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דע אט מידותיך הדרכה מעשית – עפר-עצלות מפורט

1 | *Moving Out of Non-Movement*

Two Opposing Elements: Wind/Movement and Earth/Permanence

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will learn here about the element of earth, the root of the trait of laziness.

As a general description, there are two “pairs” within the four elements – the elements of fire and water, and the elements of wind and earth.

The Vilna *Gaon* said that the elements of fire and water are Heavenly elements and more associated with the Next World, while the elements of wind and earth are baser elements which are more associated with This World.

Man’s body was taken from the earth, and when man received a soul, he became a “talking spirit” (*ruach memalelah*). Therefore, the soul is rooted in the element of “wind”.

Laziness - Stifled Movement Caused By “Heaviness” In The Soul

Wind is the root of movement. Wind is the motivating force in everything. Earth, by contrast, is a serene, unmoving element which gives permanence and solidity. Therefore, the element of earth is the very antithesis to the element of wind/movement.

When earth’s nature of “serenity” is in repaired, this is the genuine serenity which is referred to as “*menuchah*”. When serenity is impaired, this is what we call “*atzlus*”, laziness. Therefore, earth is the opposite of wind in two ways: either because it is serene [the rectified use of earth], or because it breeds laziness [the impaired use of earth].

Laziness is essentially whenever a person stifles his power of movement. When a person’s movements become completely stifled and still, this is death. At death, the soul (or the “wind”) of a person returns to Hashem, and the body (or his “earth”) returns to the earth. When a person’s movements are only partially stifled, this is what we experience as laziness. The trait of laziness should therefore be more precisely defined as a partial stifling of wind/movement in the soul.

When one needs to move more (based on his personal needs for movement, which vary according to each soul) but his movements have become restricted, due to the nature of “heaviness” which comes from the element of earth, this produces laziness. Laziness comes from the aspect of “heaviness” in the element of earth, and this is what lays behind the definition of laziness we explained above: laziness is a partial stifling of movement. So it is really the “heaviness” of earth which, when it dominates, causes a partial stifling of movement in the soul. This heaviness of “earth” in the soul, when it meets the “wind” in the soul, can slow it down – and this is what we know as laziness.

The Five General Functions of the Soul

The soul generally consists of five functions (in order of lowest level to highest level): (1) **Action**, (2) **Emotion**, (3) **Speech**, (4) **Thought**, (5) **Will**.

Let us explain these levels, from the lowest to the highest.

How Laziness Affects Action

When the element of earth is impaired, it will generally manifest in the “actions” of a person. Action is the lowest use of the soul, and earth is the lowest of the four elements. Our Sages also equate the element of earth with the power of action. Earth activates the potential of the elements of fire, water and wind, bringing them into the realm of action. The “world of action” which we live in is generally associated with the element of earth.

Although the element of earth is generally manifest in the world of action, the aspect of “heaviness” in earth also exists in the subtler areas of the soul: the faculties of will, thought, emotion, and the speech. Actions, though, are the basest function of the soul, and therefore the earth’s “heaviness” is mainly manifest in one’s actions, the “heaviest” force in the soul [which weighs a person down and which is closest to physicality]. Thus, the element of earth mainly corresponds to the level of action.

The heaviness of earth mainly settles on the area of action, but it can also show up in the subtler areas of the soul. Therefore, we can detect laziness in the will, thoughts, speech and emotions – where the element of earth can produce stifled movement, resulting in laziness, within the above areas of the soul.

The Effect of Laziness On The Character Traits

Laziness is also a character trait. While laziness is mainly manifest in the area of action, it is also one of the character traits, and therefore, besides for laziness in the active sense (*poel*), when a person “acts” lazy, there is also laziness that can be manifest on a potential level (*koach*) in the soul. While the **results** of laziness can be seen in the area of action, laziness still exists on a **potential** level in the other areas of the soul as well, which include speech, emotion, thought, and will.

Therefore, although we have explained that laziness is manifestly manifest in the area of action, it also exists on a subtler level, as a character trait, in all areas of the soul. So while laziness can mainly be seen in the area of action, it also exists on a subtler level, when it comes to the areas of speech, emotion, thought and will. When laziness is in its “potential” form, it can be detected as **slowed movement** in the soul, which then results in laziness.

As a result of this, when laziness takes effect on various character traits of the soul – such as the traits of joy, enthusiasm, love, etc. – what will happen? The particular trait in question will become somewhat restricted - either totally, or partially. The laziness will “slow down” the soul’s movements, within the particular trait in question. This will be detrimental to the inner makeup of the soul. So, besides for the fact that laziness bears negative results – it causes a person to act lazy – it also has subtler detrimental effects. It will “weigh down” a certain character trait.

For example, if a person is lazy, his joy may also be lessened. Or, he may feel less loving. Joy and love are both emotions that come from inner expansion, and when laziness dominates, these emotions are constricted and the soul cannot expand as much. As a result, a person will experience less joy even when he is experiencing joy, and less love even when he’s experiencing love, etc. The laziness doesn’t let the soul expand, and the character traits will be prevented from expanding as they normally do, remaining in their potential state, unutilized.

Many times, when a person is lazy, this has a detrimental effect on his character traits, and when he attempts to fix his character traits, he doesn't realize that the problem is causing from the laziness, and instead he thinks that there is something wrong with his love, joy, etc. The laziness is preventing his character traits from performing properly.

Since laziness is a character trait, its effect on the character traits is clearly felt, because that is where the laziness mainly settles.

Laziness In Speech

Laziness also affects a person's speech. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that the lightest part of the body is the tongue, meaning that a person can speak freely. But when laziness takes hold of a person, it weighs down his speech as well.

A classic example of this is the *mitzvah* to speak words of Torah. When one is lazy, he will be lazy when it comes to speaking words of Torah as well. When learning with his *chavrusa*, he may be too lazy to say what he's thinking.

Or, when learning Torah privately, he may be too lazy to verbalize the words. The ideal way of learning Torah is to verbalize the words when learning it, and the *Baal HaTanya* said that it is an actual obligation, for the *Gemara* says that one must verbalize the words of Torah with his mouth, so that it should become "alive" in his mouth. A person may be learning with a *sefer* and he is thinking about Torah, but he is not speaking words of Torah, because he is being prevented by laziness.

Another example is that a person may be too lazy to give a compliment or an encouraging word to someone else, when the other is going through a difficult time. This is also an example of laziness in speech.

Another form of laziness in speech is when a person speaks slowly. There are some who speak slowly because they have a deliberate thinking process, and they think things through very well before they speak, carefully choosing their words. Others, however, will speak slowly because they have a dominant element of earth in their souls, and the trait of laziness produced from earth is manifest in their speech.

(Laziness doesn't always affect the entire spectrum of the soul. In some people, laziness is only present in their actions, and in others, it shows up in their speech, and in others it will show up in their emotions. Others will have laziness only in their thoughts, and others will have laziness only when it comes to their will.)

When laziness manifests in speech, a person's speech is slowed. A person may seem to be a very calm person who always speaks slowly and calmly, while in reality, the reason he speaks slowly may be because he is weighed down by his element of earth. So if a person is always speaking very slowly, it may either be stemming from a calm state of mind, which is a quality, or it may be stemming from the "heaviness" of a dominant element of earth, which is detrimental.

How Laziness Affects Thought

Laziness can also be manifest in a person's thoughts. This is a more expansive topic.

Every person thinks, each on his own level. The three thinking abilities are called *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daas*. Although laziness affects the entire spectrum of the soul, we can possibly say that the main detrimental effects of laziness are on the power of thought: when a person is lazy when it comes to his thinking.

The Sages state that “A person is thought” (“*adam da machshavah*”). Man has the power to think and reflect, and this is a power that is constantly active. However, it is well-known that a person does not use much of his brain. Whatever has been discovered about the brain so far is only about a small part of the brain, which the scientists admit to. There are many more parts of the brain which people do not use, and for the most part, these parts of the brain are asleep. One of the main reasons of why so many people are “asleep” in their brains is because they are simply being too lazy to think.

People are trained to do actions, but they are not that trained to think, and that is what they are used to since childhood. Those who merit learn Torah throughout the day, are usually using their minds to think, each on his own level. But if a person isn't learning Torah that much during the day, or even if he's sitting and learning Torah all day in the *beis midrash* but he is not trying to exert his mind that much, he isn't using the potential of his mind, and he won't be aware of his mental capabilities, because he isn't using them. Even if he is aware, he may still be using very little of his ability to think.

Therefore, in most people, there is a laziness which prevents the person from using his thinking, because they have never trained themselves to get used to thinking, which further limits their active mental abilities. This issue has many bearings on one's ability to think. There are two issues here – an issue of quantity, and an issue of quality. One issue to consider is how much a person is thinking, and the other issue is the quality of one's thinking – how well he can think. When one hasn't trained his mind to think that much, not only isn't he thinking, but the quality of his thinking will also decline. His comprehension will therefore become very narrowed and limited.

How Laziness Affects The Will

Laziness also has a detrimental effect on the will of the person. When one is lazy, the laziness prevents him from actualizing his willpower.

If a person hasn't yet begun to improve his spiritual state, his connection to materialism and his sins will block his heart, and he won't be able to actualize his spiritual will to improve. The purer he becomes, the better he will be able to actualize his will. However, this problem is not always when it comes to the spiritual. It can affect a person even a more basic level, of simply not having enough willpower for anything. This is a problem that affects even the “animal” level of the soul, and it is not always related to a spiritual will. We can see that some people have a very active willpower, whereas others don't express any aspirations for anything, and they would need something compelling to motivate them.

There are also other reasons why a person wouldn't be motivated. A person may simply be too lazy to even want something. It may feel too burdensome. Just as a person doesn't want to carry a heavy package, so would a person want to avoid having a will for something, if it feels like a load upon him that he's not interested in having. This is not the same issue as a person who wishes to throw off all his responsibilities. Here we are speaking of a different issue, where a person doesn't want to deal with too much, so he avoids it. He doesn't want to bear the weight of wanting something, so he doesn't try to awaken his willpower.

Even more so, sometimes a person doesn't want to activate his will because he's afraid that it will contradict a different will he has, and he doesn't want to face his own conflicting desires. Subconsciously, he will deny what he

wants, because he doesn't want to deal with contradictions in his will. Part of the reason for this is due to laziness, because he doesn't want to exert his mind. He is not prepared to deal with his own willpower, and this is a form of laziness.

Laziness: Inactive Potential

Thus, when a person is having difficulty accessing his own willpower, part of the reason is due to laziness, of not wanting to deal with internal conflict. The result is that a person doesn't try to activate his potential.

There are two forms of laziness: Either when a person doesn't act at all, or, when he performs his actions too slowly. The first kind of laziness (refraining entirely from performing) is referred to as *atzlus*, while the second kind of laziness (performing slowly and slothfully) is referred to as "*atzaltayim*". In either case, the laziness is preventing the person from utilizing his potential, keeping his soul's power in a dormant, inactive state.

Understandably, this can be explained in further detail, but it will suffice for now with the general description of laziness explained until now.

Impaired Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth: The Unwillingness To Act

Laziness comes from the element of earth, and there are aspects of all four elements in each of the elements. Therefore, in earth, we can find earth, water, wind and fire. Let us begin by first seeing what laziness produced by "**earth**"-of-earth is, and how to repair it [and we will begin with the laziness that comes from "earth"-of-earth-of-earth].

As mentioned above, there are two basic manifestations of laziness – when a person does not act at all, and when a person acts slowly. For a person who has a strong amount of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, his laziness will take on both of these forms – he will act very slowly, and also, he will often not want to act at all.

Now we shall understand this deeper. As mentioned earlier, a person on this world is mainly using his elements of earth (serenity, or non-movement) and wind (action, or movement). What is the initial perspective of our soul? Are we naturally inclined towards action, or serenity?

Here is an example that brings out the idea. There is day and night. In middle of the day, the natural perspective of people is action and movement, and by night, the nature of people is to seek serenity, not action and movement. Our question is: What is the natural state of our soul? Does it initially seek serenity, or does it initially seek action and movement?

The way to define it is as follows. In our world, the main perspective [of the soul] is movement and action, for we live in a "world of action", but in the Next World, which will be "entirely Shabbos", our initial perspective will be serenity (*menuchah*).

To give a general description, when it comes to the personal makeup of one's soul, if a person's main element is wind, his nature is drawn towards action and movement, but if his main element is earth, his nature is to seek serenity. Earlier, we explained how earth/laziness affects the five general areas of the soul, which are: action, speech, emotion, thought, and will. The nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, when it is left impaired, causes the initial

perspective of the soul to avoid even the tiniest, subtle desire for any movement. When this nature is rectified, it is called *menuchah*, which is true serenity, and when it is impaired, it is laziness.

When **earth-of-earth-of-earth** remains impaired, the initial perspective of this person's inner makeup is that he will want to avoid any movement. What will happen from this, as a result? He will not even be aware of the necessity to do any action right now, even when he has to. Any time he will want to do some movement or action, subconsciously he will feel opposition towards it, and as a result, he will not want to do it.

As soon as this kind of person gets even the subtlest will to do anything, the "heaviness" of his **earth-of-earth-of-earth** will make its appearance, awakening the "initial perspective" of his soul, which does not want to do anything. It will overpower any desire that he has to act, and even if he does have a desire to act, he will usually deny it subconsciously.

Repairing Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth At Its Root: Changing The Soul's Initial Nature

To improve impaired **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, we will need to treat the issue at its root, as opposed to merely working with the "branches" of the issues (the laziness per se). In the coming lessons, with the help of Hashem, we will explain how to work with the branches of laziness-related issues, such as by how to improve upon actions and thoughts affected by laziness.

Here in this lesson, where we are discussing how to repair **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, which is the "root" of all laziness, we need to improve it by working with this nature at its root, as opposed to dealing with the results and the "branches" of the laziness.

The way to repair **earth-of-earth-of-earth** is not simply by forcing oneself to do something when one doesn't want to, or to force oneself to think when one doesn't want to, etc. Although it is true that one will need to do that as well, that is only dealing with the "branches" of the issue. What we mainly need to do here, in order to improve **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, is to work with the root: to change the order of the inner workings of one's very nature, by changing the "initial perspective" of the soul [which, in this case, naturally seeks serenity and avoids action and performance]. Otherwise, the heavy nature of his **earth-of-earth-of-earth** will overpower one's will, meaning that the person's unwillingness to act will overpower any desire for action, and, subconsciously, a person will not even be aware that there is a need for him to move and act. This is the very depth behind the trait of laziness, in particular, when the laziness stems from **earth-of-earth-of-earth**.

Now that we have studied the depth of the issue, we can proceed to the depth of solution. With the help of Hashem, as we continue in the coming lessons to discuss the issues of laziness, we will also examine the "branches" of this issue, in their many details. First, before getting to the branching issues of laziness, we need to understand the **root** of how laziness is repaired – which will involve a change in the inner makeup of one's soul.

Solving Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth At Its Root: Awakening Wind/Movement

How does one change the inner makeup of his soul? There are two ways of *avodah*, to overcome the heaviness in the soul that breeds laziness. Either one can simply try to oppose the laziness and fight it [by forcing himself to act], or, he can begin to **awaken his element of wind**, at its root.

In the first way, a person identifies the laziness as an inner heaviness in his soul, and he then tries to deal with this issue, using any of the various methods which can help him overcome the heaviness/laziness, which we shall explain in the coming lessons, with *siyata d'shmaya*. (These methods are also mentioned in the words of our Sages.)

But when we use the second way, we do not work with branches of the issue. Instead, we work with the root. Here we do not focus on how to deal with the laziness per se. The work here is to awaken movement. This is not because we are trying to deal with the difficulty of laziness. Rather, the approach here will be in the opposite manner: One should simply get used to doing various movements, for the purpose of awakening movement - and not for the purpose of fighting laziness.

These actions of awakening movement (which we will soon give examples of) should be done sensibly, in a way that one can handle, because if a person goes too far with this idea and he is moving too much, he won't be able to concentrate or focus well. Therefore, it is a subtle matter which requires caution. So each person should see which movements he can awaken, as long as he won't be doing anything that disrupts his concentration.

Examples of Awakening Movement

Here are some examples of how a person can awaken more movement and train the soul to avoid staying too long in non-movement.

- 1) When a person is riding the bus, he should try not to stay seated the whole time or fall asleep in his seat. Instead, at a certain point, he should rise from his seat and get used to standing on the bus. (Of course, this is only possible in cases where the *halachah* allows it.)
- 2) If a person is sitting and learning Torah, he shouldn't sit there glued to his seat with a kind of heaviness which he doesn't budge from. He should deliberately awaken some movement every so often, such as by getting up from his seat at times and standing while learning, or by swaying in front of his *sefer* on a *shtender*.
- 3) Additionally, a person should try to avoid lying down in a bed unless he needs to go to sleep. If one wants to take this even further, he can try not getting too comfortable even when he's going to sleep. He can try making it a bit difficult for himself [i.e. by removing one of his pillows].
- 4) One should try walking for a certain distance every day.
- 5) Instead of taking an elevator, he can try walking up the steps.
- 6) Taking this further, one should try taking care of doing something, even if he's not sure he needs to do it. Instead of thinking if he really needs to do this action or not, he should just go do it. Even if he doesn't need to do it, it is good for him to do it, because he will be getting used to practicing movement, so the gain is worth it. It is not a waste of time - as long as a person going overboard with it.

The Goal – “Habit Becomes Second Nature”

Understandably, when trying to practice this idea, one should not try to do anything extreme in order to change his nature. Instead, one should simply get used to practicing movements that are minimal and easy to perform.

When one gets used to this practice, it gradually changes the “initial perspective” of the soul which naturally avoids movement, taking him out of the heavy, dominant nature of his **earth-of-earth-of-earth**. As a person does it more, he gets used to more and more movement, which gradually changes the inner makeup in his soul. At some point, he will feel as if a heavy stone has been lifted from his heart. He will feel lighter, even though he has not dealt directly with the trait of laziness itself. Instead, he has dealt with the root.

There are more examples of the idea, but the point is to gradually enter into a life of movement, in a sensible and balanced way, and slowly, the “initial perspective” of his soul change, both in how he thinks and in how he acts. In this way, the person with a dominant nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth** comes out of his initial nature, and instead, his element of wind (movement) can start overpowering his earth, since there is a rule that “habit becomes second nature.” Eventually, if one keeps going in this direction of change, he can rectify his nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, where it will then become genuine *menuchah*, serenity.

And so, a person with a nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth** starts out with a “heavy” nature of earth, which avoids action and movement, and his inner work (in order to repair his nature) is to get used to practicing small amounts of movement, which awakens his element of wind. After he practices this for a considerable amount of time, he rectifies his nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, where it becomes true *menuchah*/serenity, because his serene nature becomes balanced by the ability of movement.

Rectifying The Soul’s Root vs. Trying To Overturn It

As emphasized, this must be a gradual process of getting used to movements, because if a person tries to move too much, he is acting too extreme, and the problem with this is that he may be trying to change his “soul root” - which cannot actually be done. If he has a “soul root” of earth and he is trying to turn it into wind, this will only prove detrimental to him, because he cannot change his soul root. Trying to go against his soul root, by taking on too many extreme changes of action, will only throw him out of balance.

The person who has the initial nature to avoid movement has a “soul root” of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, and since it is his “soul root”, it cannot be changed – instead, it must become rectified and balanced. Therefore, one should not try to overturn his nature of **earth-by-earth** by trying to totally go against his nature, such as by performing extreme amounts of movement and the like. He would by trying to change his soul root, which cannot be done.

Instead, his work is to **balance out his nature**, by bringing some movement into his life, which enables his element of wind to overpower over his nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, thereby rectifying his impaired **earth-of-earth-of-earth** and turning it holy, where his **earth-of-earth-of-earth** can now be the true, ideal serenity that is known as *menuchah*.

However, even when he does rectify his nature, he should still make sure to awaken movement in his life, so that he doesn’t fall back into his old, impaired nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**. Since **earth-of-earth-of-earth** is his “soul root”, he may easily fall back it into its impaired state if he allows it dominate again, by avoiding movement. So he should still be wary of his nature to become too serene, and he should make sure that he keeps awakening movement in his life, even after he has succeeded in balancing out his nature.

Conclusion

Through these changes of action, the person with a nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, who once had an initial nature to avoid movement, can gain a new nature, in which the element of wind/movement becomes his primary function, overpowering his initial nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth** that had been confining him. This is because there is a rule that “habit becomes second nature”¹, and it enables a person to reach the ideal, balanced kind of *menuchah*/serenity, where one can perform action and still be able to maintain his original serene nature.

¹ *sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh*. Also mentioned in the Rambam: *Shemoneh Perakim*.

דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית – עפר-עצלות – מפורט

2 | *Side-Tracked*

Water-of-Earth: ‘Dragged’ Into Laziness

With *siyata d’shmaya* we will continue here to discuss laziness. Now we will discuss laziness that stems from “**water**”-of-earth-of-earth.

As explained earlier, the root of laziness is in the “heaviness” within the element of earth. The more “heaviness” there is, the more laziness a person will have. Laziness stemming from “**water-of-earth-of-earth**” is when a person is “dragged” towards laziness, just as water is dragged down its current.

Others are drawn towards laziness by their very nature, and we addressed this in the previous chapter. By their very nature, they don’t move. In its impaired state, this is the evil trait of total laziness, and when this nature is repaired, it is holy, and it is known as *menuchah*, serenity. That is a brief synopsis of the laziness that stems from “**earth**”-of-earth-of-earth.

Here we are speaking about “**water**”-of-earth-of-earth, which is a person who isn’t lazy by nature, and it is just that he has a nature to become ‘dragged’ after something which offers him some serenity. He gets sidetracked from this serene state, so he finds it hard to continue what he was doing. This breeds laziness, as a result.

Here are some examples of this kind of laziness.

Example 1 – Sidetracked By A Phone Call

A person gets up in the morning and *davens*, and is on his way to go to work or wherever else he has to go, and he passes by a store and he’s hungry, so he goes inside to eat something. Then, he gets a phone call while he’s eating, and he remains on his phone, as the minutes pass by. He doesn’t budge from his place, until he is finished his phone call. He becomes ‘dragged’ into the little bit of serenity he feels, and he doesn’t leave the situation, and as a result, he doesn’t continue moving to where he has to get to. He is too stuck within this pseudo state of “*menuchah*”, and he feels like he can’t part from it.

Example 2 – Lost In Conversation

Similarly, a person meets a good friend of his, and they get into a long conversation. Perhaps he hasn’t seen him in years, so he is very compelled to converse with him and catch up on the last few years. He may have a very good reason of why he lost track of time. Once he begins talking, he finds it difficult to return to whatever he was on his way to doing.

A more extreme level of this problem is when a person gets sidetracked, and then he decides it’s too late to continue with his day, so he ‘throws in the towel’. He figures he should return to his house and eat something. He goes back to his house and then he decides maybe he can use some rest....

He becomes 'dragged' further and further after different activities, once he feels a little bit of serenity while he's sidetracked. Once he gets sidetracked and he's enjoying the serenity of it, he is thrown off schedule, and he doesn't push himself to go take care of whatever he was on his way to do. Once he enters a serene state, he doesn't want to leave it, and laziness takes him over.

Example 3 – Answering The Phone While Doing Housework

Here is another example. A housewife is in middle of taking care of things in the home, and she gets a phone call. She is talking on the phone and she needs to concentrate on the conversation, so she is very focused on her conversation, and she loses track of what she was in middle of doing. (In our generation in particular, there is a problem that people talk endlessly and also to try multi-task at the same time.) Finally, she ends the conversation, and then she finds it overwhelming to continue everything else she has to do in the house. Once she became serene from the conversation on the phone, laziness takes her over, and she finds it difficult to go back to what she was doing before.

Change of Routine and Lulled Into Serenity

In summation, the problem is when a person gets sidetracked in the middle of taking care of something, and when the distraction lasts for a considerable amount of time and the person feels serene from it, the person finds it difficult to break away from the serenity. The person then finds it hard to get back into what he was doing.

Getting deeper into this problem, when one becomes dragged after something which offers him a break from what he was doing, and he becomes serene from it, he experiences the pleasure of serenity. He then finds it hard to part from this serenity, so he becomes lazy. Although the power of serenity (*menuchah*) is holy at its root, it is evil when it manifests as laziness, where it becomes an unwillingness to act, a clearly unproductive and detrimental trait.

Offset By Any Change

Going further with the problem, in some cases, there are people who become somewhat paralyzed by even the smallest change. Once they go through some small change, they find it hard to return to what they were doing before the change took place. They find it hard to make the transition from serenity to action, from non-movement to movement. When a person becomes dragged after something that offers him even a small feeling of serenity, he may find it hard to change from this serene state and to make a transition into an active state.

To get a better idea of this issue, let us examine the opposite problem than this: When a person has a dominant element of wind - and certainly if his dominant nature is wind-of-wind - he has a nature to always be on the move, and he would be going against his nature if he were to make himself still and non-moving. It is very difficult for such a person to make the transition from a state of movement to non-movement. This is also an example of difficulty with transitioning, just it is being done in the opposite manner than what we explained until now.

Thus, laziness also brings it with another issue: It causes a person to find difficulty with changes.

Of the four elements, the element that does the least well with change is earth, because earth doesn't move and therefore it is unchanging. Fire is jumpy and unstable, so it is always moving. Wind is always in movement. Water, unless it is contained, will naturally move from place to place. Earth is the only element which stays in its place. It is unmoving and unchanging.

Therefore, a person with a lot of earth in his nature will find change to be very difficult. Once he goes through even a slight change, he will have difficulty transitioning to a different state.

There are two general scenarios of laziness. One kind of laziness is when a person simply doesn't act. Another kind of laziness is when a person doesn't want to transition from his current state, because he stays where he is. In fact, even if he is in middle of moving, he may find it difficult to stop moving and to become more serene, because he finds it difficult to make any transition right now – even if he will be prevented from experiencing any more *menuchah*. He would rather not go through any sort of change, even if the change would provide him with more serenity.

To give an example, some people are 'workaholics' – they find it difficult not to work. Whereas most people would rather take it easy and refrain from physical work, some people feel weak if they aren't involved in some of kind of work. Thus, besides for the problem of laziness itself, there is also the problem of avoiding any sort of change.

In summation, when a person's laziness stems from **water-of-earth-of-earth**, he becomes 'dragged' into different activities which throw him off track, and he experiences a bit of serenity in these little breaks, which he finds difficult to part from. He finds it difficult to make any transition out of his current state and to return to what he was in middle of doing, due to the heavy, permanent nature of "earth" which dominates him, which makes it hard for him to make any changes. So he stays in the situation that gives him some serenity, where he gets sidetracked and taken out of his routine.

The Solution: Practicing Change of Routine

The solution to this issue consists of several parts.

The first part of the solution is only meant to be practiced by those who have a dominant nature of earth: A person like this will need to get used to practicing changes.

If one has a dominant nature of wind, he has the opposite problem – he makes too many changes, and he has very little permanence. He is the type of person who is always switching where he lives, switching his study partners, switching his workplace, etc. But if one has a dominant nature of earth (and certainly earth-of-earth-of-earth), he needs to counter his nature by getting used to small changes – for the sake of experiencing changes.

- 1) For example, he should try switching the place where he *davens* (as long as it is within his space of "four cubits", so that it is still considered *davening* in his regular place, as is the *halachah*).
- 2) If one usually sits at a certain place by his table, he should try sitting in a different seat.
- 3) If one is used to sleeping in a certain room in his house, he should try sleeping in a different room at times (of course, only if this won't bother anyone else in the house).
- 4) If one sleeps on a certain bed in a certain room, he should try sleeping on a different bed and in a different room.

5) If he takes a certain route when walking to *shul*, he should try a different route.

So when a person has a lot of earth in his soul, he is drawn towards serenity and non-movement, but he must go against his nature sometimes, and get used to changes, even when there is no particular reason to change. Even though this may seem pointless, the person gains the ability to make transitions and changes, and he learns how to go against his “earth” nature.

