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FIXING YOUR WIND

TORAH MANUAL TO FIXING TRAITS OF SPEECH

UNEDITED TRANSLATION
V4

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היסודות



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Editor's Intro

This is the **third** in the “Fixing Your *Middos*” series. The Rav has already covered the traits of **sadness** and **laziness** in “Fixing Your Earth.” Then the Rav covered the topic of **desires** in “Fixing Your Water.” Now the Rav progresses to explain to us how to fix **evil speech**, which stems from the element of wind in the soul. Hence, this series is titled Fixing Your Wind. The theme of this series is how to rectify our power of speech.

These chapters will discuss the traits of **lying, flattery, gossip, and bragging.**

After this series, *b'ezras Hashem*, the Rav will progress to discuss the element of **fire** of the soul, which result in the traits of conceit, anger, hatred, seeking honor, and seeking control. This will complete the “Fixing Your *Middos*” series.

1 | *Falsity, Part 1: Distorted Reality*¹

Preface

We will now begin, with the help of Hashem, to learn how to fix the evil traits which stem from the element of **wind** in the soul.

We have already covered the bad *middos* which stem from earth (sadness, imagination, and laziness) and the element of water (desires, pleasure, envy and jealousy). In the last chapter of the previous series (*Fixing Your Water*), when we concluded the topic of desires, we explored envy and jealousy a bit [and we can really delve even more into those traits, but the time will not allow us to continue with it.]

So we have finished the discussion on the *middos* which stem from the element of water, and now we will begin to study the bad *middos* which stem from the element of **wind**.

1. Wind and Speech

The main evil trait which stems from the element of wind is **evil speech**; to be general, it is called *devarim betailim* (“idle speech.”) Man’s power of speech is called “*ruach memalelah*”, a “talking spirit”; the element of *ruach*/wind is revealed through the mouth/speech.

There are also additional functions of the element of wind, such as movement, which mainly stems from wind. But the element of wind is specifically manifest in the power of speech.

(Rav Chaim Vital lists the *middos* stemming from earth as sadness and laziness; water is about desires, and fire is about conceit and anger. These are all *middos*, however, and they are not *active uses* of their respective elements. However, when it comes to the element of wind – which is actually the root of all the elements – Rav Chaim Vital lists the power of speech as being the main *active use* of the element of wind).

2. Four Kinds of Idle Chatter

The evil trait that stems from the element of wind is idle speech, and Rav Chaim Vital lists four branching kinds of “idle” speech:

- 1) Words that speak **falsity** (*sheker*).
- 2) Words of **flattery** (*chanufah*).

¹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-001-falsity-part-1-distorted-reality>

3) Words of **gossip** (*lashon hora*).

4) Words of **bragging** (*shevach atzmo*).

We have not listed the order here according to the exact order of Rav Chaim Vital; rather, we have listed it like this purposely so that we can explain them each in order of the four elements, beginning from earth, then water, then wind, then fire.

3. The Four Branches of Wind

Words of falsity are an evil kind of speech that stems from **earth-of-wind**. Words of flattery stem from **water-of-wind**. Words of gossip stem from **wind-of-wind**. Words of bragging stem from **fire-of-wind**:

3-A) Fire-of-Wind

When one **brags** about his own praises, he seeks to elevate his status, and this stems from conceit, which is a trait of the element of **fire**. Since he is speaking about himself, and speech is rooted in wind, bragging about oneself is thus a trait which stems from **fire-of-wind**.

3-B) Wind-of-Wind

One who speaks **gossip** on a regular basis (of whom *Chazal* say will not be able to greet the Shechinah) is someone who talks continuously, without restrictions to his speech; and this shows that his idle speech is stemming from wind of his wind. His speech has become dominant, and speech is the defining nature of wind; thus, gossip stems from **wind-of-wind**.

3-C) Water-of-Wind

Words of **flattery** are from **water-of-wind**, because a person who speaks flattery to another is seeking love and connection with others, and love stems from water.

4-C) Earth-of-Wind

Words that are false stem from **earth-of-wind**; this is when a person speaks words that are not true; and when he does this on a regular basis.

5. Beginning

These are the four kinds of idle speech which all stem from the element of wind in the soul.

We will begin with discussing idle speech that stems from **earth-of-wind**, which is about speaking words of falsity [and within this, there will be four kinds: earth-of-earth-of-wind, water-of-earth-of-wind, wind-of-earth-of-wind, and fire-of-earth-of-wind).

6. *Four Reasons Why People Lie*

Why would a person lie? We will discover here that there are four reasons that would motivate a person to lie.

We are dealing with evil speech that stems from **earth-of-wind** (which area all words of falsity), and there are four applications of this [earth, water, wind and fire].

6-A) *Earth-of-Earth-of-Wind: Lying As A Result of Imagination*

1) False speech that stems from **earth-of-earth-of-wind** is when a person lies as a result of his tendency to imagine. Earth is the root of the power to imagine, thus, when one has a distorted picture of reality and that is why he described something falsely, his lying is being produced from his “earth” aspect in earth-of-wind. (It is this kind of false speech which we focus the discussion of this chapter on.)

6-B) *Water-of-Earth-of-Wind: ‘Dragged’ After Lying*

Another kind of false speech stems from **water-of-earth-of-wind**, and this is a very common problem: A person can be telling over a story and making up things that never happened. When asked why he said such a thing, he says something like, “Oh, that’s just how it came out of my mouth in the conversation...”

He was sort of “dragged” after saying certain words in the conversation. As we have explained in the past², “dragging” is a nature of the element of water.

6-C) *Wind-of-Earth-of-Wind: Habitual Lying*

A third kind of false speech stems from **wind-of-earth-of-wind**. This is when a person is missing an inner sense towards *yashrus* (uprightness).

The Vilna *Gaon* said that ever since the sin of Adam, man deviated from the state of *yashrus*/uprightness, and instead entered into *cheshbonos rabim*, the “many calculations”, the nature to be cunning and deceitful. All of mankind was affected by this, but in some people, this evil nature can be more dominant than the usual. When a person has a nature to be deceitful, he naturally is drawn to speak words that are false. Not only does he lie all the time and on a regular basis, but even more so, his whole nature is to lie.

6-D) *Fire-of-Earth-of-Wind: Bragging About Non-Existing Qualities In Oneself*

A fourth kind of false speech is from **fire-of-earth-of-wind**. This is when a person exaggerates what he’s saying, and as a result, he fabricates words about himself.

This is not to be confused with the regular case of bragging, which stems from **fire-of-wind**³. With **fire-of-earth-of-wind**, the person will brag about himself of qualities that are true. But when a

² See *Fixing Your Water* #02-#05

³ This will be discussed in *Fixing Your Wind* chapters 12-16

person brags about himself about qualities that do not exist in himself, this stems from **fire-of-earth-of-wind**.

For example, there are people who generally will not lie, but when they talk about themselves, they will brag about themselves and make up things about themselves that are not true.

7. Earth-of-Earth-of-Wind: False Speech That Results From Imagination/Fooling Yourself

We will first discuss false speech that stems from **earth-of-earth-of-wind**, which is when one speaks falsely as a result of one's tendency to imagine.

The imagination can cause a person to convince his mind about certain things that aren't true. We see this very dominant in children, who will make up stories and really believe it's true. The person who lies because his imagination is leading him is not lying intentionally. Rather, he has fooled himself, so he ends up saying a lie.

Of course, he is still saying something not true, but he's not consciously trying to lie. The problem here is that he really believes that a certain thing happened, when in reality, it did not happen. So when he describes something, he is giving an inaccurate description of the facts, because he didn't realize that his imagination has fooled him and has shown him a distorted view of reality.

We have discussed imagination in the past (in the series "*Getting To Know Your Imagination*"), but here we are discussing a different kind of imagination, which is more subtle and not as obvious. It is a kind of imagination in which a person has gotten used to having a false view on things, so he doesn't realize that his imagination is fooling him and distorting reality.

8. Outline of the Solution: Gaining A Truthful Lens On Reality

When a person doesn't realize that he is being fooled by imagination, this needs to be countered with getting used to developing a more truthful viewpoint towards things.

The word "*emes*" (truth) is an acronym for the Hebrew letters *Aleph*, *Mem*, and *Tav* – the beginning, middle, and final letters of the *Aleph Beis*. The implication of the concept of "*emes*", the truth, is to take into account the view of the beginning, middle, and end of a matter. *Emes* is about connecting the beginning and end together, including the middle point - leaving out nothing in between.

To apply this concept, sometimes a person thinks he gets the whole picture of something when he reads a little about it, and he is really missing information. For example, a person reads the beginning lines of an article and the end of the article, and based upon that, the person thinks he knows what the middle of the article discussed. Sometimes he guesses right - but sometimes, he is wrong!

The ability of *emes*/truth is thus to see the beginning, middle, and end of a matter, which connects all the details together.

9. False Reality: Focusing Too Much On A Detail & Failing To See The Bigger Picture

Now we will examine the opposite of *emes* (truth): *sheker* (falsity). We will also see the differences between *emes* and *sheker*, and how it is *sheker* that really fuels the subtle kind of imagination we are discussing. Imagination (*medameh*) is a problem that affects all people. Everyone is somewhat affected by imagination, some more and some less. There are only a few people in the world who see a truthful lens on reality.

The classic example of imagination-based life can be seen in children. Children live only for the moment, and they don't think about the past or the future. An adult has the power to be sensible and think in a mature way, so an adult can think about past or future and he can see how they relate to and affect the present moment. However, the immature kind of thinking which a child has, often remains unchanged even in adults!

How can we see this? When a person focuses too much on a particular detail, and he doesn't take into account the other factors that make up the picture, he sees a distorted view of reality, because he does not see the bigger picture. It resembles a child's thinking, who lives in imagination and therefore doesn't see how past or future connect with the present.

To illustrate, the *Gemara* says that a *chazakah* of ownership is established through three consecutive acts. If one's ox gores three times, it is considered to a wild ox, which must be guarded by its owner, or else it is negligence on the owner's part. But a person who has a superficial perspective sees the third time in which the ox gores and he doesn't see how this connects to the previous two times that the ox gored.

This was just an example; there are more examples as well of the concept we are saying. The point is that when a person isn't used to viewing things with a truthful lens, he is dominated by a false kind of view, and this causes him to overlook details; when he sees a detail, he focuses on the detail alone, failing to take into account what came before and what comes afterwards.

We can give another example. A person is purchasing a table for the house, and he also needs a few chairs to go around it. He purchases four chairs, and then he gets to his house and he finds that the four chairs can't fit, because he didn't measure the exact centimeters of the table. He saw some chairs he liked, he saw a table he liked, but he didn't think about how they can all fit with each other.

9-A) Connecting Your Life Together

Here is a deeper example: a person goes through different stages of life. First he is a teenager, then he is married, and so forth. When a person has an immature perspective towards life, he never thinks that much, so he only focuses on his current stage of life, not before that and not after that.

When he is a teenager, he just sees himself, and he doesn't think about what he was like when he was child, or what he will be like when he is married. When he gets married, he is a little more mature, and he has many memories about his childhood, but he doesn't think that much about what he was like when he was child; nor does he think about what old age will be like. He spends most of his time thinking about his current stage of life, and he doesn't think about past or future. (Maybe he will think about old age if he is concerned about getting his pension.)

People usually don't think about their past childhood, the current point they are in, and the point they are heading towards. The Mishnah in *Avos* says: "Know from where you come from, and to where you are going, and in front of Whom you will have to give an accounting". In other words, one has to contemplate his beginning point, his current point, and his later point. This is a perspective towards life - it is the perspective of truth.

Most people want to focus just on the present, without thinking about past or present, and this really comes from being so used to a false view towards things.

10. Emes Vs. Sheker

When a person has a view of *sheker* (falsity) on things, he doesn't realize that his view is really splitting apart pieces of reality, and thus he doesn't see how the bits and pieces connect together to form a bigger picture. By contrast, the view of *emes* (truth) is to see a beginning and end point, and to connect it with the middle (or current) point.

When a person speaks falsely due to earth-of-earth-of-wind, it is not a lie in the regular sense. It is true that the person is lying, but that is just the result of a deeper issue. He doesn't see reality correctly, because he doesn't know how to think beyond the present moment - and that is why he speaks falsely. He is speaking from his incomplete view of reality.

"The truth" is: there isn't that much "truth" in the world today. Anything truthful that we usually know of on this world is only truth when we compare it with *sheker*, but the perfect level of truth is rare to find.

11. The Basic Level of Truth Vs. The Higher Level of Truth

To explain this concept further, a true *Gadol* is someone who sees the entire picture of Creation, from beginning until end, and how it relates to the present moment. A *Gadol* sees the totality of things.

A person who is not a *Gadol* is greater than people who are below his level, but a *Gadol* is someone who sees how the many details of Creation connect together, and thus he knows how to use all of the details to serve Hashem. Of course, nobody can see all the details that are in Creation since the beginning of time; no human being is capable of this. But the basic perspective of truth to

have on life is for a person to take into account the beginning point, the current point, and the later point, of the details.

11-A) *Examples of Basic Level of Truth*

For example, you go home and you see a table. Here is a question: When did Hashem create a table? You can simply answer that “Hashem didn’t create a table; He created the tree, which the wood of the table comes from”. It appears that tables were not part of the act of Creation. But a table comes from a tree, so the table’s beginning is that it comes from a tree. When did Hashem create trees? On the sixth day of Creation. (The plants were created on the third day, but nothing sprouted until the sixth day).

So the question here appeared silly, but the answer wasn’t that simple. The point is that everything has a beginning point you can connect it with. A table is not just a table that comes from a piece of wood manufactured in a factory. Its origin is that it comes from a tree. That is its beginning.

So in everything you see, you should try to think how it somehow connects with the beginning of Creation. The Chofetz Chaim would do this exercise all the time: he would see how everything he came across was contained in *Maaseh Beraishis* (the first six days of Creation). Of course, what you see in front of you is not the way it looked at the beginning of Creation. But it was definitely at Creation, just it was in its raw form.

A person needs to get used to seeing the beginning point in the things that he sees. Without getting used to this kind of thinking, a person doesn’t see a truthful lens of reality.

Of course, you definitely see what you are seeing, and you are ready to swear that the table you see is a table. But from a truthful perspective, if you don’t contemplate the beginning point of something, you don’t really see the table – you are not really seeing what you are seeing. You aren’t seeing it as it really is.

Taking this further, when a person isn’t viewing reality as it is, he surely won’t be able to attain a perfect bond with the Creator. Only the Creator is found completely in everything. In order for a person to completely reach the recognition of the Creator, he must first see realities in a truthful way. In each thing a person sees, he must take into account the whole picture of what he is seeing.

Noticing The False View

When a person doesn’t know of truthful perspectives towards things, that really means he is deeply immersed in *sheker* (falsity). In fact, he will even think that his view of *sheker* is really the *emes*!

To begin rectifying this, a person first has to intellectually contemplate what the *emes* (truth) of something, and then he can begin to realize that all the *emes* he sees is only “*emes*” in relation to *sheker*, but that he still doesn’t see reality as it is. The first step is - that a person has to begin to absorb that *he simply does not see reality as it is*. Seeing the *emes* (truth) is to see before and after the

current point. If one cannot see the previous point and the later point of something, he needs to realize that he does not see *emes* yet!

The Importance Of Seeing The Truth

The words here, when a person hears them the first time, will often sound very strange. But that is only because a person is so far from *emes* that he is not ready to absorb a truthful perspective.

If a *Sefer Torah* is missing a letter, it is invalid, because if it is missing even one detail, it is not a “true” Torah, for Torah has to be “*Toras Emes*”, a “Torah of truth”.

When a person is learning a certain *sugya* in the Talmud, like if he is learning Tractate *Erwin*, it seems that Tractate *Niddah* has nothing to do with the current *sugya*. But the truthful perspective is that all the details of the Torah are always relevant to whatever you are currently learning.

Again, the words here will seem strange to most people when they hear it, because most people do not understand what *emes* and *sheker* is. For example, people tend to think that “lying” is only called lying when a person says that it’s raining outside when really it’s not raining, and that *emes* is to say it’s raining outside when it is raining outside. But *emes* and *sheker* really go much deeper than that.

When a person really understands what *emes* is, his entire perspective changes. Someone who reaches the real understanding of what *emes* is someone who will reach true understanding of Torah, and he will have a true connection with Hashem.

Leaving The View of Falsity & Getting Used To A View of Truth

Now we will make these concepts practical. We elaborated upon the concept a lot until now due to the intense nature of this concept; hearing these words the first time are hard for most people to understand even on a very simple level.

How indeed can we draw ourselves closer to *emes*?

1) Firstly, one has to begin to contemplate, at least on an intellectual level, what the concept of *emes* (truth) is – it means for one to see beyond the present moment, to take into account what comes before and after something; to see the bigger picture of things, as opposed to just focusing on a particular detail of any given situation.

2) The second step is for a person to see in his own personal life that he is not yet living a life of *emes* yet.

Practically speaking, in whatever you see, think about what came before it, what came after it, and what the details are that it is made of. When you begin to think like this, you will notice that your initial perspective of things is inaccurate, but in doing so, you will draw yourself closer and closer to what a truthful perspective is.

Some Practical Examples of Becoming More Truthful

For example, pay attention to what you say, and you will notice contradictions. You will discover that you weren't paying attention to what you were saying. When you take apart your conversations like this, it helps you get used to the idea of distancing yourself from *sheker* and instead getting used to *emes*.

Another example: often a person asks a question in *Halacha* to a *Posek*, and he gets an answer from the *Posek*. But the *Posek* is only answering you according to how you are presenting the question! A very large percent of responses from a *Posek* to a person are really not the answer to the question asked – not because the response was incorrect, but because the question was phrased incorrectly.

A person is telling over an episode what happened, and there are many factors going on; is he saying over all the details? A person would have to be extremely wise in order to know all the details that are involved. If a person is used to thinking about before and after, he will be able to ask a question accurately.

One should get used to taking apart the details of everything he comes across: to think about before and after the current point. Obviously, this should be worked upon slowly; one cannot become perfect so fast when he tries to work on this. The point is to think about what came before and how it relates to something else that comes after it. Often a person focuses on the current point and doesn't see what comes before it and what comes after it.

Here is another example: when a person thinks about our generation, he should think about what the previous generation looked like, and what it will look like in the next generation. For example, what will the generation look like if this generation doesn't merit *Moshiach*?

In Summary

Thus, a person first needs to become aware of what the concept of *emes/truth* is. Then, one should admit that he is far from truth.

Don't look at something as it is; see what comes before it and what comes after it. Getting used to this will give you a whole new perspective on things. This is the depth of distancing yourself from falsity.

In Conclusion

The concept described here is something we can relate to very well from when we learn a *sugya* in the *Gemara*. When a person learns a *sugya* of *Gemara*, a person should think about the details that are involved with the current page of *Gemara* he is learning, and see how the details connect to the current *sugya*.

A person without this perspective will merely be aware of the details, but he doesn't know how to connect them to the current point he is learning about. He can know the details well, but he doesn't know how to connect it with the beginning, middle, and end of the *sugya*. By contrast, a true Torah scholar, who has a truthful perspective, knows how to take other details he is aware about and connect them to the current point he is learning about.

Just as we can relate to this concept from how learn *Gemara*, so can we learn how to connect details in all other aspects of our life we come across.

We have described here the point of **earth-of-earth-of-wind** in the soul, the source of speaking words of falsehood. We can fix it with the trait of *emes*/truth, which is when we pit *emes* against *sheker*. It was explained here the depth of how we use the trait of *emes*/truth - a power deep in our soul.

2 | *Falsity Part 2: Dragged After Lying*⁴

Water-of-Earth-of-Wind: Dragged After Lying

We continue here to learn about the element of wind, the root of idle speech. We have begun to explain idle speech stemming from **earth-of-wind**, which is to speak falsity. Previously, we explained evil speech/falsity that stems from **earth** within earth-of-wind.

Now, we will discuss words of falsity that stems from **water**-of-earth-of-wind. This is when a person is **dragged** after speaking falsity, similar to the nature of water, which can pull and drag things with it.

There are different ways how a person gets dragged after speaking falsehood. There are both external as well as internal reasons for this.

A “World of Falsity” We Live In

Chazal state that when Hashem wanted to create the world, He consulted with the angels, so to speak, and asked them if He should create the world. The trait of *emes* (truth) said to Hashem: “Don’t create the world, because it is entirely false.” What is the meaning of this? The inner understanding of this is that since the entire Creation conceals the reality of Hashem, Who is the true reality, the entire concept of the Creation is this one big “lie”, because it hides the truth of reality from us.

We won’t discuss this deep concept here, but the simple understanding of this is that the world is full of many lies. A person on this world is pulled after falsity, due to the surroundings that we are affected by. The world is called *alma d’shikra*, “a world of falsity” – thus, a person is naturally drawn after the surroundings; the surroundings cause us to be drawn after falsity.

“Surroundings” - the *sevivah* you are in - does not refer specifically to the close surroundings you are in; it refers to the entire world of the generation, which surrounds you and affects you. Since falsity envelopes the entire world, and the entire world affects a person, it follows then that a person is influenced by the falsity of the surroundings.

Falsity Caused By Surroundings

Besides for the above spiritual reason that was given, there is also falsity in a person’s surroundings which a person is simply dragged after. There are a few examples of this.

⁴ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-002-falsity-part-2-dragged-after-lying>

Here is one example: what we go through in *shidduchim* (finding a spouse). Imagine if the two sides in every *shidduch* would give over 100% truthful information about both the boy and the girl; no *shidduch* would ever happen! If a person is clear that he's saying the truth, there is no way to be clear that the *shidduch* is a good *shidduch*. If a person says only good things about the boy or girl, it sounds like he is exaggerating, so his words are dismissed as being full of fluff.

So whenever we hear information about a *shidduch*, unless we recognize the person as being very truthful, we know that no one says the exact truth. In fact, if a person would only say the exact truth, people will want to harm him. The constraints of *Halacha* also do not allow a person to speak the exact truth, because when a person is always being 100% truthful, he hurts people with his words.

When we do research in *shidduchim*, there are some things that you are allowed not to say; it is not called lying when you do this. It is rather that you are not revealing the truth. But there are some things that we say which, although we may say them, the words need to be said with the right tone of voice and with correct timing in the conversation.

When it comes to this aspect, people add a lot of fluff to their words in order to impress the listener. It kind of forces the speaker into getting **dragged** after lying.

When We Feel 'Forced' To Lie

In the world we live in, we cannot say the exact truth to people when we talk to others. And in fact, if one does say the exact truth all the time, he is being hurtful to others.

Indeed, a person has to give an answer to the person according to what that person wants to hear. Usually, when a person is asking information on a certain *shidduch* inquiry, he is probably not that concerned with what the truth really is, and he just wants to hear good information about the other side so that the *shidduch* can happen. Therefore, the one who gets the phone call knows that the caller is awaiting a certain kind of answer that he would like to hear.

Here is a common lie that people make up when asked for information on a *shidduch*: If someone learns for most of the *seder*, he is deemed as a "*masmid*", and if he learns a little more than that, he's considered a future *Gadol*...

Because we live with generic terms like this, we usually respond to questions about *shidduchim* with certain kinds of false classifications. A person is dragged after the 'lingo' of how people think and what people want to hear, and we are often feel *forced* into this kind of lying, because we know that if we tell the truth as it is, others will want to take revenge against us and harm us. A person is scared to say the truth, because he's afraid that he'll get pummeled for it.

And so, we are forced to make up lies in order to satisfy people. But even as one does so, he can feel himself cringing inside, because he knows deep down that he's getting helplessly dragged after having to lie.

To this we can apply the statement of our Sages: “Woe to me from my Creator, woe to me from my inclination”. Whichever way we turn, we are stuck! How indeed is a person supposed to respond to such calls?

We are given all kinds of situations in life in which it is not possible for us to be totally truthful, even when we want to be truthful. Sometimes, it is permitted according to *Halacha* to lie, but it still gets us used to a lifestyle of lying on a regular basis; even though they are only small lies. How can we avoid this kind of lying that we feel helplessly dragged after on a regular basis??

Even in situations when you may lie, even when it’s a *mitzvah* to lie, getting used to lying causes you to not care about talking truthfully. It causes a person to become dominated by falsity.

As an example, a person doesn’t always fill out information correctly when he’s filing for various papers. Or, when one gets a phone call about a *shidduch*, he gets used to leaving out details, and this causes a person to get used to not being precise.

A person would have to be very truthful to be able to feel how is dragged after falsity all the time. Most people do not feel this, and are so used to lying like this regularly, that they even rationalize it and consider it to be totally acceptable! Even if a person senses that he tends to lie, a person is usually not consciously aware that he’s doing as he’s doing it.

Falsity Caused By Oneself: Talking Excessively & Not Being Precise With Words

We have described here how a person is dragged after conforming to the ‘lingo’ of society, and that is why he doesn’t talk truthfully. That is a problem that caused by one’s **external** surroundings.

There is also another reason why people are dragged after lying, and it comes from an **internal** source: when a person talks excessively and without pause; it gets him used to not being precise with his words.

Even if someone thinks before he talks (which the Ramban says to do), he might still have the habit of yapping about all kinds of subjects. When a person talks a lot, he is usually not being precise with his words.

Two Reasons For This Problem

There are two reasons for this problem:

1) When a person talks a lot, he is not precise with the words coming out of his mouth; he gets used to the lack of precision and he comes to accept this.

2) Another reason is because a person might have a nature to simply talk a lot about things which he has no real knowledge about.

Exploring Reason #2

When a person gives his opinions on every area, even if he knows what he's talking about, it causes him to lack precision in his wording. He will make up things or distort the information. Also, he feels that he has to know everything, what's going on all over the world, while in reality, he really doesn't know anything at all that he's talking about.

So when a person is used to talking about things he doesn't know about, first of all, he is not being precise with his words, and secondly, he get used to giving his own opinions, which will cause him to make up information, for he will be dragged after lies; he is getting dragged after lies, because he has gotten used to speaking from an untruthful place in himself.

In fact, most of the conversations in the world today are about things that people don't really know about!

As an example, there are people who like to “hock” about what's going on the world of insurance, of finances, of world events, of news about the Yeshiva world... the person who talks about all of these things talks about it as if he knows everything! What does he know? He thinks he knows every detail of all these topics! It gets a person used to being dragged after lying and making up information, because when he talks so much about so many different areas, he is definitely not speaking from a truthful place in himself.

To illustrate, sometimes you can hear young children talking about things they didn't know about, yet each one is defending his opinion strongly. Sometimes a child knows something because his father told him, but sometimes it is simply because the child thinks that he has his own opinion. How could it be that a person thinks he knows about so many areas of life? It can only be because he is so used to speaking about things he doesn't know about, and this causes him to get dragged after lack of precision. He will continue to get dragged after more and more falsity.

Lying Stemming From Motives

Another **internal** reason why a person is “dragged” after falsity has is because he is silently being motivated by something he wants. When a person speaks about a certain thing that he wants to speak about, he won't be precise in what he talks about, because his motives are taking him over.

For example, a person wants to buy an apartment, and he calls the person in charge, where he is told about all the qualities of the apartment. Is he being told the complete truth? The person trying to sell him the apartment will go on and on about how good the apartment is, and he will only extoll its virtues, and he's exaggerating as well. And it's not because he is a very positive-minded person who only knows how to see the good in something....

From the world of business, we can see this concept very well, that the details are lied about or exaggerated.

Another example: a person wants his son to get into a certain yeshivah, or he wants his daughter to get into a seminary. The world is not running after his son or daughter, so it is the father who has to fend for his children and praise them to the world, so that he can give them a good name. Often, the father will exaggerate the praises. Of course, it is not good if the father says the exact truth about his child; that's the other end of the extreme. But the point is that when a person praises his child to others, he's not being precise.

Why does a person lie like this? It is because he has a certain desire that he wants, so his mind is leading him towards getting what he wants, and he will even convince himself of what "reality" is, because he wants very badly that reality.

This kind of lying is different than the scenario of one who gets a phone call about a certain *shidduch* idea and he lies about the information. When it comes to *shidduchim*, you don't really know the person well whom you are talking about, and you are forced to give information, and you don't want to sound like a negative person who speaks badly about people. Therefore, you feel helpless, so you might lie in the information. There is no motive here that is causing you to lie; here, the lying is simply because of the surroundings that exaggerate. It's not like the person giving information wishes so much that the boy or girl will get married and build a *Bayis Neeman B'Yisrael*. He talks about the boy or girl in question because he doesn't want to sound like a person who talks badly about people.

Here, we are discussing a different kind of lying: when there is a certain desire that is motivating the person, which is subconsciously leading him to lie, so that he will get what he wants. It doesn't make a difference if this is being done consciously or not; either way, the person badly wants something, and that desire is causing him to lie.

With this kind of lying, the person is also being "dragged" after lying. Why he is being dragged after lying? It is because he has some kind of motivation for something, and that is leading him in the direction towards lying, so that he can get what he wants. If you would ask a person if he planned on lying, he would answer in the negative. He ended up saying differently than what he planned, and the reason for this is because he got dragged after lying; he had a certain desire he wanted, which is the real reason why he lied. It can be summed up as a war between what he wants. His *yetzer tov* is telling him to say the truth, and his *yetzer hora* is telling him to lie.

Here is another example which is very common. When a person has to do repairs in his house, he calls up the technician and tells him to come at 9 A.M. The technician comes at 9 A.M. and he's still in middle of *davening Shacharis*. When the person said it, he planned on doing what he says, but he's being dragged after a lie. He acquires the bad habit of not being precise in his words, and he gets used to a lifestyle of not caring about being truthful.

The Solution

Now we will speak about how to remedy this habit.

First of all, we must know that it's impossible to avoid falsity on This World we live, which is called "*alma d'shikra*", a world of falsity. We are connected with people who are not truthful, which affects us negatively. So it's impossible for a person to be 100% truthful as he lives on This World of falsity. What we can do is increase the amount of truth in our life, but we can't totally avoid falsity.

There are two things to do about this:

1. *Become Aware That You Tend To Be Untruthful In Your Words*

First of all, one needs to become aware in the first place that he lies on a regular basis. He should see which areas he tends to lie about. For example, a person can become aware that he lies when it comes to *shidduch* information.

2. *Before A Conversation, Plan What You Want To Talk About*

Once there was a *Mashgiach* who called me for information about a certain person he was involved with. Afterwards, he told me he needs two minutes to himself to think. I asked him, "What are you thinking about?" He said to me, "When I called you, I didn't plan on talking about a lot of the things I spoke about with you. I'm wondering which parts of the conversation were the parts that I really wanted to say to you." This is a truthful kind of person – he thinks to himself what he needs to say, and what he doesn't need to say.

Thus, if a person thinks and **plans beforehand about what exactly he needs to talk about in a conversation**, he will have a much better chance at being truthful in the conversation and to avoid getting dragged after lying. Without this preparation, there's a big chance that a person will end up lying in the conversation. A higher level than this is to think before you talk, as the Ramban says to do; but even if a person is not at that level, he can still plan before he has a conversation exactly about he wants to talk about.

3. *After A Conversation: "How Much Truth and Falsity Did I Say"....?*

The next thing to do is that after a person is done his conversations, he should think into the conversation and take notice of the different lies he said.

4. *Let It Bother You That You Had To Lie*

And, in addition to this, a person also needs to feel bothered that he didn't say the exact truth; it should pain him that he wasn't truthful. If a person isn't bothered by the lies he says, his trait of falsity will worsen.

Even if a person knows what he will say in a conversation, after the conversation he has to think into what he said which wasn't that true - and it should bother him.

Herein is the key to becoming a more truthful person: become aware that you tend to lie, plan out what you want to say in a conversation, and let it bother you afterwards that you didn't tell the exact truth.

Diverging From The Truth Vs. Saying A Total Lie

We are not referring to one who says outright lies; which is bona-fide *sheker* (falsehood). We are discussing here someone who leaves out some of the truth in his conversations. It is forbidden for a person to lie straight out; even in cases where it is permitted according to *Halacha* for a person **not to tell the total truth**, he is still not allowed to **lie** straight out. On a more subtle note, he is only allowed to diverge slightly from saying the exact truth (in extenuating circumstances), but there is never permission given to say an outright lie.

We are discussing a case in which one diverges from the exact truth in a conversation: that even when this is permitted, it still has to **bother** a person that he has diverged from the truth.

So after a person is done a conversation, he should mentally review the conversation and ask himself: “What was true about what I said, and what was false in what I said?”

Summary of The Solution

To summarize the way to fix the problem of being dragged after lying:

1) **Become aware that you tend to leave out the full truth in your conversations with people.** 2) **Plan out before a conversation about what you will talk about, so that you will have less of a chance of lying.**

3) Even when you do plan your conversations, you won't be able to totally tell the truth, so that's why you need the second part of the remedy: **After the conversation, review the conversation in your mind and ask yourself which parts of what you said were true, which parts were not true.**

4) **And, let it bother you that you didn't say the exact truth.**

In this way, even when you are forced to have conversations in which you inevitably don't tell the truth, you are able to awaken *emes*, the power in your soul to be truthful, after you have had the conversation.

The Deep Perspective Towards Life: Nothing Your Hear Is 100% True!

If a person is very self-aware, he can absorb the following deeper point.

There is no way to investigate into everything we hear and read, to see if it's true or not; there is not enough time in our schedule to do this. Rather, what a person can do is to train himself not to believe anything he hears or reads. Just like there is a *halacha* that you are not allowed to believe *lashon hora* that you hear, so too, you can train yourself not to believe everything you hear. You can definitely suspect that the information you are hearing is true, but don't ever believe everything with 100% certainty.

