” as mentioned earlier, and it can also stem from an opposed *ratzon*, which is what we discussed here. In either case, while we are actually angry, we do not have the calmness to wonder where the anger is coming from. But after the anger has subsided and we are a bit calmer, we can now wonder how much we wanted the *ratzon* that we didn’t get, and then we discover that although we had a *ratzon* for a certain thing, the amount of anger we had over it doesn’t match up to the intensity of the *ratzon* and therefore it wasn’t worth it to get angry over this minimal *ratzon* we had.

There do exist some people who have no *yishuv hadaas*¹⁷ and they have no self-control over themselves, and for such people, this kind of reflection will not be that helpful to them. But when one lives a more thinking kind of life and he is interested in making regular self-accounting, he can try reflecting like this after he has gotten angry, and he will come to understand what exactly has awakened his anger, and he will also be able to calm the anger to a large extent. Of course, it will take time to change. A person will still get angry at the old situations that bother him, but we can compare it to a pot of boiling water that takes some time until it is cooled and it becomes lukewarm.

In Summary

We discussed here anger that stems from earth-of-earth-of-fire, which is an anger that results from despair. We explained that there are three forms of this kind of despair induced by anger: Partial despair, total despair, and an anger that stems from an unclear *ratzon* in the person.

The *avodah* of fixing this particular kind of anger (and all anger in general), in the first step as we said, is to clarify one’s *retzonos*. One should know his *retzonos* both on a general level as well as on a more particular level. The second step applies after one has gotten angry and he has calmed down, where he should reflect: “What did I want, that I got upset about it? What exactly made me feel opposed? And how much did I want it?”

By getting used to this exercise, a large percentage of the anger will cease, when these same situations reappear.

Fixing ‘Total’ Despair Caused By Anger

The above solution will be able to weaken anger that causes despair on a partial level, such as when it causes us to despair on a particular *ratzon* we have, or when it causes us to despair on some other *retzonos* we have. But how do we do deal with “total” despair that results from anger, where a person comes to feel that everything in his life is worthless, as a result of an unmet *ratzon*?

This problem does not affect most people and only a few people can relate to it, but we will briefly explain the *avodah* that is necessary for this, which is different than the earlier solution.

¹⁷ lit. “settled mind”

The less mature a person is, the more he sees things in one-dimensional terms, seeing only two sides. He weighs everything in terms of two sides facing each other, he sees things as either black or white, negative or positive, good or bad, etc. This is the result of living in *katnus hadaas* (smallness of mind; undeveloped mind). By contrast, the more a person matures, the more he sees how everything is multi-layered.

When a person lives in *katnus* (immaturity), he is apt to fall into total despair over his entire life when things don't go his way, even over things that are not that are not of major concern. His entire life, and all of Creation, is deemed worthless to him, simply because something hasn't worked out for him. But the more a person matures inwardly and he lives a more inner kind of life, a life of soul awareness – he realizes that life requires a step-by-step process, and his attitude of “all or nothing” ceases with time.

When a person has an “all or nothing” attitude, giving up on everything in his life when something frustrates him, this is a reaction, which usually stems from an immature view towards the world, where a person sees everything in extreme terms, seeing things in terms of black or white. We have explained elsewhere of how a person can leave this immature perspective.¹⁸

This kind of total despair over everything in one's life would make sense only if a very deep *ratzon* of the person was opposed, where a person feels like his essence has been attacked. This situation is different than the immature kind of anger-despair that we discussed above.

With this, we conclude our discussion of anger that stems from **earth-of-earth-of-fire**.

¹⁸ Refer to Fixing Your Wind #015 – Self-Absorption

2 | *Advice On Reducing Anger*

Anger Stemming From Water-of-Earth-of-Fire: A Loss of Energy Amidst Anger

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will continue here to learn about the element of fire and its resulting trait, anger. Previously, we discussed anger that stems from earth-of-earth-of-fire. Now we will discuss, with Hashem's help, the anger stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**.

As mentioned in the first chapter, **water-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person's vitality (his *chiyus*) leaves him as he is angry. Our life-giving energy (our *chiyus*) enters us as we inhale and exhale, which is through our nose; in Hebrew, the nose is called "*af*", which is another term for "anger", as in the term "*charon af*" (lit. "wrath of the nostrils").

When a person is angry, he has "*charon af*". His soul leaves him, as our Sages explain¹⁹, and his life-giving energy leaves him with this.

Lessening Our Anger

The stronger the anger, the more a person loses his *chiyus*/vitality as he's angry. The intensity of anger is not always the same each time, and therefore the loss of *chiyus* is not always on the same level.

For this reason, in order to repair anger that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire** - which is when a person loses his vitality as he's angry - the solution will lie in lessening the intensity of the anger. The complete level of *tikkun* (rectification) will of course lie in uprooting anger itself, but long before a person reaches this complete level, he can still rectify his anger, when he lessens his anger.

When a person realizes that getting angry makes him lose his *chiyus*, this can greatly aid him in avoiding anger, and this is a part of the rectification process of anger.

We will mention here several methods which can aid a person in lessening his anger, and they add to the solutions explained in the first chapter. However, these solutions are not only to be used specifically with regards to the kind of anger we are discussing this chapter. We will need to make use of these solutions when we discuss the other kinds of anger which we will discuss in later chapters, with *siyata d'shmaya*. Here we will try to present the roots of these matters.

¹⁹ Zohar II 182b

Preparing Before The Anger

When a person knows beforehand that he will be in situations which will anger him, and he prepares beforehand, this can lessen the anger when it comes. For example, we know that in the winter, where Shabbos is earlier, Fridays are shorter and are much more stressful. Our anger is tested more frequently during these short Fridays when we are preparing for Shabbos. Therefore, we can prepare ourselves before these situations arise, by realizing that these situations will probably test our patience, and in this way, we experience much less anger when those stressful situations come.

We will soon explain how exactly we can prepare beforehand for these situations, but the first step is to simply prepare ourselves for these stressful situations and to be aware that these situations test our anger. In this way, we save ourselves from the surprising stress of these situations, and the intensity of the anger we feel will then be much less.

The way this works is because anger stems from fire, and fire has a jumpy nature, so if we ‘stave’ the fire from beforehand, the jumpy nature of fire will act restrained when the fire is eventually activated. This is not merely a piece of advice that lessens anger. It is a solution that deals directly with the root of anger. The very essence of anger is that it is fueled by its jumpy and unrestrained nature, so if we manage to slow down the fire (by stabilizing it from beforehand), this will contradict the very nature of fire, and then the very ‘fire’ is prevented from getting sparked in the first place.

The idea is to stabilize the element of ‘fire’ before it is activated, because it is much harder to restrain fire while it is burning. Whereas the elements of earth and water are calmer elements to deal with, because earth and water do not move that much, the element of fire is jumpy by its very nature, so it is hard to restrain once it is activated. (If we analyze this further, this is actually due to the “wind” present in fire, which is the “movement” within fire).

Therefore, if we restrain the ‘fire’ from beforehand [in our case, by preparing ourselves for the situations that anger us], the fire will then perform in a more delayed manner and it will not spread as much, decreasing the reach of the fire (This is called “*tzimtzum*”\narrowing).

Preventing the fire/anger from beforehand will not entirely uproot the anger when it comes, as we can see in what happens with most cases, but it will definitely weaken the extent of the anger.

Method 1: Don’t Think Or Talk About The Anger

Now we will discuss how we can deal with anger when we’re actually experiencing it.

When a person becomes angry, we can all recognize that there are two stages of the anger. The very first moment of anger is one stage, and the next stage is the anger that spreads from there. The more a person thinks about what’s angering him, the angrier he becomes, like a fire that is being blown at and spreading.

Therefore, in order to prevent the anger from getting worse, the first step (upon becoming aware of the reason that made him angry), is: Do not continue to think about what has just happened, and do not express it verbally either. If you keep thinking or talking about what made you angry, this is like blowing wind upon a fire, and the anger will continue to burn and get worse.

Method 2 – Shifting The Focus

An additional advice to lessen anger as it comes is to employ the ability known as “*hesech hadaas*” – removing your mind from the current thoughts, and steering your thoughts in a different direction.

There are two ways how you can use *hesech hadaas*: one way is a positive use, and another way is in a more negative use (each of these can be helpful).

2A) “Positive” Hesech HaDaas

Using “positive” *hesech hadaas* is by keeping the focus of your mind on an inner, spiritual kind of thought which you find pleasant to think about, and connect yourself to that thought. In this way, you take your mind off what’s angering you and your mind is instead drawn towards a pleasant thought that you have prepared for yourself from beforehand.

2B) “Negative” Hesech HaDaas

An alternative way of how you can use *hesech hadaas* is to “switch evil for another kind of evil”, in our case, by leaving the anger mode and instead entering into a different negative character trait. This method was used by some of our Sages, but it contains a danger, as we will soon explain. An example of this method is that when a person is angry and he wants to calm the anger, by engaging in some kind of indulgence or desire that pulls him away from what’s he’s currently involved with, he stops thinking about his anger and he is instead immersed in fulfilling the desire.

Rav Dessler said that when he was a child and he had a hard time getting up for *davening* on Shabbos morning, he needed candies as an incentive to help get him up. He discovered that a negative *middah* (in this case, *taavah*\desire) can be used to over a different negative *middah*, laziness. As a child, he used his desire for the sweets overcame his laziness, so he used a negative *middah* to weaken a different negative *middah*.

Using this method of “switching evil for evil” can weaken the anger, when one gets busy with a different desire of his as he is angry.

But the danger of it is that it awakens other negative character traits, and it might cause a person to further enlarge the negative character trait he is using. For example, in the example we gave, where one switches anger for desire, he gets involved with some kind of indulgence instead of being angry, and he might become gluttonous in the process.

Therefore, if one is using this method of “switching evil for evil”, he would need to pray to Hashem for special assistance that he not be harmed by using this method.

In Summary of the “Hesech HaDaas” Solution

In summary, we mentioned two different ways to apply *hesech hadaas*: to take your mind off the angry situation by thinking about a certain holy thought that you find pleasant to think about, or by indulging in something else, which steers the mind away from the anger.

One can also use *hesech hadaas* to think about anything else in particular that he wishes to think about it. However, this is not very feasible when one is very angry. This is because the anger is far more interesting to the person than some random thought about something else which is not particularly interesting to the person.

Therefore, in order to use *hesech hadaas* to deal with anger, it is recommended to prepare a certain thought that you like to think about, which will interest you more than the anger, and that is where you should steer your mind to when you are angry.

Method 3 – Pushing Off The Anger

Additionally, similar to what we discussed about using the trait of desire to disconnect the mind from anger, one can try another method that our Sages recommended: One can try putting off the anger for later.

If you try to tell a person when he’s angry “Don’t be angry!” he might feel that this is too high of a level for him to be on. Therefore, the advice is to push off the anger for later. Usually the anger will subside in between, “slowing down” the jumpiness of the fire. Getting used to this method can greatly weaken one’s anger. By constantly interrupting the anger, the fire of the anger is not given a chance to build up its fuel. Again, let us emphasize that this does not completely get rid of the anger. But it certainly lessens anger.

Method 4 – Weakening The Anger While You Are Angry

An additional method to weaken anger, which is a more subtle kind of exercise, is that one can try lessening his anger even as he’s angry. Although he may not succeed in totally restraining his

anger, it still lessens the intensity of the anger, and therefore it is still helpful to lessen the anger somewhat.

So even when a person is very angry and he feels the anger burning in himself, he can still practice minimizing his feeling of anger as much as possible. Although he is still angry, he is still lessening the intensity of the anger, which is a worthwhile gain. The very act of trying to lessen the anger will certainly prevent the anger from getting too out of hand, and it will place some restraint on the anger, preventing it from spreading any further.

Method 5 – Contemplate The Verse “Remove Anger From Your Heart”

An additional method in lessening anger is based upon the advice of Rav Yisrael Salanter, who wrote that when a person wants to fix a particular negative trait, he should study the parts of Torah that explain that character trait, and even more so, he should also contemplate Torah verses that speak about the character trait.

With regards to our subject, uprooting anger, one can keep reviewing the verse, "הסר כעס מלבך", "Remove anger from your heart".²⁰

Besides for the fact that this is a *segulah* (a spiritual charm\remedy) to chip away at anger, it is essentially a spiritual light that becomes lit within one's own inner world as he says the words of the Torah which disparage anger. It is the "light of Torah" that has been ignited within him which is weakening the anger.

This is based upon the concept of "Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world"²¹. Hashem has placed into the Torah a spiritual light which enables us to create new possibilities, when we tap into the Torah's power; specifically, when we review and contemplate the particular verses in the Torah that speak about character refinement.

When one reviews this verse of the Torah, "Remove anger from your heart", and he reviews it 10 and 20 times and more, he taps into the Torah's light and he can be improved by it. The letters of the holy Torah that he is studying and verbalizing contain the spiritual light that can affect him, and by reviewing this verse of Torah again and again, one can weaken his anger.

Method 6 – Judge The Other Favorably

An additional method to weaken anger, which is a more subtle method to use, is to be "*dan l'kaf zechus*" – judging the other favorably.

²⁰ *Koheles 11:1*

²¹ *Zohar parshas Terumah 161b*

(There are generally three situations of anger. One kind of anger is where a person gets angry at another, another kind of anger is where a person is angry at himself, and another kind of anger is when one is angry at Hashem, *chas v'shalom* (which borderlines on heresy). In most cases of anger, a person's anger is directed at others. That being the case, one of the ways to lessen anger is to judge others favorably.)

However, this method will not always be practical, because if the anger is very strong, it is hard to judge the other favorably, and the smaller the anger, the easier it is to judge another favorably. The power to judge others favorably is an ability of our rational intellect, but anger stems from the element of fire, which is an emotional aspect. Therefore, judging others favorably doesn't work in most situations of anger, because usually the strong emotion of the anger overpowers the intellect's ability to rationalize.

In addition, the Sages state that when the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is present, there is no mention of the *yetzer tov*²² (the good inclination), thus, when a person is angry, his *yetzer hora* is dominating, so it is very difficult for one to gain control over his emotions. Most people, even when they are calm, are not that much in control over their rational mind to the point that their mind can dominate their emotions; and surely when most people are angry, they have difficulty in controlling their intense emotions. Therefore, it is difficult to judge others favorably when one is angry.

The only exceptions to this are: (1) Those who can maintain extraordinary self-control over their emotions in all situations, (2) If the person's anger was not that intense to begin with, (3) People who are regularly involved and immersed in the *avodah* of judging others favorably and they apply it to all areas of their life.

Such people are able to judge others favorably even when they are angry at others, but most people are not any of the above three categories, and therefore, it is very difficult and impractical for most people to try to judge others favorably while they are angry.

Method 7 - Ahavas Yisrael

Another method that can be used to lessen anger is to awaken one's *ahavas Yisrael* (love for the Jewish people). The more a person has revealed *ahavas Yisrael* to all Jews (and this means that he feels a deep connection in his soul to all Jews, with no exceptions), the less angry he will be others, even when he is actually angry. Even if his anger is awakened at another, his love will be reawakened with it, and the love will overcome the anger.

To illustrate why this works, we see that when children anger their parents, the parent is angry, but soon after his love for the child is reawakened, and the love makes him overcome the anger. This is true even when the child has greatly angered the parent, because love has the power to weaken anger.

²² *Nedarim 32a*

Therefore, the more a person loves other Jews, *before* he is angered by them, the more he will be able to overcome his anger at others, when he gets angry.

But it won't be practical to start having *ahavas Yisrael* when you are angry. The *ahavas Yisrael* has to already be developed from beforehand, in order for the *ahavas Yisrael* to overcome the anger when the anger comes. It will be almost pointless to try to begin loving the other person when you are angry. You cannot suddenly have a change of heart, as your heart is burning with anger. But if you have developed a love for him from beforehand, it is much easier to awaken love towards him when he angers you, because it will already be in place.

It is in fact difficult for a person to reach true *ahavas Yisrael* to others in the first place. *Ahavas Yisrael* is reached when a person feels deeply and truly that his soul is part and parcel with all other Jewish souls and he realizes that "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one."²³ Although a Jew can know of this lofty concept, that doesn't mean that he has reached it, because this recognition can still be very distant from being felt in the heart, and it is certainly very hard to think of when a person is angry at another person.

But if a person has worked on his *ahavas Yisrael* before he is angry, there is a much higher chance that he will be able to lessen his anger when he is angry at someone.

Method 8 - Emunah

An additional method to weaken anger, which is very clear to all, is to awaken *emunah* (belief in Hashem's Divine Providence).

When Dovid HaMelech was hailed with curses by Shimi ben Geira, he did not retaliate, and when others wanted to attack him for it, he did not allow them, and instead he said, "*It is Hashem who told him to curse.*"²⁴ Anger at another person, in all cases, is always rooted in a lack of *emunah* that this happened due to Hashem's will.

When a person is angry at Hashem, there it is obvious that he needs to rectify this with *emunah*. (When anger is directed at oneself, this is a separate topic which we will explain later). But anger is usually directed at others. The stronger a person's *emunah*, the more he can recognize that nobody else can harm him unless Hashem has decreed that it happen. It is not "this" person or "that" person who has hurt you; it is Hashem's will that it happened. The more you have this *emunah*, the less angry you will be at the person who has harmed you. The depth of *emunah* is to see Hashem as the sole Performer behind every action and every person your encounter.

So the more a person lives with *emunah*, the weaker his anger will be. This does not mean that he will never get angry anymore. It means that when he gets angry, the anger will be lessened, to a

²³ Zohar I parshas Achrei Mos 73a

²⁴ Shmuel II 16:10

prominent and noticeable degree. The more a person has worked on his *emunah* from beforehand, the easier it will be to summon forth *emunah* when one is angry.

The depth of *emunah* does not mean simply that Hashem does everything. Hashem certainly does everything, and everything He does is good, but the power of *emunah* is essentially to make use a spiritual light, which awakens the true inner *ratzon* (will) of the soul which only desires Hashem's will – even when one is angry.

Thus, *emunah* rectifies the faculty of *ratzon* in the soul, because it enables a person to feel that he should want what Hashem wants; it enables a *bittul* (nullification) of one's personal *ratzon*, in favor of Hashem's *ratzon*.

Emunah fixes anger at its root. From all of the methods in weakening anger, the root method in getting rid of anger is to use the power of *emunah*. In the previous chapter, we explained that the stronger one's personal *ratzon*, the stronger the anger will be when the *ratzon* is attacked. But if one has the ability to nullify his *ratzon* in favor of Hashem's will, the anger is weakened before it even surfaces. When something happens that doesn't go his way, the person who has developed strong *emunah* is able to awaken his understanding of the truth that this is Hashem's will.

Thus, the depth of using *emunah* to fix anger does not simply mean that now that I am angry, "I must remind myself that Hashem has caused this to happen." That would imply that I am still angry, but I have no choice but to believe that it's all from Hashem, without actually nullifying my own *ratzon* to Hashem. Instead, the more inner attitude is that my own *ratzon* is nullified to the *ratzon* of Hashem, therefore my very "I" doesn't want anything other than what Hashem wants. The inner attitude of *emunah* is that if Hashem wanted something to happen, then I must want it to, for my *ratzon* is nullified to His *ratzon*.

These are not merely superficial words. If one has truly worked on his *emunah*, the spiritual light of the *emunah* will have directly affected the *ratzon* in the soul, and then a person's *ratzon* will feel nullified to the *ratzon* of Hashem.

Defining The Concept of "Nullifying The Will"

However, this is a power that contains a danger, when it is used in the wrong place. There are people who regularly use the power of *emunah* in this way, always reminding themselves that they must nullify their *ratzon* to Hashem's will, but then they despair on their entire life. They keep nullifying their *ratzon*, which eventually destroys their *ratzon* altogether, so they give up on ever attaining anything they want in their life, and they give up on their life altogether.

Therefore, we need to really clarify what it means to nullify one's *ratzon*. Nullifying your *ratzon* means that *you* want what *Hashem* wants. It is a very subtle point.

If *bittul haratzon* means that I must simply give up whatever I want because I know that Hashem wants otherwise, that would mean that if I miss the bus in the morning and I come late to Kolel, I

must want what Hashem wants, and since Hashem wanted me to miss this bus for some reason, it must mean that it was His will that I should also lose time from Torah learning. With this attitude, a person would come to be lax with his time for learning Torah.

Bittul haratzon, when not understood properly, can cause a person to despair on reaching any of his *retzonos*, even his *retzonos* that are holy and proper. Therefore, *bittul haratzon* doesn't mean that I don't want my *ratzon* if Hashem willed otherwise. It means that **my *ratzon* becomes aligned with Hashem's will, and now this is what I want**. It is essentially to awaken the inner will of the soul, which is: "***Retzoinenu Laasos Retzoncha***", "It is our will to do Your will."²⁵

Nullifying one's will for Hashem's will therefore **does not** mean that I don't want my *ratzon* anymore; it means that **I want what Hashem wants**. This is what is meant by "*Chaim b'retzono*", "Life according to His will."²⁶

Thus, *emunah* enables a person to nullify his *retzonos* for Hashem and to reach the inner and holy *ratzon*, which is "*Retzoinenu Laasos Retzoncha*". This is the deepest method to prevent and rectify anger. We have so far listed several methods (in order of lower level to higher level), and this method, *emunah/bittul haratzon*, is the highest and the most complete rectification of anger.

These Methods Are Applicable To All Kinds of Anger

Depending on which method a person uses to weaken his anger, to that degree will he regain the *chiyus/vitality* that he has lost as he was angry.

As mentioned before, all of these methods explained here are not uniquely applicable to the subject we are discussing, which is anger that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire** (a loss of vitality when one is angry), for these are all methods that can be used to solve all kinds of anger. We mentioned all of these methods here with regards to anger that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire** only because they are directly relevant to this kind of anger, but they can be applied to all kinds of anger.

Regaining Your Lost Vitality: Becoming Aware Of What Gives You Vitality

Now let's deal with the anger that stems uniquely from **water-of-earth-of-fire**, the subject of this chapter, which is when anger results in a loss of *chiyus/vitality*.

A person can use any of the methods listed above or he can use a few of them at once (but he definitely should not try to use all of them at once, because this is unrealistic), but either way, there is always a loss of vitality as a person is angry, whether he has succeeded in lessening the anger or not.

²⁵ *Berachos 17a*

²⁶ *Tebillim 30:6*

The solution to this is to become clear about one's source of *chiyus*\vitality. One must know: "What provides me with vitality? From where do I get my *chiyus* from?" After one has gotten angry and he senses a loss of his *chiyus*, now that he is aware of it, he should awaken in himself a reason to give himself *chiyus*. But one has to know what gives him *chiyus*, in order to awaken it.

If one merits it, he gets his *chiyus* in life from *d'veykus*²⁷ in Hashem, from learning Torah. We say of the words of Torah "for they are our life", the Torah is the ultimate source of vitality in our life, but this is only to those who merit it. One has to know clearly of what really gives him *chiyus* in his life and then awaken that *chiyus*, so that he can regain the *chiyus* he has lost when has gotten angry.

The less clear a person is about what gives him *chiyus* in his life, he will not be able to regain his lost vitality when he is angry. The more a person is living with clarity towards his life, he is clearer about what gives him vitality, when his anger is awakened and he feels like he has dried up from vitality, he has a source to go back to re-awaken his vitality. Similar to this method is another method we mentioned earlier, which is to get involved with another character trait that provides a person with vitality, such as desire. When a person becomes involved with a particular desire, this can provide him with vitality, and then he can then regain the vitality he lost when he was angry. However, we mentioned earlier that this method contains a danger, as it might awaken other negative character traits in the soul.

Sometimes a person will need to make use of this solution when his *nefesh habehaimis*²⁸ dominates and he is not on the level of implementing any spiritual solutions. But even when this solution is used, it needs to be used sensibly, and one will need to pray to Hashem for assistance. Whenever we involve ourselves in something that is "permissible" but it is not holy, we need special assistance from Hashem to succeed with it and not have a spiritual fall, and thus we need to pray to Hashem for assistance, if we are using this solution.

The main source of *chiyus*\vitality that we need, in order to regain the lost vitality that results from anger, is to derive our *chiyus* from "Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one." When our main *chiyus* in life is coming from being connected with Hashem's Torah, we will then have a *chiyus* to return to even after we have lost our *chiyus* from getting angry. In that way, even when we fall into anger, the anger becomes a catalyst for spiritual growth, and we ascend from the fall.

This will not mean that the anger has been completely rectified. There is still more inner work to be done on uprooting anger in general, but at least we will regain our lost vitality that results from anger and to become alive again with *chiyus*; it is a degree of the revival of the dead. When we utilize our situations of anger in this way, it becomes a "descent for the purpose of ascent" (*yeridah l'tzorech aliyah*). It is written, "Because I have fallen, I have risen"²⁹, and, similarly, "A righteous one falls seven times, and rises."³⁰ Through our failures, where we fall, we are presented with opportunities to rise higher than before.

²⁷ attachment; closeness

²⁸ lower, animalistic layer of the soul

²⁹ Michah 7:8

³⁰ Mishlei 24:16

3 | *Paralyzing Anger*

Anger Stemming From Wind-of-Earth-of-Fire: When Anger Paralyzes

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will continue to explain the element of fire, the root of the trait of anger. Now we will discuss anger that stems from **wind**-of-earth-of-fire. As mentioned briefly in the introductory chapter, wind-of-earth-of-fire refers to the movements (wind) that result from anger.

When a person is angry, one of the things that happen is that his movements are weakened, and his element of earth takes over, which can somewhat of a 'paralyzing' effect on his movements.

We can see this on an extreme level with children, and also with some adults, that when they get angry, they feel like they can't move, they become melancholy, and they take to their beds and go to sleep. Their element of earth becomes dominant as they are angry, and they feel like they can't do anything as they are angry. Their wind/movement is weakened by the dominant amount of earth, making them want to go to sleep and not do anything.

Even if this is not necessarily what happens, there is also a more subtle result of this kind of anger. As explained in previous chapters, anger is a result an opposed will; when one's *ratzon* (will) has been attacked or it is unrealized, a person is angered. Anger is not always a fiery display of rage. Anger can also be quietly experienced as a subtle feeling. As long as a person feels an opposition to his will, he is angered at this.

The result of the frustration can certainly lead to despair (the subject of the first chapter) a loss of vitality (the subject of the previous chapter), and to a state of paralysis (the subject we are currently discussing).

But let's understand the following. When a person's will is opposed, he had a certain reason that he wanted such a will and he considers it to be his current goal and purpose in life. A person wants a certain desire and he tries to get it, so he views obtaining the desire as his current purpose in life. When a person is trying to get something he wants and he is actively striving to get it, and he doesn't get what he wants, the result is anger.

This gives us more of an insight into understanding anger. At first we defined anger in the general sense of the will being opposed. Now we are explaining more about how this works. When a person is moving towards a certain goal and he doesn't arrive at the goal he was striving for, he is angered. This is not simply because his will was opposed. It is a little more than that: it is because the movements in his soul haven't gotten to their desired goal. The result is anger, and therefore, anger can cause a restraint on one's movements.

This is the anger that stems from **wind-of-earth-of-fire**.

Analyzing The Motivations In Our Actions

In order to tackle this kind of anger, then, we need to analyze the root of our motivations in our acts, of what makes us strive towards our various goals and ambitions.

Most people in the world are working towards goals, and even if it seems that there are people who are not working towards a goal, there is still a reason each person has of why he is doing certain actions. So every person is doing certain acts for certain reasons. When a person doesn't get what he wants after actively striving to get it, either he might tell himself that he shouldn't get his hopes up anymore about anything and he will come to feel despair (earth), or he might keep performing in the hope that he will eventually get what he wants (wind).

If we don't know the reason of why we are doing a certain action, the chances of getting angry are much higher, because we don't know what we are aiming for in the first place. But even more so, we need to get to the inner root of all our actions – the inner motivation of why we must act.

Letting Go Of Our Self In Our Actions

Let's go deeper with this analysis into our actions.

Avraham and Sarah taught the world about Hashem and they made many converts. What happened to all of those converts? The Sages explain that as soon as Avraham left the world, the converts went back to their old ways. If so, what did Avraham gain? Simply, we can say that he brought holiness into the world for the time that these converts remained loyal. This is true, but there is a deeper way to understand it. It is to show us that the actions of man can never be completely realized. That being the case, all our actions/*mitzvos* must be done solely because it is Hashem's will that we do them - even if we were to gain nothing from it in the end.

A very good example of this is Moshe Rabbeinu, whose life's purpose was to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt and bring them to *Eretz Yisrael*. The entire generation which he led did not make it to *Eretz Yisrael*, and he did not either make it. If so, what did he gain from all of his actions in leading the Jewish people, when he did not reach the goal? But it shows us that a person must do everything simply because it is Hashem's will. Every time that Moshe led the Jewish people, he was doing Hashem's will, and this was the purpose.

Hashem created His world with its people and He does not need any of their actions. It is simply His will that we do certain actions that He has commanded us to do; all of the 613 *mitzvos*. We must do them whether we understand them or not.

For example, when one is putting his *tefillin*, he might be thinking that he is building the spiritual realms, as explained in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*. Indeed, this is true, but others put in *tefillin* with an even more inner perspective: because it is simply Hashem's will that we put on *tefillin*! This

is based on the words of the *Gemara*, “Why do we blow shofar? Because Hashem said to blow!”³¹ Even if *tefillin* wouldn’t build any worlds, we would have to put it on, simply because it is Hashem’s will that we do so. In fact, even if Hashem would have made it that it destroys worlds, we would have to put it on! But not many people would be willing to do it if that’s the case. Yet, this is the inner perspective which we need to strive to internalize.

Man naturally needs to feel that there is some gain and some purpose in everything he is doing. He must think that he is building something and getting some *toeles* (purpose) out of it. But the inner perspective to have is that “we are servants of Hashem”, and therefore, it should not make a difference to us if we get a *toeles* or not from all that we do. The true meaning of being a “servant” to Hashem is that we serve Him even if our acts wouldn’t cause anything good to happen. He simply wants us to act according to how He has told us to act.

If Hashem would command a person to do something and he would get absolutely no reward for it, would he listen? Would a person do something for Hashem if he will gain absolutely nothing from it?

Most people would not be willing to do it. The greatness of Moshe was that was nullified to Hashem in this way. Avraham *Avinu* fathered a wayward son, Yishmael, and Yitzchok *Avinu* had a wicked son Esav. All of their hard work on these children did not amount to anything, and their efforts on them were for naught. They did not despair from this and they kept being the servants of Hashem, even after going through such a setback like this; that was their greatness.

The pain of fruitless effort, after having toiled so many years, would be unbearable to any normal person, who cannot accept that his actions do not amount to anything. When people realize that they were unsuccessful after all that they did, the natural result is anger, disappointment, and sadness.

Each person, at some point, will need to realize that he must choose, to be willing to be nullified to Hashem, in the sense that he is letting go of any personal gain. Therefore, a person should know if he is doing his actions purely to get his goal, or if he is ready to perform even if he were to get nothing out of it. Hashem created us with a nature to see our goals met, but it is this very nature which we must also return to Hashem and let go of.

This is a deep use of our *bechirah* (free will). The first and elementary stage of *bechirah* is to choose between good and evil, and the second, deeper level of *bechirah* is, to choose to be prepared to do all of our actions for Hashem even if you were to gain absolutely nothing from it. This concept has many applications. At first when we hear of this concept it sounds too lofty, but every person at some point will need to realize it.

³¹ *Rosh HaShanah 16b*

Why People Want To Be Remembered

Most people want something to remain of themselves on this world after they die - they want to “leave their mark” on this world. Some people want buildings to be named after them. Others are more spiritual with this desire, so they will write a *sefer* with their *divrei Torah*, this way they know that something will remain of them on this world. But let us think about this.

Why do people want something to remain of them on this world? Man lives on average for 70-80 years and his life will feel “like a passing dream”³² when he dies. Shlomo HaMelech said in *Koheles* that there is no memory of our past life! If nothing is to be remembered of us anyway, why do people wish so badly to be remembered on this world?

It is because nobody would want to feel that all of his lifetime was for nothing. Therefore, a person feels that he must know that something will remain of him after he leaves the world, so that he will never come to have a feeling that his life was all in vain.

But when a person lives with an inner perspective, he understands: What is so bad if nothing remains of a person on this world after he dies? What would happen if nobody remembers that he died...? Why must a person feel that everyone should know of his *yahrtzeit*...? (Aside from the fact that he might not know why he was living in the first place...)

When a person is aware of why Hashem created him and he truly serves the Creator, it does not make a difference to him if he will be remembered or not after he dies. To illustrate, look at a rock outside. Does it make a difference to you if this rock won't be here tomorrow? Just like it doesn't bother us if a rock will go missing in Creation, so should it not bother a person if there would be no remembrance of him.

This deep perspective will only be possible when a person is truly serving the Creator and he lives to do His will. But when someone is not able to live selflessly for Hashem, then it will not be possible for a person to accept that he doesn't have to be remembered after he dies.

Anger and The “I”

Based upon the above, we can now understand that anger is linked directly with the “I” of man. Anger means that “my” will has been opposed, “I” did not get the goal I wanted, and therefore “I” am angered. But if one gets to the inner root of his actions – the fact that we must act solely because it is Hashem's will that we act - he greatly lessens the opportunities for anger.

More specifically, acquiring this attitude is what rectifies the anger stemming from **“wind”-of-earth-of-fire**, which is when a person becomes angry after his will has been opposed, to the point that he feels paralyzed.

³² As we say in the prayer of “U’Nesaneh Tokef” on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

Practically Working On This Concept

If someone tries to quickly attain this high level being described, he is being delusional. To practically work on the concept, one should take one of his actions and be prepared to do it for Hashem even if nothing will come from it. He should do it simply because it is the will of Hashem, and for no other personal reason or gain.

This is also the depth of the concept of acting *lishmah* (for non-ulterior motivations). There are many levels to *lishmah*, level within level, but here, it has been described the deepest level of *lishmah*. The deep nature of our soul is prepared to act *lishmah* for Hashem.³³

The Roles of The Heart and Mind In “Lishmah”

So far, we have described a role of our “heart” in *lishmah*. What is the role of our “mind” in *lishmah*? The thoughts we need to think are that we are found in Hashem’s world, not our world. Hashem’s thoughts are very deep, as it is written, “*Your thoughts are very deep*”, so we do not comprehend Hashem’s purpose in creating the world, in creating us, and why we must do certain things for Him. That is the why we must do all of the actions required of us.

Any of the reasons which we do understand are but slivers of understanding which are meant to aid us and give us some appreciation of what we doing, but we do not know the actual reasons of why we must do all of the acts that we must do for Hashem. There is a famous statement in our *sefarim hakedoshim*, “The purpose of knowing is to know that we do not know.”³⁴

To illustrate, the Ramchal³⁵ lists several reasons of the purpose of Creation, and after all of them, he writes that the ultimate purpose in Creation is that Hashem’s name be revealed. All of these understandings are just drawing us closer, but we do not comprehend the actual reasons. As the Chazon Ish said, “The world is a closed riddle”.³⁶ We do not understand the Creator’s reason in creating us, and anything we do understand is simply to draw us closer to act correctly, but we still do not comprehend anything.

This must give us a totally different perspective towards life. When we get up in the morning, we can remind ourselves that we are living in Hashem’s world, and we do all of our actions *mitzvos* simply because Hashem has commanded us to. It is about *what* we must do, not *why* we must do.

In this way, we can live a life of being nullified to Hashem. Without being aware of the concepts described above, many people cannot handle the mention of such a thought.

³³ For more on this concept, see *Fixing Your Water_015_The Desire To Progress Continuously*

³⁴ *sefer Bechinas Olam 13a, 33a.*

³⁵ *in sefer Daas Tevunos*

³⁶ *Eemunah U’Bitachon: 1*

In Conclusion

Acquiring this perspective (becoming aware of the fact that this world is Hashem's world and it is not ours, and that we must be willing to let go of any personal gain if Hashem were to ask it of us) greatly lessens the opportunities for anger, and in particular, it helps fix the paralyzing kind of anger that stems from **wind-of-earth-of-fire**. It instead replaces the imbalance of "wind" in the soul with an awakening of the holy kind of "wind", the inner root of all motivations: to be prepared solely to do Hashem's will.

We cannot reach this point completely, because it is a very high level, but we can certainly touch upon it, each day. Every day you can take one *mitzvah* and be prepared to let go of any personal gain from it, and do it solely because it is Hashem's will and for no other reason. Getting used to this draws you closer and closer to a *lishmah* kind of life, and it is explained in our *sefarim hakedoshim* that *lishmah* is the secret of all *avodas Hashem*.

We must again emphasize and warn, however, that you should not try to grab this level too fast, nor should you should practice it so much. This is because it is a very high level, and one should not delude himself that he is acting entirely for Hashem. Instead, do this realistically and practically by just taking one *mitzvah* a day and to do it solely for Hashem's will, and for no other personal gain.

It indeed takes a lot of wisdom of life and prayer in order to touch upon this point in a sensible way. But we should definitely try to touch upon it and connect ourselves to this concept of total *lishmah*, even though we cannot reach it fully.

4 | *Frequent Anger*

Anger Stemming from Fire-of-Earth-of-Fire: Frequent Anger

With *siyata d'shmaya*, let us continue to discuss the element of fire, and the trait which stems from it: anger. We are up to discussing anger that stems from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**.

In previous chapters, it was explained in general that anger stemming from **earth-of-fire** is a kind of anger where a person loses his feeling of vitality, amidst the anger. There are four branches of this kind of anger.

Anger stemming from “**earth**”-of-earth-of-fire is when anger results in despair, anger stemming from “**water**”-of-earth-of-fire is when anger results in a loss of energy, and anger stemming from “**wind**”-of-earth-of-fire is when anger results in a feeling of being paralyzed. Now we will discuss anger that stems from “**fire**”-of-earth-of-fire. This is a kind of anger that is constant and ongoing.

Two Kinds of Constant Anger: Hot Temperament vs. Pressure

Before we continue, we will preface this discussion with the following. We must know that there are two kinds of constant anger which people experience.

Some people have an imbalanced element of fire in their soul, which can be a source of frequent angry outbursts. These people are very hot-tempered, and they give off a very angry demeanor, as if it is their entire essence. Others experience a lot of anger on a regular basis, but their anger is not stemming from a dominance of fire in the soul - it is very possible that this person's primary element is not fire, yet he still experiences lots of anger, on a constant basis. What is the source of this kind of anger (since it is not stemming from a dominance of fire)?

It happens to a person when he is going through a lot of pressure. When he reaches the peak of feeling pressurized, he explodes in anger. It is natural for a person to unleash his anger when he feels like he is under a lot of pressure; any small thing that irritates a person when he's under a lot of pressure can cause the anger to explode from within him.

A Pressured, Stressed Out Generation

Every person has periods in his life where he experiences more pressure, and he is easily angered when under this pressure. But in many situations – and in our generation especially - a person is living a very pressurized kind of life in general, and this can awaken a person's anger on an ongoing

basis. When this is the case, the anger of a person is not stemming from a hot temper. It is rather stemming from external factors.

For example, some people have a nature to raise their voices when they become passionate about something, and they will even yell and scream at others, but it is not because they are angry. The “anger” they are showing does not fit their personality. Whenever there is something pressurizing them, they react with raised voices, shouting, yelling, and screaming. In many homes there is a lot of shouting take place, but it is not always because the family members are angry at each other.

Many people grew up in homes where the parents yelled at each other a lot whenever they were under pressure, and they continue this behavior into their own homes, where they explode and shout whenever they feel pressure, like if they hear something distressing or something that is hard to absorb; such as hearing about distressing news, or about a painful medical condition, which is usually very hard to deal with. Whatever the cause for stress in the home, these people grew up in homes where there was a lot of pressure, where there was a lot of shouting taking place, and usually it is more of a passionate reaction than anger.

In these scenarios, when people get angry due to the pressure they have become used to since growing up, it is not because they have a hot temperament, but simply because they were under a lot of pressure. This particular scenario has always existed, but it is a very common one in our generation, which experiences much more pressure than in previous times.

Thus, in many cases where people show a lot of anger, it is actually not stemming from anger. It is usually stemming from certain pressure, or medical conditions that are very distressing to deal with, and any other news which a person has a hard time absorbing. A person in this situation is much more likely to show anger towards others, even if his natural temperament isn't easily angered.

(However, if the display of anger is very intense, it might be stemming from **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, which is the most extreme kind of anger, but we are not currently discussing this. Here we are discussing anger stemming from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, which is when anger is awakened by a pressurized kind of life in general, which causes the person to lose stability (earth), coupled with a dominant amount of “dryness” in the soul³⁷; which, in turn, causes frequent explosions of anger.)

Now let's explain this more in detail, with the help of Heaven.

Unnecessary Pressure and Imposed Lifestyles

There are two kinds of life people are living. Either a person lives in a way where he thinks originally and truthfully, or, a person lives with a superficial attitude of simply what has to get to done, how exactly things should be done, what is considered socially accepted, what does life obligate me to do, etc.

37 For more on “dryness” of the soul and how it relates to anger, refer to the first chapter (Fixing Your Fire_Anger_001_Despair Caused By Anger)

Anyone with a family, especially those who have bigger families (which Hashem has blessed them with), are aware that there are all kinds of situations in life which we go through. There are calmer times and there times of pressure. There is no home which does not go through some kind of pressure in it; that is the reality of our life. But many times, the situation in life which a person is placed in is a pressure that is way beyond his capacities.

There are homes in which the atmosphere of pressure in the home is so great that it is totally unsuitable for the souls of one of the spouses or the children. There are not a small percentage of homes – and I am emphasizing that it is *not* a small percentage of homes - where the lifestyle taking place is too pressurizing for either the father, or the mother. The children growing up in such a home cannot turn out normal and functional, by all natural means! Perhaps one of the children will remain normal - but he will be like the lone *tzaddik* in a city, and he is nothing short of a miracle. The atmosphere in such homes is simply not healthy for any person to grow up in.

Some pressurizing situations, of course, cannot be avoided. For example, if the family has become larger and more blessed with children (*Baruch Hashem*), and now there are more expenses, a mother who used to be a housewife might have to go out to work in order to earn livelihood. This new situation is pressurizing for her and it affects the children, but it cannot be avoided. But there are many things the parents do which are not that necessary in order to live life, and these things cause so much unnecessary pressure within the home.

There are all kinds of examples of this, but very common examples of include community individuals, or even very family-oriented individuals, who end up imposing all kinds of pressure in their homes, so that his spouse and the children should align their lives with his wishes. In these homes, the parent involved with this position gives off the impression to his family that a lack of conforming is almost like committing one of the cardinal sins of the Torah. The emotional needs of the other family members are not considered. Perhaps it is a lifestyle which is beyond the emotional capacity of one of the family members to handle, but too bad! Everyone in the family must conform to the imposed lifestyle which one of the parents is leading and work along with it, whether it is suited to their nature or not.

Add to this all of the normal pressures of life which are already in place aside from all of these imposed pressures, creating an enormous amount of pressure upon the family that is unbearable.

We don't have to get too far into the details; we can all understand already how problematic it is. If we get into the details of it, we can go on and on, and there is not enough time now to discuss all of it.

The Solution: Make A List of Your Priorities In Life

To counter this problem, we need to try to think of what a normal and functioning kind of life should look like.

We cannot avoid problems that life will bring, but we definitely need to draw up a functional plan to begin with, of how we choose to live our life. After we are living a functional kind of life we should then seek to fix our issues, of course. But first, we need to at least have a *plan* for how we will live a normal, functional kind of family life.

I am not coming here to solve every possible kind of problem which exists, but we can at least begin to make things more normal, by first understanding the following.