The following is an important example of this idea:

6) When a person gets woken up in middle of the night, like when the baby is crying, naturally, he wants to go back to sleep. He prefers to let the baby cry and fall asleep eventually, rather than to get up and put the baby back to sleep. Perhaps he has the belief that it’s better for the child to let him get used to crying, so that the child shouldn’t become spoiled. Sometimes, he may be correct. But whether he is right or wrong for doing this, when he gets woken up in his sleep, his laziness becomes dominant at that time, and he finds it difficult to get out of his bed. This would be the perfect opportunity to get used to changes. He should force himself to get out of bed and tend to the baby, even if he feels it is unnecessary.

The gain of this is that he is learning how to go against his laziness, by moving himself out of bed and making the transition from non-movement to movement.

Taking this idea even further, if a person wakes up in middle of the night and he isn’t sure if it’s time for him to get up or not, he should force himself to get out of bed anyway, simply for the purpose of getting used to change and movement. Of course, one should go about this sensibly, and he should not do this if it will cause him to be tired the next day.

As long as it is sensible to do so, one should train himself to making such changes, so that he learns how to make the transition from serenity to action, from non-movement to movement.

Transitioning With Ease

When one practices these kinds of changes, he will find that even when he does become ‘dragged’ into certain situations, he will still find it easier to transition back to what he was doing before, because he can now handle the idea of changes.

In addition to this gain, even when he does become ‘dragged’, it won’t be as much, so he will find it easier to pull himself away.

As a result, when he meets a friend and he gets into a conversation, he won’t get too caught up in the conversation, and he’ll be able to stop the conversation and part ways from his friend, so that he can get back to his routine. Instead of becoming totally dragged after the pleasant serenity he finds in the conversation – instead of talking continuously with his friend, with no restraint - he can remain somewhat objective while in the midst of conversing, so that he doesn’t become totally lost in the conversation.

And in the case of the woman who gets a phone call while she’s doing household tasks, as a result of practicing changes and transitioning, she will find that she doesn’t become totally dragged after the conversation she’s in middle of, which was causing her to totally relax and put on her tasks on hold. For example, instead of falling onto

the couch in a totally relaxed state, where she doesn't do a thing, she makes sure that she doesn't become too relaxed, so that she can continue whatever she was doing. She may allow herself to sit down on the chair or couch, so that she can relax a bit – but she makes sure not to become too relaxed.

Avoiding Total Serenity

The idea is that whenever a person is 'dragged' into some activity, he can train himself not to become totally 'dragged', so that he can easily transition out of it when he needs to. Instead of letting himself experience total *menuchah*, he can give himself partial *menuchah* – he lets himself relax only a little bit, but not totally.

When one allows himself to be in a state of total relaxation and rest, where he feels free from all constraints of life (which abuses the soul's power of "freedom", also called *menuchah*/serenity), this will strongly awaken his element of earth and cause it to dominate a person, leading towards a "pseudo" state of *menuchah*, (serenity), a.k.a. "laziness". Therefore, even when a person needs to rest and wind down from activities, he must apply some boundaries to his relaxation, so that he doesn't fall into a state of total relaxation.

This was mentioned earlier, that when **water-of-earth-of-earth** is left impaired, the person's nature drags him towards "pseudo" state of serenity, which is really a form of evil laziness, and the course of action to take is that a person should allow himself to become only "partially" dragged towards relaxing, as opposed to total relaxation.

Too Much Sleep

Here is an example. When some people go to sleep, they feel as if the whole world is asleep with them and that there is nothing else in the world right now other than their bed. The person decides to go to sleep in a certain place and just falls into his bed, as if nothing else exists.

In more extreme cases of this problem, which is more common with teenagers and adolescents (and even more common with girls), especially when they go on a vacation, is that they may sleep for many hours, uninterrupted, and way more than necessary. What about waking up on time to *daven* and recite *Kerias Shema*? What time do they get up? Sometime around 12 or 1 in the afternoon, and sometimes even at 2 or 3 in the afternoon. Even then, they may lie a few hours in bed until they finally get up. What happens to the soul, as a result of this? What does the soul feel from this? The person who gets used to this will form the belief that he can sleep as much as possible, and if he were to get up from bed at 9 a.m. in the morning (G-d forbid), it feels terribly disturbing, and the whole day is ruined....

The problem with such vacations, where people sleep for so many uninterrupted hours, is that they accustom the soul to situations of endless sleep, where person wishes to experience a kind of serenity that is unlimited, in which he or she does not do a thing for the entire day, before finally getting out of bed. Living in such a way causes a person to want nothing other than *menuchah* (serenity) in his life, which is obviously a pseudo, un-genuine kind of *menuchah*. Clearly, a person who lives this way is greatly lacking in *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven), as anyone can understand. It is the greatest "throwing off the yoke of Heaven" possible, when a person allows himself to sleep endlessly.

Certainly, a person needs to rest. One certainly needs to relax, because he needs *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind) and he needs to relax his body and soul. But a person who accepts upon himself the yoke of Heaven doesn't allow

himself to be free from all constraints of life and to experience unlimited *menuchah*/serenity. There is no such place in the soul, for any G-d fearing Jew.

When one allows himself to become drawn into days and vacations where he wants to experience nothing but unlimited relaxation, he awakens the impaired **water-of-earth-of-earth** in his soul, which makes him lazy from the serenity.

Placing Boundaries On Our Power of Serenity

A true kind of life, in contrast to the above, is for a person to place some constraints on his ability to rest, even as he is in the midst of relaxing and resting. He never lets a state of *menuchah* totally take him over with no restraint.

For example, a person should not lay on bed and go to sleep unless he absolutely has a need to. Of course, if a person just had surgery or if he must be laid up to rest, then he needs to lie on a bed, whether he needs to sleep or not. But in normal situations, a person should avoid falling into a state of non-movement, where he doesn't do a thing. If he allows himself to fall into such a state, it is total laziness, in which he is living a life free from any constraints, and the antithesis to a Torah-true life.

The average person needs somewhere between 6-7 hours of sleep. If a person has very little spirituality in his life [his physical needs will be stronger, and], when he is on a vacation, he may get a little more sleep than this, such as an hour and a half more than what he actually needs, but not more than that. That is not to say that this is the ideal way to live, but he is not being detrimental to his soul if he gets a little more sleep than necessary. But if one is sleeping way more than necessary, the mere act of lying in a bed for so many hours gets him used to a state of inactivity where he feels like he doesn't have to do a thing the entire day, and this is detrimental to his soul.

There is a deep, unmoving place in the soul which desires the state of total *menuchah*. But when people want to access this place the soul, it usually stems from an evil desire for laziness, to be free from all constraints of life. So although the state of absolute *menuchah* is in a deep place in the soul, it is the "animal soul" which uses this deep space in the soul for its own purposes, where it clearly becomes detrimental.

A person should never allow himself to be totally free from all constraints of life, and therefore, he should never allow himself to fall into a state of total laziness and non-movement, such as those who allow themselves to sleep for long, uninterrupted amounts of time.

Leaving A "Space" Within Your Serenity

The ideal way to live is, that in whatever situation of "serenity" a person has in his life, where he relaxes and unwinds from the constraints of life, he must leave a "space" within this relaxation for anything else that he will need to take care of. Similar to how we must leave a space in the home in remembrance of the *Beis HaMikdash*, we need to leave a space as well within our own *menuchah*/serenity/relaxation, so that we don't enter a state of total *menuchah*.

If one has a dominant nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, he will find this very difficult, because his soul is naturally drawn towards *menuchah*, and in an extreme way. Others are drawn towards excessive relaxation not

because they have a nature of earth-of-earth-of-earth, but because they simply become dragged after situations that drive them into the state of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**.

Here we have just added on another deep angle to our discussion. We are explaining here about **water-of-earth-of-earth**. When one's nature of water-of-earth causes him to become 'dragged' towards *menuchah*/serenity, it drags him towards the "pseudo" kind of *menuchah* of earth-of-earth-of-earth, unproductive non-movement which is total, and which awakens the evil trait of laziness. It also can awaken the **earth-of-earth-of-earth** in the soul, a state of total rest and freedom from all restraint, even when this is not his primary nature to act this way.

Therefore, part of repairing this nature is that a person must always leave a "space" within his relaxation, so that he should not reach a state of total serenity/*menuchah*. As a person gets used to working on this idea, he will slowly lessen the amount of the evil, "pseudo" kind of *menuchah* in his life.

On a more extreme level, there were some *Gedolim* who would practice this idea by sleeping without a pillow, or by keeping their feet outside of the bed, so that they wouldn't become too comfortable while sleeping. These are subtle ideas, and they are not for all people to practice, for the simple reason that a person may not be able to sleep properly if he does this, where the loss is clearly not worth the gain. That is one extreme. But on the other extreme are those who remain asleep in their beds with not a care in the world, with no sense of responsibility to keep the *mitzvos* of the Torah.

There is a middle path between these two extremes which any person can take, on any level he is on, in which a person can slowly and sensibly lessen the nature in the soul to experience the power of "freedom" (serenity/*menuchah*): As a general rule, one should place boundaries on how far he will relax, so that he doesn't let the state of relaxation totally take him over. Sometimes a person is physically weak or he needs to simply relax in order to keep his body healthy, but this needs to be done sensibly.

The very awareness of the person that there are boundaries on his relaxation is enough to avoid the dominance of **earth-of-earth-of-earth** in the soul. A person should not allow his body to totally relax, to the point that he has no sense of responsibility. Rather, he should let himself become serene and relax, but only partially, not totally. And he must do so sensibly, according to what he needs right now.

As a person gets used to practicing this, even when he is 'dragged' to the nature of **water-of-earth-of-earth**, at least he won't become dragged towards the absolutely non-moving state of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**. Even more so, with the more he works on this idea, the 'dragging' will be on a lesser degree. As explained earlier, he can work on this idea by getting used to small changes in his routine, so that he can relate to the idea of leaving his state of *menuchah*/serenity and transitioning into a state of movement.

In Conclusion

We have tried to explain here this subject in its entirety, though there is a lot more to say here. With the help of Hashem, we will say more about this [laziness] in the coming chapters.

In each of these lessons, we are attempting to explain one major point which can greatly solve the issues, and the lessons of other chapters may also be applicable to a current subject, so each person should discuss these points with others and see how to combine the information properly, what to add on and what to leave out. Of course, we cannot review each lesson as we go along, as this would take up too much time.

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we have explained the roots of the issue when it comes to impaired water-of-earth-of-earth, and the root of how it is fixed.

3 | *Moderating The Pace*

The Opposing Elements – Earth/Heaviness and Wind/Movement

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will continue here to learn about the element of earth [with regards to the trait of laziness]. We will now discuss “wind”-of-earth [of earth]. As mentioned earlier, earth is the root of heaviness, and wind is the root of movement.

The Vilna *Gaon* said that the four elements consist of two “pairs”, which are each opposing elements of each other: the elements of water and fire, and the elements of earth and wind. In Heaven, there is fire and water, so fire and water are a “pair”. On this world, the main elements which combine together are earth and wind, and this is symbolized by the primary physical creation, the human being, who is a combination of earth (physicality) and wind (the soul, or the “breath of G-d”).

When these opposing elements of earth and wind are properly balanced, it is a wondrous combination, a *mafli laasos*, “a wonder to make”, and this is also called *pele Elyon*, “a wonder from on High”. Two opposing forces always bear one root, and therefore, they can be balanced and harmonized.

Thus, the opposing elements of earth and wind can combine, and they can also be balanced. When earth and wind combine properly in man, man resembles the *tzelem elokim* (“image of G-d”) which he was created in. In the usual situation, though, the earth and wind in man are not combined properly – meaning that there is a lack of balance between the body (earth) and the soul (wind).

The Generation of the Dispersal – The Evil Combination of Earth and Wind

This concept, the combination of earth and wind in the soul, bears several results. The following is an example.

The Vilna *Gaon*² says that the three active elements are water, wind and fire, whereas earth is not an active element, and rather acts as a container to harness the other three elements, utilizing their potential. The Vilna *Gaon* drew a parallel between these three active elements and the three evil generations in history, who each misused one of these elements: The Generation of the Flood were impaired in their element of water, the Generation of the Dispersal were impaired in their element of wind, and the Generation of Sodom were impaired in their fire.

The *sefer Megaleh Amukos*³ differs about this, and writes that it is the Generation of Enosh who were impaired in their wind, whereas the Generation of the Dispersal were impaired in their earth. The Generation of the Dispersal built the Tower of Babel. This was a building of earth, and their motivation to build it stemmed from a dominance of their element of wind. It was a combination of earth and wind.

Which element was dominating? Clearly, their wind overpowered their earth. If their earth would have been dominant, it would have slowed them down and they would have been prevented from building the tower. Their

² *Peirush haGra al Sefer Yetzirah*

³ *Megaleh Amukos parshas Terumah*

ambition to build the tower came from a dominance of wind, which overpowered their earth. In this way, we can reconcile the words of the *sefer Megaleh Amukos* with the words of the *Vilna Gaon*, that they are both correct. The people in the Generation of the Dispersal were dominated both by earth and wind. The power to build comes from earth, whereas ambition comes from wind.

Laziness of Wind-of-Earth-of-Earth: Slowed Movement

For our purposes, an example of a result of the combination of earth and wind is when these elements are the cause for a specific kind of laziness – particularly, when one **moves slowly**. When a person’s movements are slow, this stems from an impaired combination of earth and wind. The wind allows for some movement, whereas the earth aspect slows down the movement. Thus, when a person moves slowly, this is a specific kind of laziness which stems from wind-of-earth. His dominant “earth” slows down his movements, and the result is that he moves slowly.

Furthermore, not only does this result in him moving slowly, but since his main element is earth, he will cease moving as soon as his movement gets interrupted a bit. He may start moving, but if he becomes slowed down or if he gets prevented from continuing, he falls back into his unmoving nature, and he stops moving.

So when one’s laziness is stemming from a dominant nature of wind-of-earth, either he will move slowly, or he will cease moving once his movements are interrupted.

This is a general description of the laziness that stems from **wind-of-earth [of earth]**.

The Pace of Our Movement: How Quickly Do We Need To Move?

Whenever a person moves, there are differing levels of speed, in his movements. There is either slow movement, fast movement, or moderate movement.

If a person is physically heavy, usually he moves slowly, unless he has great strength of soul which empowers him to move quickly and energetically. On the highest level, one acts quickly and energetically because he has accessed his higher will (*ratzon*), a spiritual source of energetic movement. But even if one isn’t that spiritual, he may simply have a nature (due to the personality of the “animal” level of the soul) to move quickly.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who naturally move slowly, because they have much internal “heaviness” which slows them down. When a person with this slowly moving nature also bears the negative trait of conceitedness, he is more self-conscious when he walks, and this will slow down his movements even more.

A person’s movements must be balanced. One should move with a speed that depends on his current needs in his soul – his soul may require more movement, or it may require less movement, depending on the situation. His physical speed of movement must become properly aligned with the speed of the movements in his soul. If one moves too slowly, he will become lethargic. If he moves too quickly, he will usually lose his peace of mind, and in turn, he will lose his inner balance and then he won’t be able to focus and concentrate well. So the speed of one’s movement can either slow down one’s thinking, or it can accelerate it.

Thus, whenever a person moves, he must wonder and discern if his amount of movement is properly aligned with the rest of his soul’s needs right now. Sometimes a person must change his speed of movement, depending on the situation.

For example, when a person wakes up in the morning, he should arise quickly, he should “be strong like a lion to arise in the morning, to serve his Creator” as stated in the beginning of *Shulchan Aruch*. He should overcome his laziness, and get up joyously. It is also brought in *halachah* that he should not arise too quickly, because this is physically endangering to the spine. But besides for that, there is a more inner issue as well: if he arises too rapidly and he jumps out of bed immediately after waking, this may be jolting to his soul, because he cannot handle such rapid movement right now, after he was just asleep for so long. It creates an imbalance in his soul, so this kind of rapid movement is damaging to him on an inward level.

Most of the time when a person wakes up, he wakes up in steps, in stages, and not right away. The body needs some time until it fully awakens, and the soul also has an emotional need to arise in stages, so that the transition from sleep to waking shouldn't happen so rapidly. The ideal way to wake up, indeed, is to wake up calmly, and in stages. One should not be getting up in the morning as if he is waking up from a nightmare, where he wakes up terrified and chaotic, making a rapid transition from being asleep to quickly waking and rising. This is too jolting for the soul. Instead, the proper way to wake up in the morning is to arise calmly, and in stages.

Therefore, if a person jumps out of bed in the morning as soon as he wakes up, it may seem like a praiseworthy trait of enthusiasm, but in actuality, it is jolting to the soul, because the rapid physical movement is too much for his soul to handle right now. It creates an imbalance in his soul.

The same idea is true in the opposite scenario: If a person was moving a lot during the day, and later he slows down and he feels himself getting lazy, and he wants to get moving again, he should not move very quickly. Although he would be overcoming the heaviness of the physical body which was weighing him down, his body is weak and it needs to regain its strength, so it would not be wise to get the body moving very quickly. If he does, it is jolting to the soul and it creates an imbalance between his physical movements with his inner movements. Usually when a person is tired after moving a lot, his body needs to rest from all of the movement, and he needs that rest to recharge his physical strength.

Rapid Movement Can Be A Catalyst For Anger

Also, when one is used to moving quickly, this usually awakens his emotional state. Movement awakens the emotions in the soul. There is a relationship between movement and emotion – which can each influence and activate each other. In any case, the quicker a person moves, the more his emotions may become activated. What can result from this? When one's emotions are active and intense, he may easily be **angered**. He is chaotic and his physical movements may increase his emotional intensity, causing him to be more prone to anger.

Moving Too Slowly vs. Moving Too Quickly

Therefore, each person needs to know how to have different degrees of movement. With some people, this depends on their mood – they will move quickly when they are in a good mood, and when they feel low and despondent, they feel inwardly heavy and they move slowly. However, this is not what we mean here. Here we are speaking of a concept that every person needs to know how fast or slow he needs to move, depending on what the situation calls for. One needs to develop a place in his soul where he can perform different kinds of movement.

One needs to know how to move either quickly or slowly, whether he is in a situation which requires him to move at a certain speed, or whether his soul currently needs a certain speed.

Here is an example which illustrates the concept. Some people will generally move very slowly. When they see the bus coming and it's in the distance, they will walk very slowly towards the bus, even when the bus slows down for them. This has nothing to do with having more *emunah* (faith) or not, which is a separate matter. Even when this kind of person runs to the bus, you can tell that he is contradicting his nature. It's hard to tell if he is running to make the bus or not. This is true whether a person is physically heavy, or even if he feels inwardly heavy. He will not run fast even when he should, because his heavy nature weighs him down. This kind of person needs to learn how to run, when the situation calls for it.

Others have the opposite problem - they have a nature to move very quickly, so they will always be on the move, and they never walk slowly. That is good, but when does this become a problem? Sometimes there's an elderly person walking slowly in front of them, and they are stuck behind him, which slows them down, and they have no patience for this. They want to get going already and barrel past him. This kind of person has never yet developed a place in his soul for moving slowly, so he does not have the patience to move slowly right now.

Earlier, we explained the contrast between the elements of earth and wind, which are the powers of non-movement and movement, and how a person should balance out these elements with each other. We explained about the speed of movement which the body needs, the speed of movement which the animal soul needs, and the speed of movement which stems from the higher will of the soul. Now we are explaining that a person needs to acquire different kinds of movement.

What is the correct balance? Every person needs to know how to move slowly, as well as how to move quickly. One needs to know how to move with *yishuv hadaas*, a settled mind, with maturity and dignity, as well as to know how to move quickly and energetically.

Understandably, not everyone moves quickly on the same level. Others move faster, and others move slower. This differs based on one's physical weight, height, and personality. But each person, on his own level, must know how to move quickly, and naturally. Even if it is not one's nature to do so, he should learn how to acquire either of these movements as his second nature. For example, some people move their hands very slowly, and some move their hands very quickly and rapidly, which can cause others around them to be anxious. How should a person move? One's movements need to be aligned with his inner state, but besides for this, one needs to be able to move his hands slowly and calmly, and he also needs to know how to move quickly.

This idea is practiced on a superficial level today by people who teach others about how to influence others through professional speech and proper body language, which they offer complete courses about today in our generation, just on this one topic alone. But we are learning here of a concept that develops our inner, true world, not the external, superficial world. One needs to move at a speed that is aligned with the deep needs of his soul, because he needs to act at a certain level of speed, and not because he is trying to program his body language. One needs to know how to move at different speeds, not because of any external reasons that are superficial, but because his soul needs it.

The Art of Combining Opposite Abilities – “Dovor V’Hipucho”

This concept, when practiced, enables one to acquire the power of “*dovor v’hipucho*,” “a thing and its opposite”, an ability in the soul which enables one to contain opposites⁴ – in our case, the ability to contain the opposing elements of wind and earth.

As mentioned earlier, wind and earth are opposite extremes from each other, and it is part of our inner work to contain these opposite elements in ourselves. Simply speaking, this means that we need to balance out these opposite elements in ourselves. If we have a lot of wind, we need to balance it with earth, and vice versa. That is true, but there is a deeper part of our inner work. The opposing elements of earth and wind are not only an inner contradiction that we need to make sense of - rather, these opposing elements are the **root** by which we can acquire a deep ability in the soul: the ability to contain opposites, “*dovor v’hipucho*”.

This is not simply a way to solve the contradiction of earth and wind. This is a very fundamental concept, and it is the very depth of the soul: when we unify opposites. In our world, the main contradiction is between our body/earth and soul/wind, and therefore the contradiction between earth and wind is the inner root by which a person can acquire the ability of opposite movements. Our work when it comes to wind-of-earth [of earth] is not simply to work out the contradictions between our natures of earth and wind and balance them out. That is the only the external definition, though it is certainly needed. The depth which we need to come to is to acquire the art of *dovor v’hipucho*.

When one acquires this ability, either it means that (1) He will be able to live with contradictions, or (2) He will be able to balance out the contradictions, or, (3) He will be able to reach “the root of opposites” – which is the deep rectification for the soul.

Thus, our work is not simply to attain balance in the soul between contradicting elements. That part was addressed in previous lessons. Our work here, as explained in this chapter, involves a deeper aspect.

We are not simply trying to learn here about how to balance out our earth and wind with each other. With Hashem’s help, we will explain more about this balance, in the coming chapters, when we will speak about the general element of “**wind**”-of-earth. At the beginning of our work, though, where we are now studying **wind-of-earth-of-earth-of-earth**, we need to begin with the idea of **integrating opposites** with each other, before we work on balancing. That is why we explained in this lesson that one needs to become familiar with two kinds of movement – slow movement, which is rooted in earth, and quick movement, which is rooted in wind.

When one can do these two kinds of movements which are opposite from each other, this is the depth of the balance between earth and wind.

Easily Transitioning Between Different States of Movement

Going further with this, the more a person acquires this ability to act with opposite movements, he will also find that he can easily transition between the states of slow movement and quick movement.

⁴ Editor’s Note: The Rav has spoken more about this concept of “*dovor v’hipucho*” in the series “*Da Es Daatcha*”, “*Utilizing Your Daas*” - in Chapters 03, 04, and 08; and in *Tefillah #0127_Turning Against and Turning Over*; and in *Fixing Your Fire-Anger #011_Scattering of the Soul*

Normally, any transition from one state to another involves difficulty, and sometimes even danger. For example, if a person is in the heat and he quickly enters a cold place, or vice versa, this is dangerous to the body. One needs to first transition into a serene state, before he can move on to an opposite state. In order for any transition between two different situations to go smoothly, there must be a point of *menuchah*/serenity, or *ayin*/nothingness, between the two states. One must make a “space” between opposite kinds of movements, in order to make a safe transition from quick movement to slow movement, or vice versa.

How long should this ‘break’ last? How much time should one allow, when transitioning between two states? For a person who lives superficially, this issue is irrelevant, because he doesn’t feel the need to allow a break between two different states, and he tries to easily transition from one state to another, without taking a break in between. He isn’t aware of the need to form a ‘bridge’ between two different states, and the result is an undesirable mixture of both. But a person who lives internally will understand the need to create a space/break between two different states. How much of a break should it be?

It depends on how much emotional or mental strength he is in middle of using. If his movement is minimal, he will not have to allow that much time pass, because he isn’t that connected to the movement. But if he is strongly involved with the movement, he will need to allow a longer amount of time to pass before switching to a different kind of movement, because he is more connected to the movement, and hence he will need more time to pull away from it. However, when one acquires the ability of *dovor v’hipucho* as explained previously in this lesson, the transition between two states will be quicker.

When one moves slowly, he awakens his aspect of heaviness/earth, and when he moves quickly, he awakens his aspect of movement/wind. This is not about mere external behavior of how to act. It does not mean that a person should move slowly when he wants to appear more honorable, and that he should run in other situations. It is about the deep, inner movements of the soul which are the roots of a person’s physical movements. When a person is moving slowly, it is really a reflection of the slow movement in his soul, rooted in the element of earth. (On an inner level, this is the secret of *Shabbos Kodesh*, which corresponds to the “heaviness” in the element of earth on the side of holiness). The same is with quick movement: a person moves quickly when he is aware that there is fast movement in his soul. This is the root of how a person is able to make any quick transition.

Understandably, whenever a person makes a quick transition [between two different movements], he must not do so if it will cause any imbalance to any other areas of his soul. Any transition must be balanced with the rest of his soul. The transition must be done calmly and serenely. When one can do this quickly, this is a true balance between the elements of earth and wind. How much should one move, and at what pace? This will be different with each person.

To review, our work when it comes to repairing **wind-of-earth [of earth]** is not merely to attain balance between our elements of earth and wind. Rather, we must take an “opposite” direction than this. Our work here is not simply to repair the laziness caused by the element of earth, which can either be non-movement or slow movement, as described in the previous three lessons. Rather, the complete way to repair **wind-of-earth [of earth]** is when we are able to do opposite kinds of movements. Herein is contained a deep aspect of man’s *shleimus* (self-perfection).

Practically Actualizing This Lesson

Practically speaking, in order to actualize the concepts of this lesson, one needs, firstly, to:

- (1) Fortify his element of earth, so that his element of earth [serenity, non-movement, consistency, permanence] is strong.
- (2) Then, he should develop a strong element of wind [action, movement], in order to balance out his element of earth.
- (3) After that, he can work on the concept of practicing opposite movements. Part of this stage is that one should practice moving quickly, as explained in previous lessons. After that, one should progress to the stage of making quick transitions between two different kinds of movement – by quickly switching from slow movement to quick movement, and vice versa. One should keep practicing this until he can make the transition in a way that he doesn't throw him off balance, and he can remain calm and serene while transitioning.

Acquiring Deep Self-Control

This helps a person acquire great self-control over his movements. When one is in control over his movements, he can easily transition between different kinds of movement. He can quickly transition from slow movement to quick movement, and vice versa, depending on the situation.

How can one work on this idea? He should practice moving quickly. For example, if one is in a closed room, he can try running, and he should remain calm while running. He can also try running from one room to another, and then he can try walking slowly back to the other room, and then he can repeat the cycle. He should guide the pace of his movements and make the transition between them. However, one should only practice this if he is remaining calm throughout the different kinds of movement.

Slowly as a person practices this, he acquires for himself a kind of self-control. Of course, only Hashem has total control. But a human being, on his own level, can acquire self-control over his movements, either by quickening or slowing down his movement.

Often while a person tries this, one will notice if he is running too quickly, and then he can balance himself out by slowing down his movements. He will see if he can quickly balance out his movements, either by accelerating his movement or by slowing down his movement – whatever the balance requires.

When one practices this often, he will live a life of sensitivity and deep awareness [of his inner world]. It is a life of stable movement that is aligned with one's personal soul.

In Summary and In Conclusion

Most people are far from this concept, because they are not that aware of the pace of their movements. Here in this lesson, it was described how one can live a life of deep awareness of the movements in the soul, and how to direct them, according to one's current needs. It is a life of experiencing the movements of the soul, and controlling them. This is a higher experience of life than what most people are aware of.