This is a deep perspective to have towards life: You can suspect, but you don't have to believe. We aren't able to investigate the total truth; sometimes we can get closer to the truth, but most of the time, we aren't able to even get close to the truth of a matter. The reason for this is simple: we are always missing information. We only see half the picture in whatever we come across, or we are simply just missing important details.

When it comes to hearing words of Torah, we need to search for true understanding it, and to keep refining the truth. But when it comes to anything else we hear, we need to train ourselves not to believe what we hear. We can suspect that what we hear is true, but we can't believe it with certainty. Anything we hear is possibly not true; nothing is concrete!

Often a person believes and accepts right away what he hears. But the inner way to live life is to never accept everything you hear with certainty. When you train yourself to get used to this kind of perspective, you are a lot closer to being truthful.

For example: If someone tells you he's coming to your house at 9 AM, maybe he will come - and maybe he won't. It's not definite that he will show up at 9 AM just because he told you he would.

This is not an issue of working on your *emunah*. It is simply because the information you hear in never exactly precise, so don't accept anything you hear with 100% certainty.

When you train yourself to get used to this kind of thinking, you gain doubly: besides for feeling bothered at falsity, you will also live all the time with a need for truth, and you will be aware all the time that you live in a world of falsity.

In Conclusion

We have explained here the root of falsity that is caused by being "dragged" after falsity, and how we can train ourselves to awaken truth in ourselves, which can prevent us from getting dragged after falsity.

3 | *Falsity Part 3 : Living In Denial*

Habitual Lying

We are discussing how to fix the trait of idle speech, which stems from the element of wind in the soul. The **earth-of-wind** in the soul is the source of speaking words of falsity.

We have already discussed **earth-of-earth-of-wind** [lying as a result of fooling oneself through his imagination] and **water-of-earth-of-wind** [getting dragged after lying]. Now we will discuss **wind-of-earth-of-wind**. This refers to those who regularly lie, on a set basis. *Chazal* describe this kind of habitual lying as *kat shakranim* – the “group of liars.”

The more subtle understanding of this is as follows. The pure state of the soul is to be *yoshor*, to be straight-minded and honest. After the sin of Adam, man tends to have *cheshbonos rabim* (“many calculations”), as opposed to being *yoshor*. If someone has a dominant amount of wind-of-earth-of-wind in his soul, his speech is drawn towards lying, and he will do so on a regular basis. It comes from a “crookedness” that has developed in the heart - the opposite of a heart with *yashrus* in it.

In clearer language, a person who constantly lies is someone whose initial thought (*muskal rishon*) is to say a lie.

If someone’s initial thought is to say the truth but he ended up lying, even if he ends up lying many times, then he doesn’t have the problem we are discussing. We are discussing here someone who lies on a regular basis **because his initial thought** always leads him in the direction of lying.

The *muskal rishon* (initial thought) of the mind always begins in the heart. If the heart of a person has become “crooked”, a person is missing *yashrus* in his heart, and this will affect how he thinks. The mind follows his heart, and since his heart is not concerned with truth, his mind’s first thoughts are led in the direction of lying.

A lesser degree of this kind of problem (though it is still a problem) is that even if one doesn’t lie on a regular basis like this and he still has some *yashrus* in himself, still, the fact that he lives on This World and is affected by it negatively can be a factor in his habit of lying.

We find this in a person who wants to mimic his surroundings and he sees that people do things that are false, so he might follow the crowd, simply because he sees that’s the way of the world. This kind of person doesn’t lie as much as the first kind of person we mentioned here, but he is still close to that level. He is drawn towards falsity; he has learned how to wear it, like a disguise so that he can fit into the rest of the crowd. With this kind of person, it’s really not part of his nature to lie, but he learns the trick of the trade in order to fit in with society.

These are two general kinds of people who are of the “*kat shakranim*”, the group of people on this world who regularly lie. Understandably, these two kinds of people only make up a small percentage of people.

Lying To Ourselves

But there is another kind of habitual lying which almost all of us have: lying to *oneself*.

Most of the lying that we recognize is when people lie to others. But the main kind of falsity which manifests in our soul is when a person *lies to himself*!

A person might hear about this concept of “lying to yourself” and immediately assume that he doesn’t have this problem, and that it is only others who have the problem. But this reaction shows that the person has fooled himself so much that he doesn’t realize how much he lies to himself!

In fact, most people, without exception, are really lying to themselves, every day, and all day.

Here’s how we can see it. All people have things that they want, and in addition, all people have certain energies. What happens when a person encounters something that he doesn’t want, and what happens when a person encounters something that he feels he doesn’t have energy for? A healthy reaction is for a person to realize that he simply isn’t capable of doing it, so he doesn’t force himself to do what he can’t do. But if someone doesn’t know how to be honest with himself, either he will involve himself with something else, or, he might deny the facts a little bit, so that he can calm himself.

In doing so, the person denies reality. How does a person deny reality? He convinces himself what reality is, suiting it to fit his needs.

All of us encounter situations which we don’t want to be in, as well as situations which we don’t have energy for. The issue is: how we react to those situations.

A person who is honest with himself understands that he is encountering a situation that contradicts his energies, and he deals with it accordingly. But most people, when they encounter unwanted situations, will either get involved with something else, or they will deny the reality to a certain extent.

Sometimes it’s hard to believe how a person can deny reality so much, when the truth is so apparent! Yet, people still deny reality somewhat, even when the reality is so stark and obvious.

Examples of Denial

Here is an example: If a woman becomes widowed, *rachmana litzlan*, she has a very difficult reality to face. At first, she might console herself over the fact that there will eventually be *techiyas hameisim* (resurrection), but it’s not the actual *techiyas hameisim* part of this which is comforting her;

it is rather a means to calm herself and to tell herself that her husband's death is only a temporary situation. It's a way for her to deny the reality of the situation she has to deal with. When she knows that he can come back to life any day, it's a way of telling herself that she doesn't have to live with his death for that long.

It's not really coming from a deep *emunah* that she has in *techiyas hameisim*; it's rather a way of denying reality. Sometimes, it could really be that she is truly comforted by having *emunah* in *techiyas hameisim*, but most of the time, it is not her *emunah* which is comforting her, and it is rather a way for her to deny the reality.

There are more examples as well of this concept, which most people can identify with. We are describing a tendency in people to deny reality somewhat; no one will deny reality 100%, but it is very common for a person to deny certain parts of the reality, as a way to calm oneself down that the reality he's facing isn't as difficult as it appears.

Here is another example: A child comes home from school and complains that school is hard. One parent will get the child to do something else to take his mind off the problem, and another kind of parent will deny the reality somewhat: "It's not actually difficult. It'll pass." In this way, a person runs away from facing the harsh reality. The parent doesn't even bother to find out what's really bothering the child, and he just tells the child that everything will be okay, because it's easier to deny reality.

There are many cases we can recall in our life in which we deny the harshness of reality. We tend to deal with our problems by denying them somewhat; if not totally, at least partially. This is the depth of "*kat shakranim*" in our soul – we lie to ourselves. Either we run away from reality by taking our mind off with it as we are involved with it, or, we deny reality.

Becoming Honest With Ourselves: Attaining Self-Awareness of the Soul

To begin the solution to this, we must know the five general layers of our soul [from lowest to highest point]: action, feeling, speech, thought, and will. (Each of these also subdivides into several layers, but these are the five general layers of the soul, beginning from lowest layer to highest layer).

Awareness To Our Actions

Man has the habit of pushing himself away from what he needs to do. A person is in middle of doing something, yet it's possible he is not aware of what he is doing! Sometimes a person is simply spacing out, but other times it is because the person gets involved with something else as he's doing something, and later he doesn't even remember that he did it.

If a person is told that he did something and he lies intentionally that he didn't do it, this is the classic kind of liar, which we addressed earlier. But now we are dealing with a person who simply doesn't remember that he did something. What is the reason for this?

It is really because he wasn't **aware** as he was doing something; and why? Because he didn't want to do what he did, and that's why his memory of the act gets pushed away. Right now, it's forgotten from his consciousness, and that is the truth. It's not because there is something wrong with his memory. It's because earlier, he managed to push himself away from the act as he was doing it, and that's why he doesn't remember he did it.

Even more so, another way that people deal with problems is when they do what they have to do, but they didn't want to do it (for whatever reason), and therefore, a person teaches himself how to deny what he did. To illustrate, a child often denies what he did, or; he denies certain details of what he did. The next day you ask him what he did, and he says something a little differently than yesterday. Sometimes the child is consciously aware that he is lying. But sometimes it can be because the child really believes that he's telling the truth – he denies reality, or a part of reality, so that he won't have to deal with the reality of what he did. He has fooled himself and therefore he really believes what he's saying.

If a person hears about this concept and he says, "I never have this problem," it must be that he lives in so much denial that he is totally unaware of how much he lies to himself. He cannot come to terms with the fact that he has the problem and that's why he teaches his subconscious to deny it.

Many times a person did something which was improper, and he can't deal with the reality of his mistake, so he learns how to deny realities. He might wake up on *Erev Yom Kippur* that he has to do *teshuvah*, and that's when he thinks about what he did; but it's even possible that even on *Erev Yom Kippur* he doesn't recall what he did that year.

Even if a person remembers that he did something improper, he will tend to go easy on himself and deny some of the details to what he did. To illustrate, often, if a person is in a *Din Torah* with another and he is asked to tell over his side of the story, he forgets some of the details, to the betterment of his situation. We aren't speaking about liars who don't care to lie. We are speaking of even a G-d fearing individual; a person might lie to himself, and as a result, he ends up lying to others, because he believes that he is telling the truth - and he is unaware that he is denying certain details of what really happened.

So there are two scenarios of this tendency to deny. One scenario is that a person denies the external factors in the reality, and the second scenario of this is when a person denies his own actions that he did.

Awareness Of Our Emotions/Feelings

Now we will take this even further.

We all have emotions. We have positive emotions such as joy, love, and enthusiasm. We also have negative emotions such as sadness, anger, jealousy, and conceit. How does a person deal with the reality of his negative emotions?

Some people don't care if they have bad *middos*. For example, a *baal gaavah* (conceited person) doesn't care that he has *gaavah*; he'll even say it openly: "I'm proud of myself! I'm proud of what I do." This kind of confidence is conceited, and it is the opposite of the Torah's outlook on healthy confidence. A truthful kind of person is bothered, though, when he realizes that he has bad *middos*. If he becomes aware that he has *gaavah*, he seeks ways in how he can work on removing himself from traces of *gaavah*.

But a person might not be able to deal with this reality in himself - so he will deny that he has *gaavah*. If a person is a bit more truthful, though, instead of denying altogether that he has *gaavah*, he will convince himself that his *gaavah* is holy, (*gaavah d'kedushah*).

Or, if he knows he's jealous of someone, he'll convince himself that his jealousy is the holy kind of jealousy, "jealousy of scholars" (*kinas sofrim*) because he can't accept the fact that he has a bad middah of jealousy. He might find many statements of *Chazal* that proves that he's right. He denies the reality.

We have seen how people deny the reality of their negative emotions.

Lower Emotions (Nefesh HaBehaimis) and Higher Emotions (Nefesh Elokis)

Let's explore this part more deeply, and we will see how there are really two parts to this. There are two kinds of emotions we have - and there is a huge difference between them.

There are natural emotions we have, which come from our *nefesh habehaimis* (lower and animalistic part of the soul⁶), and there are emotions which come from our *middos* (character traits).

Our *nefesh habehaimis* has emotions in it, but these are **not** *middos*; even animals have feelings, so there are feelings which come from our *nefesh habehaimis*, "animalistic" kinds of emotions.

Then there are feelings we have which come from our *middos* (character traits). We all have a *nefesh habehaimis* with its negative emotions, and we all have *middos* that come from our *Nefesh Elokis* [G-dly soul]; and we also have [higher] feelings, which are called *hargashah*.

To know how to differentiate which of our feelings come from our *nefesh habehaimis* and which feelings comes from our *Nefesh Elokis*, it's a broad matter, and we won't get into this discussion now. Here we are focusing our discussion on the very concept that there are feelings which come from our *nefesh habehaimis* as well as our *Nefesh Elokis*, and that a person has to be aware to both of these feelings.

⁶ See Tanya chapter 1

Most people are not even aware of the feelings in their *nefesh habehaimis*, and surely they don't reach self-awareness of the feelings which come from the *Nefesh Elohis*. When a person lives life on the level of *nefesh habehaimis*, he is not aware of his feelings at all, not even his lower emotions, which are of his *nefesh habehaimis*.

If we ask a person "What makes you happy? What makes you sad?" he often responds, "Um... I need some time to think about that." And the answers he comes up with are very superficial and so far from the truth. A person lives life for so many years yet he doesn't even know what makes him really happy!

A person can't give an honest answer when he's not aware of himself. One has to be aware of his feelings and then know how to deal with them.

If a person doesn't know how to deal with his emotions, what will happen? He will come to the conclusion that emotions are some kind of weakness in himself, therefore he tells himself that he must run away from his emotions.

Others recognize the reality of their emotions, but they will accept their emotions they can deal with and deny the other emotions in themselves that they can't handle. What will happen when the person encounters the negative emotion that he doesn't know how to deal with (because he denies it)? Either he will run away from it because he wants to "push it off", or, he will completely deny it.

When a person runs away from his own emotions, this is the total level of lying to oneself. Such a person, who runs away from his own emotions, is closing off his emotions in the process. And if he accepts some of his emotions but he can't accept other emotions he has, he will also run away from the emotions he can't deal with, by dwelling on the positive emotions he has. Or, he will get busy thinking about something else. Or, he gets involved with doing something else. Or, he will deny his emotions (of his *nefesh habehaimis*) altogether!

The Mistake of Learning and Teaching Secular Psychology

The idea of validating emotions, as opposed to denying them, is a concept that can apply even to gentiles, for it is within the arena of the lower soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*.⁷

In recent years, psychologists have been bringing in material of secular psychology into the Torah world, because they wanted people to recognize their emotions of the *nefesh habehaimis* and thereby be improved. Their hope was to educate people about the nature of the *nefesh habehaimis* in the human soul; to become aware of it and thereby develop it and improve one's emotional well-being.

⁷ Note: For further research, see *Getting To Know Your Feelings (Chapter One)*, the Rav brings from the Chasam Sofer that there are also subtle differences between even the *nefesh habehaimis* of a Jew and the *nefesh habehaimis* of a gentile, and that even the physical body of a Jew is different than a gentile's body.

The problem with the entire approach, however, is that they have buried their own souls in the process of doing this! In favor of developing the *nefesh habehaimis* – the animalistic part of the soul - they ignore the deeper aspects of a Jew's soul (the *nefesh Elohis*, the G-dly, Divine soul).

Working with only the *nefesh habehaimis* (the lower emotions) alone is a way that can work for gentiles, but it is not the way for the members of the nation of *Yisrael*. Most people involved with secular psychology today do not have this mentality, and therefore, they have harmed the souls of Jews they have taught – it's as if they have buried them.

Self-help for a Jew needs to be drawn from understanding the *Nefesh Elohis* (the G-dly, Divine aspect of the Jewish soul). One must become aware of his *Nefesh Elohis*, which are his higher powers of the soul.⁸ This kind of self-awareness is a much deeper kind of self-awareness.

However, even our *Nefesh Elohis*, which contains a lot of good in it, also needs to be perfected of course, and one needs to learn how to deal with those emotions.⁹

We won't get into the difference here between our *nefesh habehaimis* and our *Nefesh Elohis*, but we have laid down the outline: that they are totally different sources of emotions in us.

Awareness To Our Speech

We have explained self-awareness of our surroundings, our actions, and our emotions. Now we will progress to discuss a higher part of our soul, which is our speech, and how to become more aware of it.

When most people talk, there is little awareness to what is coming out of the mouth. There are many reasons for this: it can be because the person isn't thinking as he's talking, or it can be for deeper reasons. Sometimes a person is talking and he is totally unaware that he's talking, and another person is talking as he's thinking into something deeply, and because he's thinking so deeply, he's not aware of what he's saying! There's a contradiction between his thoughts and his speech.

It is a very subtle matter of why people aren't aware of their thoughts, but most of the time a person is not aware of his thoughts simply because he speaks without thinking, and then he doesn't even remember what he said- and he's even ready to almost swear that he didn't say the words he said.

This problem affects all people somewhat, and the only question is how much of it affects each person, because there are degrees to it.

Awareness To The Thoughts

⁸ Note: The nature of the "Nefesh Elohis" is discussed in *Sefer Tanya*. To date, there are several different English translations of *Sefer Tanya* available in stores.

⁹ Refer to *Getting To Know Your Feelings*.

Now we will progress to discuss awareness of our thoughts.

We are usually aware of our basic thoughts, but there is a more subtle kind of thought which quickly passes through our mind from time to time. These are fleeting thoughts which come and go very quickly, like a bolt of lightning.

All of us sometimes notice that we have thoughts that come and go very quickly. We have thoughts that are pleasant to think about, and we have no problem thinking about these thoughts, because they don't challenge us. But there are some thoughts we don't like to think about, such as to think about something that reminds us of something scary.

Sometimes, we are seized with sudden sadness, and we don't know why. This can be because our *mazal* is seeing something sad, even though we can't see it, as the Sages revealed; this is the more subtle reason. But many times it is a passing thought that we don't like to think about, and that is what makes us sad. We can't figure out why we have suddenly become sad, but it's really because a negative thought has quickly passed through our mind.

These passing thoughts are about things that we feel like we can't deal with; they come like a flash of lightning. That is why don't become aware of them, because we don't want to think about them.

But there are other thoughts which we can become aware of, just, we don't want to know of them, so we like to push it out of the mind. This causes a person to lose awareness to his thoughts.

These passing thoughts are really our inner thoughts, which are very hidden from our conscious state. Our external thoughts are gruff in their nature and they are revealed to our consciousness, and sometimes we deny even those basic thoughts; it's harder to deny those thoughts, though, because they're so obvious. But our inner thoughts, which pass very quickly, are about things that we would rather not think about (because they entail some kind of hardship), and therefore, because we don't want to think about them, we push them away from our mind.

Awareness of The Ratzon (Will)

Now we will see how people deny awareness to their *ratzon* (will) as well.

There are things we want, as well as things that we want but we wish we wouldn't want it because we know deep down that it's bad, so we deny the fact that we want it.

For example, a person knows that *gaavah* (conceit) is a bad *middah*. If we ask him if he wants to feel *gaavah*, he will say "No". But the truth is, he really does want it! It's a pleasurable feeling, after all. He just knows deep down that he's not supposed to want it, so he denies the fact that he wants it. He says, "No way! I don't want anything to do with *gaavah*!" But the truth is that he's lying to himself. In fact, his own *gaavah* has convinced him that he doesn't want *gaavah*. He's not aware of his desire for *gaavah* and therefore he denies the desire for it.

We will point out here that this is not a discussion about fixing the *middah* of *gaavah* – it is about discovering what our desires are.

Most people are not aware of their desires at all. True self-awareness is very rare and it often eludes a person. It's really because a person doesn't want to deal with himself. He knows deep down that he if he were to discover what's going on inside himself, the truth would scare him. And because a person doesn't want to be afraid of his own self, it's more comfortable to deny what's going on inside himself; he'll even deny every aspect of his soul rather than deal with the facts.

Ratzon is the deepest layer in the soul, so when a person denies his *ratzon*, he uproots all of his self-awareness with it, because he has uprooted the root of his own soul.

Outline of the Solution

Now we will begin the solution to all of this.

1) First of all, a person needs to decide that he will seek truth. Without agreeing to do this, none of the following will be of any use.

2) After making that firm decision, one has to agree that we are not perfect, and that man by essence is an imperfect creation. We must agree with the fact that we have shortcomings. If one can't accept with the fact that he has some weaknesses, then he denies his entire self; it resembles a subtle form of heresy.

3) The next step is for a person to agree that he is prepared to work hard in order to fix his shortcomings.

4) And, believe that Hashem has given you the ability to work hard on yourself.

Now comes the following. You need to develop the following two abilities.

5) The first ability is called *birur*, the ability to clarify and take apart a matter. You need to know how to explain and isolate different aspects of a problem, so that you can properly define what exactly you need to work on.

6) The second ability you need is *adinus* (subtlety), also called *dakus* (refinement). When you learn how to become aware of subtleties, you are able to find yourself agreeing with the various subtle aspects of the soul, and then you will be able to recognize subtle aspects in your soul.

You will then be able to tell a much more subtle difference between truth and falsity: the difference between a truth and the total truth (*emes* vs. *emes l'amatih*). Your self-awareness will greatly increase along with this.

Without developing this ability, a person spends his whole life lying to himself.

7) Another ability a person needs is to acquire a deep inner calmness (*sheket*). The more you attain a deep inner calmness in your soul, the better you can listen to yourself, recognize yourself better, and experience yourself.

The deepest level of this is to recognize the deep subtleties of your *ratzon*; the second-to-highest level is to recognize the subtleties of your thoughts; and the more basic level of this is to recognize your feelings.

But in order to experience the deep subtlety of your will, thoughts, and feelings, you need the previous tools we mentioned, which is: to be interested in the truth, to acquire the ability of sensing subtleties and fine points, and to attain deep calmness of the soul. If you have those three factors, you are able to experience all of your soul's layers.

Secular Psychology Vs. Understanding The Jewish Soul

The study of secular psychology about the human soul can get a person to experience the emotions of his *nefesh habehaimis* and become aware of them, to a certain extent, so it is not totally false.

But, our point here is that when a person relies on those methods to help himself, he might feel that he has discovered a utopian kind of existence, as if he's living on the Next World with all that he is discovering; in reality, he's just learning how to make his life on **This** World better. It's not going to give him a better life on the **Next** World. He might make his life happier on this world, but he's not refining his spiritual situation.

Beginning To Leave Falsity

The more a person can identify subtle and refined points about the soul and he attains inner calm, he can penetrate deeper and deeper into his soul.

Most people, who are caught up in superficiality, are immersed in falsehood even though they don't realize it, because when a person remains superficial, he is really lying to himself all the time. Falsehood affects all of us, but when someone works on self-awareness, he is aware of what he knows about himself and what he doesn't know about himself, so he is a lot less affected by falsity.

Although the problem of lying to oneself affects all people in different degrees, we can lessen it a lot when we truly work to understand our souls and become aware of our feelings, thoughts, and desires.

The more a person understands himself, he can see that he doesn't yet understand his more inner layers. He should view this discovery with the understanding that what he knows about himself is *emes* (the truth), and what he doesn't yet recognize is *emes l'amitah* (the total truth), and that the more inner layers after that are totally not yet recognizable.

When one is interested in truth, he will seek to get to total truth about himself, and he will be able to get to even the deepest parts of the soul eventually. In fact, it can be said of him that although he's not there yet at the total truth about himself, he's still connected with that truth, even though he hasn't reached it yet. This is based on the words of *Rabbeinu Yonah*, that when a person accepts upon himself that he will do something, it is considered as if he already did it, even though he didn't do it yet.

In Conclusion

These are words can be further expanded into a discussion for itself, but for now, let it suffice with just mentioning the roots of this matter.

We have studied here how people lie to themselves when it comes to denying their surroundings, actions, base emotions, higher emotions, speech, thought, and will.

The way to correct it, as we outlined here briefly, is: to search for truth, to agree that we are not perfect, to agree that we will work hard at self-improvement, to agree that Hashem gives us ability to work on ourselves; and to be able to clarify and become aware of subtle points about the soul, along with inner calm.

From inner calm, a person can slowly leave the tendency of lying to himself, and to penetrate further and further into the truth about himself, getting closer and closer to the “seal of Hashem that is *emes* (truth).”

4 | *Falsity Part 4: Inaccurate Speech*¹⁰

Exaggerating When Our Speech Becomes Inaccurate

We continue to here to discuss the element of wind. We are currently discussing **earth-of-wind**, which is the source of words of falsity. Now we will discuss, with the help of Hashem, words of falsity which come from **fire-of-earth-of-wind**.

Wind is the root of speech, and earth-of-wind (its downside) refers to false speech. Fire spreads pasts its boundaries. Thus, **fire-of-earth-of-wind** in the soul is the source of words that go past their true boundaries, causing a person to exaggerate.

This is not to be confused with one who brags about his praises, which stems from **fire-of-wind**. Here, we are not dealing yet with fire-of-wind; here we are dealing with fire-of-earth-of-wind, which is when one goes beyond the bounds of truth in what he is saying. This is termed by *Chazal* as “*sefas yeser*” (extra talk), in the words of Rashi. It is also called *guzma* - exaggerating.

There are different forms of exaggerating. A child often exaggerates, and this stems from the imagination, which is very dominant in a child. Some people grew up with a tendency to exaggerate because they had a big amount of imagination when they were children, and they might even remain that way when they are adults, so they can continue to exaggerate even when they are children (adults).

Others exaggerate in the form of exaggerating their praises, which is really a form of *gaavah*/arrogance, but we will not discuss this here; we hope to discuss it (it) later, with the help of Hashem. Here, we are speaking about *sefas yeser*, which stems from fire-of-earth-of-wind.

How An Impaired Mind Affects Speech

Most people, when they talk, are not being precise with their words. Why is it that most of the time people are not careful with the precision of their words?

It is really because the thinking process of one’s mind is often impaired. When one’s thoughts are off-base, this will also affect the words coming out of the mouth, and thus the words coming out of his mouth will be off as well.

The words a person speaks are stemming from what he thinks and feels. Thus, if the thoughts and feelings of a person are off-base, so will the words will also come out imprecise.

This is the first reason why people are not precise.

¹⁰ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-004-falsity-part-4-inaccurate-speech>

How Emotions Affect Speech

There is also another reason why people tend to be imprecise with their words (besides for arrogance, which we will address later).

As we said, we speak either from our thoughts or from our feelings. When a person speaks calmly, usually he is talking from his thinking intellect. When a person is yelling or shouting, usually it's because his emotions have overtaken his intellect. He still has his intellect of course, but for a temporary amount of time, the emotions have overtaken his intellect, and therefore the words he speaks will be stemming from his emotions and not from his thoughts.

Now that we have explained that, we can now proceed to understand the following. When it comes to intellect, most people know how to articulate their words to be in line with what they're thinking. But when it comes to emotions, most of the time, a person does not know how to talk accurately from his emotions. With most people, the intellect and emotions are off-base; this is the natural way of the world.

Inaccurate Speech When It Comes To Intellect and Emotion

A Torah scholar is usually very precise with his intellect, and he can speak clearly from his intellect. He can know how to give a good shiur which makes sense and is said with clarity. (Some people are better at expressing their thoughts than others can).

However, it can happen that a person is very bright when it comes to learning *Gemara*, but when he has dealings with others in worldly matters, his brilliance fails him, and he isn't able to express with precision from his intellect. One simple reason for this is because he can be a "*Talmid Chochom*" when it comes to learning Torah, but not when it comes to worldly matters. He can be very smart in what he knows, but when it comes to worldly matters, his intellect is not that different than people from the street.

Even if one has a precise intellect both when it comes to his Torah learning as well as when it comes to worldly matters, when it comes to verbalizing their emotions, most people cannot express them accurately.

(There are also people who don't learn Torah but they know how to express themselves in a precise manner, because it is part of their personality to be precise, and not because they have worked on themselves to refine their precision).

It is thus possible that a Torah scholar might not be precise when it comes to worldly matters, because his intellect has only been refined with regards to learning Torah, and not when it comes to dealing with worldly matters.

And even if he can express himself precisely from his intellect as well as when it comes to worldly matters, it's still possible that his emotions are off-base. For example, when he gets emotional, like

when he feels a powerful love for Torah, his emotions might overtake him so much that it warps his intellect a little bit, when he's in that "emotional" mode.

If someone didn't work on his *middos* yet, his emotions are usually off-base, and as a result, he cannot express his emotions accurately.

There are some people who don't have the problem of not expressing their emotions with accuracy. This can be for either one of two reasons. Either this is because they worked on their *middos* and therefore their emotions don't overtake them, thus they can express their emotions precisely. Others, though, are able to express their emotions precisely because they have a strong amount of the element of earth in their souls, and therefore they can contain their reactions very well. In particular, when one perfects his element of earth, which provides stability of the soul, even when he gets emotional he can speak from his intellect, because he is very good at being precise; he knows how to cool off and contain his emotions.

These are two kinds of people who are precise in their emotions and can contain them, and therefore when they speak from emotion in themselves, they know how to express their emotions accurately. But most people, as we said, when they are in an emotional mode, do not know how to speak accurately from the place of emotion in themselves.

Summary

So we have described here three kinds of people:

- 1) Those who do not speak with accuracy, both in describing their thoughts and emotions.
- 2) Those who are immersed in Torah and they have a precise intellect when it comes to their Torah learning, but their intellect is weak when it comes to worldly matters, and therefore they can't express themselves with precision when it comes to dealing with the world.
- 3) Others are precise in their intellect both in Torah and in worldly matters, but their emotions are unrefined and therefore the words they speak when they are in an emotional mode do not come out accurately.

Lack of Awareness To One's Speech

There is also another kind of expression that does not give an accurate description of what's going on inside the person: there is a kind of a person whose speech is disconnected from his intellect, as well as from his emotional awareness, as he's speaking.

When a person says something that doesn't make sense, we can see clearly that he simply didn't pay attention to what he's saying, because he just talks and talks and talks. But even when a person does speak from his intellect, sometimes he is disconnected from his thoughts as he's talking; he loses

track of his thoughts because of what he's saying, and he has to heavily strain his mind in order to get back his train of thought.

Why does this happen? Sometimes, it's because a person is focusing too much on the next thing he's about to say. This is linked with the imagination, because imagination can cause a person to become too focused on a certain point and disconnect him from his thoughts. Even when a person is calm and he's not in noisy surroundings, internally he can still have "noise" in his thoughts, and this is when imagination takes over.

Sometimes, however, it is because a person is so concentrated on what he's saying that he becomes very focused, to the point that it becomes difficult to have constant thought.

The Solution: Resting The Mind In The Midst of Speaking

The solution to this problem is that the mind needs to be given rest as a person is talking, so that the thoughts won't dominate too much and throw a person off-balance of what he's saying.

When a person is speaking to the public, his mind might weaken and he's disconnected from what he's saying. Some speakers know how to immediately return to their previous thoughts even after this happens, and the listeners might be aware of this or they might not be, but either way, it happens to all speakers: the thoughts fly around.

The Problem of Disconnection

Another problem that can exist, which is more subtle, is that as a person is speaking, he can be disconnected from his thoughts and emotions. He might lose awareness of his thoughts or emotions as he is speaking. Most people are indeed weak when it comes to conscious awareness of their thoughts and emotions.

The results of all the issues we have described here is that the lack of accuracy in one's speech causes a person to say things that have nothing to do with the previous words he was just saying.

One part of the problem, we explained, is that a person disconnects from his emotions or thoughts as he is speaking, and this is the more subtle point of the problem; it causes a person to say things that are disconnected from what he said previously.

But the more obvious part of the problem, which is what we are discussing, is that it can cause a person to speak falsity. Since we are discussing how to fix the trait of speaking falsity, we will focus the discussion here on how to rectify this area.

When a person is not exactly aware of what he is saying, his words will be imprecise. He will say things that have nothing to do with what he just said and this causes him to speak words that are inaccurate.

This is the reason behind why people tend to say things that are inaccurate.

The Solution To Disconnection From Intellect and Emotion

To give the general outline of the solution, if someone has (an) impaired intellect or emotions, the solution is clear: he must learn Torah in-depth to develop his intellect and then he'll be able to learn how to express his thoughts properly, being that he has refined his intellect through the power of Torah study, which sharpens the mind. In addition, he must learn how to refine his emotions.

Verbalizing The Thoughts

When it comes to the area of refining the intellect, the Ramban says that one should think what he says before he talks. This will teach him how to be aware of what he says.

The superficial solution which people use for this is to learn how to speak slowly, which helps a person gain some conscious awareness of what he's saying. This is a superficial solution, though – why? It is because when a person is saying words of Torah, he is limiting his words as he does this, which hampers his learning.

Although we can make use of this superficial solution to a certain extent, we will mainly need a method that is more inner and spiritual. If one wants to make his intellect more precise, the inner method is that he should learn Torah in-depth and, in addition, he should also think before he talks when it comes to worldly matters.

Verbalizing Emotions

And if one wants to learn how to express his emotions precisely, he should learn how to refine his emotions, which is a broad work in and of itself.¹¹ And he can also talk more slowly, as a superficial method to help himself.

Remaining Connected To Your Thoughts And Emotions As You Are Talking

But we need to add on the more inner aspect of the solution: get used to remaining connected to your thoughts and your feelings as you speak.

When the average person speaks, either he thinks about what he will say before he talks and then he talks (but he doesn't think that much as he's talking, because he's so focused on getting the words

¹¹ It is recommended for this to see *Getting To Know Your Feelings and the Understanding Your Middos series and the Fixing Your Earth and Fixing Your Water and Fixing Your Wind series of the Rav.*

out), or, a person will think as he's talking, but he's very focused on his talking and not on his thoughts. For this reason, most people, when they talk, lose their thought process as they are talking.

So as a person is talking, he can think to himself, "What's the main thing here? What I'm saying, or the fact that I'm thinking?"

Most people feel that the main thing when they speak is the words and not their thoughts. But an inner person knows that as he's speaking, he reminds himself that his thinking process is the main thing, as opposed to the words coming out of his mouth. He puts more emphasis on his **thoughts** as he's talking rather than on the **words** he is saying, and this in turn will cause his words to be more precise.

The same goes for emotions. When a person is focused on his emotion rather than on his words, he is connected to his emotion, and therefore the words will express his emotions more precisely than if he would be more focused on the words coming out of his mouth.