Anyone who seeks to live a real, normal life should sit down with himself for some time, and come up with a plan for what kind of lifestyle he wants to live life with. He should make a list of what he thinks the necessities of life are, and which things are priorities, and which parts of life are not priorities. After doing this thinking with himself, he can then do it with his spouse and children as well and ask them what they feel about it.

These are the questions one should be asking himself: “What really needs to be done, in life? What is truly important, and what is not that important? What are we really capable of doing, and what are we not capable of?”

In most homes, the amount of pressure found in the home, due to the way of life of one or both of the parents, is way too much for the family to handle. This is the reality. Sometimes the family can handle the pressure, but in most cases, they cannot. So one has to know if the way of life he is living is really taking into account the needs of his family and how it affects them, if they can really handle it or not. One must know which parts of his life are really needed that should be pursued, and which parts of his life are unnecessary pressures that need to be cut out.

Understandably, if one is not used to deeply reflecting like this, he will not know how to differentiate between needs and wants, and he will discover that there are many things he needs to do which aren't being actualized in his life, and then he will feel even more pressure.

But if one is already used to deep thinking, and he is very interested in doing the will of Hashem, he can go deep into his thoughts and ask himself important questions about what he should really want in life. He can think in an original way and he doesn't have to think like everyone else thinks, like Avraham *Avinu*, who did not follow the rest of the world's thinking and he uncovered his own original thinking.

One can ask himself questions like this: “What is the will of Hashem? What are the *mitzvos* of the Torah and what do they entail? What are the obligations of *Halachah* and what is considered pious behavior that is non-obligatory? What are the *mitzvos* between man and G-d, and what are the *mitzvos* between man and his friend?” and etc. He can keep asking himself these important questions and arrive at a certain picture of what an ideal kind of life should look like.

Take a half-hour and think about questions like this, during a quiet time where your mind feels settled. Come up with a more functioning kind of life than the kind of life you have been living until now. It doesn't mean you need to think of how to totally overhaul your life; just try to come up with some minor changes in your lifestyle that are more truthful than the current way you are living.

Think of the first thing you need to change, the second thing you need to change, the third thing you need to change, etc.

The more mature a person has become, he can live more internally and he will be able to see better the changes that need to be made.

Step 2: Knowing Your Actual Capability Level

That is all but the first part of the plan. The second thing a person needs to do, which is also very important, is, that every person must know what his actual capabilities are – what he can really handle, and what he cannot really handle (which only stresses him out when he takes upon those things).

One must know well what his normal capabilities are, and how much he can really handle.

Here is an example. Even in the world of Torah learning, where people exert themselves in the study of Torah, there are many aspirations to have exertion in learning Torah, to know *halachah*, to be exacting in *halachah*, to take upon *chumros*³⁸, to take upon pious behavior, to be good in interpersonal relationships, and many other such holy aspirations. These are all necessary aspirations to have, and they are holy, and we should want them. But in some people, there is a problem of immediately acting upon everything that they learn, without considering how this will impact on their emotional state. It is actually impossible for a person to act upon everything that he sees written in what he learns.

The Steipler zt”l told people that when he was young, he resolved to that whenever he heard a *chumra*, he would take it upon himself. When he reached a certain age when he got older, he asked people to stop telling him of any more *chumros*, because he knew that he couldn’t take upon himself any more *chumros*.

Most people who live with imposed *chumros* on themselves are not living based upon how they really need to act, but based upon what they perceive as “what needs to be done.” Of course, we are not referring to something that is firmly established *halachah*, which must absolutely be observed by every Jew, without question. That is clear and simple, and we shouldn’t even have to mention this. We are only referring to taking upon certain pious actions or behavior which may be too much for a person to really handle.

One needs to examine those behaviors he has taken upon himself. Firstly, he must see if it’s really meant for his actual level to take upon himself. This is a separate discussion for itself and we aren’t discussing this here. The second thing a person needs to know is if the behavior is really enough for him to handle emotionally.

³⁸ Stringencies in halachic observance

Let's give an even simpler example, which is from our physical world. Some people keep buying and buying things in the store and they aren't aware that they won't be able to carry all the bags home afterwards (Instead of abiding by the words of the Rambam that a person should only spend money on expenses based upon his income, this person keeps buying as long as he has expenses!). He doesn't think about how much he is really able to carry home. He just sees what he needs to buy, and he buys it, because he wanted to buy it, without wondering how he will be able to carry home.

(If he really needed it or not, is the first thing he needs think about. He first wonders if he really needs it or not, and then decides. The next step he needs to wonder about is, even if he does need this item, he must know if he will be able to carry it home!)

Let's this apply this to our soul capabilities. One must know how much he can really take upon himself – what his emotional capacity is. How much can you really handle? That is what a person must know.

One cannot know it perfectly. Nobody knows exactly how much he can handle. But in between the areas of what we can handle and what we cannot handle, there is a large area of uncertainties, of which we are not sure if we can really handle or not, and we need to figure out those areas. This self-examination is only possible for someone who is trying to learn about his soul, to recognize it, who wants to give proper order to his life, and to take upon himself the burdens that he can really handle, as opposed to what he cannot handle.

If one recognizes his personal limitations in life, more or less (we said that it cannot be reached perfectly), a transformation in his way of living will occur. He will know how much he can really handle in life, and then everything changes.

Whenever a person is living a kind of life where he is taking upon himself too much, in most cases, his heart will become closed off from proper emotion, and even his mental abilities will become blurred. But in addition, he is far more prone to anger. Even if he does not have that much fire in his soul, he will still find himself getting angry a lot, which is really unsuitable to his personality. But that is the result of a very pressurized kind of life, and this kind of life is very commonplace in our times.

Developing A Place of Inner Silence In Yourself

Practically speaking, if one wishes to change this, every person needs to have a place of inner calm in himself that he can go to. If someone doesn't have some degree of quiet calmness in his soul, the noise around him will increase the amount of his angry explosions. The inner way to live life is to develop a place of inner silence in the soul. This inner quiet is a source of inner *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind) and it enables a person to return to his inner essence.

In order to reach this place of inner silence in oneself, we will give a sharp definition of it: It requires a whole different kind of "load" than what you are used to carrying. There is what you can carry when you live with a load, and there is what you can carry when you live with inner calm. We

are not referring to a life of lethargy and laziness – we are talking about *yishuv hadaas*, of something subtle.

For example, if you are asked to do a *chessed*, like at the end of a wedding and you are asked to help and it will take a lot of time and cause you to come home late, instead of running to do the *chessed*, first think if you can handle this or not and how it will affect you. Think of the fact that you will go to sleep late and perhaps wake up late the next morning. The point is, in whatever you enter, think about what the consequences will be on your *yishuv hadaas* - and consider your *yishuv hadaas* more important. Protect it and guard it.

Also, consider how much sleep you need. Some people need more sleep than others. Although Torah scholars lose sleep over their Torah learning, and it is not a good thing to always go to sleep on impulse, one must be aware that he needs sleep, and he should know how much sleep he needs. We can't say here exactly how much sleep each person needs. (If someone is drawn towards sleepiness, that is a different story.) The question of how much sleep you need directly affects one's *yishuv hadaas*. If you hear that your *chavrusa* sleeps less than you, that doesn't mean it's good for you to do the same. Just because you saw others succeeding in this way doesn't mean you can handle it.

Sometimes, of course, you need to awaken your aspirations, and woe to a person who has no aspirations to improve and he is never inspired by other people. But everything must be weighed in terms of how it will affect your *yishuv hadaas* or not. This is your new "load" in life that you will be carrying – everything you encounter will be weighed against how it affects your *yishuv hadaas*.

At first, you will see that you cannot handle that much in your life, and you will see your limitations. But in the end, you will see that you have acquired an ability to carry a lot more on your shoulders, than how you started with. This is because when you started out, you wanted *yishuv hadaas*, but you didn't yet have it, and with the more you live with this inner *yishuv hadaas*, you will find that you are able to handle more in your life.

Proper Spiritual Development

We are talking to *Kolel* men here, who are at a more mature stage of life, but a *yeshiva* boy in his younger years needs to hear something else. A young boy needs to learn how to exert himself in Torah learning and he needs to learn how to "break the body" through accepting the yoke of Torah. Only after getting used to this comes the stage we have described here, of *yishuv hadaas*.

If one begins his development in Torah learning through focusing on *yishuv hadaas*, generally, he will not want to exert himself in Torah learning, and he has not yet broken the hold of his body; he will remain tied to the materialism of the body. But if a person has begun his development with exertion in Torah learning, and he has already gotten used to a stage of learning Torah whether he has energy for it or whether he doesn't have energy for it, he has already developed some connection to the Torah to some extent, and the next stage in his development will be to become attuned to taking care of the needs of his inner world, as explained here.

Let us emphasize that the first stage of development, which should have been traversed in one's younger *yeshiva* years, is to get used to exertion in Torah learning, without considering of how this will affect one's actual capabilities. Exertion in Torah learning means that one must learn with all his energy and he must also exert himself a little bit beyond his normal capabilities sometimes. (This must be done sensibly, as we see that many tried to do it and were unsuccessful).

Only at a later stage in one's life, long after one has traversed this elementary stage, should a person be concerned of how his *yishuv hadaas* is being affected. At this stage, one needs to make sure that he is not taking on anything that is negatively removing his *yishuv hadaas*.

Pressure Doesn't Mean That You Have To Fall Apart

When this is the perspective of a person, he avoids completely the problem described in the beginning of this chapter: a lifestyle of pressure which takes its toll on a person's natural capabilities. With a pressurized lifestyle, a person's emotions become hardened and his mind cannot think properly, bombarded by so many different thoughts; and he easily explodes in anger, due to all the pressure weighing on him.

A life of maintaining your inner *yishuv hadaas* greatly decreases the amount of angry explosions that a person would normally have under a lot of pressure. It does not take away anger completely, of course. There is no such thing as a totally peaceful life, and anyone who thinks otherwise is too dreamlike, wrapped up in himself and out of touch with his surroundings.

In addition, everyone goes through certain difficult periods in his life; everyone has his 'bag' of troubles. One of the Gedolim once said to someone, "Just because you see that I am always serene does not mean that I don't have any troubles. The '*pekele*' (the 'bag') I must carry is *not* small." A person can be going through a lot yet he is still calm and peaceful inside, where we do not lose our *yishuv hadaas*, in spite of all of the troubles.

We do have a lot to deal with in our life, each on his own level. We are faced the responsibilities and pressures of having to make livelihood, maintaining our health, raising our children, growing in Torah knowledge, perfecting our character, performing acts of *chesed*, and *davening* better, and so much more. The list can go on and on, and each person can fill up a list of the many responsibilities we have; it's enormous. Yet we must not allow all of this to take away our inner calmness.

If only we could have known about this as we started out life. But even if we didn't, it's never too late, because if not now, then when?

Sensible Changes

Understandably, we cannot make such extreme changes so fast and we cannot change so many aspects of our life all at once, so we won't be able to remove all the pressures in our life at once.

If, for example, you realize that you really need another half hour of sleep, and you want to make sure that the home goes to sleep earlier to accommodate your new plans, you need to know well if this will go well or not in the family. Before you make any changes to your lifestyle, you need to consider well how it will affect others, whether you will be adding in some new rules or whether you will be taking away some old patterns.

Anger Due To Lack of Orderliness In The Soul (Inner Anxiousness)

Based upon the above, we can now proceed to another point.

Until now we have explained what happens when a pressurized lifestyle causes people to lose their calmness, which furthers the opportunity for more angry explosions. But there is another kind of angry explosion we will address, which, as we explained, is not rooted in the element of fire in the soul: There are people who are relatively calm (we emphasize ‘relatively’ calm, because there is no one who is completely and always calm), but they lack inner order in their souls. Since there is chaos taking place in their souls, there are wars taking place inside themselves, and this hampers their inner calmness.

Sometimes people are very ambitious and as a result, they cannot be calm, because they are very anxious about what they want. Others though are not particularly ambitious about something they want, but there is a lack of balance in their soul, and this itself is a reason for inner anxiousness, which does not allow a person to be calm inside.

There are a small percentage of people who are born with balance in their souls. These people still have an *avodah*, of course; all people have an *avodah* that begins from the point where they are, and every person has an *avodah* when it comes to learning Torah and in improving their *middos*. But there do exist some people who, relatively speaking, are born with a proper balance in their souls. Most people, however, are not born with a balance in their souls, and there are also people who are born with extremities in their nature.

This problem can also be manifest in a good character trait when it is too extreme. For example, some are people have a very generous nature, always involved in acts of kindness with others. They are so generous that their own family needs are neglected in the process of all their acts of kindness to others.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach once said that he would never fall into the problem of giving too much charity to collectors. This is an example of maintaining a balance in the soul – to make sure that a good character trait doesn’t become too extreme. It is wonderful to have a good heart, but a person with a family must remind himself that he has obligations towards his family, which must come first.

So in some people, it is their best quality which causes problems, when they are imbalanced. The trait of generosity can be a very good example of this. In other instances, being too generous can be a different problem, of not being able to say “No” to others, which stems from a problem in the *nefesh*

*habehaimis*³⁹; this is a separate discussion. In either case, too much generosity can cause problems to a person, even though it is a wonderful quality to possess. When a quality is too strong and it is not balanced out by other abilities of the soul, there are deep inner contradictions that are formed within a person, and it's all stemming from a good character trait which is missing balance.

Surely this is the case when the imbalances in the soul are not stemming from a good character trait, but from an imbalance in the elements of the soul. If a person has too much earth in his soul and not enough wind in his soul, there is a lack of balance between his earth and wind. If a person has a particular desire that is very dominant in his life, which he is trying to overcome, there will be much more opportunities for him to become angry, because every time he can't overcome the desire, he is disappointed with himself that he couldn't overcome the desire. His life becomes anxious and there are thus more opportunities for him to become angry, so he regularly experiences anger, due to his many frustrations.

One who observes this person always getting angry might conclude that he has a very hot temperament, and he might diagnose this anger as stemming from fire-of-fire-of-fire. After all, the person always seems to be getting angry – isn't this a sign of a bad temper? But it is very possible that there is a totally different reason for his anger. This person might have a very weak element of fire in his soul, yet he still suffers from anger all the time, because there is an unusual lack of order in his soul, creating much imbalance in his soul. Thus he finds himself often in situations which anger him.

Unlike the scenario where we discussed earlier, where anger stems from a pressurized kind of life, which is an outside and environmental factor, here we are discussing a person whose anger stems from an internal anxiousness.

If a person merits it, he can attain a balance in his soul in his younger years, or at least at the beginning of his marriage, where he will be forced to attain a balance in his soul in order to maintain marital peace; this can provide a person with great balance in his soul, if he utilizes the opportunities.

But getting married doesn't always give an automatic balance to a person's soul. If a person has married a wife who doesn't test his anger, or if he is the type of person who can bear through a lot of difficulty, he has never yet attained a balance in his soul, and eventually, at some point, he will still have to straighten out the lack of order in his soul, when the pressures of life begin to set in. The children will certainly add pressure to his life, and he will have to work on himself now in order to handle the pressures. His wife perhaps has already learned how to "accept suffering with love", because she is used to raising the children and all of the pressures that come with it. But the husband will find the pressures involved with the children to be unbearable, because he has never yet given order to his own soul.

As he begins to realize his responsibilities to his growing family, he is apt to feel explosions of anger on a regular basis from all of this pressure that he has never dealt with before. This is what happens when a person has never yet given inner order to his soul.

39 nefesh habehaimis: animalistic layer of the soul, the source of base, underdeveloped emotions

If a person was born with a natural balance in his soul, or if he is at least very close to having a well-balanced soul, he will encounter far less situations that arouse anger. But there are a small percentage of people that have been born with an extreme imbalance in their souls, so they end up experiencing frequent explosions of anger.

The *avodah* of such a person does not mainly lie in fixing anger. Many times people who want to work on their anger will seek various tips on how to reduce anger, but that is not where the issue *mainly* lies. Of course, we cannot say that a person shouldn't work on reducing anger; we certainly should work on it at some point. But the main *avodah* of a person who experiences frequent explosions of anger is, to learn how to give general inner order to his soul.⁴⁰

When many people begin to give inner order to their souls, they become calmer, and they experience much less anger. How did they accomplish this, without working to uproot their anger? It is not simply because working on yourself in one area causes improvement in other areas; although that can also be true. It was mainly due to the inner orderliness that has been given now to their soul.

In Summary and In Conclusion

Making this all practical, we have discussed here several root causes for anger. Some people have an angry temperament, and that is the root of their anger; but we did not discuss this type of anger here. Here we have spoken about two kinds of frequently experienced anger, which are not stemming from “anger” per se, but from other factors.

In a very large amount of people, there is a lot of frequent anger being experienced due to all kinds of pressures in their life. These pressures include the many stresses of life, such as financial stress, marital difficulty, difficulty with raising children, problem with children's *shidduchim*, health issues, etc. Everyone can have a full list of his troubles, and all of this pressure is apt to be a cause for frequent anger. The solution to such anger does not lie in fixing “anger” per se, but to come up with a plan for a less stressful kind of life, as we explained. Understandably, one should also *daven* to Hashem for help.

Another kind of frequent anger we discussed are those who have imbalances in their soul which causes them to have inner anxiousness, which leads to their frequent explosions of anger. Here the solution lies in giving inner order to the soul's elements and abilities, which will lessen the situations for anger.

Understandably, every person has times where he feels pressure and he feels stressed. If a person is sensible, he will think beforehand of how he should act when under pressure, and not push this off reflection until when he feels stressed. If you never think beforehand about how you will act under the situation, you won't find the strength to deal with it when you are under stress. That is why a

⁴⁰ To learn how to give inner order to the soul, refer to the author's *Getting To Know Your Soul*

wise person makes sure to think about it beforehand, and in that way, he'll find the stressful situation more manageable when it arrives.

Making these reflections will greatly lessen the opportunities to get angry, and thereby lessen the amount of angry explosions in a person's life.

5 | Anger Lovers

Anger Stemming From “Water”-of-Fire: When Anger Is Enjoyable

We are learning about the trait of anger and its subdivisions. We will now begin to learn about anger that stems from the “water” aspect of fire, and its branches. First we will outline the four kinds of anger that stem from “water”-of-fire, and then we will go through each of them in detail.

As mentioned in the first chapter, anger stemming from **water-of-fire** is when a person *enjoys anger*, because he is getting a *sense of vitality* (water), from the anger. There are four branches of this kind of anger:

- (1) **“Earth”**-of-water-of-fire is when anger has gained permanence (earth) in a person’s life, to the point that he derives a sense of vitality from it.
- (2) **“Water”**-of-water-of-fire is when a person is dragged (like water) towards situations that anger him, because he derives vitality from those situations.
- (3) **“Wind”**-of-water-of-fire is when a person has a specific agenda in his anger, moving and directing himself (like the wind) towards a certain goal that he has in mind, of which anger is the vehicle to get him there; and in this way, he derives a sense of vitality from the anger.
- (4) **“Fire”**-of-water-of-fire is when a person derives vitality from situations where he is unexpectedly angered, similar to the nature of fire, which is jumpy; and he ends up enjoying the anger, deriving a sense of vitality now that he realizes that he has overstepped his bounds.

At this point, these concepts will sound vague to us, and as we continue, we will explain each of these in more detail.

Deliberately Choosing A Lifestyle That Breeds Anger (Earth-of-Water-of-Fire)

“Earth”-of-water-of-fire is when a person chooses for himself a certain lifestyle which involves plenty of anger, yet interestingly, he derives vitality from this permanence of anger in his life and in this stressful lifestyle that he has chosen for himself. First we will see how this nature can manifest in our physical world of action, and then we will see how this nature can also manifest in more spiritual kinds of people as well.

Here is one example of this, from the physical world. There are some people who have deliberately chosen (because they have come to believe that this must be their lot in life) to work at a

certain job or profession where they experience lots of frustration and anger when they have to deal with other people.

Once I needed a worker to show up in my house to do some repairs, and I asked him to come to me at 9:30. It came 9:30, and he wasn't there. Finally he showed up. I asked him simply, "What happened to you that you couldn't get here on time?" He said to me, "There was so much that happened to me before I got here! I got into all kinds of fights with different people I have to deal with, along the way getting here, which delayed me from getting to you on time."

He could easily find himself another job where he doesn't have to go through all these daily fights with the people he's involved with. All of this fighting wears him out and delays him from getting to his work on time, and he also cannot keep to his word even when he tells people that he will show up. He simply is so tired out from all of the run-ins he has with people that he simply cannot pull himself together – he can't give his word that he'll show up on time, and even if he gives his word that he will be there on time, you still can't trust his word.

There are certain jobs people have which are entirely based on arguing and disputes with other people, with constant situations that are stressful, and which are not a calm place to be in. Yet many people stay in such an environment when they know that they will encounter a lot of anger with other people there.

A very good example of this is the job of being a taxi-driver. Anyone who takes such a job is inviting himself to a life full of nerve-wracking situations, where there is constant anger. How many times will it happen that the person who called the taxi wasn't at the stop on time, and the taxi-driver becomes infuriated? There are so much more opportunities to get angry at people, when you are a taxi-driver. The decision to become a taxi-driver is basically a decision to enter into the den of anger.

Of course, he will still have free will to control how much he gets angry, and how he chooses to express the anger. But he has essentially chosen to enter into a situation that will involve constant anger.

Most people who choose jobs that involve high levels of stress and anger are not looking for the anger involved; they just need a job, and perhaps they are aware that it will involve much anger, but they take the job anyway. But there are some people who will deliberately choose such a job because they *enjoy* the anger that is involved in such jobs.

Here is another example. The Sages teach that one should not take the profession of being a persecutor. This is a profession which is entirely based on hearing others' complaints and disputes with each other, on trying others, on getting involved with disputes – and there is a lot of yelling involved too, whether outside the *Beis Din* or in front of the *Beis Din*. Why do people choose such jobs?

Some people choose it because they need to make money, and they heard that others do this and make money from it. But others choose it because they find it exciting to be involved with disputes.

They find it enjoyable to wake up in the morning knowing that there will be another case today to tackle, where there will be plenty of drama and yelling and disputing.

This is a kind of person who gains a sense of vitality from arguments and dissension. Sometimes, these jobs are enjoyable to the person because he is succeeding at his job, and if that is the case, his main enjoyment is being derived from the fact that he's succeeding at something. That is not what we are dealing with. Here we are dealing with a person who enjoys these kinds of professions because he loves all of the disputing and drama involved, for its own sake.

You can see this in certain children, who enjoy fighting and arguing with other children, for the sake of fighting with them. But this nature also exists in some adults. It is not that common, but it is certainly found in a percentage of adults, whose lives are centered on an enjoyment that comes from the drama of witnessing arguments and dissension with others.

A Torah scholar might actually find it difficult to become a *dayan* (judge) and witness the fighting in the *Beis Din* between the two litigants, for this very reason. But the person who enjoys the drama of anger and disputing is having a different experience entirely, when he witnesses the dispute. He is excited by what he is seeing, and he's feeling, "This is part of living!" It's enjoyable to him.

Unlike the normal kind of anger which drains people of their sense of vitality [which we spoke about in the previous four chapters], this is a kind of anger which a person gets vitality from, and he bases his enjoyment in life on this.

There are also writers in newspapers and magazines who love to vent all of their anger in the articles that they write, and their entire life is spent on venting, venting, and venting out all of their anger at different things in the world that bother them.

Besides for these examples mentioned, there are other professions as well which are of this nature where there is much 'drama' involved, and the person who chooses that profession is deliberately choosing the job so he can be in all the drama, because he enjoys it.

Children Who Enjoy Fighting

So far, we have seen how this phenomenon manifests in the physical world. Now let's see how this kind of enjoyment from anger becomes manifest in the more spiritual areas of life [which starts from early childhood].

There are many children who regularly scream and fight in the home or at school. Sometimes they come from very pressurized homes, and the only way for them to release their tension they feel is by yelling and fighting, so that someone will notice and give them the attention they need to be heard. But sometimes the child has a more excitable nature, where he enjoys drama and action. These children don't like it when things are calm and simple.

When people aren't satisfied with the simple and calm situations of life, normally they will seek something new to satisfy their need for action. But others react differently: they become filled with a need for drama and action. They let loose their negative character traits, and deliberately get into fights with others. The root of this nature in the soul really comes from a spark of “*Erev Rav*”⁴¹ and “Amalek” [who are instigators of strife]! It is a nature to gain vitality from opposition with others.

We can see this nature to enjoy opposition in some children who enjoy getting into arguments with their parents, and in school, this type of child will enjoy causing stress to the teacher or principal, wishing to drain all of the life out of him; and to do the same to other children in the class. He enjoys noise, arguing, and yelling, and he lives off of this.

When these children grow up and they become adults, they have matured somewhat beyond all of their childish tendencies, so they don't intentionally fight with others. But they still might get dragged easily after arguments with others, a nature that stems from **water-of-water-of-fire** [which we will discuss in the next chapter], or they might intentionally draw themselves towards such arguments, a nature which stems from **wind-of-water-of-fire** [which we will discuss, G-d willing, later].

Usually by the time he has matured into an adult, he has developed some more compassion for others. But in his childhood, he does not yet have as much compassion on others, and he is capable of far more cruelty to others, so he is apt to get into deliberate fights and arguments with others.

Misguided Zealotry

When this nature is manifested in a more spiritual kind of person, he will seek to intentionally engage in arguments with others in a misguided kind of zealousness, thinking that it is all “for the sake of Hashem”. Of course, sometimes people do argue with others for the sake of Heaven, where the motivations are pure. But there are people who are constantly involved with *machlokes* (dissension) with others, always fighting with others, in a hotheaded manner.

As mature adults, people have more *da'as*⁴², and when one is found in the Torah world, he is not as concerned with superficial matters that children are busy with. Instead, he has more spiritual concerns now, and he channels his nature of dissension to fight vehemently with others about more spiritual matters.

But his motivations in arguing are not pure, and it is not motivated by a search for truth. His zealousness is not for the sake of Heaven. Rather, it is because he had a nature ever since he was a child to enjoy opposition with others. It has become the way he lives, and he derives a sense of vitality from it.

⁴¹ “*The Mixed Multitude*”

⁴² *mature thinking abilities*

It has a permanent place in his life (earth), and he enjoys (water) the anger (fire), hence, he is dominated by a kind of anger that stems from **earth-of-water-of-fire**.

Picking A Chavrusa To 'Argue' With

So far, we have not yet described examples that are of relevance to those who are still learning in the *Beis Midrash*. Now we will describe some examples that can apply to those who are in the Torah world who are still learning in *Beis Midrash*.

Let us examine the following scenario which may take place amongst those who are learning in the *Beis Midrash*, which is a prime example of the issue we have been describing. When choosing a *chavrusa*⁴³, normally a person will choose a *chavrusa* who is suitable for him to learn with, but sometimes, a person will deliberately choose to learn with a *chavrusa* who thinks very differently than he does, whom he is bound to get into a lot of arguments with. He chooses this *chavrusa* anyway, even though he is well aware of their different styles of learning and thinking.

Why? Sometimes it is because he is looking to be enlightened by someone who thinks very differently than he does, so that he can further develop his own mind. That's fine. But sometimes a person chooses this *chavrusa* because he is looking forward to all of the arguments they are going to have – and more specifically, to the anger that he knows he will be experiencing, when learning with this particular *chavrusa*. The *Gemara* says that a young Torah scholar's anger is caused by the fire of the Torah (“*rischa d'oiraisa*”), and this kind of person is looking forward to all of this heated and fiery anger....

But if he is looking forward to the anger, his anger is not coming from a pure place in himself. It's better than taking out his anger in the *beis midrash* when he's learning Torah than to take out his anger in the streets, of course. But it's essentially the same kind of anger, where he's looking for trouble. It is merely taking on the form of his Torah learning. But it is still an evil trait of anger which needs to be fixed.

Sometimes we can hear shouts and screams in the *beis midrash* between people learning with each other, and it is not always stemming from a desire to arrive at the truth. It has nothing at all to do with wanting to get to the truth. In fact, when one is screaming at his *chavrusa* so heatedly, he usually can't even hear what his *chavrusa* is trying to tell him, and many times he doesn't even hear himself! He is so caught up in his own anger, because he is not motivated by a desire to get to the truth or to arrive at greater clarity in Torah. It is usually stemming from a nature of enjoying opposition.

Of course, we know that learning Torah involves constant contradictions that we come across, which invites opposition and questioning. But this is a more refined and softer version of opposition.

⁴³ study partner for learning Torah

When a person deliberately seeks opposition and he derives vitality from opposition, it stems from an unrefined place in the soul, which is seeking to assert itself.

Drawn Towards Opposition and Disagreements

A person doesn't always use a *chavrusa* for this; he might be drawn towards opposition even without a *chavrusa*, by always seeking to question the truth of the words of the Sages that he learns, wondering if their words are "truthful" enough to his standards of truth.

He will not be foolish enough to argue with Moshe Rabbeinu, of course, and he won't either have the foolishness and audacity to argue with the *Gemara*, or even with the words of the *Rishonim*.⁴⁴ (for Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes that the *Rishonim* contained such "straight logic" that it is unthinkable to argue with them). But when it comes to the words of the *Acharonim*,⁴⁵ perhaps he will feel comfortable enough to "disagree" with their words and attack them sharply, arguing with *Acharonim* on a constant basis. It is not because he possesses such "straight logic" that he feels like he has the license to do this; it is rather because he has long ago developed a nature to disagree, and vehemently.

When learning Torah, there is nothing wrong with analyzing all the possible points in a matter, wondering what the opposite arguments may be. That is the way it should be, that is the way of Torah, for the Sages teach: "Turn it over, and turn it over, for all is in it." But some people feel a need to always oppose and disagree with what they learn, and this is the problem we are discussing.

If he is giving a *shiur*, he might also deliberately argue with the way of thinking of others, emphasizing his own approach and insisting that his way is the more truthful one. (Sometimes this stems from conceit, which is a different problem). His entire approach is based on arguing, arguing, and arguing, with others. It is really a kind of anger in him that manifests as a nature to enjoy opposition on a consistent basis. Even if he produces *chiddushei Torah*,⁴⁶ any arguing that he has done in the process might be stemming from his nature to simply argue and disagree. It is stemming purely from anger, and not from a search for truth.

In The Home

We can give several more examples, but the point is that there are some people who have this nature to enjoy opposition and they live from it. Now we will discuss a scenario which is much more common that all people can relate to.

⁴⁴ early commentators, spanning the 10th-15th centuries

⁴⁵ later commentators, spanning the 15th-19th centuries

⁴⁶ novel Torah thoughts

In some homes, there are husbands who enjoy arguing with their spouse and children, for the sake of arguing and disagreeing. *Baruch Hashem*, this is not the case in every home. But it happens in some homes. The father might think he has inherited the title of a “*Mashgiach*”⁴⁷ in his yeshiva, where he thinks that he is the self-appointed spiritual overseer of his home, who must continue the path of his *Mashgiach* and make sure that every aspect in the home should follow this regime. He is always looking for things in the home that aren’t in line with his ideals, always pointing out whatever is lacking, and he finds deficiencies everywhere in the home. His wife has to bear all of this criticism the most.

We must know that this is an issue, which has nothing to do with proper *chinuch*⁴⁸. It may also be coming from a nature to point out flaws in everything, which is not either good; but that is a separate matter. Many times, people are overly demanding in their homes when it comes to attaining spiritual perfection, but not because of a desire for living truthfully. It can often stem from a nature of enjoying opposition.

This nature exists both in the physical and in the spiritual areas of life. There are people who love to argue about physical matters that are trivial and unimportant, whereas others will only love to argue when it comes to the spiritual. But that doesn’t make it holy. It is not holy for a person to make demands in his home of higher spiritual levels and to explain to the family members exactly what they are doing wrong.

We aren’t talking about outright ignorance of matters that are obligations of *Halacha*, which a person must certainly make sure his family is being careful in (but even then, the Sages say that one should speak softly to his family). Those are valid areas to stress in the home, as long as they are conveyed properly to the family. But many times, people are tough on their families to have higher spiritual standards simply because they enjoy opposition.

Here is another example. Sometimes a newly married woman will bring in some things from her old home into their new apartment, and the husband doesn’t approve. If he gets angry at her for bringing in these items, the anger is only the byproduct of a deeper issue that he has: he enjoys opposition. The enjoyment of opposition is motivating him to show some anger; sometimes the anger is more intense and sometimes it is only revealed partially, but it is a result of enjoying opposition.

In Summary

Until now we have given examples of the concept, so that we can better relate to it. In many of the above scenarios which we mentioned, most people will say that there were other reasons that motivated them to get angry. But usually, we will be able to find that in at least one of the above scenarios mentioned, the reason for the anger was stemming from a nature to enjoy opposition.

⁴⁷ spiritual dean in a yeshiva

⁴⁸ child education

Countering Opposition With Peace and Love

How can this issue be fixed? For the solution, we will need to look inward and make use of two abilities in our soul [*shalom*/peace and *ahavah*/love].

Among the many powers in the soul, there are two opposite powers – “war” (*milchamah*), and “peace” (*shalom*). Hashem’s ways are peaceful, for “Great is peace, for Hashem diverges [from truth] for the sake of peace”.⁴⁹ At the same time, Hashem also fights wars, it is written, “Hashem is a man of war.”⁵⁰

These are two deep powers in our soul, war and peace, which need to be balanced. If one is only peaceful and he has no boundaries to how far his peace goes, he will lose his ability to fight for truth. In order to be successful at anything, we need to know how to fight and persevere, so on one hand, we must make sure not to lose our power to fight. But on the other hand, we need to also know how to strive for peace, or else we will fight too much.

When a person is making sure to work hard at giving order to his soul, he will have an easier time with attaining a balance between his abilities of peace and fighting.

The amount of fighting one has to do in his life needs to be preceded by developing the power of peace, and then one can fight properly. Usually when a person gets used to fighting with others, it damages his power of peace, and the person will find himself getting into more and more fights with people. Instead, the correct approach is that whenever one engages in any kind of dispute, opposition, or fight with another person, he must first make sure that he is balanced out by a power to find peace. If he can be peaceful, he can know how to fight properly with others. If not, he will fight too much. So before one gets involved in any kind of opposition with another, he must first make sure that he also knows how to be peaceful.

There is also another point which a person will need, in order to fight properly with others. One needs to be able to feel a love for others (*ahavah*). This is because we usually do not fight with people we love, and we usually do not love the people we fight with. Therefore, if we want to balance out our ability to “war” with others, we must make sure that we are able to love them. This is based on the words of the *Gemara* that the ideal way to learn Torah with others is that “At first, they become enemies to each other, and at the end, they become beloved friends with each other.”⁵¹

One needs to love all creations in the world (except for souls of the *Erev Rav*⁵²). When one has to fight with others, he must first be able to love them. If this is true concerning how we need to view the other nations of the world, surely it applies to how we must relate to other Jews. So the amount that we can fight people must match the degree of love towards the Jewish people.

49 *Maseches Kallah Rabasi 9:1*

50 *Shemos 15:3*

51 *Kiddushin 30b*

52 Refer to the “*Erev Rav*” pdf, a compilation of some of the *Rav’s derashos translated into English, concerning the “Erev Rav”*

To summarize, in order to have proper ‘war’ with others, we need to first need to be able to love. When it comes to our interpersonal relationships with others, we need to reveal peace towards others, in order to be able to oppose others properly. This is also true when it comes to one who enjoys opposition in his Torah learning. In order to fight properly within the parameters of Torah learning, one needs to be able to develop the power of *shalom*/peace.

One who has the proper balance between the powers of ‘war’ with the powers of love and peace in the soul, will know how to fight properly.⁵³

Practically speaking, before a person enters into some kind of disagreement with another, he should first awaken his love towards the person. That is the condition necessary to fight properly within the parameters of Torah. Upon that condition, he can then argue “for the sake of Heaven”. But that is only if he has strengthened his love for others and a wish for peace.

The Proper Perspective When It Comes To Fighting Evil

If one attains this balance between the powers of ‘war’ and love/peace in his soul, he can then engage in zealotry “for the sake of Heaven”, because his is truly fighting with pure motivations, for he knows how to love others and be at peace with others.

When it comes to the matter of being zealous in fighting evil, he should have the proper perspective. If one is fighting for Hashem’s Torah and he thinks that he must destroy the evil from the world, this is actually a form of heresy, for he is failing to realize that Hashem also wants there to be evil on this world. It is not up to him to destroy the presence of evil from the world. Hashem has His reasons of why He wants there to be certain evil on this world, and He gave us an *avodah*⁵⁴ to fight this evil as well⁵⁵, but we need to have the proper perspective about this: we must be aware that as soon Hashem wills it, He will erase all the evil from the world in the blink of an eye.

Hashem wants the evil to be here on the world and He also wants us to do our share in getting rid of it, for the purposes of our *avodah*, allowing us to bring rectification to the world. But it is not simply so that the evil shouldn’t be there anymore. If that was the reason, Hashem doesn’t need us for that. He can get rid of all the evil in the blink of an eye. He lets the evil exist so that we can have the *avodah* of destroying it. This is a very subtle point.

When one lacks this understanding towards zealotry, he is consumed with war at others. He thinks it is up to him to destroy all the evil. But if a person realizes that the evil has been placed on this world so that we can fulfill our *avodah* of fighting it – and that fighting evil does not exist as a purpose unto itself, for Hashem doesn’t need us for that – he is then using the power of ‘war’ for its holy and intended use.

⁵³ See also Tefillah #0164 – Truth Before Peace and also Tefillah #0170 - Peace

⁵⁴ spiritual task

⁵⁵ as explained in sefer Daas Tevunos of the Ramchal

In our generation, where we are surrounded by the worst levels of spiritual impurity, we need to know that not only will Hashem be the only One who can take it all away, but He can do so in an instant, and He will, with the coming of Mashiach. It is just that we currently have an *avodah* to fight evil, and it is an *avodah* and nothing more; there should be no personal agendas involved in it. If we look at it purely as an *avodah* and that it is not up to us to do it entirely, only to do our share, we are much closer to attaining a balance between war and peace\love in our soul (*How to fight evil*, however, is a separate matter, which merits its own discussion).

A good example of this is what happened on Chanukah, when the house of the *Chashmonaim* won against the Greeks in the war. This is seen in connection with the miracle that they found a jug of pure olive oil. The deep implication of this is that because they had pure motivations in their fight against the Greek evil, they were able to fight with the proper and holy perspective, and that was how they could win. Such a war merits assistance from Hashem, Who fights for a holy and pure war, when our motivations in war are correct and in proper perspective.⁵⁶ – when our power of ‘war’ is balanced out by a power of love\peace.

“The War of Torah”

This gives a person a totally different perspective towards how we need to “fight” with others in our Torah learning. This is the implication of the term, “*milchamah shel Torah*” – the “war of Torah.” To fight in Torah learning doesn’t mean to simply argue over the words of Abaye and Rava in the *Gemara*. It means to fight within the parameters of Torah’s perspective.

This is also the meaning of “*milchemes mitzvah*”, a war fought on grounds of a *mitzvah*. It is a pure kind of ‘war’ with another, unlike the negative enjoyment derived from opposition with others, which stems from the earth-of-water-of-fire element.

In Conclusion

When one has developed the powers of love/*ahavah* and peace/*shalom*, he knows how to properly use the soul’s power of war/*milchamah*, for he has the proper balance. He will then be able to ‘fight’ properly in his Torah learning with others, in a way that does not compromise on his pursuit of love and peace with others, and the ‘wars’ that he fights will be with pure and holy intentions. This, in turn, will certainly minimize the kind of anger that stems from **earth-of-water-of-fire**.

⁵⁶ See also *Tefillah #067 – Fights*; and *Reaching Your Essence #010 – Utilizing The Power of Peace*

6 | *For Argument's Sake*

Anger Stemming From Water-of-Water-of-Fire: Being 'Dragged' Into Anger

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are continuing to discuss the element of fire and the trait that results from it, anger. We are currently in the middle of discussing anger that stems from the “water” aspect of fire, which is when a person derives a sense of vitality from anger.

The “water” aspect of water-of-fire is where a person is “dragged” after anger, similar to the nature of water, which drags things with it.

In the previous chapter, we discussed anger that stems from “earth”-of-water-of-fire, where a person makes anger into a permanent place in his life, by deliberately placing himself into situations that will entail anger, and he enjoys it. Anger stemming from **water-of-water-of-fire**, however, is when a person is spontaneously drawn after situations that involve anger, and then he enjoys the anger, now that he has been drawn towards it.

If a person becomes dragged into this situation and he doesn't end up enjoying it, we are not discussing this; we are discussing here a person who gains a sense of vitality from the anger.

This kind of anger is very commonplace. We will give a few simple examples of it.

When People Love To Argue Vehemently

Here is one example. A person is sitting at a Shabbos table, or he is eating in a dining room, either with his friends or with people who are sitting next to him and chatting, and they are arguing about a certain topic. Then somebody states an opinion which is deemed a bit ‘controversial’, and the argument becomes more heated. They didn't plan on getting into this argument, but now that they are arguing, the people at this table find themselves amidst a heated argument, and sometimes a person there will not leave until the argument is finished. At other times, the argument isn't over, and it extends into a longer period of time, accompanied by much shouting and yelling.

In these types of situations, the person gains a sense of vitality from the arguing.

Another example: a person is sitting by a *shiur*⁵⁷, and he hears a thought which he disagrees with. He begins to argue with him. He hears a Friday night *derasha*⁵⁸ and he disagrees with what the *rav* is saying, and he lets the people next to him know that he doesn't agree, and he gets into an argument

⁵⁷ *Torah lecture*

⁵⁸ *sermon*

with the people next to him, and shouting ensues. Sometimes he is motivated to do so with intentions that are more *lishmah*⁵⁹, and sometimes, with less intentions of *lishmah*.

These are very common situations, where a person deliberately enters into arguments. Initially, he does not become angered. His intention is merely to argue. But as the argument continues, he is dragged further into it, and he feels as if it's his very vitality. These arguments might be in the context of Torah learning or in discussing matters that are holy, or they might be about the mundane; in either case, however, he is getting vitality from the heated arguments and in all the anger that was involved.

Those Who Enjoy Machlokes\Disension

In a more extreme level of this kind of 'enjoyable' anger, a person enters into a heated argument between people, where they are fighting about something, and he becomes personally involved in the argument. His initial motivation to enter into the argument might be curiosity, to hear what each of them is thinking. But then as he hears their argument, he becomes dragged into the argument; he involves himself in a fight which is not his, sticking his nose into situations that are not at all his place to enter.

He is dragged after it because he *enjoys* the argument - for if he wouldn't enjoy it, he wouldn't have allowed himself to have been 'dragged' into it. Whether he is consciously aware or not of the enjoyment he is having in these arguments, he still enjoys it; he enjoys the anger that was experienced. The intensity of the anger might vary depending on how heated the argument was, but in either case, he still *enjoys* the arguments, even though these arguments have nothing to do with him.

There are people who involve themselves in a *machlokes* (disension) that has nothing to do with them, and they resemble the men who joined the *machlokes* of Korach.

The problem of *machlokes* has always appeared throughout the generations, but in our generation, it is unfortunately very common, *rachmana litzlan* (may G-d have mercy on us from this), that there is *machlokes* in so many places. Of this it can be said, "There is house that does not have corpse in it."⁶⁰ Every place in the world is brimming with *machlokes*. Because of this, some people are unwillingly pushed into the area of the *machlokes*, due to the particular circumstances of their life which force them to take sides in a *machlokes*, where they must vehemently oppose the other side; the motivations here might be a little more *lishmah* or they may be less *lishmah*, but this scenario of *machlokes* still makes sense in the lives of these people, because it is connected to circumstances of their life.