In actual practice, most people will only be able to understand the idea of attaining a balance in their movements, as explained in previous chapters, and which we will continue to explain about in coming chapters.

That is a kind of inner work which most people will relate to. But the concept described in this lesson is a deeper kind of self-work which not many will not identify with or want to work with.

In summary, this lesson explained the idea that one should acquire the ability of doing opposite kinds of movements, both quick and slow movement, knowing when to make use of either of them, and transitioning between them with ease.

This offers a deep self-perfection in the soul: when one is able to contain opposite abilities. It is contained in anyone who has a strong combination of earth and wind in his soul, but it can also be activated from its potential state [by any person] when one develops a constant awareness and experience of the movements of his soul, which are the roots of his external movements. After one has developed this keen awareness, he can easily moderate the pace of his movements, as well as easily transition between different movements, depending on the situation.

This is a life of self-control over the abilities in one's soul, from a deep, subtle kind of awareness that is within oneself.

דע את מדותיך הדרכה מעשית – עפר-עצלות מפורט 004 אש דעפר דעפר אש דעפר (דעפר)

4 | *Sudden Laziness & The Solution*

Fire-of-Earth-of-Earth: “Explosions” of Laziness in the Midst of Doing Something

With *siyata d’shmaya*, we shall continue here to discuss the trait of laziness, which stems from the element of earth in the soul. In this lesson, we will specifically discuss laziness that stems from the “fire” aspect within earth-of-earth.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, earth is a heavy element which weighs a person down. Hence, earth is the root of laziness. Fire is the lightest of the elements, which easily rises. Not only is fire the lightest element, but when it encounters a heavy substance, it turns the heavy substance into a lighter substance. For example, when fire touches a tree, the tree itself becomes turned into a fire. What used to be a heavy, thick tree has now become turned into a flickering inferno. The tree used to be attached to the ground, and now the tree can “rise” upward, into the sky - though the flames of the fire which it has now been turned into.

When fire overpowers earth, there is upward movement, as is the nature of fire. In this lesson, we are analyzing the nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, meaning that the primary element of the person is earth, with some aspect of fire that is revealed amidst his earthy nature, but the earth is still stronger, since this person’s main element is earth. As a result, this kind of person has a tendency towards laziness (earth), but with some “fire” in it, which counters his nature of “earth”.

Fire-of-Earth: A Contradictory Nature

This particular nature, **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, is an example of a contradictory nature. When fire-of-earth is a major part of one’s personality, one lives with a deep inner contradiction. His earth draws him towards laziness, causing him to ‘stay where he is’, but at the same time, his fire makes him want to rise higher from where he is.

What will happen, as a result of this contradiction? The person will be in middle of a certain activity, and there will suddenly be an “explosion”. Since his main element is earth - which causes him to be lazy - his performance will be somewhat weak, not as productive, and somewhat slow or lethargic. In each person, this problem will be manifested differently. The person’s “fire” is driving him to perform, but his strong amount of “earth” restrains it [so he doesn’t act even though he would like to].

To illustrate, if we have a closed pot with a fire inside it, the fire can’t get out. But if there are holes in the pot, the fire can burst out through the holes. Similarly, when it comes to the personality of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, the person’s earth is dominant, so it will heavily weigh down on his fire and restrain it.

Usually, when one’s primary element is earth, his earth can keep his fire restrained, so that his fire doesn’t burst out unexpectedly. But sometimes, the fire succeeds in overpowering the earth, and it explodes outward. This may happen in a scenario where a person’s earth is not that strong, or, it may happen when there is a very strong explosion of the fire. When the fire makes its appearance, it comes out in “cracks”, just like in the example of a fire that escapes through the holes in a pot.

The repaired, holy use of the element of earth is the power of orderliness (*seder*) and building (*binyan*). The nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, when it is impaired, will mean that the earth is unutilized, resulting in laziness, and in addition, even when the person does perform what he has to do, there will be frequent “explosions” amidst his performance. These explosions occur because the performance of the person is weak, due to his impaired earth.

Forced Work Which Awakens Slothfulness

In such a case, a person will not do any kind of work unless he absolutely has to do it, such as when he has no other choice. He will do what he has to do, but it will be with “explosions”, because the contradiction between his earth and fire will prevent him from working properly (his earth makes him stay where he is, so he gets lazy, but his fire is driving him to perform). His fire explodes outward because it is opposed by his earth, so it will want to overpower the earth.

In the nature of fire-of-earth, a person performs lazily, and his fire causes him to “explode” while performing, driving him to perform further. But since his primary element is earth, the fire cannot totally overpower his earth. What happens? Even when the fire suddenly makes its appearance, it will not dominate totally, because it cannot completely overpower the person’s primary element here which is earth.

As a result, the person who is usually lazy will be performing any work [due to the fire which is exploding outward and demanding a performance], for the entire time, will be looking forward to resting from his work. He will do what has to be done, but he will want it to be over.

The Negative Relationship Between Earth and Fire Which Breeds Laziness

To analyze this deeper, with a nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, a person’s earth will cause him to want even more serenity, now that his fire has forced him to perform. The work doesn’t feel pleasant, because it came from a demand for performance which counters his lazy nature. That itself awakens even more laziness in his personality, so he will perform his work lazily and slothfully, because he wants the work to end already. Since he is performing a more extreme kind of work, he keeps awakening his earth.

What caused him to perform extreme kind of work? It is due to his primary element, earth. When the movements are extreme, this awakens his fire, and he is bothered by the extremity of the work, so he falls back into the laziness that comes from his element of earth.

The person might know that he is not acting logical, but this is the nature of impaired character traits, which operate in the realm of emotion, and emotions can be illogical. The Sages state “There is no reason for the will”⁵. That is a rule when it comes to all character traits [emotions].

The person’s earth prevents his fire from being active, and when he tries to act against his earth, his work feels difficult, and this awakens a desire for serenity and rest. As a result, becomes lazy. For such a person, every bit of work feels like the suffering of *Gehinnom*. It is difficult for him to work, and even when he does work, he wants a break. He keeps hoping that his work will be over already.

⁵ *Sefer HaPardes* 8:10, *Shelah HaKadosh Maseches Pesachim derush* 6, and cited in *Kisvei Rema M’Pano*

There are two factors here: the person has difficulty doing any work, and he wishes for it to be over as soon as he starts working hard. These two factors together turn all work into a double struggle for him. He finds the work difficult, and while he is working, he will keep waiting for it to be over. He keeps thinking, “When will this be over already?”

A Life of Always Feeling Pressured and Never Seeing Success

The result of this resembles the statement of the Kotzker Rebbe: “A person may be act quickly, but it is not enthusiasm. It is laziness.” He may try to accelerate his work, but he is still being lazy, because he is working fast in order to rest already, and not in order to get things done. His work will feel pressurizing. What will result from this kind of work? He will become chaotic, and because he isn’t calm while working, his performance will be off-mark, and this will lead him to make all kinds of mistakes. As a result, he won’t succeed with any of his work, and he will be an unsuccessful person in general.

This brings us to the following related issue. Many people today suffer from feelings of low self-esteem, and they don’t know the source of it. Often it is because people aren’t succeeding at what they do. Their lack of success causes them to feel pressured to perform even more work, so they act under pressure, and this causes them to try harder. But this only causes them to feel more pressured, so they have a great desire for serenity, and then they don’t do their work correctly. Then they see that they aren’t succeeding, so they pressure themselves even more, creating an ongoing, vicious cycle. The person’s life becomes a life full of terrible, never-ending pressure, and to exasperate this problem even more, he sees that he isn’t successful at anything he does. His inner will to improve is also weak, when he keeps seeing that he isn’t successful. He keeps becoming discouraged.

Eventually, when he keeps going this way, he loses his desire to act at all, and then he despairs from succeeding at anything in his life. He stops believing that he can succeed in anything, whether at small things or at bigger things. He doesn’t believe he can succeed at his job, and then he despairs about his marriage, and how to raise his children properly, and in his Torah learning, etc.

Understandably, there are also other reasons which may lead him into this state of terrible despair, and laziness is not the only cause. But in this lesson, we are discussing when the cause is laziness, in particular, from the laziness that stems from impaired **fire-of-earth [of earth]**.

Alternating Periods of Depression

In some cases, those who have a dominant nature of impaired **fire-of-earth [of earth]** can get into very troubling situations in life. People with this nature are prone to fall into terrible depressions, sometimes staying in bed for many consecutive hours.

This kind of person lives with many alternating “*tekufos*” (periods) in his life in which he is simply depressed. In this state of depression, a person like this may not want to see anyone in society, not even his family, and he just buries his head under the covers, and in some cases, he doesn’t even say *Kerias Shema* on time, and he doesn’t get up to *daven Shacharis* until 10, 11, or 12 in the morning when his soul feels calmed, and then he finally gets out of bed and moves on. He keeps going until his next dismal period, where the vicious cycle repeats. This sounds like a very

extreme scenario, but those who have a dominant nature of impaired **fire-of-earth-of-earth** will often identify with this struggle.

This is all a general description of the issues that come from impaired **fire-of-earth-of-earth**. Understandably, there are more details to it, but we will suffice for now with this.

1. Countering Earth – By Practicing Minimal Activities

How is this nature repaired?

We explained earlier that the root of the problem begins with a demand in the soul for serenity, and when the person does any form of work, he feels an opposition to doing any sort of work, which makes him grow lazy and then he stops his performance. Thus, the issue here is that there is an inner contradiction between his elements of earth and fire, which are clashing with each other. This inner contradiction is a result of **fire-of-earth [of earth]**, which, by its very nature, is a contradictory force.

Although we usually refer to wind and earth as the primary contradicting elements, that is a general contradiction in the soul, whereas fire and earth are a more specific level of contradicting elements in the soul. When a person has a lot of impaired **fire-of-earth [of earth]** in his soul, he has a particular struggle with these contradicting elements in his nature. His strong nature of earth causes him to desire serenity, and when this nature is left impaired, it translates into laziness. At the same time, his element of fire causes him to be active. His earth and fire clash, resulting in an inner contradiction between these elements. This inner contradiction is the root of his resulting laziness.

What is the way to fix this nature? In general, whenever a person is drawn towards laziness, he needs **to get used to doing small things he doesn't need to do**, in order to counter his dominance of earth/laziness. Even when he doesn't feel particularly lazy, he should practice some kind of minimal activity, even if it is unnecessary, so that he can train himself to simply do work [which helps him go against his nature a bit]. And he should certainly try this whenever he feels laziness taking him over – he should do some small kind of activity, to counter his laziness.

2. Countering Fire – By Getting Used To Thinking About Your Next Activity

Practicing the above can help a person counter his impaired element of earth. However, since we are dealing here with the nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, a person will also need to counter his impaired fire, which “explodes” every so often and which causes him to feel opposition at continuing his activity.

To counter this, one needs to get used to the power of organization, practically speaking, by **trying any activity which involves any planned thinking, which forces himself to think about the next step from where he is at**. One needs to practice this for a long time, until he slowly acquires in his soul the power of inner order/organization, which counters the explosive nature of his fire.

A person with a nature of **fire-of-earth [of earth]** usually has difficulty giving order to his thoughts and actions. He has a nature of suddenly becoming chaotic and being unable to perform properly, due to the fire in his nature which explodes outward every so often. This kind of person has difficulty thinking about the past or the future, and he tends to live only in the present moment. It is hard for such a person to think about the next step he needs to

take, such as what he will need to take care of tomorrow. He is caught in the present moment and he never thinks about the bigger picture of things.

Where does this nature come from? Some people are like this because they are generally dominated by their element of earth, which constricts them to their current place and time, and therefore they have difficulty expanding their minds a bit and seeing past where they are. Here we are not dealing with this. Here we are speaking of a kind of person who doesn't think about past or future because it feels like moving too much, like water spreading out very far. This kind of person, in order to repair his nature, should try thinking a little about the near future, as long as he can handle it.

The result will be that if there is something he needs to take care of, he will think about doing it, and if it is something he doesn't need to take care of, then he won't think about doing it. The goal is that the person should just think for a little bit, about something that he will need to take care of.

The Nature To Push Things Off Until The Last Minute

For example, before Succos, people shop for *arba minim* (the four species, which include an *esrog* and *lulav*), and there are some people who seek to buy their *arba minim* even before Rosh HaShanah. (Without getting into the argument if one should buy his *arba minim* before Rosh HaShanah or not, when he is supposed to be preparing for the day of judgment, there are those who like to have their *arba minim* already 30 days before Succos.)

At the other extreme, there is a kind of person who will wait until the last few hours before Yom Tov to buy his *arba minim*. (Some do this because they want to get their set for a cheaper price, and others do this because they are too busy to get it done before Erev Yom Tov. Others wait until the last minute before Yom Tov simply because they lack *yiras shomayim*⁶, and they aren't that clear about how much of a *mitzvah* it is, and therefore they push off buying their *arba minim* until the last minute. This kind of person is also the type to perhaps push off his wedding until the last minute, if he could.)

However, there are others who do this simply because they have a nature to push things off as much as they can. A person like this will take care of something only if he absolutely has to, and if not, his rule of thinking is to push it off to later. Everything gets pushed off tomorrow, and usually even what was pushed off for tomorrow also gets pushed off to the day after that. It is simply part of his personality to keep pushing off things for later, because the person only thinks about the current moment and never about later.

When There Is A Gap Between Thought and Action

We will also point out that there are people who have no problem thinking about what has to be done later, and they can even do so in a very organized manner, but this does not always translate into any taking any action. Although they do not have the problem of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** when it comes to their thinking patterns, they do have a problem of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** when it comes to their actions.

In order to understand this, we need to know that the inner makeup of a person [the soul] is composed of several layers:

⁶ Fear of Heaven

1. His *nefesh habehaimis* (“animal” level of the soul),
2. His “*Ruach*”,
3. His “*Neshamah*”, [which contains his thinking abilities] – this includes his ability of *seichel enoshi* (human logic), as well as his ability of *seichel Eloki* (G-dly intellect), which is the root of his *neshamah*.

A person with a dominant nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** doesn’t necessarily have this nature [of suddenly feeling uninterested in work, which causes him to be lazy] due to any of the higher parts of the personality (which are beyond the *nefesh habehaimis* part of himself). Rather, his nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** stems from the particular makeup of his *nefesh habehaimis* (animal level of the soul).

Some people have a *nefesh habehaimis* which is subservient to their intellect, so their **fire-of-earth-of-earth** doesn’t make an appearance, because their intellect is in control of their emotions. Others, though, can be considered as two people living in one body - they have a *nefesh habehaimis* which has a lot of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, which causes them to have many sudden “explosions” from their element of fire, and this will be true even if they possess a strong intellect which normally enables them to be very organized. This kind of person may be very insightful, and he may even be able to give advice to people on all sorts of issues. Yet, when it comes to issues in his own life, he does not act upon any of his vast knowledge.

To give an example, I once met a person who gives advice to people, and he said to me: “Do you think I can really practice in my own life, what I tell people? When people ask my advice about what to do about a certain thing, I tell them “Don’t do it”, but I myself do it.” He doesn’t listen to his own advice which he gives people! He gives advice to others, but his own life is separate from all of the advice that he gives. He is very aware of the contradiction that he lives in, and it pains him very much, but that doesn’t stop him from changing how he acts.

When one is aware that he lives a contradiction, if he is a bit truthful, he feels acute pain at this, because he is intellectually aware of the ideal kind of life that he would like to live. He is aware of the contradiction between his earth and fire in his personality, and it is a painful, destruction contradiction which eats away at his soul. He feels the deep, inner contradiction in his soul.

If a person cannot even organize his thoughts and plan what he needs to do in order to be productive, he will have a difficult time when it comes to his actual performance, because it is hard for him to even think about what needs to be done.

Examples of Thinking About Your Next Activity

Thus, in order for a person to repair the impaired “fire” aspect that is within impaired **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, one needs to get used to thinking for a moment, before he is about to do anything: “What will be the next step, after I do this?”

When some people are told to do this, they feel like it’s too much of a change. Their reaction is, “I need to think before what I am about to do, about what the next step will be? That’s too hard!” In spite of their unwillingness to do this, the first step which they need to take is to begin an organized kind of planning in their thoughts, by simply thinking: “What will be the next step, after I do this?”

Of course, trying to change too much at once will not be realistic. A person should not try to think of the next three things he will have to. Rather, he should start by just thinking of the next thing he has to do.

Here is an example. A person is about to go shopping in the store. He should think: “What will I do, after I go shopping?” Whatever you will “find out” later, make sure to “find out” now. Some people never think about what they need to do later, because they believe that they have complete *emunah* that Hashem will lead them to wherever they need to go. But in many cases, this stems from an inability to think about what the next step should be.

We are speaking here of thinking about small, simple tasks that you need to take care of, and not major tasks such as setting a goal in your Torah learning of what you will learn for the next six months, and what you will learn after that, etc. We are referring to a more basic kind of thinking: To simply think about what your next step should be.

Here’s another example. If you buy food for Shabbos, and you know that there will be extra food, think: What will I do with all the extra food? It’s not enough to leave it for *Motzei Shabbos* when you’ll worry about it then. Instead, try thinking even now about what you plan on doing with the extra food.

Similarly, we just passed Purim, and everyone has leftover *Mishloach Manos* that he received from others, which is still lying around the house. Before Purim, a person knows he will be getting *Mishloach Manos* from others and that he will have plenty of leftover *Mishloach Manos* in his house afterwards. So he should think: How do I plan on getting rid of all it? One should think about it before he gets all of the *Mishloach Manos*, as opposed to pushing off this thinking for later.

There are many examples as well we can give, of this idea. The point is to think about a certain aspect in your life which you need to take care of, and to think about what the step after that will be. **Simply plan out the next two steps that are coming up: The thing which you know you will need to take care of, and the step that will follow after that.**

Countering The Contradiction Between Fire and Earth

The reason we are suggesting this is because in this lesson, where we are discussing what to do about impaired **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, we want to counter the contradiction in the soul that exists between fire and earth.

Since the problem stems from a contradiction between fire and earth, on one hand, we need to repair earth by learning how to do things that aren’t necessary, in order to counter the nature of laziness which comes from earth. And in order to counter the explosive nature of fire, we need to use the element of earth (the repaired use of earth, that is). When we work in a step-by-step manner, planning out what we need to take care of, this counters the explosive nature of fire. It awakens the repaired form of earth, the power of orderliness. (On a deeper level, it awakens the spiritual light which is in the element of earth).

When this holy use of earth is awakened, what happens? The fire-of-earth will explode less, because the working in a step by step manner will increase the hold of the earth on containing the fire.

There will still be an inner contradiction between the elements, though, because the fire wants to jump outwards and the earth is restraining it. But this will only be a problem for a person who is dominated by the element of fire. Here we are discussing one who is dominated by fire-of-earth [of earth], which is much less explosive than fire itself.

A person whose main element is **fire-of-earth-of-earth** is mainly dominated by earth. When such a person awakens the holy use of the element of earth – the power of orderly, organized action – the result will be that he is

able to perform more work, and the fire which wants to jump outwards will now find that it has more space to utilize its potential. This will afford some degree of peace to the contradiction that exists between fire and earth.

As mentioned earlier, this will only be true if the person's main element is earth, not fire. If a person's main element is fire, his fire is so strong that it will not be calmed when we try to awaken earth to restrain it. We are discussing here fire-of-earth, which means that the person's main element is earth and not fire. Such fire can become slowly contained through awakening the element of earth (orderly, organized work) in the manner we explained here.

A Deadly Combination – When There Is Strong Earth and Strong Fire

However, there are some people whose main element is earth, but they also have a strong amount of fire in them, because fire is their second-to-most dominant element. Although earth is the main aspect of their personality, they still show lots of fire in their personality.

(In some people, it is possible that their second-to-most dominant element is even stronger than the primary element of others. Besides for their primary element, they have a secondary element which is almost as strong. As a result of this combination, their inner makeup is more powerful than others, so they have stronger soul abilities).

What happens when a person has a strong element of fire-of-earth, where his earth is the primary element and his fire is weaker? That is the scenario we discussed until now - the earth is mainly dominant, and his fire explodes outward sometimes. But others have a primary element of earth and they have a secondary element of fire, and their fire is almost as strong as their earth. What happens in such a scenario? They have a strong earth as well as a strong fire. This is a much deeper inner contradiction than the normal scenario of fire-of-earth.

Their earth is strong, so they can greatly restrain their actions, but they also have a strong fire, which will clash with their ability to be organized. The strong inner contradiction in their nature causes them to have strong, outward explosions, and they are dangerous to be around when they are in the midst of their work. Their fiery explosions resemble "the war of Gog and Magog". When combined with a generally negative character, a person with this nature is capable of murder, G-d forbid.

These kinds of people have very strong "explosions", because they have a strong amount of earth which greatly restrains their fire, but they also have a strong amount of fire which continues to burn even after it is restrained, which eventually explodes from its place. A person with this nature faces an intense battle in his own personality. He becomes simply dangerous when his strong fire explodes outward.

Such a person will not be helped much by the advice of this lesson we explained above. His work instead is to repair his element of fire, and he will need to learn how to weaken his strong element of fire. Such a fire cannot be calmed through the advice of working in a planned, step-by-step manner. His strong fire will demand from himself a strong amount of work and performance, and at the same time, his strong earth keeps him inclined towards laziness.

This person has a primary element of earth, so earth is his strongest element, and he has a secondary element of fire, which is almost as powerful as his earth, so he has a powerful combination of negative fire (a demand for much performance) and negative earth (laziness). For him, it will not be enough to repair his primary element, which is earth, for he has a secondary element which is almost as strong, which also requires repair. In addition to repairing his earth, he will need to repair his fire.

This is a very complex kind of personality, due to two contradicting elements that are almost equal to each other in their strength. This kind of person will often find himself in deeply troubling situations in life. Whereas other people can eventually attain a balance in their souls, in spite of contradicting elements in their personality – which leads them to much success in life, because they have managed to balance their own conflicting personalities – the person with a strong earth and fire has a much harder time attaining a balance in his personality.

If this kind of person has the merit to do much inner work with himself, he will reach great success in his life. There have been people who have had very imbalanced personalities in their childhood, but 20 years later you can meet them and you see that they have become very successful. People are in awe of how much they changed, and they will say, “Wow, this is what he became, after all these years?? It’s simply *siyata d’shmaya* (assistance from Heaven!)” It certainly took a lot of *siyata d’shmaya*, but the person also put in a lot of inner work in order to balance out his personality.

In other scenarios, though, a person with this imbalance in his personality does not work on improving his nature, and the result will be that he will live a terrible life. This kind of person will have a very difficult time in his marriage, as well as with all of the various parts of life. On a deeper level, he will also have a difficult time with his own self.

When others see such a person, they may say, “He just doesn’t have *mazal*.” But it’s not that he’s missing *mazal*. It is because this kind of person simply has a very complex inner makeup in his soul, and he hasn’t yet merited to work out the contradictions in his personality and to attain a balance, so the result we see before us is a very explosive and chaotic personality, which causes him to lead a very dysfunctional kind of life.

Conclusion

In summary, this lesson addressed two different scenarios (and their solutions).

We first discussed a scenario where a person’s main personality is **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, in which a person has a strong “earth” and a weak “fire”.

In the end of this lesson, we discussed a scenario where a person has a strong amount of earth as well as a strong amount of fire in his personality. This person would need to improve his nature by repairing his element of earth (as described in this lesson) as well as by learning how to weaken his fire. However, since we are not discussing the element of fire in this series, we did not elaborate upon this aspect here. In this lesson, we mainly explained about how a person can fix the inner contradiction between the earth and fire in his soul, on a general level, and how one can attain a balance between these two elements.

5 | *Pulling Away From Consistent Desires*

Water-of-Earth: Desires Which Weigh A Person Down

We shall continue, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to explain the trait of laziness. In the previous classes, we learned about laziness which stems from the “earth” aspect within the element of earth. In the next four lessons, we will discuss four specific kinds of laziness which stem from the “water” aspect within the element of water. Therefore, these four kinds of laziness that we will discuss in the next four lessons are all stemming from **water-of-earth**, which subdivides into laziness of: (1) Earth-of-water-of-earth, (2) Water-of-water-of-earth, (3) Wind-of-water-of-earth, and (4) Fire-of-water-of-earth.

The nature of water is that it descends from a high place to a low place. Water has a downward pull, and in addition, it is drawn downwards when it becomes heavy enough. When this manifests in the soul, a person is drawn after a desire and it also weighs him down. For example, when a person is drawn after eating food, he becomes heavier from the food, and besides for this, the desire itself weighs him down. The desire drags him and pulls him downward, just like the downward pull of water. Desires in general weigh a person down, and the result is laziness.

This is a general description of laziness that stems from **water-of-earth**. Now we will explain the subdivisions which stem from this laziness, beginning from **earth-of-water-of-earth**.

Earth-of-Water-of-Earth: Consistently Dragged Towards Certain Areas

Laziness that stems from **earth-of-water-of-earth** is when a person is consistently dragged after the same areas.

Sometimes a person becomes dragged after something even when he doesn't have the nature to become dragged, but there are other cases where a person's very nature is to become dragged after certain things, when he is pulled after them with a kind of consistency and permanence. This is the laziness that comes from **earth-of-water-of-earth**. His element of water ‘drags’ him, and his earth gives it permanence, causing him to be consistently dragged after something.

Getting more specific, there is the aspect of “heaviness” here, which is earth, contained in the “dragging” aspect, which is water. **Earth-of-water-of-earth** is when a person is consistently dragged. To illustrate how this works, when something is heavy, it stays in its place with a kind of permanence. The heavier an item is, the less it moves from place.

The nature of heaviness/consistency also exists in the side of holiness: When a person learns Torah with consistency, setting side times of Torah study every day. But in all other cases, where a person is often dragged after something which is unproductive and which locks him in place, this comes from impaired heaviness/consistency, which is the nature of **earth-of-water-of-earth**, and it weighs a person down.

An Imprisoned Lifestyle

When a person is regularly ‘dragged’ towards a certain thing, this does not mean that he becomes dragged after other things. For example, there are some people who will only become ‘dragged’ into the habit of always noshing on a certain food, downing a certain alcoholic beverage, or reading the news. The person like this will regularly pursue these empty desires.

This kind of person will certainly take care of whatever he needs to do, but he is still dominated by a nature of **earth-of-water-of-earth**, so he becomes more and more permanently dragged after certain things, which eventually imprison him. Every person has certain bounds, but if one is dominated by a nature of earth-of-water-of-earth, he stays imprisoned within certain activities, and he finds it too difficult to get used to anything else.

For example, if he is sitting at his Shabbos table and his wife serves a new dish, he won’t try it, simply because he is not used to it. He cannot try anything he isn’t used to. He is used to having the same old foods, and he can’t try anything else. If he gets invited for a Shabbos meal and the food isn’t exactly what he is used to, he feels that all of his *Oneg Shabbos* is ruined. (He considers all of the food to *muktzeh*, because to him, it has no use on Shabbos.) He has become dragged after certain foods with a kind of permanence, and he can’t part from them.

This is more than a simple nature of heaviness in the soul. It is more constricting. A person with this nature feels that there are no other possibilities, and in turn, he places his soul into a constricted state. He has greatly increased his limitations, because he never does anything other than what he’s used to. By placing so many bounds on himself, he increases his element of earth so much that his element of wind can’t ‘drag’ him out of the limitations that he dragged himself into.

Even more so, this kind of person won’t want anything other than what he is used to. Therefore, his power of will also becomes constricted. Whereas the will is the force in the soul that makes a person run in order to pursue what he wants (the word *ratzon*/will is from the word *ratz*, run, because the will makes a person run after what he wants) a person with a lot of **earth-of-water-of-earth** is very limited in his own will, by only wanting what he’s used to, never wanting anything else. This increases the earth in his soul, and in limiting his will, which is rooted in the element of wind, his movements become constricted.