A person who exercises this is one who rectifies the trait of falsity (particularly fire-of-earth-of-wind), and he is one who lives an inner kind of life even as he's among this world of superficiality. Most people as they talk lose their innerness as they talk. It is indeed written, "*My soul leaves when I speak with him*". But an inner kind of person makes sure to remain focused on his thoughts or emotions even as he's talking. This is a very inner kind of life to live.

The more a person refines his mind, he refines his imagination, and then the imagination doesn't affect his speech as much, and his words become more precise.

Some Examples

For example, when a person is giving a *shiur* and people ask him questions in middle, how can he return to his previous thoughts? It's a very subtle matter to know if one should focus more on the question or if he should return to his thoughts, because he shouldn't compromise on his exertion in Torah learning, so it's hard for him to discern what he should immerse his thoughts in. So it's impossible to say how to act in such a situation. Nor is it possible to give exact guidance in this matter when it comes to any scenario, because we cannot be 100% inaccurate in how we speak.

Let's give a very practical example, though, which helps us understand how to apply the concept. A person goes home at the end of the day. Assuming that he is a more emotional kind of person (and most people are more emotional than intellectual), and he is told of things that awaken his emotions, what happens? His emotions simply react to what he's told, and they will be uneven reactions. The emotions will overtake him and he won't be able to express his words properly.

What, indeed, should a person do if he wants his words to be more precise as he's in middle of emotionally reacting? One should try to become aware of his thoughts and emotions as he's reacting. Awareness to what you're thinking and feeling will slowly refine your intellect and

emotions, and then the words coming out of your mouth will be a more accurate description of what's going on in your thoughts or feelings.

This is a subtle inner kind of work. If one isn't used to working with his inner world, all of the words here will seem strange to him.

The point of all of this is: to get our words to become more accurate.

5 | *Flattery Part 1: Internal Dishonesty*¹²

The Source of Flattery

We continue here with the help of Hashem to explain how we fix our element of wind in the soul, the root of idle speech.

We are currently up to discussing **water-of-wind** in the soul, which, as we mentioned briefly, is the source of the trait of flattery (*chanufah*). The Sages say that those who regularly engage in flattery are of the four kinds of people who cannot greet the *Shechinah*.

Flattery is about false connection with others. When one speaks words of flattery to another, which is our current subject, this stems from **water-of-wind**. The wind is the root of speech, and the water is the root of connection; thus, **water-of-wind** is the source of words of flattery.

Water-of-wind (words of flattery) subdivides into four more branches: earth, water, wind and fire.

Earth-of-Water-of-Wind: Flattery That Reflects Internal Dishonesty

Earth-of-water-of-wind is the source of speaking words of “flattery” that are caused by an “internal dishonesty”. *Chazal* describe this as “one who is not *“tocho k’baro”* - his “inside is not like his outside”. *Chazal* also call this “one who is not *“piv v’libo shavin”*, “his mind and heart are not equal with each other” – one who speaks words that are not matching what’s really on his heart.

Now we will proceed to understand the following.

When words remain unspoken in a person’s heart, the words remains in the heart, and this is the “earth” aspect that is involved in words of flattery. The words coming out of his mouth, which do not match what’s on his heart, are the “wind” aspect in the words of flattery.

We will explain this in broader terms. When one speaks words that do not match what’s going on in his heart, the words are superficial; this would be **wind-of-water-of-wind**. But as for the words unspoken that remain in his heart which he hasn’t released outward - that part stems from the “heaviness” of the element of earth. So this particular aspect is the **earth-of-water-of-wind** that is a factor of the flattery, and that is what we will discuss here in this chapter.

We have explained so far how earth and wind are factors in internal dishonesty, but water and fire can also be involved in dishonesty, depending on the situation. If the words of flattery are words conveying love, it is water (because love/connection is rooted in water). If the words are about honor,

¹² <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-005-flattery-part-1-internal-dishonesty>

it is fire, because honor is a trait of fire [because fire seeks to ascend, which is the idea of honor]. An example of this is what the Sages state that Korach used flattery to engage the others with him in his argument, by speaking words to them that made them feel honored.

So the “earth” aspect in speaking flattery are the words unspoken which remain in the heart. The “wind” aspect is the words that come out of his mouth, which are not in line with the words in his heart. The “water” is when one speaks words of flattery to another that are loving, and the “fire” is when one speaks of flattery that makes another feel more honored.

We have described the evil traits which stem from each of the four possibilities in **water-of-wind**. Let’s now discuss how we can rectify these traits, beginning from earth, then water, then wind and then fire which are within water-of-wind.

Rectifying Earth-of-Water-of-Wind

Earth-of-water-of-wind, as we explained, is when a person speaks words that are not in line with his heart. This is what lays behind one who speaks flattering words to another.

Why does a person not say what’s really on his heart? One reason is because he simply doesn’t want to say them. But why doesn’t he want to say them? He is being silent from those words, and his silence is really a form of flattery. The Sages state that the followers of Korach were silent so that they could flatter him and win his approval. So we see that being silent in the face of flattery can be a form of flattery itself.

When the words of a person remain dormant in his heart and he speaks words of flattery instead, this stems from the **earth**-of-water-of-wind.

The element of earth is rectified and holy when a person utilizes something from its potential state into its active state; similar to how the earth can nurture something and bring it out from the ground in its full form.

With flattery, though, a person’s words remain in his heart, and this leaves the words in their dormant state, which is an evil use of earth: when something remains as it is, unutilized. This comes from the aspect of “heaviness” in the earth. Earth is a heavy substance, therefore, it can bring on internal heaviness in the soul. When the “heaviness” in the earth of the soul gets too strong, it causes a person to be unable to utilize his potential.

Two Kinds of Internal Hardening

We will try to give more understanding to this concept.

The dominant amount of “earth” here is what is responsible for causing one’s words to remain in his heart. This happens for either one of two reasons:

1) When person has a problem expressing his heart's emotions through his mouth, it is because his element of earth is stuffing his heart and blocking the words he really wants to say, from escaping his mouth.

Here, the problem is that the blocked heart is preventing the mouth from expressing the right words. He knows deep down what he really would like to say to another; the words are revealed in his heart, but it is his **mouth** here which isn't allowing the words to be revealed.

2) There is another kind of blockage in the heart which can occur, however, which has worse implications than in the first scenario: when the blockage is taking place **in** the heart. This is a deeper kind of inner heaviness. Here, the person is not even aware of the words that he really wants to say to the other person. He will be blocked off from knowing his own emotions.

Inability To Express True Emotions & How It Results In Flattery

In the first scenario, the words he would really like to say are at least revealed within his heart, and it is just that they are not being revealed through the mouth. In the second scenario, though, the words are concealed even from the heart. What will happen in this scenario? Not only doesn't he express himself in a way that's true to his emotions – he doesn't even know what his true feelings are in the first place.

So there are two scenarios of when a person doesn't say what's really on his heart. In the first scenario, a person is consciously aware that he's not saying what he really wants to say. This results in words of flattery to another person. In the second scenario, he has fooled himself so much with his flattery to another that his words are concealed even from his own heart; so he will not be consciously aware that he's flattering the other.

In the first scenario - when one's true words remain in the heart and he instead says something else to another, he will deceive the other person; he will say words to another that are not true. But in the second kind of flattery, the person not only fools another; he fools himself. This is a kind of flattery which a person is not consciously aware of; his element of earth has gotten so heavy that even his heart is stuffed from it (not just his mouth), and that is why it doesn't register to him as flattery. He's not even aware that he's flattering another.

The Source of Unexpressed Emotions: Inner Heaviness

This concept - of **inner heaviness** that gets too dominant¹³ (resulting in a loss of self-awareness), is not limited to the scenario of flattery. It is a concept that applies to all of our emotions: inner heaviness can block a person from being aware of his emotions.

¹³ For more on "inner heaviness", see עפר-כבידות_018_מדות המדות (English translation not yet available).

There are bodily emotions, as well as soul emotions. The bodily emotions are our sense of touch, which can feel things. Our soul's emotions are (mainly) in our heart. When earth gets too heavy in the soul – and this happens to many people – a person loses his self-awareness, and he doesn't feel what's going on inside his internal world at all.

Two Reasons For Lack of Emotional Self-Awareness

How does a person become completely disconnected from self-awareness to his emotions? There are two possible causes for it.

One cause for it can be because of **internal contradictions** in the soul, which causes a person to be concealed from being self-aware.

But another cause is because of **inner heaviness**. The *possuk* says that “*Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh*” - Pharaoh's heart was “hardened”; meaning, there is a concept of a “hardening of the heart”, a “heart of stone”, which causes a person to lose awareness of himself. The emotions of a person's heart can become covered over and concealed from a person's conscious awareness - a “heart of stone”. This is the reason behind why a person doesn't feel what's going on in his internal self.

Such a person might be the kind of person who flatters others all the time, yet he's not even aware of this as he does so. But the problem starts before the trait of flattery. It comes from a lack of self-awareness, due to a dominant amount of internal heaviness.

Two Kinds of People On This World: Non-Emotional and Emotional

To be general, there are different kinds of personalities in the world: some are born less emotional, and some are born with a more emotional nature.

Each person, depending on his unique situation, has to do inner work with himself on This World, which he was put here in order to improve and rectify himself. Both types face a different struggle than their counterparts; we aren't saying here who has a healthier personality type, because the purpose here is not to downplay anyone, *chas v'shalom*. No one should be made fun for a nature he is born with! It is merely upon each person to work to rectify his nature that he was born with.

If one was born with less of an emotional nature - either because that's his personality, or because he was like that in a previous lifetime (otherwise known as “*gilgul*”/soul reincarnation), and therefore that part of his personality is heavily imprinted him when he's born in a new lifetime) – it is upon him to learn how to open up his heart and reveal feelings in his life, which provide emotional vitality to a person.

Others, though, have the opposite struggle: they are born with a more emotional heart, but as they go through various life experiences that are unpleasant, they become hardened, and they get

closed off from their emotions. They suffer from their emotions, and the more emotionally sensitive a person is, the more he suffers from his emotions.

At a certain point, he learns more or less how to harden himself from emotions, as a survival tactic so that he won't go crazy from all the internal suffering. He disconnects from feeling emotions altogether, and he instead places all his energies on the areas of action and intellect, so that he won't have to face anything that has to do with emotions/feelings.

Those Who 'Run Away' From Their Emotions

There are those who have merited to learn Torah all day in the *Beis Medrash*, enjoying a life immersed in the intellect, and this helps them escape from their emotional suffering. But we must understand the following (this is a harsh fact, but it is true): there are people who are immersed in Torah not because they are immersed in Torah, but because it helps them run away from their emotions!

There are people who suffer so much from their emotions, and so, they crave the cold intellect which can disconnect them from their powerful emotions; so they turn to Torah learning as a way to leave their emotions behind, and instead be involved with intellect.

This has nothing to do with the *possuk* "*If not for Your Torah my delight, I would go insane from my suffering.*" Rather, it is an excuse of running away from self-awareness of their emotions! *Baruch Hashem*, such people don't run away to the streets; of course it is better to run away to the Torah rather than run away to the street! But the point of what we are saying is that their Torah learning is mainly a refuge to them from emotional suffering, and it is not out of a love for the Torah itself.

The intellect is much more appealing to a person than to become involved with action, so they run away into their intellect; they talk it into themselves that only the intellect is important, and that emotions are for people who are "weaklings" and for people who have are "immature" and have to "grow up". They form this erroneous belief about life: that life is all about intellect, and that emotions have no place. A person might make this mistaken notion his entire life, and it's really all an excuse for running away from self-awareness to his emotions.

Of course, as we already said, it's better that a person turns to Torah learning to satisfy his intellectual needs, than to look elsewhere to satisfy it. But he is still forming a belief that life is all about intellect, and this is a very incorrect perception about life.

It might seem to us that people who are disconnected from emotions are stronger and more mature about life than their sensitive counterparts, because since they are less sensitive, they don't get hurt as much. So it seems that the people who harden themselves from emotions are the 'winners' in life who can get by life scot-free from emotional scars and insults, while the emotional people of the words are the like 'babies' who can't make it on this world.

As a result of this erroneous perception about life, the person with an emotional nature might force himself to adapt a non-emotional nature. If he ever feels insulted, he tells himself that this is an immature reaction, a sign of weakness, and that he has to “just grow up already” and “not be insulted.”

We can go further into the details of what results from this kind of mentality about life, but the common denominator between all “desensitized” people is that they have trained themselves [whether consciously or subconsciously] to disgust all signs of emotions and feelings, and that emotions and feelings are for “weak” or “immature” people.

With this kind of attitude towards emotions, most people surely can’t speak about emotions and express them, because emotions have become a totally foreign concept to many people. Many people recoil from the topic of emotions and get uncomfortable about any mention or thought of it.

So this is what’s behind a person who speaks words of flattery: his emotions cannot be expressed properly by his mouth, and they remain dormant in his heart; or, even worse, he is closed off entirely from his own emotions, because his heart has become closed and hardened from feeling any emotions.

Thus, the root of flattery doesn’t begin with flattery – it begins way before that. It starts with a “hardened heart”.

Two Scenarios of A “Hardened Heart”

In fact, most people have a ‘hardened’ heart!

There can be two kinds of people like this. Either it’s because some people were born with a less emotional nature, or, it’s because a person taught himself to suppress his emotions. In either case, almost all people are uncomfortable with expressing their real feelings.

Of course, some people do express their true feelings; but it’s rare to find such a person. Most people do not express what’s really going on in the heart. People lock up their feelings in some jail inside themselves and express something differently in their mouths: words that have to sound “mature” and emotionless.

With most people, the feelings are for the most part closed off. The world is drawn toward mostly action, not emotion. Sometimes a person has a *simcha* (a celebration) and then he allows himself to “get emotional”, but beyond that, people are afraid to get emotional. People are mostly living with action and with rational thought, and emotions are rarely accessed.

Thus, flattery really is a sign that one lies to his own heart; he is disconnected from what’s really going on in his heart and that’s why he doesn’t say the words he really wants to say.

If a person has an emotional nature and he can’t express himself properly, he suffers greatly. He feels an internal contradiction in himself, because he feels emotions inside himself, but he cannot

express them properly. There are also people who are emotional but they are not honest with themselves, and that is why they flatter others as well as lie to themselves. Another kind of person, though, is honest with himself and with others, and even though he is emotional, he doesn't flatter others.

The *Gemara* says that it's permissible to flatter the wicked¹⁴. However, if a person is missing a sense of *yashrus* (straightness/honesty) in his heart, when he lies to the wicked, he's not using the permitted kind of flattery; he's simply using his tendency to flatter others, and he justifies his behavior with this statement of *Chazal* that one is allowed to flatter the wicked.

Step One: Speaking About Emotions

Now that we've studied the roots of flattery, we can explore how to rectify it. The matters here are not only about how we can rectify the trait of flattery – they are matters that apply to all of our life. First we will explain how to solve the first kind of flattery (of the mouth) and then we will explain how to fix the second kind of flattery (of the heart).

Firstly, we must understand that the fact that people don't like to speak about emotions is not a plus. It is a weakness.

However, when we do speak about emotions, they must be expressed within proper boundaries. When a person doesn't understand properly what emotions are, he tends to think that emotions are childish reactions; he thinks that emotions are about being "sensitive" and thus a sign of weakness. But when a person has a proper perspective towards emotions, he knows that emotions are not limited to our base emotions of our *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul); they stem from our higher *middos*, such as love and fear of Hashem, and compassion, etc. So all of our feelings really stem from higher powers in our soul.

Our emotions are not merely sensitive reactions to insults. The emotions in a Jew's soul stem from a higher soul. The emotions in a gentile's soul are merely 'emotions', whereas the emotions in a Jew's soul stem from G-dliness. Our emotions are from a high and lofty place in ourselves, not from a lower place in ourselves.

Of course, our emotions can certainly be negative, and that is when we just view them as stemming from our *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic level of the soul) and below that. But our emotions, in essence, really stem from a higher place in our soul.

If this would be the perspective that a Jew has towards himself, he would greatly remove the blockage from his emotions.

Most people, as we said, have a hard time speaking about emotions, because they view emotions with disdain, thinking that emotions come from a low place in ourselves. One needs to instead view

¹⁴ *Sotah 41a*

his emotions as stemming from a higher place in the soul, and then he can train himself to this kind of mentality; the next step will then be to get used to speaking about our emotions.

Emotional Training

To our chagrin, people usually first hear about this concept of “expressing your emotions” only when they go for guidance before marriage, and until then, one is not taught how to express his emotions properly. This creates a difficulty in suddenly making the transition of ‘learning how to communicate your emotions to your spouse’.

The boy getting married hears from the marriage teacher that “When you live with your spouse, you have to speak about your feelings with her.” It goes in one ear and goes out the other ear. A person might get himself to express his emotions for the first week of marriage, and soon after that, he’s back to his old routine...

The truth is that teaching people how to express emotions shouldn’t be limited to pre-marriage guidance. It should have been developed way before when a person was a child. The problem is, “emotions” are not a subject taught in yeshivah, nor is it taught in the girls’ schools. It is not popular to talk or teach about emotions, and then when a boy getting married hears from his marriage teacher that he will have to express emotions when he’s married, it seems foreign to him, and he feels uncomfortable, as if he’s going to be contradicting his whole life that he lived until now.

When a person grows up in a way that doesn’t teach how to express emotions, how can he be expected to suddenly express love to his wife, when he has never been taught about emotions until now?! Instead, a person needs to be taught way before marriage of how to speak about emotions.

Most of the emotions expressed in marriage, in fact, are negative emotions (such as anger and complaints), or they are express mundane things. Of course, it’s important to know how to express emotions in those areas as well, but it’s more important to get used to expressing emotions on a regular basis.

Finding Someone Whom You Can Express Your Emotions To

One idea of how a person can try this is to pick a friend, or perhaps two or three, who are good listeners, whom he or she can express his/her emotions with.

Of course, this should be done sensible. It should not be overdone, and it should not either take up most of a person’s life. It needs to be done in its proper and healthy limits. The idea is that is that when one speaks about positive emotions, and in a healthy amount, he trains himself to speak about emotions, and this can eventually train a person to naturally speak about emotions.

This is something which all people need. Speaking about emotions needs to become natural. This ‘breaks the ice’ on all his stifled emotions and gives a person the key to removing all the blockages.

Most people, understandably, don't do this; but as we said, that is a weakness, not a sign of strength. Because most people cannot express emotions, most people have a hard time with the concepts of fear and love for Hashem, because it involves emotion. A person might be able to conceptualize love of Torah and even speak about it, but ironically, he recoils from expressing anything to do with the emotion of love. If one can't express love, how can he express love of Torah?! It doesn't happen.

This is the first step, and it is the more superficial aspect of the solution.

Step Two: Meditating On Your Feelings

The second step of the solution, which is the inner part (and if one is a more inner kind of person, he can start with this step), is: to take quiet time (as the Chazon Ish says to do, in sefer *Emunah U'Bitachon*) and reflect on what you are feeling. Ask yourself what you are feeling.

Some people try this and don't feel a thing; all they feel is the temperature. (Others aren't even sure of what the temperature is!) To start having feelings start with trying to feel physical feelings: feel if it's cold or warm in the room.

After that, try to feel if you're happy or sad. If you can't discern if you're happy or sad, try to remember a time in which you were happy or sad. The point here is not to learn how to infuse yourself with positive emotions; the point is to begin to feel your emotions, which opens your soul to the emotions.

Next, take a pen and paper and write down the various emotions you feel. Don't write down what you learn about in *sefarim*, and don't write down what you would like to feel. Instead, write down the actual feelings you are feeling.

You can then notice which feelings are more common in your life, and which are not as common. This slowly gets you used to recognizing your emotions, and as you progress with this, you can recognize how high the quality of the emotions is.

Just as you can work to understand the words of the *Rashba* in-depth, so can you work to understand your emotions in-depth and begin to experience them.

In Summary

To summarize, there are two steps you can take to begin opening your emotions. The first step is to train yourself to speak about emotions, and the second step is to take quiet time to reflect about your feelings, beginning with bodily feelings and then your various emotions.

One who does this will transform into a new being; he'll discover new qualities in himself. He will also discover his weaknesses, and this needs to be dealt with. But he'll reveal a whole new world in himself which will provide him with new emotional vitality.

Yes, some pain will come along with this, because as one increases his emotional sensitivity, he feels pained from the various feelings he will come across. It is indeed written, "*An increase of knowledge is an increase of pain.*" However, that is how life is supposed to look like.¹⁵

Pursue The Truth

When one can properly express his words, as well as what's on his heart – along with working to pursue the truth – he will have the key to rectifying the trait of flattery.

Chazal say that "it is permissible to flatter the wicked on This World". This is permissible, but it is not an obligation; if one has to use flattery, it should bother him that he has to engage in flattery, because ultimately, we are supposed to pursue truth, and it should bother us when we have to engage in any kind of deception.

In Conclusion

We have explained what flattery causes, what its root is, and how to rectify it at its root: to get in touch with one's true emotions, which will enable one to express himself honestly and simply, in the true way that a Jew lives life.

¹⁵ See *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part II, Chapter Nine*

6 | *Flattery Part 2: Smiling*¹⁶

When Flattery Is In The Form of a Fake Smile

With the help of Hashem we will continue to discuss the element of wind; we are currently addressing **water-of-wind**, which is the root of the trait of *chanufah*/flattery. [Previously, we discussed **earth-of-water-of-wind**, and here in this chapter we will discuss **water-of-water-of-wind**].

Wind is the root of idle speech, and water-of-wind is to speak words of flattery, because it is speech (wind) which involves the pleasure of connection (water). **Water-of-water-of-wind** is a kind of flattery in which a person gives a fake smile to another in the hope of flattering him.

It is written, “*Just as water reflects one face to another, so does the heart of man reflect to another.*”¹⁷ When there is genuine feeling of mutual connection, the other person reciprocates the feeling. This is not flattery; it is genuine love, and it is *Ahavas Yisrael*. But when a person flatters another and it is not from a place of love in himself, rather for some superficial reason, the other will not reciprocate.

Three Kinds of Smiles

One kind of person smiles at another from an inner place in himself; this is the holy and good kind of smile, and it is not flattery.

Another kind of person will smile at another because he needs the other for something, therefore, he smiles at him, in the hope of receiving something in turn for his smile. This is also not flattery. However, it is not a genuine smile either, for it does not come from his inner essence.

But another kind of person smiles at another in order to flatter the person, and this is the evil trait of **flattery** (*chanufah*). In his heart, he does not like the person, and the loving words coming out of his mouth are not in line with what he really feels in his heart towards the other person.

Three Kinds of He'aras Panim (Radiant Countenance) That Are Inward

Smiling at another is also called *he'aras panim* (a radiant countenance).

We find three kinds of *he'aras panim*. One meaning of it is to smile at another from your *p'nim* (inside). Another kind of *he'aras panim* is when the smile doesn't come from one's inside, and it is merely coming from the smile on a person's face. A third kind of *he'aras panim* is when it is a smile

¹⁶ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-006-flattery-part-2-smiling>

¹⁷ *Mishlei (Psalms)*

that stems from the evil trait of flattery; when one's heart does not match the words coming out of his mouth.

Right now, we are discussing in particular the act of smiling at another for the sake of flattery, which is an evil use of the power of *he'aras panim*. We will delve into this matter more deeply now.

“He'aras Panim” When It Is A Revelation of G-dliness In The Person

We find that Moshe had *he'aras panim*; he had a shining countenance on his face, and it shone so brightly that no one was able to look at his face. This *he'aras panim* which he merited was a revelation of G-dliness that shined outward from within him. On a general note, all wise Torah scholars possess a radiant countenance – it is written, “*The wisdom of man illuminates his face.*”

This is a holy kind of *he'aras panim*, in which the soul of a person illuminates outward. However, it is an inward kind of *he'aras panim*, because it is not being used with relation to others. Others can see it on his face, but the person who has it is not seeking to turn his *he'aras panim* outwards towards others. It's rather an inward revelation that can be seen on his outward appearance.

He'aras Panim of The Heart (Enjoying Life)

Another kind of *he'aras panim* comes from the heart. When a person's heart is shining, it can show up on his face; here again, the person doesn't use it to shine it outward to others.

An example of this power - when used for evil - is as follows: The Sages say that those who raise hogs and those who are wealthy because they charge interest (both evil sources of livelihoods) have faces that shine with a yellow color. Because these kinds of people are successful at what they do and live comfortable lives in which they don't have to work that hard to make a living, they are content, and therefore their faces shine with happiness. It is their heart inside which is happy with the successful kind of life they have.

Such a person is enjoying a very happy life (albeit evil), and therefore his heart and his face are shining with happiness. But this kind of person won't necessarily smile at others. This is a kind of *he'aras panim* that remains inward and doesn't shine outward; there are both good and evil ways to use this power.

He'aras Panim of the Body: A Radiant Face

A third kind of *he'aras panim* is when the physical body (*guf*) has a shine to it. An example of this is that the Sages state¹⁸ that wine reddens a person's face.

¹⁸ *Sanhedrin 70a*

So these are three kinds of *he'aras panim*, and none of these are used with regards to smiling at others. In all of these scenarios, the *he'aras panim* remains inward (whether it is a holy or evil kind of *he'aras panim*), because it is not a *he'aras panim* being used to smile at others. It just means that the person's face has *he'aras panim* on it, and not because he uses it to smile at others.

To summarize all the kinds of “inward” *he'aras panim*: There is *he'aras panim* of the face, *he'aras panim* of the heart, and *he'aras panim* of the body.

Outward “He'aras Panim”

There is also second group of people with *he'aras panim*: those who show their *he'aras panim* **outward** towards others.

In the first scenario that we brought above (which had three examples), the person's inside is also revealed outward, but the person doesn't turn it towards people. But in the second scenario, the person turns his *pnim* (inside) outward towards others.

So there are two kinds of *he'aras panim*: when one's *pnim* is revealed outward but he doesn't actually it turn towards others, and when one actively shows *he'aras panim* towards others.

(On a deeper note, there is a perfected kind of *he'aras panim*, in which a person has both at once: his *pnim* is turned outward, and in addition, he turns it towards others.)

“Inward” He'aras Panim Vs. “Outward” He'aras Panim

Now that we've explained this, let's return to discussing our current topic, flattery, and how it relates to the concept of *he'aras panim*.

There is something fundamental to understand about the concept of *he'aras panim*. A person has a nature to sometimes reveal what's going on inside himself. That is activated even in the first kind of *he'aras panim*. The second scenario of *he'aras panim*, however, in which a person turns his *he'aras panim* towards others, and this takes it further: it enables a person to leave his natural limits and go beyond his private self. [We will explain here that there are both pros and cons to this ability].

In the first scenario of *he'aras panim*, the person still remains inward. In the second kind of *he'aras panim*, the person has left his limitations, for by smiling at others, a person leaves his private self.

What differences does it make? It makes a very big difference, as we are about to explain.

In the first scenario, which is “inward” *he'aras panim*, the person remains in his *pnim* (inwardness). As we have explained in the past, true *he'aras panim* to another emanates from one's *pnim*; in other words, true *he'aras panim* is not merely *he'aras panim*, but *he'aras pnim* [it is not just a smile on your face, but it is rather that you are shining your inner essence outward].

But in the second scenario of *he'aras panim*, in which a person actively turns toward others with an active smile, the person has totally gone outward from his *pnim*. This is a power that can be used for either evil or good; the point is, though, that it is always an exit out of one's private self.

The Danger Of Smiling At The Whole World

When one smiles at another, he is really leaving his private self, but he doesn't always feel this. When a person smiles at another out of a deep sense of true and absolute *Ahavas Yisrael* to others, and he feels truly "one" with another Jew, he won't feel how he's leaving himself, because since he truly feels that he is "one" with the other Jew, it doesn't even register by him as a transition.

(However, this is very rare, because even if a person is in touch with that deep part of the soul that loves all Jews, still, the lower parts of our existence (our body and our *nefesh habehaimis*) get in the way of this deep feeling of oneness with another, and this is what prevents one from actually feeling one with for others.)

Unless a person has a lot of *Ahavas Yisrael* – which is rare – he will feel like he is leaving himself and joining with another, when he smiles at another. He will feel like he is totally leaving himself and he connects to the other – and the danger here is that he is leaving his *pnim* (inner world) and going outward into the rest of the world when he smiles at people. He might leave his *pnim* behind totally, in favor of those whom he connects outwardly to.

A person is safe from spiritual dangers when he remains in his *pnim*, but when he connects outwardly to the world, he opens himself up to all kinds of dangers to his spirituality. He is not remaining in his *pnim* – rather, his *pnim* is going outward as he connects with others. He will connect with all kinds of people, and not everyone is good to connect to. Not only does he leave behind his own inner world where he was previously protected from spiritual harm - he is also likely to enter the *pnim* (inwardness) of another when he smiles at others, and he will connect himself to the evil and negative spiritual influences that are found in another person.

When one leaves his *pnim* because he wants to show his *panim* to others, and he turns to the *pnim* of another, the other will reciprocate. "*As water reflects one face to another.*" That is the concept of *he'aras panim*, in which a person radiates his *pnim* outward towards the *pnim* of another, and the other will in turn reciprocate the feelings.

However, even when a person shows genuine *he'aras panim* to another, there is a danger: the person whom he is connecting to might be an unsavory person, who will harm him spiritually now that the other has joined with him. With true *he'aras panim* to another, you are entering another's *pnim*, and thus there is a danger to *he'aras panim*.

If a person wants to live a holy life, which requires one to live inwardly¹⁹, and he tries to smile at everyone, what will happen? First of all, he will leave his *pnim*. Secondly, he will connect to all kinds of people, some of which are not holy. And in addition, his *pnim* will connect to others' *pnim*, both to the qualities of others as well as to the deficiencies of others, both to the holiness of others as well as to the not-so-holy parts of others!

A person who smiles at all people with his whole being is endangering his entire spirituality, because he is opening himself up to all kinds of connections that can bring him down spiritually.

What About Just Smiling In A Superficial Way?

Smiling at others doesn't endanger one's spirituality if the smile is superficial. We all know people who smile at everyone, but most of the time it is a superficial kind of smile; it is not a smile that comes from one's *pnim*. It starts with the face and ends with the face; it is not about being *poneh* (turning) to the other's *pnim*.

Sometimes, a smile on one's face indeed brings another person's face to smile, but it is usually just a smile of the face, and not a smile that emanates from the inner essence of the person.

On one hand, living in this way (of giving superficial smiles to others) has a plus to it, because the person doesn't leave his *pnim*, since he isn't going outward from himself. So it seems that a person who just pastes a smile on his face and he doesn't put that much thought into it, is saving himself from the spiritual dangers he is susceptible to, as we explained here at length.

However, there is still a drawback to always smiling at others, even if it is only done superficially and not out of a desire for soul connection with others. It causes a person to live a very superficial kind of life.

For example, you can have an earnest person who reads statements of *Chazal* about the loftiness of smiling at others, and he also reads the famous letter of the Ramban that one should always smile at others - so he thinks that life is all about smiling at others. He thinks he has to smile at all people, and he doesn't realize that all of this smiling is really scattering his soul inside. He doesn't realize that he is becoming more and more superficial with the more he smiles at all people.

Maybe on his gravestone they'll write that he smiled at all people, but the truth is, this person has lived a very superficial life, for he never gave a genuine smile to others! He seemed like a nice person who always smiled at others and always had a good word to say to anybody, always making people happy by weddings and cheering up depressed people - but the truth is, he has lived a very false and superficial kind of life! He never once joined with another; it was all external and superficial.

¹⁹ For more on this concept of living within your *neshamah* (inner soul), see *Tefillah* #083 – *Retreat To The Soul and Tefillah* #0133 - *Sanctuary*

Of course, sometimes, a person should indeed smile at others and say nice things to people, but this should only be done at certain times, when there is a need for it; it should **not** be a general way of life for a person. It is a kind of life which uproots the entire *pnim* of a person.

All that we have said here thus far is not referring to the kind of *he'aras panim* which appears on a person's face either because he is wise, or when it comes from his heart, or when it comes from his body.

With those kinds of *he'aras panim*, there is no danger to the person's spirituality, because he is not actively turning outward towards others. He is merely happy inside of himself, and although others can see that there is *he'aras panim* on his face, he is not using his *he'aras panim* to actively form a soul connection with others through his smile. Here, we are speaking about a reciprocal smile, which is when the smile truly stems from one's heart.

The Definition of A Genuine, Holy Smile

However, as we mentioned earlier, the heart of a person can be happy either for good or for evil, as we brought before. When the heart is happy, this creates an inward kind of *he'aras panim* in the person, which lights up his face. As we brought earlier from the words of our Sages, there are wicked people whose faces shine because they have happy lives, as the Sages state, and this happiness comes from their hearts. But this is the evil kind of *he'aras panim* that stems from the heart when a person is immersed in evil acts.

By contrast, the holy kind of *he'aras panim* which stems from the heart is when you truly feel a love for another, and therefore your face lights up when you see him. As it is written of Aharon HaKohen, "*And he will see you, and his heart will rejoice.*" When one who is truly happy to see another Jew's face, and when he feels that the other's joy is his own joy – that is true *he'aras panim* when he smiles at another. Such *he'aras panim* is coming from his *pnim* (inwardness), and it is also being *poneh* (turned) outwards to another. This is the genuine *he'aras panim*.

When To Smile, and When Not To Smile

However, even when one is giving this genuine kind of *he'aras panim* to others, there is subtle inner work to do here, as we will explain. (Later, with the help of Hashem, we will explain how this relates to the our current *avodah* with regards to fixing the trait of flattery).

When one is having genuine *he'aras panim* to another – when he is smiling at another from his own *pnim* – he has to make sure that he is not totally leaving his *pnim*. This requires an inner sense of balance.