⁵⁹ motivations for the sake of heaven

⁶⁰ Shemos 12:30

That is not the problem that we are addressing here, however. Here we are talking about people who enter into a *machlokes* when it has absolutely nothing to do with them.

Every time that this kind of person sees a *machlokes* taking place, he feels a need to be on one of the sides, as if he will be the deciding factor between the two sides. He may think that he is righteously fanning the flames of the *machlokes*, but in reality he is only fueling it. He comes to feel a personal connection to this *machlokes*, when in reality there is no justification for him to enter into this *machlokes* which has nothing to do with him. He becomes involved anyway, thinking that it must have some personal relevance to him.

He could have chosen to remain outside of the *machlokes* and to have nothing to do with it. Instead, he chooses to get involved with a *machlokes* that is not his place to enter. These kinds of people lose both This World and the Next World at once. They feel a personal need to stick their noses in matters that are none of their business, they derive vitality from it while they are at it, and therefore they are drawn after *machlokes*.

When people enter into a *machlokes*, besides for the evil of being in the *machlokes* itself, there is so much more damage they bring upon themselves. They end up being insolent towards certain Torah scholars along the way, disgracing the honor of the Torah, and concerning such a person the Sages said that “there is no cure to his wound”. There are many other evils as well which they get into. This type of person is dragged after all kinds of *machlokes*, whether it is an argument with the neighbors, with the landlord, with someone in the community, with someone they disagree with – any possible form of *machlokes*, he deliberately gets involved with and he enjoys it.

More Examples of Enjoying Argument

In the beginning of this chapter, we discussed a lower degree of this nature, where a person gets caught up in an argument around him and he is enjoying it. This is a very common scenario; another common scenario we mentioned is when people love to argue with the *derasha* of a *rav* or speaker.

There are people who cannot stand to hear others give a *derasha*. Sometimes this stems from conceit, of not acknowledging people who are wiser than he. Sometimes it is because there is a lack of understanding of what the person speaking was trying to say. But many times it comes from a nature to simply enjoy arguing, once a person is dragged into it.

Here are some other examples. Some people like to buy *sefarim* and write down notes on the pages of the *sefer*, expressing their disapproval of the author’s words. Either this can be stemming from a desire to learn Torah, or it can be stemming from a negative desire to simply oppose others. There are also authors of *sefarim* today who constantly write letters to other authors where they express disapproval of the thoughts of that author, and this is their whole vitality in life.

(Of course, if the person is doing so out of a motivation to help the other see his mistakes so that he should not err in his Torah learning and come to teach others incorrectly, then it is an act of kindness to correct him.)

There are even *sefarim* written today where the entire purpose of the *sefer* is being written in order to argue with the author of another *sefer*. This is not an issue of if his motivations are *lishmah* or not; even if it was written entirely “for the sake of Heaven”, it is the very attitude behind it which belies an issue of coarse character. And sometimes a person writes a *sefer* entirely to take issue with a certain *sefer* that is already widely respected by the *Gedolim* of previous generations!

Such a person is naturally dragged towards arguing with others. It is one of the natures of the soul that can express itself [and it manifests more strongly in certain people, when their **water-of-water-of-fire** is dominant]. Everyone can also identify in himself this nature, to some extent.

An example of it also includes people who regularly get into arguments in the home, with their spouse or with their children. They are not looking intentionally to get into arguments, but once they suddenly find themselves in the argument, they end up enjoying the argument, deriving vitality from it.

So far we have just given some examples of this nature, and there are additional examples as well which one can discover. The basic idea of anger stemming from **water-of-water-of-fire** is: When a person allows himself to be ‘dragged’ into heated arguments.

Rectifying The Nature of Being ‘Dragged’

In the series of “*Fixing Your Water*”, we explained that the more a person becomes aware of his actions, speech, and thoughts, the less he will become “dragged”. There we elaborated much more on the concept of being “dragged”, which is a general nature that stems from the element of water. We will discuss here yet another way of how to avoid getting ‘dragged’ into things, although we are not dealing here with the trait of water, but with **water-of-water-of-fire** specifically; it can rectify the problem of getting ‘dragged’ in general, but it has particular relevance to the current topic we are discussing, anger that stems from **water-of-water-of-fire**.

Daas Vs. Anger

Anger is essentially a destructive force. Although every negative character trait is destructive, it is anger specifically which is destructive. Whenever any of the elements in the soul is more dominant, it causes a lack of balance in the soul. This is true about the soul in general, but it is particularly the case with the trait of anger.

Anger causes a more glaring kind of imbalance in the soul, because the very nature of anger is that it is out of control, for it is a product of the element of fire that it comes from. The trait of conceit

can also get out of hand, for it is also a product of fire, and we certainly find instances where a person's conceit can suddenly explode outward from within him. But it is anger which causes a much greater amount of imbalance in the soul's elements than any of the other traits, for the entire essence of anger is that it is an explosion, where things spin out of control. That is the essence of anger, being that anger stems from the aspect of fire which jumps and sparks.

Anger thus causes general imbalance in the soul. Understandably, the imbalance will depend on how intense the anger is; the more intense the anger is, the more imbalanced his soul will become. That is one part of the destructiveness of anger: it causes imbalance in the soul.

An additional problem that results from anger is that it causes a person to temporarily lose his mind. The Sages say, "Whoever becomes angry, his wisdom is removed."⁶¹ Elsewhere the *Gemara* says, "Whoever becomes angry, he forgets his Torah learning, and his foolishness is increased."⁶²

The *Gemara* says that Bilaam knew the exact time where Hashem is angered.⁶³ Bilaam's power in evil is equal in strength to the holiness of Moshe Rabbeinu [in order to allow free will]. The quality of Moshe Rabbeinu, which is *da'as*⁶⁴, was paralleled in the side of evil by Bilaam. Thus, anger (Bilaam) is the antithesis to *da'as* (Moshe).

In terms that apply to our own souls, our soul contains the faculties of *chochmah* (our thinking abilities) and a more subtle power of the mind, called *da'as*. The trait of anger, represented by "Bilaam's anger", stands to oppose *da'as*, represented by Moshe Rabbeinu. Thus, anger is the antithesis to *da'as*. (To a certain extent, the anger of Bilaam which challenges Moshe/*da'as* was able to break through at one point, where Moshe got angry once, and he came to err).

So a person's *da'as* is challenged by anger, which comes to oppose it. We can see this as well in physical terms. When a person is angry, not only does he lose the ability of wisdom at the moment, but he can't weigh out information properly; he can't work through his thoughts properly. He loses his ability to have any *shikul hada'as* (weighing out the thoughts).

The *Gemara* says that anger can cause a person to break things in his anger.⁶⁵ This is when the anger has hit its extreme point. But even if a person doesn't get to that point where he is breaking things in his anger, the very fact that he is in the midst of an angry explosion will compromise on his ability to think properly at that moment. He loses his ability of *shikul hada'as*, to weigh out his thoughts properly and work through his thoughts; in other words, he loses his *da'as*.

From a deeper understanding, this is because *da'as* enables a person to have balance in his soul. When the "fire" of anger is out of control, he loses balance in the soul, and this causes him to temporarily lose his *da'as*. We can see that when another person becomes very angry, or if we find

61 *Pesachim* 66b

62 *Nedarim* 22a

63 *Berachos* 7a

64 *da'as* – higher or spiritual intellect; a heightened awareness towards the spiritual; a mature level of thinking

65 *Bava Kamma* 91b

ourselves getting very angry, *chas v'shalom*, we can see that to some extent, there is a temporary insanity.

This is one of the destructive effects of anger: it causes a person to lose his mind temporarily, where he cannot work through his thoughts properly. Besides for the negative use of anger itself, anger causes a person to lose his ability of *shikul hada'as*. When Achashveirosh woke up the day after he had Vashti executed, the Megillah says that “*his wrath had subsided*”. He got back his ability to think properly and then he realized all that he had done. From this we see that when a person is angry, he loses his ability to think calmly.

The greater the anger, the more a person's *da'as* will leave him. It is written, “*He tears up his soul in his anger.*”⁶⁶ The Sages also said that when a person is angry, “his soul leaves him”⁶⁷ - in other words, his ability to have any holy *da'as* leaves him. That is why if a person is constantly drawn towards anger, when he is one who is “easily angered and difficult to appease”, his ability of *shikul hada'as* is weakened. In contrast, one who has a stronger ability to maintain his *da'as* will be much less drawn after anger.

In different terms, *da'as* is an ability that fosters connection [for *da'as* is known as the connecting force; “*chibbur*”], whereas anger is a force that causes separation. The stronger one's *da'as*, the more he can remain *connected* and anchored to himself, staying centered within himself, and anger will have much less of an effect on him; it won't shake him up as much.

Thus, *da'as* accomplishes the ability to stay connected to oneself (connection/*chibbur*) and it also enables a person to carefully think through his thoughts (*shikul hada'as*/weighing out the thoughts). These abilities are also known as *da'as d'chibbur* (the ability of the *da'as* to foster connection), and *da'as d'hachraah* (the ability of the *da'as* to decide). Anger uproots both of these aspects of *da'as*. It doesn't enable a person to think properly and it causes a person to lose his sense of centeredness.

The stronger the anger, the more a person becomes shaken up to his core. We can see that when a person is very angered, his whole body is shaking. To illustrate the idea further, if there are two good friends, Reuven and Shimeon, who enjoy a very close friendship, and one day Reuven becomes very angry at Shimon, the display of anger can ruin their entire relationship, shaking the foundation of the relationship at its core. All of the other negative character traits can cause disarray, but they don't cause as dramatic an effect as anger. Anger creates a tension which can shake a person's power of connection, on a core level.

Thus, it follows that the more a person can maintain his power of weighing out his thoughts properly and his connectedness to himself, the more his anger is weakened, and anger will have less of an effect on him. Therefore, one of the ways to weaken anger is by developing an ability to maintain control of one's *da'as*, in these two aspects that were mentioned: Through maintaining one's ability to have *shikul hada'as*/weighing out the thoughts, and to make sure to stay centered within the self even amidst the anger, which is known as the power of *chibbur*/connectedness.

⁶⁶ *Iyov 18:4*

⁶⁷ *Zohar II 182b*

Anger - A Loss of Inner Calm

There is another deep problem which results from the destructiveness of anger. This matter will only be relevant, however, to those who have already matured in their inner worlds.

The more internal that a person becomes, the more he maintains his inner calm (his “*sheket*”). This is based on the verse, “*For Hashem is not found in a stormy wind, nor is Hashem found in a noise, but in a soft, subtle sound.*”⁶⁸ The soul, in its higher root, dwells in a level that is a “*kol demamah dakah*” (a soft, subtle sound). The more a person feels pressured, the more “noise” the soul feels, and that it cannot find any peace. It will feel disturbed and it will lose its calm source that it comes from.

First we will point out that some people are born with a quieter nature, and some people are born with a louder nature, and this depends on the personality that is part of their *nefesh habehaimis*.⁶⁹ Sometimes a loud personality is a lack of refinement in the person, and sometimes it is positive and constructive; and sometimes a quiet, calm personality can be constructive and sometimes it is not. This is all true regarding only with regards to a difference in personality, which is the area of the *nefesh habehaimis*. But here we are not dealing with a quiet kind of personality that stems from one’s *nefesh habehaimis*; here we are dealing with the inner world of a person, which thrives on a deeper and internal kind of calmness.

The more internal that a person becomes, the more inner *sheket* he develops. Sometimes the quiet calmness that he gains will be manifest in his external part of life, which will mean that he lives a quieter kind of life, and sometimes, the circumstances of his life require him to be placed in a louder environment; this depends on what his own personal soul root is. But once a person develops his inner *sheket*, he can always maintain it, whether his life is quiet or noisy.

In order for a person to have any proper amount of *shikul hadaas* (to think over things properly), he needs inner *sheket* for this. If one has *sheket*, he becomes more of a *bar daas*, more capable of *daas*, and he will be able to think on his own. This is the implication of the verse, “*From my flesh I see G-d.*”⁷⁰

Sometimes a person is in a noisy environment and it is hard to concentrate on something that he needs to think about; when people are in a noisy street or in the supermarket or when they are at a noisy wedding, and they need to concentrate on something important, they will usually find a quieter place to think. But if a person maintains his inner *sheket*, he can remain connected to his inner world even as he is in a noisier place, and he can think calmly and make proper decisions even as he’s in that noisy place.

Sheket (inner calm) is the root of the inner world; an inner kind of life is based on the ability to have *sheket*. It is also known as *menuchah* (serenity). The Torah attributes the quality of *menuchah* to Yissocher, who is compared to the donkey, in his exertion of Torah learning, for he “*saw that serenity*

⁶⁸ *Melachim I 19:12*

⁶⁹ lower, “animalistic” layer of the soul; lower aspect of the self, the source of undeveloped and egoistic emotions

⁷⁰ *Iyov 19:26*

*was good.*⁷¹ The simple meaning of this is that a Torah scholar finds his *menuchah* in exertion of Torah learning. However, the deeper meaning of it is that that even one's exertion in Torah needs to stem from a calming energy of an inner *sheket*/calmness deep in the soul.

It is only the *outer layer* of Torah learning where there must be exertion in Torah learned in a “fiery” manner, the “war of Torah” where sages and scholars argue and debate the words of Torah, where the discussions and arguments can get quite heated. This is in line with the verse, “*Are My words not like fire, so says Hashem.*”⁷² The Torah is a fiery, and Torah learning is learned in a fiery manner. But all of this is present in the *outer layer* of Torah learning. The *inner core* of Torah learning is actually a place of inner calm; of *sheket*. A person's exertion in Torah learning, in order for it to be genuine, needs to stem from there. Otherwise, he lacks *sheket* \ *menuchah* in his exertion of Torah learning.

The inner world inside a person is a very calm place. The more inward that a person becomes, the calmer he becomes inside himself.

There are many Torah scholars and even *Gedolim* who had to engage in actions that were very “loud” and far from quiet - shouting and screaming the words of Torah in the *beis midrash* - but they were still amazingly calm inside themselves. At one moment they were involved in the “fire of Torah”, and two minutes later, they were able to decide upon a life-and-death issue, and to think about it very calmly.

This could only have been possible due to an amazing ability to maintain their inner *sheket*. If they could make the transition so easily from fiery debates to utterly calm thinking, this could only have been possible due to the place of deep, inner *sheket* in themselves which they reached. They were able to be involved with the “fire” and in the “war” of Torah, in the heated arguments of Torah learning, and immediately return to a deep inner silence in themselves as soon as they needed to. This ability of *sheket* is what determines the true greatness of a person.

This is also the depth of what the Sages describe as “One who is difficult to anger, and easily appeased.”⁷³ How does a person attain a level in which he is “easily appeased”? When one has developed a place of calmness inside himself, he can easily return to the calmness, and that is how he can easily overcome anger.

There are also additional reasons of how one overcomes anger: By arousing compassion, or by awakening a love for others, or any other motivation that would help a person forgive. But the deep power to be appeased is due to having an inner *sheket*. When one develops *sheket* in his soul, even if he is the type to be easily angered, it will be easy for him to immediately return to his *sheket*, and to become “easily appeased”.

Anger, however, causes a person to lose his inner *sheket*. Sometimes a person gets into an argument at home with his spouse, and he got so angry that he can't think straight for the whole

⁷¹ *Beraishis* 49:15

⁷² *Yirmiyahu* 23:29

⁷³ *Avos* 5:11

day; he comes to yeshiva and he can't concentrate on his learning the entire morning. This is all because the anger caused him to have turmoil inside himself, which disturbs his inner *sheket*.

There are also people who can't concentrate properly for several days, after they are angered. Even when they try to force themselves to concentrate on their Torah learning, they aren't able to concentrate that well, and they aren't able to learn with nearly as much clarity.

Understandably, all people go through disturbances. But the more a person refines his inner world, the more he is sensitive to maintaining *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind) and *sheket*. He feels an "inner noise" in his system when he is disturbed by external factors, and he will find that he cannot concentrate so easily. This is because he is sensitive to the need for *sheket*, so he cannot simply dismiss the disturbances to his *sheket* which he is feeling inside himself.

When a person is dealing with noise from the outside, he can disconnect from the surroundings and return to his inner calmness. That helps for outer and external noises, but if the noise is taking place inside himself, if there is "inner noise", how does a person disconnect from this? If the noise is found within, he will need to have a deeper kind of disconnection.

Some people are not disturbed by noises. They can learn Torah with concentration even amidst a hustling marketplace. Others have a harder time disconnecting from physical noises, and they can't concentrate unless the surroundings are quiet. This is a matter which depends on a person's soul root, and it also can depend on one's spiritual level; but we are not discussing this matter here. Here we are discussing "inner noise". How does a person disconnect himself from the "inner noise" that is created from anger which he experiences?

If the inner noise feels very intense and chaotic, it will be most difficult for any normal person to concentrate. And the more inward that a person is, the more he values his inner *sheket* and *yishuv hadaas*.⁷⁴ he is acutely disturbed by situations of anger. The more anger that he experiences, the more inner disturbances he will feel. It will be influenced by two factors: the intensity of the anger, as well as by the quality of his *sheket*. When there is a lot of anger and he also gained a lot of inner *sheket*, the inner disturbance will feel sharper.

Sometimes when a person has a lot of *inner sheket*, even the smallest inner noise can disturb him. Sometimes it works in the opposite way: because he has so much inner *sheket*, a small noise won't be able to take away him away from that calmness which he has nurtured inside himself. It will depend on what kind of personality he has.

In either case, though, anger causes disturbance to the inner world of a person. It causes a person to lose the root of his inner world on the current level that he is found at. This is the depth of "He tears up his soul in his anger." The soul leaves a person when he is angry because the "*kol demamah dakah*" of his soul goes lost from him.

⁷⁴ settled mind; peace of mind; calmness

Guarding Your Inner Calm

In order to deal with this, one will need to absorb the following perspective about the essence of our life.

When a person lives superficially, he is only concerned with keeping the 613 *mitzvos*. A person who lives more inwardly is also concerned with fixing his *middos*. If he is a deeper kind of person than this, he is concerned with the quality of his Torah learning. When a person is living a life of Torah learning, he needs to be constantly vigilant of how connected he is to the Creator, to the Torah, and to the Jewish people. That is where his soul is found, and that is how he measures his spiritual level of performance. These are things that a person cares about when he is living very deeply and inwardly; this is his inner world that he values.

When this is his concern, as soon as he begins to get angered, he can remind himself that it's not worth it to get dragged after the anger, because if he does so, he will be losing the calmness of his entire inner world that he values so much.

This is a totally different approach than anything mentioned earlier. We are not describing here a mere definition, or something to know about intellectually; nor are we describing here another piece of advice of how to control anger (which we have started to explain in the previous chapters, and which we will continue to explain, with the help of Hashem). This is a whole different kind of power to deal with anger.

The more a person allows himself to be dragged into anger, he loses his inner calmness, and he loses any connection he has to his inner world. Getting dragged after anger will mean that he is losing his connection to *sheket*. Thus if he can realize that getting dragged after anger will cause him to lose his inner world in the process, there is a much better chance he will have in preventing himself from getting dragged after the anger.

It will still depend on how strong the anger, and on what external factor caused the anger, and in many other factors as well. But if he can be aware that getting dragged into the anger will cause him to lose his inner calm, he has a strong incentive to avoid the anger. Even when he will be dragged after the anger, he will immediately want to return to his *sheket* that he has veered off track from, he can be “easily appeased”, because he is strongly motivated to maintain his *sheket*.

Methods Of Maintaining Inner Calm When You Are Angered

How indeed can a person calm down after he has been angered by another person?

(1) One possibility is that if he has developed a high degree of *sheket* within himself, this will make him want to easily return to it, as soon as he feels that he is losing it. Either he won't want to get angry and immediately calm himself, because he doesn't want to lose his *sheket*; or he will immediately return to the *sheket* if he is angered, because since he has a high degree of *sheket*, he is immediately drawn back towards it.

(2) The other possibility is that he can push himself to get back his *sheket*, using any of the following approaches: (A) - By arousing **compassion**⁷⁵ for the person who angered him, (B) Or by awakening a **love**⁷⁶ for the person who angered him, (C) Or out of strengthening his **emunah**⁷⁷ that everything that happens is from Hashem.

Using any of these approaches, a person can quickly return to his inner *sheket* when he begins to become angered. He does not want to lose his *sheket*, and it will bother him too much if he loses it – so it’s worth for him to overcome his anger rather than lose his entire connection to his inner world.

The Conditions For This Solution

In order for this to work, though, one has to already have a genuine connection to the inner world, to live with deep inner *sheket* inside himself; to the point that he realizes that getting angry will take away his life from him, that it feels like he is being taken away from his inner world.

If a person understands this only on an intellectual level, it will be almost useless to him to try to use this approach to avoid anger. It can only work for a person who has a palpable feeling of the concept here that we described. That can only be a person who *lives* the inner world, and he is fully aware that anger causes him to lose his inner world. He will then have a much easier time preventing himself from getting dragged after anger, and even if he does get angered, he will quickly be able to return to his inner calm.

The Deep Solution To Overcome Anger

There is much advice that can help a person overcome anger, which we have begun to explain in previous chapters and which we will continue to explain the coming chapters (with the help of Hashem); but the depth behind all of these solutions is this - to be aware that anger makes us lose the entire connection that we have with our inner world.

Why is this the depth of all solutions to fixing anger? We will illustrate it through the following.

When some people become angered, they try overcoming their feelings of anger, and they feel as if they are fighting a war within themselves. It feels like a tough battle, and it feels very difficult to overcome the anger. Let’s say that the person is trying to overcome his anger by awakening a love for the other person. He knows that he shouldn’t be getting angry at the person, and he might indeed contain in himself a deep love for others, so he is aware that getting angry others will contradict his love for others. So he “fights” the anger in himself, trying to awaken the love, in order to fight the pain of the inner contradiction he feels.

⁷⁵ *rachamim*

⁷⁶ *love*

⁷⁷ *faith in G-d*

In another scenario, a person will fight the anger he feels in himself by reminding himself that he is supposed to have *emunah*. In another scenario, a person will fight with his anger by trying to arouse his compassion on the other. There can be other reasons as well why a person fights the anger.

But the deep reason of why a person should fight his anger is because it causes him to lose his inner *sheket*, because losing his *sheket* will mean that he has lost his connection to his inner world. If one is aware of this, he has much more of an incentive to avoid getting pulled further and further into the anger, and he is much closer to returning to his *sheket* after he gets angry.

In Conclusion

If one lives by these definitions, he will find that he no longer feels a pull to involve himself in the disagreements of other people that having nothing to do with him, and he will naturally avoid getting into arguments with others.

He will acquire a power of *bittul* (self-nullification) to his soul's abilities, where he will not feel a need to voice his opinion on all matters, and he will find it easier to silence himself if someone insults him, and he will not feel a need to respond back: "Those who hear their disgrace and do not answer, are as strong as the sun in its zenith."⁷⁸ He will learn how to naturally stay outside of matters that are not his place to be involved in.

Getting used to living by these concepts is a general method of rectifying anger, but it will especially weaken the kind of anger which stems from **water-of-water-of-fire**, preventing himself from getting "dragged" after anger.

⁷⁸ *Shabbos 88b*

7 | *Obstinacy*

Anger Stemming From Wind-of-Water-of-Fire: Obstinacy Caused By Anger

We continue here, with the help of Hashem, to explain the element of fire and its resulting trait, anger. Here we will explain the kind of anger that stems from **wind-of-water-of-fire**.

Anger stemming from **wind-of-water-of-fire** is when a person becomes ‘dragged’ after anger, where he has a specific agenda of staying in the anger.

Here is the basic idea of how it works. The element of fire in the soul causes a person to have “explosions”, similar to the nature of fire, which sparks and jumps from its place. When fire in the soul ‘explodes’ outward, this is the source of anger. If a person has such an angry explosion because he has become ‘dragged’ into these kinds of explosions, this stems from the ‘water’ aspect of fire.

The nature of water is that when it meets up with anything, it sweeps it away with it, dragging it in any of the four directions. The current in the water will cause it to flow in a certain direction and prevent it from flowing in an opposite direction, but in essence, water can carry anything into any direction. The ‘wind’ aspect of water is that when a person is being ‘dragged’ into something, he can be led in a particular direction. The person is being dragged (water) and led in a certain direction (wind) with the anger (fire); hence, anger in this scenario stems from **wind-of-water-of-fire**.

This is a nature of the soul, and just as everything else, it can be used for either good or evil. First we explain how it is used for evil: when a person is ‘dragged’ by his anger into a certain situation and he continues to remain firmly in his anger, and even if you argue with him and you try to show him that he he’s not seeing the situation objectively enough, he still doesn’t give in, and he refuses to step down from his anger.

Examples of Evil Stubbornness Caused By Anger

Here is a simple example of this kind of anger.

Sometimes a person goes to the bank and he requests something from the person behind the desk, and his request is refused, and he is frustrated at this, so he might go to speak to the manager or someone else there and ask him for an explanation of why his request is being refused. Most people would calm down in this kind of situation, as long as the reason for the refusal of his request is explained to him with a pleasant smile and in a gentle, courteous manner. But another kind of person will not relent, even after it is explained to him gently why his request cannot be fulfilled. He is more concerned about being justified, and to him, the main thing is that justice be served (at least

according to what he thinks it is), and he feels that another is obligated to carry out what he feels is correct - so he stubbornly remains in his position.

There are many other examples of this nature to remain stubborn when one is angered. We can see many times that there are people who, when they are going through an issue and they are angered by something, they will stubbornly refuse to hear any other option to solve a problem, even if listening to another's advice would make his life easier. When he is angry, he remains stubbornly in his position, refusing to step down and hear an alternative, and you can't reason with him.

Analyzing Evil Stubbornness

This kind of stubbornness in a person is actually the very same *root* that *fuels* anger, and it can also *result* in actual anger. This is because anger is all about feeling opposed. When one feels opposed, that is the root of anger; the feeling of anger which he subsequently experiences is the *result* from this, but the *root* of the anger is the very fact that one feels opposed by something.

Why does a person remain stubborn and insist on having his way, even if letting go of this would make his life easier? Sometimes he is motivated by a pursuit to feel more honored. Sometimes it is because he feels that he must “do what is right”, or other motivations. Whatever his personal reason is, he continues to remain stubbornly in having his way, and he will oppose anything that threatens the way he feels. And sometimes, a person will use anger as a way to fight back the opposition that is threatening him.

This is the evil use of **wind-of-water-of-fire**, and it is clear that it is a negative trait, to anyone who thinks sensibly. Even if a person insists that he is “right” when he remains stubbornly in his anger, he is being immature. If he would have a more mature perspective, he would be able to let go, and realize that things don't always have to be his way, even when he feels that he is right and the other is wrong.

The Solution To Stubbornness – Seeing How It's Not Worth The Fight

Thus, the concern of always being in the “right” is an evil manifestation of stubbornness. The more sensible a person is, the more he understands that we cannot always influence others to always agree with us, because it is nearly impossible for a person to truly utilize the potential of his soul. The sensible thing to realize is that we often have no choice except to move on and let go.

In addition to this, the more internal that a person becomes, the more he realizes how these situations of anger cause him to lose his inner calmness, as we spoke about in the previous chapter. When we cannot let go of situations that oppose us, where we insist that we are right and that others are wrong, we use up a lot of energy. It steals so much energy from our soul when we remain in the

anger of these frustrating situations. When we are involved with arguments with others, it is draining.

So even if you know you are absolutely right, it is much more worth it to give in to the other person, so that you won't drain yourself in the process of arguing your position. This is almost always what needs to be done: one needs to find a way to appease others, even when he is right, and to choose the calmest route possible.

Dealing With It vs. Procrastinating

So far, we have briefly addressed what we need to do about the **evil** use of wind-of-water-of-anger. Now we will speak about the **positive** use of **wind-of-water-of-fire**, which is a broad matter.

Many times, a person faces situations in life that are very frustrating and difficult; like when we have setbacks that are particularly difficult to deal with. Not only do we experience frustration with other people that we need to deal with, but there are daily aspects of life which can be frustrating to us in general. There is a certain amount of energy that each person has, which allows him to deal with the situation fully, as much as his physical, mental, and emotional energies allow him to. But beyond a certain point, a person does not have the energy to cope, and at that point it gets really challenging, and it feels frustrating and difficult.

At that point, where a person has reached the end of his energies, he has two possible options he will employ. Either he continues to deal with the situation, remaining firmly in place and being prepared to go through difficulty (which is **wind-of-water-of-fire**), or, he will run away from the situation, so that he doesn't have to deal with it – he employs the trait of laziness.

The attitude of laziness in a person says, “Why should I bother with this situation? Why go through the pain of dealing with this? Instead I will run away from it, and be in a different situation than this, which will be much easier for me to deal with.”

In contrast to the stubborn person who refuses to budge from his situation, a lazy person's attitude is to deliberately run away from the situation, so that he is not in the “situation” and so that he doesn't have to “deal” with it. When a person is overcome by laziness, he might come up with 500 very intelligent excuses of why he should not have to deal with the situation, further justifying and rationalizing his laziness.

Wind-of-water-of-fire, the root of the nature to be stubborn, is the opposite of laziness. It tells a person that he should face the situation head-on and to persevere.

So we have two opposite powers in the soul which are used to deal with situations: stubbornness (where we deal with the situation), or laziness (where we don't deal with the situation). Laziness tells us to run away, whereas our wind-of-water-of-fire in the soul enables us to say to ourselves, “Deal with it, and keep going at it until you succeed.”

“Man Is Born To Toil” – Awareness That Life Contains Challenges

We must know that life consists of many challenges, where we will feel opposed. Hashem created male and female not just as man and woman, but as opposite forces within Creation, which means that we are constantly going through opposition during the time that we live on this world. There is nothing in Creation which is not opposed by something else; and there are no exceptions to this rule. Within this creation, everything must be opposed by something else, and that is way Hashem designed the world.

Therefore, in any situation we enter, there will be always some challenge. It doesn't make a difference whether you are entering first grade, high school, *Beis Midrash*, *Kolel*, getting married, finding a job or position – in anything you enter, there will be some point where you are challenged. Sometimes the challenge is small and sometimes the challenges are bigger, but you must know that there will always be something to deal with, in any situation that you happen to be in.

When one is well-aware of this fact of life, he fully realizes the verse, “*Man was born to toil.*”⁷⁹ There is hard work to do in everything we are involved with, because “*Man was born to toil*” – and to be more specific, it is because there is always a challenge in anything that we do. The *avodah* of a person to “toil” is essentially to get past whatever challenges him, and to continue to the next step.

If one chooses to work hard on this world – and I emphasize that this is a choice that one makes, through his own power of free will – he will find that he has the power to face any situation and deal with it, instead of running away from it. He will not look for ways of how to run away and avoid the situation. He will first think of how he can deal with it, instead of immediately thinking of how he can run away from it.

But if one is not ready to work hard on this world, he will naturally seek the lazy route away from the situation. As long as a person has not yet come to a decision that he will be prepared to work hard on this world at anything, he will naturally seek the lazy route, whenever he faces something challenging. This attitude of laziness will then continue to fester and it will cause him to perform less and less.

He might rationalize his lazy attitude by saying that he can't deal with *this* particular situation, but he will work hard in a *different* situation. Sometimes he may be correct, but in most cases, he will remain lazy, and he won't work harder in a different situation he is placed in. As long as one is running away from challenges and he feels like he cannot deal with anything that is hard to deal with, his laziness will only continue to get worse.

When he sits down to learn a *sugya*⁸⁰ of *Gemara*, and he sees that he must exert his mind on a certain point, he will come up with all kinds of rationalizations of why he doesn't need to do the hard work of thinking about it. He might think, “The *Rishonim*”⁸¹ probably ask this question”, and if

⁷⁹ *Avos* 5:7

⁸⁰ section of *Gemara*

⁸¹ early commentators (10th-15th centuries)

he sees that the *Rishonim* don't ask the question, he will look through the *Acharonim*⁸², and if he looks through the *Acharonim* and he doesn't find the answer, he will conclude that it's a mistaken question to begin with, instead of exerting his mind to try to answer the question that he has. He keeps pushing off any exertion in his learning that he may have to do, thinking that perhaps it will be answered by the time he's finished learning the *sugya*....

Sometimes he is indeed correct in his assumption, and he is not always being lazy. But when a person gets used to this kind of thinking where he pushes off the exertion for later, he slowly develops a lazy attitude, where he teaches himself to run away from anything that is difficult to deal with.

In Summary

Earlier, we addressed the problem of too much stubbornness, which is the opposite of laziness. That is also a problematic approach to dealing with difficulty, as we explained about before. But most people do not have the problem of being too stubborn when they face difficult situations. With most people, the problem is usually a pull towards laziness. So there are two opposite approaches to deal with frustrating situations (stubbornness and laziness), both of which are detrimental approaches.

The Solution: Knowing What You're Getting Yourself Into

The ideal way to go about difficult situations is to first use your mind to analyze the situation and see if you can handle it or not. Ask yourself if it's within your natural capabilities to deal with the situation you are facing, or not. This does not mean that you need to make this reflection with everything that you encounter. Make this reflection only when you encounter something that feels challenging to you.

To illustrate the idea we are saying, when Moshe Rabbeinu struck the Egyptian who was fighting, he feared the consequences of what might happen to him, so he ran away to Midyan. Why didn't he just stay where he was and deal with his situation? Why didn't he just believe in "*Ain Od Milvado*" as the *Nefesh HaChaim*⁸³ says, that no harm can come to a person if he believes that there is nothing besides for Hashem? This is certainly a good question we can wonder about, and it involves a lengthy discussion about the power of *emunah*, which we won't get into here. It is difficult to know how to go about the *avodah* of having *emunah*. But there is a point we can take out from this which applies to our current discussion: Moshe Rabbeinu recognized in himself at that point that he could not deal with the situation, and so he had no choice but to run away from it.

⁸² later commentators (15th-19th centuries)

⁸³ *Nefesh HaChaim*, Shaar III

There are always two ways to deal with a difficult situation: Either to face it head-on, or to run away from it. Each person needs to know what his current level is when it comes to this: is he capable of dealing with the difficult situation, or would he rather run away?

As we explained, the natural recourse of a person to take when he is faced with difficulty, is to seek how to get out of it and run away from it. But if one has gotten used to the idea that life is about working hard (“*man is born to toil*”), he is able to acquire a different reaction to his difficult situations, which becomes his new natural way of thinking. If one has reached this, he has a deep *avodah* in anything he encounters, to analyze if he has the energy or not to handle the situation.

This is a brief description of the concept we are trying to convey here, but it is a very deep and all-encompassing – and it requires a lot of hard inner work for one to know. Why?

Knowing Your Natural Limitations and Capabilities

If one is not familiar with recognizing the abilities in his soul, he is unaware of his personal limitations of what he can do. He might think that he is aware of what he can do, after momentarily thinking about it, but this is a mere superficial awareness of his limitations. He doesn't really know what he can do and what he can't do.

Here is a simple example. If a person is approached by someone where he is asked if he can set aside 500 shekel a month for *tzedakah*, and he is trying to put away money for his children's weddings, does he think he can do it? If a person is aware of his limitations, he sees a bigger picture in front of him, he is aware of the expenses he has and if there's more money coming in or going. He can make somewhat of an assessment, before he quickly commits himself to something that he cannot do.

Others aren't aware of their financial limitations and they quickly commit themselves to donating, thinking that they can really do it: “What's 500 shekel? Surely I'll be able to do it.” Or, a person doesn't think at all if he can give 500 shekel a month or not. Either he gives generously, where he is quick to give the 500 shekel (without thinking of how this will affect him financially), or he lives frugally, so he won't even consider giving the 500 shekel.

If we find this problem even when it comes to worldly matters, where people are not clearly aware of their limitations and means, surely this problem exists when it comes to knowing one's spiritual limitations and capabilities. It is far more complicating to know one's soul abilities - unlike the bank account, where you can determine the exact amount of money in your account.

Thus when people are faced with a situation where they will have to use mental and emotional energy, in most cases, they will not be clear about what their limitations and capabilities are. So either a person will try to persevere through the difficult situation (when he is not really able to handle it), or a person will run away from it (when in fact he might have been able to handle it very well).

If someone is not sure about what to do, he goes to ask a *Rav*. Now if the *Rav* has *Ruach HaKodesh*, then he knows for sure what to do. A *Rav* can only have *Ruach HaKodesh* if he believes that all help can come from Hashem and that only Hashem can help guide others to see the truth. If that is the case, this is wonderful. But if the *Rav* does not have *Ruach HaKodesh*, and he asks the *Rav* if he should face a certain situation or run away from it, what indeed should he do? He must know his personal capabilities at this moment in his life; what he can really handle and what he cannot.

When two people come to a *Rav* with the same question, they might each receive different answers, because each of them has different capabilities and limitations. One might person might be told “Yes” from the *Rav* and the other person might be told “No.” In order for one to enter any situation, he needs to have the mental and emotional capabilities to deal with it, or else he is not prepared to enter it.

So first one must know that every situation of life contains challenges. Only after one is well aware of this can he then wonder if he may enter certain situations or not. He might be able to, and he might not be able to. He should consider the various factors he will be involving himself with. This will entail two parts. One part of it is to wonder how he will be able to do it, and another part of it is to know if one has the strength to deal with this or not.

Taking On Too Much

Many times people enter into certain situations and they never considered all the many factors that it would involve. This is commonly the case when people take upon themselves various projects or undertakings. For example, if a person agrees to become *gabbai*⁸⁴ in a *shul*, is he aware of some of the factors that it will entail, before deciding?

If he is asked about what it means to be *gabbai* and he thinks that it will only involve making announcements in *shul* on Shabbos and putting up signs in *shul* during the week, he will be in for a surprise. He will slowly see that it involves much more than that; there are more factors involved. Then *Yomim Noraim* will hit him and then he'll become hit with worrying about the funds of the *shul*. He might be forced to collect money from different places in order to upkeep the funds. Then he'll have to approach people in the *shul* for money that they should pay up their dues, and of course there are some people who are not paying at all, and he will have to deal with complaints and fights of people in the *shul*, and he is the one who must sit through all of it. He never would have dreamed of all that he would have to go through when becoming *gabbai* and he just thought it would be simple.

So if one is about to enter into a certain situation which will require him to use his strengths, he should try to think of what factors it will entail, and then wonder if he has the capabilities or not to handle it.

⁸⁴ *Appointee, collector of funds*

Thinking Into The Factors Involved

In addition to making this reflection, one should wonder what factors the situation will entail. The more superficial a person is, the less he thinks into things and he is unaware of the factors involved in something.

For example, if we ask a person before he is married if he knows what it will entail to raise children, what would he answer? He might say that he will need enough money to pay for their clothing expenses, some government support, a *Kolel* paycheck to help him out, and that this is enough. But the deeper and more internal a person has become, he is more aware of what life is about, the more he thinks into things, wondering what a situation will entail, what the factors will be.

The truth is that there is no person who will know what it will entail to raise children. It is impossible for one to know. But in the little knowledge that a person does have about raising children, he can try thinking more into the details. If he is aware that he will need to buy clothing for them, he can ask himself, “What else do children need...?”

He might realize that children have emotional needs too. Is it so simple to even provide children with their most basic emotional needs? And after that, to raise them to live a life of Torah, to do *mitzvos*, to be prepared to serve Hashem, and to help them reach the purpose of life, to become close to Hashem? It’s a tremendous responsibility upon a parent to raise children. True, the Sages teach that “The work is not upon you to complete”, but at the same time, they also said, “Neither are you exempt from it.” One should be aware that there will be a responsibility upon him to raise his children, which will not be so simple.

If we ask a person if he is ready to have 10 children, one kind of person will say, “Yes, absolutely, with *simcha* (joy)!”, whereas another person will say that he will not be able to handle it. The second kind of person has all kinds of motivations of why he doesn’t want to have that much children; but even the first kind of person is not always the type to be aware of what it will entail, nor is he always on the level of having so much *simcha* to accept situations of life. Many times he is simply unaware of what raising 10 children will entail, so he says that he will happily raise 10 children. (It can indeed be a *simcha* for him, but only if he has thought beforehand of what the factors that it will entail and even so he accepts it.)

A superficial attitude towards life is when one doesn’t think into the factors that are entailed in any given situation. If one is prepared to get involved in situations that he has no idea of what they will entail, he might find later that he cannot deal with life as he thought he would be able to.

The deeper and more truthful way of living life is, that before you get involved in situations [which are known to be challenging], first think into what it will entail, and don’t rely on a superficial view towards it. Then you need to see if you can handle it, and if you see that you can, you also need to pray to Hashem for assistance.

We are not talking about situations that Hashem has placed a person into against his own will, before he can decide to enter it. In those situations, a person has no choice but to deal with it as best as he can. Here we are discussing *before* one is about to enter into certain situations which will challenge him. In order to know how to deal with challenging situations, one must first think of what he is about to enter; what it will entail.

Entering An Undertaking – Two Requirements Needed

In order to deal with any situation that challenges us, one needs a little bit of wisdom about life, along with an ability to feel somewhat humbled.

If a person is missing any of these two factors, and he enters into challenging situations anyway, he will become involved with situations that he really doesn't belong in, and he will have no idea what he is facing. Then after some time he will end up harming other people from it.

Examples of Taking On Too Much Without Thinking It Through

As an example, there are people who want to do *chessed*, so they take all kinds of undertakings on themselves in order to help others, but their undertakings involve others whom they enlisted with, and they had good intentions, but in the end, their *chessed* project may not work out, because they eventually realize that their resources are limited and they don't have the energy for it that they would have. In the end, nobody gains anything from it – not themselves, and not the people they wanted to help and not the people who were involved.

Here is another example. Sometimes people open a money-lending *gemach* for the community, and they do not realize what they are getting themselves into. They convince people to lend money to it and there are co-signers involved, and they do not know what this will entail. In every *gemach*, how much of the money is returned to them by the end of the month? How much of it goes missing? How many times are there cases where people have to go to *Beis Din* in order to collect back the money? How much is a person willing to fight with people who are not willing to pay back the money, or those who simply don't have the money to pay back the loans?

How many times do people help *bnei Torah* invest their money and the plans don't work out, and they lose a lot of money from it? I'm not even talking about cases where people are clearly swindling others of their money. Even when people are well meaning and they want to help people, if they are not clear about what they are getting themselves into, people will end up suffering losses due to their ignorance.

There are many more examples we can give, where people enter into an endeavor before thinking it through enough, and here we have just given some of the more common examples. Usually there

are good intentions involved in these situations. If people don't know what they be dealing with before they get involved in something, the results can be disastrous.

If someone wants to open a yeshiva for young children, does he know what he is getting himself into? Does he know what it means to be a principal of a yeshiva, for young children? Whether it will be 200 children, 400 children, 1000 children? Does he know what being a principal of a school will entail? Does he know what it means to find good *Rebbeim* teachers for the school? It is a lot more complicated to run a school than the way it appears to observers.

We have brought these examples to bring out the intensity of the issue we are discussing. Our point here is that most people are not aware of what they are getting themselves into, when they become involved with any undertaking. Only after getting involved with it do they begin to learn about what they have become involved in, by trying to get through each challenge that comes their way, even being thankful to Hashem for every “wave” that comes over them. But they do not have a plan of how they will deal with the challenges they will encounter in the undertaking.

Many times we see this problem in teenagers when they are in yeshiva, and often it is still a problem in adults: when they want to be *bnei aliyah* – those who have very high spiritual ambitions and they wish to achieve high levels. Most people do not succeed when they aim very high, as one of the Sages said, “I have seen *b'nei aliyah* (those who ascend), but they are few.”⁸⁵ There are many reasons why people don't succeed in their ambitions, but one of the reasons for it is due to the point we are explaining here: when one is not making proper use of **wind-of-water-of-fire**.