In contrast to this nature, there are some people who go all over the world to fulfill their lusts, and they don’t have a problem with laziness. They can have all kinds of different desires they pursue, old ones and new ones, and they will do anything to get what they want. They will fly to any country in the world to try something new, if they desire it enough. One with a nature of **earth-of-water-of-earth** is the very opposite. A person with this nature will not seek any new desire, other than what he is used to. He wants to remain with whatever he is accustomed to, what he grew up with, and what he is familiar with. He will never try anything new. He becomes constricted, from all four sides, and by his very nature, he can’t move out of it. Even his trait of desire becomes constricted, because he will only want what he is used to, so he will never have desires for anything else.

His element of wind is the most constricted, because he can’t move out of his limited kind of lifestyle. His element of water also becomes constricted, because he is never pulled after anything else other than his same old desires [activities, outlets, and hobbies]. If he would have a strong element of fire, perhaps his fire will be able to excite him and allow him to open up to new things. However, usually a person with a nature of **earth-of-water-of-earth** doesn’t have that much active fire in his soul, because he has become so constricted by this nature.

Until now we have explained the issues with impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth**. Now let us see how this nature can be repaired, with *siyata d’shmaya*.

What Will Not Work

It would seem that in order to solve this issue at its root, one should slowly get used to becoming ‘dragged’ after other things, in order to counter his nature that is only dragged towards the same old things. In this way, he would become open to trying other things and becoming pulled after them, and this would expand his mind a bit, and then he would allow himself to break out of his imprisoning, constricted lifestyle.

However, the danger with this approach is that if we get a person to start trying new desires and he becomes pulled after them, he may become drawn towards all kinds of negative desires, which only exchanges one issue for another. Recently I was in the supermarket, and I saw 80 types of chocolate being sold, all in the same store. There is an endless array of desires available today, so a person can easily be dragged towards them, once he allows himself to be pulled after anything different. We don’t want to solve one problem by creating one another. Therefore, there is a problem with using this approach.

To counter this issue, perhaps we could also try providing him with a holy outlet to pursue as well, so that he isn’t totally dragged towards materialism and he can also be dragged towards holiness. (For example, if we could get him to sing for many hours on Shabbos table, and he feels himself getting dragged after the holy songs, he has a holy outlet he is dragged towards, which doesn’t allow him to become totally dragged after his other materialistic outlets.)

However, this is not either that feasible, because often when a person allows him to be dragged after holiness, he will also increase his nature to become dragged in general, and then he may find himself getting dragged and pulled after all other kinds out of outlets as well, which aren’t holy or good. Most of the time, when people become dragged and pulled, even after something holy, it becomes a way of life, of becoming ‘dragged’ after all kinds of hobbies – holy, and unholy. Even if a person is dragged all day after something holy, that is not either good, because it should not become a general way of living. It is not a true kind of life.

Therefore, the above advice is an incomplete solution, and it is not the ideal one, as explained. So we will need a clearer approach to solve the issue.

The True Solution: Countering The Impaired Consistency and Dragging, Separately

The *avodah* in fixing this nature of impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth** consists of two parts. One will need to deal with the impaired **consistency** which often takes him over, and he will also need to counter his nature to become **dragged** after things. Each of these factors will need to be dealt with separately. One will need to get used to doing something permanent even when he is not dragged, and one should also reach the point where he can get ‘dragged’ yet he isn’t becoming permanently ‘dragged’.

1. Countering Impaired Consistency – Through Changing Routine

To counter his impaired consistency, he should try doing something out of his routine every so often. Since the problem is that he becomes too permanent in his behaviors, he needs to learn the idea of pulling away from consistent or permanent behavior. In this way, he goes against his normally consistent nature, and when he learns how to go against his own permanence, he slowly learns how to decrease the consistency in whatever is dragging him.

(This advice, however, should only be used by one who has too much permanence and consistency in his life, and it should not be used at all by someone who has a problem with permanence and consistency, who requires an opposite approach than this.)

We have given examples in the past of how a person can break out of routine habits. Examples includes: Walking on a different side of the street he normally walks on, taking a different route than his regular route, etc. If he wakes up at a certain time of the day, he can try setting his alarm to wake up a minute earlier. All of these are just examples, but the idea is to learn how to take himself out of consistent, permanent behaviors.

Of course, we do not mean that one should start giving up his consistent schedule. The aim here is not so that one should uproot his entire power of consistency, *chas v'shalom*. That would be detrimental, as consistency is a necessary tool in all areas of *avodas Hashem*. But when a person is unable to pull away from consistent behavior, he is imbalanced in this area, so he should definitely learn how to veer from it sometimes.

2. Countering “Dragging”

In addition to the above, the main part of the remedy in fixing impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth** is to overcome the “dragging” aspect here, an issue which comes from the element of water.

2a) Developing Awareness.

In general, whenever a person becomes dragged and pulled towards anything, the general way to get control over his desire and to overcome this problem (temporarily) is, firstly, that he must be aware of what is happening. He needs to be aware of it before it happens, as opposed to catching himself in the act, when he has already been dragged. The fact that he simply becomes aware of what’s happening around him is already a sign of improvement, even if he can’t yet control himself from going after his desire.

However, one cannot suddenly develop awareness right before he is about to feel dragged towards something. Instead, one needs to work on himself to develop awareness in general, so that then when he becomes dragged, he can be better aware of it.

2b) Not Giving In Totally.

After one acquires the power of awareness, with *siyata d’shmaya*, the next step is, that when he is being dragged, if he feels a strong pull towards something and he has a hard time getting control over himself, he should try delaying a bit what he is in middle of doing.

There are two methods of doing this: to take breaks in middle of the act, and to leave some of the desire unfulfilled. In this way, even he is dragged/pulled, he doesn’t become totally dragged/pulled. As he is in the midst of becoming aware that he is becoming dragged, he should not let himself become totally dragged after his desire. He should leave over some of his desire unfulfilled.

For example, if a person is thirsty and hungry at the same time, and he wants to experience the pleasure of eating a good meal, naturally, he wants to first eat the food and only afterwards does he quench his thirst with a drink. If

he first takes a drink, usually this decreases the good taste of the food. A person should deliberately do that, in order to decrease his desire as he is in the midst of fulfilling it. In this way, even when he becomes dragged after the desire, he doesn't become totally dragged.

2c) Delaying The Act.

In addition, as he in the midst of being dragged after his desire, he should also try taking breaks in between what he is in middle of, by pausing himself every so often. For example, while eating, he should take pauses between his eating, and put down his fork for a minute. He should try delaying his desire to eat or drink when he feels it, and wait a bit before eating or drinking. The point is to take pauses, so that he delays the 'dragging'.

2d) Getting Involved With A Different Familiar Pull.

Finally, whenever one is 'dragged' after a particular desire, one should counter it by 'dragging' himself after anything else that he is usually 'dragged' towards. In this method, a person counters one desire with a different desire of his, creating a war between the two desires. Although he won't be overcoming the trait of desire, because he is instead giving in to a different desire, the gain is that he is learning how to go against a particular desire of his, so that he doesn't become totally dragged after it.

However, as mentioned earlier, we don't want a person to try new kinds of desires he isn't used to, which would only be trading one problem for another. We only mean that one should drag himself towards areas which he's already dragged after anyway, so that whenever he feels himself becoming dragged after something, he can instead involve himself with a different desire that he's already used to pursuing (providing, of course, that the desire in question is a permitted desire, not a forbidden desire).

Therefore, one should be aware of what he is usually dragged towards, and then he should make use of those desires whenever he feels himself getting dragged and pulled after anything. For example, some people regularly read or hear the news, while others are regularly dragged after noshing on certain foods. One can try the following. If he usually reads or hears the news, he can instead get involved with food. If he regularly noshes on the same food every day, he can switch this with reading the news instead. Every time he feels the pull towards his routine habits that are detrimental, he can try switching it for a different desire that he is also regularly dragged towards.

This particular advice is written about in the Sages: "One should fight water with fire, and one should fight fire with water." The idea is to create a war between different impulses. The consistency of a particular desire then becomes weakened, when he gets used to switching the consistent desire for a different consistent desire. Ultimately, one is fighting the desire which is consistently 'dragging' him after it. Although one isn't uprooting the nature of consistent desires like this, the gain of it is that he will be preventing himself from getting 'dragged' after a particular desire which he was consistently drawn towards. In this way, he weakens the aspect of the "dragging".

Through the above, with *siyata d'shmaya*, a person weakens his nature of dragging and his nature of impaired consistency, and in turn, he weakens his impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth**.

6 | *Childish Immaturity & The Solution*

Water-of-Water-of-Earth: Totally Dragged

Laziness that stems from **water-of-water-of-earth** is when a person becomes totally dragged after something, due to his dominant nature of earth.

Earth is serene, whereas wind moves. When one's earth overpowers his wind, he moves less. However, every person, by very human design, has a nature to be a mover. Therefore, every person will always have some level of movement. If a person doesn't move at all, he is kind of dead. But no one is like this. Even a person who doesn't like to move will still have some movement in his life, and he will always feel the need to move. He will at least move towards wherever he feels a pull to.

If one has a dominant nature of **water-of-water-of-earth**, though, a person will only move towards what he is dragged after. He will not move towards anything else, and only he will only move towards the specific interests that pull him.

Although this appears to be that he is using the power of "movement", which is a force of the element of wind, it is not really movement, but the force of "dragging", a force rooted in the element of water.

A Childish Nature

We find two kinds of movement.

A newborn baby will not move around that much, and stays in his place. The baby is weighed down by his element of earth. When he gets a bit older, he begins to move around more, and when he is no longer an infant, but a young child, he becomes jumpy and playful. A child likes to move for the sake of simply moving. Children don't move necessarily to get somewhere. Rather, children like to play and move around, simply for the sake of moving.

Another, different kind of movement of a child is when a child moves only towards something he feels a pull towards. Either of these movements have no specific direction. The movements aren't being guided with any sense.

When a person gets older and he becomes an adult, he may still be like a child in this aspect. A classic example of this is when people (whether a child or adult) ride a merry-go-round, which moves around in a circle, where all of the riders keep returning to the same place, again and again. This is a movement for the sake of movement itself, with no specific destination to get to.

A different kind of movement is when a person guides his movement towards a certain thing, because he wants to get to a certain place and he sets out to get it, planning out how we will get there. An adult, who has reached maturity, is capable of planning where he will need to go. If a person wants to go visit graves of *tzaddikim* in Northern Israel, he gets hold of a map and figures out which routes to take, and he plans out his journey.

A child is unable to do this. He cannot figure how to get where he wants to get to. A child's movements lack direction. He has no specific path to take. He doesn't guide or direct his movements. He only moves because he is pulled and dragged after things. A mature adult is able to develop a path to go in, and that is precisely what makes him mature; whereas a child has no guided movement, and therefore he will either move for the sake of simply moving, with no destination to get to, or because he is simply dragged and pulled after something that interests him.

When people get older and they mature, they usually develop some kind of path they want to go in. They develop a sense of *tahalich*/journeying, knowing that there is a certain path they must take, and they set out on their path. A child in elementary school already understands that there are stages to take in life, because he sees that there is first grade, then second grade, then third grade, etc. and eventually high school. Adults see that in order to earn a livelihood, they need to learn a profession. This power to direct one's movements is called *tahalich*/journeying, and it is a power that comes from the repaired element of wind, where one's movements are guided and directed.

When a person develops this power, he can form a path for himself which is lasting and productive, which will lead him towards success in various areas of life. He sets out to attain his aspirations, and he takes a certain path to get there. But if he remains like a child, he will have fewer aspirations, just like a child, who doesn't aspire for much and who doesn't seek a path to get to what he wants.

This childish nature, when it remains in an adult's life, comes from impaired **water-of-water-of-earth**. Therefore, impaired **water-of-water-of-earth** is not just another human weakness. By its very essence, it is a childish nature. It is a nature in a person to remain childish, with the perspective of a child, where a person has no *tahalich*, no ability to direct his power of movement.

Here are some examples of this nature, when it continues to remain in the life of an adult.

Example 1 – Never Thinking About The Future

An adult chooses a certain job, and he never thinks about when he will receive his pension, if he will get it at the age of 62, 63, or 67. In some cases, a person like this has a high level of *bitachon* (faith in Hashem). But another kind of person would say, "Why should I think about what will be in 20 years from now?" He has a belief that there is no point in ever thinking about his future. Perhaps if he sees that his parents are facing a dilemma with their pension, he will start worrying. Otherwise, if there is nothing that compelling to make him think about his future, he doesn't think about it. This is an example of a person with the immature, childish nature of impaired **water-of-water-of-earth**.

Example 2 – Impulsive Shopping

Another example is when a person keeps buying things in the store, without keeping to a budget. We aren't talking about a person who has no money in his account, who keeps buying on credit. We are talking about a more responsible kind of person, who will only buy things if he has money in his account. But he never thinks about how much money he will have in his account in a few days from now, and he keeps loading on the items into his shopping cart, buying whatever he wants and whenever he wants, without ever thinking of the future. The next day, he is back in the store, buying more things that he "suddenly" realized he needed (but the truth is that there is no such thing you "suddenly" need).

Lack of Taking Action

Anyone can think of more examples of this problem, but the point is that there are adults who live as if they mature adults, but they never do any planning. They have no concept of holding onto any aspiration for that long, so they never try to actualize anything they aspire for.

Some people may have all kinds of aspirations deep in their soul, but their problem is that they never do anything to actualize their deep wishes. They are busy and bombarded from various responsibilities in life, so they never have time to think and plan. This kind of person has aspirations, and it is just that he is deficient in the area of action. He wants certain things, but he isn't doing anything to get them. He may be able to give advice and he can explain very well about the necessity of certain things, but this doesn't translate into action. He has a problem when it comes to taking action, even though he logically understands the need to take care of those actions.

Others don't take action, however, simply because they don't see the need to. This is the nature of impaired **water-of-water-of-earth**.

Example 1 – Ambitious for Owning a House

Here is a fundamental example of it which is also common. There are those who want to own a house, so they live a very financially tight lifestyle in order to make it work. They borrow money and get into all sorts of obligations to others in order to get the house. They just want to own the house already and have a fixed place to live in, where they are the owners and in charge of their home. They are so 'dragged' after owning the house that they don't think about what this will entail for them.

Example 2 – Never Moving Out

Others prefer to rent. They find an apartment for rent and stay in it for a year, until they move out a year later, and they never think about where they will live the following year. As long as they find a place to live for now, they feel fine, and they don't want to think about the future. But it becomes a way of life for them, where they have no aspirations for anything, and they just 'take everything as it comes'.

Sometimes, it is necessary to do this. But when people live this way in general, they have no guidance in living. They are 'dragged' after whatever the situation is like, and they don't bother themselves to seek an alternative route. They rent out an apartment and if the landlord doesn't say anything to them, they stay, and if he tells them to move out, only then do they start looking for a new apartment. There are also people who will never move out of their apartments. If there is no compelling reason to drag them out of there, they stay there, even if it would make sense for them to move, and even if they can find cheaper rent. Unless they get dragged away from their apartment in into chains, they stay there.

The Adult With a Child's Perspective

All of these scenarios are examples of impaired **water-of-water-of-earth**. When an adult remains with this nature that dominates a child, the adult will remain very much like a child, approaching life with a child's perspective. He

doesn't take any *tahalich*/path, because he doesn't plan anything. Although it appears that he is moving, he doesn't choose these movements, and he is just being dragged.

In summary, impaired **water-of-water-of-earth** causes a person to have a perspective of laziness, where he is not trying to guide or direct his movements, and as a result of this, he is totally dragged and pulled after things,

1. Creating Movement Through Planning A Weekly Schedule

Now let us see how to repair this nature, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

As mentioned, a person with a nature of impaired **water-of-water-of-earth** is not really moving, he is just being dragged. His movements aren't coming from true movement, which is the element of wind, but from being dragged, which is the element of water.

Therefore, the way for him to repair his nature is to develop a true power of movement, which comes from the element of wind. He had been moving until now only because he was being dragged and pulled after things. Instead, he needs to develop the power of "*tahalich*" - following a specific path, in order to get somewhere - so that he learns the idea of directing his movements. Every person has a certain schedule. Usually, a person has the same fixed schedule every day, and he does certain activities at certain times of the day, on a set basis. Others, though, have a more random schedule. A repairman, for example, is working at different times every day, depending on when he gets a phone call to come do repairs. He has a different schedule each day.

In any of the above two scenarios, though, a person must think of some kind of plan, of what his schedule will be like. For example, in the beginning of the week, he should try to sit down and think which tasks he will be taking care of this week. A person should fix in his schedule what he will do on each day of the week and when, and he should also leave room for any new things that will come up. He should look over his plan for the week and he gets the idea of following this certain path.

Some people will find this difficult, because they are used to a random schedule, and they clearly don't like to plan out a schedule for themselves. Although this will be hard for them to get used to, they should understand that this is the ideal way to go about their work.

In addition, each evening, the person should think about what he will do the next day. In this way, he gets used to planning things in his mind. Instead of living with randomness, he is following a plan.

Without having any sort of planned schedule, a worker or repairman is contacted by people to do work for them, and he says, "Call me tomorrow, and I'll see then." What will be different tomorrow? Lots of things can change. Maybe he doesn't know if he will be available the next day or if he will be held up by the previous day's work, maybe his mood will be different tomorrow, maybe he will get up later, maybe he will eat breakfast later. Usually, repairmen are running from one job to another job, with no planned schedule, and they don't think about tomorrow. In the end, you can call them the next day in the morning, when you were told to call - but they don't answer their phone....

Although a person will find it difficult to plan out his weekly schedule, he should get used to it, so that he trains his soul to get used to the idea having a *tahalich*/path which he will try to follow.

2. Awakening The Will

After one gets used to the above, the next step is to awaken one's will. The stronger one's will, the more a person moves. Until now we addressed an external layer, and now we are explaining a more inner layer: to get into one's motivations.

One needs to get into the depth of his will, and then one's movements will be 'running' and following his own will. This will turn his movements into an expression of his will. In this way, one's movements won't be dragged, and instead they will be true movements, which come from one's will.

Practically speaking, even if a person cannot plan out his how he wants his life to look like from beginning until end, at least in the beginning of the week he can plan out one day of the week in which he will live with a *tahalich*/path. He should set aside some time of the day where he will think of where he wants to get to, as well as how to get to it. He should take one day of the week, or half a day, or some hours of the day, and think of where he wants to get to, as well as how he can practically get there. And then one should set out to try to do it.

In this way of living, a person opens the power of *tahalich*, as well as the power of movement, and the power of the will and actualizing his will, even though it may only be activated on a partial level.

There are many people who want so many things, and they never succeed in getting what they want, because they never bother to try actualizing their will. For example, a person may feel that his spouse is an evil person, so will he never get what he wants from his spouse. This is a negative perspective towards life which dampens and darkens everything. A person needs to find some time of the day when he can actualize his will, planning how to get what he wants, and then actually trying to get it.

The result of this will be that a person will actualize more and more of his will. The more a person persists with this, the more that he builds and develops the structure of his soul's abilities, through developing the powers of *tahalich*, *ratzon*, and actualized potential (*hotzaah m'koach el poel*). This will all lessen his "dragged movements". To say it in different terms, the person will mature from his childish perspective into an adult's perspective.

Giving Proper Outlet To The Childish Nature

In this way, one turns his childhood past into a stage of life which was necessary for him to traverse, and thereby he gives new meaning to his childhood.

When one matures, he may look at his past as a waste of time. Now that he is mature, he sees that in the past he was immature, so he naturally disdains his childhood past. But that is not the true perspective to have. Instead, one's perspective should be that he has now grown into an adult, he has gained control over his childish nature which he used to have, but the childish nature is still there, in a potential state. It still exists in him, and it is just that he doesn't let it dominate him anymore.

Compare this to a deceased person, who is not here in the world anymore, but he definitely exists. So too, the adult who has matured still retains his childish nature in a deep place in himself, so his childish nature still exists, in a dormant state. Since his childish nature of the past (his impaired water-of-water-of-earth) still exists, what will happen if he doesn't give it proper direction, and instead he stifles it? It will explode outwards every so often. As an example, sometimes you can see adults playing with children, and it is because even though they have matured, they still feel like acting like a little child sometimes.

Although the person feels like he wants to act out his childhood again, he should not act this way in public, which will make him appear immature in the eyes of others.

What, then, should this kind of person do about his childish nature, whenever he feels his childish nature being awakened again? He needs to give it proper direction, by giving it some outlet. He should let his childish nature come out sometimes, and he should do so very sensibly. Any person can find certain activities which give outlet to his childish nature, but he should be careful not to do anything in front of other people that will make him look immature.

In short, a person's childish nature, or his **water-of-water-of-earth**, will always be dormant within his personality, and therefore one must give it proper outlet at times, so that it doesn't get stifled and then explode outward from him at a later point.

In this way, one achieves the complete repair of the nature of **water-of-water-of-earth**.

7 | *Going Against Your Will*

Wind-of-Water-of-Earth

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we continue here the discussion about the element of earth, and the trait of laziness which results from it. In this lesson, we will learn about the particular kind of laziness that comes from **wind-of-water-of-earth**.

Earth is the root of laziness, water is the root of the nature to be dragged, and wind is the root of movement. A person with a nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth** will have a contradictory nature. Earth and wind are opposing forces to each other, on this world. In the soul, the element of earth causes a person to be unmoving, while the element of wind causes a person to move. So when one has a dominance of wind within his element of earth, there are contradictory forces taking place in his nature.

What will this contradiction produce? His primary nature of “earth” causes him to have an unmoving nature, or, he will move very slowly, while at the same time, his “wind” motivates him to move. He will have a contradiction in his nature, because even though he doesn't move much - due to his “earth” - his “wind” makes him aware that he needs to move. This contradictory nature can be manifest in several ways.

One of the ways it is manifest is when a person has a nature to both be unmoving and moving, due to the dominant natures of his earth/non-movement and his wind/movement. His element of water “drags” him towards different movements. His wind will demand movement, while his earth keeps him in place. A person like this does not become simply “dragged” due to his element of water, but due to the very contradiction in his soul. When his need for movement suddenly bursts out of its dormant state, he moves, and then he becomes ‘dragged’ after the movement. His wind overpowers his earth. But whenever he is not dragged towards movement, his earth overpowers his wind, and he stays stagnant.

When a person has a nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth**, in most scenarios when he is moving, it is only because he is being ‘dragged’, and not because he really wants to move. His movement is coming from his element of wind, but from his water, which is dragging him towards movement. This is due to the contradictory forces in his soul.

When one becomes ‘dragged’ after a movement, one might become dragged after a smaller kind of movement, or after a bigger kind of movement.

Dragged Into Smaller Movement

Here is an example of a ‘smaller’ kind of movement that one might become dragged towards.

If one wants to do some minimal activity or he wants to take a short trip somewhere, his nature of earth causes him to stay in his house, while his nature of wind pushes him to get moving and take care of the errand. Some external factor can also get him out of the house, such as if a friend calls him and asks to go somewhere with him, to which he replies “Yes, yes” and he goes. His wind is then given outlet. But if his friend doesn't call him, or if he

doesn't get invited to his friend's wedding, he doesn't go. He only goes somewhere if he gets a push, but otherwise, he isn't proactive about it.

There are many other examples as well, of this kind of nature. But there is a lot more to it, because it is a nature that becomes the very way that the person lives his life.

Dragged Into Larger Movement

A person like this may end up doing all kinds of things in life, such as running various organizations or projects, and it is only because he has been "dragged" into these activities, because he has a desire to achieve, but at the same time, he is held back by his earth which doesn't let him pursue other options.

When a person is asked, "How did you become involved with this?" he may respond that he believes that this is his role in life. He may believe that he is brilliant and strong enough to be the man for the job. Whether he is right or wrong or not about his beliefs, at least he has given it a lot thought, and he is following his plan. But others, when asked how they became the head of certain organizations or projects, or their job, might respond that it was all coincidental, and if the person is a bit spiritual, he will say that it was all because of Hashem that he ended up in this position. However, what truly motivated his way of living? It is because he was simply 'dragged' towards certain kinds of movements and activities.

Of course, from a higher perspective of *emunah*, everything is all from Hashem. Hashem also arranged that this person should be 'dragged' into what he did, because He conducts the world and He moves all that is in it. But from the viewpoint of the "animal" level of the person's soul (which does not relate to *emunah*), what was this person's motivating factor? He did not choose what he wants to do with his life! He has a contradiction between his natures of earth and wind, and his water has dragged him towards certain movements, and once he enters into something after being dragged towards it, he stays there.

It is shuddering to think about, but this is the reality taking place: A person looks back at his life and wonders how he got to where he is in life, and he might say it's all Divine Providence. Although this is all true from a higher perspective, it is not a truthful way of living when one touts this attitude. The truth is that the person has been dragged towards certain activities to do in his life, and that is where his comfort zone was. He lives a life of being dragged after certain activities and places, and that is how he got to where he is today....

This kind of person, after becoming dragged towards certain activities or places, forms certain ideologies about his way of living. Now that he is there, he can't admit that he has been dragged. Instead, he blames it on Hashem, or that he has an ideal way of living. He cannot admit, even subconsciously, that maybe he is living in the wrong way. So, to counter this, he forms certain beliefs about his way of living. He changes his ideals about life, his *hashkafos*, in order to suit his beliefs.

He might even write a *sefer* about all his newfound *hashkafos*, but he has fooled himself. He is not being truthful with himself, even if his *sefer* contains truths, because he's not writing it from a truthful place in himself. He may have fooled even his subconscious, by forming certain beliefs about life, when he is not aware of the true reason - that he has simply become 'dragged' after a certain way of thinking or after a certain standing or position in life, which he finds too difficult to part from.

Even more so, a person with this nature might become very active about what he does, which strengthens his beliefs about life. His wind becomes strengthened. Not only doesn't he admit that he has been pulled after

something, but he has blown it up, and he brings proof from this that he's right. He decides that he must teach his children a new way of life, based on his newfound beliefs, when in reality, he is terribly wrong. This happened to survivors of the Holocaust who came to Israel after the war. They became involved with politics and believed that all of life should revolve around this.

In summary, a person with a nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth** has a contradictory nature, between his earth and wind. He becomes dragged towards certain activities and places in his life, due to his element of water. He becomes firm about his beliefs in life, due to his nature of earth, and he becomes active about his causes, due to his element of wind. That is the way he lives his life, and he thinks that his way of living is the only right way to live.

Repairing Wind-of-Water-of-Earth

Now let's see how this kind of person can fix this impaired nature. Although we can approach this issue from many different angles, we will say one fundamental approach.

The higher of an **awareness** that a person has towards himself, the further he will be from these issues, because he doesn't have the problem of fooling himself. He knows how to be self-critical with himself and therefore he doesn't make a move without thinking about it beforehand. In contrast, the less self-awareness a person has, the more prone he will be to the issues discussed in this lesson.

A person with this nature, unless he is regularly involved with inner work, can easily be dragged and pulled into a certain ideology or belief, and if he doesn't, it is simply because Hashem has not yet given him the opportunity to find a place to become drawn after. But as soon as he does get that opportunity, he is drawn after the lifestyle which becomes his ideology, and he stays there.

In contrast, the inner perspective towards life, in whatever a person wishes to do or thinks about, is that a person must always suspect himself in two areas. The first thing one must always wonder is: **"Maybe the path that I'm taking is the wrong one?"** The second thing one must wonder is: **"Even if the path I am taking is a proper path, who says it's the right path for me, individually?"**

Any person can ask himself these two questions, no matter where he stands in life. Besides for the general clarification about life which each person must make, which is to wonder what man's purpose is on this world, what the Creator asks of him – this includes Torah and *mitzvos*, and all of *halachah*, as well as the matters of *chassidus* (piety) – there is also another question a person must clarify: What each person's individual task on this world is.

Thus, any person, wherever he is in life, must ask two fundamental questions about his individual task on this world: "Who says I'm taking the right path? And who says it's for me?"

1. "Who Says I'm Taking The Right Path?"