So: how much should one smile at others? It depends. If a person knows that he can remain connected to his internal, spiritual world even as he's smiling at all kinds of people, then he can

smile at others. But if he senses that he will lose all his spiritual levels when he smiles at other people, it is a sign that he should not allow himself to actively smile at others.²⁰

Of course, there is always some degree of exiting outward from yourself when you smile at another, but as long as you can immediately return to your inwardness, you can allow yourself to go a little outward.

But as we said, if smiling at others is causing you to leave your *pnim*/inwardness, your *avodah* is to refrain from *he'aras panim*. Although it appears that “it’s a big *mitzvah* to smile at others”, it is the truth what counts, and since this will cause you to have a spiritual fall, it’s forbidden for you to allow yourself to go outward of yourself.

This excludes certain particular instances, as well as when it comes to honoring parents, or other unique circumstances, in which you have a *mitzvah* to smile at the person. The point of what we are saying here is that the **general** way to live life is to remain in your *pnim* as you give *he'aras panim* to others, and that if you cannot remain in your *pnim*, you are endangering your spirituality when you to enter into “*he'aras panim*” mode.

Using Superficial Smiling To Deal With Those Whom You May Not Connect With

When you smile at another, are you smiling at his face, or are you turning to his inner essence? We can see that when a person smiles at another, it is often just a smile of the face, and it is not an active attempt to connect to other person’s essence.

²⁰ *During the shiur, the Rav explained that “Each of us has an “individual” aspect which no one else has (as Chazal say, that every person should say “B’shvili Nivra H’Olam”, - “For my sake the world was created” – thus, no one should be allowed to enter into our most private aspects of our self. Although we need friends, we should not allow another friend into our most private and individual area of our soul. The outer layers of our soul require friendship and socializing, but the inner part of our soul must remain individual and alone from others. Even one’s “best friend” should not be allowed to enter into that private part of one’s soul, because the “alone” aspect of your soul is only for you to use in your relationship with Hashem.*

“Most people who hear this concept think that this is anti-social, or a lack of ahavah (love) towards others. But if someone understands this well, he knows that friendship and companionship is a need only for the outer and external layers of our soul; the part of our soul which connects to others is the part that we use to make friends with. The inner place of the soul, however, which is “alone” (“levad”) is only to be used in relationship with Hashem, and a person should not ever attempt to bring another person into that “alone” part of the soul.

“Although Chazal say “Either a friend or death”, there are limits to this, because a person also has the “alone” part of the soul which must be kept private from others. Hashem is called our “Friend” (see Shabbos 31a), and the part of the “alone” in our soul is the part which can recognize how Hashem is our “Friend.” The inner part of the soul lives “alone” from people, as if it’s in mourning from other people; it is alone and isolated from people, and it left to be “alone” with Hashem.”

To illustrate, it is brought in *Halacha* that it is forbidden (for a man) to stare in a woman's face, at the face of a wicked person, or at the face of a non-Jew. Sometimes we have to look at a wicked person, like if we have dealings with him, or if looking at him will assist him in doing *teshuvah*. In these instances, we have to smile at the person for whatever reason, but we should not be attempting to connect to the person's essence. We can smile at him, but only from our face to his face, and not from our essence to his essence.

We see that a person can have internal *he'aras panim* yet keep himself inward, such as in the scenario of *he'aras panim* that wise people possess, in which their faces are lit up with wisdom, but they are not actively smiling at others. This is the kind of *he'aras panim* that should be used when dealing with those whom we are forbidden to show *he'aras panim* to. They can see *he'aras panim* on you, but you shouldn't be turning your *he'aras panim* outwardly towards them.

To give a simple example of this, a person making a *simcha* makes sure to give a smile on his face; he is not intending to smile at anyone in particular, and he is just pasting a superficial smile on his face. This is the kind of *he'aras panim* you can give towards people whom you may not give *he'aras panim* to.

Smiling At A Non-Wicked Person: How To Smile

But if you are dealing with someone whom you may give *he'aras panim* too – someone who does not present a spiritual danger to you - you can allow yourself to shine your *he'aras panim* towards his face, and you can even look into his eyes and show him a shining face and a nice smile. Indeed, the true way to give *he'aras panim* to others is to look them in the eye as you smile at them.

However, most people who smile at others don't really know how to smile with their faces, and it is usually just eye contact (and sometimes people kiss each other). But eye contact with another alone is a superficial kind of *he'aras panim* to another. Make sure to smile at his face, and give him your face, as you are looking him in the eye.

Smiling At A Holy Person

There are some rare times, however, where you can allow yourself not only to smile at another's face, but you can even allow yourself to connect to his inner essence. This is a very subtle matter, but you can try this on someone who is known as a holy or pure person; you may smile at him totally, with your entire being, and let yourself connect with him, because there is no reason here to suspect that you will be harmed spiritually when you smile at him.

Smiling For “Kiruv” Purposes

Sometimes, for *kiruv* or for *chizuk* purposes, you also need to fully smile at others, but even in these circumstances, you must remember not to leave your inwardness when you connect with others. If you allow yourself to fully connect with another’s inner essence, you receive all his “data” – both the positive and the negative (and even if it’s positive, that doesn’t mean it is good for your soul to receive it), which harms your soul.

So even when you have to smile at another to draw him close to Judaism or to help him, make sure that you are only smiling at his face [to make him feel good] and that you are not trying to connect to the other’s inwardness.

Why Some Gedolim Smile, and Why Other Gedolim Don’t Smile

There are different kinds of people when it comes to the matter of smiling, and it depends on one’s soul root (*shoresh haneshamah*).

There are some people whose *avodah* on this world is to remain more inward, and it is not part of their task on this world to radiate themselves outwards towards others. For this reason, there were certain *Gedolim* who didn’t smile that much at others.

There were other *Gedolim*, however, who were more the “smiling” type, because their souls’ mission on this world was to radiate themselves outward towards the world. Therefore, there are souls whose personality is meant more for smiling as part of their mission on this world.

We all knew of different kinds of *Gedolim* in our current era – those that smiled a lot, and those who didn’t smile that much. It’s not an issue of who was greater; it was an issue of what their soul roots were.

One whose soul root is *pnim* is one whose *avodah* is to remain very inward, and therefore he doesn’t smile that much at others, while one whose soul was rooted in *chutz* (going outward) is meant to smile a lot at others.

(To clarify, “*chutz*” here does not mean simply that the *avodah* of these kinds of people on this world is to simply go out into the world *chas v’shalom*; for the world is full of terrible spiritual dangers. Rather, it refers to those whose souls are meant to go *m’pnim el hachutzah* (to let their inside go outward).

So it’s not like how some people think, that one who doesn’t smile is a “cold” person inside. It is not quite the case. A person might very well have a warm heart towards others, and it just that his personality is that he doesn’t turn that warmth outwards toward others.

The words here are subtle - and deep.

Flattering The Wicked: Use Only A Superficial Smile

We have discussed the background of the concept of *he'aras panim* in order to return to discuss our current topic, which is how we can fix the trait of *chanufah*, flattery. We are discussing here *he'aras panim* when it stems from *chanufah*/flattery, which we have explained as a false kind of *he'aras panim*.

When a person smiles at another solely in order to flatter him, the person's *pnim* really hates the person! It is just that on his outside, he shows the other a friendly face. As we explained previously, flattery is when one speaks words to another that are not in line with what he really feels in his heart ("echad b'peh v'echad b'lev"). Flattery is not coming from the person's heart, for it is not the true feelings that one has towards another.

Not only doesn't it come from one's heart, but it comes from an internal contradiction in the person. One who is used to giving a superficial and fake smile to others has gotten so accustomed to a lifestyle of flattery that he is deeply enmeshed in it, and he doesn't even realize.

Chazal say that "it is permissible to flatter the wicked on This World"—what does that mean? To connect your inner essence as you smile at his face? Or even worse - to connect to the innerness of the wicked person? Surely this was not the intention of *Chazal*. One must be very careful when he has to engage in flattery with unsavory people.

This is really the downfall of the "group of flatterers" which *Chazal* describe, people that are so used to flattery that they are totally swept up in the superficiality and in the evil ways and habits of other people.

Although there are situations when we may flatter the wicked (as *Chazal* say), that should only be with **words** of flattery towards them, and not with *he'aras panim* to them. (In the next chapter, which deals with flattery that stems from **wind**-of-water-of-wind, we will address this). Even when you must give *he'aras panim* to wicked people, only give them a superficial smile, and don't give them a smile from within yourself.

When one engages in flattery, he leaves his *pnim* (inwardness) and in turn, he damages himself internally with the more and more flattery he grows accustomed to. And when one flatters the wicked on a regular basis, smiling at them and fully connecting with them, he falls down spiritually along with them.

The Hebrew word for "flattery" is *chanufah*, from the word *chein panim* (a charming face). Flattery is to show someone else a pleasant "face" and nothing more than that. It is not a feeling of love that comes from one's heart.

The Torah says that Noach was someone who found *chein* (favor) in the eyes of all people. He had real *chein*, as opposed to *chanufah*. He had real *chein* because he truly shined his essence outwards to people, and not because he was merely trying to flatter the wicked people of the generation with a smiling face.

Avoiding Flattery & Practicing A Genuine Smile

To conclude and actualize this concept, if someone wants to really internalize this lesson and overcome habits of flattery, he should try the following exercise.

Find at least one person whom he can have real *he'aras panim* with – someone who you will practice giving a genuine smile to. Smile at him with your whole being, not just at his face, but because you are radiating yourself outwards towards the other person's inner essence.

However, in addition to this, it should be someone who will be open towards you and allow the soul connection. This is, indeed, hard to find.

The reason for this is because although most people can receive *he'aras "panim"*, a smile of the face, most people are not emotionally capable of receiving *he'aras "pnim"*, a smile that comes from the inner essence. Meaning, not everyone you meet can handle your soul being shined upon his. The souls of many people [in our times] are covered over and concealed, and therefore, most people are unable to receive *he'aras panim* from you, even when you want to give it to them.²¹

If one has reached a higher spiritual level, he can feel the *he'aras panim* from his relationship with Hashem. But even if one is on this level, he should still find another person whom he can have real *he'aras panim* with, and by practicing genuine *he'aras panim* with another, this will chip away at the trait of flattery. In fact, the more a person gets used to real *he'aras panim*, the more he will naturally recoil from the fake *he'aras panim* of flattery.

Of course, it is obvious that if you want to chip away at flattery, one needs to simply avoid smiling at another out of flattery. That is the external part of the solution, but in addition to this, you have an inner work here to do: to find someone whom you can have real *he'aras panim* with, which will in turn lessen your habit of smiling at others out of flattery.

Getting used to this will eventually allow you to bask in the *he'aras panim* with Hashem – as it is written, "*Face to face I speak with him.*"

²¹ See also Tefillah #020 – *The Longing For A Smile*

7 | *Flattery Part 3: Craving Social Acceptance*²²

Words of Flattery: Lack of Awareness To One's Speech

We are in the midst of discussing **water-of-wind**, which is the source of speaking words of flattery. So far we have explained flattery stemming from the earth-of-water-of-wind and water-of-water-of-wind. Now we will discuss flattery that is rooted in **wind-of-water-of-wind**.

Flattery rooted in **wind-of-water-of-wind** is when a person utters words of flattery without being aware of it, because he is somewhat unaware of the words that leave his mouth. He speaks words of flattery to others simply because he is so used to it; this is called *melumadah*, to act “by rote”. He is so used to it that he’s not even aware of it.

A common example of this (words we utter out of “*melumadah*”) is when a person is *davening Shemoneh Esrei* and he forgets where he’s up to in *Shemoneh Esrei*, or like when he forgot if he said “*Yaaleh V’yavoh*” or not; because he doesn’t pay attention to what he says, and he can’t recall the words that he said.

Of course, no one is perfectly aware of all the words coming out of his mouth, but each person can identify at least three or four times a day when he utters words which he forgets that he even said.

It is a problem that does not begin with words of flattery; it begins way before that – it began with lack of awareness to one’s speech. It is due to the habit of *melumadah*, when a person acts by rote. The habit of *melumadah*, besides for being the source of words that we’re not aware of that we say, is also what leads one to speak words of flattery, because since the person is so used to being unaware of what he says, he is also not aware that he is using his speech all the time to flatter others.

Examining Flattery

Taking this further: what indeed is the reason that a person flatters others?

Chazal say that “it is permitted to flatter the wicked on This World”; we learn from this that it is permitted to engage in flattery when it necessary, like if one needs something from a wicked person, and the only way to get it out of him is to flatter him. It seems that a person flatters others in order to get something he needs out of them; that is the simple understand of why people flatter – so they can get on the other person’s good side and get what they need.

But we also know that sometimes, a person flatters others even when in a situation where he doesn’t need something from the other. It is simply more comfortable for him to engage in flattery.

²² <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-007-flattery-part-3-craving-social-acceptance>

So flattery isn't always about getting something out of others. It can simply be a nature to flatter others.

We also find that there are people who flatter others in order to be good to others; this kind of flattery is being used for a holy cause, such as giving another a smile or a compliment to another in order to make the other feel good and strengthen his spirits. This is a kind of flattery which is not evil, in essence.

A Deeper Look At Flattery

However, let's take a deeper look into the root of flattery.

When a person flatters another, there are two factors involved: the **words** of flattery he utters, as well as various **actions** of flattery that he does in order to win the other's approval. This is a true description of flattery, but the deeper understanding behind flattery is that the person is saying what he knows (or thinks) that others want him to say. Or, he will say certain words to others so that others will praise him for if he says those words.

The point is: a flatterer is he not being himself! He is acting in a way that he thinks others want him to act like, and he is saying words which he thinks that others would like him to say.

Thus, flattery is essentially when a person says or does things that aren't from his true self. He'll act a certain way and say certain words just so that he'll "fit in" to society. The root of [evil] flattery, therefore, is not the act of flattery he does, nor the words of flattery that he utters, nor is it in the smile of flattery that he projects; the root of evil flattery is that a person trains himself to act or talk in the way that he thinks how others wants him to act. [He is not acting like himself; he is performing for others, albeit subconsciously].

This is what *Chazal* refer to as the "group of flatters." It is a kind of person who has transformed his entire behavior into someone whom he really isn't, which deceives others, so that he can fit in with society.

The Holy and Evil Ways To Use "Bittul" (Nullifying Oneself)

When this power is used for holiness, it is used as the holy power in the soul called *bittul*, to nullify oneself to others (and to feel nullified to Hashem). *Bittul*, in a subtle sense, really thrives on using the power of flattery for holiness, because it involves giving up one's real self for the betterment of others.

Evil flattery, however, is when this feeling of *bittul* to others is coming from one's *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic level of the soul), and it is an evil kind of *bittul*. And when we are dealing with the *nefesh habehaimis*, there are many different kinds of "animals" that one can imitate....

When one doesn't have his own sense of healthy individuality, he will try very much to fit in with others. Thus, evil flattery is really a lack of proper identity of oneself. When one does not have a healthy sense of individuality for himself, he is more drawn towards this form of evil flattery of always having to "fit in" with others.

Two Kinds of Flatterers

When we reflect, we can see that there are two kinds of people who regularly engage in flattery.

One kind of person will flatter others because he has an agenda to get what he needs out of others. He'll be nice to the banker because he needs to form a trust with the banker. This is not the kind of flattery we are dealing with; it is also flattery, but it is not as deeply ingrained in the person, because here the person is just using flattery as a tool to get what he needs out of others.

Here, we are dealing with a person who flatters others because he has trained himself to become a flatterer, since he wants to fit in with others, for he has no sense of individuality of his own. He has trained himself to become a professional flatterer, as a means for survival. He has become something he is not. That is the prime example of evil flattery – the "group of flatterers."

The Solution To Flattery Stemming From Lack of Individuality

The root of the problem always contains the key to the solution. Since we have explained here that flattery is not rooted in flattery, but in a lack of individuality, the solution to flattery/lack of individuality is thus rooted in developing a healthy sense of one's individuality.

Chazal say that "Each person was created individual". When one develops his individuality in a holy way (and this does not refer to *gaavah*/conceit, *chas v'shalom*, which it very well could be confused with) and he knows his inner world well, he is stronger about his true identity, and this in turn will weaken his need to flatter others. The whole reason that he needs to flatter others is because he does not have a strong sense of identity of himself, therefore he feels a need to always be nullified to others, so that he will have an identity. But if we can get him to develop his individuality (in a holy way – which is by knowing his strengths), then his whole need to flatter others will fall away.

Those Who Should Not Use This Solution

However, we will mention here that a person who is drawn after flattery is probably a person who lacks "fire" in his soul. If he would have a lot of fire in his soul, he does not nullify himself to others easily. If a person with a lot of fire in his soul attempts to increase his sense of individuality for himself, he will probably go overboard with this and become too conceited.

Therefore, the words here are only addressing one who does not have that much fire in his soul. If one knows himself well that he is very drawn towards *gaavah*, he should not use the following solution, because it will only increase his *gaavah*.

Fixing Flattery: Developing Your Own Identity

If one is too meek and that is why he flatters others, he has to develop a healthy sense of individuality for oneself. He has to get to know how he is unique. The more a person is clear about his inner world, the less he will feel a need to flatter others, because he will feel stronger about himself and thus not lower himself that easily.

Of course, he should also avoid flattering others in the practical sense, such as resolving not to do certain acts of flattery and not to say words of flattery to others. We've already mentioned this in the past. However, what we are introducing here is that resolving to stop one's habits of flattery only happens when one knows how to eradicate his own tendency towards flattery. This is achieved through building in oneself a healthy sense of identity and individuality.

Complimenting Others

Until now, we have explained the evils of flattery and how to fix it. Now we will explain an additional point, which answers a question that many are asking on this topic.

When a person flatters another because he needs something from him, where does this behavior come from? When a person gives a false compliment to another, or a compliment that's a little exaggerated, what is the motivation in the person that's behind the false compliment?

If a person looks into himself deeply, he can discover that it really comes from a feeling of low self-worth; this comes from his *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic level of the soul). He might not be aware of it, and he doesn't realize that the reason why he falsely compliments others is really coming from his own low self-worth! He really wants to find *chein* (favor) in the eyes of others, and he doesn't even realize that this is his motivation when he compliments others.

For example, a person attends a family *simcha*, and he goes around giving compliments to everyone. If he's very used to this, he probably hopes that everybody else compliment him as well. This is a subconscious expectation he has; a person is not always aware of it. He's not smiling at others because he learned that *Chazal* say that you should smile at people; that's not his actual intention when he smiles at others. He's smiling at others because he wants others to make him feel good in return! His *nefesh habehaimis* has gotten him used to making others feel good for this very reason: he really is hoping that others will also make him feel good.

It could be that he started out making others feel good and smiling at them because he was inspired by the words of *Chazal*, or because he heard a *mussar shmuess* about it. But as he gets used to

always complimenting others, he might not realize that he really wants others to make him feel good in return, and in fact, it could very well be that his entire motivation in making others feel good is so that others will make him feel good! He has trained himself to live according to what others expect of him. This is really a form of flattery.

The Solution

Now we will explain how to do it the right way – how to give compliments to others and make others feel good in a non-flattering way.

When one give compliments to others and he says nice words to others to make them feel good, first of all, he needs to really focus on a good point in the other, and upon that, he should then give the compliment. It should be something that is a true virtue in the person, and not something that is made up.

What happens, though, if you're asked to speak in public by a *simcha* and you have to say nice things about a person, but you have nothing nice to say about the person that's true? For example, when you're asked to speak by a *Sheva Berachos* about the *chosson* or the parents or the in-laws, and you need to come up with all kinds of nonsense that praises the person whom you're speaking about (and often one sentence has nothing to do with other in these kinds of speeches) – is that okay?

Fact of the matter is, you should get up and speak. You have no choice. But try to think about something that's true about the person you're talking about. If you focus on something good about the person which is true, at least you'll be starting from something true about the person.

Of course, it's better not to speak at all about the person whom you have nothing nice to say about. When you have to speak about someone in public, you are forced to make up things about him that aren't true, so it's always going to involve some lies. Therefore, you should not deliberately speak at these kinds of events, because you are placing yourself in a situation where you will have to lie.

But if you are in a situation where you are basically forced to speak, you have no choice; you can't back out, because that will not look nice. So you have to speak, if you're asked to. What do you do?

At least find one nice thing that's truthful to say about the person. In this way, at least there is some truth lacing your words, and although you still have to make up false compliments about the person, the fact that you said something truthful will protect you from engaging in more words of flattery than necessary. It's still flattery, of course, but at least you're putting some truth into it, which will lessen the amount of falsity you're saying about the person.

However, if you are a person who is usually negative towards people, it might be better for you to speak in public and try to come up with nice things to say about the person, because it is upon you to acquire more of an *ayin tovah* (good eye) to people. But if you're not a negatively inclined person,

it's better for you to avoid flattering and falsely complimenting people in public, as we explained here. This is a subtle point you need to clarify with yourself.

Here is another example of how to chip away at flattery. When you go to a *simcha* and you find yourself complimenting the *baal hasimcha*, ask yourself if you're doing so to really be kind to him, or if it's because it's coming from a need for flattery.

Becoming Aware of Your Speech

Earlier, we addressed the lack of awareness in one's speech. A person should try to become consciously aware as he's saying the words of *Shemoneh Esrei*, to the words he's saying. Even if you know that as you daven *Shemoneh Esrei* that your mind and heart is not connected to the words, still, if you're at least aware in your conscious state that you're saying words which you don't feel connected to, that itself will already protect you from spacing out.

We used *davening* as an example, but the point of the concept is to become aware of the words that come out of your mouth and what's motivating you. You need to clarify this internally.

When you discover that certain words you say to others are really stemming from a need you have to flatter others in order to win their approval, now you are aware of those words of flattery you say, and you should refrain from saying those words of flattery. According to *Shulchan Aruch* it may not be forbidden, but if you want to work on your *middos* in an inner way, it's forbidden for you to say the words of flattery. And even if your compliments to others are earnest and for the sake of making others good, you should still suspect that there is some flattery involved in your words.

Flattering The Wicked

We have mentioned in the past the statement of *Chazal* say it is "permissible to flatter the wicked". What does this mean, and how far does this go?

First of all, you should bear in mind that when you have to flatter the wicked, it's only "permissible," - it's not an obligatory *mitzvah* upon you.

Also, Yaakov *Avinu* was allowed to flatter Esav, but it bothered him afterwards. So even when you are permitted to flatter a wicked person (like in a situation where you need something from him), it should still bother you afterwards that you had to engage in flattery.

If one flatters the wicked out of his desire to flatter, there is no permission granted for this. It's only permitted when you need something from them. To flatter for the sake of flattery is prohibited even towards the wicked. Why? Because through flattery, one will come to connect to them.

Therefore, in order for one to know if he has acted correctly after he has flattered the wicked person, he should check himself if he feels a connection to the wicked person. If one feels connected

to the wicked person, it shows that he engaged in a forbidden kind of flattery with him. The only flattery which is permissible with the wicked is when you use the flattery as a tool to get what you need, and not for the sake of flattery.

In Conclusion

We have explained here that flattery is defined as a superficial form of speech with others.

We have said that the evil side to flattery is that a person engages in superficial speech in order to find favor by others. The holy kind of flattery is when a person speaks to others from an inner place in himself to make others feel good – with intention to truly be kind to them. Holy flattery is that the words are not true, but the person's heart has intention to bestow good on the other.

We have explained here that evil flattery (expressed either through actions of flattery or words of flattery) really stems from a subconscious need to win others' approval, which really stems from a lack of identity. The solution is thus for one to build his sense of identity for himself.

We have also explained that it is better not to speak about others in public, because then you are forced to flatter people, but when you are asked to speak, you should not decline; but you should still try to say something truthful about the person which is a compliment about him.

In situations where you need to flatter a wicked person, you may only do so if it is necessary, and not to form a friendship with him. But your intention should be only to get what you need, and not for the sake of bonding with him.

The way you can know if you acted properly with this is to check yourself afterwards and see if you feel connected to him or not. If you feel that you have bonded with the wicked person, it shows that your intention in flattering him was for the sake of flattery, which was forbidden; if you don't feel a connection to him, it must be that you only used the flattery as a means to get what you needed, which is permissible [when it is towards the wicked].

8 | *Flattery Part 4: Having Connections*²³

“Egrofah shel Chanufah”: Flattering The Powerful

We are in the midst of discussing the evil trait of speaking words of flattery, which stems from **water-of-wind** in one’s soul. So far we have explained flattery that stems from the aspects of earth, water, and wind within **water-of-wind**. Currently, we are up to discussing flattery that stems from **fire-of-water-of-wind**.

This is the kind of flattery which the *Gemara* calls “*egrofah shel chanufah*” – the “fist of flattery”. The *Gemara*²⁴ states that ever since people began to have *egrofah shel chanufah* - flattering the government - the Beis Din no longer has that much power, and because of this, people are able to do as they please without having to worry about being judged in Beis Din; and in addition, because there is no Beis Din, people cannot rebuke others properly.

What exactly is the concept of “*egrofah shel chanufah*”? It is to flatter someone who has power, to form connections with one who has power so that you can get what you need from him. This is not the same concept as “flattering the wicked” – we will explain the difference.

The *Gemara*²⁵ brings that the Sages tried to flatter King Agrippas, a descendent from the wicked Hordos (who killed out the entire house of the Chashmonaim). When King Agrippas came upon the *possuk* in the Torah that says we have a commandment to have a Jewish king, he grew upset, so the Sages consoled him (in the attempt to flatter him) and said, “Prepare, prepare [to become the king].” On that day, because they flattered King Agrippas, much destruction came about to the Jewish people, as *Tosafos* brings from *Talmud Yerushalmi*.

This is called “*egrofah shel chanufah*” – to flatter a person who has power. Earlier, we mentioned “flattering the wicked”, which is when one has to flatter a wicked person for a permissible need that he has. In the case of flattery we are currently discussing, *egrofah shel chanufah*, though, a person flatters a person who has power for a forbidden cause. That was the case with King Agrippas; it was forbidden to flatter him, because it involved encouraging him to become a Jewish king, which he was not fit to become.

Here we will speak about how the concept of “*egrofah shel chanufah*” is used with regards to someone who flatters because he needs something that is **permissible**, though; not someone who flatters in order to get something that is forbidden to him. Although the *Gemara* uses it in context with flattering for a forbidden cause, it can also be applied to flattering a person for power when a person needs something from him. We will focus on the discussion here on this kind of scenario.

²³ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-008-flattery-part-4-having-connections>

²⁴ *Sotah 41a*

²⁵ *ibid*

Forming Connections With The ‘Right’ People: A Form of Flattery

“*Egrofah shel chanufah*” that is common in our times is when we flatter someone who is more powerful than us, so that we can get something out of the person who has power. This kind of flattery is mentioned with regards to flattering the government, but it can apply as well to flattering anyone who is in a position of power.

To give a simple example of this, a person might want to flatter someone in the community who is in any sort of position of power, such as a person who is very wealthy and influential. Even if he’s not getting something out of him right now, he might want to form a connection with a powerful person so that at a later time he can get a favor from him. He makes sure to form all the right “connections” with people.

This kind of flattery, called *egrofah shel chanufah*, was always around. But it is especially prevalent in our times. In fact, society in the world we live in today is immersed in “*egrofah shel chanufah*”! We often find ourselves dependent on having to form certain connections with those who have power. All kinds of organizations sit and contemplate how to form connections with people to use them, using all kinds of advertisements and messages. This is really a form of flattery – the kind that is called *egrofah shel chanufah*.

We live in a world in which superficial calculations run many organizations; pursuing what’s right and true is not of that much interest. This is not only the way it works in the outside secular world - even organizations of Torah causes are often being run by the powerful and influential.

For example, when a big *g’vir* (wealthy donor) passes away, organizations have to make big memorials for him in the papers and magazines, as part of the protocol, and it’s often just so that other people will notice that these organizations exist, because if not, they never make into people’s radar. It really shouldn’t be that way, but it is.

Another example: A person wants to get his child into a certain yeshiva, and as long as he has the right “connections” with the right people, his child gets in to the yeshiva.

People who work for organizations can relate to this very well. Everything works on based on how much connections you have. People who do fundraising for Yeshivos have to get a lot of their money using flattery, making sure to form the right “connections” with certain wealthy individuals.

This is called “*egrofah shel chanufah*”: where flattery makes the world go round. It is a kind of flattery which envelopes society.

Becoming Aware of How Flattery Runs Society, and Letting It Bother You

If one is not aware to this (and one must be sensitive to this - not just intellectually aware of it), he is somewhat disconnected from the deceptive reality that we live in. It’s a very big fact of life that the world revolves around this kind of flattery, and there’s no way for a person to ignore it.

A person has to know how the world is really supposed to look like, in contrast with the way it runs now, and then he needs to figure out how to act in the reality we live in. (When you think about it deeply, you can see how it's the entire depth of our exile...) We must first realize that we live in such a false kind of world.

First think about it on an intellectual level, and then become sensitive to it, so that it bothers you.

This doesn't imply, *chas v'shalom*, that everything on this world is false. It is just that the general way that the world conducts themselves with is through "*egrofah shel chanufah*".

So the first step here is to become aware of this, and the second step is: to let it bother you. When it bothers you, you will wish to come out of it.

This can be expressed either through your *davening* for the redemption, or through yearning for the redemption – when we will all come out of the corrupt way in which society is run.

That's one side of the coin to your job in coming out of this kind of flattery that society is entrenched in.

Dealing With A Corrupt World

The other part of your job is: to know how to deal with this, now that we realize that we are all within this problem. How, indeed, can we survive spiritually, in a world which revolves so much around flattery?

We have two abilities in our soul which we were given that can help us fight flattery.

One power we have is *emes*: truth. When we are in a situation in which we need to engage in some kind of flattery towards a person of power, we can wonder what the truth/*emes* is, and then pit the truth against the falsity that is found in *chanufah*/flattery.

Practically speaking, when you have to engage in any sort of flattery with influential people or with those who have power, whom you ultimately need to deal with at some point, you can use the power of *emes* in your soul and try to analyze how much truth is involved in what you are doing.

In this way, you'll notice the elements of truth in what you are doing as well as the elements of falsity, and hopefully, your search for *emes*/truth will guide you in avoiding the *sheker*/falsity that is found in *chanufah*/flattery. That is one way how you can separate yourself from the falsity of flattery when you inevitably find yourself in a situation of having to flatter another: we can try to increase the amount of truth in any given situation, and in that way we have a hope in lessening the flattery.

The other power we have to fight flattery is: *emunah* (faith in Hashem). Through increasing our amount of palpable *emunah* in Hashem, we can less the amount of *chanufah* that we are involved with. When we use our *emunah* to avoid falsity, it is called "*emes v'emunah*."

Summary of the Two Approaches

To summarize, we have two different abilities that can weaken the amount of *chanufah*/flattery we find ourselves in.

The first method that one can use is to increase one's sensitivity to what *emes* is, which, in turn, lessens the amount of *chanufah* you will have to engage in. We can see what the *emes* is and what the *chanufah/sheker* is in a situation, and then decide which path to go in; hopefully, we will take notice of the falsity that is involved in having to resort to flattery, because our *emes* has been activated.

The second option we have is to use our power of *emunah* against *chanufah*, and the more we use our *emunah*, the less desperate we will feel on having to resort to *chanufah*.

Using Emunah To Avoid Chanufah/Flattery

When people engage in *chanufah*, what are they really doing? They flatter people when they really need something from them. Here a person comes to a deciding point in his life: what is really meaningful to him?

When we need to talk to the banker, and we are given all sorts of options on how to earn more credits and make some profit, we have two choices in front of us. If we don't have *emunah*, then we will probably be more comfortable with forming a trusty and reliable relationship with the banker. We'll become wrapped up in *egrofah shel chanufah*, because we are desperate to be comfortable.

But if we use our *emunah*, then our *emunah* tells us that only Hashem is in charge of our money, and no one else is; in that way, we'll be able to give ourselves a good chance at avoiding *egrofah shel chanufah* from ensnaring us.

If one does not base his life on a palpable kind of *emunah* in Hashem, when *emunah* isn't an actual part of his life, then chances are that *chanufah*/flattery will take over. But if one's *emes* or *emunah* is actively dominant, then his *emes* or *emunah* will take over and save him from having to engage in *chanufah*/flattery.

Your intellect will probably rationalize with you that you need to flatter people on this world in order to succeed. But your *emunah* can overpower your rational logic and save you from flattery.

Knowing Your Personal Level of Emunah

That being the case, a person has to know really well what his personal level of *emunah* is.

If one's *emunah* is just on an intellectual level but it is not palpable to him, he will not have the power to overpower the tendency to engage in *egrofah shel chanufah*. Even if he says "*Ani Maamin*" every day, if he doesn't have a palpable sense of faith in Hashem in his life, then his *emunah* is only

intellectual and not active, and it will not be strong enough to help him avoid depending on *egrofah shel chanufah*. One needs palpable *emunah* in order to overcome the urge for *egrofah shel chanufah*.

Here is an example which really brings out the concept. Most *bnei Torah* are struggling with having to make *parnassah* (livelihood). A few *bnei Torah* merit not to have worries about it, but most *bnei Torah* do not have it easy with *parnassah*. Sometimes a *ben Torah* is offered a way to make some money, as long as he does such and such, and he is very tempted to engage in some efforts to make a little money on the side. Being that he is a *ben Torah*, he will of course not think of it if it might compromise on his *ruchniyus* in some way. However, way before that, a person first has to know how much effort he needs to make in the first place! And he might find out, upon examining himself deeply, that he has no *emunah* at all.

If that is the case, then he may make more effort in making some money. But if he discovers that he does have *emunah*, then it's not appropriate for him to engage in making *parnassah*. This is because the whole entire need to make a living is a penalty placed on mankind²⁶; but if one has *emunah*, there is less of a penalty on him.