What it will all boil down to is: if one can handle what he is entering or not. Most teenagers who want to achieve very high are prepared to take the plunge, but they don't realize what it will entail and if they can handle certain parts or not. In fact, it is not most aspiring teenagers in yeshiva, but *all*. The reason for this is simple: A teenager does not think about what life entails, of what Torah and serving Hashem will require of him. The truth is that even a mature adult doesn't understand, but at least he knows that he doesn't understand, because he has matured in his *daas* (thinking abilities) to understand this; whereas a teenager will think he understands what he is entering, even though he doesn't.

This problem is also found with most people who take upon themselves various resolutions of Rosh HaShanah. These resolutions usually don't last for long, due to the reason here we have explained: because people don't stop to think of what they are getting themselves into. In fact, they would rather *not* understand what they are getting into, because they would rather believe that they *can* handle what they take upon themselves. But even if a person doesn't fool himself like that, he is still usually not aware of what he will be getting into when he takes upon himself a resolution.

We can give more examples of this idea. It is an all-encompassing concept which includes all areas of life, both the physical and spiritual sides to life. The common denominator between all these situations is that the person is unaware of what he will have to deal with, before he enters these

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situations. And if he is not aware of what he will have to deal with, how he will he deal with the difficulties when they come?

Practically Speaking

We have said that one needs to think things through before he involves himself in any undertaking, but the truth is that there is no way to be sure about anything. We are never able to plan out anything exactly as it will happen. Even the simple, daily aspects of our life cannot be planned out. We may think about what we will do today, while Hashem has other plans for us.

In spite of this, we still need to plan out things as much as we can and determine if we are up to doing certain things or not. One needs to know what his abilities allow him to do and what his limitations are, and one needs to see what energies are required of him in a situation.

One cannot know how to do this perfectly, because we do not have an exact knowledge about what our personal soul is capable of. We also do not know exactly what we will encounter in anything we become involved with. But the difference between one who thinks about it and one who doesn't bother thinking about it, is a huge difference. It is a transformation from living a superficial kind of life to a more internal kind of life.

So before one is about to enter an undertaking, he should first think about what it will entail, and if he has the energies to handle it or not – and he should also *ask people who have gone through the experience* of that which he wishes to enter. “There is no wise person as one who has experience.” He should try to speak to 2 or 3 people whom he identifies as being close to truth, and discuss with them what the factors are in the undertaking.

After he has done that, he should still know that the human intellect cannot foresee everything that will happen in any given situation. Our intellect does not have the power to know everything. Yet that doesn't exempt us from trying to use our intellect and to know what we are getting into, as much as we are able to know. And we also need to pray to Hashem for help in order to succeed. Then, we can go ahead with our decision.

Of course, we cannot do this in every aspect of our life. We cannot spend so much mental energy and prayer on every last aspect that comes our way, because this is impossible. But if you are about to enter something that feels challenging to you and you are not sure if you should enter it, in these situations, that is where you should think about it before you go into it, in the way we have explained.

Uncovering Greater Strength In Yourself

When a person takes this path, he will find that it is more natural for him to deal with difficulty. He will then see that he has a greater ability to work through challenges. What first seemed to him as

a daunting challenge will now seem to him as something that he can handle. He will see that he really does have the strength in his soul to deal with certain situations that he originally thought he would never be able to handle it.

In the beginning of one's life, he will think that he has certain soul abilities, and not more than that. Some people have more self-awareness and some have less; but either way, a person will think he has certain abilities and limitations. When a person goes through life, though, his capabilities change. There are two reasons for this.

One reason is because a person actually has more inner strength in his soul than he thinks he does. He is just not consciously aware of those hidden strengths. Those hidden strengths are slowly brought to the fore as one exerts himself in life.

For example, when a person is in his first years of marriage and he has just had his first baby, and he can't sleep at night, he might wonder how it's possible that others who have many more babies than him are able to come on time to *Kolel* and have full strength, when he is struggling to stay awake. As the years go on, he learns more about life, and he learns that it is indeed possible. He may see others who fall apart, but he also sees others who are able to handle it fine.

Slowly he begins to realize that it is possible to be kept awake all night by the baby and raise a family, and also be able to learn good the next day in *Kolel*. What appeared to him first as impossible, is now possible. (Instead of waking up to only crying at midnight, he can now thank Hashem at midnight for it as well!)

In addition, one who truly exerts himself in spiritual growth merits to have the inner light of the *neshamah* (Divine soul) opened to him, where he receives entirely new capabilities. This is generally referred to as "*siyata d'shmaya*" (heavenly assistance), but to give a more precise definition, it is when Hashem's light within the *neshamah* has begun to affect even the physical body.

(In particular, it affects the "*Ruach*", which is contained in the [spiritual] heart, and it is not merely an expansion of the natural abilities of the *nefesh habehaimis* (the animalistic layer of the soul). It is Hashem's light being shined upon the *neshamah*, whereupon the light of the *neshamah* can then penetrate to the physical body, allowing a person to receive new strength to deal with difficulty.)

That will increase a person's ability to deal with challenges. There is also another ability in the soul which one will need in order to balance out his exertion: the power of *menuchah* (serenity) in the soul (also called the "Shabbos" in the soul). Here we have explained the power of exertion in the soul (*ameilus*), the power to face challenges, but one also needs to have some connection to *menuchah* \serenity in order to be balanced.⁸⁶

In Conclusion

⁸⁶ *Refer to שיחת השבוע_וישלת_כח המלחמה שבנפש*

In summary, we have explained here that before one enters into an undertaking, he must first realize what he is getting himself into and analyze the factors that will be involved. He should also know what his capabilities and limitations are and then determine if he has the strength to enter the undertaking he's thinking about. Finally, as we have just mentioned, a person also needs to realize that he contains more inner strength than he thinks he does, because Hashem gives each person a little bit more strength from Above than his normal capabilities.

One must believe that he has more capabilities than he thinks he does. This applies to each individual soul. If one thinks that he does not have any capabilities at all, he has basically buried himself while alive. If he does believe that Hashem gives him more strength than he thinks he has, he will uncover a great wealth of abilities in his soul, and then he will discover that he has even more capabilities than he thought. And through that, he will slowly reach the inner light of Hashem contained in his own *neshamah*, and his ability to deal with difficulty will become stronger.

The Sages said, “Whoever is greater than his friend, his evil inclination is stronger”⁸⁷ – a person has the ability to face that which opposes him. That is the depth of the greatness which the soul is capable of.

⁸⁷ *Sukkah 52a*

8 | *Flashes of Anger*

Quick Flashes of Rage (Fire-of-Water-of-Fire)

With the help of Heaven, we continue here to discuss the element of fire and the trait of anger. Now we will discuss the kind of the anger that stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire**. Our Sages described this as “One who is easily angered and easily appeased.”⁸⁸

The inner workings of this kind of anger are as follows. Fire (the root of anger) bursts out of its place when it is opposed by something that gets in its way. Water-of-fire is when a person is *dragged* towards those oppositions that create the explosions, and the “fire”-of-water-of-fire refers to the boiling point of water-of-fire.

To illustrate, we can see that when fire and water meet, if the fire is boiling, the water will sizzle when it hits the fire. This takes place so quickly that it can all happen in the blink of an eye. Water can also be boiled by fire to the point that it is sizzling hot and it cannot be touched without getting scalded. That sizzle is the “fire” of water-of-fire.

It manifests in the soul as a nature to react in an extreme manner when one feels opposed, causing a “boiling of the blood” (*resichas damim*), where there is a momentary flash of anger. It is a flash of anger that comes in the blink of an eye, and it is also gone just as quickly. This is what is meant in the term “easily angered, and easily appeased.” However, although this kind of anger is somewhat easier to deal with, because it is easily put out, it is also easily activated, as soon as one is quickly ‘dragged’ towards it.

Delaying The Anger

Earlier it was explained that all anger results from opposition. Sometimes the opposition feels intense and sometimes less intense, but all anger is a result of feeling opposed. We mentioned that one of the ways to reduce anger is to delay the anger until later. This can also work for all kinds of anger, and not just the particular anger we are discussing, but it is particularly helpful for the quick flashes of anger that come from **fire-of-water-of-fire** which we are discussing.

Since the nature of this kind of anger is that it can be easily removed, pushing off this anger until a later time is very effective when dealing with this kind of anger. It is always recommended to push off anger, but it is especially effective when we want to put a stop to flashes of intense anger. The

⁸⁸ Avos 5:11

more intense the anger is, the more a person should push it off, and in turn, the more the intensity of the anger will decrease.

Remembering That The Anger Is Only Temporary

In addition, even when a person is experiencing the flash of anger, he should remind himself that the anger is only temporary. The whole nature of this kind of anger is that it can leave quickly just as it comes quickly. By becoming aware of this, that very awareness already weakens the anger. Although this doesn't totally uproot anger, the more one is aware that the anger is only temporary, the weaker the anger will be.

Additionally, the gain of this will be that he will not do as much damage when he is angered. The *Gemara* talks about one who breaks things in his anger, which is when one hits the boiling point of his anger, to the point that he is breaking things. Yet a person can attain some self-control and train himself to lessen the degree of his anger, where he won't be damaging things.

While a person is angry, he is going through a temporary insanity, to some degree. That is why he would break things in his anger; he loses control. But it is possible for a person to weaken the intensity of the anger, even as he is angry (by becoming aware that the anger is only temporary), and then there is a lot less insanity during the anger.

In summary, the first thing one should do for this kind of anger (momentary flashes of anger, which come from **fire-of-water-of-fire**) is to push off the anger until later, and an alternative, deeper method that can help is for one to remind himself and be aware that this kind of anger is only temporary.

Avoid Decisions During A Rage

In either case, when a person experiences a flash of rage, he must make sure that he doesn't make any decisions during this time. He should realize that his rational mind is not able to think properly as he is raging, so now is not a good time to make any decisions or agree to them. Nor he should resolve anything upon himself at that moment.

To illustrate, Chazal say that when a woman is at the peak of labor, she swears that she doesn't want to have relations with her husband anymore, because she sees the difficulty of bearing a child. That is why she needs to bring a *korbon* after giving birth, for making a false oath. We see from this that while a person is angry, he might say things that are very decisive, which he regrets later. Therefore, when a person is angry, he should make sure not to decide anything then. He should recognize that he is not fully rational at that moment and that he should not say anything then that he'll regret later.

Uncertainty Caused By Excitement

Until now we have spoken about what happens when a person is actually angry, but we mentioned earlier that anger is a result of feeling opposed. Here we are dealing particularly with **fire-of-water-of-fire**, where a person excitedly ‘explodes’ after he has become ‘dragged’ into excitement. This is a nature which does not always result in anger.

Almost all people experience **fire-of-water-of-fire** [on a subtle level] where their fire is ‘boiling’ inside themselves, in the form of excitement or anxiousness by something, and it is not necessarily anger. They feel very uneasy and anxious about something, and they are not able to think clearly during this time.

We can all recognize the following example where we can see it. A person might go to a certain place where he thought he would be able to buy something that he wanted, and when he gets there, he is told that it won’t be in stock for another month. He becomes anxious, because he really needs to buy the thing he wants, so he might decide right then that he will buy something else which he didn’t plan on buying. He is not able to calmly think about it and weigh out the factors of his decision. His mind becomes anxious, thinking: “What should I do?? If I make a decision now, maybe I’ll regret it later. If I don’t decide, maybe I’ll also regret it later.” Whichever way he turns, he is in doubt about his decision. (Understandably, the more *emunah* a person has, the calmer he becomes and he won’t get so excitable).

Sometimes a person is walking through the streets and someone calls out to him that he is selling a certain item for much cheaper than the normal price. First he calls out, “60 shekel!” and then when he sees that he’s not getting a response, he yells out, “40 shekel!” The person walks by and begins to wonder, perhaps it’s a good deal. “Maybe this really is a bargain!” he thinks. “But maybe it’s not that worth it...?” He is busy hemming and hawing about what he should do, and meanwhile, the other person is pressuring him to buy it, being a very good salesman. Finally he makes the decision and he goes ahead and buys it, paying him the 40 shekel, thinking that he has gotten a really good deal.

When he comes home and shows his family what he bought, they tell him that what he bought isn’t worth a cent. He felt so anxious as he was being pressured by the salesman that he made a rash decision, because he couldn’t think clearly. And he probably also thought that the salesman is not swindling him, so that influenced him as well in his decision. Without getting into a discussion here if the average salesman on the street is assumed to have integrity or not, the point is that when a person is suddenly asked to decide something and he is not that composed, he is apt to make a very rash decision, because he becomes unclear about what to do, and he is doubting his decision back and forth, finally deciding but without clearly thinking about it.

The more a person is dominated by **fire-of-water-of-fire** - and there are many people like this – he will become excitable, ‘dragged’ into it and pulled after the excitement, and he won’t be able to maintain composure over his mind and be able to think clearly. Many people don’t know how to put a halt to themselves when they find themselves in doubt over a certain decision, and at a certain

point they go ahead and make a rash decision, to ease their anxiousness. But it would have been much better not to do anything at all. This is where it can be applied the rule, “*shev v'al taaseh adif*” - “Sitting and not doing, is better [than doing].”

Avoid Decision-Making When You Are Anxious

If you are anxiously full of doubts about something, it is much better not to decide anything, rather than make a decision. Even if what you would have bought would have been worth it, I will still tell you that it's still not worth it to decide when you're in doubt. Sometimes you will in fact “lose out” by not making a decision, but the gain that you will have from restraining your anxiousness of making rash decision is an inner kind of gain, which is far worth the monetary loss.

When you find yourself pressured to give in to something that will affect you financially, it is always better not do anything. If you can do this out of having *emunah*, that is of course wonderful, but if you have not yet merited a high level of such clear *emunah*, you should still be prepared to go through some physical\monetary loss and hold onto your composure, rather than make a rash decision.

This is the kind of action you need to take when **fire-of-water-of-fire** (excitement) dominates: you need to calm the ‘excitement’ of the fire.

Thus, a more inner and truthful way to live is, that whenever you find yourself faced with doubts about making a certain decision, when the doubts are particularly pressing on you, you don't decide anything. This will apply to all areas of life which involve important decisions.

If it's not such a major decision, though - like if you are not sure if it's worth it for you to buy a package of 12 yogurts versus a package of 10 yogurts, and it seems that it's worth it to pay the difference for the package of the 12 – then of course, you can decide whatever you want, even if you're not sure if it's worth it or not. But if it's a more important kind of decision, then you should not decide anything, when you have doubts. Instead, push off the decision for later, like tomorrow.

Sometimes people push off making decisions because they are being lazy, and sometimes it comes from being full of doubts, which hampers their ability to decide. One should deal with himself according to his personal circumstances. If he does not have the problem of being too lazy or being too doubtful, he should do as we said, and not decide anything when he's in doubt. With most people, this is what they should do.

Regaining Composure

How long should one push off a decision for? He should wait until he feels calmer inside himself. This is based on the words of the Ramban, who writes that when one needs to decide when he is in doubt, he needs to come to a point of *hishtavus*, of equilibrium. When he reaches that state of inner equilibrium, he can then have the peace of mind to make a proper decision.

However, it is a very high level in *avodas Hashem* for one to reach *hishtavus*, and it is a lifelong task, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes. But even if a person doesn't reach the actual high level that is *hishtavus* (which is the end goal of all our life, of becoming totally and absolutely nullified in our existence to Hashem, which is the deep purpose of our entire existence), on our current level we can still attain touch upon a degree of *hishtavus*: when we make sure to stay composed and calm, where we aren't too anxious or excitable.

From a place of calmness in ourselves we can decide properly; after we have given ourselves enough time to regain composure. This does not mean that the decisions we make then will always be correct. But we can have a truer place in ourselves where we can be deciding from.

The idea of pushing off decisions for later might seem to a person like a way of running away from responsibilities, but the more a person understands about life and he is living a more inner kind of life, the more he realizes the importance of this, and he will get used to pushing off decisions for later, until he feels calmer and more composed, where he can decide more calmly.

Of course, there will be some risk involved with this idea, because if a person gets used to pushing off decisions too much, he will become irresponsible. If a person thinks that this will happen to him, he should make up a time where he will decide, and decide then – even if he hasn't yet calmed himself yet.

In Summary

In summary, a person should first try to calm down from the excitement before making a decision, which will give him the time to decide properly, but if he knows himself well and he realizes that this will make him become irresponsible, he should make up a certain time where he will decide and then decide at that time he sets for himself, whether he feels calmer or whether he doesn't.

Most People Do Not Make Real Decisions

This is a sharp statement, but it is the reality today. We should understand that most people are not able to decide properly, relying on the very first thoughts that come into the mind, and that is what determines their decisions.

Even after weighing out the options before deciding, a person will usually compare it with his first thoughts about it and try to align his thinking with the first thoughts. Whenever a person wants something, and he begins to doubt it and he weighs the options, he has basically “decided” already what he is going to do, because his will has been awakened, and that will probably be his determining factor. The will of a person affects the rational mind like *shochad* (bribery). Once the

mind has been “bribed” by a certain *ratzon* will, it will not think truthfully, even if all the rational proofs in the world are brought to argue with it.

When a person is very inclined to decide a certain way, due to the excitement that stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire** in the soul, the pull is very strong, and it will be hard for the person to change his initial, subconscious ‘decision’. For this reason, most people are not able to come reach a truthful decision about anything.

In similar terms, it has been said that most people do not access their true *bechirah* (free will). Instead, many people are deciding based upon their *muskal rishon* (first thoughts), without really weighing out the options.

In a decision that is based on *bechirah*, a person sees two options in front of him, and even though he may be drawn towards one of the options, he is able to pull himself away from where he is drawn towards and choose the opposite. But in most decisions that people make, a person is usually not using his *bechirah* to decide. Instead he is just following his first thoughts, and that is where he will operate. As we have explained here, this stems specifically from **fire-of-water-of-fire** in the soul.

This might sound far-fetched to a person when he first hears this, but this is the situation with most people when it comes to making decisions. There is usually a subconscious decision that is already in place, due to something that the person wants; all of the thinking afterwards will be centered around that initial, subconscious decision. Therefore, the idea of pushing off a decision for later is something that is necessary for most people to do, in order to be able to decide properly.

When You Need To Immediately Decide

There are some exceptions to this rule, of course, as we mentioned. And sometimes a person needs to decide quickly, which cannot be avoided. When a person needs to make quick decision on a matter, he has no choice but to decide, and he must also go to a Rav for some decisions, which require immediate deciding.

In these cases, one should realize that it was the will of Hashem that this should happen. There will definitely be times where we must decide immediately and we don’t have the time to compose ourselves and decide calmly, and this will include even decisions that are not life-endangering but are important nonetheless, and they will require you to quickly decide. But generally speaking, one needs to learn how to push off decisions for later.

Gaining Some Serenity In Our Life

This inner way of living brings a person to attain a great degree of *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind). Most people do not have *yishuv hadaas*, because as soon as there is excitement or pressure about

something to decide upon, there is already a subconscious ‘decision’ that a person has decided to follow, with only a few obstacles getting in the way of the decision.

Many people are constantly going through a cycle of excitement, then deciding, then excitement, deciding, etc. The degrees of the anxiousness will vary with each person, some people are more anxious to decide than others, but this nature exists in almost all people to some degree.

But when a person practices pushing off decisions for later and only deciding after he is calm, as we have explained here how to do, he becomes like an “*ish menuchah*”, “a serene person”. He will not make decisions unless he has done some reflection in his thoughts about it, and his decisions will be based on this serenity.

This will of course take a lot of deep inner work, which will take time to develop. It might even take hundreds of times of practicing a restraint on deciding anything when you’re anxious, in order to gain this ability of composure.

Eventually, after getting used to this, you will be able to restrain yourself even as you are excited (similar to how the power of despair works, where you are able to give up and let go of something you want). You will also find that even when you do become excitable, the excitement has become much calmer and it doesn’t dominate you when it comes. This will in turn improve your ability to push off decisions for later, and the cycle will strengthen.

This is the depth of how Torah scholars have more *yishuv hadaas*.

Seeing The Reality Of Things

After gaining this ability, you are able to reach a deeper point in the soul, where you won’t be acting from a place of excitement in yourself when you hear or see something. You will become less reactive. Instead, you will see or hear things more objectively, hearing or seeing something from what it actually is.

As we mentioned, when most people hear or see something, they are influenced by a flash of excitement, and they are not seeing it truthfully and objectively. Even more so, we explained that people are usually influenced in their decisions by excitement, and not by truth. But the more a person works on the ideas here and with *siyata d’shmaya*, he will be able to hold back from making any immediate decisions that are rash.

Even more so, he will gain the ability to see things as they truly are, as opposed to acting out of an unrestrained excitement for what he is seeing. A person who reaches this will reach the view of a Torah scholar, who sees things as they are, seeing the reality of each thing for what it is.

Almost all people do not see the clear reality of something that they are seeing. This is not even referring to the lack of being able to see the totality of things; it is referring to a more basic view, which is usually missing, in the view of most people. People are simply not seeing the reality of

something they are encountering, and instead, they are experiencing an excitement of what they are seeing.

To illustrate, a person walks by a store and he sees a certain kind of clothing advertised in the window, which appeals to him. He goes into the store, he tries on the item in the window that is being advertised, and he finds that it's a totally different fit than what he imagined. What he saw in the store window was a completely different reality than the reality of what he is trying on in the store. It seemed like the same thing, but they were two different realities. He might only find out his mistake later when he gets home and he realizes that it's not what he really wanted.

The more a person gains *yishuv hadaas*, he knows how to compartmentalize things in his mind, maintaining his mental composure, without being too excited and caught up in details. He sees more the reality of things, seeing each thing for what it is.

Increased Clarity In Torah Learning

When this ability becomes stronger in a person, his comprehension in his Torah learning will also increase. When a person begins the *sugya* of the *Gemara*, he usually will not see the truthful meaning. He is missing some general information, and he also is unaware of certain details he will need to know. But even more so, he hasn't yet absorbed the words as they are, because he is initially understanding it based on his very first thoughts. (In some great people, their first thoughts are *Ruach HaKodesh*, but this is not the case with most people).

In this way, a person is able to think and decide things from a calmer place in himself, without getting confused by all the outer stimuli. Sometimes the clarity will feel greater and sometimes it will be less, some periods of time offer more clarity than other times, and in addition, it will depend on how much holiness and purity is present at that time.

In Conclusion

Thus, **fire-of-water-of-fire** plays a very big role in our life. In a few people, it will manifest as quick flashes of anger, which we discussed in the beginning of this chapter. But in almost all people, **fire-of-water-of-fire** does not result in anger, and it is rather expressed as a flash of excitement and anxiousness [caused by various outside stimuli] that dominates a person, which doesn't allow him to think clearly and make proper decisions.

Here we have come to explain how to calm the **fire-of-water-of-fire**, to reach a place of calmness in oneself, which enables a person to live a life of *menuchah* (serenity) and *shikul hadaas* (being able to weigh out one's thoughts properly).

The full extent of this power is reached by our *Gedolim* who gain the ability of "*daas Torah*", to rend decisions on questions that come before them. The depth of this is not simply because they know how to decide, (which is certainly necessary as well), but because they can absorb very well the

words that are relayed to them. (There is also the level of *Ruach HaKodesh*, where the *Gadol* can answer even without hearing properly what is said to him; but that is an altogether different matter which we are not discussing here).

However, even average people can acquire the ability to think from a calmer place in themselves and to truly absorb the reality and information in front of them, without becoming too excitable, which enables us to weigh out our thoughts properly and to decide from there. Understandably, we will also need *tefillah* and *siyata d'shmaya* along with it, to succeed.

9 | *Extremity*

Wind-of-Fire: Opposition

With *siyata d'shmaya*, let us continue to discuss the element of fire and its resulting trait, anger. Now we will discuss anger that stems from “wind” of fire, which, as we mentioned briefly in the first chapter, is the idea of opposition.⁸⁹

First we will outline the four branches of **wind-of-fire** (its subdivisions of earth, water, wind, and fire), and then we will go through each of these in more detail. At first these outlines will sound ambiguous, but they will be explained as we go along, with Hashem’s help:

- (1) **“Earth”**-of-wind-of-fire is when a person is regularly living in extreme situations, where he has to contend with some kind of opposition.
- (2) **“Water”**-of-wind-of-fire is when a person enjoys opposition.
- (3) **“Wind”**-of-wind-of-fire is when a person is guiding and giving direction through opposition.
- (4) **“Fire”**-of-wind-of-fire refers to the wars fought in the world, which result from opposition.

Earth-of-Wind-of-Fire: Living Based On Extremes

Let’s begin with **earth-of-wind-of-fire** [where one is regularly in a situation of extremity and opposition].

The words of the Rambam⁹⁰ are well-known: when one wants to improve a negative character trait, he must go in the opposite extreme of that trait, until he can eventually arrive at ‘the middle point’ (also called “the golden path”) between the two extremes, which is the goal.

However, there are some people who live all the time in extremes, both when it comes to their *avodas Hashem* and in their general way of thinking, because they have a more extreme kind of personality, where they will only function at extremes. They will live a life where they will regularly be at opposition with something, because they are drawn towards living in an extreme mode.

89 Editor’s Note: After delivering this shiur, the Rav was asked, “What does opposition have to do with anger?” The Rav answered that anger is but the result of a deeper root, “opposition”. The root of anger is the force of opposition, and the reaction of anger itself is the result of the force of opposition. Thus, in these next four chapters (Fixing Your Fire: Anger: #009-#012), which discuss wind-of-fire (opposition), the Rav will not be discussing “anger” per se, but the root which leads to anger, which is “opposition.”

90 Rambam Hilchos De’os

The Sages say that the world stands on three pillars – Torah, *avodah*, and *chesed*. We will see here how a person with an extreme nature will act within the areas of Torah learning, *tefillah* (*avodah*) and *chesed*.

“All Or Nothing” Attitude In Torah Learning

A person who can only operate at extremes might be the type of person who can learn Torah all day, from day until night, but if he is somehow forced away from learning for some time of the day, he won't open up a *sefer* for the rest of day. Either he puts in a full day of learning, or he puts in nothing.

Sometimes it happens that a man learning in *Kolel* all day, who has three sessions a day of in-depth Torah study, will get thrown off schedule, due to various things that come up which he has to take care of; and indeed, every single person will inevitably encounter various issues that bombard him and which take him away from normal routine. But if a person only operates in extremes, once he sees that he has to miss part of his day in the *Kolel*, he won't show up for the rest of the day either.

He has an “all or nothing” approach. On one day, this kind of person will attend all of the study sessions in the *Kolel*, fully immersed in the words of Abaye and Rava, but on another day, when various issues come up and he has to be absent for part of the day, he sees no point in returning to the *beis midrash* for the remaining time of the day.

He won't even see a reason to learn the *Daf Yomi* that day, and he might not even bother saying the words of *Kerias Shema*, which is the minimal obligation of Torah learning. Either he does it “all” or he does “nothing” – he will not settle for anything else in between.

Anyone with some *daas* (mature understanding) can see that that this is not a sensible approach to live life. But this is the mindset of a person who has a dominance of **earth-of-wind-of-fire** (extreme mentality): he has an “all or nothing” attitude. Either he is totally in it, or he is totally out of it.

“All or Nothing” Attitude in Prayer

When it comes to the area of *tefillah* (prayer), we know that sometimes a person feels like his heart is more opened, and sometimes it is closed, which is a normal occurrence to every person. In some people, when their heart is open, they will *daven* with fervor, but when their hearts feel closed, they feel like they cannot pray *Shemoneh Esrei* for more than 2 or 3 minutes, and they will quickly finish and get it over with.

If a person doesn't feel like *davening* from his heart right now, the sensible reaction would be that although he can't concentrate fully right now as he would like to, at least he can concentrate on the

meaning of the words, and have some minimal level of concentration, which certainly counts. Why should he throw in the towel just because he feels like he can't concentrate fully? But a person who lives in extreme modes will not think like that.

To him, it's all or nothing. If he can't get it fully right, he doesn't bother trying at all, and he gives up from the start. In the scenario of *davening*, either he will despair from davening at all and he won't *daven*, and if he does *daven*, it is just to be *yotzei*.⁹¹, and he won't try concentrating at all.

“All or Nothing” Attitude When It Comes To Kindness

Now let's see how this attitude can also exist when it comes to *chessed* (acts of kindness).

There are some people who will engage in acts of *chessed* that can take up their entire schedule of the day, fully involved in helping people in some way, where they are tremendous *baalei chessed*. But on some days, they will not feel like helping anyone at all. They won't want to have any guests at their Shabbos table or have anyone come to the house, when they are going through this mode.

When this kind of person is in “*chessed*” mode, he will have guests for Shabbos and set up the table beautifully, going out all of the way to make it the best possible experience, but when he's out of *chessed* mode, he does not set the table at all – not even the *leichter* (candelabra) that normally graces the table.

Seeking Extremes vs. Perfectionism

We gave here three examples of this kind of nature where a person vacillates between extremes. We should know that there are two possible causes for a person to move back and forth between extremes.

In some people, it is because they are “*mevakshei shleimus*”, those who seek perfection, as described in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*. When a person is seeking *shleimus* \perfection, either this comes from the deep desire to become an *adam hashaleim* (complete and holy person), which stems from the soul's true desire for *shleimus*; or it stems from the negative trait of conceit. That is a separate matter, which we aren't discussing here.⁹²

Here we are discussing someone who will only act in either one of two extremes. When he wants to get it right, this is not stemming from a desire for *shleimus* that he has, but from his extreme approach towards everything. Sometimes he is found at the extreme of seeking *shleimus*, but it's not because he's seeking *shleimus*; it's because he is being drawn towards one of two extremes. This kind

⁹¹ to fulfill his halachic obligation

⁹² this was discussed in Fixing Your Fire: Conceit_015_Aiming For Perfection

of person is not seeking to do things perfectly; it is just that he pursues an extreme. *Shleimus* may meet up with one of the extremes, but it is not *shleimus* which he seeks.

How indeed can one know if he is seeking *shleimus* or if he is just seeking an extreme? If he sees that every time he seeks an extreme that he is seeking *shleimus*, then his agenda is not to be extreme, but to seek *shleimus*. But if he is seeking to be extreme in a way that doesn't bring him closer to *shleimus*, then it clearly does not come from a desire for *shleimus*. It is rather coming from the fact that he is drawn towards an extreme.

Here is an example that brings out the difference between the desire for perfectionism (which stems from the desire for *shleimus*) and extremity: When a father goes shopping for basic needs in the home, sometimes he will also make sure to buy some extra treats for the children, even though they don't need these things, in order to show love for the children. Another type of father, though, will come home with lots of treats for the children one day, giving them many gifts all the time, and on some days, he will only buy a smaller amount of treats and give it out to some of the children, where some of the children won't get anything at all.

This is not an outcome of perfectionism, but from a nature in which a person will operate in either one of two extremes. There is either a lot or there is almost nothing at all.

The desire for *shleimus* can be manifest in learning Torah, in *davening*, and in *chessed*. One may seek to have *shleimus* in his Torah learning, *shleimus* in his *davening*, and *shleimus* in *chessed*. But a person must know if his desire for *shleimus* in these areas is indeed coming from a desire for *shleimus*, or if perhaps it is because he is drawn towards an extreme. One should differentiate if it is an extreme that he is pursuing out of a need for *shleimus*, or if it is just about being drawn towards an extreme and it is not because he is seeking some kind of *shleimus*.

Extreme Thinking\Beliefs

We so far gave a few examples which apply to our physical world, in the scenarios of learning Torah, *davening*, doing *chessed*, and buying gifts to children. These are all areas of physical action and behavior, where a person will act in either one extreme or another. However, those are just external manifestations of extremity. Usually, extremity does not begin with a person's behavior, and it is rooted in one's particular thinking patterns. Even more so, it can also be because the entire personality of the person is to be extreme.

Here are some fundamental examples of how we can see this.

In *Chareidi* society, we find different extremes, as with everything else in Creation, which contain extremes. There are some people whose observance to Torah is doubtful, and at the other end of the extreme, are the people who connect themselves to what they consider as the *Chareidi* society. Why do people connect themselves to *Chareidi* society? With some people, it was because they were born *Chareidi* and they grow up *Chareidi*. Others, though, were not born into *Chareidi* society, and they connected themselves with *Chareidi* society. Why does a person 'become' a *Chareidi*? Some people

do so because they were searching for truth, and they conclude that the truth is found in *Chareidi* society. Others, though, connect to *Chareidi* society because they wanted to make a huge overhaul in their life, and it is usually because they have an extreme mentality.

If this kind of person would have been born secular, he wouldn't believe in anything that is even remotely religious, *chas v'shalom*; that is one extreme. If this kind of person is found amongst Torah society (and this is often the case with many *baalei teshuvah*, who have travelled from one extreme to the other extreme), he is at the other extreme. Sometimes, unfortunately, there are *baalei teshuvah* who return to the other extreme, *Rachmana litzlan*, when they see that their extreme change of lifestyle didn't do anything for them. But even if nothing negative results from extreme mentality, it is the very way of extreme thinking that is the problem.

If a person only thinks in extremes, he can never find a middle point. Either he is at one extreme or at the opposite extreme; everything he does has to always be at an extreme.

Why doesn't this kind of person realize that he is acting entirely out of an extremist mentality? It is because it is all under a disguise of Torah, so he doesn't see his motivations. He will connect himself to a certain sect or community of religious Jewry because he thinks that this is where the true Torah is found, and that everyone else lives incorrectly.

He might write an entire book explaining why only his version of Judaism is the correct one and the truthful one, and that everyone else in the world has it all wrong. But it is all because he has a deep problem of not being able to admit that he is drawn towards being extreme. It could even be that he has found a truthful place to connect himself to, but that is not his motivation. His thinking patterns and his beliefs are extreme, and that is what leads him.

It is similar to a child's thinking, which sees things only in terms of black or white, good or bad, happy or sad, rich or poor – he only will only see things in terms of extremes. As a child gets older, his thinking begins to mature a bit and he sees that it's not always so black or white. There are levels in between. There are people who are not so wealthy but they aren't poor, and there are people who aren't poor but that doesn't make them wealthy, with many levels in between.

There are adults, as well, who haven't changed in their thinking patterns that much since they were children. Just as when they were children they only saw things in extreme terms, so do they continue to think in this way when they are mature adults. This kind of person will only see the extremes of a matter and he never considers that there may be a middle point in between them. He only sees two sides, right or left, therefore, he identifies himself as belonging to one of the two sides.

It seems to him that he is clear about everything he sees. If we tell him that there's a middle ground between the two extremes, this will be a very vague concept to him, because in his mind, he is clear that there only two possible options to take, and he is clear which one is correct and which one is incorrect.

(Some people seek extremities because it offers them a sense of clarity in a matter, and it is clarity which they are mainly interested in. But we are not discussing that aspect, and that merits a

discussion of its own. Here we are discussing a person who seeks extremity because his nature is to be drawn towards extremes, and not because he seeks clarity of a matter.)

The depth of why a person seeks extremities is not simply because he seeks something extreme, but because he likes to uncover a state of opposition to something, and he gets vitality from this. This is a deep insight to anyone who understands this.

When People Gain Vitality From Opposing Others

When a person is gaining vitality from uncovering opposition towards something, this is **earth-of-wind-of-fire**, which is what we are discussing here.

A person might not always be aware that this is his motivation is seeking an extremity, because it is a motivation that is very deep in the soul, where a person wants to gain a life-giving vitality from the very state of uncovering opposition towards something. He doesn't seek "the middle point" in between the extremes, because that wouldn't give him vitality – he only gets vitality from something that opposes something else. He chooses a particular extreme because that is a place where he can keep getting vitality from.

When one sect of Judaism opposes another sect, that is but the result of this deep aspect in the soul: a person feels that one of the extremes is the place where he belongs, he gets his vitality from it, and when he is in that extremity, he lives off the fact that he is opposing something. He might think he is pursuing the truth, but many times it does not come from a desire for truth, but from a desire for opposition.

Opposition is really an inner force in the soul. The wars in the world that are fought are but a result of this inner force of opposition, and we will discuss this later when we discuss **fire-of-wind-of-fire**, which is when opposition leads to war with others. But even when opposition doesn't lead to actual war with others, it still becomes the very patterns and movements of the soul, where a person regularly receives a negative kind of vitality from it.

Extremity In Personality and Emotions

Now we will see how extremity is also manifest in one's personality.

Most people are not overly sad or particularly happy, and they just live in a routine way, getting emotional only sometimes at certain events which are either joyous or saddening. But when a person has an extreme kind of personality, he is always found in some kind of extreme emotion. At any given moment, either he is happy or sad – one of two extremes – but he is never in between.

We must know that these kinds of people are really suffering inside their own souls. They are tangled up inside themselves, at an alarming rate.

The truth is that it is impossible for a person to be happy all the time, in the lifestyle of today. That would be living all the time within an extreme. If a person doesn't know how to find 'the middle point' of life, his emotions will function only at extremes, and he will not be able to live normally.

Earlier, we have seen how extremity is manifest in action and in thoughts\beliefs. Now we are speaking about extremity in emotions. Every person has emotions in his soul which are granted to us by Hashem, as well as various feelings that have come to us based upon how we chose to act throughout our life. There are some people, though, who were either born this way, or because they became like this, who have a personality of extreme emotions. These kinds of people will either be very sad one day, or very happy on another day. They are constantly vacillating between two opposite extremes.

When it comes to emotions, no person can survive if he stays on one extreme. Unlike the areas of behavior and thoughts\beliefs, where a person can choose to place himself on one extreme, a person cannot survive when he stays in one extreme emotion. But what will happen with a person who has an extreme nature? His nature will draw him to choose a certain extreme emotion to stay on [either happiness or sadness], and since he cannot stay on one extreme emotion for his entire life, he will have to choose another extreme emotion to stay connected with. But when he does this, he inevitably will not be able to handle it, and then he will fall into the opposite extreme! He will keep moving back and forth between extreme emotions, and this vicious cycle keeps repeating itself and it is the ongoing story of his life.

This is a form of *Kaf HaKela* (spiritual suffering).⁹³ on this world! I am not exaggerating with this term. It is simply *Kaf HaKela*, because it is the very idea of *Kaf HaKela*. There is *Kaf HaKela* in emotions, and also in place to place, and there all other kinds of *Kaf HaKela*. But *Kaf HaKela* is always about being thrown around from one end to another. That is the case with this kind of person.

Every person has movements in his soul, but the movements are usually not that sharp, so it doesn't feel like such a jolt. But if a person has an extreme personality, his extreme experience of emotions will throw him around from one kind of emotion to another emotion, throughout the day, and this is suffering for the soul to go through. If he hears of a tragedy, he will feel like he is getting thrown into the emotion of pain, and then when he hears of something joyous, he feels like he is thrown into this as well, and the transition feels confusing to him. His emotions are constantly in movement and there is no particular pattern that they are following, so he is quickly passing from one kind of emotion to another.

Sometimes a person is aware of this, and sometimes he is less aware to it. When the inner movements are sharp, when one moves from one extremity to another extremity within his emotions - at a certain point, it will feel unbearable for him. Most people cannot handle strong interchanging

⁹³ *Kaf HaKela* (lit. "The Flinging Ladle), a spiritual form of suffering where a person feels like he is being 'flung' all over the universe.

emotions. It goes beyond what they can really handle, because the inner movements feel very sharp and jolting.

To illustrate, the world is always revolving, but we don't feel this movement. In order to feel movement of the world, we would have to feel an earthquake, and then we can feel the world moving. Just as slight physical movements are usually not felt by us, and by the same token, most people do not sense slight movements in their soul. However, the more a person is sensitive to his feelings and to his soul, the more he can feel even slight movements in his soul; he feels more things.

The *Gemara* says that the lives of people with overly emotional personalities are not considered to be lives, and *Rashi* explains, because they suffer all the time from all of these constant emotional reactions.⁹⁴ People who are very emotionally sensitive people are constantly feeling every kind of inner movement in their soul, and they also feel all of the clashes of these movements within, when different emotions in their life intercede with each other. The constant transition of these many different kinds of emotions takes its toll on their inner state, preventing them from living a tranquil life.

Here we are discussing in particular a person with an extreme personality (**earth-of-wind-of-fire**). This kind of person never has a “simple”, normal day in his life. You should know that these kinds of people have much internal suffering. In many cases, they are simply *cholei nefesh*, they are ill in their souls – simply put.

They have extreme patterns in their personality, and the feelings in their soul are extreme and they feel the extremity of it, and they can't handle the extremity on such a continuous basis, so they are often vacillating between their extreme emotions in order to avoid staying in one of the extremes. They will be sad one day and happy on another day, but never in between.

A person can never be calm when he has this nature, and his soul is always being shaken up. He doesn't feel anything stable in his life. When this kind of person keeps going through his emotional rollercoaster, he feels like he doesn't know who he is and what is happening inside himself.

This kind of person will need much more help, because, as we said before, these kinds of people are *cholei nefesh* (ill in their souls). Therefore, we cannot give the full solution to here to those who have extremity in their very personality, who have constant interchanging emotions. We have only mentioned it here in order to complete our discussion, which is about extremity, but we will not actually discuss here how this kind of person can be helped, because it is not the place here to discuss it.

We will mainly discuss here how to fix the nature of extremity when it comes to the areas of action and thinking patterns\beliefs, which we described earlier, and perhaps we will touch a little bit upon how we can treat someone who faces constant extreme emotion, but we will mainly speak about the first two areas of extremity: when people act extreme in their behavior and in their thinking patterns\beliefs.

⁹⁴ see *Pesachim 113b*: “The lives of three kinds of people are not lives: Those who are overly compassionate, those who are ill-tempered, and those who are *anini hadaas* (delicate).”

Helping An Extreme Person Become More Balanced In His Actions

When a person's behavior is extreme, the solution is to get him come to the 'middle point' in between the extremes.

This seems to go against the advice of the Rambam, who says that in order to come to the middle point, one must go towards the other extreme of how he is acting. However, we must know that this rule of the Rambam doesn't apply to every person, even though it is certainly true. If a person has an extreme nature, he must go to the middle path, not to the other extreme. Only by first finding the middle path to begin with can he go against his nature.

With most people, who do not have that much extremity in their nature, they should go from one extreme to another when trying to improve their character, as the Rambam advises. But if someone has a generally extreme personality, going to the opposite extreme will only feed his already extreme nature. They instead have a different *avodah*: they must seek the middle point to begin with.

We cannot give exact rules for this idea, but this is the outline of the solution for an extreme person: he needs to seek the middle point in between the two extremes, because it is only the middle point which can nullify his extreme nature.

As we have explained, this is not what most people need to do. Most people need to take the Rambam's advice, of going to the opposite extreme. But with people who have a very extreme nature, which we are discussing here in this chapter, they will need to make sure that they never be in an extreme. If they ever have to go opposite of their nature, which they inevitably will have to do, they should not go completely to the other extreme. They will need to remain a little close to the extreme that they are currently found in, far away from the other extreme.

Why should they do this? So that they can train their soul not to follow extremes. Although they will need to travel towards the other extreme, they need to leave a little bit of "space", so to speak, where they can come back a little closer to their old extreme. (This excludes anything that is required of *halachah*, of course).

Helping An Extreme Person Change His Thinking Patterns

When it comes to changing extreme thinking patterns, this is a bit harder to do than changing extreme action. A person chooses one extreme which represents his beliefs, because he believes that this is where the truth is found, and therefore, it is harder for him to change his mindset. It is not only his thinking patterns that are involved; he has attached this to what he feels is the truth, so it will be very hard to get him to budge from there.