Regarding the first question, of "Who says I'm taking the right path?", one may counter to this that he's not taking an individual path, but a path that was already taken by the Sages and great Torah leaders. If so, why should this even be a question?

Certainly every path is true, and certainly we must have *emunas chachomim*, to have faith in the Sages. That is not what we are questioning here. The question is **if a person is clear about the particular path he is taking** which was once traversed by our Sages and leaders.

There are many people in our generation who are taking various paths in *avodas Hashem* and they claim that they are taking the path of our Sages. But if one does his research into these ways of the Sages, he will see that there is barely a comparison. The person is fooling himself and imagining that he is taking a path traversed by the Sages.

People today are suggesting all kinds of paths, based on generalities that were practiced by certain leaders of the past. In some places, the main emphasis is on Torah learning, and in other places, they mainly emphasize *tefillah*. In other places, they mainly emphasize *chessed*, and others will mainly emphasize *Eretz Yisrael*. There is truth to all of these paths, but they are all very general paths. One must know all the subtleties involved in any of these paths, in order to have the complete picture. If one is missing even one of the subtleties involved, it changes the whole picture.

For example, The Vilna *Gaon* aspired to go to Eretz Yisrael and he also told his students to live there, in order to hasten the redemption, and this was based on the words of Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid. This is all true, but one must understand how far this definition goes, and the depth to it.

When people claim that their path was already taken by the Sages, they are certainly correct that there were Sages who took such a path, and without a doubt, this is part of our *emunas chachomim* (faith in our Torah sages). But most people today don't understand these paths of the Sages which they are taking. They understand only the external surface of these paths.

Many people today don't even understand the path of their current teachers in this generation. Certainly, one must listen to the guidance of his teachers, leaders and sages in today's generation, whether he understands or not. But when people today try to take any of the paths of our sages and leaders, usually, their understanding is superficial. It is as if they are following a general blueprint of a building before it is actually built, without knowing what the building will really look like. A large part of their work will be off-mark, and another large part of what they will do resembles a body without a soul. Yet a person may feel confident that he is taking a path of the Sages.

How much one needs to cry during his lifetime, in order to understand the path of his own teachers! This is not referring to understanding the ways of other teachers in this generation. Rather, one must first try to really understand the ways of his own teachers!

Many times a Rav says one thing and the student says another thing. Sometimes the student writes a *sefer* in his Rebbi's teachings, and what the Rebbi actually said and what the student wrote in the *sefer* are two different things. What was said, and what was written, are not always the same thing. It is well-known that details can get lost in between the communication.

Whatever path of the Sages a person takes, he must know what the path is. We are not discussing here those who take their own path which isn't based on the Sages, which usually stems from being conceited. We are referring to someone who is taking a path of the Sages, who must learn about his path in-depth, along with prayer for help, and with constant clarifying. One must know the external aspects of the path [i.e. *halachos* and *minhagim* associated with this particular path of *avodas Hashem*] as well as the internal aspects of the path [i.e. the *hashkofos* that are behind it].

2. “Who Says That The Path I Am Taking Is Right For Me?”

Even more so, one must ask himself this second question: “Even if I am taking a correct path, who says it’s right for me?” This is question to which there is no absolute answer for.

The Sages state that “One must learn Torah in a place where his heart desires.”⁷ But this is only true for one who has purified his heart, who can then trust what his heart is telling him. When a person is still controlled by his evil inclination, his initial will comes from the evil inclination, so he cannot trust what his heart wants. Even *tzaddikim*, who aren’t ruled by their *yetzer hora*, can still have *negios*, some subtle ulterior motivations. So one must always question himself: “Who says that I am taking a path that is right for me?”

There are some people who believe that if they were born and raised in a certain environment which emphasize a certain path, then this must be the path that is right for them, because if not, why did Hashem place them there? There is some truth contained in this argument, but it is not certain. It may have been a good path until now, but maybe now the person needs a different path. Maybe Hashem placed a person into this path so that can he get out of there!

A person may believe that any confusion and doubts about his path stem from the Other Side, and that he shouldn’t question anything. If a person has such a perspective, he will never clarify anything his whole life. That is definitely not a truthful approach. On the other extreme, a person cannot be in doubts all day if he’s taking the right path or not. But one must certainly go through a clarification process about life.

In whatever situation or path in life a person is found in, one must get to know the abilities of his soul, and then he needs to see if his soul is able to handle the path he is found in. This requires exertion and prayer. One must pray to Hashem that he should become clear, and secondly, he must pray to Hashem to guide him on the right path. After all this exertion and prayer, he must still suspect himself that maybe he is going on the wrong path. This is known as *safek d’kedushah*, “holy doubt”.

In summary, one first needs to clarify what his path is, and if it’s right for him. Even if he clarifies that the path he is taking is good for him, he needs to always suspect if he’s taking the right path or not. This repairs the “dragging” aspect that comes from **wind-of-water-of-earth**. Although it does not completely rectify the nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth**, it definitely weakens the detrimental kind of “dragging” that comes from this nature.

3. Going Against His Nature of Becoming Dragged

One will always need to suspect if he’s taking the right path or not, even after he has become used to this clarification process, because he has the nature to become dragged, and therefore, he is always prone to becoming dragged.

When one gets used to this kind of self-examining, he may reach the conclusion that he has been “dragged” his entire life after different things, and that he has a nature to feel drawn after a certain path simply because he has gotten comfortable there. When he realizes that he has a nature to get ‘dragged’ like this, he can conclude that he has a nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth**, and therefore he will have to be even more wary of his tendencies. In that way, he rectifies his nature even more, because he lives with awareness of his nature.

⁷ *Avodah Zarah 19a*

If one realizes he has such a nature, in order to fix himself, his work will be that he must always go against his nature to get dragged. He has a nature of water which drags him and pulls him towards certain things, and he must realize that he can lose everything if he simply follows his nature. Such a person, whenever he feels drawn towards something, must learn how to ignore his feelings. He has to learn how to go against his nature which drags and pulls him after things. He cannot do this all the time, but he must at least be able to say “No” to his initial thoughts and feelings.

For example, if one realizes he has a nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth**, and he has opened a *chessed* organization, he must suspect that he has become dragged after such an endeavor. Instead of thinking that Hashem has enabled him to live a life of doing *chessed*, he must suspect that he has become dragged after this way of living, and that it may be causing him to lose everything and to divert his attention away from his true individual purpose in life.

When people live superficially, if they ever examine their spiritual situation, they are concerned about how much Torah they learn, how many *mitzvos* they do, how much they did, etc. Although this is a truthful self-examination, it is only external. The inner self-examination which one needs to make is: “What is my individual role on this world? Am I reaching it?”

If one doesn’t work hard to clarify this part, he might be in error about his entire way of living! He may be taking the wrong path in general, or he may be taking a path that is not right for him to take. In contrast to this, one can live a life in which he is constantly going against his nature to become pulled and dragged after things, because he thinks before he follows his heart’s desires and he questions them.

The Ability of “Thinking Into The Opposite”

Now we shall see an additional insight into this nature of becoming dragged.

When a person lives a life of being dragged, his problem is that he only sees one side of a matter, without seeing a bigger picture. He doesn’t think of any other options, so he will only ‘flow’ in one direction – the one he feels a pull towards. To illustrate, water becomes dragged after its current, and it will only flow in one direction. There are some places where there are different currents in the water which clash with each other, but generally, water flows in one current, in a particular direction.

How can a person go against his own ‘flow’, when his element of water is causing him to get dragged into a certain direction?

There is a power in our ability of *daas* called “*daas hamis-ha-peches*”,⁸ to “turn over” in the mind, to do the opposite of what your initial logic is.

A person might be the type to always go with the flow around him, which, in many cases, can be spiritually harmful to him – and this is generally the case with pursuing *taavos*, negative desires, such as becoming lulled after good-tasting food, exciting clothes, or certain possessions he wishes to own. What is the depth of fixing the trait of

⁸ Editor’s Note: Our mental ability of *da’as* divides into three general abilities: (1) *Daas d’havdalah*, also called *daas ha-mavdeles*, or *havdalah*, separation. (2) *Daas d’hachraah*, also called *daas ha-machraas*, or *hachraah*, decision. (3) *Daas d’chibbur*, also called *daas ha-mischaberes*, or *chibbur*, connection. (4) In the series of *Da Es Daatcha (Utilizing Your Daas)*, the Rav explains additional abilities of the power of “*daas*”, such as *daas ha-mishapeches*, also called *daas d’hipuch*, “turning over” – which is essentially the same concept as *dovor v’hipucho*, a “thing and its opposite”, a concept mentioned in previous chapters in this series.

evil desires, *taavah*? By going against the flow. When you train yourself not to ‘go with the flow’ around you, you can learn how to go against it, and then you can avoid pursuing your desires.

So too, whenever you feel like you are being dragged and pulled after anything, you need to create a countering force which will oppose the pull. The idea is to get used to training yourself, at first in your thoughts and then in your feelings, to deliberately go against your own thinking and feelings, and to instead think of the opposite option.

This concept is called “*dovor v’hipucho*”, thinking into the opposite, and it is a fundamental idea which helps for many different areas, but it is especially effective whenever a person wants to overcome a particular desire or pull which he feels drawn towards. He needs to get used to thinking of doing the opposite, and to challenge what his thoughts and feelings are telling him.

Of course, this power must not be used in the wrong place. For example, one should not say a lie instead of telling the truth. The power of *dovor v’hipucho* is meant to be used mainly when it comes to Torah study, where a person must challenge his logic and think into the opposite. In this way, a person can come out of superficial thinking and enter into in-depth Torah study.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein *zt”l* said that he heard from the Alter of Kelm, that whenever a person learns of something new, he should think: “What did I think before I learned about this, and what do I think now?” This kind of thinking is the beginning stage of getting used to the idea of *dovor v’hipucho*, where a person simply thinks about what has changed, from before until now. Similar to this idea, the *Gemara* says that there was a student who could think of 150 reasons why a certain *sheretz* should be impure, as well as 150 reasons of why it should be pure.

One needs to take this idea further and always think into the opposite of his reasoning. Whenever one thinks of a reason of why he should do something, he should think of a reason why he shouldn’t. For example, when a person feels like eating a good-tasting delicacy, he should identify the reason he wants to eat it - the trait of desire - and then, he should think of a reason why he shouldn’t eat the food: Perhaps he doesn’t need to eat it right now.

This fundamental way of thinking is an ability which builds the soul in general, and in particular, it uproots the nature of becoming dragged after any stimuli. The idea is that before one is about to do something, he should first think of why he shouldn’t do it.

Changing The Will

Getting used to this idea not only changes a person on a behavioral level, but it also changes a person’s very will (*ratzon*). It works with the will, instead of directly working with one’s behavior, and in turn, the negative behaviors are prevented, by way of the will.

The will produces the thoughts, and the thoughts produce emotions and character traits, which produce the actions. The Sages state, “The eye sees, the heart desires, and the tools of action complete”⁹ - after a person has seen and desired something, he runs after it, until he gets what he wants. But if a person has trained himself to always question his logic whenever he wants something, he has already weakened his will for it. When his will for it is weak, he thinks about it much less, and in turn, he will feel much less of a desire for it, so he won’t try to get it. He prevents himself from becoming dragged after various stimuli.

⁹ *Yerushalmi Berachos 1:5*

When one gets used to this, and he is being overtaken by a pull towards anything, he can think: “Why am I getting dragged and pulled towards something? Am I being motivated by my element of wind, or my element of wind, or from the contradiction between these two elements in me?”

The clearer a person becomes about his soul, he recognizes his inner workings better, and he can become more aware of his motivations. As a result, he will have less explosions of impulsiveness.

Daas – The Ability To Go Against Your Thinking and Actions

So far, we have explained how the ability of *dovor v'hipucho* is used in the area of *daas*: that a person can learn to think against his own initial logic. It can be also used on a practical level, in the realm of action, where a person can go against his own actions. The power to go against yourself is essentially known as the power of *daas*.

The Vilna *Gaon*¹⁰ said, based on the *Zohar*, that Shlomo *HaMelech* wrote three sefarim – *Shir HaShirim*, *Mishlei* and *Kobeles* - corresponding to three different abilities in the soul. *Shir HaShirim* corresponds to the soul's abilities of love and kindness. It is a *sefer* that describes the love between the Jewish people and Hashem. *Kobeles* corresponds to *yirah* (awe) and *bittul* (self-nullification), because it speaks about the worthlessness of everything on this world. *Mishlei* corresponds to *daas* (knowledge and wisdom), and the third part of this *sefer* describes opposite concepts of each other (*dovor v'hipucho*).

Mishlei is also called a *sefer* of *mussar* (self-discipline). The whole idea of *mussar* is based on using the ability of *daas*, or the ability of *dovor v'hipucho*. The *mussar sefarim* challenge us to go against our initial thinking, and to change our actions as well – to go against both our thoughts and our actions.

When one wants to change his *middos*, by going against his nature – for example, if he is lazy, he tries to overcome his laziness, and if he gets angry often, he tries to overcome his anger – although this seems commendable, it is like a ‘branch’ without the ‘root’. Everything has a ‘root’ and a ‘branch’ to it. In order to change anything, we need to “overturn” it.

How do we “overturn” anything, in the actual sense? If we “overturn” the ‘branches’, we haven’t overturned the ‘roots’. Instead, we need to “overturn” the ‘roots’. The way to “overturn” the ‘root’ of anything is by connecting our power of inner *daas* to our initial will (*ratzon*), which then enters our thoughts, which then extends to our emotions and character traits (by always “thinking into the opposite” throughout), and then our behavior can change. This is the depth of how to rectify the soul.

Practically Using The Power of “Dovor V’Hipucho” To Go Against Your Will

The nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth**, which was described in this chapter, is a nature which contains opposite forces, earth and wind. Its very nature is built from opposite forces, *dovor v'hipucho*. How is **wind-of-water-of-earth** repaired? Through acquiring the way of thinking of *dovor v'hipucho*. In that way, one begins from the root (his will) and eventually his “branches” (his behavior and actions) are changed. Practically speaking, this means that whenever a person wants a certain thing, he thinks into the opposite of what he wants. He will also be able to act in the opposite way than what he wanted to do, because he has weakened his will for it.

¹⁰ *Gra: Mishlei: hakdamah*

Fixing Behavior By Working Against The Will

Thus, the ability of *dovor v'hipucho* is a tool to fix one's character traits. It is not just a way to change behavior, but a way to fix the character traits, which will in turn influence one's behavior.

Many people, *Baruch Hashem*, have the merit to work on fixing their character traits. But usually they work on their *middos* by trying to “change” their behaviors. They are working with a branch without the root. As a result, only a small amount of their behavior becomes improved. But the more a person works with the path of inner *avodah* as described in this lesson, by becoming aware of the contradictory forces of earth and wind within him, he can discover his power of *dovor v'hipucho*, to against what he thinks and wants. This ability is already ingrained in the soul, and all he has to do is bring it out of its potential state.

This is true for all people, but it is especially true for a person with a nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth**, who, due to his contradictory nature which causes him to get pulled after different things, will see the necessity even more to access the power of *dovor v'hipucho* [and go deliberately against his desires, thoughts, and feelings].

Using This Power (Dovor V'Hipucho) Sensibly

When a person does not understand how to use the power of *dovor v'hipucho* properly, it manifests as a nature to alternate between different extremes each day. Today, there is a term for this known as “split identity crisis”. It is like the expression, “Today he is a *malach* (angel), tomorrow he is a *galach* (priest).” His soul is moving in different extremes. That is the negative side to this power.

But when a person has an impaired nature of **wind-of-water-of-earth**, it is already ingrained his nature to use the power of *dovor v'hipucho* [so there is nothing wrong with his personality]. In order to use this power sensibly, we have explained here that a person should not simply act differently all the time. Instead, a person should work with the roots behind his actions [which are his feelings, thoughts, and desires that empower them]. One works with the root of the issue by challenging his own will, through thinking into the opposite option of whatever he wants.

In Conclusion

As a person perseveres with this idea of thinking into the opposite, he comes closer to truth. Whereas in the past, his contradicting elements of wind and earth would awaken his element of water to drag him after different things, instead he will access the pleasure that is found in his element of water, because he can contain opposites in himself. He will actually enjoy going against his thinking, gaining a *taanug* (pleasure) in the idea of *dovor v'hipucho*. It will become a *taanug* for his *neshamah*, which can be felt all the way down to the animal level of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*.

8 | *Doubts & The Solution*

Fire-of-Water-of-Earth: When Laziness Comes From Doubts

With *siyata d'shmaya* we continue here to learn about the element of earth and its resulting trait, laziness. Here we will learn about [the laziness that results from the nature of] **fire-of-water-of-earth**.

The element of earth is the root of laziness. The element of water is the root of the nature to become dragged/pulled after things. The element of fire is jumpy, and it is also opposing.

When one has a dominant element of earth in his nature, his heavy amount of earth makes him lazy, because earth brings on non-movement, or, it will at least slow down a person's movement. Although a person always has the power to move, this nature can become "weighed down" by a heavy amount of earth in his soul, so that he doesn't move that much. Even so, he will still move, whenever he is dragged/pulled after certain things. This idea was explained about in the previous chapters.¹¹

What happens, though, when a person doesn't want to move, and his only movements that he has are because he becomes dragged/pulled after certain things? He might seek a way to oppose whatever is pulling him into movement mode, so that he can remain in his lazy, unmoving state.

In this way, the person creates a war between his elements of water and fire. His water is dragging him, while his fire can oppose the pull. He does this so that he can return to his nature of earth, and become serene, unmoving, and lazy. This is all done on a subconscious level: he seeks to create a struggle between his water and fire, and this is the root of his laziness.

That is the nature of **fire-of-water-of-earth**. People with this nature will seek war and challenge. They thrive on the idea of opposition.

Some people look for challenges because they have a nature of fire, which is an aggressive element by its very nature. Due to their aggressive nature, they look for challenges and opposition, because they get pleasure and vitality from it. This kind of person will deliberately challenge others and seek some kind of opposition towards them, or, he might read books that describe the wars and battles of history. If he is a worked-upon person who is involved with *avodas Hashem*, he gets his main vitality from the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) within him, and from his "war with the evil inclination" which he very much identifies with. In either of these cases, he is living in a constant state of war and he derives vitality and enjoyment from it.

But here we are speaking of a different nature, **fire-of-water-of-earth**, which is a nature to seek out a war for the purpose of a serene state (earth) that comes after the opposition (fire). His purpose in creating a challenge is because he wants to get to the state of non-movement which will come after the challenge is over. So he is not in it for the sake of the challenge itself. Rather, he is using the challenge as a means to return to his unmoving, earthy nature.

We will explain how this nature is manifest, but this is the general outline of the nature of **fire-of-water-of-earth**: The person's dominant nature of earth makes him lazy and therefore he doesn't like to move, so his water

¹¹ Editor's Note: Refer to Chapters 03 and 07 of this series.

drags him towards different kinds of movement, and then his fire gets to work and opposes the dragging. His subconscious agenda is so that he can return to his nature of earth, so that he can be lazy again and not do anything.

Doubts – The Impaired Use of Dovor V'hipucho (Thinking Into The Opposite)

Deep in the soul, there is a power called *dovor v'hipucho*, to perceive “a matter and its opposite”. We explained about this power in previous lessons. This ability is the secret of the inner unity in Creation. Although the Creation is full of opposing forces, Hashem combines together these opposite forces, through a common root of the opposite forces. The main rectification for the soul is to integrate opposite forces together.

However, when this deep power of the soul is misused by the lower, “animal” level of the soul, a person will use this power to uncover the opposite forces that can be found in everything, and from seeing so many different aspects that oppose each other, he becomes doubtful about everything, because he sees everything as deep and complex, and there is nothing concrete which he's sure of. In every situation, he will always goes against the normal, accepted logic, by instead uncovering an opposing logic to it.

In some cases, a person goes against logic by simply acting silly and senseless. However, in other cases, a person discovers truth in an opposite kind of logic. What causes a person to think of the opposite force in anything? It is a power ingrained in Creation. The ideal state of the soul, a perfected person, can see the opposite sides to each thing. But when this power is misused by the lower, unrefined parts of the soul, a person will deliberately create opposition by challenging his thinking. Then he becomes doubtful, because he sees different options, and he doesn't know which of them is the most logical.

When people are full of doubts, they may react to this by not doing anything at all about it, becoming passive and lazy. When people get used to always being doubtful about everything, they deliberately create issues for themselves, and even if it wasn't originally in their nature to be doubtful, it eventually becomes a second nature which they acquire onto their souls. The result is a laziness that comes from being in doubt.

This person appears to have a very doubtful nature, who has a problem of always opposing his logic and thereby creating issues for himself. But the truth is that his doubtful nature is merely a “second nature” that he has gotten used to, habitually, over time. The root of his problem is that he is really seeking to be lazy and not do anything. Subconsciously, his earthy nature, which seeks laziness, is causing him to doubt things, and in this way, he can ‘justify’ why he doesn't take action about anything. He doesn't begin to do anything, because he doubts it in the first place.

When a person lives with *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind), he first thinks about what he will do and then he does it. The Kotzker said that in order for one to act enthusiastically, one must first think about what he will do. But a person must also not think too much about what he is about to do. If he does, he is being lazy, and in the end, he won't do anything at all, after thinking so much about it. One should not either think too quickly before doing something. In any case, though, a person must first think before he acts.

However, there are people who begin to think about what they are about to do, and then they never get around to finish any action. Sometimes, this is because the person has a slow thinking process, and he can only think slowly before doing something. Sometimes it is because a person is not action-oriented, so he would rather think than get to work. And in other cases, it is because the person really doesn't want to do anything, because he has a last minute nature. He doesn't complete his thinking process about anything because deep down, he doesn't want to get it done.

That is the kind of laziness we are discussing here. This kind of person will conclude that he is not sure about what he needs to do, because he comes up with so many different possibilities of what he should do, and he can't decide between his options. So he decides to be passive about it and not do anything. His slow thinking becomes a way for him to justify his laziness.

The truth is that if one would see every possible option in front of him, he would never be able to completely decide. He would be overwhelmed by the many options. Part of deciding is to narrow down the possibilities. In order for a *halachah* to be decided upon, the possibilities must be narrowed down until the decision can be made. When **fire-of-water-of-earth** is a dominant nature in the soul, a person will look for contradictions and opposing options, and as a result he cannot take any practical action, because he is in doubt about what to do.

Excessive Fears and Doubts Are Rooted In Laziness

So far, we have been explaining how this issue affects the mind. Now let's see how it also affects a person in the practical sense.

Consider the following. Can a person predict all of the possible issues he will ever face in his life? Can a person know how many issues he will have in his marriage? When a person decides to get married, is he aware of all the details that are involved in marriage? If he would be aware, he would be overwhelmed and he wouldn't be able to make the commitment. When a young couple wants to buy a house, do they realize all the issues involved with this, such as the environment, the neighbors, and how the children will fare there for the next 20 years? It is impossible to predict all these details, unless one has total *ruach hakodesh*.

What happens when a person doesn't want to do anything, because he thinks too much about the details involved and he can't make a decision? He might be disturbed by far-fetched issues which probably won't be relevant, but that's enough to overwhelm him and prevent him from making a decision. He has thought so much about it and uncovered so many doubts about it, that he cannot decide what to do. The more a person thinks, the more options he sees. But in addition, he can't even act, as a result. He is in doubt, so he figures that his best course of action is not to do anything.

In everything he comes across, his reaction will either be full of doubts, or he is full of suspicions. He has all kinds of fears, thinking to himself: "Maybe this will happen, maybe that will happen." Where does all this fear come from? He is really afraid of taking action. When one repeats all these fears, as times goes on, he slowly acquires this habit as a second nature. He worries about every possibility that can theoretically happen. This is not genuine fear that comes upon the soul, it is just a second nature he has acquired. His problem is not fear. His real issue is that he doesn't want to do things. Since he doesn't want to do things, his subconscious pushes him to be afraid, so that he won't have to do those things. He is using the fears as a tool to get to his goal: not doing what he wants to do.

A person with a nature of **fire-of-water-of-earth** deliberately brings himself into situations where he can oppose whatever has to be done. Even if he goes to a wise person for advice, his fears may seem genuine, because he is an expert at explaining why his fears and worries are substantial, and the wise person may conclude that indeed, this person's fears are correct. Deep down, in his subconscious, he has all these fears because he would prefer not to take action, so that he can get back to his nature of earth, which seeks serenity. Therefore, his fears are really a disguise for being lazy.

Creation Is Complex, So We Cannot Decide Completely On Anything

This issue is really a product of a deeper issue. When a person is full of doubts and fears, it is a result from something else. The root of the issue here is not the person's doubts or the person's fears. One must certainly deal with the doubts and fears as well, but a person will mainly need to get to the root of this issue. The fundamental way to understand this nature, and to repair it, is as follows.

Since everything in Creation contains *dovor v'hipucho*, one must know that he will never be able to come to a complete decision about anything. There are endless contradictions within Creation. At a certain point, a person can realize that he cannot decide on anything, even on the slightest doubt he has. Although this seems to exasperate the issue of doubts even further – by confirming that indeed, we truly cannot decide whenever we are faced with doubts – this is the first step a person must traverse: acquiring the perspective that we truly do not have the power to decide on our own.

When people do feel that they can decide, it stems either from *gaavah* (conceit), or, it stems from being superficial. (Or, if a person is on a very high level, it is because he has complete *emunah*). A *baal gaavah* thinks his opinions are important, and a superficial person only sees one side of a matter, as if he is being faced with a choice of taking a thousand dollars versus taking one dollar, where the choice seems obvious to him.

A person should instead think that the Creation is so vast and deep, as it is written, “*Very deep are Your thoughts*”,¹² and therefore, we cannot completely decide on anything, because we cannot fully know anything.

How can a person have the power to decide? From our human power alone, we cannot decide. Decisions come from the power of *daas*, which is an extension from the higher perspective, *emunah*, which transcends our limited reality. In the higher dimension, *emunah*, it is only Hashem Who decides. This higher point, *emunah*, extends all the way into the lowest levels of reality, and into our own *daas*, and that is how we are enabled to decide.

Thus, the ability to make any decision does not come from our human ability. It comes totally from Hashem. We are only given the power of *bechirah*, to choose between doing the will of Hashem or the opposite of His will [*chas v'shalom*]. That is all that we can do, using our own power. Besides for our power of free will, we cannot decide on anything. Only from the *emunah* that it is Hashem Who decides everything, are we enabled to truly decide.

Only Hashem Acts and Decides

When one reaches this deep understanding, he weakens his doubts. As a result, when one is faced with contradicting options – and certainly if he has a dominant nature of **fire-of-water-of-earth**, which makes him much more doubtful - instead of not doing anything about it, he can uncover the root of his doubts, using the doubts as a way to reveal that he cannot be sure of anything, for only Hashem has the answers.

If a person lives superficially, he has fewer doubts, because he doesn't think that much and therefore he doesn't uncover that many possible options in front of him. If he lives more inwardly, he will doubt everything he comes across, because when he sees the depth and complexities of each thing in Creation, by seeing how each thing in Creation has an opposite to it, he uncovers more doubts. But if he goes deeper than this level, he will see that he cannot decide between all of the doubts he has, and he comes to realize that only Hashem can decide.

¹² *Tehillim* 92:6

For example, a person has two options of who to marry, and he marries one of them, and sometime after the wedding, he regrets his decision. He is disappointed with his spouse and realizes that she isn't what he thought she was. He realizes he made a mistake and he thinks that he has made the worst decision in his life, and that he should have chosen the other girl he was offered. He has seen two options in front of him, and he is in doubt about his decision. But if he has *emunah*, he realizes that there is no doubt, because all decisions come from Hashem. He wasn't able to decide on his own in the first place, and therefore, there is no room for him to have any doubts.

With this approach, doubts do not cause a person to be lazy and to refrain from doing anything. Instead, doubts bring a person to a sense of *bittul*, self-nullification, when the person realizes that only Hashem can decide. Doubts do not have to cause a person to refrain from action. Instead, doubts can cause a person to return to the root of *emunah*, to act according to the decision of Hashem.