The point of the above example is to bring out the concept that one has to discover how much *emunah* he really has. This is not a small discovery one notices in his life – it's an issue of how he lives his entire life.

Woe to the person who leaves this world after 120 years and he never knew what his level of *emunah* was! There are many actions that people do which are really not appropriate according to a person's level of *emunah*. Knowing your personal level of *emunah* is very important, and it might even be the most important things you can ever know about yourself.

Of course, it's impossible to go by life for 120 years and never flatter anyone. But the question is: How much do you really need to flatter others and form 'connections' with others? Where do you draw the line? If one knows what his level of *emunah* is, he can know how much he needs others or not, and this will greatly lessen the amount of *chanufah* he relies on in order to get by life.

(This is not addressing the need that one feels to make friends, which fulfills emotional needs. That's a different topic).

On a deeper note, this is really the meaning behind the words of *Chazal* that "It is permissible to flatter the wicked." When one knows his level of *emunah* well, he is able to engage in flattery without getting negatively affected.

Remembering Who Is In Charge

Thus, in order to avoid *egrofah shel chanufah*, when you do have to engage in some kind of flattery another in order to form a connection with someone whom you need, you need to remember that it's always up to Hashem if you will succeed or not. Don't think that some person

²⁶ *Mesillas Yesharim*. For more on this subject, see *Tefillah #112 – Bitachon And Making A Living*

will help you get anywhere, no matter how powerful or influential he is, without Hashem letting it happen. Try to always remember that Hashem is in charge, not people.

This is a very practical way to get by life during this exile we live in. Pit your *emes* and your *emunah* against the amount of *chanufah* in your life. This will gradually weaken your dependency on having to engage in *chanufah* even as you find yourself in a situation where you need to use some kind of *chanufah* in order to get by.

Lessen The Amount of People Whom You “Need”

In addition, after you have worked on these two steps, realize that your need to form connections with people on this world should be few. Most of the people we are involved with are not truthful; we mostly have to deal with people who live life superficially, who are not concerned about being truthful. So it's better for us the less we are involved with having to deal with so many people.

The more a person lives an inner kind of life, he will find that he is fine without having to make that many connections with others. So if you're afraid that your son won't get into the yeshiva you want him to get into, you can *daven* to Hashem about it and strengthen your *emunah* in Hashem, rather than engage yourself in *chanufah* and form the right “connections” with certain people.

Of course, you can't run away totally from having to deal with the world. You will have to form connections with people and need others to help you get by, but the amount of flattery you have to engage in can still be lessened to a great degree, when you have make sure to increase your *emunah*. Your *emunah* tells you that you don't need *chanufah* to get by. So use your *emunah* by telling yourself that you will disconnect from having to need people on This World.

Surely, you also need to make efforts to achieve any results, and this will inevitably involve *chanufah*. Although it appears to us that life is about making the right connections with others, the inner and true way to live life is to disconnect from all of these connections - and to instead reveal your abilities of *emes* and *emunah*.

In Conclusion

So the very first thing you need to do, to counter *egrofah shel chanufah*, is to disconnect from needing people on this world to get by; and if you succeed in doing that, you can then have the ability of deal with the world of deception you are inevitably must live with and deal with - through using your abilities of *emes* and *emunah*.

9 | *Idle Chatter Part 1: Dry Conversations*²⁷

Wind-of-Wind: Idle Speech

With the help of Hashem, we continue here to learn about the element of wind in the soul. We are up to discussing **wind-of-wind**, which generally refers to *devarim betailim* (idle speech). Wind-of-wind subdivides into four categories: earth, water, wind and fire.

Four Kinds of Idle Speech

Earth-of-wind-of-wind is the source of ‘dry’ kinds of conversation (just as the earth is a dry substance). As an example, the Sages say that a person who talks *lashon hora* (gossip) has no enjoyment in his speech, just like the snake does not enjoy its food, which can only eat dirt. Hence, when one speaks words (wind) that are idle (wind) which are “dry” in their nature, it stems from earth-of-wind-of-wind (Soon we will explain the depth of this).

Water-of-wind-of-wind is when a person talks about topics that are enjoyable to him. Water is the root of enjoyment; hence, when a person speaks idle words (wind-of-wind) which are enjoyable to him (water), such speech stems from his water-of-wind-of-wind.

Wind-of-wind-of-wind is when a person talks freely. The *Chovos HaLevovos* said that “the lightest part of the body is the tongue”, meaning, speech flows very freely. When speech emanates from one’s ‘tongue’ - when it flows lightly and freely, it is coming from wind-of-wind-of-wind, because the person’s words (wind) are moving quickly (wind) and he speaks idle words: wind-of-wind-of-wind.

Fire-of-wind-of-wind is when a person speaks excitedly and he thus he gets ‘fiery’ with his words.

Earth-of-Wind-of-Wind: Empty Conversations

We will begin by discussing **earth-of-wind-of-wind**: “dry” kinds of talk. Just as the earth is dry, so can a person’s speech be dry, when it lacks content.

When a person talks, sometimes the talking is alive with vitality, and sometimes the conversations are dry and dead.

Sometimes it is a ‘dry’ kind of conversation because it is about a ‘dry’ topic. For example, two people meet and talk about nonsense, such as what they bought in the store or where they went,

²⁷ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-009-idle-chatter-part-1-dry-conversations>

what they did, etc. Now, if a person says something to his friend that contains something new and exciting, this can be called an ‘alive’ kind of conversation; there is some content to what he is saying. But sometimes people talk about empty things that are unimportant.

A large part of speech that exists today is about things that have no life to it, such as, “I went to the bank. I went to the store. I got on the bus.” These are all dead conversations! There’s no content in them.

Even more so, let’s say two people meet each other and start *schmoozing*, and for some reason the conversation goes flat in the middle, and the other one is silent. What is the reason for this? (Now, if two women meet, they are for sure not going to have any quiet between them.) What is the reason for the long pauses of silence? Sometimes it is because a person isn’t interested in people or because he is too closed up inside himself; we are not dealing with this here. We are dealing with an emotionally healthy person: why isn’t the other responding in middle of the conversation?

If they are two *bnei Torah*, they will speak about matters of content, such as topics in Torah or *avodas Hashem*. But if a person is not like this, what does he usually talk about with another? When there is a *simcha* and the people are sitting around with each other by the table, what do they speak about? People are usually speaking about matters that have no content in them!

Sometimes the conversations are a little more meaningful, but they are mostly just talking out of keeping to various social rules. Most of the talking going on in social scenes is about things that are dead from any inner content to them.

The Same Old Conversations That Never Change

Worse than this is when a person has the habit of having to voice his opinions and how everything should be. Often, a person will speak about things he doesn’t know much about, and he is only speaking about it because he has trained himself to always speak about those topics. Perhaps he grew up that way, to talk about those specific topics and only those topics. These are also conversations that do not contain vitality to them.

Even a person who is more spiritual, who only talks *Divrei Torah*, might only be saying over the same ‘*shtickel Torah*’ he always says, and he keeps repeating it. The words are not alive. There are people who keep repeating the same Torah speech whenever they have to speak in public, for years and years. These are also ‘dead’ kinds of speech.

Sometimes there are topics which everyone likes to talk about, such as *chinuch* (child education). However, a person might just be repeating his words and opinions every time he speaks about timeless topics, and there is nothing new contained in his words; he is just repeating his words. People tend to keep speaking about the same topic, again and again, and the words have no vitality to them.

The more a person talks, the more dry his words probably are, because it's not possible to say so many words that are alive. Thus, talking a lot leads to superficial kinds of talking.

Even 'talking in learning' with a *chavrusa* can be 'dead'. This is when one talks from his undeveloped '*hashkafah rishona*' ("first outlook"), and not from his heart or from thinking it over properly, and he simply says the opposite of what his *chavrusa* says, simply because it's not his *hashkafah rishona*; he hasn't even thought it over well. (Of course, there is a level of *hashkafah rishonah* that can be trusted, which is when one is on a high level. But we are not talking about this). When one talks from his *hashkafah rishonah*, the words he speaks are usually dead.

Even when one talks about important topics that are on people's minds, such as *chinuch* or *shalom bayis* (marriage) or areas of *chesed* or Torah causes, it can very well be that hasn't thought it over that much, and when he talks about these topics, his words are kind of 'dead'. And he keeps repeating them, again and again, each time that the topic comes up again...

One who is a bit emotionally aware can tell that sometimes when he speaks with others, the other is talking from a superficial part of himself.

Those Who Talk With Expertise On All Areas

This problem is more apparent in people who always have opinions about everything whenever they converse with others. There are also people who talk about all areas of Torah as if they know every area of Torah very well, without having learned it. (Thus, the problem of excessive talking is not only a problem that exists in the outside world, but it can affect even people who are more spiritual). Even if such talking came from thinking about the words beforehand, the person might have very well come to a superficial conclusion, and when he speaks about it, the words are not alive. Most of the words spoken today are "dead" words, words that have no inner content to them.

More examples are: a person sings *Zemiros*, and often he just sings them because he is repeating them, simply because that's what he used to. Another example: a person says the same "*vort*" about *Sheva Berachos* every time he is by a *Sheva Berachos*, the same *vort* which everyone knows. The words are dead and merely being forced out of his mouth because it's the social norm that you have to speak when you are with people... These are words that come from **earth-of-wind-of-wind**, words that are "dry" and thus dead, lacking *chiyus* (vitality) to them.

Earlier, we brought the words of the Sages that the Snake has no enjoyment when it speaks. Now we can understand the depth of these words: when a person speaks words that are 'dry', such speech stems from earth-of-wind-of-wind, just as the Snake eats dirt and has no enjoyment in it, so are there people who do not enjoy what they talk about, yet they talk anyway, always talking words that are dead from content and thus dry from vitality.

1. Don't Talk So Much

If a person has a bit of *chiyus*/vitality in himself, he can feel empty and sad after he has such a conversation or even as he's amidst it. When one lives a more inner life, he knows how to talk from his intellect and heart together. This is the general outline, and now we will explain this more in detail.

First of all, a person has to know that we don't have to talk so much. Just because you are with people doesn't mean you have to always schmooze with people. Sometimes we are active with people, and sometimes we withdraw.

2. Infuse Renewal Into Your Conversations

However, even when you do choose *schmooze* with others, at least speak from a place of *chiyus* (vitality) in yourself. This can be achieved in either one of two ways: Either a person can feel vitality in talking about a topic that he loves to talk about, or if it's a conversation that will contain a new point that he never thought about yet.

Of course, sometimes you have to talk to people to be kind to others [so that they won't feel like you're ignoring them, or to raise another's spirits]. These words don't have to be alive or contain anything novel.

But in an average situation, where one chooses to *schmooze* with others, he should talk from a more alive place within himself. To speak a conversation that has *chiyus* in it, either one can speak about holy matters, or at least matters that are close to holiness; or, one can speak about things that contains a new insight into something. The point is that in your conversations with people, strive to look for a point in the conversation that contains some *chiyus* and then speak about it with the other.

To illustrate, Rav Dovid Povarsky *zt"l* said that each times he gives *shiur* on the same *masechta* that he already learned in the previous cycle of yeshiva, he would learn it as if he never learned it before. The point of the concept is to look for something new in the same old words.

So when you are speaking with someone, one should speak about a point that is alive. You can even be repetitive about it, as long as it's something which contains *chiyus*. To illustrate, we can see that a first grade teacher or second grade teacher says the very same words to his class each time that he teaches it, but he teaches it with *chiyus*, because he loves to speak about what he's talking about.

The other way to infuse *chiyus* into your conversations with others is that there can always be renewal in your words. For example, when you learn *Gemara*, you can always find some new point in what you're learning each time you sit down to learn the same old piece.

In Summary

Thus, in every conversation, there are two points for you to consider: *where* you speak from in yourself, as well as *what* you speak about. You need to speak from a place *in* yourself that is alive and not dry and dead, as well as to speak *about* things that are alive and not dry and dead.

The point is: don't keep repeating your same old words that you always say; look for a point of *chiyus* in what you're speaking about (and if you do so, you can be repetitive about it), or, look to speak about something that you like to speak about (don't be repetitive about it).

(When you speak words of *chiyus*, they can penetrate into the one who hears them.)

3. Improving The Quality Of Your Conversations

Now we come to a third, deeper point, which is relevant to **wind-of-wind-of-wind** (speech that flows freely) that we will later expand upon.

Why do people talk so freely? It comes from being used to talking words that have no *chiyus*/vitality. Once a person gets used to speaking words of vitality in his conversations, though, he will find that his words take more strength out of him (for it is written, "*My soul leaves when I speak with Him*"), so he will find that he talks less!

When one gets used to speaking words of *chiyus* in his conversations, he will discover that he speaks less. Sometimes of course you need to *schmooze* with others in order to be kind to them, but generally speaking, you will find it harder to speak so much with others, because your words take more energy out of you, being that they are energy-giving and thus use up your energy more.

Such words are words that a person can connect his words with to Hashem. One who speaks without *chiyus* does not experience the *possuk*, "*My soul leaves when I speak with Him.*" On the other hand, one speaks with *chiyus*, can feel that he's used up more energy when he speaks words that are more alive and spiritual.

In Conclusion

We have mentioned these ideas briefly, but it has been described here a way of speaking which is very different than "street talk." It is the kind of speech that ideal Torah scholars have, who find life in the words of Torah and thus have more elevated kinds of conversations.

10 | *Idle Chatter Part 2: Enjoyable Gossip*²⁸

Water-of-Wind-of-Wind: The Enjoyment of Speaking Gossip

Water-of-wind-of-wind is when a person has particular enjoyment in speaking idle chatter, which results in *lashon hora* (gossip).

There are four classifications of creations – *doimem* [the non-living, such as rocks], *tzomeiach* [growing organisms, such as plants], *chai* (living beings, such as animals), and *medaber* (social beings/people). Man is called *medaber*, a social creature.

Man also has the power to lead (*hanbagah*) through his speech. The power of speech is rooted in man's aspect of *hanbagah*. One can be a *manhig* (leader) or, he is *munhag* (led). When one's speech is impaired, he falls from the level of "manhig" to "munhag".

The simple understanding of this is that if I am choosing, I am being *manhig*. If I am being dragged after something which I am losing control of, I am being *munhag*.

But it is more than that. We have many deeds, words, and thoughts that we go through. But what is it that leads all of our deeds, words and thoughts? When one doesn't work to understand himself, he is unaware of what is motivating his deeds, words, and thoughts. He might have some control of himself, but chances are that his deeds/words/thoughts are leading him.

If one is not aware of what motivates him to speak, it is hard for him to control the words that come out of his mouth. Learning *Hilchos Shemiras HaLashon* can help of course, but it will still be very difficult for one to overcome his desire to speak *lashon hora* if he's not aware of what's causing him to speak those words in the first place.

Being Controlled Vs. Being In Control

For this same reason, many people cannot concentrate properly during davening and learning, because they are unaware of what is causing their thoughts. There is a lack of self-awareness of the root of our deeds, speech and thoughts. When we are being *munhag*, and we are not being a *manhig*, we remain unaware of the inner motivations that are behind our deeds, words, and thoughts.

Of course, we always have *bechira* (free will), and therefore we are able to control ourselves somewhat as we are in the midst of a deed, word, or thought. But this can be compared to a person riding a bus – is he able to lead the bus, or is he being led by it? He has free will to jump out of the window if he wants, but for the most part, the bus is leading him and keeping him inside it.

²⁸ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-010-idle-chatter-part-2-enjoyable-gossip>

True self-control is achieved only when you get to the root of your deeds, words, and thoughts. Of course, you are still able to catch yourself in the middle of what you're doing/saying/thinking and stop yourself, but this will not be enough for you to be in control of yourself that much. You need to be able to “lead” yourself from the start – that’s the real, inner kind of self-control. The more a person becomes aware of his motivations, the more he can be able to **lead** himself in how he acts/talks/thinking and thereby gain more self-control over himself.

We Are Always Motivated By Pleasure

This is generally the concept of the element of wind: the power in a person to lead himself.

Water-of-wind-of-wind, when used for evil, is the power to lead oneself towards evil, which is the trait of speaking *lashon hora*. The holy side of water-of-wind-of-wind is when one derives true pleasure from talking. Pleasure, *oneg*, can be holy or evil. A person is always leading himself to pleasure. The question is if he is leading himself towards holy pleasure or evil pleasure.

Thus, the root of *hanbagah* (leading) is *oneg* (pleasure); your *oneg*/pleasure is leading you either towards something good or evil.

Therefore, as long as a person is not aware of what gives him *oneg*, he is being *munbag* – he is being somewhat controlled, rather than being in control.

This is the aspect of **water-of-wind-of-wind** in the soul. When it is perfected, one is aware of his *oneg*. When it is impaired, one is *munbag* and he is not a *manhig*.

In deeper terms, when Adam sinned, his *daas* (thinking) became the *daas* of the Serpent. The holy kind of *daas* existed before the sin, in which man’s *daas* was the *daas* of Hashem. The *daas* of the Serpent, which came into man after the sin, is essentially the tendency in man to seek evil pleasure – he is “led” by the “Serpent”. And what does the Serpent enjoy? It enjoys speaking *lashon hora*, as our *Chazal* state.

This concept is what lays behind the words of our Sages that “The wicked ones are ruled by their evil inclination.” It is when a person is *munbag* (led/controlled) by the general force of evil in the world. In fact, even if a person is always learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, he might be *munbag* through evil. Although it appears outwardly that he is always doing the right thing, inwardly, he has still not learned how to gain control of himself, which inevitably means that evil has a pull on him and controls him to a very large extent.

The depth of one’s *bechirah* (free will) is for one to get to the root of his motivations. The more superficial a person lives life, the more he is *munbag* through subconscious motives for evil. He might think that he wants to do the will of Hashem and he might even say so, but it is not really motivating him. He is being motivated by some other motivation that is evil, which he is unaware of.

For this very reason, the *baalei mussar* understood that the stage of *zehirus* (watchfulness), which is described in the beginning of *Mesillas Yesharim*, which is for one to get to the root of how careful he is in *Halacha* - is mainly about clarifying one's internal state. One can only have true *zehirus* when he knows the motivations of why he acts.

Developing Self-Awareness

If a person wants to become aware of himself internally, he needs to develop two abilities: **Logical analysis** to the reason of what you are doing/speaking/thinking, as well as **emotional sensitivity** to the reason of what you are doing/speaking/thinking. (When a person has peace and quiet, he can calmly reflect and develop emotional awareness to his motivations).

For example, if we hear that a person steals, we can try to think about why he stole. Did he steal because he had nothing to eat? Did he steal because "stolen waters are sweet"? Maybe he stole because he was bored. Or maybe he stole so that he could get caught and get put in prison, where he'll be guaranteed food every day.

So there are all kinds of logical motivations that can exist in any one act. Just as we learn a *sugya* of *Gemara* in all its detail, so can we analyze any matter with precision and try to discover all the details.

After you become aware of the logical reason of why you did what you did, now try to **feel** what the reason was that motivated you. If one only feels one motivation in himself and not more than that, this is a sign that he has no self-awareness at all! There are always many motivations that motivate you. Try to discover and feel more than one reason of what motivated you to do a certain act.

So first, figure out all the logical possibilities of what motivated you, and then, take the quiet time to try and feel what motivated you.

Of course, our inner world is incredibly deep and complicating; we never truly know ourselves 100%. For this reason, our *Gedolim* always suspected themselves of having more motivations than what they were consciously aware of. Any *bar daas* (sensible, mature person) knows that Torah is endless. Similarly, the soul is beyond full comprehension, so it's impossible to know all our inner motivations.

Yet, we are still commanded to learn the Torah as much as we can and exert ourselves in it, even though we will never know it totally. In the same sense, we must strive to know our personal soul, even though we will never know it completely. A real *bar daas* always seeks to know himself with more clarity.

Getting used to this reveals a whole new world inside you. Compare this to a person who learns Torah in a "*bekius*" manner and then he discovers what it's like to learn with *iyun* (in-depth study); he feels like he discovered a new world within the Torah. So too, a person can discover a whole new

world within himself, when he seeks to know himself with more and more clarity. One has to keep trying to gain clarity about his soul, and this is a lifelong task.

This enables a person to become more of a *manhig* over himself and free himself from being *munhag*. Of course, no one can totally be in control of himself. This is because we live after the sin, and the Snake's effect is still on us. But we can lessen our aspect of being *munhag* and draw ourselves closer to being a *munhag*. This makes a massive, internal overhaul to one's life.

Example: Acting Zealous "For The Sake Of Heaven"

To give an example, there are people who are constantly involving themselves with various zealous arguments with others, "for the sake of Heaven." Is there anyone who is totally sure that he argues with others only for the sake of Heaven? Even if the person is right in the points he is making when he argues, how does he know that he is entirely being motivated by pure motives for the sake of Heaven? If one suspects himself, he can discover more motivations in himself, and he'll find that he's not motivated purely for the sake of Hashem and doing His will. He'll discover that he is motivated by various motives that are self-serving, such as the pursuit of honor....

Leaving Superficiality

Even more so, one who practices this will uncover a whole inner world in himself, depth within depth, and he will leave the superficial kind of life around him (the world is superficial right now that it's scary how superficial it has become!), and enter a new world - within himself. When he has to deal with the outside world, he will be able to remain in his inner world and retreat into himself even as he is amidst worldly affairs.

This is a fundamental concept, not a side point. These words are opening thoughts of the concept that we will now explain.

Examining What Is Motivating You To Talk

Now let us return to discussing our subject, **water-of-wind-wind**, which is when one enjoys speaking words of gossip.

If a person would count how many words he speaks each day, it would be countless. The Chofetz Chaim said that in one minute, a person can speak 200 words.

But what is it that motivates a person to speak? Taking this further, even when a person speaks words of Torah, what is motivating him? Love for Torah? The desire to feel victorious over another? The desire for honor? A person speaks with his friends – why is he talking to him? Because he loves him and wants to do kindness with him? For his own sake, or for the sake of the listener?

Think of the following. Let's say you discover that you talk to another for your own needs. This motivation can further be analyzed and broken down. Why do you have a need to talk right now? There can be many reasons:

- 1) Some people speak in order to connect with others.
- 2) Others speak to others because they want others to listen to them or because they want others to feel and understand them, not because they want connection with others.
- 3) Others speak to others even when others aren't listening; they can talk and talk, forgetting that others are even in the room, as long as they are generally aware that there are listeners in the room.
- 4) Others speak in order to relieve their worries, as *Chazal* say, "When there is worry in the heart, tell it over to others."
- 5) Others speak to others simply because they are bored and they have nothing important to talk about.
- 6) Others speak because they are in need of moving around, and speaking to another makes them feel like they are moving.

So here is one example of so many motivations that can exist in the same act. This is the question to ask yourself: When you talk to another, are you aware of why you are talking? Is it always about making another feel good?

Without self-awareness towards one's speech, one's speech resembles (like) the speech of the Serpent when it spoke to Chavah. This is not necessarily limited to speaking *lashon hora*; as long as the words spoken lack self-awareness, the words are rooted in the words of the Serpent. In concept, it can apply even to speaking words of Torah! As long as one is not aware of why he is talking, his words are affected by the "*daas* of the Serpent" which entered mankind after the sin.

Thus, one has to know well the reason that motivates him to talk. The Ramban says to think before you talk, and the point behind this is because one has to uncover his motivations in talking. Even if one is not speaking words of *lashon hora*, a person still has to think about what is motivating him to talk right now.

When one gets used to probing his motivations like this on a regular basis, he uncovers within himself a whole new world, a whole deeper dimension in himself. He will keep discovering more motivations in himself in what he does.

One cannot live an inner kind of life if he just remains superficial and ignorant of real self-awareness. Just as a person cannot experience exertion in learning Torah if he does not learn with *iyun* and he just remains satisfied with learning the words of Abaye and Rava alone, so can a person only experience his inner world when he leaves superficiality and he analyzes deeper and deeper into his motivations.

Practically Speaking

Practically speaking, to work on this concept, take one deed of yours and think deeply into it, of what all the possible motivations are. If you have a bit more patience and emotional awareness, you can keep thinking into it throughout the week and throughout the month, where you will discover even more about how you acted.

This is how our *Gedolim* lived their lives: they always suspected themselves of having more motivations than what they were aware of. The Alter of Kelm, the Alter of Slobadka, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz and other great *Gedolim* of our past lived with this concept all the time.

Thus, **water-of-wind-of-wind** is to get in touch with what kind of pleasurable motive is motivating you to act, in particular, with what motivates you to speak.

11 | *Idle Speech Part 3: Non-Stop Chatting*²⁹

Wind-of-Wind-of-Wind: Unrestrained Talking

In our discussion on the trait of idle speech, we have begun to explain the kinds of idle speech that stem from wind-of-wind. Currently, we are up to discussing **wind-of-wind-of-wind**.

This is especially the case when it comes to speaking *lashon hora*, but the general idea of it is whenever a person speaks freely and loosely, without any restraint to his speech.

We mentioned in the past the words of the *Chovos HaLevovos* that says that “the lightest organ of the body is the tongue”, therefore, it is human nature to talk freely.

Let’s analyze this matter further: there are two different factors involved in speech.

The element of earth is the source of inner heaviness. When a person feels heavy inside, he finds it harder to move. As long as nothing is opposing a person, he finds it easy to “move”, but when man faces opposition, he finds it harder to “move.” However, man also has a deeply rooted nature to move, which means that it is nature of man to use his movements freely and without restraint. So when a person is not being opposed, not only will he find it easier to move, but he will move freely and lightly. This is the nature that stems from man’s aspect of **wind-of-wind-of-wind**.

But what is the root of this? Movement (*tenuah*) is a power that can be used for either good or evil, just like all other forces in man. Everything in Creation is moving. All living things – plants, animals, and people - move. Even rocks move, because the world is always in orbit. The *Nefesh HaChaim* also describes this in terms of an ongoing process of change in Creation; every moment, the entire Creation is changing and being renewed.

(There is also a deeper aspect of man, non-movement, which is known as the state of “*Ayin*”. But usually, *Ayin* is not revealed, and most of the time a person is in a state of movement.)

The Relationship Between Ruach/Movement and Bechira/Free Will

Movement (*tenuah*) is also known as the power of *bechirah* (free will). A person chooses where he will ‘move’ towards – towards good, or towards bad. When a person lives mechanically and by rote, he doesn’t really access his *bechirah* that much, so he will end up moving toward wherever it is easier for him to go towards. With regards to talking, “the tongue is the lightest part of the body”, and therefore, a person is drawn towards speaking words that flow freely from his mouth.

²⁹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-011-idle-chatter-part-3-non-stop-chatting>

The *Chazon Ish* wrote that the heaviest part of the body is the tongue. This seems to argue directly on the words of the *Chovos HaLevovos*. But it is not a contradiction. When a person trains himself to be more silent and he is careful with his words, the more he does this, he will find that it is harder to talk. So our initial nature is to use our speech lightly and talk freely. But if we train ourselves to control what comes out of our mouth, then speech actually becomes heavier upon us – the heaviest aspect to our existence.

What, essentially, is the root behind **wind-of-wind-of-wind**?

The element of wind in the soul, *ruach*, is also known as *bechirah* (free will) according to the Vilna *Gaon*, because a person is always choosing in his *bechirah* where he will move towards. Thus, the more a person utilizes his *bechirah*, the more his movements will be given direction and precision. But when a person just lives by rote [taking life as it comes], he does not access his *bechirah*, and then the person will move without any restraint, because there is no direction being applied to his movements.

As a result, utilizing one's *bechirah* therefore enables a person to ascend spiritually. In most people, the nature to ascend spiritually is not that active, and therefore the person is usually descending spiritually. This is because a person's *ruach* is not activated, so his *ruach* spreads him out in many directions, like a wind out of control. He has no direction in his 'movements', and that is why he doesn't ascend. Thus, using *bechirah* activates the *ruach*, which gives direction to a person's movements, and then the person can ascend as he wishes to.

Some people have more *ruach* active in them than others, but in all people, *ruach* is the ability to direct one's movements. It enables a person to grow as he would like to. The more a person recognizes himself well and directs himself, he uses his *bechirah*. This is the depth of using our power of *bechirah*, although there are more details to its use.

Having understood that, now we will proceed to discuss a deeper point. Utilizing one's *bechirah/ruach* helps a person control his movements, because when a person is used to giving direction and precision to his movements (when he is used to practicing self-restraint on his actions and making sure to always choose correctly), a person will be able to naturally avoid superficial kinds of movements.

Thus, we can now understand better the words of the *Chazon Ish* that the tongue is the heaviest part of the body. The meaning of his words is that the more a person is used to practicing silence and self-restraint over his words, the heavier he will find speech to be upon himself.

Restraining Physical Movements

There are really two sides to the coin: your outer movements, and your inner movements. There is a concept that one can use his outer movements to awaken his inner movements; one can get

through to his inside using his outside³⁰. The other side of the coin is that one can use inner movement (his self-control) to direct his outer movements with more precision.

The *Kuzari* writes that when a person dances, it can awaken a person's inner essence to burst forth in joy, through the outer movements of the dancing. However, what usually happens when people dance, or they get very excited in general? What usually happens is that the person performs many kinds of movements, without restraint, and then he loses control over his movements. As a result, he will perform movements that are beyond his actual level of emotional energy, and then he will be harming his soul in the process.

So physical movements, when they are not restrained, can be very harmful to a person's soul and cause him to act bizarre, and he will feel drained afterwards, because he has used up so much emotional energy.

If a person gets very emotional, he is able to talk excessively and without restraint. He can talk and talk and talk about whatever he is getting emotional about. What happens as a result? The unrestrained talking causes him to have much inner movement that have no direction, and he will get sent in all kinds of directions!

The Root Of Speaking Gossip

Most people who talk excessively, especially those who habitually talk *lashon hora* (gossip), are doing so because they simply have no control over their speech. They speak freely. The type of person who is always talking *lashon hora* doesn't just have a problem of talking *lashon hora*. The root of it is really a lack of self-control, because wherever he is, whether he's at home or in a public place or in the shul or in the *Beis Medrash*, he's talking *lashon hora*. So it's a lack of control over his speech/movement.

Thus, when a person has unrestrained movement, it is not simply because his emotions have overtaken him. The root of this is because his aspect of **wind-of-wind-of-wind** is impaired.

Most people, when moving/talking, are moving only on the outside, and they do not have any inner movement. Thus, the movements of most people are usually superficial. But if one is calmer inside of himself, his physical movements will also become calmer, because he is used to self-control, so he doesn't go overboard in his emotional reactions. Even when he does get very emotional (and indeed, all of us have times in which we get very emotional and excited, because we all have in us of **wind-of-wind-of-wind**), he will still be calm as he is in his "movement". He will be able to contain himself and restrain himself even as he's getting very excited.

Deeper Self-Control: Keeping Your Innerness Reserved

30 Mesillas Yesharim (Chapter III) and Sefer HaChinuch (15)

Now we will say a deeper point about the concept of directing your inner movements. [Until now, we explained how one's inner calmness ["being calm, cool, and collected"] can provide more self-control over his physical movements and emotional excitement. Now we will explain something about one's inner world itself and how to give it direction from within.]

One's innerness needs to be contained in himself. Woe is to the person who reveals everything that's going on in his inside! When a person lives an inner life, he knows that it doesn't have to be revealed outward. Even when one does reveal his innerness, it should be revealed slowly and in parts, not all at once. When one has reached inner movement (silence), he knows how to keep his innerness hidden. He doesn't reveal all of his thoughts to others. One can absorb an idea and not tell it to anyone. The idea actually develops better that way.

One has to know that he in himself a kind of '*reshus hayachid*' ("private domain"), a place that is *yechidi* ("individual") – a private aspect of himself that must not be revealed. This refers to one's inner thoughts that are holy, which are meant to be your own "secret". *Chazal* say that it is forbidden to reveal another's secret. The deeper meaning of this is that every person has in himself certain "secrets" that he needs to know how to keep. Eventually one may speak of it to others, but even then, it should only be revealed slowly, and not all at once. [This is a deeper kind of control over your inner movements.]

We find that by the *Simcha Beis HaShoeivah* that they would dance freely and let go of themselves. There are certainly times in which can let himself *simcha* (joy) flow freely, such as when he has a big *simcha* and he wishes to express his deep emotions. But as a general course of action, a person should not let go of his movements, and he should keep himself restrained.

The Alter of Kelm said that when a deep thought would come to him, he would not tell anyone about it for 20 years, until he revealed it to others. When asked about this, he said that the fact that he held onto it for 20 years allowed the thought to be nurtured and deepened. Most of the time we do not know of our depth, and even if a depth of understanding comes to us, it should not be revealed to others that fast.

Living like this changes one's life totally. The point is that we need to keep something inside and let it develop and absorb. It is hard to know exactly when a person should let his private insights be revealed to others, and how. But the general concept of it is for one to let his deep insights stay private in himself, where it can be allowed to absorb.

This will also result in having more restraint over his physical movements as well; he will find that he doesn't have to move as much as he used, because he receives movement from his innerness.

Think about how much physical movement people do. Most movements are not necessary, and they are merely learned behaviors which a person is not aware of. For example, how many people are aware of how much they nod their heads during davening? The more a person is concentrated on his inner movements, he is more precise when it comes to his physical movements as well. He will move less, and when he does move, it is more controlled.

In this way, one returns his **wind-of-wind-of-wind** to its holy root, and instead of becoming unrestrained *lashon hora*, it becomes the power in oneself to guide his movements.

These are the true *bnei aliyah* (spiritually ascending people), who use all their *ruach* to always grow higher in their *ruchniyus*. Of course, a person always has a physical body with its human weaknesses, even if he is always making use of his **wind-of-wind-of-wind** correctly. But he will still be a growing person, because he knows how to control himself and is keenly aware of himself as he moves, which changes his whole orientation in life.