Hard as it is, we still need to get him to move away a bit from his extreme beliefs. We should get him to think, "Maybe the truth is found at the other extreme?" We need to root him out from his extreme thinking patterns.

It will take a long time for him to get there, though. He will not be able to change his temperament at the age of 17 or 18 – he will not be able to get there before the age of 40 or 50. Only by then will he have firmly developed his beliefs, to the point that he has chosen one of two extremes. During the interim, we need to get him to get used to the idea of traveling away from extremity.

For example, we can try to get him to choose some kind of extremity in life which he will decide to move away from; at the same time, we should advise him not to totally move towards the opposite extreme, and he should make sure he can easily find his way back to his original extreme. In this way, he takes small steps to move away from the extreme that he is at and he can slowly make his way towards the opposite extreme, and he still leave some ‘space’ for himself in the meantime to get back to his old extreme; the point of this is so that he shouldn’t become “extreme” as he tries going towards the opposite extreme, because then the purpose is defeated.

Even for those people whom we said need will to take the path of the Rambam, going to the opposite extreme - this does not mean that the person should go totally into the other extreme. He should go towards the opposite extreme, but he should not go to it totally.

Thus, when one has a dominance of **earth-of-wind-of-fire** (extremity), he needs to be trained to go towards another extreme without going totally towards it. When it comes to the realm of changing his extreme orientation in the realm of his behaviors, he should leave some “space” where he can come back a little closer to his previous extreme, and not go totally towards the opposite extreme.

The point is that one is leaving one extreme and he is going towards the opposite extreme, he needs to leave some “space” for himself, both within his actions and within his thinking\beliefs, so that he shouldn’t totally follow the other extreme.

This “space” he leaves over might seem like a divergence from truth for him, but a person gains a humbling feeling from it, by distancing himself from something he thought was true. In a subtler sense, he has reached an even greater level of truth in this way.

Arriving At Bittul (Self-Nullification)

This ultimately rectifies a person who staunchly believed in one extreme, who originally couldn’t see any truth in anything else.

He believed that only his way of thinking was correct, and that everyone else is wrong. He believed that he is the one person who gets everything right, and he failed to think that maybe there is truth with other people in the world. He had been so confident in himself that only his way is the right one, and that everyone else was wrong. Why didn’t he seek out more truthful people and connect himself to them? Maybe they know better than he does? It is therefore a very great *bittul* (self-nullification) for him to accept that there is truth elsewhere in the world, which is no less truthful than his own way of thinking.

If a person knows for sure that the rest of the world is found in falsity, then there is no need for him to have this *bittul*. But if there are other holy and pure Jews out there in the world who think and act differently than he does, even if it appears to him that they are mistaken, he needs to have some kind of *bittul* to them, by realizing that there can be truthful points contained in others.

The soul will actually feel calmed from this *bittul*, because it will have reached a place where there are no oppositions, and all it feels is a sense of being nullified. This power of *bittul* in the soul is a deep form of salvation for a person. (On a deeper note, a person must understand that we don't comprehend what the truth is in any case. This is a separate matter which we are not discussing here).

There are a few people stubbornly remain on a certain extreme because they feel that they are doing so “*lishmah*” (for pure motives). These people are not actually being guided by their beliefs. They are simply unaware that they have an extreme personality. Their *avodah* as well requires them to move a bit out of their extreme and towards the opposite extreme, and at the same time to make sure that they don't go totally into the opposite extreme.

The Depth of Bittul (Self-Nullification)

In the ideal and complete state of our soul, the soul sees a separation between its inner essence and its outer “garments”. The essence of our soul is the “*cheilek eloka mimaal*”, “portion of G-d above”, which is totally removed from all physical and emotions and actions of This World. All actions and emotions are but “garments” of the soul itself. When one realizes and palpably recognizes that his actions are not his essence, but his “garments” – if he can clearly make this distinction - this is the deepest part of the rectification process. With that perception, one realizes that all of his abilities are simply his garments, not his essence.

If someone isn't at that perception yet, he will immediately ask, “What does that mean? Who am “I”, then? If there is no “I” after I nullify myself, where do I exist, if there is nothing?” The answer to this is that this is the true meaning of absolute *bittul* (nullification).

Someone who hasn't yet built his own “I” properly will destroy himself through *bittul*, and he has destroyed his own structure before it has been built. The Sages state that “Hashem builds worlds, and then destroys them” – we see from this that first there is building and then there is destruction, but destruction must not become before building. In terms that apply to us personally, first we must “build” our “I” by recognizing its abilities well, and only after we have solidly built our “I” can we “destroy” our “I” and feel nullified to Hashem.

After a person has recognized his soul's abilities and he knows of all the aspects of his personality, which he recognizes as his “I”, now comes the deeper aspect, which is to recognize that the essence of the *neshamah* (Divine soul) is called a “*cheilek eloka mimaal*” at its root. Therefore, the “I” and all that it contains is entirely a “garment” that wraps around the essence of the *neshamah*. Arriving at this point enables a person to act from an entirely different place in himself.

(Acting and living from this deep place of *bittul* in oneself should only be done at temporary times and not on a permanent basis, because we cannot live in this state totally right now.)

It seems simply that a person who achieves this *bittul* is going through a form of “accepting suffering with love”, and that is how it appears to be; it is certainly an ability of our personality to be able to accept suffering with love, but we are referring to a deeper aspect of the personality. For a few moments, each person on his own level can act from an entirely different place in himself, where he feels totally nullified to Hashem.

This is not about just knowing that one must do Hashem’s will; that is something which anyone who keeps *mitzvos* can understand. We are speaking here of a more inner level, where one acts from a place of self-nullification, because he realizes that it is only the garments of his soul which act, and therefore it becomes easier to switch extreme movements. One who is found in this point in the soul is found in a different place entirely than what was discussed until now; he will be able to easily switch over from one extreme to another.

To another person, he might seem like he is suffering as he moves between extremes, resembling one who is going through the suffering of *Kaf HaKela*; but the truth is that he is actually in a place of true *menuchah* (serenity), because he is able to have a mastery over his movements - for it is the very essence of the soul where he is acting from, and that essence can “wear” itself in whatever “garment” it needs at the moment.

Of course, a person is always a human being with physical limitations, which ultimately prevents him from being a totally spiritual being, even after he exposes his *neshamah\cheilek eloka mimaal*. But once he reaches this place of self-nullification, he will acquire an ability to easily switch between extremes – and then he will be able to easily rectify his extreme nature. Sometimes he will be able to go in one extreme, sometimes he will be able to go in the other extreme, and sometimes he will get to the middle point between the extremes. He can “wear” all of these movements like garments.

Understandably, this last point we explained (of shedding one’s “I” and uncovering the essence of the soul, which is *cheilek eloka mimaal*, or *bittul*/self-nullification), is not a point that most people will get to. What is closer to home with most people, however, is that a person can rectify an extreme nature by training himself to go a little bit towards the opposite extreme of where is right now, and to make sure that he doesn’t go totally towards it.

That will be true both when it comes to the area of extremity in his actions and extremity in his thinking\beliefs.

Helping A Person With Extreme Emotions

As for those with an extreme personality, who have extreme emotions on a regular basis, we will mention here a brief piece of advice that can be helpful to this kind of person, although we must emphasize as we mentioned before that these people are really bordering on mental\emotional illness, and they will need much more help than this little piece of advice we are about to say.

This is what they can do: they should try to hold onto a little bit of their previous emotional state, even as they are shifting into another emotion that is completely different. Of course, a person will not be able to hold onto the previous emotional experience completely, but he can try to hold on to a little bit. That much, he should be able to do.

In order to help himself for this, we can suggest that he try holding onto some kind of imaginative thought that will help retain the previous emotional experience, and vividly imagine it in front of him; or he may find holding onto a certain object helpful for this, and imagine that he is “holding” onto some of the previous experience.

As we said, though, this little piece of advice is only a small part of the help that this kind of person will need, because when a person has an extremity in the realm of his personality\emotions, he is very sensitive to the constant shifts between his feelings that he goes through on a daily basis, which throws him around between many different kinds of emotions in one day. Therefore he will really require much Heavenly compassion, in order to be fully helped.

10 | *Enjoying Opposition*

Water-of-Wind-of-Fire: Enjoying Opposition With Others

We continue here with *siyata d'shmaya* to discuss the trait of anger. Now we are up to discussing **water-of-wind-of-fire**.

As mentioned earlier, **wind-of-fire** in general is about opposition. In particular, the “water” aspect of wind-of-fire is the *taanug* \pleasure (water) that one feels when he is connected to a state of opposition. As with every other nature in the soul, this is a nature that can be used for either good or evil. Let's first see how it is used for evil, and then we can see how we can use it for holiness.

There is a nature in some people to always oppose the system of wherever they are found in. They always like to do the opposite of how others act, or to think in an opposite way of how the people around them are thinking. They will always want to do differently from others, because their thinking does not conform to those around them.

Sometimes this kind of person will want to think very differently from others around but he won't act upon those thoughts. He will behave like everybody else around him, but he just disagrees with them in his thoughts. And sometimes, because he wants to think differently than others, he will also behave very differently than others as well.

Understandably, there can be all kinds of reasons that are motivating him to think differently than others. He might think that everybody else just has it all wrong. He might have other reasons as well for why he doesn't want to conform to how others think. The more a person is aware of his inner world, the better he can discern his motivations, and know if he's fooling himself or not. But it's very possible that the reason why he often disagrees with others' thinking is because he simply has a nature to oppose others. His soul deep down is demanding from him that he should see things differently than others.

We will give a few examples of this from our physical world, where we can see this kind of nature in some people.

Example 1 – Deliberately Diverging From The Norm

In many buildings, there's a place to enter the building and a place that is generally used to exit the buildings. There's a sign for “Enter” and a separate sign in the back of the building for “Exit”. Normally, when people are exiting the building, they will go through the doorway that is for “Exit”, and when people enter the building, they normally go through the “Enter” doorway. But if a person

is the type to think differently than others (because he has a lot of **water-of-wind-of-fire** in himself), he will deliberately enter through the “exit” sign, and he will exit through the “enter” sign.

Understandably, because he does so, he will cross paths with everyone on their way out, because they are exiting while he is entering, and they are entering while he is exiting. If he is asked why he doesn’t just do like everyone else, he will say, “Who says it has to be this way? Why must I do like everybody else...?”

He acts this way because his nature is to always do the opposite of what others are doing.

To be clearer about this, it’s not simply because this kind of person wants to be “different” than others. If that would be the case, it is either stemming from an expression of his individuality, which stems from **fire-of-wind-of-fire**, which we discussed elsewhere; or it would be stemming from the negative trait of conceit. But with **water-of-wind-of-fire**, which is what we are discussing here, a person will not just act differently than others, but he will act in a totally opposite way of how others conduct themselves.

Example 2 – Intentionally Learning In A Different Style Than Others

If this kind of person is in a yeshiva setting, where the style of the yeshiva is to learn in a certain way, he will always seek to learn in a different style than everyone else in the yeshiva around him.

If the style of the yeshiva is to learn with *iyun* (in-depth analysis of *Gemara*), he will intentionally start up with others in the yeshiva and tell them that they’re wasting their time learning the *Gemara* so slowly, and he will bring all the proofs he knows of that stress the importance of striving to know all of Torah, which requires one to cover more ground, as opposed to spending so much time trying to understand each line.

And if the yeshiva’s style of learning is to learn in a manner of *bekiyus* (cursory reading of *Gemara*, which does not focus on in-depth learning), he will argue with everyone around him that they are learning superficially, and that the whole point of learning Torah is to learn it in-depth and to understand it well.

If he finds contradictions with his own self when it comes to this, sometimes he will conclude that one way is true, and at a different time he will conclude that the truth is the opposite, and realize that he was mistaken the first time around.

In whatever scenario he is in, he will act and think differently than those around him. If people around him are following one extreme, he will go in the other extreme.

The Negative Results Of This Nature

We can bring countless examples of this nature, and we have only brought here a few examples of it. The point is that this kind of person gains vitality from opposition with others, he lives from it, and he enjoys it. It is pleasure (water) in opposition (wind-of-fire), hence, it is a nature that stems from **water-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul. He will keep finding himself in situations where he is at opposition with others.

Sometimes, having this kind of personality will lead him towards situations of actual anger and dissension with others, and the like. All of that, however, are the results of a root that comes before it. That root is what we are discussing here: a nature to always think and act differently than others.

Holy Water-of-Wind-of-Fire: Enjoying Others' Thinking

Now we will speak about how this nature can be channeled towards holiness. This nature in the soul, the power to enjoy acting in an opposite way than others, is actually a nature that stems from one of the deepest aspects in soul.

If someone cannot relate to it, it is a sign that he hasn't matured yet, and he lives with narrowed perspectives. He doesn't see beyond his own self and his own life. By contrast, the more a person has matured in his inner world and he has expanded his soul, the more he can contain the thinking of others, even when their thinking opposes his own; and with the more he expands his soul, the better he will be able to contain others who are the totally opposite of his nature.

There is a deep power in our soul (which, we will emphasize, is something that not everyone can live with in their life, but it is one of the deep ways of living), in which one can tolerate that which completely opposes his way of thinking.

When a person thinks into something, he can see two options in front of him, he sees that there are two different extremes to follow, and he concludes that one of the extremes is the correct approach to follow. Naturally, the other extreme seems completely incorrect to him. But there is a deep place in the soul which can understand the opposite extreme and tolerate its viewpoint. We have an ability to clearly understand the opposite viewpoint of how we think.

In the language of our Sages, this is the well-known concept of, "There is no light except through darkness."⁹⁵ A person can only have clarity, "light", by contrasting the light with darkness, which intensifies the light. In order for there to be light, there must be darkness before it, and together, the darkness and light are "one" day, and that is the depth of what the Torah regarding the first day of creation: "*And it was evening, and it was day, one day.*" This shows that we can contain and unify opposites within ourselves.

95 "לית נהורא אלא מגו חשוכא" – "There is no light unless it is [preceded] through darkness"

The more narrowed a person is, the less accepting he is of how others think, because he remains confined to his own way of thinking. When a person has matured in his thinking, he understands that there are other ways to see things, and that his way of thinking is not necessarily the only way to think. He sees that there can be 2 or 3 different views towards something, and the different viewpoints are each valid, and they need to be considered and weighed. He is ready to hear what others have to say, and he is ready to accept the ways of thinking of others.

But if he lives even more deeply than this, he is regularly thinking into the opposite viewpoint of how he thinks, and he is always at the point of understanding the viewpoints of others. He keeps uncovering the two different extremes with which how a matter can be viewed, he finds a middle point between the two extremes, which offers him an expansive view towards the matter, where he can see all the many different colors.

Thus, there is a deep power in the soul to discover two opposing points and then to find the middle point between the two extremes.

Seeing The Two Extremes and Finding ‘The Middle Point’

First, one needs to know how he thinks. He needs to weigh one of the sides against the other side, comparing the two extremes, and then he can find the middle point, which is where he will find the entire ‘ladder’ that he needs to ascend on, where he can view the entire situation from atop that ‘ladder’ in the middle. This is one of the inner paths a person can take, and it is the soul’s power of **water-of-wind-of-fire**.

For others, who aren’t living from their point of **water-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, and who are instead at other areas in their soul, they will have a different *avodah*. They need to work in a more ‘upwards’ manner, resembling Jacob’s ladder which is footed on the earth and its head reaches the heavens. They start from a bottom level and work their way upwards, step by step, until they can arrive at the other extreme of where they started off.

Applying This Concept When Learning Gemara

Anyone who learns *Gemara* in a methodical, step-by-step manner, can relate to this. If someone learns *Gemara* in a way where he thinks that only his way of thinking is correct, he is not able to include others’ way of thinking. But if someone wants to have a more expansive view of the *Gemara* he is learning, he finds the ‘middle point’ in between two extremes.

How can a person reach it? Either a person can work his way through the *sugya* and cover all the points, seeing step after step, until he gets to the other extreme of how he started out with, and then he sees the whole picture. Or, a person can start out by noticing the two extremes in the *sugya* of the *Gemara*, and from there he can slowly work his way through the *sugya*, step after step.

If one doesn't identify that much with **water-of-wind-of-fire** in his soul (meaning that he is not using it that much), he is drawn towards the first approach we described, where one first works his way through the steps of the *sugya* in the *Gemara* until he notices the two extreme points of how to view the matter he is learning about.

Understandably, some people will also skip around between the steps even as they are taking this orderly approach, and sometimes skipping is necessary even within the step-by-step approach. But the basic method of this approach is to work in a step-by-step manner, with some occasional skipping around between the order of the steps, where a person goes back to where he skipped from and then fills in the gaps.

But someone who has much **water-of-wind-of-fire** in his soul works in a different manner. First he makes sure to see the two extremes in front of him, and after seeing the two extremes, he has a clearer picture of what is in front of him. It is then much easier for him to get to the middle point between the two extremes. Not that it will be so easy to get to the middle point; obviously, learning Torah always requires exertion. But it will be made easier to get to the middle point between the extremes, because he identifies the two different extremes of how to think.

Some people like to find the two extremes in a matter simply because they want to gain clarity in a manner. By contrasting the opposite extremes, they are able to come to the middle point in between the extremes and understand it from there. That is something else which we are not explaining here, and it requires a separate discussion. Here we are talking about someone who enjoys finding two extremes in a matter.

After one has tasted the enjoyment of finding the two different extremes of how to view a matter, he must then express a search for truth, by seeking to find the middle point between the two extremes. When one is concerned about seeking the truth in the matter, he will be very motivated to get to the middle point between the extremes.

If he doesn't seek truth, he will find himself in either one of the two extremes. We discussed this in the previous chapter, where we discussed one who has a lot of **earth-of-wind-of-fire** in his soul, which is a kind of person who functions only at extremes. Here we are discussing one who is enjoying the extremes but he can also find the middle point between the extremes, where he sees a clearer and more complete view towards a matter.

If he reaches that point, he sees a beautiful, expansive view of the entire matter from there. Of this, it is said, "*Yisrael, in you I am beautified*" – the "beauty" that this is referring to is when there is a revelation of an expansive view towards a matter, where one can cover all of the angles and levels and dimensions in a matter.

Finding ‘The Middle Point’ In Between Two Extremes

To apply this concept practically, one must be able to think into the opposite view of how he thinks, and then find a point of truth in it. This is how a person rectifies the nature of his **water-of-wind-of-fire** and channels it to holiness.

When someone is superficial, he balks at this concept, because he cannot relate to this. He will immediately want to dismiss any opinion that is not aligned with his thinking, and he cannot stomach the idea of trying to understand anything that is contradictory to his thinking. If he does not feel that that opposing view contains any truth, he will not be interested in trying to understand it.

However, we are taught that one of the Sages was able to say 150 reasons why something should be *tamei* (impure) and 150 reasons why it should be *tahor* (pure). For what reason did the Sages teach us this? We learn from this that one has to be able to understand opposite viewpoints towards the same matter, by searching to understand the truth of the matter.

From a superficial perspective, if we conclude that something is *tamei*, it cannot be *tahor*. But the Sages revealed to us here that if we conclude something is *tamei*, we should also be able to understand how it can be *tahor*. We also have this personal *avodah* of “finding 150 reasons why it should be *tahor*” – to be able to clearly understand an opposing view, by seeing how it can also be true.

This does not simply mean to look for arguments on how you think. Rather, when you are certain of one way to think, now try to see the opposite view. Don’t just see what the view of truth is and what the false view is. Instead, see two extremes and view them both as equally true, and enjoy the contradiction between them.

Part of enjoying learning Torah is to enjoy the many contradictions we come across in our Torah learning. This is the holy use of **water-of-wind-of-fire** when it comes to the sweetness of Torah learning, which is found in learning the many opposing views towards the same matter, while learning the Torah.

Slowly as a person gets used to this and enjoys this, a new window of inner clarity is opened to him. It becomes a new kind of thinking for him.

However, as we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the power to enjoy opposition is used for evil when a person deliberately thinks in an opposite way from others, because he cannot tolerate how others think. Based upon what was explained here, we can now see what the rectification for this kind person will be. He needs to make use of his **water-of-wind-of-fire** precisely as we have been describing above: he must to try to understand the opposite way of how he thinks, and enjoy the contradiction he finds, and then, he should see if it contains any truth in it.

By getting used to this, one will be able to weaken his tendency to think differently than others, and instead he will rectify his nature, by enjoying the ways of thinking of others who think very differently than he does. Until now, he had been enjoying his way of thinking which was opposite of

how others think, and now, he has rectified this nature by learning how to enjoy how others see things. His soul becomes quieted from this, and even more so, his thinking patterns will begin to change, as he slowly gets used to enjoying the thinking of others. This is the holy way to use **water-of-wind-of-fire** and it is also the way of how this nature is rectified.

Fixing The View of ‘Negative Eye’ Towards Others

This concept that we are explaining here is really coming to describe a fundamental way of living that applies beyond Torah learning as well. So far, we have seen how it applies to Torah learning, where a person can learn how to understand and accept that others think differently than he does. (Of course, this is not the only way to learn Torah. There are many different ‘ways’ within learning Torah, and this is just one of the ways.) When one is making use of this idea, he will find that understanding others’ thinking is also a way to further develop *ahavas Yisrael* (love for the Jewish people).

There are two types of *ahavas Yisrael*. One level of *ahavas Yisrael* is to love other Jews after one has purified his heart. There is also a level of *ahavas Yisrael* that one can attain even before he has purified his heart. If the heart hasn’t been purified yet, which is usually the case with most people, a person views others in a negative light. Sometimes, having a negative view towards others is not because the person hasn’t purified his heart yet, but because he has certain thinking patterns he was used to since childhood, in which he got used to viewing others in a negative light. He developed a view of a “left eye” [a reference to the ‘evil eye’ towards others, seeing others negatively], towards others, instead of viewing others from him “right eye” [the ideal and positive way to see others].

The inner way to fix a “negative eye” towards others is, to break down his viewpoint into separate parts, and then to try to see some good points in other people. This is a matter which needs caution, however. We should not try to find good points in those who are intentionally wicked and rebellious, because this is spiritually endangering. It can cause a person to connect himself with evil, and who knows where he will end up? Therefore, great caution must be exercised when we try to find good points in others and when we try to understand those who are on the opposite extreme of where we are found in.

Even so, it is still a fundamental concept to know about. One can at least look at other Torah observant Jews in his society, who live and think differently than he does, and try to see good in them. Maybe there is a Rav you don’t approve of, or certain *minhagim* of other Jews that seem strange or incorrect to you, or a certain community that you don’t like, or certain mannerisms and ways of thinking of other Jews that you don’t like. As long as they observe Torah and mitzvos, they deserve to be seen in a good light by you. Try to understand how others think, and even though you disagree with them, try to find some truthful points in how they think.

It goes without saying that you need to judge other Jews favorably, because this is a *mitzvah* anyhow. We are referring to a deeper level, which is really behind this. The depth of “judging others favorably”, of seeing other Jews in a good light, is to try to understand how they think and to see

some truth in it, even though it doesn't match your thinking, and enjoy what you find. Some people derive enjoyment from the fact that others are wrong. Others, though, find enjoyment in uncovering opposite viewpoints, and seeing the truths that are contained in both of them. That is the ability we are describing here, which is **water-of-wind-of-fire**: deriving enjoyment from opposing, contradicting views.

The Meaning of Seeking Truth

“Truth” in Hebrew is the word “*emes*”, which contains the letters *aleph*, *mem*, and *tav* – which are the first, middle, and end letters of the *Aleph Beis* – which shows us that a person only sees the *emes* truth is he can see the two extremes in a matter, and then to find the middle point between them.

“*Emes*” doesn't mean to see only one side of the coin; that's not the meaning of “*emes*”. The following is a very, very deep point. “*Emes*” is usually perceived as only one side to the matter, and that everything else is false, but that is not what “*emes*” means. “*Emes*” means to see the two extremes in matter and then to connect yourself to the middle point between them. A person who only sees one side in a matter doesn't see “*emes*”.

Only when a person can see two extremes in a matter, and the middle point between them that connects them, can he see the *emes*; only then can he enjoy the *emes* that he sees. This is the inner, hidden kind of “*emes*”.

To be clearer about this, there are two levels of truth: “*emes*” (truth) and “*emes l'amitah*” (absolute truth). *Emes* can refer to seeing only one side of a matter, whereas “*emes l'amitah*” means to see two extremes in a matter and then to see the middle point that connects the opposing points.

A Purification of the Heart

As a person lives with this concept, besides for getting used to it in learning Torah, he also learns how to handle those who are opposite of him, and he learns how to think differently than he used to, and his beliefs will become more stable. His heart, which had once been in a state of impurity, will also become more purified with this. Understandably, there are other ways to purify the heart, but this is one of them, and it is a deep inner journey, where a person changes the negative thinking patterns he was used to since he was a child.

The point is not to go from being a negative kind of person to a more positive kind of person who only sees good in everything. One must certainly stick to his beliefs and ways of thinking that he has received from his teachers (if they are genuine to his soul, that is). The point is to gain a more expansive view towards others and to see points of truth that are contained in others. Slowly by getting used to this, a person will gain a deep feeling of connection to *Klal Yisrael*.

Using This Power Sensibly

As mentioned earlier, this concept requires caution to use, because if a person isn't strong in maintaining the beliefs and the ways of thinking he has received from his teachers, it will be detrimental to him if he embraces others. It can fault his whole his way of living. He wasn't strong to begin with, and now he will be all over the place, connecting to every way of thinking he comes across. He will wander a little bit away from his real place, and then he will go further, too far away from where he belongs.

As we can see, there are some people who fell into extreme ways of living because they tried to connect to other ways of living before they were solid in their own ways of living, and they become broken from it, to the point that you can't tell it's the same person anymore. That is what happens when people make extreme changes in their lifestyle when it wasn't yet appropriate for them, when they weren't solidified yet in their own way of living and thinking before they connected to the others' thinking.

The Two Stages of Seeing Extremes

Therefore, practically speaking, if a person isn't solid enough in his own way of living and thinking, his *avodah* is to first see extremes in terms of truth and falsity, and to connect himself to what he concludes as the truth. The very first stage is to discover what is true and what is false, and then to seek the truth.

When it comes to learning Torah, one needs to always make use of this ability. But outside of Torah learning, one needs to also differentiate between truth and falsity. He should then see the contrast of truth and against falsity, which will sharpen his feeling for truth, and then he will be able to better connect to truth.

After one has gone through that step, and he can remain firmly connected to truth, it is now time to progress to the next step, which we explained about at length here: to compare two different truths with each other. He should think into the two differing views which are both truthful, seeing how each of them can contain truth.

When one has this balance, on one hand he will develop a strong pursuit of truth in whatever he was involved with, but at the same time, he is also to connect himself to every point that he comes across and be able to relate to it. He has the clarity of truth, he is clear about another truth which argues on that truth, and he is also clear that that they are both parts of the truth. He is clearly aware of the truth he is connected to, but at the same time, he can be at peace with differing viewpoints.

At first, when a person begins to work on this concept, he will feel that he cannot stomach anything that differs with what he believes is true. Everything else other than his way of thinking will be deemed as false, and it will feel too difficult at this point to try to see how other viewpoints can also be true. This is the first stage, where a person is always weighing truth against falsity, and his

avodah at that point is to find the two extremes, see which of them is more truthful, and connect to the truth.

But after a person is able to differentiate between truth and falsity and he can connect himself to truth, comes the second stage, where a person compares two truths with each other, seeing two extremes that are both truthful, and the middle point between them. On one hand, his feeling for truth gets sharpened with all this, but at the same time, his soul expands and it can accept the views of others.

Most people, though, think in terms of “either, or”. Either they will connect with one kind of truth and completely dismiss the other extreme as being the incorrect view, because they can only one kind of extreme, and not another. At best, they will “judge others favorably” and tolerate them, but they will not be able to see how others can also have a truthful viewpoint; or, if that doesn’t happen, a person will just become ‘lukewarm’ towards the very truths that he knows of, when trying to understand others. Either of these approaches is superficial.

There is a third option to take, which is the balanced approach, where a person can stand in the middle of the two extremes. That is what we have been describing here.

Even more so, as we have been explaining here about **water-of-wind-of-fire**, where a person enjoys behaving extremely different than others - when a person is using this nature in a holy manner, there is less of a chance he will leave that opposition, since he is enjoying it. He has changed his narrowed thinking patterns, but even more so, he will know how to get a permanent kind of pleasure from the opposing views that he comes across. There is then much more of a chance that he will remain more firmly connected to truth, since he is deriving a feeling of vitality from truth.

This is all describing a deep place in the soul which can contain extremes, and to live with a more expansive kind of *ahavas Yisrael*, which derives pleasure from opposing views and from the truths that one can find within them. This deep way of living brings a person closer to becoming an *adam hashaleim* (a completed and perfected kind of person).

Pleasure From Opposition and Pleasure In Simplicity

However, as important as it is to derive pleasure from oppositions (**water-of-wind-of-fire**), this kind of pleasure should only have a partial role in our life, and it should not be made into our entire source of pleasure. We will explain why this is so, and briefly.

There are two deep, fundamental powers in the soul: *peshitus* (simplicity), and an opposite power than this, called *harkavah* (complication). The power of pleasure we have been describing here (**water-of-wind-of-fire**) is a use of *harkavah* (complication), because it enjoys the complications that we discover in contradictory, opposing viewpoints. Although this is a deeper form of pleasure, it is still coming from the more external layers of the soul, because *harkavah* only exists on the outer parts of the soul, not on the inner layer.

The inner layer of the soul derives pleasure from things that are of *peshitus* (simplicity), and it does not get pleasure from opposition and contradiction.⁹⁶ The deepest pleasure is found in enjoying the reality of Hashem's existence, which is a "simple" reality. The more a person uncovers a pleasure in it, the more he reveals pleasure in simplicity.

This idea is also true with learning Torah. When a person has an enjoyment in simplicity in learning Torah, he enjoys simply reading and learning the words of the *Gemara*, to the point that he begins to hum the words in a singsong voice, because his soul is pulled after the words.⁹⁷

One needs a subtle balance in his soul of where he is getting his pleasure from – a balance between pleasure in things that are of *harkavah*/complication and pleasure in things that are of *peshitus*/simplicity. Thus, the kind of pleasure that stems from **water-of-wind-of-fire** (enjoyment from opposition) should not become the source of all our pleasure, because it is an enjoyment that stems from contradictions and oppositions, the very antithesis to simplicity. Therefore, it needs to be balanced with a pleasure in simplicity.

On a deeper note, only in this current 6,000 year era are we meant to derive pleasure from contradictions and oppositions. But in the era of the future, the Next World, we will have a pleasure entirely from simplicity, because the pleasure found in simplicity is only when there is no possibility of opposition, which will be the state of the future [and even now we have an *avodah* to mimic that state of the future, thus we need some pleasure in simplicity even in our current times].

In Conclusion

Thus, the *avodah* we described here, where we make use of **water-of-wind-of-fire** for holiness, is only one part of our *avodah*. It is a very fundamental power to make use of, but it is only one side of the coin. We need to also use the deeper part of the soul, which derives enjoyment from simplicity. This is even more fundamental than deriving pleasure from oppositions.

That "simplicity" we are referring to here is the enjoyment that comes from the state of "simplicity" that we can have in our bond with Hashem, which is the greatest and "simplest" kind of pleasure.

⁹⁶ For more on this concept, see *Fixing Your Water_020_The Desire For Competition*

⁹⁷ Refer to *Tefillah_0167_Torah of Life*

דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית אש כעס 011 רוח דרוח דאש פיזור הנפש

11 | *Scattering of the Soul*

Wind-of-Wind-of-Fire: Clashing Within The Soul

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we continue to explain the element of fire and its resulting trait, anger. Currently, we are up to discussing **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

The wind moves in six directions – east, west, south, north, up, and below. Wind is therefore an element that causes “scattering” (*pizur*), and it also clashes with anything that it meets, as it travels in its direction. In particular, when a person is ‘scattered’ all over the place, this stems from the soul’s aspect of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

Three Scenarios of “Scattering of the Soul” (Pizur HaNefesh)

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that “A pious person prays that he be saved from *pizur hanefesh*”,⁹⁸ “scattering of the soul”, which is when a person is constantly moving in different directions [within his soul].

There are different scenarios of “*pizur hanefesh*” (scattering of the soul):

(1) Sometimes a person keeps moving around due to various external stimuli. We can see this particularly with children, who will move towards anything that catches their interest, and if there are many things catching their interest all at once, they will move all over the place. A person becomes ‘scattered’ due to external reasons when he is not solidly anchored enough to his inner world.

(2) Another source of *pizur nefesh* is when one become “scattered” within himself, due to things that he thinks about or wants (and, in actuality, the thoughts and the will have the same root). This happens to a person when he hasn’t yet given inner order to what’s going on inside himself.

Both of the above kinds of *pizur hanefesh* are based in the general element of wind, but here we will speak about [a third kind of] *pizur hanefesh* which stems in particular from **wind-of-wind-of-fire** [when the various abilities in a person’s soul are at contradiction with each other, creating inner turmoil].

98 *Chovos HaLevovos, Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh: 5*

When Inner Forces Collide

There is a concept that for every side that exists, there is always an opposite side, and there is always separation between the sides unless there is a middle point between them which connects them. In addition, two sides can be in contradiction with each other. For example, the directions of right and left are at contradiction with each other. The same goes for the opposing sides of east and west, north and south, and up and down. The element of wind, which is the element that gives direction to the soul, is essentially the very concept of two different sides scattered from each other, and in opposition with each other.

Thus, there are two distinct aspects contained in wind\direction [both in its properties as well as how it manifests in our own soul]: (1) scattering, (2) opposition\contradiction.

When the sides and directions within a person are clashing against each other, this is the **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, where the sides are at opposition with each other and they cannot harmonize. It is in essence a point of “*Kaf HaKela*” [a state in which a person is thrown around from one place to another] that is within the soul.

“*Kaf HaKela*” doesn’t just mean that a person is flung from one side to another and then back again. It is essentially a situation of an intense tug-of-war between the body and the soul, where the soul wants one direction and the body wants the other direction, and each of them is demanding their share. Besides for the actual punishment of “*Kaf HaKela*”, which is when a person is sentenced to be flung from one place to another place, there is also “*Kaf HaKela*” in the soul itself - when the abilities in the soul are at contradiction with each other; where the different aspects of the person are clashing inside himself.

For example, if there is a lack of balance between one’s element of water and fire, his fire will want to go higher and pull him upward, as it is the nature of fire to rise; while his element water will want to pull him downward, for the nature of water naturally descends. The person won’t be able to stabilize himself in any place he is, because he will be trying to go up and down at once. It is a form of suffering, and it all takes place within the soul, where, sadly, the soul of the person is not able to stay in any one place.

Disconnected from The Here and Now

Here are some examples of it which we can relate to.

When it comes to learning Torah, any sensible person will think about how much time of his Torah learning should be spent learning with *iyun* (in-depth learning), and how much of it he needs to devote to *bekiyus* (a cursory reading of the *Gemara*, which is not focused on depth of understanding). Of course, a person cannot always be totally clear about how to make the proper distribution between *iyun* and *bekiyus*, and it is really an ongoing issue in one’s Torah learning, and it changes with time, depending on a person’s particular circumstances in life. But any sensible

person can achieve clarity in this area to some extent, and know more or less how much time he needs to spend learning with *iyun* and how much to learn *bekiyus*.

However, if someone has a lot of **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in his soul, when he is learning in a *bekiyus* manner, he will feel that he must learn *iyun*, and when he learns with *iyun*, he will feel that he must learn in a manner of *bekiyus*. He is never “here” or “there” whenever he does anything, and, by acting this way, he will not either be successful in whatever he does.

Here’s another example. Some people, when they are taking care of their children, will feel that they should be instead helping other people during this time. They find it too hard to focus on giving all of their attention to their children with their full heart while taking care of them. And when they are involved with helping other people, they will feel like they should instead be helping their children right now.

They are never able to stay completely with where they are. Part of their heart is “there”, and part of their heart is “here” - they are always feeling torn between two sides, and they can never be completely in the here and now.

The amount of disconnection that this causes a person is tremendous. The person will not be able to stay connected to whatever he is doing as he is doing it. Even if he somehow realizes that this is the place where he needs to be right now, he is not able to actually feel connected to where he is right now and to stay centered there, because there is always a part of him that is telling him he should be elsewhere.

There are many other examples as well of this problem which we can bring, but we can suffice with these examples.

A Gehinnom On This World

Some people have this problem only in certain areas of life, and with some people, it dominates either most of their life or all areas of their life. In any case, a person who has a dominance of this **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in himself goes through a *Gehinnom*-like existence on this world, because he is always in a state of inner suffering. With such a lifestyle, he will also not be able to succeed in anything he does on this world. He cannot feel calm inside himself in any given situation, and indeed, it is not possible for him to be calm, due to the constant “scattering of the soul” taking place inside himself.

The Deep Source For Scattering of the Soul

There is a deep source for this problem that can develop in the soul. When there are clashes within the soul, it is really stemming from a combination of the soul’s demand for true *shleimus* (self-perfection) as well as the soul’s desire for the many aspects that *shleimus* entails. A person cannot

actually attain *shleimus* all at once, and so he is left with nothing but the many contradicting forces that are left over from pursuing it, causing him to feel “scattered” inside from all of these contradictions.

The soul pursues *shleimus*, which is one unified desire alone, and it also pursues different aspects of *shleimus*, which are many. At its root, this is one single desire in the soul for self-perfection; but at the branches of this nature, it spreads into many different aspects that it wants.

When a person wants many different kinds of things, and he cannot stay centered in any one goal at the moment, he develops the problem of a “scattered soul” that we are describing here.

Rectifying A Scattered Soul: Learning How To Stay Centered

In order to rectify the problem of “scattering of the soul”, we cannot use the elements of fire or water for this. The element that will rectify a “scattered soul” is the element of earth. Earth is the element that provides building and stability, which is exactly what this person will need, in order to be able to stay centered within the many different directions that are pulling him all over the place.

Therefore, to give a brief outline of the solution: A person should pick something to do and make sure to stay completely focused on it while he does it. He should decide that no matter what comes his way, he will not lose focus on what he’s aiming towards.

The point is to learn how to stay centered within what you are doing right now and to avoid any movement that pulls you outward. Getting used to this focused concentration on what you are doing at the moment is the beginning of the way towards developing inner stability.

When a person accepts upon himself this small “resolution” - to do something and not lose focus on it, and he focuses his thoughts on this resolution - his soul will feel calmed from this. This is because as long as a person knows that it is possible for him to be moved from where he is, his soul will feel insecure and anxious. But once a person has decided that he will not be moved from what he is doing, with a conviction that no matter what thought or desire comes his way, he will not budge from what he is doing in the moment - his soul receives the message that it will not be possible for him to move from what he’s doing, and it is thereby calmed by this secure kind of knowledge.

This ability (of focused concentration on what you are doing in the moment) is also used for evil, when it is used for the trait of despair, where a person is not willing to take in any other thoughts or desires that come into him, because he feels immobile to any kind of movement. But here we are speaking about the holy way to use this power of becoming immobile to any other movements, where one uses his power of focus to build for himself a point that he won’t budge from.

This provides him with a bit of stability within his soul, and he can further build upon this stable place in himself. Building this place of stability in oneself will feel like a ray of light to the person. It will be like an island in middle of the ocean for him, where he can be rescued.

Understandably, most people are not suffering from ‘scattering of the soul’ as we have described here at length, but those who do suffer from it are suffering terribly inside of themselves; it is *Kaf HaKela* on this world. But by learning how to stay focused on a particular act that you are doing, you build for yourself a stable place in yourself, which gives a person a place inside himself to hold onto amidst all of the clashes of the contradictory forces within the soul.

The Holy Use of Wind-of-Wind-of-Fire: Covering All of the Angles

So far, we have seen learned about the evil use of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, where it manifests as “scattering of the soul”. Now let us see how this power can be used for holiness.

Wind-of-wind-of-fire is used for holiness when a person uses opposition for the purposes of building. In everything Hashem created, there is always a force that opposes it. For example, there is man and woman, who are of opposite natures. The masculine and feminine aspects of Creation are always opposite of each other. In order to understand any concept, we need to be able to understand its opposite (*dovor v’hipucho*), because by knowing its opposite, we can learn a lot about the essence of the concept.

When one is experiencing life only through the lower layers of his soul, he will think that he is either at one ‘side’ or at the opposite side, and he cannot harmonize with the opposite point of where he is right now. He will think that he can only be there, or there. If he thinks he is in two places at once, either he will become confused and not know where he is; or, he will feel what we call “split-personality disorder” (in Hebrew, “*pitzul ishiyut*”). This is actually the improper use of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, which we are discussing in this chapter.

But when one is experiencing life through the higher aspects of his soul [because he has gotten deeper into his inner world], he reaches a point in view in the soul where he can contain everything, “*klalut hakol*” (the all-inclusiveness of everything). This ability in a person enables him to harmonize with all ‘sides’, with anything that contradicts or opposes his own direction.

In order for a person to reach the place of “*klalut hakol*” in the soul, he needs to always think into and reflect into the opposite side of where he is. This is the concept of *dovor v’hipucho* – to “think into the opposite”.⁹⁹

This is the first step: In whatever you encounter, you need to think of what its opposite would entail. This is because without understanding the opposite of a concept, one cannot understand a concept. The next step after this is to see the matter from all its angles.

The following illustrates the difference between the first and second steps. The first step would be like a person thinking about the opposite direction of where he is. For example, if he is in the east, he should think about what the west is; if he is in the north, he should think what south is. The

⁹⁹ *The Rav* has discussed the concept of *dovor v’hipucho* (thinking into the opposite) in the following shiurim: *Utilizing Your Daas* #003, #007, and #008; and in *Tefillah* #0127 – *Turning Against and Turning Over*

second step is, that after you have conceptualized that the very idea that there are opposing directions, you can now see them as different ‘sides’, as opposed to ‘opposites’ of each other. In this step, you can contain the other ‘sides’ of where you are because you do not see them as being in opposition of where you are; rather, you realize the importance of understanding the opposite side of where you are, and that helps you contain it and harmonize with it.

Thinking Into The Opposite: Sharpening Your Understanding In Torah

This is also the depth of how Torah scholars are “*mechadedin zeh es zeh*”, they “sharpen” each other in their Torah learning, when their different viewpoints come into opposition with each other. When two different sides are contrasted with each other, there can be a “sharpening” of the sides, where each of the sides can be better grasped, now that they are being pitted against each other, which can ultimately lead to harmonizing them together.

This force in the soul, where one can think into the opposite of a matter and thereby sharpen his understanding of a matter, is like an inner ability of “*chavrusa*”¹⁰⁰ in the soul - it is how one can “sharpen” himself from within himself. It is accessed when one gets used to thinking of all the possible sides of a matter, seeing all the possible options and angles of understanding and contrasting them with each other, which enables one to become like his own “*chavrusa*” to himself.

This is the holy way to use **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. One who gets used to this will uncover more subtle understanding in what he first perceived, by always getting used to “thinking into the opposite” of where he is. When one is learning Torah and he has a certain understanding of a matter, he should think into what the opposite of that understanding would be.

When a person is always “thinking into the opposite”, he is also able to come to the power of *shalom* (peace), and he will be at peace with those who think opposite than he does. He will gain the ability to contain in himself all the many different opposing directions that there can be.

Wind-of-Wind-of-Fire: The Power That Expands The Soul’s Perception

Getting used to “thinking into the opposite” keeps opening the soul, more and more, with each time that a person thinks into the opposite of what he is learning about. This is actually the depth contained in the soul’s element of wind, and it is specifically **wind-of-wind-of-fire** which enables a person to keep expanding and opening his soul, for it is this ability which enables a person to cover all of the angles of a matter.