Rectifying Laziness – Through Attributing All Power To Hashem

The trait of laziness is evil and impaired when a person doesn't act. In contrast, the rectified, holy form of laziness is when a person doesn't take action because he realizes that only Hashem can act. Holy laziness is essentially the realization that "It is not I who does things, but Hashem."

This is not just practical advice in how to deal with doubt. Rather, it is a deep rectification for the soul's trait of laziness. Instead of not acting because you are in doubt, do not see it as a personal contradiction you are grappling with. Rather, you should realize that the entire Creation contains contradictions, and therefore, we are not able to decide or do anything on our own. To put it in slightly different terms, any contradiction you face is a "spark" of the many contradictions in Creation. We cannot do anything on our own, and we can only do something if Hashem allows it to happen.

When we get used to working with this higher perspective and it eventually extends into our lower levels of the soul, this brings our soul to a sense of *bittul* (self-nullification), when we react to our doubts by reminding ourselves that only Hashem can decide things.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner says that when *Chazal* taught that there will come a time when there will be so many troubles that "We have no one to rely on, except our Father in Heaven", which is referring to the period of *ikvesa d'meshicha* (the footsteps of *Moshiach*), part of the issues of this period is that people will rely so much on Hashem that they won't do anything at all, and then they will blame Hashem for everything, because they misuse the concept of depending on Him for help. Sometimes a person must indeed rely on Hashem and not do anything at all, but sometimes, a person has the *avodah* to take action and then realize Who enabled him to act.

With a nature of **fire-of-water-of-earth**, a person doesn't act because he has doubts. One can return this power to its root by approaching his doubts with a new perspective. In this way, oppositions and doubts are seen not as something that opposes me, but a tool to receive Heavenly sustenance from Hashem [for when one uses his doubts as a vehicle to realize Who is the only One who can decide, only then is he enabled to truly decide, because he is tapping into the source.]

Doubts purify the soul when a person realizes that he cannot act from his own power. Doubts are crushing to the soul, and they make a person feel powerless. In that way, doubts are a great tool of self-purification – if a person uses the doubts as an opportunity for this. Doubts bring a person to the sense of *bittul*, self-nullification, of realizing that one's power to act is not his own, but Hashem's.

On a deep level, by realizing that it is Hashem's power within our acts, our acts become truer and more genuine acts, and this is the ultimate rectification for laziness. This is because, on a deep level, all of our acts are somewhat lazy, for all our actions are somewhat incomplete, when compared to Hashem's acts, which are always perfect and complete. Therefore, when we realize that Hashem's power is empowering our own acts, and that it is not our own power, this is the ultimate rectification for laziness.

What causes a person to think that he is the one acting, not Hashem? Simply speaking, it is due to a person's conceitedness, but according to what we are saying here, there is a deeper reason: laziness.

In Conclusion

In summary, when a person has a nature to refrain from doing anything when he is full of doubts and worries about something, instead of reacting that way, one can use the doubts as a tool to realize that it is only Hashem Who can decide what to do, and that only Hashem has the power to act. A human being does not have power of his own, and therefore he cannot decide on his own. In this way, one reveals how it is Hashem Who is acting even within our own human actions. [This rectifies laziness, and in particular, the laziness that stems from **fire-of-water-of-earth**, which is a laziness that stems from doubt].

9 | *Difficulty With Finishing*

Earth-of-Wind-of-Earth: Difficulty With Starting and Finishing

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing here to learn about the element of earth and its resulting trait, laziness. Now we will learn about laziness that stems from “**wind**”-of-earth. We will begin with **earth**-of-wind-of-earth.

The element of earth, in general, is the root of laziness. Wind-of-earth is the root of movement which results from such laziness [i.e. slowed movement]. **Earth-of-wind-of-earth** is when one begins with laziness/earth and ends with earth/laziness, with an intermediate stage of wind/movement.

Chazal state, “All beginnings are difficult.”¹³ There is a difficulty when it comes to starting anything, and that’s one kind of difficulty. Another kind of difficulty is when it comes to finishing something.

When a person starts something, he may have difficulty in finishing it. The difficulty in beginning something comes from the element of earth, which weighs a person down and causes him to be lazy, so he doesn’t want to make any changes. The difficulty in ending something, though, is because a person needs strength to put a stop to something. We see that even in the physical world, in order to put a stop to something and bring it to halt, strength must be applied. When it comes to the soul as well, there is a need for inner strength in order to finish anything.

Thus, a person finds it difficult to begin something, due to the element of earth in the soul, and *Chazal* refer to this as “All beginnings are difficult”. It can also be difficult for a person to finish what he started, and this is another use of element of earth. In between the beginning and end of any endeavor that a person embarks on, there are movements and actions that a person will take, to try to finish what he has begun, and this is the “wind” aspect. So a person is working in an order of earth, then wind, and then earth. Thus, when a person has difficulty starting and finishing, his laziness stems from **earth-of-wind-of-earth**.

When a person finishes learning a tractate of *Gemara*, there is a custom to say, “Just as I merited to begin other tractates and *sefarim*, and to finish them.”¹⁴ This shows us that there is a difficulty in beginning, as well as a difficulty in finishing.

At the beginning of Creation, man was created on the sixth day and he sinned already on the first day, and then he received the curse, “*You are earth, and to earth you shall return.*”¹⁵ The Creation began with difficulty, with the element of earth. This brings out the depth of “All beginnings are difficult.” There is also difficulty at the “end” of Creation, which immediately precedes the period of Redemption. At the end of this 6,000 year exile, there are difficulties, which herald the redemption. This exile is long and drawn out, “all of the ends [the ideal times for the redemption] have finished”, and *Moshiach* still hasn’t come yet. We acknowledge that there is difficulty in ‘getting to the finish line’ of this exile.

¹³ *Mechilta Shemos 19:5, cited in Rashi to Shemos (ibid)*

¹⁴ *This prayer appears after the end of each tractate of Talmud Bavli, and it is mentioned by sefer Yoma Tava L’Rabanan: 177 and in sefer Minhag Yisrael Torah: Hilchos Pesach: 257*

¹⁵ *Beraishis 3:19*

Thus, there is difficulty at both the beginning and end of Creation. All of the years in between the beginning and end of Creation, which lasts for 6000 years, are essentially the ‘middle point’ that is in between the beginning and end of Creation. This intermediate stage is like one big movement of wind, in between the “earth” at the beginning of Creation (the difficulty of beginnings) and the “earth” at the end of Creation (the difficulty of getting to the end).

Here in this lesson, we will focus more on the difficulty of finishing, and less with the difficulty of beginning.

The Difficulty In Finishing – When One Wants To Get It Done Already

The depth of why a person has difficulty in finishing something is because the earth in the soul makes a person want to speed up the process of working at something so that it can be over with already [the need for serenity]. On one hand, a person has a difficulty with finishing, and at the same time, a person also wants to finish it already. What is the result? The person gains nothing, and he remains in the middle of his work.

The nature of earth causes a person to want to finish, when it is unrealistic to do so. When a person wants to finish something very quickly, most of the time, even if he gets it done, he hasn’t really finished it. He is trying to bring a quick finish to something, when really he needs more time to finish. Often when a person tries to finish something already, he will get stuck before he does so.

In a different scenario, a person wants to get something done already so he performs very quickly in order to get it done. But many times, there can be a different scenario: The person is not acting quickly to get it done already, but he has difficulty in finishing and therefore he remains stuck in the middle of his work. Because he gets stuck, he never really gets started.

If a person gets things done quickly, his “wind” is pushing his earth to move. But many times, a person might be moving to get something done, yet he doesn’t finish, and he remains in middle of his work. This is an impaired use of the element of earth.

When the element of earth is repaired, his earth can ‘carve’ things in place and keep it there. When one’s earth is impaired, the result can be compared to a miscarriage. When a person doesn’t finish something, he has not really done it. It is a broken act, and whatever he did so far was like gathering air. Chazal state that “*Melachah*, an act of work, is defined by its end.” The end of a person’s act says it all. When a person doesn’t get to the end, his actions are broken up, interrupted, and incomplete. When a person doesn’t finish things, not only doesn’t he do it, but his work is broken up and he has done nothing except gathered air.

Repairing Earth-of-Wind-of-Earth

What is the root of the remedy to this nature?

1) Working Your Way Backwards - It is well-known that Reb Elchonon spoke with the Chofetz Chaim about the difficulty his yeshiva students were having in finishing the tractate they were learning. The Chofetz Chaim suggested that they should begin from the end of the tractate and work their way backwards.

This is because when you start from the end point, you don’t have the fear of trying to get to the end, because you have already seen the end. This is one way to deal with the difficulty of finishing – by starting from the finishing point, you lessen the difficulty of getting to the end.

2 – Chartering A Path (*Tabalich*)

a) Step By Step - An additional way to deal with this issue is by “chartering a path (*tabalich*)”. When you begin a tractate of *Gemara*, you traverse a certain path until you get to the end.

How do you traverse your way through? One way is to look at the entire tractate as one big structure, one long path, with many steps in between to take, until one finally gets to the end. When will a person encounter the end? Only at the end.

b) Gaining A General View - An alternative way of traversing your way through, is to gain a general view of the entire path from beginning until end, so that you are already glimpsing the end even at the start. Try to see all the way from beginning until the end, as much as you can, according to your own level of understanding.

However, when one takes this approach, it might awaken fear and laziness, because the person may be overwhelmed when he sees the whole path from beginning until end. He may not want to begin at all. Even more so, he will only meet the end point only at the end itself, so it is difficult until then. Yet, if he doesn't focus on getting to the end and he is only concerned with the details that he meets on the way there, he is being small-minded, by getting caught up in the details and losing sight of the goal. He will never get to the end in this way.

Integrating The “Step By Step” and “General” View Together

Instead, one needs an integration of these two views. He needs to know the general path from beginning until end, as well the details and steps in between. In this way, at each step of the way, he is found both in the beginning and in the end. In every step, he meets up with both the beginning and end. He won't only meet up with the end at the end - instead, he meets the end throughout every step of his way. He will see each detail as part of a greater whole. This is a deep perspective of how to view everything in Creation.

In different terminology, to focus on the general view is called “*kelalus*”, whereas focusing on the details is called “*peratus*”. *Chazal* also refer to these two different abilities as the views of *chochmah* and *binah*. But when a person sees details, either a person can see the details themselves, without seeing how they are part of a bigger picture – which is the small-minded view – or, he can see the details as being part of a greater picture, which is the more mature-minded view. *Chochmah* is the view of *kelalus*, and *binah* is the view of *peratus*. One needs to integrate these two views together, seeing the details as part of a greater whole.

An example of this is *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. Either we can see each day of the *Omer* separately, or we can focus on the totality of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, which lasts 49 days. The integrated view is to see each day of the *Omer* as being part of the greater whole of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. The example of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* shows us how to see each detail as being part of a greater whole, so that we keep meeting up with the end even at the start, as well throughout each step of the way. In this way, whenever one wants to finish working on or understanding a particular detail, and he is having difficulty, he should see it as part of a greater whole. This is a subtle ability of the soul.

4) Taking Apart The End - There is also another way to deal with the difficulty of finishing: by taking apart the end itself, to see what reaching the end itself will entail. This makes it easier to get to the end, after one has taken it apart.

To illustrate, one of the 39 forbidden *melachos* on Shabbos is *makeh b'patish*, the final-hammer blow. What does this transgression entail? It is an argument of the *Rishonim*, if it is one blow or if it takes several blows. The *Meiri*

and other *Rishonim* hold that it takes several blows to transgress *makeh b'patish*. It is not just one act, but a combination of several acts. Thus, even an end of act contains several parts, until it can happen.

The idea we want to take out of this is that one can take apart the end itself, seeing the various parts that the end consists of, and in this way, he can more easily get to the end. Practically speaking, he should split up the end point itself into several parts, and in this way, he knows what reaching the end will entail. It is then easier for him to get to the end, now that he knows what to expect.

Working Your Way Backwards: Starting From The End

An additional way is to begin from the end, as mentioned in the beginning. Now we will explain the depth of this.

There are two different “paths” in Creation – the path of *seder*, orderliness, and the path of *dilug*, skipping. Generally, the path that we need to traverse, in this current era, is *seder*. There is an orderly approach to everything, and we have to take certain steps in order to get anywhere, following the order. But there is also a concept of skipping. This will be the situation of the Redemption, which will “skip” towards us in an unpredictable manner.

When it is necessary to use the power of *dilug*? Whenever we are having difficulty getting to an end, we can use the path of *dilug*. To try to get to the end, step after step, can prove to be too difficult, with no end in sight.

On a more collective level, this is the situation of the end of our exile, where we need to get to the era of the Redemption. Since the Redemption is an era of skipping levels, we will need to “skip” towards it, as opposed to trying to follow certain steps to get there. Through *dilug*, we can “jump” past all of the difficult stages in between, and go straight to the end point.

Overcoming Difficulty In Finishing: Recognizing That Only Hashem Has The Power To Finish

And the truth is that we cannot get to the end, whenever we start from the beginning. The Sages say that “The task is not upon you to complete.”¹⁶ We really cannot finish anything! It is simply not within our human power. Only from Heavenly assistance can we get to the end.

Therefore, the depth behind the difficulty in finishing is because we really cannot get to the end on our own. So it is not just a difficulty - it is humanly not possible, to finish anything.

Any of the ways mentioned previously, in how to deal with the difficulty in finishing, involve our logical thinking and planning. Either a person sees the details as part of a greater whole, and that is how he gets to the end, or he takes the apart the end itself and makes it easier for himself to get to the end. These are approaches within our logic and within our own power to do. But now we are using a higher approach, which does not come from within our own power.

We cannot get to the end of anything on, because of only of Hashem is it said “*I am Last*”, which means that only Hashem can finish things. We also cannot begin on our own, because only of Hashem is it said, “*I am the First*”. We cannot begin, nor can we end, on our own. All that we can do, as human beings, is to do all of the work

¹⁶ *Avos 2:16*

in between the end. Hashem created the world and made it begin, and He will bring the end through the Redemption. Our entire *avodah* is the 6000 year period in between the beginning and the end of Creation. But the powers of beginning and finishing are entirely Hashem's domain.

This is also the depth behind why "All beginnings are difficult". It is because we do not have the power on our own to begin anything, for only Hashem can create beginnings. The simple reason of the difficulty in beginning, as we mentioned earlier, is because the element of earth weighs a person down and prevents him from making any changes to his situation, so he finds it hard to begin anything. But the deeper reason is because only Hashem can begin, and people are not able to begin on their own.

Thus, the difficulty in finishing something is not only due to the impaired element of earth. One certainly needs to repair his element of earth as well, in order to overcome the difficulty in finishing things, simply speaking. He can do so using the methods before that were mentioned, such as seeing each detail as part of a greater whole, etc. That is the elementary level. But the deeper part of the *avodah*, when it comes to overcoming the difficulty of finishing things, is to gain the perspective that we cannot reach the end on our own, because it is not within or human ability to do so.

Choosing "Yediah" Over "Bechirah"

To understand this on a deeper level, it is because there are two levels of *bechirah*, our power to choose. There is simple *bechirah*, to choose between doing good and bad, and there is a deeper level of *bechirah*, which is to "choose not to choose" - to return our power of *bechirah* to Hashem, by letting Him take over and decide for us. It is also called "choosing *yediah* (Higher Knowledge) over *bechirah* (free will). You can "choose not to choose", and to instead decide that only Hashem is choosing.

Before the sin, Adam had the higher level of *bechirah*, to choose *yediah* over *bechirah*. His *avodah* was not to simply choose between good and evil, but to choose between letting Hashem decide, where there is no possibility of evil, or choosing to let himself decide. After the sin, *bechirah* is mainly about on our own choice between good and evil.

We have the *avodah* now to return to the level of before the sin and to choose *yediah* over *bechirah*, meaning to let Hashem choose. Therefore, whenever a person is having difficulty in getting to the finish, he should "choose" to recognize that only Hashem can let him finish.

The *Gemara* says that in the era preceding *Moshiach*, "We have no one to rely on, except for our Father in Heaven".¹⁷ The depth behind this is because in order to make the transition from our era of exile into the era of *Moshiach*, where there will be no more *bechirah*, we must "choose" to want to live in such an era, where there is *yediah* rather than *bechirah* - where we are letting Hashem take over and decide, so that there is no possibility of contending with any evil in the first place. In this way, we have the *avodah* to "choose" that we cannot finish things on our own, and that only Hashem can do it.

This is the depth of how to repair the difficulty in finishing things. The element of earth causes a person to dislike change, because earth is about permanence. The power of *bechirah* is essentially the struggle between the soul and the body (or, in different terms, the struggle between the Divine soul, *the neshamah*, and the "animal soul", the

¹⁷ *Sotah* 49a

nefesh habehaimis, which is “partners” with the physical body, the *guf*). The element of earth essentially causes a person to remain in his lower level *bechirah* and to not want to choose the higher level of *bechirah*.

This is deeper way to understand the difficulty of finishing: A person’s element of earth weighs him down and prevents him from choosing the higher level *bechirah*. One must want the era of *Moshiach*, where there is no evil. He must want a situation in which there is no possibility of doing evil. This is the challenge upon a person, because a person doesn’t want to part with his power of *bechirah*, besides for not wanting to part with his “I”. He wants to remain with his current state, where he has the power on his own to choose between good and evil.

The redemption, which will change the current state of the world where there is *bechirah*, and transform it into a world of *yediah* over *bechirah*, is like the element of wind. It will come suddenly, just as the wind appears suddenly. That is the antithesis to the element of earth, which stays the same and which is predictable.

So there is a deep *avodah* upon a person to choose higher level *bechirah*, of wanting Hashem to take over his decisions. One needs to be prepared to change his *bechirah* level, and allow Hashem’s view to take over, in which there is no possibility of struggling with evil. In order for a person to attain it, he needs to agree, deep in his soul, that he is returning his power of *bechirah* to Hashem, to let Hashem decide.

This is the depth of what is written, “*I am the First and I am the Last*”,¹⁸ which will be revealed at the redemption. At the end, we will return to the way things were in the beginning, where there was only Hashem’s will, with no possibility of evil. The more a person becomes aware of this concept, the more he will receive the power to finish things – not from his own power, of course, but from the power of Hashem, because he recognizes that “*Hashem is the First, and Hashem is the Last*”.

18 *Yeshayahu 44:6*

דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית – עפר-עצלות מפורט 010 – מים דרוח דעפר

10 | *Self-Deception & The Solution*

Water-of-Wind-of-Earth: Escaping Into A 'Comfort' Zone

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will continue to learn about the element of earth, and the trait of laziness. Here we will learn about laziness that comes from **water-of-wind-of-earth**.

As mentioned in previous lessons, earth is an unmoving element, so earth is the root of the trait of laziness. Wind is the root of movement – the very opposite of non-movement/earth/laziness. Water is the root of “dragging”.

Water-of-wind-of-earth is when there is an internal tug-of-war between one's earth/laziness and one's wind/movement, due to the contradiction between these two natures, which can produce a nature in a person to become dragged after a sort of ‘escape zone’ - where a person runs away to, in order to avoid dealing with the contradiction between his earth/non-movement and his wind/movement.

In order to ‘run away’ from the inner contradiction in himself, a person ‘moves’ towards wherever he's comfortable, where it's easier for him there and he doesn't have to deal with a challenge. The contradiction between his elements of earth and wind is already a challenge to deal with, and this contradiction may compel a person to ‘run away’ from it – using the element of water, by ‘dragging’ himself away from the contradiction. That is where he finds his ‘comfort’ zone.

Subconsciously Dragged Into One's Comfort Zone

Sometimes, this ‘escape into the comfort zone’ is done consciously, but in most cases, it is being done subconsciously.

For example, a parent asks a child to do something. It can be hard for the child to do it at first, so he does it begrudgingly, but after some time, the child becomes drawn after something else that catches his attention, and he becomes pulled and ‘dragged’ after it, forgetting about his chore. With children, this is very common. But adults as well can have this problem. A person may have something he needs to take care of, so he begins to do it, but while doing it, he becomes pulled and ‘dragged’ away into doing something that's more comfortable him for to do.

In most cases, this is done on a subconscious level, because the person usually isn't clear of the various thoughts and motivations that are inside him. If you would ask most people about what the general structure of their souls are like [i.e. what kind of nature they have, what they are mainly drawn towards, what their likings and dislikings are, etc.], they would not give a clear answer. That is the nature of most people: they lack a clear awareness of themselves [their natures]. People will often know what they like and what they hate, and what makes them happy or sad, etc. But they often don't see the connection between all of these tidbits of information about themselves.

Therefore, even if a person knows that he has both a lot of earth and wind in himself, he still may not be consciously aware of the contradictions in his nature, so he cannot explain his contradictory behavior, even though he may subconsciously know about this inner contradiction in his nature.

That is why there can be all kinds of excuses and reasons that people give, of why they became sidetracked in the midst of doing something. They don't want to admit that it is because they usually run away into their comfort zone. Instead of admitting this, they will come up with all kinds of good reasons of why they became 'dragged' into something else: "I only started to do this because I was asked to do it – I didn't really want to do it", and etc. Usually the answers make sense, but it is still not the actual reason that they got sidetracked.

The Complexity In Our Souls

There are many different motivating factors in everything that a person does. There is never any one reason for doing something. The Creation is complex, and therefore there are an endless amount of factors in everything.

The Creation contains an initial, beginning point, where everything is one, and this is referred to as the concept of *maaseh beraishis*. In the initial point of the Creation, there were no other details yet in the Creation, so there were no complexities yet. After Hashem created the first point, which was the *maaseh beraishis*, He created a myriad amount of details in the Creator, which is referred to as *maaseh merkavah*. Currently, we live in a world of *maaseh merkavah*, where there are an endless amount of details in the Creation, with all of their complexities. Only in the future will we have total clarity of our motivations.

Therefore, we have to understand that everything in our world is vastly complex. That being the case, our motivations are complex as well, and there is never any one reason that motivates us, when we act.

Not only is the world filled with endless amount of creations, items, and all kinds of things, but there are an endless amount of actions, resulting actions, and motivations, in people. In every action that every person does, there are conscious and subconscious motivations. There are reasons that a person can know of, and reasons that a person can't know of. One may be even motivated by higher reasons that go beyond his scope of awareness, which he will never discover. So whenever a person does anything, there can be many reasons why he did it. A person may do something and he has no idea why he did it.

For example, if a person finished *Shas*, why did he do it? He may say that it's because he wanted to be kept busy. But perhaps there were other reasons he isn't aware of. A person thinks that he did something for a certain reason, but that is only the partial reason. There are reasons which he simply can't know about, of why he did it. A person needs to become aware of why he does something, but he should also know that there are other reasons which he doesn't know about.

To describe this in subtler terms, there are motivations of our *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul), which are baser motivations, and we are also being motivated by our *nefesh Elohis* (G-dly soul), which are spiritual motivations to do the act. A person cannot become aware of the higher motivations behind the act, because it is simply above the grasp of his level, so he cannot know of them and hence he can't become aware of them.

A person might be confident about why he did something, but that doesn't mean he's right. Often he can be easily contradicted from his very actions. A person may not agree that there is a hidden reason that was motivating him, and he will be certain that it's because of a certain reason. He thinks he knows himself 100%. People can lie to others about the reason of why they did something, and often it's because they're lying to their own selves. They are simply not aware of their own reasons and motivations in doing something. It is more comfortable for a person to think that a certain reason motivated him, when it was really a different reason that motivated him. The person doesn't want to deal with the true reason that motivated him to do or not do something, and as a result, he is fooling himself.

This is the laziness that stems from **water-of-wind-of-earth**. Wind and earth are a contradiction in the soul, causing a person to run away into the comfort zone. A person becomes pulled and ‘dragged’ into his comfort zone only because he lacked *daas* (awareness). As a result, when asked why he became sidetracked like this, he will give all kinds of answers, but he is unaware of the true reason that motivated him. As we have been explaining here, the true reason that caused him to become sidetracked is because there was a contradiction between his earth (his laziness) and his wind (his movement), which turned on his ‘water’, his desire to flow after what’s comfortable for him to do. He got sidetracked because he allowed himself to be pulled after his comfort zone, because he didn’t want to deal with the contradictory forces in himself.

The more a person becomes aware of his soul, its forces, and the many contradictory forces in it, the less of a problem this will be. The less he is aware of the contradictions in his soul, the more difficult it will be for him to stop his habits of getting sidetracked into his comfort zone, because if he isn’t aware of his subconscious motivations, he won’t admit to the contradictions in his nature, so he won’t see the need to work on himself in this area.

Running Away vs. Dealing With It

This leads us to a deep insight about the soul.

Most people, whenever they are doing something, are doing so because it is a way for them to run into their comfort zone. Most people aren’t trying to deal with their problems, and instead they choose to run away, into the most comfortable kind of life possible, so that they don’t have to face the truths about themselves.

This is not possible, of course, when it comes to the physical side to life, where people must face difficulties and challenges in their various responsibilities, and there is no option of running away from them. The problem we are describing in this lesson is only applicable to the inner world of a person. People would rather run away from what’s taking place in their inner world, rather than deal with it.

This all takes place on a very subconscious level. Even if one does become aware of an inner contradiction in his nature, he will usually want to run away from it, rather than deal with it. But he isn’t aware that he is running away. He will be in denial about it, because he doesn’t want to think he’s acting pathetic. Therefore, it’s more convenient and comfortable for a person to deny the fact that that he’s running away from facing his inner contradictions.

So, not only is there an inner contradiction between his earth and wind which makes him want to run away from facing his contradictory nature, but in addition, this all motivates him to find something to do where he can ‘run away’ to, where he’s comfortable, where he won’t have to face any truths about himself. Living with this pattern prevents a person from true growth. When there are difficulties and contradictions that are hard to face, and a person runs away and escapes from them, he will never grow. Either a person doesn’t admit to the contradictions in his nature, or, he is aware of them, but he is simply not prepared to deal with them.

Facing Our Inner Contradictions

This leads us towards the remedy for the issue.

It is written, “*He sits in the concealment Above.*”¹⁹ Hashem has created many contradictions in the Creation. Every person needs to realize that this is the way Hashem made the Creation, and that he, too, has contradictions in himself. Each thing in Creation has an opposite to it. The primary creation is the human being, and the human being can either be man and woman – who have opposing natures to each other. Every creation as well has a “man” and “woman” to it – for each force in Creation that we find, we can find something else that opposes it. Since Hashem has created the world like this, a person always needs to notice the opposite of each thing.

Applying this to our own souls, one needs to become aware that each power in his soul has a contradicting force to it. After one realizes that, he can then take this further and realize that we all need to deal with contradictions throughout our entire life. There will always be forces that oppose us.

For example, a person may try to become more responsible, but later he can be tempted to become an irresponsible kind of person. A person may be striving for *kedushah* (holiness), but he is always waging war against the forces of *tumah* (defilement). *Chazal* state that the greater a person is, the greater his evil inclination is²⁰, and the depth of this is that even when a person grows further, there will always be forces that will try to contradict him, more than before.

Chazal describe how the *yetzer hora* continuously tried stopping Avraham Avinu and Yitzchok Avinu by the *Akeidah*. This was the greatest of Avraham’s ten trials, and therefore it represents the most all-inclusive test of mankind possible. What was this great test? Avraham and Yitzchok kept persevering in their *mesirus nefesh* to fulfill Hashem’s command. The loftiest power in the soul is *mesirus nefesh* (which is really a power that comes from above the soul). Therefore, the *yetzer hora* had to keep testing their *mesirus nefesh*, since it represented the greatest test of mankind of possible - to persevere with *mesirus nefesh*, against the *yetzer hora* who kept arguing with them that they don’t need to have this *mesirus nefesh*. Avraham and Yitzchok were facing contradictory forces: their power of *mesirus nefesh* was being opposed by the *yetzer hora* not to have *mesirus nefesh*. We see from this that a person will always be challenged and opposed by some other force, no matter how much he has grown.