Becoming Aware of Your Movements

When a person shakes during *davening*, is he aware of this? If he does, does he know why he is shaking...? Often, much of the physical movements that a person is doing is not being done with awareness, and rather mechanically. It is usually not being done to awaken the person's *kavanah* by davening – it is simply habitual, with no self-awareness whatsoever to it.

Another point which we will mention pertaining to this, is that each person needs to give outlet for his need for movement and make sure that his body move a little bit every day; and he needs to be aware of the movement as it's happening.

Do this for the sake of your own physical body's needs! I don't mean you should go swimming in the Kinneret every day for 2 hours. Just pay attention to the movements as you are moving, so that you can teach yourself how to be aware of movement, as you are in it.

So when you do have to move physically, just be aware of why you are moving. If you are eating, be aware that you are eating. If you are going to sleep, be aware that you are going to sleep.

When a person doesn't move when he is supposed to (for example, when a person needs to get up from his seat and get a *sefer* from the shelf, and he is lazy so he doesn't get up to get it), the movements will become stifled, and they will burst out at a later point, and it often be a negative outburst.

This is a very common cause for anger: when a person wanted to move and he restrained himself too much, tension is produced from this, and the imprisoned movement will want to assert itself at some point, and it might come out in the form of an angry outburst. We can see this common in children, when they are restrained too much from moving, and then they become antsy and they will lose their temper.

Anger is just one example that can result from being too rigid with one's movements. As long as movement is being restrained too much, the movement will need to come out at some point, and it will be some kind of dysfunctional outburst.

So when one moves physically, there must be awareness to the movement, and the movement must be allowed to be expressed, or else it will create an inner tension.

A person who really works on this idea will be very in control of his physical movements, as well as be very self-aware of them.

The Root of Stopping Evil Speech

This is the root of fixing the tendency to speak *lashon hora*.

Although one must certainly learn the laws of *Shemiras HaLashon* (guarding speech)– and this is the first thing one must do if he wishes to ever fix this sin – still, he will not be able to restrain himself from speaking *lashon hora* unless he learns how to practice self-control. A person cannot simply tell himself, “I won’t speak *lashon hora*.” It doesn’t work. You might know the laws of *lashon hora* very well, but that doesn’t mean you’ll be able to stop yourself from talking *lashon hora*!

What a person should do is, that together with learning the laws of *shemiras halashon*, he should also learn the art of self-restraint over his movements (as it was explained here).

In this way, a person works on the matter both through his outside and inside, and herein lays the depth of fixing the **wind-of-wind-of-wind** in the soul.

12 | *Idle Chatter Part 4: Excitable Talk*³¹

Fire-of-Wind-of-Wind: Talking With Excitement

We have discussed so far the kinds of **idle speech** that stem from earth, water, and wind within **wind-of-wind** (dry conversations, pleasurable gossip, and unrestrained talking). Now we are up to discussing the **fire** aspect within wind-of-wind, which is when one talks **excitedly** about gossip-related matters - similar to the nature of fire, which sparks and thus 'excites'.

This power is used for holiness when one speaks excitedly about words of Torah, and it is used for evil when one speaks excitedly for the purpose of *lashon hora* (evil gossip).

Man has a nature to talk being that the nature of man is to be a *ruach memalelah* (talking spirit). The soul has a nature to turn outward. When one talks, he turns outward to others, as it is written, "*My soul leaves when I speak with him.*"

Why Does Speaking Make Us Feel Drained?

We find two kinds of excited talking:

1) One kind of speaking we find is that as a person speaks, his *chiyus* (feeling of vitality) is released outward; as a result, he can feel that he has lost some of his vitality after he is done talking.

2) Another kind of speech we find is that a person's *chiyus* can actually increase as he speaks. This kind of speech is by speaking words of Torah, "*It is life for those who speak out it in their mouths.*" When one's speech is increasing his *chiyus*, it is a whole different kind speech than the usual.

Usually, a person feels drained after he speaks - and this is really because most speech is not said with vitality. But sometimes, a person does speak with vitality, and he gains even more vitality from his speaking.

If someone speaks without any self-awareness to what he is saying, that means he is not putting any of his heart and soul into his talking, and such a person will usually lose some of his vitality as he talks. He will feel somewhat tired or drained after he's done talking. But if one puts his heart into his talking, he is self-aware to the words exiting his mouth, and his vitality will increase when he talks. This is because when we put our heart into something, the heart in us provides life-giving energy, as is written, "*Guard your heart, for from it, comes life.*"

³¹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-012-idle-chatter-part-4-excitable-talk>

The power to speak with vitality and excitement can be used for holiness when one speaks words of Torah with excitement, and it is used for evil when one speaks *lashon hora* - whereupon the speech emerging from his being becomes a death-like kind of vitality.

Ideal Speech: Speaking From Your Mind and Heart

As mentioned earlier³², true speech is when one speaks from both his mind and heart together, as he's talking.

'Speaking from the heart', however, doesn't mean to be merely become emotional and excited as one is talking. Often, we can notice that after a person is done talking and he was very excited as he spoke, as soon as he's done speaking he loses his excitement and looks like he needs to rest. This is because he didn't realize that while he was speaking, he was really emptying himself out of vitality. This is what happens when a person only knows of superficial speech.

By contrast, **inner** speech is as *Chazal* say, "Words that come from the heart, enter the heart". When you truly speak from your heart, it gives vitality to another. It is to speak from your own vitality, and that vitality can then enter another, infusing the other with life.

It is written, "*And Haman said in his heart*" – we learn from this about the internal speech process: when a person speaks, he is first consulting with his heart and he speaks with *himself*, before he speaks those words to another. It is also written, "*I spoke with my heart.*" So a person first talks to himself, within his own self, before the words emerge from him when he talks to another. (Now, obviously, if a person only speaks with himself and he doesn't let those words emerge outward, this will be problematic).

Speech really begins with talking to oneself! To illustrate, when one leads the public he must speak to them, but when he speaks to them, he really has to speak *with his own self* - if he ever wishes to influence them for the good. If he speaks to himself the words he is trying to convey, he affects his own self, and then his words will prove effective on others and can be of influence. It is said that if "one does know how to lead himself, he will not able to lead others."

Three Kind of Speakers

This concept, when applied to speech, causes an incredible overhaul to one's entire ability of speech.

1) When a person is at a superficial level, he will speak to others the words that others want to hear; words that their heart will accept readily.

³² see *Fixing Your Wind* #04

2) A deeper and more truthful person will speak to others words that will be understandable and clear, so that the listeners will be able to walk away with something practical from the speech.

3) But an even more truthful person, when he speaks to others, is really speaking to himself as he speaks to them – and his words are the most effective on the listeners.

True Speech: From the Self, To the Self

Speech, at its deep root, begins with oneself. “Words that come from the heart, enter the heart” because such words are being first spoken with *oneself* first - with one’s own heart - and then they can enter another’s heart. But if one did not first speak with his own heart – if he didn’t speak those words to himself yet - then those words will not either enter another person.

When one learns how to speak *from* himself and *to* himself first, his words become alive and infused with vitality. Although he might feel physically that some energy leaves him as he speaks, in return, a larger amount of vitality is being infused in him as he speaks. A person who speaks in this way can actually feel, and experience, the words that he is saying. (Of course, that doesn’t mean he is reaching the perfect level of what he is describing).

Most people only begin to experience what they are saying as they continue the conversation, gaining clarity in what they are saying as they continue to talk. A person is talking excitedly, and then he notices that he is in middle of talking *lashon hora*. He begins to realize and become aware of his words as the conversation develops, and then he realizes that he has spoken unnecessary words,

Here, we want to develop a deeper and truer kind of awareness to our speech. *Chazal* say “*daas ganuz b’pumei*”, that “*daas* (understanding) is hidden in mouth”, which means that ideal speech comes from a mouth that talks sensibly. But the ideal kind of speech we want to develop takes this even further: by first speaking to yourself, you actually learn how to experience what you are saying – as it is written, “*My soul leaves when I spoke with him*”.

This does not just mean that one merely thinks before he speaks and therefore he speaks clearly. It is more than that: as while he is in the midst of talking, he experiences what he is saying, so he is very self-aware of what he is saying as a result; he’ll be able to catch himself before he makes a mistake in what he’s saying. Even more, the words that leave his mouth are being experienced by him, so he will retain a mark of the experience long after the words have left his mouth.

Three Steps To Ideal Speech

So far, we have said that the ideal kind of speaking is when:

- 1) You think about you will say, before you speak.
- 2) Thinking as you are speaking, so that you are experiencing what you are saying.

3) Even after you spoke, you are still experiencing the words that you said, at least a little bit.

This is how a person can learn how to speak words that both contain vitality and are vitality-giving. Not only will he experience what he says as he says them, but he retains those experiences. As it is written, “*For they [the words of Torah] are life to those who express it with their mouths.*”

Mussar & Singing

For this reason, if a person wants to inspire himself and give himself enthusiasm, Reb Yisrael Salanter said that besides for learning the words of *mussar* (self-discipline)³³, he should say the words with “flaming lips” – he should say the words passionately, singing them to himself with a tune that will stir him. This uses the element of “fire” in your power of speech – the ability to speak with passion or excitement. When you verbalize the words of *mussar* in that way, you can experience the words, and then the words can remain in you long afterwards – which is really the whole underlying essence of learning *mussar*.

The Torah is called “*shirah*”, because it is the “song” that remains in you long after you have learned it. We also learn from this about the inner essence behind the concept of singing, which can affect your soul. Singing is effective on the soul only when you sing *with* yourself and *from* yourself; this enables you to experience the place in yourself you are singing from that is in yourself, and to retain those experiences.

Learning *Mussar* passionately and with excitement, therefore, is not just about learning with emotion. It is to learn how to speak with oneself, from yourself. One who learns *mussar* in this way experiences the words and that is how he can relate it to others, and those are the true *baalei mussar*.

Calming ‘Fiery’ Speech With ‘Water’

One who does not develop this ability will not know how to use his ‘fire’ in his speech when he talks excitedly, and when he gets excited as he’s talks, he will find himself unable to restrain his emotions. He is not listening to himself – he is not listening to the words coming out of his mouth, so he lacks self-awareness as he is talking. He won’t even remember anything of what he said if he is reminded about it.

But when a person who develops inner speech as it was described here, he will be able to lessen his excitement as he feels the urge to speak some *lashon hora*. Since he speaks more truthfully, he has gotten used to being concerned for truth, and that will overpower his negative tendency of speaking *lashon hora* even as he’s tempted to.

The deeper way to understand this is that the fire in the soul is opposed by its opposite element: water. Too much fire in one’s speech, even when it is not about *lashon hora* or other kinds of evil

³³ i.e. sefer “*Mesillas Yesharim*” and other ethical works of Jewish self-improvement

speech, can still be detrimental, because it takes away a person's calmness. One cannot be calm if he gets overly excited when he speaks - even if he speaks words of holiness. Thus, learning how to speak words of true vitality activates the 'water' of the soul and calms the 'fire' in one's speech. Fire is jumpy in its nature, while water is naturally calm; one can use calmness ('water') in his speech to stave the excited 'fire' of his speech.

[Thus, being overly excited when we talk conversations is like a fire that gets out of control, where you find yourself talking heatedly, about topics that are forbidden; and even if you are not talking about things that are forbidden, you lose control over your speech, because you simply become too anxious.]

To counter this problem, a person should practice two things: times of **talking calmly**, as well as times of **silence** throughout the day. This increases the 'calmness'/water of the soul, which can stave the fiery excitement that one is used to in his speech.

Learning Torah With Passion and Calmness Together

In one's learning, whether he is learning *Gemara b'iyun* (in-depth analysis, with focus on understanding) or *bekius* (general reading of the *Gemara*, without focus on understanding), or *mussar*, he should allow some of his learning to be "fire" and some of his learning to be like "water" - part of his verbalization should be done excitedly, and part of it should be done calmly.

However, this is a subtle ability to know how to use. Although we are saying that one needs to learn how to calm down in his speech, even when he's learning and speaking words of holiness, still, *chas v'shalom* should one only speak calmly when he learns Torah! *Chazal* say "the words of the wise are heard only when they are uttered pleasantly" but that does not mean that one should only speak calmly when he learns; one needs to speak excitedly too when he learns. We need both 'water and 'fire' in our speech. Talking excitedly in learning Torah is a need that every person has and it's a need that should not be stifled.

But it is just that when a person does talk excitedly in his learning and he's all fired up, he still has to make sure that he doesn't lose his good *middos*, and for this reason, he must learn how to calm down a bit even as he's excited. It is written, "*Are My words not like fire, so says Hashem.*" Torah learning must be learned in a fiery manner; but even though there's a lot of fire involved, there must also be some water/calmness involved. It is the ability to restrain one's excitement.

For example, while one is getting excited in his learning and his words are fiery, he has to be able to listen to his *chavrusa* if his *chavrusa* starts talking back to him. In addition, he needs to learn how to stop himself even as he's all fired up, sometimes. As for how much and how exactly to do this, it is a subtle matter [which cannot be given exact instructions]. Most people won't be able to learn at all if they would try restraining themselves as they're getting fired up. But when a person is more self-aware, he knows how to get fired up as he's talking as well as calm himself down a moment later. He doesn't lose his calmness even when he gets excited.

Maintaining Your Equilibrium

Another example: a person davens, and he is getting enthusiastic, and he is full of his worries. But if he gets too excited from all of this, he'll lose his *kavanah* (concentration). He should try pausing himself after every three words. In order for a person to gain back his concentration as he's getting excited, he needs to know how to calm himself down as he's talking, even if he is speaking words of Torah or *tefillah*.

Another example: It's possible that a person is arguing with his *chavrusa* for 2 hours straight, yet he feels drained of vitality afterwards. He might think that this means "exertion in learning" and attributes this as the reason of his tiredness. But that's not why he's tired – he has tired himself because he didn't realize that he was emptying out his vitality as he spoke in learning. He lost balance in his soul. He will have reward in the Next World of course for learning, but is still not the true way to live.

In summary, a person has to learn how to have silence as well as how to speak calmly, knowing how to restrain himself as he's talking excitedly, and this is true even with regards to one who speaks words of Torah and *tefillah*.

Elevating Mundane Conversations

There is also another topic in relation to this: our regular conversations. Although this chapter is giving the remedy to speaking *lashon hora* and other evil kinds of talk, it is also applicable to all kinds of mundane conversations.

Mundane conversations are when a person speaks words that are not holy and they are not forbidden, and they are just about neutral topics. When one speaks superficially in his conversations, the words just leave his mouth and nothing remains in him from those words. One who learns how to speak from within himself experiences what he says, so even his mundane conversations will become more elevated. He will say words that remain in him long afterwards.

But it is problematic – why? Words that are forbidden need to be uprooted from one's conscious memory, and words of holiness need to be retained, but what should one do about mundane conversations? Should they be uprooted, or retained?

The more a person is experiencing the words he is saying, he will naturally speak less mundane talk. He will realize that 9 out of 10 conversations (!) that he normally would have spoken are really empty and meaningless, so he doesn't speak them. He loses interest in talking so much as he used to. He'll realize that there are two kinds of mundane talk: things that are empty, and things which are purposeful.

When one talks with others about something that serves him purpose, he should talk from his outer self, not his inner self. But he should still remain a little above the conversation and not

become totally immersed in it, so that he can gauge himself as he's talking and make sure to protect his words from falling into superficiality.

It will be a like a light above himself (also called "*ohr makif*"³⁴) that guards his speech.

If one is totally immersed in a conversation, he will surely end up saying things that are inappropriate. But if he merely speaks from the outer layers of his being and he makes sure to remain connected to his inwardness as he's talking, then he is a little 'above' the conversation even as he's talking - and it's as if a light is hovering over the conversation and protecting him from saying words that are forbidden.

Avoiding Evil Talk Amidst Your Mundane Conversations

Additionally, besides for what a person talks about, there is also what he needs. A person is usually feeling connected to the words he speaks, as well as to the **needs** of what he is speaking about.

Most of the conversations going on in the world are about unnecessary matters. What do we mean by that? It doesn't mean that they are simply unnecessary, because a large part of conversations are about things that people need. We need various things because Hashem has decided that we have those needs, for whatever reason. One should therefore be aware of what he needs simply because Hashem has willed that he needs those things, and in this way, he doesn't become overly connected to the words he is saying. He should be instead focused on the needs of what he is talking about.

Getting used to this will also lessen the amount of one's mundane talking. But it will mainly protect him from evil kinds of speech, such as *lashon hora*. It will become easier to avoid *lashon hora* in the first place; whereas most people cannot restrain themselves from *lashon hora* and by the time they realize it they've already spoken the *lashon hora*, a person can learn how to catch himself as he's getting the urge for *lashon hora* and restrain himself, avoiding it altogether.

The more a person experiences his speech (generally speaking), when he gets excited to speak *lashon hora* and he feels like he's getting dragged after it helplessly, he'll be able to stop himself even as he's talking. But even more importantly, it will protect a person in the first place from talking inappropriately, so that he avoids the *yetzer hora* for *lashon hora* altogether.

Chazal state that "When the *yetzer hora* is present, there is no mention of the *yetzer tov*"³⁵; the trick is to avoid the *yetzer hora* altogether, so that you don't fall into his clutches. The way to avoid the *yetzer hora* for *lashon hora* is to acquire the power of restraining yourself as you're talking.

³⁴ For more on "*ohr makif*" ("surrounding light"), see *Getting To Know Your Inner World_02 and Reaching Your Essence_08 (Awareness and Experience of Reality)*

³⁵ *Nedarim 32a*

In Conclusion

We have described here, with Heavenly assistance, the concept of inner speech. It is to speak *from* oneself and *to* oneself. It is a lifestyle which most people do not recognize.

Most people only know how to elevate and graduate their speech from the child level to the adult level, in the superficial sense, learning how to speak words that are more mature. But inner speech is more than that. It is for one to reveal his inherent aspect of “*medaber*” - to utilize the power of speech which personifies man.

When one graduates from a child level in himself to the adult level in himself, he becomes a *bar daas* (when he gains spiritual maturity), which means that he essentially becomes a new kind of *medaber*, an internal kind of *medaber* - one who speaks in an inner way.

Most problems related to speech are for the reasons that were described here; there are many details of how to fix it. But the the inner way to fix it, which is the ideal solution, is to learn how to speak *from* yourself and *to* yourself; the rest of the details will then be much easier to work on, when has this solution.

This is the depth behind the statement of our Sages, “Even the mundane conversations of a Torah scholar need to be understood”, because since a Torah scholar thinks before he talks and while he is talking, he experiences what he says, and his thinking patterns change and become elevated with this; that is why even his mundane conversations become wiser.

13 | *Bragging Part 1: The Need for Approval*³⁶

Fire-of-Wind: Bragging About Oneself

With the help of Hashem we shall continue to discuss how we rectify the element of wind, which is the source of idle speech. [We have already discussed earth-of-wind (lying) water-of-wind (flattery) and wind-of-wind (gossip), and each of their subdivisions]. Now we will discuss **fire-of-wind**, which is the root of **bragging**.

Rav Chaim Vital writes in *Shaarei Kedushah* that one of the evil traits which stems from wind is *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*, one who brags about his praises. Bragging about oneself is actually the “fire” aspect that is within wind.

Fire is the root of the nature to feel elevated, and it is also the source of *ga'avah* (conceit) and *ka'as* (anger). In general, **fire** is the root *ga'avah*/conceit [whether for good or evil]. But the trait of *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*/bragging is a branch of the element of **wind**. Bragging involves some factor of *ga'avah*, because the person is haughty about himself, which is an aspect of “fire”, and it involves speaking about oneself, and speech is rooted in wind; thus, bragging about oneself stems from **fire-of-wind**.

Here we will not discuss *ga'avah* (conceit), which is a separate discussion.³⁷ Here we are discussing bragging, which is often involved with *ga'avah*, but not always; sometimes bragging is done even without *ga'avah*.

The Four Kinds of Bragging/Speaking About Oneself

Fire-of-wind, just like all of the other subdivisions of the elements, has four applications: earth, water, wind, and fire. Let's first list them briefly and then explore each of them in-depth.

Earth-of-fire-of-wind is for one to speak about his qualities because he is trying **actualize** his views.

Water-of-fire-of-wind is when one simply **enjoys** speaking about his qualities. He is not doing this merely so that others will know about his qualities and come to revere him; (that would be *ga'avah*/conceit or *kavod*/honor). Rather, the way to understand his behavior is that just like a person enjoys thinking about his qualities, so would a person enjoy speaking about his qualities to others.

Wind-of-fire-of-wind is when a person speaks about his himself or his qualities with another as he's immersed in what he's doing or thinking. Someone who is very self-absorbed might speak about

³⁶ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-013-bragging-part-1-need-approval>

³⁷ It will be discussed b'ezras Hashem in the next series, *Fixing Your Fire*

his qualities with another; during a conversation, he might take up the entire conversation talking about his qualities and talents. (Others talk all the time with others about their difficulties and of their shortcomings, but that is a separate topic, unrelated to this one).

To illustrate, a child will tell his friends about what goes on his family, because the child is very immersed in his home and family life, so that is what he speaks about with his friends all the time.

Fire-of-fire-of-wind is when one speaks about his qualities which he doesn't possess, because he feels that he is empty from those virtues, so he gets vitality when he speaks about qualities that he doesn't possess. His hope is that when he speaks about those qualities he doesn't yet have, that he will increase his aspirations for them and then work towards attaining them.

Many people have this problem: they speak about qualities which they don't have, for the purpose of trying to inspire themselves so that they will be able to have the motivation to attain the qualities they wish they possessed.

Earth-of-Fire-of-Wind: The Need For Validation

Let's begin by analyzing **earth**-of-fire-of-wind: when a person speaks about his qualities so that he can actualize them.

Why is he telling another person about his qualities? It is because he feels that he needs another person's recognition and approval, in order to solidify his own sense of self-worth.

This is not to be confused with the desire for *kavod* (honor), which is also a need for value and recognition³⁸. Here we are discussing one who is not fully aware of his qualities, so he speaks about his qualities with another in the hope that he will become evaluated by another, and then he feels that he can bring out his qualities better.

The person who brags about himself to others or relates to them what's going on in his mind, is doing so because he sees that another approves of a quality or perspective that he possesses, and now he feels more confident in himself, feeling that he can now push himself further to use those qualities or to actualize his views.

Most people are not confident in themselves from within themselves, so they get their confidence when they see that others are recognizing their virtues. Some people have natural inborn confidence, but they are usually arrogant, which is *gaavah*; such people believe that whatever they do and think is right, so they are naturally confident in themselves and that's why they speak about their qualities with others. But the average person does not have so much *gaavah* like this, and that is why most people do not trust their decisions so strongly, even if he is a person who knows how to think very rationally.

38 The trait of kavod (seeking honor) will be discussed b'ezras Hashem in the next series, Fixing Your Fire.

Ideally, when a person is seeking advice from many people on one particular topic, it is because he wants to gather clarity about the information by hearing about it a lot. This does not show any sign of weakness. To the contrary: he is missing information on something, so he is being sensible, trying to gather information and expand his options; he plans on deciding which of the advice to follow, based on what makes the most sense to him.

But most people, when they seek advice, are in need of others' advice simply because they are not confident in themselves, and not because they are trying to gain clarity on a topic. A person usually gains confidence in himself when he sees that another agrees with him.

If another person tells him he is making a mistake, or that's a bit mistaken in his thinking, he will feel that he has not been understood well, and he will not accept the advice, seeking another's opinion, until someone finally agrees with him.

Why? It is really because the person did not really seek 'advice'. He wasn't interested in hearing from another that his thinking is wrong. Although it appears like he is seeking advice, his intention is not really to accept advice. He wanted solely to be validated. So if someone doesn't give him that validation, he will seek another person who will validate him.

Skepticism About Personal Decisions: A Lack of Confidence

Most people are not believing in themselves to make decisions. Even when a person goes to a wise "Daas Torah" person for advice, his motivation in going is not always coming from *emunas chachamim* (belief in our wise scholars). It is usually coming from a lack of confidence in one's own thinking.

Someone once told Rav Shach *zt"l*, "This generation must be better than previous generations, because in today's generation, everyone asks the *Gedolim* for advice on every possible topic." Rav Shach responded, "This is a weakness of the generation, because it shows that no one is confident enough to believe in their own decisions."

So most people are not confident enough in themselves to make major decisions. (There are also people who don't like to decide anything simply because they do not understand what they are deciding about, so they would rather remain neutral. Others don't like to decide because they don't trust their human logic, and they would rather ask someone who is *Daas Torah* who has a holier intellect than they. This is a separate topic.)

Most people do not like to decide even though they know how to think very rationally, because they don't have the inner strength to trust their decisions. By speaking about it with another and being validated, they gain confidence in their decisions.

Some people will even be satisfied as long as the listener says "Yeah" to what he's saying, and others will even be satisfied as long as the listener is silent, feeling that the "silence is like agreement."

Others will even gain this confidence as long as they knew that they conversed about their issues with another.

For example, you can have a person who writes a *sefer* and he needs to find the sources in the Torah for his ideas, and he sees his ideas written in another *sefer*, so that's enough proof to him that it's true. He feels that as long as his idea can come to any level of fruition and actualization, he can then feel secure about what he's doing.

Most of the time, a large factor of stability/security that a person feels is when the person speaks about what he does with another; he then feels stable/secure about what he does, simply because he has spoken about it with another.

The Power of Speech and How It Affects Reality

This is accomplished through the soul's power of *dibbur* (speech). We see that the power of speech can have an effect on reality. An example of this is the Torah's law of a *neder* (a vow). Speech can give permanence to something. Without speaking about one's issues and decisions, a person won't feel strong about his views; when he speaks about his views with others, he suddenly feels stronger about those views.

For example, a husband comes home at the end of the day and his wife tells him, "I bought this and this in the store. I made such-and such of a decision. Was I right, or should I have done something else?" She wasn't asking for his approval; she feels more secure in her decision just by talking about it with him.

If he tells her, "No, you were not right about your decision", and he explains to her why she was wrong, a dispute erupts. So why did she ask him for his approval if she had her mind made up anyway? It is because she probably needed to speak about her decision just so that she could reassure herself about what she did. She was speaking about it not because she wanted to know if she was right or wrong about it, but because speaking about it makes her feel more secure about her decision.

So when a person does not trust his thinking and he doubts himself, he might speak about his decisions or issues with another person simply so that he can gain confidence about his views.

Two Kinds of People: Seeking Advice Vs. Seeking Validation

As mentioned earlier, sometimes a person simply does not know how to decide, because he is missing information about what he has to decide about. In such a case, the issue is not about developing more belief in himself, because this will not solve his issue. What he has to do is ask a person whose decisions he will trust, and listen to the advice.

But if one is conversing with another whom he knows cannot really advise him, it must be that he is talking to him simply so that he can validate his view, by speaking about it. He is not speaking to

the other to ask him for advice, and he is not planning on listening to the advice or opinion he hears. He simply wanted to speak about his views with the other so that he can infuse himself with validation.

If someone does not know how to decide on something and he knows that he seeks advice from another, he should go ask someone whose opinions he trusts and whom he will listen to. And he must listen to the advice he hears.

However, another kind of person, whom we are discussing, really knows how to decide, he just doesn't trust his decisions. What he has to do, to fix this, is a different remedy than the above one.

The superficial method which people try for this is to brag about their qualities with another, so that their confidence will go up. We want to get to the inner solution, however, using the elements of the soul.

It will not either help the person if he learns how to speak honestly about himself with others and tells others about his weaknesses – it's even worse, because it can breed low self-esteem. He already doesn't believe in himself, and talking about his weaknesses with others will only intensify his lack of confidence in himself.

The Root of the Solution

Thus, the remedy lies in knowing the reason that motivates him to speak about himself with others. As we explained, a lack of belief in oneself is the reason why a person doesn't trust his own decisions. How are we able to decide on anything? We all have doubts, several options we face, and we need to make decisions sometimes, hoping that we are choosing correctly. Sometimes we make the right choices, and sometimes we are wrong. Nobody is always right, and nobody is always wrong.

Some people feel that they can't decide, so they will decide whatever they see most people are doing. Others do not know how to decide because they were stifled as children; if he would go to the store when he was a child to buy something for the house, his parents never liked what he bought in the store, and perhaps he got yelled at: "You don't know how to buy anything for the house!!" He grew up thinking that he has no idea how to decide.

Others knew how to decide what to buy in the store, but with very minimal thinking, such as by thinking which item is cheaper and what the house is missing right now. But this doesn't show that he still trusts his own decisions. Either it is because he is aware of his weaknesses and that is why he doesn't trust himself, or, it because he only knows how to decide based on what he knew his surroundings decide.

The Power To Make Decisions

The truth is: how, indeed, are we able to really make a decision about anything?

Some people feel that they always make correct decisions, being that they see that most of their decisions are correct. Therefore, they have confidence that they are right. But this is not either a truthful kind of decision.

The truth is that we really cannot “decide” on our own. Our power of *daas* is the part of our mind that helps us decide.³⁹ Some decisions are clear-cut, like if you would have a pile of gold in front of you and a pile of straw in front of you, and you ‘decide’ to take the gold. But a decision like this is not much of a decision; it doesn’t involve any thinking. Most of the decisions we face involve *shikul hadaas* - weighing out your options. How can we decide in such cases?

If one analyzes the matter by breaking up all the details, he is closer to seeing the answer. But there is no end to how much we can keep breaking down and refining a matter. So how do we come to a decision?

We really are not able to decide on our own! A human being does not know how to decide. The only way you can decide is when you seek truth - and then you can be assisted by Heaven to get to the truth.

A person tries to analyze and break down the matter, but he can still be in doubt about what to do, so we really do not have the power to decide. Most people are deciding without thinking enough into it, so they are not really deciding. Sometimes they are right and sometimes are wrong. These are not real decisions; they do not come from the power of *daas* (combining information and then deciding), but from *binah* (contemplation, via taking apart information).

This is indeed why most decisions being made are inaccurate – it is because the matter is still unclear even after one has decided, being that he was missing information; so the decision can be off-mark. Mistaken decisions, which result from a lack of information, can get a person into trouble.

After a person has thought very well into a situation and he has taken apart the information, he is closer to making an accurate decision; this solves most questions. There is a statement, “A question of the wise is half the answer.” But if a person is still in doubt even after he has thought very well into the information, how, indeed, can he decide?

True Decisions Come From Seeking Truth

The only way to come to a proper decision is when one has access to “the G-dly spark” in the soul, which enables a person to decide. When one doesn’t **seek truth**, he won’t have access to the G-dly spark within, and he cannot really decide on anything even if he tries to. Even if he does ‘decide’, his decisions are all coincidental.

True decisions are not possible through one’s human power. They can only come from the G-dly spark in the soul. It is reached only when a person seeks **truth**.

³⁹ See *Utilizing Your Daas #02 – Deciding*.

Discovering The Root of Lack of Confidence

Having understood this, one has to discover why he is not confident in himself.

1) Is it because he developed a lack of confidence in himself? If that is the case, he will have to learn how to remove the negative self-image he has developed from his childhood and throughout his life; this merits a discussion for itself.

2) But if a person discovers that the reason why he doesn't have confidence in his thinking is because he knows he has failed in the past with his decisions, he should realize that all of those failures did not come from a lack of knowing how to decide, but from a lack of information.

Solving Decision-Related Issues

If that is the case, the person has to learn how to think into a situation and take apart the information⁴⁰. When he goes to ask a wise person for advice, his main focus should be on simply knowing how to give over the information correctly, and to lay forth all of the factors in his issue. As for the decision itself, that should only come at a later stage.

This is because the root of why he has failed in the past in his decisions is because he didn't know how to take apart the issue and identify the various factors that were involved in the issue. The problem he had is what tells us the root of the solution: he must learn how to identify his issues, so that he can lay forth the information properly to the one whom he's asking advice from.

Seeking Truth: Purifying Your Motivations

If he sees that in spite of this, his decisions are still off the mark, he must analyze what his motivations were.

If he had pure motivations and he was acting for the sake of Heaven, a person receives the *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly assistance) to make the right decisions, as we said before.

But if a person sees that in spite of having pure intentions he still did not merit to make the right decision, it must be that Hashem has willed it for whatever reason, that he should go through a failure. If a person checks himself and sees that he didn't have pure intentions when he made his decision, then his *avodah* is to begin having purer motivations: to act for the sake of Heaven, out of a sincere desire to seek the truth.

The problem with using this method, however, is that some people are the type to blame Hashem whenever they have failures, attributing their failures to Hashem and not to themselves, but when

⁴⁰ See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts #09 – Taking Apart Details*

they have successes, they attribute the success to themselves, and not to Hashem. A person has to attribute both his successes and failures to Hashem's will - not one or the other.

Thus, if one had intentions for the sake of Heaven when he decided, and he still failed in his decisions, it must be that it was simply the will of Hashem that he fail, and it had nothing to do with his lack of thinking. If he knows that he didn't have intentions for the sake of Heaven when he decided, then it is upon him to learn how he can seek truth and purer motivations, and then he will see that he has *siyata d'shmaya* in his decisions.

One Who Doesn't Believe In His Qualities

Until now we explained how to fix the problem of not believing in oneself, in relation to the topic of speaking of oneself. Now we will explain another kind of problem: one who doesn't believe in his qualities.

The previous kind of person we discussed in one who doubts himself entirely when it comes to his decisions. But the kind of person we will now discuss is one who believes he can decide, just, he doesn't believe in his qualities.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz *zt"l* said, "Woe is to the person who isn't aware of his faults. But even worse is a person who doesn't know his strengths." Why, indeed would a person not believe in his strengths and qualities?