When learning Torah, there are two different thinking abilities. One kind of ability is to see all of the information necessary to know about the particular topic one is learning about; to span the entire ‘*hekef*’ (circular view) of the particular *sugya* in Torah that one is learning. That ability comes

¹⁰⁰ study partner

from the holy use of **wind-of-wind-of-wind** in the soul. However, here we are describing a different ability, which enables one to cover all of the possible angles of understanding, which is reached when he “thinks into the opposite” of the matter. This is **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

For this reason, it is only **wind-of-wind-of-fire** which enables a person to truly expand his soul, because it is only when a person thinks into the opposite of what he is learning about that he can truly uncover all of the possible angles of understanding, as opposed to merely gathering heaps of knowledge.

This is also the depth of what it means to have *gadlus mochin*, an “expanded mind”, which are possessed in full by one who is a *gadol* (a great personality). By contrast, a person with *katnus mochin* (“small-mindedness”) is when one’s mind cannot expand past where it is.

A person can know a lot of information of Torah, or he may be able to remember a lot of Torah knowledge, yet he might still have only a mind that is on the level of *katnus mochin*. (On a deeper note, this is also called “*gadlus mochin* within *katnus mochin*” – because a person might be very knowledgeable, but that doesn’t automatically expand his mind).

Gadlus mochin is when a person’s mind has expanded due to always thinking into the opposite side of where it is; the mind can keep expanding when it comes across contradictory concepts. Knowledge in Torah is also helpful to the mind, but it is not yet *gadlus mochin*. A person only gains *gadlus mochin* when his mind can think into the opposite of what he learns and he keeps doing so, for it is only this kind of thinking in Torah which expands the mind.

This is why Torah is called “endless waters” - the Torah is endless when one keeps thinking into the opposite of the concepts in Torah he is learning about. When he uncovers that endless kind of Torah, on a deeper level, this stems from the Infinite, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

When a person develops this ability to constantly think into the opposite of whatever he learns in the Torah, he is always covering all of the angles of the concepts that he learns about, and this is the true holy use of **wind-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul. This is also what rectifies impaired wind-of-wind-of-fire in the soul.

This power to “think into the opposite”, to be able to connect to opposites and contain them, is the very epitome of *shleimus* (perfection), enabling a person to continuously expand and contain everything.

Balancing Expansion With Boundaries

However, this power in the soul of continuous expansion must also be given balance. If a person keeps “expanding” in his soul and he does not have a concept of staying within boundaries, he will not be able to put any constraint on his expansion, and he will come to forego the boundaries and rules of the holy Torah, *chas v’shalom*.

As an example of what we mean, there have been some people who were able to keep expanding in their souls, but they did not learn how to develop the power of placing boundaries, and as an unfortunate result from this, they came to ignore the rules of the Torah, such as what happened with those who went too far with their *ahavas Yisrael*, and the like. A person must have a sense of boundaries, and this will place some constraint of his continuous expansion and keep him from expanding too much.

In Conclusion

Understandably, this concept of continuous expansion of the soul, via “thinking into the opposite” and being able to contain opposites in oneself, is a concept that is far from understanding of most people.

What has been described here is one of the fundamental ways of how a person can reach great depth of understanding within learning Torah. Besides for general exertion in Torah and clarity in learning Torah, which a person will also need to do in order to gain comprehension in his Torah learning, there is also a deeper ability of thinking in Torah: to “think into the opposite” of a matter that one is learning about. This is what enables a person to have a more all-inclusive view towards the Torah matter he is learning about.

It is as the Chazon Ish writes [concerning one who exerts himself in Torah learning]: “A new gate opens to him, and the intellect will then revel in endless bliss.” How does a person come to this ‘endless bliss’ in his mind? It is when he thinks into all of the angles of a matter in Torah, thinking into the opposite of each concept he learns about, and then he gains a connection to the infinite aspect of the Torah.

We have been brief in describing this concept. Every person has this deep ability in the soul of “thinking into the opposite” of a concept in Torah that he is learning, and to thereby cover all of the possible angles of the matter he is learning about. This gives a person access to “new gates” of wisdom (providing that he also has the conditions of spiritual purity, holiness, and that he is always doing Hashem’s will, with awe and love) in his Torah learning: when he uses this power of holy **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, as it has been explained here.

12 | *Fighting*

Fire-of-Wind-of-Fire: Expressing Opposition Towards Others

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are learning about the element of fire and its resulting trait, anger. Now we are up to discussing **fire-of-wind-of-fire**. As mentioned earlier, this is the force in the soul that motivates people to engage in war, when forces collide with each other and battle each other.

Fire itself is the root of anger, wind-of-anger is when anger is in the form of opposition with others, and fire-of-wind-of-fire is when opposition leads to wars – both the wars fought in the world, as well as war within the soul.

Disapproval of Others in Thought, Word, and Action

In some people, this nature is expressed only in their thoughts, where they feel opposition with others in their thoughts, but they will not take action against others or verbalize these thoughts. With others, this nature extends from their thoughts and into their speech, where they will verbalize their disapproval of others that they are opposed to. And in others, this nature will extend into the realm of action, where a person will engage in active opposition with them - these are the wars which we find in the world.

Mentally Disapproving Of Others

Let us first discuss the first scenario, where this nature is only manifest in one's thoughts.

When this nature is expressed in thought alone, a person deep down will want to oppose certain things that he encounters. He might think that others are wrong, that certain opinions are wrong, that certain ways of thinking are wrong, and feel disapproval towards the words and actions of others. In either case, the person feels very strongly opinionated.

Sometimes this stems from the holy *daas* of a person that he may have reached, if he is very connected to the higher dimensions of the soul. This is also called "*aisan*" (warrior) in the soul¹⁰¹, where a person strongly holds onto the truths that he believes in and knows, and this is also the meaning of the statement of the Sages that a Torah scholar needs to be as tough as iron."¹⁰²

101 Refer to Tefillah #0149 – *The Source of Your Strength*

102 *Taanis 4a*

However, most of the time it is not this holy source which is motivating the person. It is usually coming from a nature in the person to simply be strongly opinionated.

These kinds of people are very strong-minded and they stubbornly hold onto their views, and it is hard to convince them that their thinking may be wrong. They fight “wars” with other people in their minds, by holding very strongly onto their ways of thinking. When this nature becomes very dominant in a person, he will remain unfazed from others no matter how much they try to oppose him, and he will oppose anything/anyone that gets in the way of his thinking.

Verbally Disapproving of Others

Sometimes this nature extends to the person’s speech as well, where a person will express his disapproval of others’ views and actions, via the means of speech. Either he will express his disapproval verbally, or in the written word.

Writers often have the blessing granted from Hashem to express a thought very strongly in their writing, and to express disapproval of others in various areas. There are some writers who will spend their entire schedule writing their disapproval of all kinds of matters, either because they are paid to do so, or simply as a hobby, because it is their very pleasure in life to be able to strongly oppose others, via the means of words - whether verbally or through writing.

Even more so, it is often their very way of talking which invites opposition with others. There are people who love to say things that will bother people, and often it is just the tone of voice that the person is carrying which will offset people. Two people can say the same thing, yet one of them will elicit a stronger reaction from others, because he is conveying a certain tone to his words which is aimed to attack some people.

When you hear such a person talk, you hear all of the personality behind it; you can tell that the words he is speaking are strongly expressing what’s on his heart. This kind of person uses words to attack people. The more sensitive and refined that a person is, the more he will feel like the words and voice of such a person are cutting into him like a knife, and he will find it unbearable. Besides for how speaking strongly with others is a lack of *derech eretz*¹⁰³, it is essentially a way for a person to start up with other people and fight with them, through words.

Many times we can unfortunately see children who are wild and rambunctious, who look like they haven’t been nurtured properly to have even decent manners towards others. Often it is because they grew up in a home where they were spoken to very strongly all the time, and they couldn’t bear it. A person who regularly speaks strongly with others will do so whether he is in the bank, at the supermarket, or at home. He is always speaking in a strong tone with others and starting up with

¹⁰³ decent behavior towards others

people, expressing his disapproval. In the home, his family members will suffer from his verbally abusive behavior – as Chazal say, “A person cannot live with a snake, under one roof.”¹⁰⁴

This is the nature of **fire-of-wind-of-fire** when it is expressed in a person’s speech. It is not only an expression of his thoughts, but a way for the person to exercise strength, which he gains through employing strong language and tone with others.

Some people are not that strong-minded, but they speak strongly with others, because they want to express strength in their words. Usually these are more emotional kinds of people, who express themselves strongly. Most of the time, though, this kind of reactivity usually leads to anger and other intense negative emotions. In others, though, speaking strongly with others is a result of their strongly formulated opinions, and their thoughts are being expressed through their words.

[Regarding the second kind of person], this can be rooted either in his mind or in his heart: Sometimes it is because they are hold on stubbornly to their thinking, so it is rooted in their mental thinking patterns, and sometimes it is because their hearts have turned into a hardened “heart of stone”, which extends into how they speak.

Actively Opposing Others

A third kind of person we will discuss is a person who opposes others via taking action against them. We can see this nature manifest in the many fights and wars that take place in our world, where people actively engage in opposition with each other, fighting each other in this “realm of action” that we live on. The world is full of these kinds of fights and wars.

There are wars fought for holiness, such as the Ramban’s sefer *Milchamos Hashem* (“wars of G-d”), and there are also physical wars that are fought in the world, from the beginning of history and until now. Some countries have been at war with each other for centuries, and there are even some countries today that are always at war, taking breaks every so often from their wars and then continuing. They spend their lives in a state of war. They may have a very logical reason of why they are always at war, but the inner reason behind this is because the force of “war” in their souls has been allowed to become extremely dominant.

This nature is very commonly expressed by children, who are able to fight for long periods of time and enjoy it. In the younger years of a person’s life, where a person does not yet have much *daas* (mature thinking), **fire-of-wind-of-fire** may be a very common force in his life. There are even adults who don’t stop their childish antics of fighting with people, and they continue to fight with others for long periods of time, even though they are fully grown adults. Their fighting with others might be expressed in their thoughts, words, or in their actions. But during the childhood years especially, fighting might be a very normal and dominant aspect in a person’s life.

104 *Kesubos 72a*

If someone has experience with children, he knows that there are some children who get bored if they don't have some kind of fight, and if they don't find someone to fight with, they will fight with their teachers, because they live for these fights.

This is the **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, which is more dominant in childhood, but it can often continue into adulthood as well, except that in adulthood it is expressed in subtler ways. It never goes away, it stays there deep in a person's nature, and it merely takes on different forms. The world is full of people who fight with each other, and these people live for the fight; this is all the evil use of **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul.

Channeling The Force of “War” In The Soul For Holiness

Now let us learn about the inner, holy use of this power.

The truth about our life is that we are always going through wars in our life. The *Chovos HaLevovos*¹⁰⁵ writes, “Know that your inclination, which is contained in the forces of your soul, which is mixed with your temperament – this is your [evil] inclination, he is the one who hates you the most.” In our life on this world, one is constantly in a state of war with his *yetzer hora* (evil inclination).

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that all of life is a war with evil, and that we are surrounded by this war wherever we turn. Almost every person without exception must contend with his *yetzer hora*, and he battles between the warring forces of good and evil within him. For this reason, our entire life is really a war. There is no possibility for anyone on this world who isn't vulnerable to the *yetzer hora*. The *Gemara* says that the only exceptions to this were the three forefathers, whose *yetzer hora* had become uprooted from them.

There is a force in the soul that is prepared to be at war with opposing forces, and this nature is implanted in us so that we can fight the *yetzer hora*. However, most people do not use this power of “war” correctly, using it in the wrong places, instead of using it to fight their *yetzer hora*. In any case, it is impossible for a person to escape this “war” he is in on this world. The reality of our life on this world is that we are surrounded by war on all sides. Our free choice, however, is to choose what kind of “war” we will have in our life (as well as how much we will need to fight, which is another point).

A large amount of people just go through life without ever working to purify their character, so instead of being at war with their *yetzer hora*, they will find themselves in other kinds of wars and fights, which aren't holy. They will end up being at war with other areas in their life, because the force of war in their souls will ultimately seek expression, and they will get into trouble at some point.

Such a person will not be able to battle his *yetzer hora*, because he does not know how to properly engage in war with it; and the wars that he does fight in his life will not lead him towards anything

¹⁰⁵ *Chovos HaLevovos: Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh, 5*

holy. This is the case when a person remains in his impaired state of the soul and he doesn't seek to grow spiritually.

But if a person seeks to live truthfully, firstly he will identify this nature in the soul that seeks war, and after that, the *avodah* is to channel it towards its proper and holy direction.

This doesn't mean that he should weaken his soul's power of "war" (though there are some times where he may have to do this, if he is very imbalanced in this force of his soul). Instead, the first step to take is to use the power of "war" in the right place – when one realizes that he is really at war, every moment of the day, with his *yetzer hora*. He will be channeling his need for "war" towards holiness. He will still have to battle evil, but his gain will be that he is using the power of "war" for holiness, and it will greatly lessen the expression of this power where it was used for unsavory purposes.

There is still an *avodah* upon him to lessen his opposition when it comes to other areas, which we have spoken about in earlier chapters. But with particular regards to the point we are discussing here, the *avodah* of a person is to live with awareness that he is constantly at war with evil within his soul, and this war never ends. Herein lays the proper and holy use of "war".

In summary, a person's *avodah* in this aspect is to make sure that he is fighting in areas that are worth fighting about (matters of holiness), and to lessen his desire for opposition (which we discussed in previous chapters), and through these two points together, the soul will be guided in a proper direction.

The Deeper Arena Of Your Bechirah

Fire-of-wind-of-fire in the soul, which we are learning about here, is essentially this force of "war" in the soul. As explained earlier, in most people, the force of "war" is expressed in areas where it shouldn't be, and there is less of an emphasis on one's personal war between good and evil. But the force of "war" in the soul always seeks expression, whether in the mundane or in the holy.

A person has times where he is awake, and times where he is asleep. While a person is sleeping, is he in a war? It seems simply that sleeping is not a time where we are at war. But if a person has become more internal, he realizes that just as there is an *avodah* while we are awake, which is when we have *daas* and we have *bechirah* (free will), so is sleep a time of *avodah* for us.

We know that dreams tell us certain things about ourselves, because dreams show us what we thought about or imagined during the day, or they are showing us places which aren't fitting for our soul, which the soul may float to at nighttime, *chas v'shalom*, when we aren't careful in protecting it. Our *mazal* can also see things in our dreams. All of those things are shown to us in dreams. Just as we have *bechirah* during the day, where we have a war with the *yetzer hora*, so is there a war with the *yetzer hora* even as we sleep.

When Shlomo HaMelech slept, he was offered the choice between wealth and wisdom, and he chose wisdom. The simple meaning of this is that even as he slept, he merited spiritual protection from the evil forces of nighttime which may harm the soul. But the truer understanding of this is that his wisdom came from the *bechirah* he used even as he slept. The depth of our *bechirah* is present when we sleep!

When we are awake, our intellect is functioning more and it can overpower our fantasies, and it is easier to fight with the *yetzer hora* then (relatively speaking). But when we are asleep, when our fantasies are more dominant, that is the deeper use of our *bechirah* to choose between good and evil. This is a *bechirah* that takes place in our subconscious, and it is there where all of our main choices are found.

The *bechirah* we access during the daytime when we conscious is therefore not the depth of our *bechirah*! It is certainly *bechirah* to some degree, but even animals have some level of *bechirah* in this regard. The true use of *bechirah*, which is unique only to humans, is accessed only in the subconscious, while we are asleep.

There are thus two levels to our *bechirah* – when we are awake and conscious, and when we are asleep and unconscious. For example, if a person dreamt at night that he went to a certain place, it really means that he is choosing in his subconscious to go that place. He has decided to go there – in his dream. It's not that he happened to dream about this; rather, he decided to think about this in his dream.

Imagine all of the decisions we make in our dreams! Shlomo HaMelech chose wisdom in his dream, but every person as well is choosing in his dreams, to make certain decisions. There is no dream which does not contain decisions that a person chooses to decide.

Chas v'shalom, if a person chose to commit a sin in his dream, it means that he has chosen to do so! That is the deeper reason of why a person has ritual contamination from lewd dreams.¹⁰⁶ It is a reflection of something evil that is rearing its head, deep in his subconscious. It is the *yetzer hora*, its roots of evil, which hides deep in the heart.¹⁰⁷ During a dream, the hidden recesses of the heart come out of hiding.

The depth of a person's war with the *yetzer hora* is therefore not during daytime, but at nighttime when he sleeps. If a person doesn't fight the *yetzer hora* during daytime, his nature for war will seek expression in other areas which are not holy, and in addition, he will fall prey to the *yetzer hora* at nighttime, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes, that a person can become so 'sleepy' that his *yetzer hora* completely dominates him. He almost won't have any *bechirah*. When he is awake he is not using his *bechirah*, so it's as if he's already asleep, and now that he's sleeping, he's even more asleep, with almost no *bechirah* to help him fight the *yetzer hora*. He lives his life in a sleeplike state to begin with, so when he goes to sleep at night, he is truly in a 'deep sleep'.

¹⁰⁶ Refer to Kesubos 44a

¹⁰⁷ Sukkah 52a

When a person is at war with the *yetzer hora* during the day, the war he fights in his conscious state will penetrate into his subconscious as well, and he will be able to fight the *yetzer hora* even when he is not conscious. This is the deeper part of oneself, where the main war in a person's life takes place. His inner parts will merge with his outer parts, and vice versa, and then even when he goes to sleep, he will be able to retain his power of *bechirah*.

The more a person is in touch with his power of *bechirah* from daytime, he will slowly acquire the power of *bechirah* even as he's asleep, maintaining his awareness even as he's asleep. This purifies the materialistic aspects of one's being and it is this area which determines the true level of a person. The time when we sleep is the main battleground where we reveal the true strength of our character.

If a person dreams about some difficulty while he is asleep, what does he wish to do? Does he want to just run away from it, or does he feel like he wants to run away to Hashem? If he summons forth his *emunah* in Hashem in the dream, it shows where he truly is. If he chooses in his dream to simply run away from the difficulty, that also shows where he truly is....this is the true, deep test of where a person is really found.

In a dream, a person is experiencing his imagination, and the memory of a dream can feel very strong, much stronger than how much a person remembers what he went through in reality during the day. Even when a person forgets a dream when he wakes up, the experience of the dream might be deeply imprinted on his soul.

Every soul has gone through many lifetimes, including all the dreams of each lifetime, which add up for a countless amount of experiences of imagination that each person has gone through. All of these imprints make the soul very complicated to know, and that is besides for the general complexities about the soul. Every soul contains many experiences from so many lifetimes that it has been through, and the dreams are a replay of these events; though most people are not aware of this. And the main "war" of a person takes places when he sleeps, where he is subconsciously deciding upon certain things.

Only a person who is used to "war" from during the daytime, through having fought his *yetzer hora*, is one who will be able to battle properly when he dreams in his sleep at night.

The Need For Serenity

However, we must know that "war" is all but one side of the coin in our life. We really cannot live our entire life in a state of "war". Hashem created six days of the week and a seventh day of *Shabbos Kodesh* for rest. Our soul as well needs to rest. War is only one part of our life. There is a deeper part of our life where we can draw forth *menuchah* (serenity).

When this concept is misunderstood, it is translated into lethargy and sleepiness, and this is not *menuchah*. But in the depths of the soul, one can find the true *menuchah*.

It is not possible for a person to live a life only in a state of war with his *yetzer hora*. If he does, his soul will feel like it is constantly amidst a raging storm (even though he is always fighting for the right reasons) that doesn't stop, and he will become completely dominated by the soul's **fire-of-wind-of-fire**. It will be most difficult for a person in this situation to reach any *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind) and to find any deep connection [to Hashem], because he will always be in a state of "war". We can see from even physical wars fought that a person cannot have peace of mind if he is in the midst of war, because the soul cannot be calm in this situation.

In order to live a truthful kind of life, one needs to first go through the toughness of war, and to become a "seasoned warrior" from having fought the *yetzer hora*. This doesn't require that he totally defeat his *yetzer hora* [which is impossible], but to be well-trained in overcoming evil, to a prominent extent. This gives a person a certain degree of *menuchas hanefesh*, and that is the first step.

And from where does a person draw forth *menuchas hanefesh*, after having been through the toughness of war with the *yetzer hora*? It can only come to a person if he is able to connect to a serene point in his life which is "completely good", where there is no trace of evil. This is the depth contained in the holiness of *Shabbos Kodesh*, which contains only good and holiness, and no evil [for it is a reflection of the future state, where good will shine completely and all evil will cease to exist].

When a person lives all the time through the external layers of his soul (and in the external aspects of life), there is a war that he faces all the time between the *yetzer tov* and the *yetzer hora*. This war is ongoing, and it surrounds him on all sides, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* writes. It never ceases, and even when he sleeps, this war continues, and even more so. But amidst all of these wars, a person can at times connect to a point which is completely good and serene. It exists so that a person can refresh himself in order to gain the energy to return to fighting evil afterwards. It is not a search for *menuchah* merely for the sake of achieving *menuchah*, but for the sake of having the energy to fight again, refreshed and re-energized.

Where is this place of complete "good" where *menuchas hanefesh* is drawn from in the depths of the soul? It is the place in the soul of "And as for me, closeness to Hashem is good."¹⁰⁸ When a person connects to Hashem from deep in his soul, that is where he will find the place that is completely "good". This gives a person some *menuchah* even as he's amidst war, where he can find a place where he is "above" all the wars. But he must then return to war afterwards, just like we return to the weekdays after Shabbos.

Practically speaking, most people are not connected to this deep place of serenity in the soul where all is good. However, a person must be able to access some kind of inner peace in himself, because it is impossible for a person to always be fighting. One must therefore have time every day where he relaxes a little bit.

As an example, *Bein HaZemanim* is not a time where we are exempt from fighting the war with the *yetzer hora*, but it is a time where we relax a bit, and the purpose of this relaxation is so that we can become refreshed and regain the energy to fight evil. We can't stay forever in a state of war. If

108 *Tehillim* 73:28

one truly reaches deeper into his soul, he draws forth *menuchah* from there not because he has slackened off from fighting, but because he feels a connection to a point that is completely good.

This is the holy way to balance out the **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul, and in order to completely calm its nature, one needs to draw forth *menuchah* from deep in the soul. A person who is a “seasoned warrior” from having fought the *yetzer hora* so much in his life is a person who has reached a certain degree of self-perfection and holiness, and he has reached a great deal of *menuchah* as a result from this.

In Conclusion

To summarize, we explained how to balance the soul’s force of “war”, the need in the soul that wants to contend with opposition and to do battle.

We explained that the first step is for one to identify the nature to be at “war” and to then channel this desire towards holiness. At that point, though, a person will always be at “war” and he won’t yet be able to find peace from all of this war. And his main war will take place in his sleep, as he dreams, where his subconscious will play itself out. The decisions that he makes in his dreams will reflect his true, current level that he is on right now. The scenes that take place in a person’s dreams are his main area of war with the evil forces of the *yetzer hora*.

By getting used to this awareness – the fact that one is always at war with evil forces, and by trying to fight - one will eventually become a “seasoned warrior” from all of this. At a certain point he will feel a need to refresh himself and to find some inner peace [which he can find in the holiness of Shabbos Kodesh, which contains *menuchah*], and if he merits to go deeper into his soul, he will find a great, calming closeness to Hashem in his soul, where true *menuchah* is found, where all is good.

One needs to constantly move back and forth.¹⁰⁹ between these two forces in the soul, between war and inner peace in himself. He needs to fight with the evil within himself, both when he’s awake and when he’s not awake - and he needs to have times as well where he draws forth some calmness and serenity, so that he can become refreshed and then continue fighting the evil.

Herein lays the way to rectify the **fire-of-wind-of-fire** in the soul.

¹⁰⁹ this concept is known as “*ratzu v’shav*” – “running and retreating”

13 | *Dangerous Rage*

Anger Stemming From Fire-of-Fire: Rage

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we continue here to learn about anger, which stems from the element of fire in the soul. We have so far discussed the branches of anger which stem from “earth”, “water” and “wind” within the element of fire. Now we will discuss the kinds of anger which stem from the “fire” of fire – the most intense kind of anger from all of these.

Fire-of-fire, like the other divisions, will also divide into four branches: earth, water, wind, and fire. Therefore, there is anger that stems from “**earth**”-of-fire-of-fire, “**water**”-of-fire-of-fire, “**wind**”-of-fire-of-fire, and “**fire**”-of-fire-of-fire. First we will describe each of these briefly, and then we will go through them in detail.

The Four Branches of Fire-of-Fire

- 1) **Earth-of-fire-of-fire** is when a person actualizes his anger, from its potential state into its active state.
- 2) **Water-of-fire-of-fire** is when a person is continuously dragged after anger, without pause.
- 3) **Wind-of-fire-of-fire** is when a person is angered easily by any small reason that triggers it.
- 4) **Fire-of-fire-of-fire** is an intense rage, where the level of anger is total. Of this the Sages say that “One who is angered, it is as if he committed idol worship.”¹¹⁰ This is called *resichah* (fury).

Earth-of-Fire-of-Fire: The Actualization of Anger

First we will begin with examining anger that stems from earth-of-fire-of-fire.

Until now, in the previous chapters, we have been describing anger that is internal, where it is brimming in a person’s heart, and perhaps his face is also red with anger. But another kind of anger is where anger is actualized, where it goes from its potential state into its active state.

¹¹⁰ *Shabbos 105b*

Earth nurtures what is placed in it by producing plants from the original seeds, so the role of earth is that it brings things from their potential state into their active state. Thus, when anger is actualized, it is stemming from the “earth” aspect of fire-of-fire.

Anger In Speech and In Action

This may manifest in a person’s speech or actions. When a person is speaking angrily with someone, this is a less extreme manifestation of the anger, relatively speaking - compared to angry actions that are taken against another. When anger is actualized in one’s speech, it will take on the form of sudden shouting and yelling, and even more so, the words themselves that are uttered then will be “angry” words.

When people are expressing their anger in words, they are apt to let out curses, even at their parents, *chas v’shalom*, which is forbidden by the Torah. They might even curse themselves. During an angry tirade, a person may stumble upon many Torah prohibitions. Besides for using vulgar language, the person may come to swear, along with committing other sins that are speech-related. These words uttered in anger are an expression of the anger that is in his heart; they are being actualized from their potential state, via the means of speech.

As long as a person is just expressing the anger via the means of speech, the anger can be under control, but the problems begin once a person loses control of the words coming out of his mouth.

Sometimes he will continue to express things that are related to his anger, but at other times, he will say things that have nothing to do with what he was angry about. It may turn into cursing, condemning, swearing, and other kinds of speech which are uttered by people when they lose control of the words coming out of their mouth. In many cases, the anger extends way past the subject at hand, and it will either lead to getting angry about other things, or it will lead to cursing and other strong language.

Many times, though, the anger goes beyond speech - and it becomes action. When anger is expressed in action, it is the total actualization of anger from its potential state.

Chazal describe one who breaks things while he is anger, and this is referring specifically to the “actualized” anger which we are discussing here. Anger is a destructive force which is rooted in the element of fire. Just as fire destroys, so does anger destroy things when it is actualized. It might not always be a totally fiery display of anger, but since anger is rooted in fire, the actualized anger will always be somewhat destructive in its nature.

When Kayin was jealous of his brother Hevel [whose *korbon* was accepted by Hashem over his], his jealousy festered, which made him seethe in anger, and eventually, his jealousy and his anger led to the act of murdering Hevel. When a person becomes very angry, he might wish to “destroy the whole world” in his anger. Being that this is impossible for him to do, he may instead destroy everything around him, by breaking whatever is in front of him, by breaking objects or hurting people - and in Kayin’s case, to come to murder.

Holding Onto Resentment Vs. Impulsive Anger

When people actualize their anger, there are two possibilities of how it may be manifested.

Some people are very calm when they actualize their anger; they will not be that impulsive, and they will be able to slowly actualize their anger, without feeling a need to act so fast. An example of this is Esav, who waited for his father to die so that he could pursue Yaakov and try to kill him. A person may bear a grudge against someone and be full of resentment towards him, holding onto it for a long time, and then take action against the person at a later time, perhaps by harming him, or *chas v'shalom* to the point that he will kill him, as Kayin did to Hevel.

In others, anger is actualized very quickly and impulsively. As soon as they are angered, they quickly actualize the potential of their fire-of-fire, and before they even get a chance to think, the deed has been done. There are unfortunately people who have killed others as soon as they were angered, without even thinking about the consequences. A petty argument may lead to something, a sharp word is exchanged or an improper action is done to him, and as soon as the person is angered by this, if he has a knife or a gun on him, he may quickly use it against the person.

Many times there are murderers who quickly regret what they have done, and they will say, “What have I done?!” The anger is quickly gone after they have acted upon it, and only then does the regret sink in. But during the actual time of the anger, a person might be so impulsive to quickly let it out, he has basically lost his mind and he has no *daas* at that moment, and he is bordering on insanity.

(This is not to say that he isn't responsible for his actions, since he is insane at that moment. A murderer receives capital punishment in *Beis Din* if he has been warned by two witnesses.) Everything happens so quickly that the person never thinks about what this will mean for his future.

There are also people who have very destructive *middos*. Instead of quickly taking action against the person whom they feel wronged by, they will wait a long time until they can take revenge, plotting for a long of time on how they can get back at the person. The person might wait for a few days, a few weeks, a few months and even several years until he eventually strikes back, carefully waiting until he can execute his plan for revenge.

This does not stem from anger, however, but from the trait of revenge, where a person is resentful for a long time against another and he wishes to be destructive to another. A Jew's soul may know what it's like to be very angry, but plotting to harm others and waiting a long time to take action against the other person is a nature that is rooted in the wicked souls of the “*Erev Rav*” (the Mixed Multitude).¹¹¹, because the soul of a Jew is not able to do such a thing.

¹¹¹ Refer to the pdf of “*Erev Rav Talks*”.

Angry outbursts may be commonplace in a Jew's life, and the Sages describe a person who is quick to anger and difficult to appease; but at least he has much good in his soul which can do many good things, and it is just that he has an imbalance in his element of fire, which causes him to lose control when he gets angry.

But if someone can plot against another person for a long amount of time and wait years until he can take revenge against the person, his very soul is rooted in a destructive nature – and such a nature is a sign that he is not of the souls of the Jewish people.

“Erev Rav” In The Soul

We will digress a bit here from the topic of this chapter, in order to discuss the following important point that is relevant here.

In the later generations, and in our generation especially, there are some people who have different parts to their souls – part of their soul is “*Yisrael*” (Jew), and part of their souls come from the wicked souls of “*Erev Rav*”.

On a deeper note, every soul contains the entire universe, so there is also “*Erev Rav*” manifest in every soul. But on a more specific level, there are many people in the generation today who have a great mixture of good\Jew and evil*Erev Rav* in their souls.¹¹²

Our Sages wrote that in the final generation especially, the parts of the soul which did not yet receive a rectification in previous lifetimes (whether it is their aspects of “*nefesh*”, “*ruach*”, or “*neshamah*”) will return in later generations to receive their rectification, but even more so, the Sages write of a concept where parts of different souls can join together in one person's soul, in order to receive their rectification.

This is the inner reason of why a person can feel so many inner contradictions inside himself. He has a “split” in his personality, and it will seem to others that he has some kind of “split personality” disorder, but the truth of the matter may be because there are parts of different souls contained in him, so he can really be two people at once.

With regards to our current discussion, in our generation, there are people who are partially Jew and partially “*Erev Rav*”. When people are ignorant of this concept, they are baffled by the

112 After this class, the Rav was asked, “What should I do if I recognize this “Erev Rav” aspect in my soul? How do I rectify it?” The Rav responded, “First of all, let's understand that if someone has a large percentage of “Erev Rav” in his soul, he won't be that insulted from the words here. However, there are people who do have some “Erev Rav” aspect in their souls. This is the part of the soul upon which we have a “mitzvah to erase Amalek”. If a person recognizes that he has some trace of ‘Erev Rav’ in his soul, he should daven to Hashem that he merit to die al kiddush Hashem. If a person is truly willing to die al kiddush Hashem, that very decision to have mesirus nefesh for Hashem is like a “death” to that evil part of his soul; just as the neshamah leaving the body is considered to be ‘death’. In this way a person is left with an entirely holy soul. “The question you have asked is very important, because there are indeed many people in this generation who contained a mixture of good\Jew and evil\Erev Rav in their souls.”

contradictions that they may notice in the personality of many people, who come across as having some kind of split personality, where one day they are very kind and the next day they can act very destructive.

Sometimes we can see a person who has a very good heart, and he can daven with fervor and with tears, and soon afterwards he acts destructive, where he belittles things that are holy, and he enjoys it. He might be a person who causes the public to sin, *chas v'shalom*, yet when it comes Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, he looks so earnest and he is seen *davening* and *crying*. People who see this contradiction in the person will wonder: “What is going on over here? Who is he? Is he genuine, or not?!”

There are even some people who have caused others to sin, and part of their harm was due to the fact that they look like G-d fearing people, who can be seen learning in a *Beis Midrash* or in an earnest *davening*, with passionate feelings for the spiritual, but it may all be like one big joke to the person, and it is not genuine. Some people look merciful, it seems that they possess the Jewish trait of *rachamim*/compassion, but if you look deeper under the surface, there is a lot in his character that contradicts this.

Sometimes a person simply has some *middos* that aren't good, and that is not what we are talking about here. He may be very lazy, or he is very gluttonous, or he is too talkative, or he has a bad temper, but that doesn't show that he has the evil nature of “destructiveness”. “Destructiveness” is not to be viewed simply as a bad *middah*. It is a far more serious ruination of character. When a person has a nature in himself to act destructive to others and to things that are holy, this is a “spark of the *Erev Rav*” contained in his soul, which does not come from the Jewish people.

These people have two major parts to themselves. There is a part of them which is Jewish, and a part of them which is not. The part which is “Jew” is the “*pure heart that G-d created me with*”¹¹³, which can be manifest in either the traits that he shows of either compassion, love for Hashem, or crying to Hashem in prayer. Shortly after displaying these earnest Jewish traits, this person might become act destructive towards others and become involved with dissension with others.

It is not simply because he is acting in error and that he's mistaken. There is a more inner reason to his destructive nature. It is because in the depths of his soul, he enjoys the transition from holiness to evil – which is stemming from the evil that lays deep in his soul.

We are encountering these kinds of people all the time, but we don't always notice it. We should understand that when we are involved with such people, we must adapt an attitude of “Honor him, but suspect him.”¹¹⁴ It is difficult to decide who falls into this category or not. But because there do exist such people in the world today, we must be very careful with who we bond with. We should only allow ourselves to bond with someone who is good at his root, which means that he does not have the issue of being destructive. Instead of allowing yourself to be around someone who acts destructive, better hang around people who are not.

113 *Tehillim* 51:12

114 *Maseches Kallah Rabbasi* 9, *Maseches Derech Eretz* 5

Destructiveness vs. Angry Outbursts

We have digressed here to discuss this, in order to point out this very important point to know about. If a person recognizes in his soul that he has a bit of this nature of “destructiveness”, he must realize that this comes from a “spark of the *Erev Rav*” that is embedded into his soul. If the destructiveness dominates him totally, or on a very large scale, then it is a sign that he is, *chas v’shalom*, of the souls of the “*Erev Rav*”; simply speaking.

However, we are not coming to discuss such a person here and how he is rectified.¹¹⁵ Those people are completely dominated by **earth-of-fire-of-fire**, and they are able to hold onto resentment for many years against someone until they take action against the person, which is like what Esav did to Yaakov. A person who has this nature dominant in himself is living a lie. He might be a person who helps people, making sure to get a very good name for himself, but he also feels that he is right to take action against others in a destructive way.

Anyone who knows the world a bit will understand exactly what we mean. People who are dominated by **earth-of-fire-of-fire**, when they are angered, are capable of destroying entire communities; they are capable of causing dissension in marriages, they are capable of destroying father-son relationships, and they can do it all very quickly - and all in the name of “holiness”. But it does not come from genuine holiness. We aren’t discussing at all here about these kinds of people; it requires its own discussion.

Here we are talking about someone who has quick angry outbursts, which stems from **earth-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul. This is a kind of person who actualizes his anger not only by raising his voice, but by taking action against others, where he actualizes his anger from its potential state to its active state, and all of this takes place very quickly. He impulsively acts upon his anger and he never gives himself the time to think about the consequences of what he is doing. Only later will it sink in what he’s done, and then he’ll regret it, but then it will be too late – like when Achashveirosh’s anger subsided the day after he had Vashti executed, and then he realized what he had done and he regretted it, but it was too late.

A Problem That Is Not Found In Many

There aren’t many people who have this nature, to act so fast upon their anger. Even if someone does have this nature, if he has spent some years learning Torah in the *Beis Midrash*, along with purity and holiness, this anger will eventually be calmed somewhat and it won’t become out of control.

¹¹⁵ see above footnote

Helping Children Control Their Rage

We can see often that there are children and young teenagers who might have this kind of impulsive anger, and the reason for this is because they are not yet balanced in their souls then. We might see a particular kind anger in them that looks like **earth-of-fire-fire**: when they have quick angry outbursts, and they act upon it impulsively, harming others and breaking things as soon as they get angry.

We can see it for example when a child gets angry at another child and he quickly beats up the other child, violently and with no mercy. If it was just a slap, that doesn't yet show that he has this problem with anger which we are describing here. But there are some children who can act much more violent in their anger, and we pity anyone who is around such a child when he's angry. He will quickly lash out in anger and take it all out on the victim, or he will want to damage everything that is near him.

These angry tirades take place every day in the lives of many children. It is the particular kind of anger which stems from **earth-of-fire-of-fire**, which is a quick and impulsive kind of anger that results in destruction. In children, this nature can be in its full force. How can we help such children deal with this kind of anger? Understandably, when dealing with children, who are not yet capable of mature and inner *avodah*, we need to train them with the following external techniques, if we recognize that the child has this nature to have dangerous angry outbursts.

One way to deal with such a child is to apply opposite measures of authority and love at the same time. He needs to get the message that his behavior is unacceptable, but at the same time, we need to apply love to him. We must make him aware that there are certain lines which he is never allowed to cross, so that he gets the idea that there must be boundaries to his anger. And we may have to apply some extreme measures in order for him to get the point. This doesn't have to be accomplished through giving him a slap. It can be done in other ways.

But when you punish him, you have to show him at the very same time that you love him. He needs to receive the message from you that no matter what he does, he is always your son whom you love. As the *Gemara* says regarding the relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem, "Whether they are like this or like that (righteous or sinful), they are called "children to Hashem."¹¹⁶ While the child is raging and you are stopping him from unleashing his anger, at that very moment, you should express your love to your child, and let him know clearly that you absolutely love him no matter how he acts. But at the very same time, you must also apply force on him so that he will not unleash his anger any further, and you must be very firm about this.

There are no clear rules about how much strict measure should be applied and where to draw the line, and it is impossible to give exact guidelines for this. The point is that you should be both very firm yet loving to him as he's raging, without compromising on any of these two aspects. And it is especially important to do so when he's in the midst of the rage and he wants to let out all his anger. You will need to keep doing this several times whenever the child is raging and losing control of his

¹¹⁶ *Kiddushin 36a*

anger: Apply firmness with him, let him get the message that he is not allowed at all to act like this, and make sure to keep expressing love to him, so that he gets the point that he is loved unconditionally by you.

This will help a child develop boundaries to his anger, a rectified form of the element of earth in the soul, which helps him counter his nature of impulsive actualization of anger. And at the same time, he will also feel loved by his parents, even though he knows that they are applying authority to him.

If we don't express love to him as we are stopping him from unleashing his anger, a great distance is created between the parents and the child, which does almost irreparable damage.

How A Mature Adult Can Deal With His Rage: Developing Boundaries

So far we have explained about how to help children deal with their anger when they are raging. Now let us see how one can help a mature adult deal with his anger, when he feels like he is about to explode in a rage and do drastic things.

As mentioned earlier, most adults do not get to this point of anger where they lose control so much. A few people, however, do have this kind of anger. The Sages refer to this as “One who is easily angered, and difficult to appease.”¹¹⁷ How he is appeased after his anger is a separate matter, but here we are addressing the first aspect, which is that he is easily angered. When one is “easily angered”, his anger bursts out of him like a lightning bolt, and soon afterwards the anger is gone, as in the case of the anger of Achashveirosh, who had Vashti quickly executed in his anger, and later his anger calmed down.

Only a few people do drastic things as soon as they are angered, but this problem does exist, so let's see how to deal with it. The solution to this kind of anger is two-fold.

The first part of the solution for this kind of person is that he will need to go to an extreme in order to acquire the idea of having **boundaries** to his anger (which builds a holy kind of element of earth in the soul). We already mentioned this earlier with regards to dealing with children, where it is the parents who show the child how to develop **boundaries**. But here we are dealing with an adult who has never yet learned how to acquire **boundaries** to his anger.

This is not only with regards to restraining his angry outbursts. He will need to learn how to develop **boundaries** in all areas of his life. One needs to have **boundaries**, like a wall of solid earth that he builds for himself, which restrains him from unleashing any imbalances in his nature. This is the holy use of the element of “earth” in the soul. When one has placed strong **boundaries** on himself in some areas of his life, this will also help him deal with his anger and stop it from being unleashed.

¹¹⁷ Avos 5:11

However, one cannot start placing **boundaries** on his anger while he’s actually raging. This is because there is a rule, “At the time when the *yetzer hora* is present, there is no mention of the *yetzer tov*.”¹¹⁸ There is nothing that can help a person start overcoming his *yetzer hora* when it is dominating. Even more so, it will be not enough for a person to place **boundaries** only on his anger; he will need to develop the very idea of **boundaries** on all areas of his life. Of course, this needs to be done sensibly, in proper balance with the other elements in the soul, and this depends on each person’s particular soul makeup.

The more a person develops **boundaries** upon all of the aspects of the soul, he will have the firmness to stop himself from exploding in anger and from actualizing it when he feels it brimming. This is not to say that he will uproot his anger totally, but it will be greatly lessened. The **boundaries** which he will have developed for himself in other areas will have its effect on his anger as well, and it will stop him from releasing the anger.

During A Rage: Extreme Measures Required

During the time when a person is actually raging, however, none of the above will work. Even the advice we mentioned in the earlier chapters¹¹⁹, such as pushing off the anger for later, and the other techniques mentioned, are only of use to a person whose anger is not that intense, who is capable of more self-control. But while a person is in a rage, the advice mentioned in the earlier chapters will not be of that much use, because he will need something that quickly removes the anger as fast as it came, which can send him back to the point of before the anger.

The following advice which we will suggest for this is of a more extreme kind of nature, but we have no choice but to apply it, for one who experiences extreme kinds of anger that causes him to fly into a dangerous rage. When a person is often experiencing an extreme kind of problem, he will have no choice but to use extreme techniques which can prevent him from the problems. Let us emphasize that the following technique is extreme and it should not be used under normal circumstances, and it should only be used by those few people who have problems with rage.

Once again, I must repeat that it should only be used by those who have extreme anger, and it should be not be used by most people, who have “normal” anger. If a person with normal problems of anger makes use of these extreme techniques, he is endangering himself, because it is not recommended for a person to live extreme. As the Gemara says, “Many did like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, but they were not successful.”¹²⁰

Only those who are easily enraged when they are angry, whose anger quickly becomes dangerous, should make use of the following technique. They won’t be able to deal with their anger by using the normal methods, which are all a slow inner process to conquer anger. They have a more extreme

¹¹⁸ *Nedarim 32a*

¹¹⁹ See *Fixing Your Anger #002 – Advice On Reducing Anger*

¹²⁰ *Berachos 35b*

kind of anger, so they will have no choice but to take extreme measures in order to quickly get rid of their extreme anger when it overtakes them.