If one isn’t aware of the concept that the Creation is full of contradictions, or if he only knows about this intellectually but he doesn’t feel that it’s true, the result will be that he won’t be aware of his motivations, because he doesn’t realize a basic truth about the entire structure of the soul. He will not live truthfully, and he will always be in denial of his other motivations in whatever he does. If one wants to live truthfully, he must realize that we are often acting from contradictions in the soul, and that either we will run away from them, or we will choose to face them and deal with them.

Most of the actions that a person does (except for a few rare individuals) are being done from contradictions in the soul. When a person becomes aware of this, he reacts to this either by running away from it, or by dealing with it. Those are the two possibilities. One must think and discover: “What contradiction in my nature is causing me to act this way, and how will I choose to deal with it? Am I trying to run away, or will I face it and deal with it?” In whatever a person does, a person needs to think like this and try to see what the root of his actions are, what reasons are motivating him, and that there may be other hidden motivations as well, which he isn’t able to know of.

When a person has a nature of **water-of-wind-of-earth**, he usually will think that he doesn’t have a contradictory nature, and that there’s nothing to deal with here. That is the depth of this nature to run away into his comfort zone. He is so used to fooling himself. He has really run away from the contradiction between his earth and wind. Either he isn’t agreeing to the contradiction, or he knows about it and he is running away from it.

¹⁹ *Tehillim* 91:1

²⁰ *Succah* 52a

The root of all contradictions in Creation is earth and wind. Water flows, while fire opposes. If one runs away from a situation, he is using water, because he is allowing himself to simply go with the flow and be pulled after his comfort zone. If one chooses to deal with a situation and face it, and he is prepared to face his challenges, he is using fire. Wind and earth oppose each other, creating a contradiction. One needs to identify the contradiction, agree to it, and then choose to deal with it instead of running away from it.

This is a fundamental kind of thinking about the entire way Hashem has made the Creation. Become aware of the many different factors that motivate you, the contradictions in your nature, because that is how Hashem has made the world: an existence full of contradictory forces. This is the secret behind all our *bechirah*, our free will.

The more one recognizes his soul and he sees the contradictions in his soul, he can become more aware to this. He becomes aware why he should do a certain thing and why he shouldn't, why he did something and why he didn't do it.

In summary, in whatever a person does, one must know that he is being motivated by various contradicting motives. One part of you says to do it, and another part says not to do it. One part of yourself is telling you to do something, and another part of yourself is also telling you to do it, but these can be different reasons entirely, so they are not the same motivation. One needs to become aware of these contradicting motivations in himself, and then become aware of how is reacting to it – if he is either running away from it (water/pleasure) or if he is dealing with it (fire/opposition).

That is how one can repair the nature of **water-of-wind-of-earth**.

11 | *Shifting Between Extremes*

Wind-of-Wind-of-Earth: Extreme Nature Which Cycles Between Movement & Non-Movement

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will continue here to learn about the element of earth, and its resulting trait of laziness. In this lesson we will learn about laziness that stems from wind-of-wind-of-earth.

As explained in the past, earth in the soul causes a person to be unmoving, or to move very slowly, due to the heaviness in the earth.

Wind-of-earth will cause a person to move a bit past where he is, whereas wind-of-wind will make a person move a lot. In the previous lesson, we discussed the two pairs of “opposite” elements: fire and water, and wind and earth. We also mentioned the words of the Gra, that on This World, the primary opposite elements are wind and earth, while fire and water are the primary opposite elements in Heaven.

The nature of wind-of-wind-of-earth contains not only the opposing natures of wind versus earth, but also the opposite natures of wind-of-wind versus earth. Since there are two different opposing natures here, the result is a more “extreme” kind of inner contradiction in the soul. There is a dominance of earth here, which brings on inner “heaviness” that results in laziness, yet there is also a lot of wind here, due to the wind-of-wind, which demands its movement. This causes an extremity in the person’s nature. This is not the only extreme nature we can find, but it is one of them.

An Extreme Nature of Intense Mood Swings and Immaturity

Most people do not live in an extreme way, and they live closer towards the center between two extremes. Although no one is perfectly balanced, most people are living somewhat closer to a middle line between two extremes. But there are some people who regularly live with extremity in their life. They don’t choose the middle road in life. They aren’t drawn towards becoming more balanced and centered. They will stay more towards an extreme. Anyone who is familiar with someone with this kind of personality will immediately recognize what we are talking about: this is a kind of person who has a more extreme personality, on a regular basis.

This kind of person will be moving a lot one day, and he will move very quickly, even violently. He will get a lot done and he will be very productive, when he’s moving. This is their wind-of-wind at work. But when aren’t on the move, their ‘earth’ makes its heavy appearance: they will go to sleep, sometimes for hours on end, completely stopping everything in their life. They vacillate between these two extremes, of intense movement and no movement at all, in an ongoing cycle. This is an extreme way of living.

Anyone with this nature is a very moody kind of person. He has intense mood swings throughout the day, going from one extreme to another. He will be intensely joyous during one part of his day, and at another part of his day, he is terribly sad. The mood swings are not just commonplace in his life, they are violent shifts between one extreme emotion to a completely opposite extreme of another emotion.

This kind of person also has an immature nature in his soul, which is called *katnus* (childishness) – he tends to see everything in terms of either ‘black or white’. His thinking is usually “Either, or” and he can’t see anything in between. He has a child’s perspective that carries into his adulthood. One moment he can be very joyous, and a moment later he is very sad. It seems that he doesn’t know how to be happy. But the truth is that he does feel truly happy at times, and it is just that he can quickly become sad, because he has a nature to swing between two extremes.

Very few people with this nature succeed in attaining a balance in their personality. Although it is true that most people do not become completely balanced in their personality, it is also true that most people do not either become totally extreme. Most people will attain some kind of balance in their personality, as they mature through life. But a person with a nature of wind-of-wind-of-earth will usually stay with a more extreme personality throughout his life, since the very idea of attaining a balance is so foreign to his perspective. His extreme nature accompanies him in every aspect.

Three Different Reasons For An Extreme Nature

When a person has a very extreme kind of nature, where he is constantly going through a cycle of extreme ups and downs, it may come from the deep inner contradiction between earth and wind-of-wind. Or, his extreme may come from a heavy amount of fire in the soul.

When an extreme nature comes from having a lot of fire in one’s personality, a person will have intense upward movement [i.e. he will grow, overcome challenges, and attain his ambitions, by “burning up” his previous levels and aiming for a higher level], but since fire tends to be extreme in its movement, the person will have a relapse soon after he ascends. That is why a person with a strong amount of fire in his personality will often have a lot of ups and downs. With fire, the issue is that the movements of a person are extreme. But when we are dealing with the nature of wind-of-wind-of-earth, the extremity comes from a deep inner contradiction in the soul.

When a person has a lot of fire in his personality, his “outer” fire may weaken, which will mean that he will appear dismal, but his inner spiritual fire may remain strong. Indeed, there is always an inner fire which remains lit in the soul, for there is always *“A constant fire shall burn on the Altar, it shall not be extinguished.”*²¹

But here we are discussing one who has strong amount of wind-of-wind in his soul, who is contradicted in his nature by a heavy amount of earth. There is a contradiction in the very structure of his soul. This kind of person has a very moving soul, which doesn’t stay put in any one state, because he feels like he always has to be moving. But when he moves, he often uses all his energy, and then he becomes exhausted, so he falls back into his element of earth, and he becomes non-moving.

He has extremes in his movement, from upward to downward movement, until he stops moving in his soul, when he feels exhausted. He plummets from extreme upward movement to a state of absolute inner heaviness in the soul, and after some time, his wind-of-wind returns again and he gets moving again, and after using up all his energy so quickly, he becomes exhausted, until he feels like he can’t move. He may become melancholy from this, because he doesn’t want to move, and as a result, he may go to sleep for a long time.

When a person is regularly used to this pattern, he becomes “dry” in his soul, and in that state, he is apt to become very depressed, reaching the total state of his earth. It is a vicious cycle of always going from one extreme to

²¹ *Vayikra 6:6*

another, from a lot of movement, followed by exhaustion, melancholy, and laziness, then returning to extreme movement again - where the cycle repeats.

“Kaf HaKela” In The Soul

Chazal refer to this as the intense spiritual suffering of the soul known as “*Kaf HaKela*” [which feels like getting pulled in many different directions at once]. On a simple level, the punishment of “*Kaf HaKela*” is that the soul feels like it is continuously being flung from one side of the world to other, which is rooted in the contradicting desires that the soul may have. While this is true, here we are describing a kind of personality which is a deeper kind of “*Kaf HaKela*” for the soul: when a person is continuously shifting between different extremes within his own personality. So it is not simply a punishment which comes from some external factor. Even the destructive angels which are created from a person’s sins are not simply a punishment to the soul, but a revelation of the soul’s unfixed state. It is a state where the soul moves violently between different extremes, and it is a suffering of “*Kaf HaKela*” which stems from the person’s very perspective of always shifting between extremes. That perspective, itself, is “*Kaf HaKela*” for the soul.

When a person has this state of “*Kaf HaKela*” in his soul, he can never feel serene, because whenever he does anything, a different part of his personality is pulling him in the opposite extreme. The impaired wind-of-wind-of-earth in his soul causes him to exhaust himself from constantly using all up his energy, and when that is the case, he cannot have pleasure in his movements. Instead, his movements are simply stressful and exhausting.

Normally, movements are a source of pleasure for a person. A person is able to have deep pleasure just from his exertion in Torah learning even before he arrives at clear understanding, and this is a pleasure from movement. But when a person is moving because he has a lot of wind-of-wind-of-earth in him, this movement doesn’t feel pleasurable. It will only feel exhausting to him. Extreme movement is generally not enjoyable, even if a person may have a nature to enjoy extremities [a nature which we have discussed in other lessons].

After becoming exhausted from using up his energy, he feels an inner heaviness, and soon after he will want to start moving again. So he can never be serene, and he won’t feel pleasure when he’s moving. He never has *menuchah* (serenity), because wherever he is, he wants to be somewhere else - he cannot feel calm inside himself.

This is the extreme nature that results from impaired wind-of-wind-of-earth. There are also others who don’t have the nature of wind-of-wind-of-earth, but they can still have extremity in their personalities, and they will act extreme in different areas, even though they do not have a dominant nature of wind-of-wind-of-earth. Even so, the nature of wind-of-wind-of-earth is the root of all extremity in the soul.

The Root of the Solution: Analyzing The Complexities of Each Thing

Now we shall discuss the root of the rectification for this nature.

First we will describe the change of perspective that is needed, which speaks to the mind, and then will we will speak of how to bring this perspective into the heart and into one’s actions, so that one can practically act upon this change of perspective.

One needs to have the perspective that the entire Creation is complex, consisting of many different forces. This is also referred to as *maaseh merkavah*, which is the concept of the vast complexity of the Creation. Nothing in Creation can stand alone on its own, and it is always complemented by some other force. Only Hashem is One. Since each thing in Creation has a force that opposes it, there is always an integrating force that combines together the two opposite forces, which serves as the balance between them.

Thus, when one has a deep inner contradiction in his soul - such as wind-of-wind-of-earth, which contains the extreme of wind-of-wind versus the other extreme, earth – this is the very antithesis to *maaseh merkavah*. This is because the “rule” of *maaseh merkavah* necessitates that any two opposite forces be harmonized, but when a person has two different extremities that remain unfixed in his soul, there is no integration between his opposite forces. Instead, each force in his soul remains apart from the other. There is no integration in his soul – there is only separation.

Initially, when one becomes aware of the elements in his soul, he sees his elements of earth, water, wind and fire as separate forces which each stand apart from each other. But one can gain a deeper perspective towards his soul, where he sees that each force in his soul is complemented by any other force, and that there is no force in his soul which stands alone. Even more so, each part in the soul contains an opposite power which actually completes it. When one absorbs this perspective in his mind, he should view the reality in his soul this way.

As a result, in whatever he encounters, he should analyze the different parts of each thing, the complexity of each thing, and what opposes it. One should get used to seeing the different parts of what each thing is made of: the thing itself, its opposite, and how they harmonize.

Countering Extreme Thinking

Applying to this to our subject – a person with a nature of wind-of-wind-of-earth – such a person is often exhausted from always using up his energy, and then he will want to sleep for a long amount of time. What can he think, to stop himself from falling into this state? He should challenge his own extreme thinking, as follows.

He should try thinking about the following (though this will not help that much if he tries this as he’s actually exhausted, because during that time, the *yetzer hora* dominates and his thinking will be cloudy. Instead, he should practice this kind of thinking before he gets exhausted): “I want serenity right now, I want to rest and sleep – but is there really such a thing as total serenity or total sleep...?” Deep down, he wants to become totally serene, but he must become aware that this is an extreme way of thinking and that there’s no such thing as becoming totally serene.

To illustrate the idea better, consider a person who is suicidal, G-d forbid. He thinks that his situation will be different, by running away from life. He thinks all will be well and that he will have total serenity. This comes from a false belief of heresy, which is also called the “empty void” in the soul. Even if one doesn’t reach that point, he may have a total “empty void” in his soul whenever he is thinking from that place in himself.

So, too, the extreme thinking, of wishing to be in a total state of rest and serenity, is a kind of thinking that comes from the place of the “empty void” that is in the soul. One must realize that if he has extreme thinking, it comes from a subconscious desire in the soul to enter into complete emptiness, which stems from the “empty void” in the soul, the source of all heresy. There are two different extremes in Creation – on one extreme, there is *Ain Od Milvado*, the fact that there is nothing besides for Hashem, and at the other extreme, a person believes that there just a nothingness in Creation, which is total heresy. When a person thinks that there is only emptiness and nothingness

in Creation, when he is in a state where he feels no movement at all, he is really stuck inside the false perspective that comes from the “empty void” in his soul.

The main remedy for such a person is to believe that everything in the Creation is complex, so he needs to see what each thing is made of. He should see that even when he is serene, he is not totally serene. One can only become partially serene, but we never have total serenity as long as we are in this current era of Creation. And the Sages state that even in the Next World, Torah scholars do not have total serenity.

One should slowly get used to this change of perspective, that there is no such thing as being in a state of total rest or serenity. He shouldn't even desire such a thing - it's non-existent. It should be like the famous words of the *Ibn Ezra*, that the pauper who doesn't even desire to marry the princess. Thus, when a person wishes for total serenity, he should be aware that this comes from the “empty void” in the soul, which wants to enter into a state of total emptiness, and that this is a form of heresy.

There are two root kinds of heresy: Either when a person denies the Creator, or, a person denies the Creation, by thinking that there is nothing but total emptiness in Creation. The true perspective is that there is a Creator, and that He has created many creations, and that He has also created an empty void in Creation, where a person can feel nothingness. But when a person is only aware of the perspective that comes from empty void in his soul, he will make the mistake of thinking that he can become totally serene. This is the root of the faulty perspective that stems from impaired wind-of-wind-of-earth.

Instead, a person should see the complexity of Creation within each thing he encounters. This breaks his way of thinking which thinks in terms of extremes. One should analyze a force in his soul and then see what its opposite is. For example, when one wants *menuchah* and he wants to go to sleep, as he is lying on his bed, he should be aware that he is also moving, breathing, etc. He should try moving his fingers and feet and he can see that he is still moving. In this way he realizes that there is no such thing as becoming totally serene. Then he gets the idea that there is no such as total non-movement, because he is always moving somewhat.

The more one realizes this perspective, the more he uproots his extreme way of thinking which has become so used to thinking in terms of extremes. He becomes aware of his movements even within his state of non-movement, and in this way, he comes to realize that he cannot ever be in a state of total non-movement. The same is true for when he's moving: he should be aware as he's moving that he cannot always be moving, and that he will need to rest soon. In this way, he sends a message to himself that he can never stay in any one extreme, for there is always an opposite state that complements the one he is in now.

In Conclusion

Through this, the person with a nature of impaired wind-of-wind-of-earth slowly chips away at his extreme thinking, by learning that it is impossible to always stay in any one extreme. From getting used to this kind of thinking, he will give more balance to his soul, and his nature of quickly shifting between different extremities will be lessened. Although he will still not attain a total balance (which is impossible, because no one becomes perfectly balanced) from getting used to this change of perspective, he will still come a lot closer to staying in the middle point.

12 | *Outbursts & The Solution*

Fire-of-Wind-of-Earth: “Outbursts” Caused By Inner Contradictions In The Soul

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about the element of earth, the root of laziness. In this lesson we will discuss laziness that comes from **fire-of-wind-of-earth**.

As mentioned, the element earth of earth in the soul [when left impaired] is the root of inner heaviness, which causes a person to move slowly. The element of wind causes a person to move. Earth and wind are contradicting forces to each other. When a person has a nature of wind-of-earth, he has a contradiction in his nature, and this contradiction may activate his element of fire, which will then explode outward (as is the nature of fire).

When a person has contradictions in the nature of his soul, this can lead to an “outburst” of a part of his nature that a person has been stifling until now. When one has contradictory forces of earth and wind in his very nature, from time to time, he is slowed down by his earth, but from time to time he will have “outbursts” (fire) of movement (wind).

Instead of giving proper outlet to the elements of earth, wind and fire that are in his personality, these outbursts are only damaging to the person. A person doesn't become calmer from these outbursts, so his element of earth doesn't receive proper outlet. Instead, a person only becomes stressed from the outburst. His element of wind doesn't either receive proper outlet, because his movements are being performed out of anxiousness, which aren't enjoyable movements. And certainly his fire doesn't receive proper outlet, because his fire is only damaging to him, causing parts of his personality to explode outward.

The Low Self-Image, Sadness, and Despair That Results From Impaired Fire-of-Wind-of-Earth

In more severe cases of this nature, a person will develop a low self-image as a result of these outbursts, because they are commonplace in his life and he often doesn't feel good about himself because of them. He feels like he is never himself. He isn't calm inside, and his actions are not either calm. As a result of seeing this, a person can develop a low self-image because he feels generally unsuccessful, since he finds himself always getting upset and losing control over his anger. He won't feel good about who he is, both because he is pained by the inner contradiction in his personality (earth and wind) which he struggles to deal with, and also because this causes him to think negatively about himself, making him develop a low self-image.

People who have this nature are often suffering inwardly from their inner contradictions, and from their resulting low self-image, to the point that they are apt to think that they were meant to suffer on this world. We know that all souls come down onto this world to fulfill a certain task, and that each soul must go through certain difficulties and tests on this world, and therefore, each person has his personal lot in his life. A person with a nature of impaired **fire-of-wind-of-earth** may exaggerate this concept, however, and he will think that his personal lot in life is to suffer from all of his inner contradictions and low self-image.

When a person doesn't identify the issue properly, he finds himself losing control and having angry outbursts, which he may mistakenly label as "fire-of-fire". He sees that he has a very fiery nature, so he may think that he has a nature of "fire-of-fire", and therefore, he may seek remedies to calm his "issue" of fire-of-fire. He thinks that he needs to go for anger management. In reality, though, his outbursts of anger do not stem from fire-of-fire, but from sadness at himself. When a person is angry at himself for having outbursts, this is not anger, but sadness.

In other cases, a person is not having outbursts of anger, but conceitedness. Since conceitedness is also a trait of fire, and he often finds these "outbursts" of conceit suddenly making their appearance, he may conclude that his problem is fire-of-fire.

A person who often experiences outbursts of anger usually has a nature of **fire-of-wind-of-earth**, rather than fire-of-fire. Although he may also have outbursts of "conceit" as well, which is also a trait of fire, the conceit is not coming from fire-of-fire, but from **fire-of-wind-of-earth**. It is the same for his outbursts of anger. If his outbursts would be coming from fire-of-fire, the anger is coming more from his own nature. But because he is sad about it afterwards, this shows that his anger or conceit is coming fire-of-wind-of-earth, as opposed to fire itself.

The sadness that he has over his outbursts can also cause him to feel despair over his situation. This can create a very difficult situation. Children who have this nature can be very difficult to deal with. If a child is often having outbursts of anger, it is hard for anyone to be around him. The child is very reactive and he has a stormy kind of soul. This causes him to develop a low self-image throughout life, which leads to further despair about himself. People with this nature are poor souls on this world. By their very nature, they often go through outbursts of anger, which leads to sadness and a low self-image about themselves, which then leads to despair.

Identifying the Source of Outbursts

One needs to be able to properly identify where his "outbursts" are coming from.

Every person lives with contradictions in his soul. For example, a person may act conceited (fire), and at other times, he is too lazy to assert himself (earth). But usually a person will deny these inner contradictions in his nature, because if he were to admit to it, it would be difficult for him to deal with the contradictions in his nature. Since he would rather not deal with it, he will subconsciously deny the inner contradictions. When a person refuses to admit to his inner contradictions, he tries to suppress them, but they will only fester. Every so often, the parts of his nature which had been stifled will 'burst out', every so often.

This is the **fire-of-wind-of-earth** in the soul. Every person experiences it, because every person has some **fire-of-wind-of-earth** in his soul. However, if a person has a more dominant nature of **fire-of-wind-of-earth** [which is what we are discussing in this lesson], he will have these 'outbursts' more often, and it will be a more permanent part of one's personality.

There are inner contradictions in every person's soul, and since most people choose to deny them, these inner contradictions will 'explode' outward every so often. When the inner contradictions aren't dealt with and they aren't treated, they will fester, and the outbursts can get worse, as a person gets older.

However, since most people do not have a dominance of **fire-of-wind-of-earth** in their nature, their outbursts aren't that extreme when they occur, and it will only manifest itself in certain areas, because most people have somewhat of a balance in their **fire-of-wind-of-earth**. There is no person who doesn't have outbursts, but there are

some people have more extreme outbursts than others. These are people who have the nature of **fire-of-wind-of-earth**.

Becoming Aware of the Patterns of Outbursts

A person can get married and he thought he was a generally calm person who doesn't get outbursts of anger, but he suddenly finds himself having angry outbursts. The wife doesn't recognize him as the person he married. What happened? Really, he always had inner contradictions in his personality, but he managed to stifle it until now, so the outbursts arrived later.

Each person has different kinds of outbursts. In some people, they outburst of their inner contradictions will cause them to want to expand past their comfort zone, while others will want to contract into their comfort zone. Others will become lustful, etc. Each person reacts differently, but every person will have outbursts from time to time, which come from their inner contradictions.

If a person would sit with himself when he has quiet time and reflect into his behavior, he can begin to recognize the various factors which trigger his outbursts, such as specific situations where he is prone to outbursts, and etc. Without having this quiet time to reflect, a person will never do anything about his outbursts. Throughout his married life, he will have angry outbursts every so often, without ever recognizing the patterns, and instead of treating the root of issue, he will simply wait until he calms down, where everything returns to normal. But he never really deals with the issue, and he is just avoiding it. This is the pattern in most people – they never deal with the issue at its root (because they never set aside the quiet time to reflect and identify the triggers that cause their outbursts, and therefore they never gain awareness about their patterns of outbursts).

In most people, their outbursts aren't that intense, and they will only manifest in a specific area in the person's life. Since their patterns of outbursts are somewhat tolerable to live with, they don't think that much about this issue, so they do not do any inner work to try to uproot their negative patterns. When that is the case, the outbursts can worsen when they get older and they are aging. Whatever they have suppressed until now from their entire life will then come out of them, in full force, with all of their anger and bitterness that they may have kept stifled in themselves for years. In more extreme cases, a person may have had a very calm temperament in his younger years, but he had always been suppressing his anger, so he never actually dealt with his anger, and when he enters old age, he is now having angry outbursts all the time, and suddenly everyone finds it difficult to be around him.

As it was explained earlier, every person has inner contradictions in his soul, which will 'burst out' every so often, as long as the inner contradictions aren't dealt with. The problem is usually left untreated in most people, because most people do not have intense outbursts, and it only occurs every so often, so it isn't that alarming of an issue. But, as a result of ignoring the issue, they never end up getting to the root of their outbursts. Those whose outbursts are more intense and more frequent have a nature of **fire-of-wind-of-earth**, and they are much more likely to notice their outbursts as an issue, and to see the need to deal with it.

Whether a person has a dominant nature of **fire-of-wind-of-earth** or not, though, the more that he is truthful with himself, the more he will want to deal with this issue and uproot his negative patterns. Therefore, every person needs to discover the inner contradictions in his nature, and to reflect about how to deal with them. Although no one is able to attain perfect self-knowledge, anyone at his own level needs to discover his inner contradictions, and its detrimental results in his life.

The deeper a person is, the more he will discover about himself, when he becomes aware of his inner contradictions. When most people reflect on their personality, they will focus on the resulting issues that they see, such as how they and others around them are negatively affected by their outbursts. However, this doesn't get to the root of the issue, because it is only focusing on the 'branches' of the issue. They are looking at their patterns of behavior, but not at what is actually causing their negative behavior. One needs to discover the root of his negative behavior patterns: the inner contradictions contained in his personality.

The Key - Discovering Your Greatest Personal Weakness

Every person has one particular negative character trait, his particular "worst *middah*", which is his greatest personal weakness and which wreaks the most havoc in his life. The rest of his issues always stem from his root weakness, his worst *middah*.

One needs to know that there is no such thing as a character trait that is inherently evil. A "bad *middah*" is not "bad" per se, it is just being used in the wrong place. A "bad *middah*" just means that the *middah* isn't balanced properly by a different trait. Each trait in the soul needs to be balanced by a different trait in the soul. When it isn't, it becomes a "bad *middah*". It will be a *middah* that is being used in the wrong place. But one must understand that this bad *middah* is not an inherently evil trait, it is just a *middah* that isn't being used properly, since he has not yet attained a balance in this particular *middah*.

So when one examines the inner contradictions in his personality and what results from them, he needs to discover his worst trait, which is his most unbalanced trait. Then he will have the 'key' to discovering the root of his soul remedy. This will also repair the particular issue of impaired **fire-of-wind-of-earth** – but it is also a general remedy for all issues in the soul.

Fixing the Entirety of the Soul - By Balancing The Worst Trait In The Soul

The more a person takes the quiet time to reflect on his inner contradictions from within himself (as opposed to just seeing how his behavior is affecting his life) and he identifies them, he can begin to identify his weakest area, and after that, he can balance out his weakest area by developing the opposite element of his weakest trait.

This brings his soul to a general state of balance. When one balances his worst character trait, not only does he fix that particular trait, but he balances out his soul in general, because he is treating the root of all issues in his soul. The rest of his soul will be fixed, on a general level, as a result of dealing with his root issue.

Keeping Track of Balance

When a person sees that he is having outbursts, he needs to get to the very root that's causing the outburst. Something triggered his weakest point, and he needs to discover it. And in clearer terms, something triggered the nature of **fire-of-wind-of-earth**, which leads to outbursts of stifled parts of his nature.

All contradictions in the soul are branches of the primary inner contradiction in the soul, which is where one's weakest point is. When one recognizes the root of his weaknesses and he balances it, this will balance the rest of his soul in general as well. And on a more specific level, he will find himself having fewer outbursts than he used to.

Every person has outbursts, whether in the form of laziness, anger, or desire, where he steps out of line a bit from his usual behavior, where his worst trait comes out and he acts inappropriately. No one can ever be perfect, but one needs to see from time to time if his outbursts are becoming more balanced than before – that they are not as intense as they used to be. The *avodah* of a person is to see from time to time if he has become calmer inside himself and more balanced in his soul, by seeing what his outbursts look like. One needs to see if he has gotten closer to *menuchas hanefesh* (inner serenity of the soul).

The less calm a person is, the more raging his thoughts are. The calmer a person becomes, the calmer and clearer his thoughts become, and the more of a *bar daas* (sensible, logical, and thinking person) he becomes. The Alter of Kelm would place priority on the quality of *menuchas hanefesh* above everything else, and the depth behind this is because when a person's thoughts become calmer, this enables a person to come out of the inner contradictions in the soul which prevent him from *menuchah*. There is no such thing as attaining complete *menuchah*, but the more balance a person gives to his soul, the more *menuchah* he will have, and hence, the less 'outbursts' he will have from his inner contradictions.