By some people, it is because they are scared of developing *gaavah* (conceit), so they deny their qualities as to avoid *gaavah*. This is a separate subject, and the key to this lies in knowing the definitions of conceit vs. humility. But we will not discuss this here.

Another reason why a person wouldn't recognize his strengths is because he simply has a negative outlook towards himself. He might be negative towards others as well and not believe in others' qualities, focusing only on their shortcomings. (Another person has the opposite problem: he doesn't know his own qualities, and he only sees the qualities of others.) He is drawn towards focusing on negativity.

This might have been developed through surroundings in his childhood which chipped away at his confidence and caused him to slowly grow negative about everything; if this is the case, it merits its own discussion, in which a person must learn how to separate himself from the problems that have developed. But it can simply be coming from a nature of his soul to be negative about things.

If that is the case, such a problem is usually due to a previous *gilgul* (lifetime) - in his previous lifetime, he probably went through much failure, so it's deeply engraved into his soul to focus on his shortcomings. His initial thinking is therefore drawn towards being negative about himself, even if he was born into a positive environment during his current life.

Talking about his qualities will be difficult for him because he does not accept that he has qualities. It would seem that we can fix this through using **earth-of-fire-of-wind** in the soul: to

speak about his qualities, so that he can get himself to believe in his qualities. The problem is, though, is that he doesn't believe in the first place that he has qualities.

The Solution: Taking Apart Details

There are two kinds of people: one who does not accept the fact that he has qualities, and another kind of person cannot accept that he has shortcomings. The first kind of person is who we are currently discussing. The second kind of person has a problem of *gaavah*/conceit. These two problems, while resulting in opposite negative traits, are still related to each other, though.

We say in "*Borei Nefashos*" that "Hashem created all many creations and their deficiencies". The way Hashem designed this world is that nothing is perfect in Creation; there are deficiencies in everything. Nothing in the world is black-on-white; nothing is entirely good or entirely bad. Everything is a mix. There is good and evil mixed into everything.

The idea we can take out of this is that a person must take apart things he comes across, seeing both the good and bad in everything. The more a person gets used to seeing how nothing is black-or-white, he will gain a better self-image of himself as well, because he will see that he is not entirely bad. Most people do not actually see what they come across at face-value. People are usually seeing what they want to see, and not what is actually here. This can be generally labeled as a problem resulting from our imagination, but to be more specific, it comes from a lack of identification. When a person drawn towards a negative self-image on himself (and on others), he is drawn towards focusing on deficiencies and negativity.

But the more a person learns how to take apart all the details in something he comes across – and he should do this in all areas of life – even if he is drawn towards negativity, he will begin to see that nothing is black-or-white. Everything is complex, so nothing is entirely "bad" and nothing is entirely "good". This will help him gain a more accurate self-image of himself.

(This is also a method that can solve *gaavah*/conceit, because the conceited person can see that he is not entirely perfect, for everything contains good and bad.)

Getting used to taking apart information will enable a person to grow independent of others' approval. Not only will he be able to decide better without needing others to approve of his views, but he will also gain a better self-image of himself, because he learns how to label things better.

A Fundamental Mentality

Although this is a solution that solves an impaired **earth-of-fire-of-wind** in the soul as we are discussing here in this chapter, it is actually a fundamental method in one's entire *avodah* between man and himself.

Most people today do not know what's going on inside themselves, and all they know of about themselves are various imprints left by their memory from throughout their life. Based upon those tidbits of information, most people try to understand themselves from there, and they also include in this how others think of them. That is how most people are developing their self-image – and it is of course a poor and superficial knowledge of oneself.

But if a person absorbs the perspective here, he knows how to be aware of simple truths – both towards life and both towards his own self.

In Conclusion

This change of perspective (taking apart details) enables a person to come out of imagination/falsity in general, and to instead live a life from a truthful and honest perspective.

In turn, he will also not need others' approval when he talks to others. He will even be able to praise others' qualities and views instead of his own - which rectifies the trait of *mesaper b'shevach atzmo* on the most complete level.

14 | *Bragging Part 2: Egoistic Talking*⁴¹

Water-of-Fire-of-Wind: Enjoying To Talk About Oneself

With the help of Hashem, we will continue to discuss how we rectify the traits which stem from the element of wind in the soul. Currently, we are discussing fire-of-wind, which is the root of the trait *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*, to brag of one's praises. [Previously we discussed earth-of-fire-of-wind, and now we will discuss water-of-fire-of-wind].

The “water” aspect of fire-wind is when a person enjoys speaking about his praises. (Water is the root of enjoyment/pleasure/desire, which are all traits that “drag” a person).

Every person, generally speaking, has qualities. Some people do not possess actual qualities, so they imagine that they have qualities. One brags about qualities that exist in himself, while another kind of person will brag about non-existing qualities in himself. In either case, the person is bragging about himself to others.

First we will speak about the root of this matter, and then we will get to the details of this.

As we said, a person brags either about qualities he knows he possesses, or he speaks about qualities he imagines he has; either he has the qualities or he imagines them, and upon that, he brags about them. Another factor involved in bragging is that a person can simply love to talk [about himself].

When one is having a good time bragging about himself to other, first of all, he enjoys dwelling on his qualities; this involves the negative trait of *gaavah* (conceit). When we get to discussing *gaavah*, with the help of Hashem, we will explain about it there⁴². Right now, we are dealing with a different aspect involved in bragging: the fact that one is enjoying the fact that he is speaking about himself, which is the trait of *mesaper b'shevach atzmo* (speaking of his praises).

Understandably, *gaavah*/conceit and *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*/bragging are interrelated topics, but right now we are focusing the discussion on the actual ‘bragging’ aspect of bragging, and not on the ‘conceit’ aspect involved in bragging.

What A Person Likes To Talk About

When a person brags about himself, as we said, there are two factors: the fact that he enjoys speaking about his qualities, and the fact that he enjoys talking about himself.

⁴¹ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-014-bragging-part-2-egoistic-talking>

⁴² This will be explained *b'ezras Hashem* in the next series, “Fixing Your Fire”

First of all, before we proceed on how to fix this kind of bragging we are discussing, it must first be clear to a person what a person likes, both when it comes to his physical areas and in his spiritual more areas. This actually takes deep inner soul-searching in order to figure this out. Then, the next step a person must figure out is, to know what he actually likes to *speak* about with others.

The two are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes a person likes something but he doesn't like to talk about it, for whatever reason. Maybe it's because it's personal, or maybe because he feels like he is giving away a secret if he would talk about it.

So a person must figure out these two things: to know what he likes, as well as to know what he likes to talk about. A person who doesn't know what he likes is in a pitiful situation. He has nothing to get vitality from. In addition to knowing what he likes, each person also needs to know what he likes to talk about.

Some people, when it comes to most things they talk about, are just talking randomly, about any topic that comes their way; they do not know what they really like to speak about. This kind of person will speak about what happened that day or yesterday, or what's new, or what others are talking about; but other than that, there is no focused topic going on in their conversations. This is a sign that something is amiss when it comes to his self-awareness.

It should be clear to a person the things that he likes – as well as what he likes to talk about.

Here in this chapter, we will focus on the second aspect: *what* a person likes to talk about. One can examine his conversations and see where his conversations gravitate towards, and in this way he can slowly learn about what he likes to talk about.

Bragging About Qualities: “I Love Myself”

Everyone loves himself. Some people say that they hate themselves, but no one hates himself totally; they love themselves too. A person might even love and hate another person at the same time; and he might feel both love and hatred towards himself. But most people feel that they love themselves very much; even the few people who feel like they hate themselves still have some love for themselves.

Being that a person generally loves himself, and he loves himself more than anything else, naturally, he loves to talk about himself too. A few rare individuals penetrate very deep into their souls and they love others as much as they love themselves, but most people love themselves more than anything else.

There are also people who love others more than they love themselves not because they have reached a deep spiritual level, but actually because they hate themselves, so they love others from that very place of self-hatred in themselves. But this all takes place in one's consciousness. Deep down in one's subconscious, even a self-hating person loves himself – with even more love than how much he thinks he loves others.

In either case, a person always loves himself; the only question is if he loves to talk about himself or not.

Some people love themselves but they don't like to speak about themselves. Either this is because the person has a modest personality, or because he feels that it is arrogant to do. Others are so reserved that they never speak about themselves at all, and they feel like talking about anything personal might somehow "endanger the entire world" if they were to reveal it. This is an unhealthy nature in which a person is being extreme about protecting his privacy, to the point that nobody should know anything about him.

There are also more reasons, as well, why a person would never speak about himself. The point is, though, that a person might love himself very much, but he might not like to speak about himself with others, for all sorts of reasons. So not everyone likes to speak about themselves.

Some people like to speak about themselves and not about their qualities (which stems from wind-of-fire-of-earth, the subject of the next chapter). But here in this chapter, we are discussing one who likes to speak about his qualities because he loves himself, and thus he loves to talk about himself as a result.

The Nature of Self-Love

The next step, after figuring out if one like to talk about his qualities or not, is for a person to know what he loves to talk about the most.

When it comes to the love we have for ourselves, there are two layers to the love. There is unconditional self-love we have for ourselves, which is to love ourselves for who we are, as well as conditional self-love that we have towards ourselves, which is to love ourselves for our personal qualities that we recognize in ourselves.

The unconditional love we have for ourselves is usually in hidden from our consciousness, while the conditional love that we have for ourselves (love of our qualities) is usually consciously revealed.⁴³

If a person does not actually have any particular qualities, he will imagine that he has qualities. This is a survival tactic that a person develops, which stems from his innate self-love.

If a person likes to talk about his qualities, besides for this being a negative trait of bragging, it also increases his *gaavah* (conceit), because as he is enjoying his bragging, his 'fire' increases, and he gets more conceited with this, magnifying all of his qualities and feeling full of himself.

It also causes a person's imagination to increase and he will make up qualities about himself which he does not have. At first a person might start out honest about himself, but with the more he gets used to bragging, he begins to make up non-existing qualities in himself, being that his imagination has increased and become more dominant.

⁴³ See *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part Two: Chapter Seven*

Don't Talk About Yourself So Much

As we have said in the past, the key to the solution always lies in the nature of the problem. When we discover the root of the problem, we can know that the solution lies in its root.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz said that a person must know his qualities even more than how must know his shortcomings, or else he will not know how to fix his shortcomings.⁴⁴ However, besides for this, a person needs to enjoy hearing about his qualities. In this way, he won't come to speak about himself as much as he used to, because he will be receiving enough enjoyment from hearing about his qualities.

This uses the *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations) of the soul for constructive purposes, because by getting used to compliments about himself, he will feel less motivated to talk about himself, since he has grown more confident about his qualities.

There is a well-known saying of Rav Chaim Volozhiner, that there is always an element of *shelo lishmah* in whatever a person does. There are levels to *shelo lishmah*. The worst level of *shelo lishmah* is when one is motivated to prove others wrong or to feel conceited, but *shelo lishmah* can be used in a healthy way when one enjoys hearing about his praises.

We cannot uproot our *shelo lishmah* totally. Therefore, to a certain extent, we may enjoy hearing about our praises, as long as we don't go overboard; we have an aspect *shelo lishmah* in our souls which is always there, so we will have to learn how to use it in a healthy manner.

Now, if one enjoys hearing about his praises, this is fine, as long as it is not overdone, as we said. The problem is when a person talks about his praises to others. Why must he speak of his praises to others? This is unnecessary. When one talks about his qualities with others, he'll come to reveal his entire personal and inner world to another.

Just as it is forbidden to reveal secrets that someone tells you, in a deeper sense we need to have the same attitude towards our own inner world; it should be 'forbidden' for a person to reveal his inner qualities to another! These are private 'secrets' which should not be revealed to others. If one knows about his qualities, he should keep it to himself; don't reveal the 'secret.'

Thus, part of the solution to bragging - which is the more obvious part of the solution - is for one to train himself, slowly but surely, to lessen the amount that he speaks about his qualities with others. In addition, it is recommended that he should get used to not speaking about himself at all.

Talking About Your Shortcomings

But another thing he needs to do to chip away at his bragging, which is not as obvious, is that he will need to get used to speaking about his shortcomings as well – something he is not used to doing.

⁴⁴ *Sefer Daas Torah: Parshas Bamidbar*

Firstly, one must become clear about what his shortcomings are in the first place. If one doesn't know any of his shortcomings, it can be said of him that he doesn't recognize himself at all. Our qualities and shortcomings are in fact always changing with time, so one has to always become familiar with them.

There are some people who will have a very hard time with this part of the solution, because some people cannot handle talking about their shortcomings at all with others. They feel like they are slighting themselves when they admit it if they were wrong or acted incorrectly in any way.

In more extreme cases of this problem, if a person hurts another person by accident, like if he accidentally smashed into someone's car - and it was his fault - he still might not be able to admit it that it was his fault. He has a problem: he never admits to his shortcomings, so he will never say he is wrong, even when it is clear that he is. At best, he will pay the other person back for the damage and think that he's acting above the letter of the law, just to placate the other person, but deep down, he feels that he is not wrong, and he even feels righteous at himself for being so nice as to pay back the other for the damage incurred....

But when a person is truthful, he is aware of his shortcomings; the more a person strives to be truthful, the more he will become aware that he has certain shortcomings.

This does not mean, of course, that he should intentionally go looking for shortcomings in himself. Rather, when he realizes that he made a mistake, he should acknowledge it, and in addition, he should admit it. He should make sure to speak about his shortcomings with others. This should not be overdone, but it needs to be done to a certain extent, when the situation calls for it.

(Of course, if he is a person who generally has a low self-image of himself (a problem which stems from negative *shiflus*/lowliness⁴⁵), then this *avodah* is not for him, because admitting his weaknesses will only make him feel lower about himself, and the the loss will not be worth the gain.)

So first, a person should learn how to admit it when he's wrong. But even in situations when he is not wrong, he must still get used to admitting his faults sometimes. He can try practicing this with his close friends, as well as with his family members.

This should be done sensibly of course, because if a person is always talking about his shortcomings in his home, his family will grow tired of hearing about this, and eventually they will lose respect for him.

Yet, if it one takes the opposite approach and he never talks about his shortcomings at all to his family, either this is because he is very arrogant, or it is because he thinks he is perfectly righteous and holy. He has formed an erroneous belief in his head that it's "forbidden" to think or speak about one's personal weaknesses and shortcomings with others. And he will end up raising children who also will also avoid admitting to their mistakes.

⁴⁵ To rectify negative *shiflus*/low self-esteem, refer to *Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part One: Chapter Six*

Perhaps he will justify his thinking by claiming that it's more important to always be "positive" and never be negative, so that is why he feels that he should never speak about his shortcomings. He might even base his behavior on the words of *Chazal* that one must have an *ayin tovah*, to have "a positive eye", as well as other quotes from *Chazal*, to justify his misconceptions. But in always being "positive" and never talking about his weaknesses, he is disconnected from reality. (You are probably familiar with homes that are run like this, in which being honest with oneself and with family is sacrificed for the sake of keeping a 'positive' atmosphere in the home.)

So, to a certain extent, the children need to hear their parents sometimes speaking about their shortcomings. It is healthy for them, and it teaches them that, yes, we can be wrong sometimes; because we have certain shortcomings and weaknesses. They will learn that when you are wrong, you must admit it.

How much of your shortcomings should you talk about, and how much should you do it? This is a matter that cannot be given exact guidance. It should be done sensibly, within proper limits, and it should not be done too much.

In summary of up until this point: besides for lessening how much you talk about your praises to others, you also need to get used to talking about your shortcomings with others. This will slowly chip away at one's nature to brag about his qualities and talk about himself with others, with the more he gets used to it. It will not totally get rid of his nature to brag, but it can certainly chip away at it to a large extent.

Two Kinds of Self-Absorption

Furthermore, there is an additional factor to consider when it comes to bragging (besides for the fact that one enjoys to talk about himself, as well as his praises): the fact that one brags about himself to others and he becomes simply self-absorbed as he's talking.

When a person has a tendency to brag about himself and to talk about his qualities with others, it is usually because he is self-absorbed. Some people are consciously aware as they are bragging that they are "bragging", but most people who brag are not aware of it, because they are simply self-absorbed.

There are actually two kinds of self-absorption: it can stem from **water-of-fire-of-wind**, or it can stem from **wind-of-fire-of-wind**. In this chapter, we are discussing self-absorption that stems from **water-of-fire-of-wind**; in the next chapter, we will discuss self-absorption that stems from **wind-of-fire-of-water**.

When the self-absorption comes from **wind-of-fire-of-water**, the person is not consciously aware that he is absorbed in himself. Even if he is aware of it, it is only minimally. When self-absorption stems from **water-of-fire-of-wind**, however, a person is fully aware of the fact that he is self-absorbed, as he is bragging about himself. He is mainly absorbed in the feeling of enjoyment he is having as he brags about himself. (This is what we will discuss here).

When one is bragging about himself on a regular basis, it is because he is absorbed in himself; he's "immersed in his own *daled amos*" (four cubits). But he is not trying to be absorbed in "himself"; rather, he is absorbed in the feeling of enjoyment as he is talking about his praises, and as a result, he becomes immersed in himself as he's talking.

Some people are deeply absorbed in their problems. Others are absorbed in their shortcomings. Others are absorbed simply in themselves in general – not in their problems, not in their shortcomings, but simply in themselves, without being aware of anything going on in their surroundings (all of these examples stem from **wind**-of-fire-of-wind, which will be discussed in the next chapter). Here we are discussing one who is absorbed in the enjoyment of speaking about his praises to others, which stems from **water**-of-fire-of-wind.

If a person is enjoying a desire, this is rooted in the element of water. If a person is enjoying so much to speak about his praises, this stems from the "water" (enjoyment/desire) aspect in his "wind" (speech). He is absorbed in his own "*daled amos*", as he speaks about his praises with others.

The Nature of Self-Absorption

Self-absorption is one of the hardest human weaknesses to overcome. There are many human weaknesses that exist, but being self-absorbed is one of the deepest and challenging problems to uproot. This is because a person's "I" is most dear to him, more than anything else - and that is what makes self-absorption one of the hardest things to stop.

The "I" of a person is what prevents a person from seeing truth. When a person purifies his being, his "I" is purified, but before the "I" is purified, it gets in the way of all truth. Every person has an "I" which he worries about – we all worry for ourselves and our needs. But a person who is overly self-absorbed has a much sharper feeling of self-worry than a person who is not as self-absorbed as he.

Some people worry for themselves and are absorbed in themselves only when nobody else is around, and they become immersed in themselves when they are alone. This is a lesser degree of self-absorption. Others are self-absorbed in front of others, but only if something pressing is causing them to act selfish. For example, when the monthly check is being given out, the person pushes people or cuts the line, to quickly get to his check. But on his day-to-day basis, he will usually not get aggressive about his needs, and he lives normally (at least, that's how it appears).

But when a person regularly brags about his praises to others, he is entirely self-absorbed entirely. In his mind, the world begins and ends with him alone. He is kind of imprisoned inside his ego – and it's a very scary kind of prison!

It is very disturbing when we see how self-absorbed a person can be – he has no feeling for what is going on in his surroundings. Examples include not acknowledging his neighbors' lives or even his *chavrusa's* life (whether it's his morning *chavrusa*, afternoon *chavrusa*, or night *chavrusa*). He lives a kind of existence in which the world begins and ends with him!

Even if he is interested in another person's well-being, he always has some agenda of self-gain somehow. If he *davens* for another person, he is doing so that he can get answered first by Hashem. If he gives *tzadakah*, he does so only so that he will get *zechusim* (merits). He does everything for his own gain.

This is the general outline of self-absorption; here we are discussing a detail of self-absorption, which is to brag about one's praises on a regular basis. But bragging is only a result of self-absorption, and in fact, it is only one of the results; there are many more problems that result from self-absorption.

A person who is very self-absorbed will not even hear what is told to him. Not only does it go through one ear and go out through the other ear; the words never enter his ears in the first place! He never absorbs what is being said to him. He is totally wrapped up in himself.

Beginning To Leave Self-Absorption

Our general *avodah* is to reach three kinds of love – love for Hashem, love for the Torah, and love for the Jewish people. Each person as well has a personal manifestation of this *avodah*: one must be able to give up a part of himself. The *Chasam Sofer* said that just as we have a *mitzvah* to give away *maaser* (a tenth) of our money, so must every person have “*maaser*” of his ego – to set aside times every day in which he gives of himself to others.

This is not accomplished by simply doing something kind for another person. It is not done by traveling to mountains and field to engage in *Kiruv Rechokim*. It is not done when a person thinks he has to do *chessed* because he read in *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* that one gains a lot of merits when he engages in benefitting the public. Such a mindset will mean that a person is doing favors for others solely because he wants to get rewarded and to gain merits; he is concerned for his own well-being.

To counter the problem of self-absorption, one needs to devote some time of the day in which he does not live totally for himself. To accomplish this, he should try doing one thing *lishmah* – for the sake of another person, and not for himself. He should just try to do one thing a day for another person in which he is not doing it for the sake of getting rewarded in This World or in the Next World. And even more so, he shouldn't even do it for the sake of giving a *nachas ruach* (satisfaction) to Hashem. He should just do an act of kindness for another simply for the sake of another's well-being.⁴⁶

Of course, on a deeper level, we do everything because it is the will of Hashem and because we should want to give a *nachas ruach* to Hashem. But the real way “to do the will of Hashem” is to be concerned for another person's well-being. Your actual motivation should be, that as you are doing an act of kindness for another, it should be totally for the sake of just helping him.

⁴⁶ In relation to this shiur, see also Tefillah #031 – The Intent In Giving Tzedakah

The Chazon Ish said, “I enjoy it very much when I make people happy.” One needs to simply enjoy making others’ lives easier, whether it is to help others physically or spiritually, or in other matters. The point is to do something for another person entirely for the other person’s sake – and not for any personal agenda at all.

This is like the “opening of the size of a needle” which can form an opening in one’s ego and allow room to allow others into one’s existence: one needs to allow a small space in himself in which he acts entirely altruistic - and not for himself at all.

Not only should it be a space that acts altruistic towards Hashem, but it should be a space that is altruistic towards other people. This is because it’s very possible that a person is altruistic towards Hashem, but not towards people.

So each person needs to make a small space in himself that will be concerned purely for another person’s sake. Just as burying and escorting the deceased is called “*chessed shel emes*”, true kindness, because it involves no personal gain, so must we all have a place in ourselves that does some “*chessed shel emes*” for others.

The truth is that all people need to acquire the trait of being able to act altruistically for others, but a person who is self-absorbed especially needs to acquire this trait, if he ever wishes to fix himself. By making this small “opening” in the ego with this little “needle”, he has already popped the balloon of self-absorption inside himself, and he gains immensely.

Surely the self-absorbed person will have to still work on himself to uproot it, but by developing this power we have described, he is very close to uprooting it. He will have made an opening in himself, which is a very great achievement, for one who has been used to being self-absorbed.

Again, this concept is not only meant to fix self-absorption; it is needed in every Jew’s *avodah*, because it is a very fundamental ability that is needed, if one wishes to live a life of truth. It is not enough if a person has love for Hashem and the Torah; he needs love for other Jews too. This is because we have three pillars that are needed to uphold us – Torah (love for Torah), *Avodah* (love for Hashem), and *Chessed* (love for other Jews).

If one develops the power to do something purely for the sake of another’s well-being, he has popped the balloon of self-absorption with this little ‘needle’; he is very close to attaining pure *Ahavas Yisrael*. It is like a little match that you throw into a pile of straw – it can burn the entire pile. One little point of purity can destroy much evil. It is the point of truth in the soul which can penetrate through the entire ego, acting very much like a needle.

There are people who reach high spiritual comprehensions due to their love for Hashem; others reach it due to their love for Torah; and others reach it from just deep *Ahavas Yisrael*. This is because there are different soul roots for each person’s unique soul. But in any case, all of us need to be able to uncover at least some minimal degree of selfless love, for others.

In Summary

To summarize, the solution for one who is absorbed in talking about his praises to others, is:

1. To get used to lessen the amount of how much he brags about himself to others,
2. To talk about his shortcomings sometimes with others,
3. To devote a bit of time every towards doing something altruistically for another, so that he can begin to come out of his self-absorption.

15 | *Bragging Part 3: Self-Absorption*⁴⁷

Wind-of-Fire-of-Wind: Talking Amidst Self-Absorption

Now we will discuss the next kind of bragging, **wind-of-fire-of-wind**, which is when one talks about his praises to another, as he is immersed in himself.

Man is called “*nefesh chayah*”, which is interpreted by *Targum* to mean “*ruach memalelah*”, a ‘talking spirit’ – man has a nature to talk. Therefore, a person might have a nature to praise himself as his speech is moving along.

Bragging about oneself includes two factors: bragging about oneself, and bragging about one’s qualities. When **wind-of-fire-of-wind** is dominating the person, the person will brag about his qualities, because he is immersed in himself at the moment. The main factor in his bragging is that he is trying to talk about himself, therefore, he will brag about his qualities as a result.

Previously, we discussed a kind of bragging that stems from **water-of-fire-of-wind**, which is when one enjoys his bragging. There, the main enjoyment is being derived from the praises he is saying about himself. But with **wind-of-fire-of-wind**, the person is mainly absorbed in himself, and that is why he brags about his praises to others. He is more concerned with himself than with the actual praises about himself that he is saying.

That is the simpler definition. Now we will explore this more deeply.

The Root of Self-Absorption: Katnus (Immaturity)

One part of ourselves is involved with people in the world, while another part of ourselves is our private life. We live in this world, but we also live in ourselves as we are within it. What is the root of this?

Ever since we are born, the nature of man is to live with himself. Although a baby is involved with its mother, for all purposes, a baby lives in his own world. After a person gets older, he begins to get involved with others.

A baby is living in total “*katnus*” (immaturity) - he is living totally in himself. This nature of *katnus* can be carried into adulthood as well – if a person is too stuck inside himself, where he does not know how to come out of himself and be involved with others; on a deeper note, he is not emotionally capable of leaving his self-absorption to be involved with others.

⁴⁷ <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-015-bragging-part-3-self-absorption>

Usually, this *katnus* weakens as one gets older, but sometimes, it stays in its full strength, and it simply takes on different colors, due to the fact that an adult experiences different things than a child does. So *katnus* can remain as it is even in the fully grown adult; it is sometimes obvious and sometimes not as obvious.

It is not a question of it exists or not in all people. It exists in all people, because all of us have gone through a stage of *katnus* at some point, so all of us still retain parts of our nature of *katnus*. The only question is how much it is manifest in one's life. With some people, *katnus* will only be awakened when he is at his lowest moments. With others, *katnus* is more dominant throughout the day, manifesting itself in a constant self-absorption - in which a person is mainly involved with his own life, and nothing else.

Different Forms of Katnus/Immaturity

Katnus is not only manifest when a person is entirely self-absorbed. It can also manifest in certain areas of a person's life, in which he becomes self-centered when he is involved with those certain areas. So even if a person is not living entirely in self-absorption, he might still get very self-absorbed when it comes to areas that are important to him, and he won't see anything else then except for himself. The 'important' areas might either be in physical areas or in spiritual areas. Either way, when he gets involved in those areas of his life, he does not see anything else other than himself.

In others, *katnus* manifests when certain negative *middos* are exposed in the person. For example, during an argument, a person might have a very hard time remaining silent, when his negative emotions are awakened. He has a hard time understanding the other person as he's in the midst of his heated argument, and he will not be able to accept any other opinion other than his own. In this particular instance, which awakens a person's element of fire, the person will not be able to see any other side to the situation other than his own.

You can see this in a heated argument: a person can get so heated when he is arguing that he simply does not see or hear any logic in the other person's words. He might even view the other person as being worthless. This all comes from being too self-absorbed and not being able to exit his own world.

Narrow-Mindedness

Taking this further – this exists with all people and the question is how much – every person grows up with particular mannerisms and ways of thinking that he picked up from his family and community. When a person meets others who live and think differently than he does, if he has the problem of self-absorption, he simply does not validate others' way of life.

(Of course, we are not implying that one needs to accept others' way of thinking when it goes against Torah and *Halacha*. We are not talking about this at all. We are talking about the idea of

accepting others who simply act differently and their actions are not going against Torah or *Halacha*.)

The more ‘closed’ a person is, the less he can tolerate others, whether it is another person’s personality, mannerisms, opinion, etc. He lives in his own world, and according to his thinking, any other people who think and live differently than he does must be “weird”. (According to his thinking, it is probably *most* people whom he considers weird). Anyone who grew up differently than he does is considered different/ unusual/weird.

This narrow-minded kind of perspective is formed when a person lives in his own “confine” (*tzimtzum*) which he has been used to living in his for his entire life. This “confined” way of living is the cause for his *katnus*/immaturity. In his mind, anything that’s not like how he lives is considered to be non-existing, or it is considered a mistaken way of life. When he meets others who live differently than he does and he sees that there are other ways of thinking that exist, even if he sees that they are basically good people, he will conclude that they are still mistaken in how they live.

This all comes from living in oneself too much. When such a person meets others who are different than him, he feels that others must behave according to how he acts, feels, speaks, and thinks. This *katnus* is formed when one sees only himself, so he does not know how to go beyond his own world. Although he is always around other people and he might even be friendly towards them, deep down he thinks that only **his** way of thinking is correct. He might even honor others and be careful not to slight others, but deep down, even as he talks respectfully to them, he feels like he is honoring others who are “weird.” He cannot accept the fact that there are ways of living and thinking other than his own.

A Thinking-Exercise To Come Out Of Katnus

Here is a simple example that a person should try thinking about, which can help chip away at *katnus*: Imagine if you would be born to a different family, in a different sect of Judaism, in a different place – how would you act? All of us would act exactly like how we grew up. A person who suffers too much from his *katnus* will always think that others who live differently than he does are wrong, simply because they do not live and think according to how *he* grew up.

It would be interesting for him to know that in his previous *gilgul* (lifetime), he might have been born into a completely different type of family and community. But he probably thought last time around too that everyone else is weird, including the way he is growing up in his current lifetime....

By trying the above thinking exercise, a person can discover how confined he has become to himself.

Self-Absorbed Conversations

Until now, it was described a general nature in the soul. Now we will explain how this manifests in particular in our power of speech.

When narrow-mindedness extends into the realm of speech, a person will speak about himself and only himself.

Speech has external and internal layers to it. The external layer of speech is the words we speak, while the internal layer of speech is the power to “lead” ourselves (*hanhagah*) through speech⁴⁸. When someone speaks from self-absorption (we all recognize people like this), all of his speech is centered around his life and what he does.

The deep source of this is the **wind-of-fire-of-wind** in the soul; it is possible that the wind-of-fire-of-wind in the soul is what is entirely ‘leading’ a person in his conversations and thus causing all of his words to be about himself.

A person might be riding on a bus from Yerushalayim to Tzfat, and there is a person sitting next to him and talking to him, and the guy talking might launch into a conversation where he talks about himself for the entire duration of the ride. The talker does not even pause once to listen to the other person sitting next to him, to recognize what is going on in the other person’s life, to let the other have an opportunity to talk about himself. All he is interested about in this conversation is to talk about what’s going on in *his* life. He might be talking the whole time either about what he’s good at, or about his shortcomings; he might be talking about his experiences, and even if he’s only making small talk, he will only still talk about things that he’s interested in.

The problem does not begin in his self-absorbed talking. The self-absorbed talking is all a symptom of his greater problem: he lives entirely in himself, and as a result, he talks only about himself and what goes on in his personal world.

Self-Absorption In The Home

Now I will mention a point which might bother many people when they hear this. But there are fathers who are married for many years and with many children, but when they are home, they live entirely in their own world. The father might be running his home as he should, but he might be very self-absorbed, totally detached from what goes in his family and just living in his own world.

Even worse, though, are the parents who force their children to live exactly as they do, confining them to certain boundaries which the parents have set for themselves, while in reality it does not work for the children. This is another example of the problem of living entirely in oneself.

Self-Absorption Results In Poor Listening

⁴⁸ See *Fixing Your Wind* #010: *Idle Chatter – Part 2 – Enjoyable Gossip*

Let's return to what we started out with in this discussion: when a person talks from his self-absorption. Another problem which is related to self-absorption is when a person only knows how to talk and he does not know how to be a listener. (One of the 48 qualities needed to acquire the Torah is "listening.")

There are people who don't know how to listen. You can have a person who can repeat back everything you said to him, perhaps because he has a very good memory, but that doesn't mean he listened. The reason why a person doesn't listen to another with his own ears is because he doesn't know how to listen with his heart. He might hear various details that is being told to him, but he really doesn't hear anything.

It is even possible that a person lived for 70 or 80 years yet he never really listened to even one person, in his entire life! A person has a problem with listening when he does know how to expand beyond himself.

Even when he does listen to others, he is usually hearing what he wants to hear, not what is really being said, because he makes everything somehow fit into "his" way of thinking. For example, if he hears another person saying something about the *Gemara*, he will think that it is like how *he* thought. When he's learning the *sugya* of *Gemara* and he hears what his friends are saying about it, he hears it all as proof to what he is saying and as additional refining to his own points.

In reality, what he heard had nothing to do with his actual way of thinking, but because he lives so much in his own narrowness, he "hears" what he wants to hear.

Three Possible Causes for Narrowness

This all comes from living entirely in one's personal confines, which makes him narrowed. There are three root reasons of why a person lives so confined in himself [*tzimtzum*].

1) "Katnus" - Immaturity

One reason is because of *katnus*, as we have explained about. *Katnus* is emotional immaturity, not physical immaturity. A person might be an adult according to the definitions of *Halacha*, but in his soul, he might still be living in his inner confines. It might not be exactly like how when he was a child, but it is still a narrow-minded kind of existence which greatly limits him.