So let us be clear that the following advice we will mention is extreme, it is only for people who have extreme anger by their very nature, who are found in very extreme situations, who have to deal with an almost uncontrollable kind of anger, which appears to them to be impossible to control.

The “Cold Water” Technique

The first thing that this kind of person can do, upon feeling a loss of self-control as his rage is about to explode, or if he has already started to let out his rage and he feels like he does not have any control over himself anymore (it is impossible to judge each person on how much self-control he really has, because there is always some level of control that a person has over himself, for every person has *bechirah* (free will), and the only issue is how much – which only Hashem knows) – is to do the following.

One technique he can try is to **quickly take a cold shower**. The water should be very cold, and this should be done even if it's in middle of the winter.

How does this work? It is because when a person is angered, his body heats up, due to the fire in his soul that is burning. The body and the soul are interconnected, and one of the ways how we can clearly see the connection is through anger, where the heat of the soul is extending into the body and heating up its temperature. The body temperature becomes hotter as a person is very angry, and this in turn fuels the anger. Therefore, by cooling the body temperature, we cool the heat of the body, which in turn influences the soul, calming it down from the anger that the person is feeling.

If we could calm the body through calming the soul, we would be calming ourselves from within, and that is one way of how we can calm the body. However, practically speaking, when a person is raging, it is very hard to start calming the soul and to thereby calm the body, because our soul is not calm right now, and therefore it is hard to use it now. The good news is that there is an alternative approach that can work: we can calm the body, using external means, which can influence the state of our soul.

Practically speaking, one can do this by entering into cold water. It can be done either through a cold shower, or through entering into a cold *mikveh* and immersing there several times, **until one feels that the freezing cold has become absorbed in his body**. At that point, he will discover that the anger has been calmed. This doesn't mean he will totally calm down, but he will succeed to a large extent in restraining himself from raging.

A person can either enter into a cold bath for this, or he can keep immersing in a cold *mikveh* if he has access to one. This isn't always possible for most people, so one can accomplish the same effect by pouring cold water on himself. If this isn't either possible, he should stick his head under a sink and turn on the cold water. This is an extreme course of action to take, but as we explained before, there are some people who need to use this solution.

He should let the cold water run on his head until he feels that his anger is calmed, or he should enter into a cold bath or a cold *mikveh* so that the cold is absorbed into his entire body, and if he doesn't feel ready to do this, he should at least pour cold water on some of his body, such as by sticking his head into a sink running with cold water. It must be cold water specifically.

Repeating Verses or Statements of Chazal About The Detriment of Anger

The second part of the solution, for one who wants to calm down from extreme rage, is to **repeat verses or statements of Chazal about anger**. Examples include the verse, *הסר כעס מליבך* (“Remove anger from your heart”), or the statement in Chazal, *כל הכועס, כאילו עובד עבודה זרה* (“Whoever gets angry, it is as if he committed idol worship”), and other verses/statements of Chazal about the detriment of anger.

That is what a person should do when he feels like he's about to explode in a rage, but what should a person do after he has started to rage? He should start **yelling out these verses or statements of Chazal, in a loud voice**. One of the Amoraim in the *Gemara*, Rav Amram, began to yell when he felt tempted to sin.¹²¹ There is a power that a person has to scream from the depths of his soul. Using this technique, a person can steer the very outburst of his rage into screaming at himself in order stop his anger.

When a person is screaming like this, he has almost no *daas*, and although he cannot be considered totally insane, he still does not have that much *daas* at this moment, because he has very little self-control. Yet, even at that point where he has lost self-control, he can steer the rage away towards a healthier direction, by yelling out verses and statements of Chazal about how bad anger is, with all of his energy.

Understandably, one cannot always employ this solution. When one is around other people as he is about to express his rage, he will probably find it uncomfortable to start screaming out verses in order to calm down his anger, because he doesn't want other people to think he's insane. Some people wouldn't mind what others will think, but most people are not able to handle shaming themselves in public and to act upon the statement of Chazal, “Better to be deemed as insane for all of my life, rather than anger my Creator for even one moment.” But as long as one finds it possible, one should try steering the rage into a different and healthier direction.

Alternative Technique: Running Fast

Another method to try, in order to calm down rage, is to **start running as fast as you can**. The running can have a calming effect on the anger. Any sensible person knows that any of the above methods are extreme, and it is not a way for most people to live their life with. But for those who are

¹²¹ See *Kiddushin* 81a

prone to dangerous rages, these extreme methods need to be their first course of action to take, in order to improve. These methods should never become a way of life; rather they should be viewed as a beginning remedy, to be practiced on a trial basis.

Weakening The Anger Vs. Releasing It

We can give more examples of extreme techniques to use in order to stop rage, but these are the three basic options: either through cooling off the body [via freezing water], or, by releasing the rage through yelling out verses of the detriment of anger, or by releasing the rage through running. There are more techniques as well similar to the above three, which anyone can come up with on his own. The goal is either to weaken the intensity of the anger, or to try to release it in healthier ways.

Obviously, it is better to weaken the anger rather than release it. But if a person finds it more helpful to release the anger in healthy ways, as opposed to merely trying to weaken it, then he may do so.

In Conclusion

Earth-of-earth-of-fire, as we mentioned earlier, is not a nature that is dominant in most people. Those who do have a dominant amount of **earth-of-earth-of-fire** in themselves, and who have not yet worked on their *middos*, are people who are very hard to be around and live with. Their marital peace is usually very shaky, and they are not that successful with raising their children well, because they are prone to angry explosions, where they lose control of themselves in extreme ways, and their family members lose respect for them.

But if someone has this nature and he wants to fix it, he can be helped to an extent, using the instructions given in this chapter which we have explained briefly.

דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית אש כעס 014 מים דאש דאש הגרות והמשכות של כעס

14 | *Seething In Anger & How To Calm Down*

Water-of-Fire-of-Fire: 'Dragged' After The Anger

With *siyata d'shmaya* we continue here to discuss the element of fire and its resulting trait, anger. Currently we are up to discussing anger which stems from **“water”-of-fire-of-fire**. As mentioned earlier, this is when a person has a hard time letting go of the anger [because he has become too ‘dragged’ into it].

In the previous chapter, we discussed various kinds of anger in which a person had a specific reason which was bothering him and thus angering him; this would also cause a person to get ‘dragged’ into doing and saying hurtful things which are unrelated to the actual reason that had awakened the anger. Now we are talking about a different kind of anger, which we can recognize well: When a person becomes so angry that he has a hard time letting go of the situation. It is usually more common in older children, and, understandably, it also found in mature adults.

Some children can become so angry that they scream until they have no energy left. When a person cannot let go of what’s angering him, he might lock himself in a room and stay there for a long time. Eventually the person will calm down and return to normal (like when Achashveirosh’s anger subsided after some time). But there are some who deal with their intense anger by “sleeping” on the anger. By going to sleep, they feel somewhat calmed.

These are just examples of how a person may deal with intense anger; there are other possible reactions as well. The common denominator between all of these scenarios is that the anger gets so intense that the person feels dragged into it, more and more. It’s not that he’s finding more reason to get angry – it is rather that he keeps getting pulled further and further into the anger itself. He becomes ‘dragged’ into it, and it feels very hard for him to pull himself out of it.

Gaining Some Self-Control: Introduction

In general, when we want to solve problems of intense anger (fire-of-fire), the best element to apply for this is the element of water, which douses out fire. That is true in the general sense, but since we are explaining here in this chapter of how to deal with anger that stems particularly from **water-of-fire-of-fire**, we will focus here on the solutions that solve this kind of anger specifically. Therefore, with the help of Hashem, we will present several methods here of how a person can calm himself down when he’s angry.

Some of these solutions are mainly effective when it comes to dealing with anger that stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire** (when a person can’t let go of his intense anger that he’s feeling), and some of

these solutions are general advice in conquering anger, which are also helpful in gaining self-control and inner calm. These techniques are essentially of how a person can become a better “*baal nefesh*” over himself - someone who can “own” his soul, by being able to gain some level of control even as he’s flying out of control.

Of course, while a person is raging, it is not possible to have perfect self-control. But one can still attain a certain amount of self-control and be able to maintain his *daas* (logical mind) even as he’s very angry, and to calm down somewhat, lessening the intensity of his anger and controlling himself as much as he can – even though he will still feel angry, of course.

Gaining self-control contains two parts. One part of it is to be able to direct the various natures in himself toward their proper uses, and a second part of it is to be able to stay calm (*sheket*). Just like we observe Shabbos in the time that is Shabbos, so is there a place of “Shabbos” in the soul – a place of *menuchah* (serenity), *sheket* (calmness), *roga* (tranquility) and *shalvah* (peace) where one can go to at times.

There are some people who were born with a natural balance in their souls. It comes natural to them to always stay centered within themselves, so they have an easier time remaining calm, relatively speaking. Others have a calmer nature because they have a strong amount of the element of “earth” in their souls. Others worked on themselves to attain this calmness and control over themselves from within.

Anger that stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**, as we explained, is an intense burst of anger, where a person loses control. The person is ‘dragged’ far into the anger, which is the ‘water’ within the fire-of-fire\intense anger, for just as water drags things with it, so is this person ‘dragged’ far into the anger to the point that he loses self-control.

How can a person gain some self-control as he’s in the midst of this intense anger? Let’s begin with the more basic methods of self-control, and as we progress, we will explain the deeper and higher methods.

Step One: Awareness, Pain, and Decision To Leave The Anger

1) The very first thing one needs to do, when he is enraged, is to **become aware of the anger**.

If a person just thinks “I’m very angry” due to a certain reason that is bothering him, then it will be very hard for him to calm down, because the reason that angered him is still in front of him. But when one becomes aware that his anger is stemming specifically from **water-of-fire-of-fire** – which we have explained as an anger that ‘drags’ a person far into the anger, to the point that his anger has now become irrational and unrelated to the original factor that he was angry about - he can be aware that he is not angry due to any particular reason right now, and he has simply become dragged too far into the anger.

The point is for him to become aware that there is nothing in particular which is causing the anger, and this awareness will aid him in wishing to come out of the anger, when he realizes that the anger is not justified.

Of course, all anger is somewhat irrational and unjustified, because all situations of anger cause a person to go too far. But in most other cases of anger, there is some kind of understandable reason that angered him in the first place, and it is therefore much harder to calm down from those kinds of anger, because the factor that angered him still exists in front of him. But when one becomes aware that his anger stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**, which is a reaction of anger that takes place after a person has gone too far into the anger, this very awareness is the first step that can help a person wish to come out of the anger, because he knows that he's acting unreasonable right now.

2) The next step after this is to feel somewhat **pained** at this (and on a deeper note, this applies to all situations of anger as well, because a person can always feel pained at mere fact that he is angry), when he realizes that he's acting unreasonable. It has to bother him when he realizes that his anger is currently unjustified, and upon feeling that pain, he will wish to come out of it.

3) Then, he should realize that he has the free will to **choose to take his mind off it** – by being willing to take certain actions that will take him out of the anger.

Technique #1 – Using The Power of Activity

Upon choosing to leave the anger, the next step is to take action. After one has chosen to come out of his anger, how indeed can he come out of it? He can choose to do certain **activities** which will cause him to take his mind off the situation; he should start doing lots of various activities which are unrelated to his anger. He should do anything that will take his mind off the situation, which will force him out of the anger. He should get busy with several activities or with some kind of activity that is very consuming.

In order for this to work, he has to have **decided** beforehand that he wants to leave the anger. If he doesn't decide to leave the anger, he won't do anything about it. After he has decided that he wants to leave the anger, and he knows that he is still burning with the anger, he can now get busy doing certain activities in order to take his mind off the anger. As he gets busy with something else, he will eventually succeed in attaining a *hesech hadaas* from the anger.

However, it can only work if a person chooses to do many activities, one after the other, which are all time-consuming, interesting, and engaging – the kinds of activities which can calm him and steer him away from the anger.

How does this work? It is because the nature of action (*maaseh*) is that it causes one to forget about what he was involved with before. To illustrate, Pharaoh forced the Jewish people into difficult labor so that they would forget about their spiritual pursuits. He knew that their heavy involvement in action wouldn't give them any frame of mind to think about anything important. From here we see that being involved in action causes a person to take his mind off things.

Technique #2 - Using The Power of Speech

A second method that help a person take his mind off anger is through making use of the power of **speech**. When one speaks with others, he is able to have a *hesech badaas* (taking his mind off) from what he was involved with until now, by steering his mind to different topics, as he talks about various things that interest him.

Chazal say that “if one has a worry in his heart, he should speak of it to others” – but this is only if a person knows speaking about it to others will relieve him. Usually when people talk with others of something that they’re angry about, their anger only becomes fueled even more. Sometimes, however, venting anger to a friend can be helpful in calming the anger, because it releases the negativity that he’s feeling and it feels to him like freedom.

However, one needs to discern his situation very well in order to know which course of action to take. Will venting his anger to another person fuel his anger even more, or will he feel calmed from it?

Usually it is detrimental to speak to another about the anger. If a person feels like he has calmed down somewhat from the anger and he just wants to unburden himself to another of any remaining anger he still feels, then he may do so. But if he is feeling intense anger and he hasn’t yet calmed down and he’s still feeling the anger in its full force, and he hasn’t yet decided that he wants to come out of the anger - then usually, talking about it to another will only make him feel angrier.

If he wants to come out of the anger and he thinks that speaking to another person about his anger will calm him down, then it can be helpful to release the anger (that is, on condition that he is observing the laws of proper speech). But if he hasn’t yet made the decision to come out of the anger (because the anger is intense and he still feels it in its full force), venting his feelings to another will only worsen the anger.

What, then, should he do? He should find someone to chat with about various interesting topics, which will take his mind off the anger; and he should engage in an interesting conversation with the person, doing so for 30 minutes or an hour (each person is different when it comes to how much he needs to talk in order to be calmed), until the anger eventually subsides. He should make sure, of course, that he doesn’t talk *lashon hora* or other kinds of forbidden speech with the person. The point is to talk about all kinds of different things that will take his mind off what he’s angry about.

In most situations, we recommend that a person not talk about the anger with another person. It usually doesn’t calm a person down and it just serves to fuel the anger even more. When most people talk about their anger with another, they have a hard time controlling themselves and they become even angrier as they’re venting. Therefore, the suggested method that can help is to try to talk about various interesting topics with another, and to keep talking to the person, until a person calms down.

Of course, if someone is on a higher level, he can get involved with the “speech” of learning Torah, if he thinks that will calm him. But this will only work for men, and not for women, who do not learn Torah in-depth. It also won’t help a person that much if he busies himself with saying

Tehillim. This is because when a person is angry, his soul is in turmoil, and the soul will not feel calmed unless he talks to another person.

Therefore, when one is very angry, he should take his mind off it by calling someone to chat with about all kinds of different things, until he eventually calms down.

Technique #3: Get Involved With A Strong Emotion

There is also an additional method one can use to take his mind off the anger, as follows.

A) Awaken Your Strongest Emotion. If you have a strong, positive *middah* (character trait or emotion) in yourself that you recognize - whether it is love or some other another strong, positive emotion you recognize in yourself. By getting involved with another strong emotion, you are able to steer your emotions away from the anger. If you can awaken a love for something holy, that is even better, but even if it's just a love for something mundane, it can also be helpful.

Normally we do not encourage awakening a love that isn't about something holy, but if it will help calm down anger, it is constructive, in this particular case. Sometimes we have to use a 'bitter' solution in order to get rid of a 'bitterness' that's worse). It doesn't have to be love. If one has a strong hatred for something (we are talking about something that is permitted to hate, and not something that it is forbidden to hate), one can also try awakening that strong emotion of hatred, if it will steer his emotions away from what's he angry about right now. Whatever emotion a person decides to awaken, the point is to get involved with a different strong emotion that can steer his intense emotions away from the anger.

However, when most people are experiencing the intense of anger of **water-of-fire-fire**, this method is usually not feasible. If he is a child, he is not in touch with his soul yet, and if he is an adult who has this kind of anger, his anger is probably so strong that he doesn't have any other emotion in himself that can compete with the intensity of his anger. But if someone does recognize in himself a strong emotion that he thinks can steer him away from intense anger, he should certainly try awakening that emotion, if he thinks it will help him calm down.

B) Remembering An Emotional Event. Even if someone doesn't possess another emotion that is as strong as his anger, he can still try remembering a very emotional event in his life that stands out in his memory.

In either of the above two scenarios, the point is to create a different "storm" in oneself to counter the "storm" of anger that he's feeling. When a person is feeling intense anger, it usually doesn't help to try doing something quiet and calm, because when he feels stormy inside, he will not feel like making the transition from storminess to quietness. Instead, he should get involved with something 'stormy' – an intense emotion or memory which will help him take his mind off the anger.

C) Viewing Pictures or Hearing Something That Evokes Emotion. Alternatively, one can try looking at pictures which awaken powerful emotional experiences, or he can listen to something [i.e. music, a song, or a *shiur*] which reminds him of something very emotional.

The point of any of the above methods is so that a person can create a different emotional ‘storm’ inside himself that can counter the ‘storm’ of anger he is in, which can aid a person in taking his mind off the anger. Understandably, this method is not the holiest solution out there, because we usually do not encourage awakening ‘stormy’ feelings and experiences, which may open the door to other problems. Normally, one should not deliberately engage in such activities. But when feeling intense anger that stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**, this method may be used - to a certain extent.

Technique #4 - Using The Physical Senses: Taste

Another method that one can use, in order to steer the mind and emotions away from anger, is to get involved with one of the physical senses (taste, smell, hearing, and sight). First, we will explain how a person can make use of the sense of **taste**, in order to calm down from anger.

A) Eating. One can try tasting certain foods, in order to take his mind off the anger. At times, when one is feeling and intense, stormy kind anger, he should keep eating a lot of food. This is a method which should be used sensibly, or else it becomes dangerous.

This is an extreme method to use, and it is normally not the kind of behavior we encourage. In general, whenever we deal with anger that stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**, we need to use more extreme methods, because we are dealing with a more extreme kind of anger. Many of the methods contained in this chapter, as well as in the previous chapter and the next two chapters, are not for all people to use, and they should only be used in situations where one is feeling intense, stormy anger.

So when one is trying to calm down a stormy kind of anger, he can try eating and eating, until his anger calms down. Again, this method contains a danger, and it needs to be used sensibly.

B) Tasting. There is also an alternative method in how to use the sense of taste, which is not as extreme as the above one: a person can keep tasting different things, until he calms down. One should pick certain foods and nosh that he enjoys tasting, so that he can have a wide array of things to taste in order to calm himself down when he’s angry. When using this method (eating or tasting), one should be sensible about it, and he should also *daven* to Hashem for help that he shouldn’t fall into the evil trait of gluttony.

How does taste calm down anger? There are two parts here, which we mentioned earlier [in the first chapter]. Sometimes, a person’s anger is being fueled by two factors. Part of the anger may be stemming from the heart, and part of the anger may be stemming from the nerves. Sometimes the anger begins in the heart and it spreads to the nerves, and sometimes it begins in the nerves and spreads into the heart. The sense of taste, to a certain extent, can calm each of these factors. Taste can calm the nerves, and it can also calm the heart somewhat. But it can only work if a person tastes something that is particularly fond to him and which calms him.

This helps a person ‘drag’ himself away from the intense, ongoing anger of **water-of-fire-of-fire** that he had become ‘dragged’ into.

Technique #5: Using The Physical Senses: Smell

Now we will explain how one can use the sense of **smell** to calm down anger.

A) Scent. One can try smelling *besamim*, inhaling the scent deeply. The sense of smell can be greatly calming to the soul.

Once again, a person has to make sure not to get too carried away with smelling things too much. But to a certain extent, one can try getting used to smelling things that are pleasant to smell, in order to gain a degree of calmness. One should try to get used to smelling pleasant things on a regular basis, allowing himself inhale the scent, slowly, deeply, and calmly. He should allow the scent to enter him deeply as he inhales and breathes it in, and this creates a certain calming effect. It is hard to describe this in words, but a person can keep deepening the inhale, smelling it more deeply each time, until he feels a certain feeling of calmness.

B) Breathing. Alternatively, even if a person doesn’t have something pleasant in front of him to smell, one can deepen his breathing, by focusing on his inhale and exhale. If one gets used to practicing this on a regular basis, he will become a calmer person in general, and he will have an easier time with anger when it sets in.

We know that when a person is angry, his breathing rate changes dramatically, and it can get thrown out of balance to the point that a person may even have a heart attack. By working with our breath on a regular basis, through getting used to deeply inhaling and exhaling the air, a certain calmness results, and then we are better equipped to deal with anger. We will automatically feel how the anger is throwing our breathing rate out of balance, and we will quickly want to get our breathing back to normal, when we are angered. So improving our breathing will motivate us greatly to leave the anger.

It would seem that improving our breathing has nothing to do with conquering anger. But when we reflect into this, we can see that there’s a strong relationship between breathing and anger.

Technique #6: Using The Physical Senses: Hearing

Another sense that one can use in order to take his mind off anger is the sense of **hearing**.

When a person is very angry, it won’t be that helpful to immediately go to a quiet place and try to calm down. It’s very hard to make the transition from noise to quietness. Usually when there is noise, we need to counter it with some other kind of noise. That is why it is usually hard for a person to suddenly leave his anger by trying to quiet down the outside stimuli.

If the anger isn't so intense, or if he has an affinity for certain quiet, deep *niggunim* (Jewish songs) that he likes to listen to, then he should try listening to those songs, and he'll be able to calm down. However, this is usually not that effective when trying to calm down from anger. As we said, it depends on two factors together – it can only work if the anger isn't that intense, and if he has an affinity for *niggunim* that are quiet and calming. But if a person is going through intense anger, or if he doesn't like quiet and calm *niggunim* that much, then the advice for him is to try listening to louder kinds of music - which can jolt him out of his anger.

Understandably, this does not include listening to non-Jewish songs. Anyone who cares for his soul should run away 500 *amos* from it. We only mean certain “loud” and lively Jewish songs which are closer to *kedushah* (holiness). Of course, nothing [today] is totally found in *kedushah*. But there are certain loud, lively *niggunim* which can awaken the *kedushah* in a Jew's soul. In this way, we exchange the ‘noise’ of anger for the ‘noise’ of song, enabling us to calm down from anger. (This only calms down anger specifically – it does not bring total calmness (*sheket*) to the soul).

As with the other methods, one also needs to go about this sensibly, and he should not go overboard with it. Sometimes a person doesn't really have much of a choice, though, if this will be the only thing that calms him down from his intense anger, because extreme anger needs to be countered with some kind of extreme noise. At first a person may find that only very lively and loud songs can counter his intense anger, and eventually, he should try to lessen the tone a bit, so that he can come out of that extreme and come to a more balanced approach, where he won't have to turn out such lively music in order to calm down.

Technique #7: Using The Physical Senses: Sight

A) Physical Sight. One can also use the sense of sight in order to calm down from anger. One can look at something calming, such as a picture that he likes to look at. Or, he can try looking at the waves of the ocean, or at the sky. (Looking at the ocean waves and the sky are both methods that are brought in the *Gemara*).

However, one must make that concentrating on these sights isn't causing him to have more of a desire for This World. If looking at certain things will awaken certain memories that are detrimental to think about, he should avoid looking at those things. If that condition is met, one can try concentrating and focusing on calming sights to look at.

The better a person can concentrate and reflect deeply on something he looks at (it is better to try this with something holy, such as looking at one's *tzitzis*), the better he can make use of this method. We are not talking about a mere superficial glance at something, but a kind of sight where a person deeply concentrates and connects himself to what he is seeing.

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of sights. There are physical sights which are simply calming to look at, and there is a kind of sight where one can deeply connect to something, through

his *daas* (mind), by way of the physical eyes. The eyes can connect us to something, as it is written, “For with an eye and an eye they will see, the return to Zion.”¹²²

If a person is experiencing anger that isn’t that intense, he can try looking at calming sights, similar to the method of listening to calm and quiet songs mentioned above. But when a person is feeling intense anger and he wants to use the sense of sight to counter it, he should use the second method mentioned here, which is to concentrate deeply on something that he is seeing. In this way, the ‘intensity’ of the anger can be replaced by the ‘intensity’ of deep concentration on something.

B) Thought. So far we have addressed the physical use of our sense of sight, but there is also an inner use of our sense of sight: the powers of thought and imagination.

When it comes to using our power of **thought** itself, there are two different ways of how our thoughts can “see” something and then we are calmed.

1) Thinking About A Pleasant Thought. One way is to think about certain pleasant and calming thoughts. This will only be effective, however, if a person’s anger is not that intense, because it is a quieter kind of solution, which can only counter a quieter kind of anger. If that is the case, a person should think about certain thoughts that he finds pleasant to think about. Each person is different when it comes to this. For some people, it is calming to remember an event in their life that was pleasant.

2) In-Depth Torah Learning. Another way of how our thoughts can “see” something calming – and this is the main solution one should try to use, for someone who can do this – is, that when one is experiencing the intense kind of anger that stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**, he can immerse himself in in-depth Torah study. This is the depth behind what is written, “If not for the Torah my delight, I would go insane in my suffering.”¹²³ The enjoyment that a person can find in Torah study can be so calming that it can totally make a person take his mind off any anger.

The more a person can deeply connect, on a regular basis, to a certain Torah thought, immersing his mind in it in-depth - he will be able to totally forget about anything bothering him, whether it is something that is agonizing him, or something that is frivolous, or something that is forbidden to think about; there are an endless amount of things that may bother us.

Sometimes a person can do this when he just learns with a cursory reading of the *Gemara* (*bekiyus*), but it is mainly accomplished through learning with *iyun* (in-depth analysis), which enables one’s soul to deeply connect to his Torah learning.

This enables one to attain a total *hesech hadaas* (to take the mind off bothersome thoughts) and to disconnect from any outside stimuli. This is especially the case when dealing with the intense anger that stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**, where a person has become so pulled into the anger that he finds it difficult to leave it. If one has strong mental abilities and he is on the level of throwing himself into in-depth learning of a *sugya* of *Gemara*, doing so will make him leave behind his intense

¹²² *Yeshayahu* 52:8

¹²³ *Tehillim* 119:92

anger. Many times when people do this, they don't even remember afterwards that they were ever angry in the first place.

If one can decide to do this - and if he is on the level of doing so – then he is using the deepest and the most complete method in conquering intense anger. It totally removes a person from any outside stimuli, removing him from intense anger that he had been feeling beforehand, which stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**.

3) Remembering An Interesting Dvar Torah. If one feels that learning Torah in-depth is not practical for him to do when he's very angry, he can try remembering all of the many different interesting Torah thoughts he may have heard from others.

4) Putting The Mind To Work. If that won't work for him, he can try getting involved with various calculations in his thoughts that can take his mind off things. It can even be about worldly and mundane calculations to think about, which are permissible to think about even as one is in the restroom. It's better if these calculations are about communal matters, which are a *mitzvah* to be involved in. Thinking into these details can help a person calm down somewhat, from whatever he's angry about.

There is more to say about how to use the power of thought, but as a general point, one can enter into a thought that is deeply consuming or interesting to him, which will help take his mind off anything that's bothering him right now.

C) Imagination. The above all concerns the power of **thought**; now we will explain how we use our other mental power which can “see” things, in a way that can calm us down: the power of **imagination**.

The power of imagination is a more expansive topic, which needs much guidance in how to use correctly.¹²⁴ Before we learn about how to use it, we must be aware of the following prerequisite. If a person knows that he has a tendency to fantasize about things that are forbidden to imagine about (or anything which borderlines on 'forbidden'), then he should not get involved with his imagination at all. But if a person does not have a detrimental imagination like this, he may imagine something that is pleasant and calming, in order to calm down from anger.

Understandably, if one uses the imagination too much, he will become a more delusional person. But if he makes sure to keep himself balanced with the other areas in his soul, he will be able to gain from the calmness that can be attained from imagining things that are pleasant. One can imagine the waves of the ocean or anything that he finds calming to think about.

¹²⁴ Refer to the Rav's series on imagination, *Getting To Your Imagination* (דע אהרן דמיון)

A Note Regarding All of the Above Methods

Some of the methods mentioned here can be used in all situations of anger, not just the intense kind of anger that stems from **water-of-fire-of-fire**. The common denominator between all of these methods is that they should be used sensibly, minimally, and on a temporary basis, and then they can be effective in calming down anger.

In Conclusion: The secret of success in life depends on having a calm soul.

It might appear to us that success in life depends mainly on how much exertion and effort you put into things. Exertion certainly plays an important part in our life. We know from many statements of Chazal about the importance of exertion [in Torah learning, and in life in general]. But life is not entirely based on exertion. We also need some *menuchah* (serenity), in order to be able to have exertion.

The Torah praises Yissocher for being like a donkey that bears the yoke of Torah upon him like a heavy load that he is willing to carry until he is exhausted, but the end of the verse regarding Yissocher says, “*And he saw that serenity was good.*”¹²⁵ Only when there is a regard for serenity can one properly have exertion. Exertion is detrimental when it causes a person to lose his serenity; the exertion must be preceded with a degree of serenity, and then the exertion will prove successful.

The more a person is a *baal nefesh* (one who “owns” his soul), as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, and he recognizes the abilities in his soul, he is able to better direct his soul abilities properly, even as he finds himself amidst intense anger. He is able to gain some self-control. Of course, there is no such thing as always being able to have perfect self-control and to be perfectly calm, as one is in the midst of intense anger. But a large part of our life requires some degree of calmness, where the soul can remain in its pure, calm state.

The more a person can maintain his calmness as he’s angry (understandably, this does not get rid of anger entirely) and he regularly makes use of the methods explained in this chapter (in addition to other methods which we will soon mention in the coming chapters), he will learn how to calm down his angry soul, and even more so, he will then find the root of the soul’s energy, which is *menuchah* (serenity). Sometimes a person is taken out of his serenity due to various events in his life that jolt him, and that is fine, but as a general way to live, one needs a basic level of serenity, which we refer to in the *Shabbos Minchah* prayer as “*menuchas hashket v’betach*” (a serenity that is calming and reassuring).¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Beraishis 49:15

¹²⁶ Editor’s Note: After delivering this class, the Rav was asked: “If a person has problems with rage and he wants to calm down, should he take pills?” The Rav first responded (humorously): “We don’t need to go to any shiurim then – we should just give out pills to everyone.” The Rav then continued: “Taking pills in order to calm down – it depends. Some pills are made from natural herbs which are meant to aid the body’s health, and that’s different [it’s okay]. But if they are pills that calm a person’s emotional state, one must carefully consider whether he should go down that road or not. Usually when people take pills in order

to ease their emotional issues, they have basically decided to work only with their body and not from within themselves. It is living like an animal; animals also get angry [and they can also be calmed with tranquilizing drugs...]. There are a considerable amount of people in our generation today who aren't interested in working on themselves through the path of avodah (inner work) and therefore they work on themselves entirely through the body; they attempt to change their inner character by working directly with the body. Can we say that this doesn't work? Of course it can work - it is possible to cause changes in the soul by working with the body, because the body and the soul are interconnected. There is a definitely a part of our avodah to work with our body, but we also have to work directly with our middos (internal character traits) themselves. Now, if a person has such bad middos that he can't function properly unless he takes pills, then he may do so on a temporary basis and take pills to calm his body."

At a later point the Rav added on (in response to a different question, soon after the above question was asked): "When a person wants to be an oived Hashem (one who serves the Creator), but he wants do so through working with the body alone, this is contradictory behavior. He is searching to build his spiritual state but he is trying to do so through his physical body alone. This is a way that comes from the gentiles and it is only meant to be used by gentiles, and for the most part, it can only work for gentiles. In certain extreme situations, it may be used by a Jew who has fallen very low that for the time being, his life right now resembles a level that is very close to a gentile's way of living."

15 | Irrational Anger

Wind-of-Fire-of-Fire: Enraged At Everything

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we continue to explain the element of fire and the trait of anger which stems from it. Now we will discuss the particular kind of anger that stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire**. As mentioned earlier, this is a kind of explosive anger, in which the anger is spreading to many different directions.

It is similar to the nature of wind, which can blow in any of the four directions of the earth; hence, this kind of anger stems from “wind” (the direction) of “fire-of-fire” (intense outbursts of anger).

Let's try to understand this better. Usually, when a person is angry, there is something that triggered the anger. He has some “reason” which provoked the anger, and sometimes, the anger spreads past that “reason” and it goes beyond the rational understanding of the anger. A person might become angry about something else as he's in the midst of what he's actually angry about. This is when anger “drags” him away from the original reason of his anger and pulls him further into the anger, where he finds more things to get angry about, as soon as his mind begins to think about those things [we discussed this in the previous chapter].

Sometimes, when a person is very angry about X, he will get angry as well over Y, just by merely thinking of Y, simply because his anger is already fueled. That is what anger may do – it becomes irrational, because it can ‘drag’ a person away from the logical reason that triggered his anger, and it ‘drags’ him into things which he really has no logical reason to be angry about.

Once he's already burning with anger, he might not need any particular reason to keep the anger going, because the anger will continue to burn even when there's no reason right now to fuel it; so he will get angry about other things that he really has no reason to be angry about. It is not because he's trying to find new reasons to be angry about; it is just that he is [subconsciously] trying to release the anger from its potential state into its active state.

In the particular kind of anger that stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, a person will get angry even about things that he has no reason to be angry about.

We can see this kind of anger commonly in children. When a child becomes angry, and we try to calm him down by giving him a candy, he might be angry about everything and anything, and he'll get even more upset when we try giving him the candy. This doesn't make any sense, because he really does want the candy. If we would offer it to him when he's calm, he would run to grab it. But when he's raging, he will be angry about everything, and it doesn't matter what. Even if we give him

the best thing in the world, he will get more upset. This is an example of total “*katrus mochin*” (small-mindedness) that can result from anger.

In children you can see it plainly, but it also exists on a subtle level in some adults. Adults are usually more mature than children, because by the time a person has reached adulthood, he has developed some kind of balance between their intellect (mind) and their heart (emotion) to a certain degree, which we will soon explain more about. There are some adults who have tempers like immature children, and they get angry about everything that they think about, as they are in the midst of an intense fit of anger.

However, even an adult with the worst temper can restrain himself if he knows that the anger will somehow prevent him from something he desires very badly. So even when a person is amidst intense anger where he’s feeling angry about everything, he is still able to maintain some level of self-control. But if there is nothing in particular that would motivate him to hold himself back from the anger, he will ‘fly off the handle’ in his anger and get angry about everything and anything that he encounters.

Sometimes this kind of anger is expressed in even mature adults. If a child has done something that angered one of his parents, the parent may get very upset with the child and then he will get angry at all of his/her other children as well, even though the other children didn’t do anything. He\she has no reason that is motivating the continued anger, yet he continues to express rage. Everyone that he encounters then will suffer: his/her spouse, the neighbors, anyone. It doesn’t matter if he encounters another in person, or if he just thinks about another person then – he will get angry at that person whom he meets or thinks about.

There is no true reason that is causing him to get angry at any of these people. Once he has become angered, his anger will burst out into all directions. Obviously, there was something that triggered the anger in the first place. It may even be a silly reason, but there has to be some reason that triggered the anger.

So far, we have mentioned the example of a person who unleashes his anger on everyone in his close surroundings, once he has become angered from one of the family members. In some of these homes, the children become so afraid from the temper of this parent that they will all flee into their rooms once they sense that the angry outburst is coming, because they are simply terrified of being in the direct surroundings of that parent.

A person with this kind of terrifying temper simply loses self-control at whatever is taking place inside of himself then. There are two factors here to consider. When a person loses control as he’s raging, it can either be because **his mind totally shuts down** then and he can’t think rationally, or, he might be experiencing **temporary loss of mind** – to a certain degree.

The Four Abilities That Can Balance Anger

Let's explain this more deeply. In the earlier chapters, we have essentially been explaining how to use the following four different abilities that can balance anger [and, in turn, these things go lost when a person is very angry]:

- (1) ***Ritzuy* (or *ratzon*) - Appeasement.** Chazal warn that “We do not attempt *ritzuy* (appeasement) on someone who is in the midst of anger”.¹²⁷ Hence, if the person would be able to gain the power of *ritzuy* (appeasement, or letting go), when he's angry, it would counter the anger.
- (2) ***Chochmah* – Wisdom.** Chazal say that “When one becomes angry, his *chochmah* (wisdom, or ability to think rationally and sensibly) leaves him.”¹²⁸ Conversely, when one's mind is controlling his emotions (when “The mind controls the heart”), he is maintaining his *chochmah* and that is how he can have self-control.
- (3) ***Rachamim* – Compassion.** Chazal say that Hashem allows His anger to be overcome when He utilizes the *middas harachamim* (the trait of compassion), where His *rachamim* overcomes His anger. [We learn from this that on our own level, arousing compassion on the other person can overcome any anger that one has towards him].
- (4) ***Gevurah* – Strength.** Elsewhere, Chazal state that Hashem overcomes His anger using the trait of *gevurah* (strength). [And so too, if a person can gain *gevurah* strength as he's angry, he can overcome the anger and restrain himself].

These four abilities (*ritzuy*/appeasement, *chochmah*/wisdom, *rachamim*/compassion, and *gevurah*/strength) are the four different ways to overcome anger. [This will be explained about later in this chapter].

Temporary Loss of Mind

In this chapter, we are explaining how we deal with anger that stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, where a person's anger is spreading into many different ‘directions’ and he is losing control over his temper. When this happens, a person's mind is not functioning. We brought the example of the child when he is raging, who is acting totally irrational. A child has no *daas* (rational, mature mind) at all. When one grows a little past childhood, he gains some level of *daas* and he is able to attain some kind of balance in himself where he can control himself somewhat even as he's very angry. But during the actual moment of the rage, the person has temporarily lost his mind.

¹²⁷ Berachos 7a

¹²⁸ Pesachim 66b

Now let us discuss how we deal with anger stemming from **wind-of-fire-of-fire** (irrational anger); much of this discussion can also be applied to dealing with all kinds of anger in general, but it is mainly applicable when dealing with irrational anger.

Three Kinds of Personalities: Mind, Heart, and Mind-Heart Integration

The general makeup of a person consists of the mind (intellect) and the heart (emotion). Generally speaking, we find two kinds of people in the world, with regards to the balance between mind\intellect and heart\emotion.

1) One kind of person is the rational type: It is his mind which is mainly dominant.

This kind of person might also get emotional sometimes, but only when there is a particular reason that turns on his emotions. Usually, the life of a rational kind of person is being run by his intellect, and not by his emotions. He is for the most part “asleep” when it comes to his emotions.

There is a verse, *“I am asleep, but my heart is awake.”*¹²⁹ Unless there is something extreme which awakens his emotions, he will be “asleep” when it comes to his emotions, and his emotions\heart will only become “awake” if he goes through something particularly inspiring, which may jolt him. But for the most part, he lives from his rational intellect, and he is usually not acting upon his emotions. This kind of person, and this way of living, is very common and dominant in many people.

2) A second kind of person functions mainly from his emotions. The heart plays a central role in his life and in how he acts.

Sometimes he may also get involved with his thinking intellect, when he needs to. It is possible that a person learns Torah but he is mainly a “heart” person and not that much of an “intellect” person. He might even learn Torah from day until night, but in the **inner makeup** of his soul, he is mainly experiencing his life through heart/emotion, and not on the mind/intellect.

His rational mind is accessed only on a minimal level. He might possess much Torah knowledge and he might be able to memorize much information of Torah, but he is usually not the kind of person who is capable of deep thinking abilities. This is because he is usually missing the ability of *daas* that is in the mind/intellect, which is the ability that balances out the mind with the heart. This kind of person acts mainly from his heart/emotion.

There are several types within this category of “heart” people. One kind of “heart” person is a very emotional person. He may be the type to cry often. Sometimes a person is a “warmer” kind of person, or his heart is very “open” – there are all kinds of terms that people may describe it as. If a person like this also has a strong and dominant element of fire in his soul, he will be an even more emotional kind of person. These are extremely emotional kinds of people, and often they experience a very intense kind of anger. They are very emotional to begin with, and they have a dominant

¹²⁹ Shir HaShirim 5:2

amount of fire in their souls, and these two factors combine to ignite a very fiery kind of anger, when they become angered. When they get angry, they have almost nothing to restrain themselves from overreacting.

The above two kinds of people (mainly rational, or mainly emotional) are very common in the world; understandably, each of these categories can subdivide into more and more subtleties in one's personality, but these are the two general types of personalities that are very commonly found in the world.

3) There is also a third group of people, who are not as common as the above two types: They have a natural integration between their mind and heart.

This doesn't mean of course that they automatically internalize everything in their hearts that they know of. But by the very **inner makeup** of their personalities, they have a natural integration between their mind and heart. These people usually experience all areas of their life with a more complex perspective.

Let's analyze this further. Some people are born with a more emotional nature, and they have worked on themselves so that their mind dominates their emotions. *“And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart”*¹³⁰ is the foundation of all *avodas Hashem*: One must achieve an integration between his mind and his heart, where the knowledge of the mind becomes internalized in the heart; this is indeed the truthful way of living. But there are some people who are already born with an integration between their mind and heart. In their very inner makeup that they are born with, which Hashem has designed them with, they have a natural integration between their mind\intellect and heart\emotion.

There are many varying kinds of people within this personality, but on a general note, their level of comprehension in their mind is usually restricted to the perception of their emotions. If they cannot relate to something on an emotional level, they have a hard time comprehending it even on an intellectual level. Sometimes this causes them to have much “scattering of the soul.”¹³¹ Sometimes it just simply causes their comprehension to be limited: If their heart cannot accept something, their intellect won't either be able to accept it.

At the opposite extreme are those whose hearts are closed off from emotion, and it is only their minds which are active. As an example, there are people who are total geniuses, but there is nothing in their heart; they are empty from emotion.

But if someone is born with a natural integration between his mind and heart, he will only be to understand something if his emotions can first relate to it. If he thinks about something but he's not getting a 'feel' for it, he will have difficulty thinking about it. If he thinks about it and he feels like he doesn't have some kind of “emotional clarity” towards it, he also will have a hard time thinking about it.

¹³⁰ Devarim 4:39

¹³¹ See Fixing Your Fire_Anger_011_Scattering of the Soul

These are just a few examples, and there are many more. It is a very complex kind of personality to understand, and there aren't many like this in the world.

How The Above Three People React To Their Anger

Now that we have explained the above introduction, let's return to discussing anger.

We have so far seen that the more that a person's mind dominates and the weaker his emotions, the less he will have outbursts of anger.

This is also influenced by other factors as well. If a person has a strong amount of "earth" in his soul, coupled with a dominant mind and weaker emotions, there is far less of a chance of him getting angry. But even if he has a strong amount of "fire" in his soul, as long as his mind dominates his emotions, there is far less of a chance of him getting angry. Even if he does get angry, it won't be that intense, because in the end of the day, this kind of person has a very rational approach towards things, so his emotions will not overtake him.

Of course, every person will sometimes experience intense anger sometimes, but these are extreme situations, and they don't happen that often. It only happens when a person feels like he has been pushed over his tolerance level; these situations cause all people to feel an intense anger. But generally speaking, a mainly rational person has a mind that dominates his emotions, and his emotions are quiet and calm, so it is very unlikely that he will come to experience intense anger (**wind-of-fire-of-fire**).

(However, this is only true with adults. A child is a whole different story. An adult is capable of *gadlus mochin* (a mature, developed mind), whereas a child is not.)