2) "Atzvus" - Sadness/Heaviness Caused by Earth in the Soul

Another reason for inner confinement can be due to a dominant amount of the element of earth in the soul; in particular, from the trait of *atzvus*⁴⁹ (stagnancy) in the soul. *Atzvus* is when a person remains where he is and cannot go beyond where he is at now.

⁴⁹ Usually, *atzvus* refers to "sadness", but here it simply means to remain stagnant. Refer to *Understanding Your Middos* #04, #05, and #06

This is not to be confused with *katnus*. With *katnus*, a person might still love new things, but he still remains in his own world, so he cannot exit his own world. But *atzvus* is a different problem: when a person feels that he must remain where he is, and since he grew up a certain way that he's used to, he is scared to change his lifestyle, or even to accept any small changes, for that matter. *Atzvus* stems from the aspect of "heaviness" that is in the element of earth.

The Difference Between 'Katnus' and 'Atzvus'

What is a practical difference between *katnus* and *atzvus*? There is a big difference.

With *katnus*, a person is immature, and he cannot understand that changes need to be made to his lifestyle. It can take many times until you can finally get across to him, because he does not know how to conceptualize the idea of opening himself up to other mentalities.

With *atzvus*, a person has a hard time listening, but once you get him to listen, you can get him to understand that he needs to change and to become more accepting of others. He will still have a hard time changing, because he has to pull himself out of the inner heaviness that is upon him. That is his problem. But at least he can absorb what you are telling him.

With *katnus*, it is very hard to get through to him in the first place. He has a very hard time understanding what is wrong that he has to change. He grew up a certain way, and he is very set in his ways, and he simply does not want to open up.

For example, maybe he comes from a family which is very "family-oriented", in which the whole family must be together at least once a month and also for *Shabbosim*, and that everyone must call each other on *Erev Rosh HaShanah* – if there are family members who forget to call or get together, he looks at this as if it's a fundamental of Judaism that is going lost. (I won't get into here if this is a good thing or bad thing). The point is, that there is a nature to be very narrowed, in which a person is very set that "this is how it is done", and he does not see any other possibility.

That is an example of *katnus*, in which a person cannot absorb the concept that the way he lives is not necessarily the way it has to be. But with *atzvus*, the problem is different: he will be able to understand that he needs to come out of his narrowness, if you explain to him that he needs to; but he doesn't feel that he has the energy to make the changes. This stems from a dominance of "heaviness" in the soul, which comes from the element of earth.

3) Ambitions – Caused by Fire in the Soul

A third reason why people have inner confinement is because they might have a dominant amount of fire in the soul. When there is an increase of fire in the soul, a person becomes enthusiastic about the things he wants, and this reason can make him become absorbed in himself.

To illustrate a dramatic example of this, Rav Yitzchok Hutner *zt"l* said that a boy who is praying to find his spouse might become so consumed with his situation that all he thinks about in his prayers is to get a good *shidduch* (mate): When he asks Hashem for forgiveness in *Shemoneh Esrei*, he is thinking, “If I get forgiven for my sins, I will get my *shidduch*...”

Similarly, *Chazal* say that a thirsty person cannot think of anything else except for his thirst, and a pregnant woman is mostly talking about her future child. So when it comes to certain areas of life, a person might become so consumed in it that he sees nothing else at that time, other than what he is involved in.

Some people are very absorbed for a certain amount of time or only when it comes to certain areas of their life. But there are others whose ambitions are very strong, and nothing else will be on their minds other than what they mainly pursue in life.

Spiritual Self-Absorption

Such a nature is present both in materialistic and secularized people, as well as with very spiritual people, the “*b’nei aliyah*”, who are very concerned with spiritual improvement.

Bnei aliyah are those who recognize how futile this world is, for the most part; but at the same time, a *ben aliyah* desires truth and spiritual growth, which might cause him to become very self-absorbed. The wish to grow higher in spirituality, *aliyah*, is a power that has both good and evil sides to it. It is good because the person is rising spiritually, but as he rises, he might develop a problem of disconnection from other people, and he doesn’t realize that he is very self-absorbed.

This is very common even amongst the few who are considered ‘*bnei aliyah*’. The reason why it happens is simple: the more a person rises and grows in his spiritual status, he becomes less connected with This World, because he is well aware of how futile it is, and he is immersed in nothing but Torah and *Avodas Hashem*; but at the same time, he still might be stuck in *katnus* – so much so that it is disturbing – in which he does not see anything else except for his own existence.

He is in touch with the pillars of the world that are “Torah” and “*Avodah*”, but the pillar of the world that is ‘*Gemilus Chassadim*’ is ignored. He might do *chessed*, but he will only do it for the sake of fulfilling his ‘obligation’ to do *chessed*, because he knows that he needs to do it in order to be complete; he doesn’t see or feel the pain of others.

When narrow-mindedness is stemming from the element of fire in the soul, a person becomes self-absorbed as he pursues his ambitions, and this can be either with physical or spiritual ambitions. It seems that spiritual self-absorption is lesser of an evil than physical self-absorption, but in a way, spiritual self-absorption is worse. This is because spirituality enables a person to disassociate from the world, and with the more ambitious he becomes, the more he lives in his own world.

Although there is an obvious advantage to this, because it enables a person to separate from the materialism of the world, the problem that can come with it is perhaps even more troubling than the alternative: it can cause a person to live totally in himself.

These words are pointing out a common misconception which affects even *bnei aliyah*. Sometimes a person's ambitions when it comes to spiritual growth can cause him to live so much in his own world that he clashes with parents, with his friends and those around him, and with *Klal Yisrael*. The nature of ambitiousness is that it can cause a person to become self-absorbed, where he does not see anything other than himself.

On one hand we can look at it as a spiritual greatness, but on the other hand, it is a very big kind of *katnus*, for the person does not see anything else other than himself.

Beginning The Solution

We have described three root causes for narrow-mindedness, which is the cause for self-absorbed conversations. The solution for self-absorption depends on which of the three kinds it is.

One first has to identify how there is *tzimtzum* (narrow-mindedness) in his life; some have it more and some have it less, but we can all identify how it manifests in our life. Even if we are not entirely living in a *tzimtzum*, there can be areas of our life in which *tzimtzum* is dominant.

After seeing how it manifests in one's personal life, the next step is to try to discern where it comes from in himself, as we described:

- A) Is it coming from *katnus* in myself?
- B) Is it coming from *atzvus* in myself?
- C) Or is it coming from my ambitions, which are causing me to be self-absorbed?

Coming Out of Katnus

If the self-absorption is stemming from *katnus*, then one will have to understand the following subtle matter.

On one hand, a person has to be very self-aware and live the reality of his soul, all the time. One must be familiar with his soul abilities and recognize how they manifest in his life. And he must have a holy sense of individuality for himself, as *Chazal* say, "Therefore, man was created individual." That is one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is to see and feel the pain of others, just as Moshe went out from the palace of Pharaoh to see and join with the suffering of his people.

The question is, how much should one be involved with others? It is a very subtle matter. If a person would try to get to know the whole world and all that goes on it - "*How great are Your creations, Hashem*" - he would fall into the lowest depths of depravity, for the world right now is

steeped into the 50th Gate of Impurity, and he would fall together with the rest of the world. Yet, if a person takes the other extreme, and he instead lived very inwardly in his soul, he feels no connection to others; he is living a life of *katnus*. He will be totally immersed in himself.

So it is a very fine line to know. Practically speaking, a person will need to think about the following: If he knows that he can remain spiritually strong if he were to go out into the world and join with others, then it is upon him to do so. But if one suspects that that he will have a spiritual downfall if he gets to know and understand others, it is not worth it for him to come out of himself, because the loss will not be worth the gain.

A true *ben aliyah* is one who is so strong about his individuality that he knows that he will remain spiritually strong if he gets to know and understand others. This is a deep and subtle point: the more a person is truly inward and spiritual, the better of a chance he has at surviving the evil influences of this world when he goes out there. In the language of the *sefarim hakodeshim*, it is described as “The higher that a spiritual light can reach, the lower it can descend.” Meaning, when one is truly and spiritually refined, he is able to survive the surroundings which are unholy.

So there are two points contained here, which are each opposing concepts. On one hand, a person needs to have his holy sense of individuality, living inwardly with his soul, living a life that is disassociated from society, just as Moshe pitched his tent outside the camp. But at the same time, a person needs to balance himself out by joining with others. Going out into the world and joining with others is a danger to one’s spiritual level. Yet, if a person never joins with others, he is missing *Ahavas Yisrael*, a great fundamental of Judaism.

Therefore, it is impossible to say exactly how much one needs to join with others. Secondly – and this is even more important for a person to know – is how, and when, a person needs to join with others. This is also very hard to know. But in any case, the more inner that a person becomes, he needs to also ask himself if he is connecting with others.

Obviously, if a person has not yet acquired the art of living inwardly with his soul, going out into the world and joining with others will surely harm his spiritual situation, because he has not yet learned how to fortify himself. One who feels strong about his spirituality is one who can join with others and not be harmed by the influences.

Involvement With Others

When joining with others out there in the world, there are two parts to this: There is the actual *chessed* which one is doing for others, and there is also the concept of “*daato m’ureves im ha’beriyos*,” that one’s *daas* should be able to get along with others.

What does it mean to be *daato m’ureves im ha’beriyos*? It does not mean to simply chat with everyone you meet. It is rather the power to tolerate others, even when they think very differently than you do.

This does not mean that one must agree with everyone and think that every opinion he hears is holy. Rather, when you disagree with an opinion of another that you meet, you should ask yourself if you're doing so simply because you cannot tolerate others' thinking (which is stemming from *katnus*), or if it's because you feel that the other person is really saying something that is off-base.

We are being brief about this, but it is describing a very broad concept. The point is, that in anything you disagree with and you invalidate, ask yourself if it is truly wrong, or if perhaps it is coming from a low tolerance in yourself for others' opinions (which is *katnus*).

This is a subtle concept. The more a person matures, the more he begins to see that he has grown out of his childish views on things. He will find that there are things which he had invalidated when he was a child, which he now validates; and vice versa. It is as one of the Sages said, "I see an upside-down world."⁵⁰

We can elaborate further on this point, and we have been brief about it: the more inner that a person becomes, the more he needs to make sure that he is also doing things for others, so that he does not become too self-absorbed.

It is impossible to say exactly how much the balance needs to be, for it depends on many factors: each person's personal situation, as well the particular situation of the generation, etc. But the point is that a person, deep down, needs to be able to tolerate others' opinions, even when he doesn't agree with them. In fact, one must be able to tolerate everyone he comes across, as long as their opinions are not overriding boundaries of the holy Torah.

As we said, knowing the fine line between what's holy and what isn't holy, is a very subtle matter to discern.

Solving Atzvus/Internal Heaviness

The second cause for narrow-mindedness we mentioned is *atzvus* (stagnancy) in the soul, which stems from the 'heaviness' in the element of earth. In order to fix this, one has to know how to remove the 'heaviness' in his soul. We are not dealing with this subject right now, so we will not cover it here at length.

The general outline of this solution is for one to learn about the nature of 'heaviness' in the soul and then he will see how can fix this⁵¹. Generally, the more a person becomes spiritually elevated, he can "shake off the dust" that's on him, and he slowly can come out his element of earth, which will weaken the hold of the 'heaviness' upon him.

Solving Self-Absorption Due To Fiery Ambition

⁵⁰ *Pesachim 50a*

⁵¹ See *את מידותיך – מהות המדות_019_בבביות*

The third possible cause for self-absorption, we mentioned, is when a person is self-absorbed due to his many ambitions.

We are not discussing here a materialistic kind of person who is wrapped up in envy, desires, and chasing honor. We are discussing a *ben aliyah*, someone who is spiritually refined, who has fiery ambitions to grow in spirituality, and as a result, he becomes self-absorbed.

We must understand the following: there are two stages of spiritual growth. At the beginning of one's way, one's *avodah* is to acquire a fiery ambition for spiritual growth. A person has to be able to disassociate himself from his family and friends [if need be it], if he ever wishes to truly grow spiritually. There is a place in one's soul which is capable of this hold kind of 'cruelty'. But this is only the first stage, and it should not be the end goal.

The point of the first stage is for one to develop a strong *ratzon* for holiness. If one never gets to it, that means he has no ambitions, and he will simply follow the crowd, which means that he will not grow spiritually. But after a person has succeeded in igniting his *ratzon* for holiness, and he realizes that he has become self-absorbed in all of his ambitions for holiness – and he is aware to this – it is a sign that he is now ready for the next stage: he will now have to utilize the *opposite* kind of power than until now.

Until now he has been involved in working with his *ratzon* and being focused on his holy ambitions for spiritual growth, and this was all very good, but now he must look back at this and realize that it was only the opening stage. Now that he has arrived at *ratzon* and he feels strongly that he is ready to work on himself and grow, he needs to realize that his *ratzon* for holiness has served to build a good basis for him, and he is ready to build further upon that. But the *ratzon* for holiness is not all there is to spiritual growth.

One has to be aware of this concept even as he starts to grow and improve in his *Avodas Hashem*: “Man was not created for himself, only to help others.” (These are the words of the introduction to *Nefesh HaChaim*.) The goal of growth in our *ruchniyus* is not to be self-serving. We are involved with ourselves in the beginning of our way, but at a certain point we need to realize that to remain at that level is a kind of self-absorption. One must look back at his *ratzon* for holiness that he started out with as a mere pedestal that has helped him spring very far, and that his *ratzon* for growth is not the end goal of *ruchniyus*. This is because, ultimately, we are not created for our own self-serving purposes.

If one does not realize this when he begins to improve in his spiritual growth, he is missing this basic concept of all our life; he becomes self-serving even as he becomes more spiritual. Often, what will happen as a result of this is that a person will think that “helping others” means to get everyone else to think like him....!

This is really returning to his old problem of *katnus*. This is contradictory behavior, because it mixes together different powers of the soul. When a person helps others, even if he does so out of love for them, he is returning to his old problem of *katnus*, because he will “help” others only according to how *he* thinks it must be done.

If one has the problem of *katnus* together with a dominant amount of fire in his soul, it is a more detrimental combination, and it creates a very deep kind of narrow-mindedness and self-absorption. As soon as he encounters anything that doesn't agree with how he thinks, he will become full of misguided zealotry, invalidating anything else that doesn't suit his exact tastes; he will be destructive towards that which he should not destroy.

So the first stage of one's stage of spiritual growth is that he must worry for his spiritual situation and thus be very concerned about himself, and he is still involved with *shelo lishmah* (self-serving interests) at this point. He must aspire for *lishmah* (pure motivations) even as he's involved with *shelo lishmah*, as the Vilna Gaon writes.

And what is the level of *lishmah* he indeed needs to aspire for? He needs to be aware even in the beginning of his way that his *ratzon* for holiness is entirely self-serving, and that it is not yet the goal. The goal he must be aware of is that he must aspire to reach a selfless stage, in which he is not concerned about his own self. In the very same *ratzon* that he has for spiritual growth, which allows him to begin growing spiritually in the first place, he must make space in his spirituality for being dedicated to others as well.

The *Chasam Sofer* said that just as there is *maaser* (giving a tithe) in monetary matters, so is there *maaser* in one's *ruchniyus* (spirituality). This concept is applied practically when a person is willing to let go of some of himself even as he's involved with himself: to be aware that although he is right now involved with his own spiritual improvement, it is not the goal, for the goal is to be selfless and help others.

If one is aware of this, he has already broken through a large part of his self-absorption. Although one knows that he is not yet at the selfless stage, he must still be aware that his current stage (in which he is mainly concerned for himself, for his spiritual growth) is only meant for him to traverse so that he can arrive at a greater goal than his current ambitions for self-growth.

Thus, a person needs to have two opposing perspectives at once. He can be aware that he needs spiritual growth, but at the same time, he can feel disgusted at the fact that he is so concerned with himself and that he is not yet dedicated to others. He will recoil from the self-absorption that he discovers in himself.

Of course, there is the rule of "Your life takes precedence" ("*Chayecha Kodmin*"), when it comes to your own spiritual situation as well; the fact that your spiritual situation should take precedence in your life over concern for another's spiritual situation. However, even though this is true in the practical sense, you also need to feel pained that you are not yet at the selfless stage. This will help you chip away at a large amount of self-absorption.

In Conclusion

To summarize, we have explained the cause for self-absorbed conversations, which is rooted in wind-of-fire-of-wind in the soul. We explained that there are three possible causes for self-absorption, with their specific solutions.

In any case, the goal of all of these solutions is that a person needs to come to the point in which his conversations with others are not centered around himself, and that he is instead expressing interest in the other's life; to recognize others and to seek how to help them in whatever they need.

It is superficial for a person to simply smile at others and seek to help others in this way. In order to really help others and be involved with others as opposed to himself, he needs to enter the other's soul – this is the essence of helping others.

This is the way to rectify the wind-of-fire-of-wind in the soul.

16 | *Bragging Part 4: The Wish for Fame*⁵²

Fire-of-Fire-of-Wind: 'Enthusiastic' Bragging

We will now conclude, with the help of Hashem, our discussion on fixing the element of wind in the soul, by discussing **fire-of-fire-of-wind** in the soul.

Wind of the soul is the source of idle speech, and in the previous chapters we have been discussing fire-of-wind, which is the root of *mesaper b'shevach atzmo*, bragging of one's praises. In particular, **fire-of-fire-of-wind** is when one brags about himself enthusiastically, which resembles 'fire'. The fire in the soul can get awakened as a person is bragging about his praises, causing him to talk excitedly about his qualities to another.

Additionally, fire in the soul is not only a cause for enthusiastic bragging, but it can also 'spread', just like the nature of fire which does not stay from its place and spreads. When this manifests during a conversation, he is bragging about his qualities so that his 'fire' can 'spread'; he has an agenda that what he is saying will spread past the conversation. For example, he may be aware that *Chazal* say, "A friend has a friend", thus, by talking to another, he is hoping that the words will be carried to another and told to another.

This is more obvious when a person is talking to a group of people as opposed to conversing one-on-one with another: when he talks, he has an agenda that his words should spread and become known to others. Such is the nature of 'fire', which burns and 'spreads' past where it is.

In simpler words, this is a nature in which a person is mainly interested that his actions become known to others, or that he should simply get his good name out there. Either way, he wants that others should know who he is.

Why People Wish To Be Famous

There can be three reasons behind this motivation, the wish for fame.

1) One kind of person wants that others should really know who he is and what he's all about. He wants others to know what his actual qualities are. He would be uncomfortable if others will find out his shortcomings; he wants to be known to others so that others will know of his good qualities.

2) Another kind of person wants others to know that he has qualities, but he does not actually possess those qualities. Sometimes a person imagines he has certain qualities, and sometimes he is aware that he really does not have those qualities.

⁵² <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-wind-016-bragging-part-4-wish-fame>

3) Someone who is a bit more refined might wish that others should know about only some of his talents and qualities, not all of them. He wants some of his qualities to remain hidden from the knowledge of others, but he wants others to know at least some of his abilities. Either his talents become known to others unwillingly (which is not his fault), or, his talents become known to others deliberately, because he wishes to be famous (which is evil).

Thus, the desire to speak about oneself in public stems from three possible motivations, as we explained here.

The Power To Be 'Famous' Is More Dominant In The End of Days

The root concept which one needs to be aware of (and later we will explain how to use this for constructive purposes) is, that the wish to be famous is actually one of the most deeply rooted desires of our human nature.

All of Creation was created to reveal the name of Hashem, that all of the world should recognize Hashem as the Creator. In the future, Hashem's Name of *Havayah* will be known to the entire Creation, and this will fulfill the purpose of Creation. There is a deeply rooted desire in Creation to know of Hashem, but when this desire becomes twisted around by the ego, it becomes the desire for personal fame. It is the power for fame being used for evil: for self-serving purposes.

We are now in the End of Days, when the purpose of Creation is almost here, so we are all closer to this great 'fame' that will soon be here, but along with this comes along the forces of impurity, which steal the powers of holiness and use them for impure purposes. The desire for fame is the evil manifestation of this power. It is very rampant in the times we live in, the End of Days, in which it is very possible for a person to become famous very quickly. It is not by coincidence.

Most of the 'fame' that is pursued in our times is about sinful areas. Only a little bit of the fame pursued these days involve 'permissible desires', and a rare amount of it is used for holy purposes. Today we are seeing that fame and fanfare accompanies everything. The influence of the media has become so dominant in people's lives that everything needs to be made famous, everything needs to be advertised. In these times, a person can record himself and then sent out his recording to the entire world a moment later, becoming famous in one instant.

Some people use fame and advertising for the sake of *parnassah* (livelihood), but others are pursuing fame simply for the sake of fame. It has gotten to the point where many people are doing everything for the sake of how much fame will come out of it. If something becomes famous, it is considered of value, and if it isn't made famous, it is not worth much. That is what our reality has become today. This also causes people to become superficial: to view fame of a good deed as being the main thing, while the actual good deed isn't given much attention.

For example, if a person donates a *Sefer Torah* to a *Beis Medrash* or he donates a new *Yeshivah* or *kolel* building, the fact that he donated is not talked about that much, and the main thing that

people talk about is how much fanfare he received because of this: Being in the papers and in the pictures, etc. (And he has to take several poses so that they can get the perfect picture of him...)

All of this makes a person superficial and empty. By placing so much importance is given to fanfare and fame, it causes people to think initially that fame is all that matters. In addition, it places emphasis on the superficial layer of things, ignoring the real essence of things. Fame and advertising is one of the most dominating kinds of superficiality that are enveloping the world today.

Examining Your Motivations For Fame

We mentioned that there are three areas which a person might wish to advertise: All of the qualities he has; or the qualities he does not have; or, he will wish to advertise at least some of his qualities.

Therefore, if one notices in himself that he has a desire for fame, and he wishes to chip away at this desire, he needs to make the following self-introspection. One needs to ask himself for what purpose he seeks advertisement for: “Am I desiring to be advertised for what I don’t have, for what I do have, or to only advertise some of the qualities that I possess?”

This is the first step in the process towards improvement over this area: Getting down to the reason of what is really motivating oneself to seek fame.

Utilizing Your Potential and Revealing The Hidden

After getting down to the root of why a person has a wish for fame, by going through all of these three possibilities in oneself, comes the next step.

There are two basic forces in our soul: The power to utilize our potential (*l’hotzi m’koach el hapoel*), and the power to reveal the hidden (*l’hotzi m’healam l’giluy*).

The Maharal says that man is called “*adam*” from the word “*adamah*”, the earth, which utilizes the potential of a seed by producing plants. It takes the seed, which is a potential, and utilizes it to its potential, enabling a plant to grow and emerge from it.

A different ability which man has is to take something hidden and reveal it. Many times, the ability to utilize one’s potential and the ability to reveal the hidden are interconnected with each other, but in essence, they are two different abilities of man.

The power to utilize our potential is a fundamental essence of man. Even the most perfected person in the world must utilize his potential. The other ability, “revealing the hidden”, is meant to be used when we learn Torah, in which we reveal the ‘concealed’ meaning of the Torah, through our effort and exertion to learn it. But for the most part, we are not meant to use the power of ‘revealing the hidden’ – meaning, it is not upon us to reveal *ourselves* to others.

Often, though, a person confuses these two abilities in himself. A person might focus his energies on “revealing the hidden”, thinking that *this* is what will utilize his potential, and he is not as concerned about utilizing his *actual* potential.

Differentiating Between My Using My Real Abilities Vs. Revealing Myself

Now we can see the ruination that lies in fame/advertisement of oneself.

One has to clearly differentiate between the two abilities we mentioned. When it comes to utilizing your potential, you need to try to use most of it, because it is all necessary to use. But when it comes to ‘revealing the hidden’ [revealing oneself/making oneself famous], most of it is not necessary for a person to reveal, and when a person does use this power a lot, it is usually done for purposes that are not really necessary.

So first, as we already said, person must know what he can really do, and what he cannot. Therefore, the power to “reveal the hidden” should be used a lot less than the power to utilize one’s potential. Secondly, there is no person who lives totally *lishmah* (for pure motivations) as Rav Chaim Volozhiner says; therefore, since we all have *shelo lishmah* (ulterior motivations) in us, we should use the *shelo lishmah* constructively: to focus on how much we want to advertise our *actual* potential to others.

What this will achieve is that a person will see that he doesn’t have to seek fame for the sake of fame alone. Instead, he can realize that it is more important to seek to utilize his actual potential. If he gets fame from that, at least it is more honestly gained, as opposed to fame received from revealing himself entirely to others, which ‘reveals the hidden.’

So it is more important for a person to focus his energies on utilizing his actual potential, rather than on seeking to reveal his greatness to others. In addition, focusing on your actual potential is a way for you to use *shelo lishmah* constructively, whereas seeking fame for the sake of fame is totally *shelo lishmah*.

Here is an example of what we mean. If one is saying a *dvar Torah* in public, he is utilizing his potential. He has *chiddushim* to say, so he needs to say them, in order to reveal them outward and thus utilize his potential. The fame he receives as a result is a byproduct of this, but his main concern was to utilize his potential.

Something which is meant to stay hidden, however, should stay hidden, and no one should know about it. But if it is something that is supposed to be made known - such as in the case of saying a *dvar Torah* – the fact that he receives fame as a result of this is something that cannot be avoided; he is not mainly motivated here to become famous. He just wants to utilize his potential. The good feeling he gets from it and any fame that follows from this should be enough to calm his desire for fame, because he will be getting fame from using his real abilities, not from advertising something he isn’t.

Most people are using fame for its own sake, and this is the problem. But when a person is making sure to focus on utilizing his actual potential, his desire for fame will be curbed, for it will be limited to the energies he is using. This is the gain of focusing on actualizing your potential vs. seeking to ‘reveal the hidden’ [or the desire for fame].

Avoiding Fame Even As You’re Utilizing Your Potential

The next step a person needs to do is that even when he is focused on utilizing his actual potential rather than on revealing his hiddenness to others, he should also make sure to avoid revealing himself as much as possible.

For example, if a person merits to print a *sefer*, he doesn’t have to put his name on it. Just because he is using his potential by putting out his *sefer* doesn’t mean that he has to “reveal the hidden” at the same time and making himself known to others. The point was to utilize his potential, not to let everybody know who he is, so why should he need to advertise himself in the process?

Something he does privately should surely remain private, but even something which is known to others, doesn’t have to be done in a way that reveals the hidden. The point is to keep focusing on utilizing your actual potential, and to keep the focus away from revealing yourself to others/ ‘revealing the hidden’.

(There is also a deeper level in which a person can make sure to hide his potential from others, but this is a level for *tzaddikim*).

The Next Stage: Lessening Advertisement of The “I”

When it comes to the wish to be famous, there are two parts to this: the wish to advertise one’s very *self*, and the wish to advertise that which he wants to advertise [his abilities]. Until now we explained the wish in a person to advertise his abilities to others, and how one can lessen the amount of this. We did not explain yet how to lessen the advertisement of one’s actual *self*.

In what we described until now, a person can focus on making his actual abilities known to others, as opposed to being focused on simply becoming famous. He knows that he will become famous as a result, but this is still better than simply desiring to be famous, because at least his focus on using his actual abilities, which will limit the amount of fame he receives, to what he is actually good at. This uses *shelo lishmah* in the soul for a constructive purpose.

However, it is still focused on the “I”, so it doesn’t eliminate the actual desire for fame yet. There is more inner work to be done after this stage, because it still doesn’t solve the problem of how one can avoid fame altogether.

The more inner *avodah* than what was explained until now is for one to lessen advertisement of *himself*, altogether. Most people want others to know what they do and consider themselves

successful only if others will know of them. But the higher level is for one to not need others to know of him. [Later we will explain how one can come to this perspective].

There is a well-known story that someone told Reb Yisrael Salanter of a *tzaddik nistar* (hidden *tzaddik*) whom no one knows about, and that perhaps it would be better to reveal him to the world, so that the world will know he is and then be able to gain from him. Reb Yisrael Salanter said, “This *tzaddik nistar* is getting all his vitality in life from the fact that he is a *nistar*; if everyone finds out he is a *tzaddik*, he will stop being a *tzaddik*, because he will feel like he is losing his ‘title’.”

The point we can learn from this story is: Most people need others to know who they are. They want their “I” to remain and be noticed by others, even if they are not so obsessed with “revealing the hidden” which we addressed earlier.

But the more inner *avodah* is for one to lessen all traces of his “I” altogether. It is essentially for one to understand that we live entirely for Hashem: “Everything is in the hands of Heaven.” (As for how one can avoid *gaavah* (conceit) even as he’s avoiding fame, this is a separate topic). It is for a person to realize that he has nothing of his own.

For example, if someone puts out a *sefer*, he has to realize that it’s all from Hashem, not from himself. If he donated *tzedakah*, he has to realize that it was not his money, but Hashem’s.

Simply speaking, it is the level in which one realizes that nothing he does is from himself. But it is even deeper than that: since we own nothing, we can recognize that all fame must go to Hashem, and not for ourselves. This is the more ultimate level: to realize that fame is not meant to be used for self-serving purposes, and to instead realize that only *Hashem* should be made famous.

The more a person removes his “I” from the picture – the less he wants to be noticed by others - the more he avoids personal fame, and instead he returns all fame to Hashem, Who is the Only One who should be made famous. He will desire less and less fame with the more he gets used to this perspective; he would rather that Hashem’s name be known and revealed.

In the first part of the *avodah* we described (with regards to lessening the desire for fame), in which a person focuses on his actual potential rather than on being obsessed with advertising himself, there is still an “I” that wishes to be noticed. But if a person realizes that all his actions are really enabled by Hashem, not only will he desire less fame, but he returns all fame to Hashem. Not only will this chip away at his wish for fame, but it causes a person to desire for Hashem’s name to be revealed instead - the purpose of creation.

Purifying Our Motivations To ‘Advertise’ Torah and Mitzvos

Until now, we explained perspectives that can be understood and reached by most people. The last point we said was a bit more subtle. Now we will say a deeper point which is not close to most people, but we will mention it to complete the picture.

There are people who want to make Hashem famous upon the world, but they do so because they are mainly interested in making *themselves* known. They are in it as a way to make *their* own opinions known. They are aware that the main thing is Torah and *mitzvos*, and they wish to make this famous to the world - but only because they wish to spread *their own personal opinion* of what the truth is. They seek to spread knowledge of Hashem, Torah, and *mitzvos*, entirely as a *tool* to their advantage, which enables them to make *their* own opinions famous.

For example, a person might wish to make advertisements about “Stop Talking *Lashon Hora!*”, or that we need to concentrate when we say “*Amen*”, or that we need to give *tzedakah*, etc. These are all important things, but the question is, what is motivating the person to advertise these *mitzvos*?

With some people, it comes from the pure desire of their souls, and if this is the case, it is part of their purpose on this world to spread the knowledge about certain *mitzvos*; they have purified themselves internally, they have reached the purity of their soul, and they realize that it is their purpose on this world to spread certain *mitzvos*.

But with others, the desire to make such advertisements is stemming from a desire to spread his personal wishes, so that he can get fame and honor from it. It has nothing to do with Hashem; it is self-serving. It is either because a person wants to cause some movement throughout the world, or because he has the money and connections to do so, or simply because it is his personality to make his ideas famous.

We cannot say that it's *entirely* self-serving, but it's not being done entirely for the sake of Hashem either. Usually what happens is that even if many good things do come out of it, it is done entirely *shelo lishmah*. It does not come from a desire to spread the knowledge about Hashem onto the world. It is rather seen as an opportunity for a person to spread his personal ideas, due to whatever agendas he has. This misuses a high spiritual power – the power to make Hashem revealed upon the world - for egoistic purposes.

As an example of this, there are many people who believe that *Moshiach* will come from specifically their particular sect of Judaism. This is a dramatic example of how twisted the desire for fame can become. When *Moshiach* comes, he will reveal Hashem upon the entire world, yet there are people who want to claim him all for themselves. This constricts the spiritual light of *Moshiach*, which is all-inclusive, and limits it to a ‘specific’ situation. Although it is true that *Moshiach* will have to come from somewhere, the fact is, *Moshiach* will come to reveal Hashem upon the world, and people are taking the concept of *Moshiach* and ‘constricting’ it to their personal wishes.

In Conclusion

To summarize, the power to seek fame (*pirsum*) is a power that must not be suffocated, for it is needed, and the only question is, *to where* a person will direct his power to seek fame.

If one does not make himself famous nor does he seek to make Hashem famous, it can be said that he ‘buries’ himself. If he only makes himself famous, this is evil. If he seeks to make Hashem famous, it must be done with proper intentions and not for the sake of his own fame.

There is a famous saying of Rav Shach *zt”l* that “In our generation, I do not understand how there is such a thing as a *tzaddik nistar*. If he is a real *tzaddik*, how can he sit in solitude in his own private corner, when everyone else around him in this generation is in need of his help?” (There are indeed such *tzaddikim* like that even in our generation, and it is a matter which needs understanding. We are just mentioning this to shed light on our current topic we are discussing).

Thus, in summary, we need to make use of the nature of seeking fame (*pirsum*), and it is just that we need to know how to use this power properly. With most people, it is used for self-serving purposes; one who has a dominant amount of **fire-of-fire-of-wind** has an even stronger desire to be famous.

In either case, every person has to know how he uses the power of fame: if he is using it for himself, and if he is, how he can use it properly; and how to channel the desire for fame to make Hashem famous upon the world.

Practically speaking, in order to improve in this area, one needs to begin from the lower stages (focusing on his actual potential rather than on seeking to make himself famous, along with lessening advertisement of oneself when unnecessary), and after he has worked on that, he can progress to the higher stage: to seek to make Hashem famous, and not himself, by deeply realizing that nothing we have is from ourselves, only from Hashem.⁵³

⁵³ Similar context of this shiur is also in Tefillah #0151 – Purer Motivations In Kiruv