As for people that are mainly emotional, whose hearts dominate their minds - their minds do not play that much of a role in how they act, so when they experience anger (and especially if they have a lot of "fire" in their souls), they can express a very intense and extreme kind of anger. They are acting from their hearts, as opposed to their minds.

It is hard to calm down when he's angry, and it depends on how much "*ritzuy*" he is capable of, which would enable him to balance himself out. Likewise, it will depend on how much *gevurah* or *rachamim* he has access to in himself. The power of *chochmah*, though, will not be of any use at all for a very emotional person, because as soon as his emotions are activated, it is very hard for him to balance out his emotions. Therefore, the person's anger will be expressed in a very extreme way, because he doesn't have a way to balance out his emotions as he's experiencing them.

When a person is in the midst of an intense outburst of anger, he is often not even aware that he's angry. He loses awareness. His ability to rationalize has left him totally, his heart is completely dominating and his mind isn't working, so he doesn't even feel what is taking place. He is not aware of what he is or isn't angry about, and of what exactly is angering him right now.

Only later, when he calms down, can he figure out what triggered his anger. He might discover that it wasn't worth getting so angry about it, just because he was bothered by something; especially if he broke things while he was angry or if he was screaming at the whole family, for no logical reason. He will remember that he lost control over himself and that he wasn't even aware of it.

As for the third group of people that we mentioned – those who are born with a natural integration between his mind and heart – they will often experience a different kind of anger. When they get angry, they are dealing with another problem at the same time: their heart is full of anger and their minds are naturally connected to their heart (due to their inner makeup which is like this), so they will constantly be thinking over what they are angry about. They will keep agonizing over it, because they cannot separate their thoughts from their emotions.

Contrast this with the normal case of anger. In most scenarios of anger, a person has some ability to stop thinking about what's making him angry. In a scenario where the heart dominates the mind, the person will keep raging; the emotions take over the thoughts. But in a person whose mind and heart are integrated, he can't take his mind off the anger. His heart is angry, and his thoughts are connected to this anger, because in his very inner makeup, his mind is always connected to his heart. What will be the result? He can't stop thinking about the anger! He will find that his anger is continuing to fuel and burn.

That is his disadvantage. But that's only one side of the coin; now let's see the other side of the coin. He also has an advantage: He is far more capable of awareness to his anger than most people are. Since his mind and heart are naturally connected, he will never be in a situation where his heart totally dominates. He will always be able to have awareness to his situation: "What exactly is making me angry? At whom am I angry at? What is the reason that made me angry?"

He has the advantage that even as he's angry, he does not totally lose his ability of *chochmah*. His only problem is that he keeps thinking about the anger. On one hand, he has a hard time letting go of what's angering him. On the other hand, if he has reached some level of refinement, he will be able to channel his thoughts into an awareness of the situation: "What is making me angry?" Then he will be able to view the situation more objectively, and he will restrain the anger greatly.

The Key To Solving Anger At Its Root: Achieving A Mind-Heart Integration

Let us understand the following, deeply.

We mentioned that there are generally four ways to rectify anger: *ritzuy* (appeasement), *gevurah* (strength), *rachamim* (compassion) and *chochmah* (wisdom). When we want to deal with anger, either can we can work on it directly [using any of these four abilities, which have been the core of the techniques discussed in the previous chapters and until now, with *siyata d'shmaya*], But there is also a more inner way to deal with anger, which deals with the root of anger itself: to develop **an integration between the mind and the heart**. Herein lays the root of how we rectify anger.

There is certainly truth to all of the many tips that exist on overcoming anger, and we are not invalidating those methods. But if we want to deal with the root of anger, it lies in developing an integration between the mind and heart.

Anger results from a certain disconnection between the mind and heart, where the heart temporarily takes over the mind; the stronger the heart dominates the mind, the more intense the anger will be. This is especially the case with anger that stems from **fire-of-fire**, where there is a total outburst of anger; and especially when it comes to the particular anger that stems from “**wind**”-**of-fire-of-fire**, when a person’s anger is completely irrational and he is getting angry at everyone and everything in front of him.

The root of how this intense anger is rectified when there is an **awareness** to the anger - which comes from integrating the mind with the heart. This is especially effective when dealing with anger that stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, which is an extreme outburst of anger, but it is also the general method that solves all scenarios of anger at their root.

Thus, the depth of rectifying anger lies in integrating the mind and heart together. The more that a person achieves this integration, the more he will be able to restrain his anger. The further apart that the mind and heart are from each other, the more a person will lose his awareness when he gets angry, when his heart takes over his mind and he will have almost no self-control.

Overcoming Anger: Using The Quick Fixes, Along With Gradual Inner Work

Now we can understand the following.

For people who get very angry often – which stems from **fire-of-fire**, and especially if it is **wind-of-fire-of-fire** as described in this chapter – they need to know that there’s an *avodah* for them to work on their anger. They can try using any of the methods that we explained in the previous chapters, but they also need to be prepared to go through an overhaul to their entire character - which may take years: to develop an **integration between their mind and heart**.

Again, that doesn’t mean that there’s no point for them to try using any of the techniques that have been explained until now, in the previous chapters. But when a person has a problem with his temper, there is inner work to be done – in addition to using techniques.

There are people who have been trying various techniques for 2, 4, or 4 years to deal with anger, and they say that it didn’t help them that much. They have rarely seen success at overcoming their anger. Many times people try using the advice of Chazal when it comes to dealing with anger, which we have been explaining until now, yet they still don’t feel a big change happening in themselves. Sometimes this is because they are not using the right methods that will work for them, and they really need something else. But there is a deeper reason of why this happens. It is because all of the techniques in dealing with anger are not solving the anger at its root. They are helpful, but they don’t solve the root of the issue that is anger.

The root of anger, as we have explained, is when there is somewhat of a disconnection between the mind and the heart. The solution to anger, then, will lie in changing the **inner makeup** of the soul that the person has right now. When there is a problem in the very inner makeup of the soul [as is the case with people who often have problems with their temper], using various techniques to deal with anger will not solve this problem, because it never gets to the root.

On a deeper and more all-inclusive level, all of the problems in the soul are rectified by achieving a balance in the soul. The soul contains four elements, and the elements become impaired when they are not in balance with each other. The root of fixing all of our *middos* lies in balancing out the four elements with each other. This is a general description, and when we apply this specifically to anger, it lies in achieving an integration between the mind and heart.

Thus, in order to rectify anger at its root, we must understand the general *avodah* that we have of integrating with the heart. Therefore, let us emphasize that if a person's main bad *middah* is anger, he should make temporary use of the techniques mentioned until now, but at the same time, he also needs to be prepared for a huge overhaul to his entire **inner makeup**. That - and only that - is what will truly fix his anger. The other techniques given until now in conquering anger will be helpful to him a little bit, but it will not fix the anger at its root, as needed.

That being the case, let's briefly explain how we need to go about achieving an integration between the mind and heart.

The Extremes of Mind\Torah and Heart\Tefillah

The mind and the heart are generally referred to as the powers of Torah (mind/intellect/thinking) and *tefillah* (heart/emotion). The Torah makes use of our thinking minds, whereas *tefillah* makes use of our emotions, for *tefillah* is called "service of the heart", as it is about pouring out our hearts to Hashem. These are two major areas of our inner development.

Some people are mainly "Torah" people. They are mainly immersed in Torah, and less in their *tefillah*. This is because their mind dominates their heart. It is their minds which are mainly active, whereas their hearts are left in the background. Such a person might form certain beliefs that life is mainly all about Torah learning and nothing else. He might bring proof to this belief from many statements in Chazal which speak about the importance of Torah learning.

The words of Chazal, of course, are true, and the person is right when he quotes them. But it doesn't come from the truth. It is because his emotions are weak and his mind is at the forefront, so naturally, he needs to 'prove' from the words of Chazal that Torah is the main thing, and not *tefillah*.

We know of course that the main thing is Torah, but when a person says this, it is not necessarily because he has reached this conclusion. It can simply be because he has never yet given any inner order to the abilities of his soul, so he leans toward the other extreme, which says that only Torah is important; and he finds many statements in Chazal to support this belief.

Others are at the opposite extreme. They are mainly into *tefillah*, the “service of the heart”, and they are less into Torah learning. However, it not because they really value the importance of *tefillah*. It is rather because they have an imbalance in their souls. Their emotions are more powerful than their thinking abilities, so naturally, they are drawn towards *tefillah*, which gives expression to their emotions. It does not stem that much from a reverence for *tefillah*. It is simply because they haven’t yet given **balance** to their souls.

In either above of the two extremes – whether the area of Torah is given preference and *tefillah* is ignored, or vice versa – in either case, it is like the concept of bribery, which doesn’t enable the mind to see the correct perspective. The **inner makeup** in each person’s soul is different, so each person has different things that he is drawn to. A person will find support to any of his beliefs in the words of Chazal, and he will find whatever he wants to find. In fact, a person will be able to find anything he wants to find in the words of Chazal – whatever he wants to find, he will find proof there to what he’s looking for...

Now, if a person is searching for truth, he will find what he is really meant to find. This is the case when a person learns Torah *lishmah* (for pure motives). But if a person hasn’t yet refined his soul, his soul is left unbalanced, for he has never yet given inner order to his soul’s abilities; he will find in the words of Chazal whatever he “wants” to find, and that is how he will rationalize his beliefs and opinions.

When a person is drawn towards any of these extremes and he lives at one of the extremes, he will find some ‘proof’ from Chazal to his way of living and thinking. The truth is, however, that even with all of his ‘proofs’, he doesn’t understand even one of these ‘proofs’ that he has found.

Only when a person has achieved an integration between his mind and his heart, can he see the true meaning that is hidden in a statement of Chazal. There are also different ways to understand the truth contained in each statement of Chazal, as there is a rule, “*Their words, and their words, are the words of the living G-d.*”¹³² But if a person hasn’t yet achieved a balance between his mind and heart, the extreme that he is living at will “choose” which statement of Chazal he sees and how it can be explained. Whether he is mainly intellectual or mainly emotional, he is not understanding the true meaning of any proof he finds in Chazal.

Our *avodah* of fixing our *middos*, and fixing anger especially, depends on achieving an integration between the mind and heart. Therefore, one needs to suspect himself - for many years - that the way of life he has chosen for himself might not be suitable for his particular soul. He must face himself honestly and realize that he did not necessarily choose his way of living because he thought that it was the “will of Hashem”, or because he thought that “this is the *ikkar* (the main thing)”, or whatever term that a person will use. It is rather because his **inner makeup** is leaning towards any one of two extremes (either the extreme of intellect/mind/Torah, or the extreme of emotion/heart/*tefillah*).

132 Gittin 6b

Sometimes a person fulfills his main task in life by being at either of the two extremes, but if it because he has chosen to ignore the other extreme, in favor of the other extreme that he leans towards, this is an incorrect perspective to live from.

Torah, Avodah and Chessed – How Much Time For Each?

So in order to fix anger, through integrating the mind with the heart, this *avodah* needs an “introduction” that must come way before it.

Consider the following. Chazal state that the world stands on three pillars – Torah, *avodah* [or *tefillah*, which is in place of the *avodah*], and *gemilus chassadim* (kindness). How much time should a person devote to learning Torah, to *davening*, and to doing acts of kindness for others?

Some people will bring proof from Chazal that all you need to do is learn Torah. Others will bring proof from Chazal that the main thing is davening a lot, and others will bring proof from Chazal that *chessed* should be our number one priority. What is the real answer to this question? Should we get a wise scholar to conclude what the *psak*¹³³ will be about this? What is the true way to live life?

If you have read any of the biographies of *Gedolim* of the past, you can see that there were different kinds of *Gedolim*, who each concentrated on different areas. They didn’t all do the same thing. The *Gemara* says that the descendants of Eli HaKohen have a curse of premature death, but if they learn Torah, they can live longer, and if they learn Torah and do *chessed*, they can live even longer; Abaye merited to live longer due to his Torah learning, and Rava lived even longer because he learned Torah and he also did *chessed*. There are no set rules from Chazal for how much Torah to learn and how much time to devote to *chessed*. The *avodah* of each person depends on each person’s soul root, and the order that has been given to the inner makeup of one’s soul.

Therefore, the beginning of one’s change of attitude must be: that he does not know where his true area of emphasis should be in. One must realize that he has no idea if he is supposed to be more of a “mind” person or more of a “heart” person; whether his main area of *avodah* lies in Torah learning or in *tefillah*. Getting more specific, there is also the area of *gemilus chassadim* (kindness), and one has no idea how much time he should devote to it, versus how much he needs to learn Torah and how much he needs to devote to *davening*.

One needs to feel that he is unclear about this. That lack of clarity should lead a person to realize that finding your truthful place in life (whether it is Torah learning, *tefillah*, or *chessed*) depends on how much inner refinement you have attained. That shows you where your particular place lies.

At first you will be uncertain about it, and slowly you will be able to figure it out. That is how you will be able to achieve a balance between your mind and heart, achieving an integration between them. Understandably, at the beginning of one’s *Avodas Hashem*, there is less balance between the

¹³³ decision of halachah

mind and the heart. As you continue in *avodas Hashem*, there should be more of a balance between the mind and the heart. But one needs to see that there are two extremes to live life in, and to try to reach a balance between the two extremes.

Gaining Clarity About The Mind and Heart - and Integrating Them

The mind is like the sun, and the heart is like the moon. The word “mind” in Hebrew is *moach*, from the word *chammah*, the sun, and the word for “heart” is *lev*, from the word *levanah*, the moon; this shows us that the mind is parallel to the sun and the heart is parallel to the moon. The sun and moon represent opposites; the sun is the day and the moon is nighttime. They are interchanging, but they each connect the day and night together. In the winter, the days are shorter and the nights are longer, and in the summer, the days are longer and the nights are shorter; the same goes for our soul – there are times when our “sun” (mind) dominates, and there are times where our “moon” (heart) dominates. The mind and heart are constantly moving within us.

A major part of our *avodah* is to slowly achieve clarity about our mind and heart and how they are integrated. The more a person achieves a balance between his mind and heart, the more he achieves a rectification to all of his *middos*, to some level. With anger especially, this is the case. When a person is angry, he loses his *chochmah* - but when a person has an integration between his mind and heart, he won't lose himself when he gets angry.

One can only to begin reach it (the integration between the mind and the heart) through a pure and quiet place in himself, where a person recognizes well that the areas of mind and heart need to become integrated with each other, and from growing clarity towards life, and slowly, this can balance out the mind and heart with each other. Even after a person reaches some kind of clarity, there will still be times where he will have more or less clarity, and not every moment in his life will be at the same level of clarity. But he will have a solid path to live life with: he is on a path of balancing out his mind and heart with each other, which integrates them more and more.

When this is the way a person lives, he is touching upon the very root of *tikkun hamiddos*, and fixing anger especially. One also needs to make use of the various techniques in conquering anger which we mentioned until now, but the main part of the solution lies in balancing the mind with the heart. The gain from this will be that even when a person is angry, it won't get blown out of proportion; it will be kept within proper boundaries.

Of course, anger by its very essence is an emotion that goes beyond its proper boundaries. But the point is that it won't get too out of hand, when a person has a balance between his mind and heart.

The Mind-Heart Integration Leads to Awareness of the Anger

As a result, even when a person is experiencing the intense and extreme kind of anger that stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, he will at least be **aware** that he is angry. That is a gain for him, in and of itself. There is a well-known story that someone once came to the Chazon Ish and complained to him that he struggles with lustful desires. The Chazon Ish said to him, “The fact that you are at least aware of it, is already enough.” The very awareness to a bad character trait already enables a person to place boundaries on that bad *middah*, because he is pained over it and he’s concerned about it.

Of course, this does not always solve the bad *middah* at hand, and it was enough only for that person who came to the Chazon Ish; it depends on one’s personal situation. But the very ability of having a balance between his mind and heart and integrating them, is what enables a person not to totally lose his *daas* when he’s angry. Even if he does lose his mind for a moment, he will be able to immediately regain control over himself, because he is aware of his anger.

The next step, after he becomes aware of the anger, is to realize that in spite of the fact that he is angry, there must be **boundaries** to his anger. While a person is raging, his mind will tell him one thing and his heart will be telling him another thing, and his anger continues to burn, and at a certain point he releases it outward, and soon he is exploding in anger at things that have nothing to do what he’s really angry about. He’s getting angry at others in front of him when it doesn’t it make any sense to be angry with them. But if he is at least **aware** of the anger and to the fact that he is in the midst of an explosion, getting used to this awareness will slowly lead him towards an integration between his mind and heart.

The more that a person deepens this integration, the clearer his awareness will be towards his anger, and slowly as times goes on, his angry and irrational explosions will be much less frequent, and they will also be more controlled. Instead of releasing his anger into all four directions, it will stay within his own “four cubits” – it will be greatly restrained, so that it doesn’t leave his own space and burst out at others.

In Conclusion

As mentioned, this is especially effective when dealing with the explosive and irrational kind of anger that stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, but on a more inclusive level, it is the root of fixing the entire trait of anger, and it is also the root of all *tikkun hamiddos*. The more that the mind and heart become integrated with each other, all of the *middos* are fixed by this (to some level). Even more so, integrating the mind with the heart is a concept that builds the entire whole of the person.¹³⁴

134 Editor’s Note: The Rav was asked how exactly one must go about achieving this avodah of “integration of the mind and the heart”. The Rav replied that “It is not something which can be explained briefly, as it is a major fundamental in avodas Hashem which takes a long time to acquire.... There are many different ways of how to achieve it, but here we are discussing how we can attain it via the means of gaining awareness to anger. When one becomes aware of his anger, this furthers the connection between the mind and heart.”

דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית אש כעס 016 אש דאש דאש כולו כעס והפכו מנוחת הנפש

16 | Changing A Terrible Temper

Fire-of-Fire-of-Fire: An Angry Temperament

With *siyata d'shmaya*, let us continue and conclude our discussion on the trait of anger, which stems from the element of fire in the soul. The final aspect of anger we will discuss is anger that stems from **fire-of-fire-of-fire**. Clearly, a person whose anger stems from **fire-of-fire-of-fire** is a person whose entire demeanor is that of anger. It is a miniature version of *Gehinnom* (Hell) on this world. The fire of *Gehinnom* is a continuous fire, and it is revealed on this world with those who are dominated by **fire-of-fire-of-fire**. Such a person is always brimming with anger, and he feels that he has no control over his anger when he feels it.

Nobody can know for sure how much *bechirah* (free will) that each person has, and even a person himself does not know how much percentage of free will he has to control himself and keep to his boundaries. But if a person is born with a nature of **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, he doesn't feel like he has much of an alternative to anger. Understandably, this kind of person still has *bechirah* to lessen his angry nature, and he can learn techniques of how to calm himself. But he'll never be able to change his nature completely, and the anger will always remain as it is. The only thing he can do is balance himself out.

There aren't many people in the world who have this angry nature. It is obvious that nobody sitting here has the nature. Those who do have the nature are called "*raschanim*", people who are regularly infuriated, of whom Chazal say, "Their lives are not lives."¹³⁵

In extreme situations, a person like this becomes emotionally ill, and in many cases he will need to take pills in order to calm down. He basically has no control over his anger. If he's a person who is always trying to grow in his *avodas Hashem*, that's a different story. But if he is not the type of person who is always trying to improve in his *avodas Hashem*, he might get to that point of terrible anxiety from all his anger, where he will have to relieve himself using any of the various natural methods that are available on this world.

The Symptoms: Always Red In The Face, and Full of Anxiety

Anger stemming from **fire-of-fire-of-fire** involves two factors.

One part of it is the anger which is expressed. Many people who have this nature can usually be seen with a red face, due to all of the frequent anger they go through. There are also people who can

¹³⁵ *Pesachim 113b*

always be seen with a reddened face, at any given moment (The color “red” is connected with Esav, for Esav said, “Give me of this red stuff.”). This part of the anger is called *resichah*/fury, or *charon af*/wrath, or as the general term “*kaas*” – anger itself.

Another part of the anger is that it causes a person to be full of anxiety. The person will have almost no *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind). This part of the anger is even more damaging than the first part mentioned. It means that the constant anger in this person’s life will weaken his very brain.

The *Gemara* says that “Anyone who is angered, his *chochmah* (wisdom) is removed.”¹³⁶ The angrier a person becomes, the more he loses his mind. (In the previous chapter, we explained that as long as a person can control the anger, by being aware of his anger, he can still retain some of his rational mind even as he’s angry; the awareness itself to the anger can help him maintain some control over himself). But if a person has a nature of **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, this is called “*re’itah d’mochin*”, “burning of the brain”. In other words, they burn up their own minds, through their constant and fiery anger. The mind will get destroyed from within itself, as a result of one’s constant, furious anger.

These people have no *yishuv hadaas* at all in their day-to-day life. Even as they are going about their various daily activities, they act thoughtlessly and they cannot be mindful of what they are doing. If you observe a person like this as he’s performing various tasks, you can see that he is acting with almost no thought.

It can be compared to a child who runs towards his favorite food and he gorges on it, who can’t control himself, or when the child quickly runs away from something he doesn’t like. The person who has a lot of **fire-of-fire-of-fire** in himself cannot pull himself together to think properly. Most of his life will follow his natural orientation, which has a tendency towards explosions of anger, where he loses all control of his physical movements. This will become the story of his life.

People like this are not able to get married, due to their uncontrollable temper. We pity the person who does marry him, because it is unbearable to live with such a person. Some people, perhaps, can live with this kind of person, if they have a very loving nature, and if they can keep “judging him favorably”, trying to overlook his temper and to focus on his good points, perhaps seeing him as a generally good husband and father (like if he buys gifts for his family), and the like. But it is really unbearable to be around him, because his behavior cannot be tolerated.

He has no self-control when he gets angry, so it is very difficult to try to create a calm atmosphere around him. He has a general angry temperament even when he’s not particularly angry, so he tends to damage things around him, often breaking things. Surely this is the case when he’s actually angered – he will act very damaging to anything in his surroundings. As mentioned, this is a condition that is not applicable to most people, and it surely doesn’t apply to anyone sitting here in this room. But we need to discuss it so that we can complete our understanding of anger.

136 *Pesachim 66b*

The Path Towards Change: Living A Torah-Thinking Life

Chazal say, “Anyone who is angered, his wisdom leaves him”. Anger makes a person lose his mind. This is not only true when a person is actually angry. It is also the case with a person who has a nature of **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, who has such an angry temperament that even when he’s not particularly angry, his fiery nature doesn’t allow his mind to think properly. As mentioned, this is referred to as *re’itah d’mochin*, “burning of the brain” – the mind’s ability to rationalize is totally burned up and destroyed, from all of the anger.

What is the kind of life that will counter such a terrible condition of anger? The only thing that can work is to live a “thinking” kind of life – a life of Torah learning - which counters the loss of mind caused by a hot temper.

Let’s understand the following, deeply. What does it mean to live a “life of Torah”? A person may learn Torah for most of his day, and he may have a few study sessions a day of learning, yet this does not yet mean that has become a more **internal kind of person** (*adam pnimi*). The way a superficial person behaves and the way an internal kind of person behaves, are worlds apart. We are not referring necessarily to the difference in character improvement of *middos*, which is a separate matter. We are referring to the difference between the very **minds** of a superficial person and an internal kind of person.

When one is genuinely connected to the “world of Torah”, his very psyche receives a certain *yishuv badaas* (settled mind). It is written, “The words of the scholars, are heard with *nachas*” (pleasantness).¹³⁷ When a person is really living a life of Torah, exerting himself in Torah, into its depth – his life turns into a life of thought.

If he just learns Torah superficially, and it’s all just like a lip service, then it will do almost nothing to his internal state. Even if he is learning Torah in-depth all the time, it will not change him inside – as we can see on our own. These are not rare occurrences. In addition to learning Torah in-depth, one must build within himself a “life of Torah” that he is connected to in his very soul.

One might learn a *sugya* of *Gemara* in-depth and write many *chiddushim* and even give *shiurim*, without having changed inside, on how he views life. He doesn’t come to the point of “The words of scholars are heard with *nachas*.” He remains the same person as he was before, and he has merely expanded his knowledge. He knows more Torah now, he has deepened his Torah knowledge, but the way he views life is the same as it was before, and it hasn’t become a more inner perspective.

Of course, learning Torah always refines and purifies a person somewhat. But it is not yet an internal kind of life. An internal “life of Torah” is when a person has become a more thinking kind of person, his thoughts patterns have become more organized, and he is truly connected to the “world of Torah” that he lives within himself, his life will look very different. It will be a “life of Torah” that is inner.

¹³⁷ *Koheles* 9:17

This in turn will cause a person to have a mind which naturally thinks about Torah, on a regular basis; as well as to think regularly about Hashem. His thoughts become more structured and organized, and his entire attitude towards life [and man] becomes deeper. As a result of this, even when he is thinking about the mundane, his thinking patterns will work exactly like his thinking patterns in his Torah learning. The Torah which he learns – the thinking into the words of Torah that he has immersed himself in – will become a very part of his life. It will affect his very thinking patterns and the inner makeup of his soul. He will see deeper perspectives on all areas of life, not just what he learns in Torah.

It is possible that a person exerts himself in Torah, but he has never yet attained any *menuchah* (serenity), and he has never yet changed inside, because he has not yet reached an inner connection to the Torah. But when one works his way through Torah learning, making sure to learn slowly, pleasantly, and with clarity, organizing his thoughts as he goes along – eventually with time, a deep connection to Torah will form.

If he truly dedicates himself to the world of Torah learning and he disconnects from the surroundings – and I will emphasize it again: **there must be a disconnection from the surroundings** – he earns for himself his own “*mador l’fi kevodo*”, “a room befitting to his honor.”¹³⁸ He gains a “world” for himself, and within himself.

The “world” that he merits for himself will include the tractates of *Gemara* that he learns, the *sugyos* he has learned, the ways of thinking that he has developed, the in-depth learning and the *chiddushim* that are his, the sessions of learning he has kept to, the conclusions he has formed – and that is where he feels that his “life” is.

What about the rest of the world outside? If he has some need to go out into the world outside his own “world”, he goes to take care of what he needs and that’s it. He has his own “world” that he lives in, and since he lives there, he has a calm place in himself where he settles in.

There is also a need for exertion in his learning, and there is certainly “pressure” found within the world of Torah, but this doesn’t take away his inner peace. If he is really living in the world of Torah and he is connected to it inwardly, everything is clear to him. The rest of the world on the outside is outside of the Torah, and he is at the other side, found within the world of Torah. He can slowly reach it, slowly and progressively.

A Life Spent In Doubts vs. A Life Spent In Serenity

However, if someone is completely imbalanced in his soul and his problems are extreme, then even placing himself into the world of Torah won’t help, because he has no calmness within himself. He is always in a state of anxiety, so it doesn’t matter where he puts himself.

¹³⁸ *Shabbos 152a*

When he is learning *b'iyun* (in-depth), he thinks he should really be learning *bekiyus* (cursory reading of the *Gemara* where he covers more ground), and when learning *bekiyus*, he thinks he should be learning *b'iyun*. He is doubtful if he should be learning the amount of commentaries that he's learning - maybe he should do the opposite? Who says he's learning in the right way, maybe he needs an opposite approach or style? Maybe he didn't get to the right conclusions? Why start the next *sugya* if perhaps I haven't finished the current *sugya* enough....?

There are so many doubts that like this, the doubts are endless, and all of these doubts can take up a person's entire life, and he might end his life like that, having sat his entire life in the *beis midrash* in the world of Torah - ending his life full of unresolved doubts.

In contrast, there is an entirely different attitude one can have, towards a life of learning Torah. He first thinks, "What does Hashem want from me?" and after he concludes what Hashem wants from him, he acts from there. Understandably, he might still need to consult with someone who is wiser than him, and he should also *daven* to Hashem for help. But after he has decided that this is what Hashem wants from him (to sit and learn Torah his whole life), all of the doubts that may arise in Torah learning are pushed aside. Even if doubts come up, he knows how to let them all fall into a 'big garbage' can that can hold all of them.

His soul inside has come to a decision that he belongs in a life of Torah learning and that is where he will live. He gets up in the morning with a certain serenity, a certain *yishuv hadaas*, knowing that his duty on this world is to learn Torah and that this is what Hashem wants from him (after working hard to understand this, clarifying this, and *davening* to Hashem for help). He knows that this is what he has, and there is nothing else. That enables him to go about life in a very organized manner.

A person cannot calm his soul completely. But as long a person chooses for himself the life of Torah learning, and he has clarified to himself that this is what Hashem wants from him and that this is what he is doing with his life, he becomes serene. Of course, a person should always suspect that perhaps he's not trying hard enough. But this constant self-inspection should not be overdone to the point that it is causing a person to lose his happiness in living a life of Torah learning. One must be *someiach b'chelko* (happy with his lot)¹³⁹ that every day of his life he is able to clarify more and more this point.

This is a description of a very inner kind of life, a very deep way of living, and a very serene kind of life. It can only be reached if a person separates himself from the outside world and he immerses himself deep into the world of Torah.

The percentage of people who have chosen to separate themselves from the outside world and to be fully immersed in the world of Torah, however, are not always serene. They may be plagued with all kinds of doubts (which stem from the force of "Amalek"). Doubts destroy a person from within, as long as a person continues to be in doubt. A person cannot be calm when he is always plagued by doubts.

¹³⁹ For more on how to be "someiach b'chelko" when it comes to our spiritual growth, see *Fixing Your Fire-Conceit_02_Inner Satisfaction and Rosh Chodesh Avodah_012_Adar_How To Increase Happiness In Adar*

This is more commonly the case with teenagers, but many people continue to be like this even when they are adults. A person can spend years learning Torah in the *beis midrash*, in the world of Torah, yet he is anxious inside, and he isn't calmed from the life he lives; for example, a person might be full of jealousy at others who have achieved more than him. There are all kinds of painful doubts that can take away a person's calmness, and the examples are endless, but the common denominator between all of these situations is that they can sit and learn Torah all day yet they aren't calm inside.

There is a different option a person can choose. He can clarify to himself, "What does Hashem really want from me?" This is after making effort and *davening* to Hashem for help. It might take him half a year, or a year, and then he will reach the conclusion of what he must do. This is not the last time he will make that conclusion; he may have to keep returning to that conclusion several times, and to once again put in effort and pray to Hashem for success. It is a decision to live a clear and inner kind of life, separated from the rest of the outside world, with inner *yishuv hadaas*. When one figures out that this is the kind of life he wants to live, he will keep finding his rightful place.

This doesn't invalidate *ahavas Yisrael*, helping out others, being there for his family, and all other interpersonal relationships. But as a general course of action, he lives a life of his own, separate from the rest of the world. He can gain more and more *yishuv hadaas* as he continues.

Some people think that it is a very high level to always have *yishuv hadaas*, and that only rare individuals merit it. Understandably, there are those who have more *yishuv hadaas*, and some have less. But the common denominator between all people is that everyone can choose to live a calmer kind of life, in contrast to the nature of **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, which is a life of total internal chaos and terrible anxiety.

Changing A Hot Temper: Immersion in In-Depth Torah Learning

Therefore, if someone has a nature of **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, the truest and deepest advice that exists for him is to place himself fully in the world of Torah learning, where his thoughts will be calmed, as he immerses himself more and more in in-depth Torah learning.

Besides for this, there is no real advice that works for him. He might be able to use some techniques to help himself (which we have explained in several of the previous chapters¹⁴⁰), but it will only work minimally for him. Understandably, he will still have a hard time even when he's in

140 Refer specifically to chapters 013 and 014 of this series. In summary, the techniques mentioned in the previous chapters (of how to ward off intense anger) were: taking a cold shower; entering a cold bath; pouring cold water on your head; sticking your head into the sink with running cold water; yelling out verses or statements of Chazal that describe the evils of anger; developing the idea of boundaries; getting involved with an interesting activity until the anger subsides; chatting with another person about interesting topics until the anger is forgotten; listening to calming music; tasting something that calms you down, or gorging on food (if necessary) until the anger subsides; looking at calming sights, such as the sky or ocean waves; thinking of something interesting, thinking of a favorite Dvar Torah, thinking of various calculations that get you thinking; imagining something pleasant; becoming aware of the anger and then deciding to keep the anger restrained.

the *beis midrash*, because even while learning Torah his anger can still explode. But in the end of the day, there is no calmer place where he can put himself in.

Any other options besides for this are superficial. In some places, a person can find someone who is very loving to all people, who lends a listening ear to everyone, who will be able to listen to all of his venting when he's fuming. But he would have to sit with this person for as much time as he needs to be listened to when he's venting, and a mere conversation won't suffice for him. It is very hard to find such a loving, patient person who is willing to let anyone come to his house, for even once a week, where they can vent all of their anger to him; almost no one can tolerate someone with a terrible temper, on a regular basis. Only rare individuals are capable of such patience.

Therefore, the only real solution that exists, for someone who has a constant and fiery temper, is to immerse himself deeply in the world of Torah learning. He must become very, very immersed in Torah. Even if a person doesn't have the bad temper of **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, he would still have to come on to this way of life at some point, because this is the true way that life is supposed to look like!

One needs to reach a point where he is getting up in the morning with a sense of serenity, feeling happy with what he does [the fact that he spends his day learning Torah]. If he thinks that his life is not functioning properly, then he needs to “do *teshuvah*” and see how his life can become functional. If he realizes that he is doing things that are improper, he should sit with himself and decide to change. If he feels like he doesn't have the strength [to be in the world of Torah learning], if he is correct, then it is something which Hashem doesn't want him to do, because Hashem doesn't demand something from a person that he doesn't have the energy for.

A person cannot live all of his life in a constant contradiction, knowing that “Hashem wants me to do certain things [to learn Torah] but I really don't have the strength to do that, so I'm not *b'seder* (functional).” If he feels like his life is not *b'seder*, then he needs to give *sefer* (organization) to his life to that part of his life that needs to be straightened out; as for the past, he can do *teshuvah* over it. And if he feels like that he doesn't have the strength for this, he should cry to Hashem for help.

But in any case, the inner way to live life is that a person gets up in the morning, and he clarifies to himself what Hashem really wants from him, what his real energies are, and what his limitations are. Hashem doesn't want you to do something if it's beyond your capability; that is impossible. So one should ask himself each day: “What does Hashem really want from me, on the level of capability that I am at right now?”

When one reaches the conclusion, it should cause him to feel calm inside. When a person realizes that his place is in Torah learning, and he realizes that his own *cheilek* (portion) in Torah is all that he can reach on this world, according to his capabilities – that is exactly what Hashem wants from him, and that is the “*someiach b'chelko*” that he has on this world. One needs to begin and end his day with this attitude.

Of course, there is no such thing as a person who reaches *shleimus* (self-completion) in his life. The soul in us is always demanding more growth.¹⁴¹ But the attitude that one must have towards life is, “We have done our part – now You do Your part.” There is a deep place in our soul which can feel, almost definitely, that one has truly done all (or most) that he can. As for whatever you didn’t accomplish, you can regret it and do *teshuvah* about it from the depths of the heart, and decide to make tomorrow a better day.

In Summary

Let us review this, for emphasis: If you demand from yourself anything that is beyond your capabilities, it is not possible to live this way.

Secondly, even when something is *in* your capabilities, if you are constantly having doubts about something, this is also detrimental.

You cannot be serene if you are constantly thinking that you should really be doing something else.¹⁴²: “Why am I learning Torah right now? Maybe I should be doing *chessed* right now”, or “Why am I doing *chessed* right now? Maybe I should be *davening* right now.” You might read a *sefer* that stresses a certain area you need to work on, and then you see a different *sefer* that tells you the complete opposite, and then you get tossed around between many different directions. A person cannot live like this!

The inner way to live life, as we described here, is a true kind of life which a person can live, of “*And he saw that serenity was good*”, where it is realized the meaning of “The words of scholars are heard with *nachas* (pleasantness).” The inner essence of life is calm and serene.

When this is the attitude that a person has towards life, this is greatly helpful when trying to calm a hot temperament. Even when a person is prone to anger (and indeed, all of us have times of anger), he can build for himself a space in his life that totally counters the anger: a kind of life which is calm and serene. Of course, there are things that come up in our life which can take us away from this serenity, and having a hot temper certainly removes a person from his serenity. But we can counter all of the stress and anger in our life by developing a serene kind of life, in the depths of the soul.

If one wants to know if he is living an inner kind of life or not, he can see after a full season if he has become more disconnected from the surroundings (at the same time, he must make sure that he also has the “other side of the coin”: *ahavas Yisrael*¹⁴³), and if he has chosen for himself this “world” to live in within himself. His own “world” that he has acquired for himself gives him his own *yishuv hadaas*, his own clarity, his own *nachas* (pleasantness/serenity). He also needs exertion in Torah, but it should be an exertion that is accompanied with *nachas*, a pleasant serenity.

141 Refer to Fixing Your Fire-Conceit_015_Aiming For Perfection

142 See Fixing Your Fire-Anger_011_Scattering of the Soul

143 See Inner Silence_021_Hisbodedus and Ahavas Yisrael

This kind of life is the total antithesis to anger – the character trait of a person which is stormy and un-calm. Living in this way causes a person to enter a different world entirely. It is the root of how a person can enter into his deeper essence.

Revealing The Holy “Fire” of the Soul

Let us now conclude. Until now, we have spoken about the evil use of **fire-of-fire-of-fire** (a hot temperament). Now we will speak about the **holy “fire”** in the soul.

The fire on the Altar burned constantly and it was not allowed to be extinguished. This is the symbol of the pure fire that is in one’s soul. The “heart” in us is referred to as the place of warmth and fire that is found within us. One needs to reveal this “holy fire”.

As long as a person is dominated by anger, and he does not feel serene about his life, his inner and holy “fire” will not be able to be revealed in its purity, in its genuine form. Instead, he will remain with a mixture of good and evil that is left unsorted. Sometimes the good in him will prevail, and sometimes the evil will prevail. But he won’t be able to reveal his holy fire in its proper form. Therefore, even if he has yearnings for holiness – which come from the “fire” in the soul – he will be prone to explosions of “fire”, which will be unstable. That will mean that he won’t be able to have genuine spiritual growth, because his inner structure isn’t built properly.

But when one lives the inner kind of life (as described before), in which he immerses himself in learning Torah in-depth, along with a sense of serenity that accompanies this – this will weaken his external fire, and his inner fire will be revealed in its pure form: the depths of the *neshamah*. This pure fire, the depth of the *neshamah*, upon being revealed, is a great yearning for truth, and it comes from the true exaltedness that is deep in a Jew’s soul, which roars out from deep within. It yearns for closeness with Hashem, and for his holy Torah, of which it is said, “*Are My words not like fire, so says Hashem*”.¹⁴⁴

This is the pure “fire” in the soul which truly burns from the depth of the *neshamah*, which constantly elevates a person above the place where he is in. When this fire is revealed, a person will have true yearnings, which can lift him higher and higher, motivating him to do his inner *avodah*.

Living Within: Finding Your Inner Serenity and Avoiding Anger At Yourself

As we explained, as long as a person is dominated by anger (external fire), even his yearnings in *avodas Hashem* are a confusing mixture of good and evil. We can see that in most people, even when

¹⁴⁴ Yirmiyahu 23:29

they have holy yearnings for *avodas Hashem*, they remain confused. They jump around between one area of growth and another area of growth, like a fire that hasn't been stabilized. This is not the pure "fire" of the soul.

To explain the inner workings of this, anger contradicts all of the movements of the soul and doesn't allow a person to have stable spiritual movement and growth. Besides for the contradictions that are anyways found in one's behavior (which are only on an external level), there is a great contradiction to one's soul movements which is caused by anger. Anger causes a person to move outward, contradicting the movements of the soul which are moving inward.

As we explained, finding an inner world of serenity in life is the antithesis to anger, and when a person reaches it, he is acting from within himself, and not from outside of himself. Living "from within" means that a person feels complete in himself and he is serene about himself. If he makes mistakes, he does genuine *teshuvah* over them.

There is no such a life in which a person doesn't make mistakes. There are two ways of how a person reacts to mistakes. One reaction to a mistake is to fall further and become angry, and this is the detrimental way to react. The positive way to react to a mistake is to immediately feel *merirus d'kedushah* ("holy bitterness"), which motivates a person to get back on his feet and seek holiness.

(The *Gemara* says that if one sees a Torah scholar commit a sin at night, he should not think negatively about him, because he should assume that the Torah scholar will do *teshuvah* the next day. The depth of this is because a true Torah scholar knows that even after stumbling to a sin, he must not get angry with himself that he has fallen to a sin. Instead, he does *teshuvah* over what has happened.)

Living in this way enables a person to live "with" himself and "within" himself, with his *pnimiyus* (inwardness), and he is unaffected by what takes place in his surroundings; and if he does become negatively affected by the surroundings, he doesn't become angry with himself, and instead he does *teshuvah* over his mistakes. Nobody is perfect, and a person always has failures. It is written, "*A righteous person falls seven times, and rises*", but a person should not react to the fall by getting angry at himself and to have clashes within himself. Instead, he should take proper action and rectify any wrongs committed, as is needed.

Herein is the key to living a calmer, more serene life. The calmer that a person becomes, the less he will clash with others in his surroundings, because he has become more inward, and he is less drawn outwards.

This is the meaning of "Therefore, man was created individual."¹⁴⁵ Hashem created the side of holiness and the side of evil. On one side, there is Hashem, and on the other side, there are "other gods", which are represented by all of the creations, which are all "other" to Hashem, for they distress Him with their sins. But the more that a person finds his own inner place (his own "*mador l'fi kevodo*", "a room befitting his honor") and he becomes more in touch with his inner depths, his

¹⁴⁵ *Sanhedrin 37a*

trait of anger will be weakened at its root. He has learned how to live more within, and therefore he is much less bothered from people who are on the outside.

The External and Inner Work Of Conquering Anger

Thus, the depth of rectifying the trait of anger, after making use of the various techniques we have explained until now in dealing with anger, lies in living within the inner depths of the soul.

This does not invalidate the other methods mentioned in conquering anger, which are certainly true, for they are mentioned in the words of Chazal. But the essence of rectifying anger lies in living within, which enables one to live a life of serenity. It is the inner world which one lives in within himself. It helps a person easily avoid anger because he has learned how to separate himself from external stimuli, for he has learned how to live more within, in his own inner depths.

Understandably, it is not enough just to become a more internal kind of person without working on the external layers [our *middos* themselves], because if a person doesn't try to refine his external layers, he will not be able to control his temper from bursting outward. Our point is that in order to conquer anger, a person should not remain within the outside stimuli and try to fight all of the anger from there.

The techniques of dealing with anger that were mentioned in the previous chapters are therefore not to be invalidated; rather, it is that *along with using those techniques*, one needs to also conquer anger from deep inside himself: to remain solidly anchored in his own inner world.

In Conclusion

The inner depths of one's soul is where one finds his *yishuv hadaas*, serenity, and calmness, so it is above any possibility of anger.

The *Gemara* says that Hashem's anger lasts for a moment.¹⁴⁶ This "anger", so to speak, only exists in His "outer" chambers. In Hashem's "inner" chambers,¹⁴⁷ it is not possible for Hashem to have any "anger", for this is where Hashem conducts Himself with the title of "Hashem alone (*l'vado*)". In this place of "Hashem alone", there is no possibility of anger. So too, there is a place in our soul which can be above all anger, where it is separated from all that takes place on the outside, and it is just "alone" with Hashem.

The complete rectification of anger, in conjunction with the methods of conquering anger that were mentioned in the previous chapters, is to reach the very depth of the soul, the place where the soul lives "alone", a place that is serene – the place where the soul is "one" with Hashem.

¹⁴⁶ *Berachos 7a*

¹⁴⁷ *See Chagigah 5b*