Some people require less balance for their souls, because their inner world is not as exquisite, and therefore they have fewer issues in their soul to deal with. But if a person has a rich internal world, he usually needs to give more balance to his soul, because the powers in his soul are stronger, which creates more opportunities for inner contradictions in his soul. This is the depth of the statement, "Whoever is greater than his friend, his evil inclination is greater."²²

Giving balance to the soul, through developing the element that opposes one's greatest weakness, repairs the **fire-of-wind-of-earth** that is in every person. Therefore, this remedy is not only relevant for the person who has a dominant nature of **fire-of-wind-of-earth**, but for all people in general, since all people have **fire-of-wind-of-earth** in their souls.

Dealing With the Contradiction Between the Body and Soul

Now we will take this idea further, to a higher level.

Until now, we have been explaining about inner contradictions that exist in the "animal" level of the soul (*nefesh habehaimis*), which are contradicting aspects in one's personality. We have been explaining about the contradicting elements of wind and earth within the personality. But there is also a deeper level of inner contradictions between one's "wind" and "earth" - the contradiction that exists between the soul and the body. The body is compared to the element of earth, for it was created from the earth, and the soul is called "wind", *ruach*, such as in the term, *ruach chaim*, a "living spirit." Thus, the contradicting forces of body and soul are another contradiction between one's element of earth and wind.

Many people do not identify this deep inner contradiction, because their souls are concealed from them, while their body is the more dominant force in their life. They don't struggle that much with the contradiction between the body and the soul, because their soul hasn't yet been brought to the fore, so they do not encounter a clash

²² *Succah 52a*

between their soul and body. Others, however, can relate very well to the contradictory forces of body and soul, because they have been born with a more revealed soul – which is their spiritual “wind” - so they face more contradictions between their soul’s spiritual needs with their body’s material desires.

Although they are more spiritual already from a younger age, they face a deep contradiction between their soul and body, and in their younger years, they have not yet attained a balance between their physicality and their spirituality. As a result, their entire *ruchmiyus* (spirituality) is somewhat underdeveloped and imbalanced, and all of their aspirations to act more spiritual are a constant source of inner tension for them, between their body’s physicality and their soul’s spirituality, which becomes a consistent pattern of “outbursts” of different parts of their personality. Their body will demand its physical needs and wants, but the spiritual desires of their soul are pulling them in the opposite direction, and the result is an intense tug-of-war between their body and soul.

Often, the result of an intense conflict between the body and the soul will cause a person to strongly develop his element of fire, so that he can “burn up” his previous struggles and aim for higher levels of growth. These people can be called “*ovdei Hashem*”, those who truly serve Hashem – but they start off very imbalanced. They are always having “outbursts” of stifled parts of their personality, as a result between the conflict between their body and soul. Their fire strengthens, and they will produce all kinds of issues and problems with everything, so that they can give outlet to their fire, which thrives on opposition and challenge.

People like this feel like they are always trying to bring *Moshiach* closer, through deliberately creating opposition in their lives, so that they can fight against the opposition and thereby bring more spiritual rectification to the world. Whenever they have “outbursts” of idealism to fight against anything they deem inappropriate, it comes from their element of fire, which they have developed very well.

Their issue is that they lack proper organization within their inner world. They are lacking structure in their souls, and instead, they are acting based on aspiration. As a result, they are lacking proper direction.

Some people like this will eventually see themselves as failures, so they fall back into their element of earth, where they become lethargic and full of despair.

Others with this nature will continue to be *ovdei Hashem*, and they don’t give up just because they find themselves lacking direction.

Others like this become very doubtful about who they really are, because they struggle intensely between their physicality and spirituality, and if you meet them and ask them about what their ideals are, they aren’t sure if they are in a situation of spiritual growth or if they are becoming more materialistic.

In others, the contradiction between their physicality and spirituality is so strong that they are always having “outbursts” because of it: They will keep switching their community, or they will keep switching who their *Rav* is, or they will keep switching the *sefarim* they are learning, and etc.

Others with this issue will eventually end up in total despair about themselves, whereas others with this issue will not reach that point, but they won’t be able to avoid having lots of “outbursts” from stifled parts of their personality (as a result between the strong contradiction between their body and soul), and they will remain that way for their entire life [if they don’t attain a balance in their soul]. They are very idealistic and very spiritual, but they do not have any solid approach (*mehalech*) or way (*derech*) to live life with.

Since they have a strongly developed element of fire, they will also have “holy” fire in their souls, which can propel them towards high levels of spiritual growth, but because they haven’t balanced themselves yet, their holy fire

on its own isn't able to perfect their personality, since it is mixed with the baser element of fire that is in their "animal" level of the soul.

One needs to properly "build" his inner world. That is why having too much of fire in the soul can actually deter one's spiritual development. A strong amount of fire in the soul can make a person highly motivated to pursue growth and to be very ambitious about attaining higher spiritual levels, but intense motivation alone cannot build a person.

Many people face an intense struggle between their physicality and their spirituality, and this is an inner contradiction which causes a person to have common occurrences of "outbursts" of stifled parts of his nature. These people have a lot of **fire-of-wind-of-earth** in the "animal" level of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*, and this causes them to have a consistent pattern of "outbursts" in their life, even when it comes to their spiritual matters. The results of this are clearly detrimental.

They need to give structure to their inner world, and then they will attain a balance in their souls. They can still allow their fire to continue to motivate them, so they shouldn't try to stifle it. But along with this, they will mainly need to build their inner world and give organization and structure to it. This will repair their **fire-of-wind-of-earth**.

13 | *Getting Past Obstacles*

Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth: Running Into Obstacles

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will continue to discuss the trait of laziness, which comes from the element of earth. In the coming lessons, we will learn about laziness that stems from **fire-of-earth**.

As explained earlier, the element of earth is the root of the trait of laziness: when there is a lack or absence of movement. “Fire”-of-earth is when the movement explodes outward after it has been stifled. [Within fire-of-earth, there is earth, water, wind and fire. In this lesson we will begin with “earth”-of-fire-of-earth].

“**Earth**”-of-fire-of-earth is when the element of earth blocks these movements after they have been activated, returning the ‘fire’ to the original state of earth. First there is earth (laziness, or slowed movement, or non-movement), then there is fire (intense movement), and soon after moving, the person returns to his state of earth (laziness). This blocked movement happens due to the nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul.

This manifests in the form of various obstacles that a person encounters, which prevent him from progressing forward and continuing what he set out to do. There are all kinds of obstacles that can get in a person’s way, which prevents him from doing what he wants to.

Different Reasons For Encountering Obstacles

People react differently to these obstacles.

Some people will feel that if they are being opposed by anything which prevents them from doing what they want to do, it must be the *Sitra Achara* (lit. the “Other Side”) preventing them from doing the right thing, and that it is a sign that they must be doing the right thing. Therefore, they will try to persevere.

Others, when encountering obstacles in their path, will take a step back from what they are doing, taking it as a sign that they shouldn’t continue what they are doing. A similar reaction is when people react to obstacles in their path as a sign of “*ayin hara*”, the evil eye (in spite of the fact that *ayin hara* is only said of those whose work can be seen by others, there are still people who fear that even their unseen activities are being affected by *ayin hara*).

While any of the above may be true reasons, sometimes a person encounters “obstacles” in his path simply because he was involving himself in something that isn’t really suited to his personal task. It wasn’t meant for him to do, because he didn’t really have the necessary energy and skills for it. Although it seems as if he ran into ‘obstacles’ which are preventing him, these are not actually obstacles, but simply an outcome of getting involved in something that he anyway wouldn’t have been able to do.

Example 1 – Risks In Business

For example, often people who have businesses will encounter various obstacles that prevent them from actualizing their plans or ideas. Today, people make themselves ‘open’ to all kinds of options, and they will involve themselves with just about anything, even when it isn’t for them. They will try some new investment when they have no idea about it, because they want to expand their options. They become involved in things they don’t know enough about.

Understandably, they are doing so because they want to earn more money, but the rule is that “When one wants hundred, he will want two hundred”²³, so even when a person does get a little bit of what he wants, he won’t be satisfied and he will aim for more, so he will try to take all kinds of risks, in the hope of profiting. Then he encounters all kinds of issues and problems along the way, which he never could have foreseen.

Although taking all kinds of risks in business can be a way to “open up” more, it can also cause a person to be involved in something that isn’t really for him. He won’t fully understand what he’s involved with, and he will fail in his business, because he isn’t aware of all the rules involved. He will be prevented from actualizing what he wants to do, and it is because he doesn’t recognize what he is involved with. People in business will often run into all kinds of ‘obstacles’ that get in their way, which they never could have foreseen. Sometimes, encountering these obstacles can be a catalyst that serves to spur them on to success. But in any case, these ‘obstacles’ are simply an outcome of becoming involved in an endeavor that was not suited for this person’s energies.

Example 2 – Starting Organizations

Another example is when people open up various organizations, or they become involved with *chessed*, and they didn’t realize what they are entering. They become involved with pursuits that they do not have sufficient energy or knowledge for, and they didn’t think beforehand if it was suitable or not for them to be involved with it.

Problems To Expect vs. Unexpected Obstacles

However, when a person encounters an issue that he didn’t expect, it may not even be an ‘obstacle’ in his path. It can simply be a normal part of life which, by its very reality, is complex. A person may not be aware that a certain ‘unexpected issue’ which came up in his life is actually a normal issue that he should have expected.

For example, a person gets married, and as the first year of marriage continues, he finds himself running into various problems in his marital harmony. He didn’t expect that there would be any issues in his marriage, and he views his marital problems as an unexpected issue, a sudden ‘obstacle’ in his path, which is preventing him from happiness.

Anyone who gets married can understand that marriage does not always flow so smoothly as the engagement period and that there will certainly be issues, and that it will be complex. But when people think that they’re getting prevented by ‘obstacles’ in their marriage and they begin to seek advice and help for their marriage, they may not understand that their marital issues are simply a normal part of life that can be expected, as opposed to being an ‘obstacle’ that isn’t supposed to be here. Ever since the sin of Adam, there have been problems in marriage. Yet,

²³ *Koheles Rabbah* 1:32

when people encounter problems in their marriages, they may view it as an ‘obstacle’ that is preventing them, rather than as a normal problem that is part of every person’s life.

Another example of this idea is, concerning what *Chazal* say, that “All beginnings are hard”.²⁴ The reason for this is because there is a rule that the “*kelipah* (husk) comes before the *pri* (fruit).” Beginnings are always hard because all beginnings are a change, and change always causes difficulty. As a hint, Rosh HaShanah is from the word *shinuy*, change, and it is the *Yom HaDin*, the day of judgment, to show that all changes bring difficulty.

That is the way Hashem made the world. When beginnings are hard, this is nothing new, but simply the way that it’s supposed to be.

Everything Is Completed By An Opposing Force

In all that Hashem has made, there are opposing forces. Each thing in Creation is opposed by something, in a different way. Each thing is also completed by its opposite force. This is the meaning of *eizer k’negdo*, a “helpmate to oppose him”. Without being opposed by an opposite force, any created being would expand endlessly, and there would be no limitations or boundaries for the created being to stay in. This is detrimental for the created being. Therefore, each creation (and person) needs to be opposed by some other force, so that it is prevented from expanding too much, and in this way, it becomes balanced and completed, through its opposing force.

That is why whenever someone begins to do something, even if it is done with careful thought, it will always be difficult.

To understand this deeper, it is because all of the Creation is limited. Each thing has an end, and the end of each thing is essentially its limit. Since each end is contained in its beginning, the beginning is always limited and therefore difficult. The limits of each thing are at its beginning and end. Water needs to be contained or else it will flow out into all of the directions. The six directions of the world which move all over the place are therefore limited, and they cannot move endlessly without being stopped. This is called *tzimtzum*, constriction. Each thing is completed by its *tzimtzum*, its state of constriction, its limitations and bounds. The limitations of each thing in Creation acts as an opposing force which completes that which is being opposed.

When a person is prevented from continuing what he wants to do, he is being prevented by the limits of something which are inherently contained in it. If he is being stopped, it means he has reached the “limit” of this situation. The limit is already in place, and it isn’t anything new.

Therefore, obstacles in a person’s path should come as no surprise. For example, a person wants to do something and then something prevents him. Other people got in his way, and he may be tempted to think that they wronged him, because he knows that they have *bechirah* (free will) and therefore he thinks that he has been prevented due to others. Instead, he should view this situation with the understanding that the “limit” of this endeavor has been reached.

Each thing has its limits, which are already in place, and therefore one must understand that when he runs into obstacles, this is not a new limitation that has been created, but a limit that is already in place, by the very design of Creation. Therefore, whenever we are prevented from going further with something, we need to become aware that

²⁴ *Mechilta Shemos 19:5, cited in Rashi (ibid)*

we have encountered its limitation. The limitation in something is its very *havayah* (essence), for everything in Creation has a limit, and when we meet its limit, we have encountered its very essence as a creation.

Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth – The Root Cause of Encountering Obstacles

Now we will explain how the above concept can be used to repair **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which is when a person has a dominant nature of earth/laziness, followed by a burst of movement (fire), and soon after he is back in his state of earth/laziness.

Simply speaking, this kind of person becomes lazy after he has had a burst of movement. This would imply that there is now a dominance of earth/laziness that wasn't here until now. However, the true way to understand it is that it is not a 'new' appearance of earth – rather, it is that his original nature of earth has been awakened.

Therefore, whenever one encounters any 'obstacles' in his path that prevent him from accomplishing what he would like to do, he is not actually being prevented due to some outside factor, but because he has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which awakens his initial nature of earth/laziness. Although it is certainly true that there is some factor preventing him from doing what he wants to do, he only feels prevented because his dominant nature of earth has been activated. For this reason, the more that his earth dominates, the more he will find himself encountering more 'obstacles'! He is constantly getting 'prevented' from accomplishing, because his earth is easily awakened.

When a person has this nature (**earth-of-fire-of-earth**), he will find that he is always encountering more 'obstacles' in his path, and he may think that he is being prevented by some outside factor other than himself. He might fight and challenge everything that gets in his way, believing that he must overcome these road blocks. But when he doesn't understand that all of these 'obstacles' are a result of his own element of earth that dominates him, he will unknowingly invite many more obstacles into his life!

To illustrate this idea, the *Zohar* says that when a person connects himself to any trait of Hashem, that trait will become more attached to him. If one connects himself to the *middas hadin*, the attribute of judgment [i.e. by always judging others], then *din*/judgment will settle upon him, and if one connects himself more to the *middas harachamim* (the trait of mercy), then *rachamim*/mercy will settle upon him. **Whenever one connects himself to any 'outer' spiritual force, he is actually awakening that spiritual force from within him.** That is why when one connects himself to the concept of *din*/judgment, he awakens his own *middas hadin*.

On a similar note, whenever a person finds that he has encountered some obstacle that is preventing him from getting further, he has really encountered a limitation, and since all limitations are rooted in the element of earth (just as the earth places boundaries and limitations), the limitation is actually a result of his own element of earth that has been awakened.

A person with a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** has a dominant nature of earth, so whenever he begins to do something, he begins from a place of strong "earth" in himself, meaning, he is already somewhat limited as he begins his endeavor. Then his "fire" takes over and he will get a burst of movement, and he will try to get far in what he's doing, but since he has begun to act from his earth, his "earth" is soon awakened after his fire, and he finds himself encountering obstacles in his path.

He will think that the obstacles are coming from various external factors, and while those reasons may certainly be true, they are only the "branches", not the "root". The "root" reason why he was prevented is because, by his very nature, he is dominated by earth, which brings more 'limitations' upon him.

Therefore – as it was mentioned earlier – he will need to understand that the ‘obstacles’ he encounters are not coming from outside factors that are deterring him, but that they are coming from within him, from his nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**. Since he is mostly beginning from a place of earth in himself, his earth will stay where it is, keeping him in place, while his fire will also burst out at times and demand some movement. Subconsciously, his nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** is causing him to gravitate back towards his dominant nature, earth, which keeps him from moving forward.

Despair Can Also Come From Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth

When some people begin to do something and they don’t succeed at finishing, and they find that they can’t make any progress forward, they will react with despair, and they give up from finishing. But when a person has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, not only does he despair at achieving his goals, but he regrets ever starting in the first place, because his original nature of “earth” is easily awakened, and it makes him feel, subconsciously, that he shouldn’t have started at all. This is because the non-moving nature of earth keeps a person in his place.

Others will encounter obstacles but they don’t become full of despair just because they aren’t succeeding. They will persevere in spite of their obstacles, and it is either because they seek perfection, or because they seek purpose in their life. But when a person feels full of despair when he encounters something that challenges him, it can be because he has a dominant nature of earth which has been awakened. This is the case when a person has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which causes his earth to be easily awakened. After he has a burst of movement forward (fire), his nature of earth soon takes over, and he feels like giving up and that he never should have started. In other words, he is feeling despair. There can be many other reasons why a person despairs, but this is one of the main sources.

The simple reason for despair is because a person feels unsuccessful, and he develops what people call today as “low self-image”, and because he has a negative view of himself, he gives up and he stops what he’s doing. But there is also a deeper reason why he gives up. It can be because he has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which easily awakens his dominant nature of earth.

A person like this can easily relate to the statement of the Sages, “It is better for man not to have been born, than to be born.”²⁵ He wishes he could have remained in his fetal state, when he was totally constricted to the same place (a total state of earth). (There is also a higher and deeper use of this power, when a person desires to be in a state of integration with Hashem. But here we are speaking of the detrimental use of this power, which is when a person wishes he return to his fetal state and not do anything at all on this world). By his very *havayah* (the nature of his essence), he is always beginning from a constricted place in himself, his element of earth, and, subconsciously, he is always desiring to return to there, to his initial state of earth.

The Solution: When You Begin To Do Something, Do It Quickly

People can have a hard time with finishing something, as well as beginning something, or even when they are in the middle. This is an issue that we have spoken about previously, and there were several different solutions to that

²⁵ Erwin 13b

issue. Now we are speaking about a different issue, but related to the above: when a person's nature of earth is easily awakened, and he wishes that he didn't start doing anything to begin with.

The task here, for such a person, is not to fight against his challenges and obstacles as if they are some outside factor in his life getting in his way. He cannot fight the obstacles now that they are here. Instead, he will need to learn how to 'begin' his actions differently.

This is like the "exodus from Egypt", in the soul. In the exile of Egypt, we were ruled by Pharaoh (פרעה) who has the same letters as the word *ha'afar* (העפר), which means "the dirt." The implication is, that the exile in Egypt was a state of being dominated by a nature of "earth". It represents a personal enslavement to all that is associated with earthiness. When we left Egypt, we left it *b'chipazon*, "in haste" – we left it quickly, and this is a hint that in order to come out of the "earth", we need to leave it "quickly", by beginning to do things quickly.

This is the very idea behind the first *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch*: "Be strong like a lion to arise in the morning, to serve the Creator."²⁶ The beginning of our day needs to start with some quick action, because whenever we begin, we need to begin quickly, with alacrity (*zerizus*), as opposed to beginning with an earthy, slothful attitude. The *Poskim* clarify that a person shouldn't get out of bed too quickly, because this is dangerous to the spine, and only after a person has attained a bit of *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind) should he arise quickly. In this way, one begins his day from *zerizus*, quickly and enthusiastically – the very antidote to combat laziness.

The way we begin each day, when getting up in the morning, is the way that the rest of the day will look like as well. This is because there is a rule, "The body is dragged after the head."²⁷ The entire day becomes 'dragged' after the "head" of the day. If we begin the day with laziness, by getting out of bed without *zerizus*, then we will find ourselves gravitating back to laziness throughout the rest of the day as well. But if we begin the day with *zerizus*, we will find that we are doing things more energetically throughout the day.

Therefore, the advice for any person who easily falls back into his "earth" is: Whenever you begin to do something, do it quickly.

Practicing Quick Movement In The Beginning, Middle and End of the Day

Practically speaking, it is advisable to practice doing something quickly upon awakening. One can try jumping out of bed, or, if he finds it feasible, he can try to do a small dance (only if it will not disturb any other sleeping family members) as soon as he gets out of bed.

Of course, it is better if a person is able to immediately start elevating his thoughts as soon as he wakes up, when he excites himself from within, by thinking lofty thoughts that enlighten him. This is certainly better than simply jumping out of bed without any thinking at all. But most people in the morning are not able to have any lofty spiritual thoughts, and they are in a state of "*katnus mochin*" (small-mindedness), unable to enlighten their minds. But even in this state, when one does not feel enlightened, he still has the ability to simply arise quickly and jump out of bed.

In this way, one begins his day with quick movement. As explained, this needs to be done sensibly, and not too rapidly, as the *Poskim* explain that this should be done only after one has calmed his mind a bit, when he has some

²⁶ *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 1:1*

²⁷ *Eruvin 41a*

yishuv hadaas. But if one takes this too far and he spends too much time trying to gain presence of mind, he will stay in bed too long, and this will awaken his element of earth and he will become lazy. The power of *yishuv hadaas* must be used sensibly.)

In addition to this, throughout the day as well, a person should practice doing some quick movement, by doing something quickly, even if it is unnecessary. Even in the middle of the day, a person should try practicing a quick movement similar to how he arose very quickly in the morning. In this way, he trains his soul to constantly return to the power of beginning quickly.

A person should also practice some kind of quick movement even before going to sleep at night. The gain of this is that he is ending his day in the same way he began it – with quick movement – and this returns his soul to a place of quick movement, which combats his previous nature of falling back into his earth/laziness. This should also be done sensibly, because a person should not just fall into his bed quickly from exhaustion, for this will increase his laziness. Instead, a person should try doing something quick before getting into bed.

In Conclusion

When one practices all of the above – beginning the day with quick movement, practicing some quick movement during the day, and ending the day with a quick movement – one creates a flow of fast movement in the soul. This will also help many people who have difficulty with getting up in the morning.

In summation: Practice doing something quickly (1) When you begin the day, (2) In middle of the day, and (3) Right before going to sleep.

This is the very antithesis to **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, and it allows a person to move in a way to awaken more movement that is also more stable and balanced.

14 | *Loss of Excitement & The Solution*

Water-of-Fire-of-Earth

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about the element of earth, and the trait of laziness. Now we are up to discussing laziness that stems from **water-of-fire-of-earth**.

Earth makes a person feel heavy and non-moving. Fire causes a person to have a 'burst' of movement and go forward.

"Water-of-fire" is when water meets fire. When water meets fire, the water hisses and the fire sizzles. The fire becomes weakened from the water, and a clash ensues. When this happens, either the water will put out the fire, or the fire will overpower the water. If a person has a nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth**, this will mean that a clash between his water and fire will also awaken his dominant nature of earth.

A Cycle of Excitement, Exhaustion and Laziness

A person with a nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth** does not have any sound approach (*mehalech*) towards life. He has not yet given structure to his soul. Instead, he lives his life based on "explosions" (fire) of excitement, on anything exciting that comes his way which will motivate him and interest him, and he does not follow any kind of order, plan, or structure.

When a person knows how to use the element of earth properly, he could provide structure and order in his soul, and he can develop an actual approach towards the way he lives his life. But people with a nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth** do not have any kind of structure or order in their souls. They live based on excitement, which comes from the element of fire, and eventually, their 'fire' dies down – they lose their excitement after some time.

With a nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth**, a person will have excitement and soon after his "water" will 'cool off' his fire. He will begin to do something because he is excited, but later he becomes 'cooled off' from it. He may become doubtful about what he is doing (earth). He begins to do something and later he becomes skeptical about it, saying, "Who says this will succeed?" His excitement, his 'fire', becomes cooled, and he returns to his main nature of earth/laziness.

People like this will begin new projects, and eventually they will feel weak and drained from what they are doing, and they lose their energy for it. They feel like they are constantly going through the statement of the Sages, "All beginnings are difficult"²⁸, because they are always feeling drained of their energy when their fire/excitement weakens.

With a nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth**, not only does a person's water 'cool off' his fire/excitement, but it also awakens the dominant nature of earth in the person, which causes the person to become lazy. After becoming

²⁸ *Mechilta Shemos 19:5, cited in Rashi ibid*

excited, the person falls back into his dominant nature of earth, where he either becomes lazy or sad. Then he has regrets over whatever he started to do, thinking that he shouldn't have started something that wasn't going to last for him.

This is like the statement of the Sages that “The wicked are full of regrets.”²⁹ When one is always regretful over the past, this stems from his element of earth. What happens? He won't want to continue doing it anymore, because he regrets that he ever started it, so he stops doing it altogether. Even if he continues, anything he does will be with a sense of heaviness. His actions will feel heavier upon him, as if they are one big load upon him that he'd rather not have.

Since this person has a dominant nature of earth, his nature is that he doesn't move that much, but his fire causes him at times to also move a lot, and soon after his dominant nature of earth takes over, so he returns to non-movement. People with a nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth** will become excited, and then lose excitement after some time, and they become lethargic again, repeating the cycle. They become more and more lethargic in what they are doing because they are feeling heavier inside, since they feel regretful that they started it in the first place.

A person may become excited about his job, or about some other project he's involved with, or about a new *shidduch* that he is pursuing, and soon after he loses his excitement and he is back to his unexcited state, where he becomes lethargic again. People become excited and then they become regretful of what they began to become interested in, and then they feel lethargic about it. The more excited a person was, the more lethargic he will be when he loses the excitement, and this will awaken laziness and sadness.

People like this will live based on different periods of their life, “*tekufos*”. They have exciting times of their life, and when their excitement wanes, they become totally lethargic. They become very inspired and excited at first, but they fall back into their ‘earth’ afterwards, with a hard fall. And they stay this way their whole life.

This is not a stable way to live. People like this become so ‘fired up’ when they are excited that they don't see things clearly and they can't put things into proper perspective. Their element of water also becomes imbalanced due to their strong fire, and the clash between their water and fire causes their earth to strengthen and becomes too dominant. They simply don't live in a stable manner. The entire structure in their soul is unstable, and their entire way of living is simply not a way to live. It results in a dominance of earth/laziness, but that is just the result of the issue. The real issue here is that the person's entire way of living is faulty to begin with.

Grasping The Idea of Limitations

Whenever one is in a state of excitement, his fire is very active and it may not dominate him, if his nature is **water-of-fire-of-earth**. He is excited about something he deems important, such as an exciting *shidduch* he is pursuing. But a person needs to understand that everything has its proper time and limitations, and therefore, he must learn to view the limits of what he is excited about.

To illustrate the idea, we know that every person is limited. Everyone leaves the world at some point. A person generally will be married to one spouse, and sometimes people remarry, but not more than that. There is a limitation to our life and marriage. When we enter into something, we may not be aware of the limitations involved. But we need to erect “boundaries” for ourselves, by being aware of the limitations involved in something. When a

²⁹ *Nedarim 9b*

person's fire is very active, he is excited and he cannot see any boundaries then. That is when he needs to make use of the element of earth, which places boundaries on something.

This is the holy use of the element of earth: placing boundaries, so that we are aware of the limitations of each thing. Boundaries and limitations are the very essence of the element of earth. Awareness of proper and appropriate limitations is also the very antithesis to the trait of laziness. Therefore, one should understand, on his own level, the bounds and limitations of any endeavor that he is entering. He should always think about the limitations of each thing. When one regularly gets used to thinking this way, he won't be as reactive when he's excited, because just thinking about limitations already controls his excitement and limits it.

This kind of thinking must be done before one is actually excited, and not while one is actually excited, because it is much more difficult to learn how to gain control over oneself while being excited about something. The Sages state that during the time that the *yetzer hora* is dominant, the *yetzer tov* doesn't have any power.³⁰ Instead, a person needs to live a life of always thinking about the bounds and limitations of something. Of course, one cannot have perfect awareness of the limitations of each thing, but he can try to come closer to this concept as much as possible.

Examples of Grasping Limitations

Here are some examples.

- 1) A person joins a new job. He should think: "Will I be here forever? For how many years will I be here? Three or four years? How long do people work at this job for?" This is especially the case in today's times, where people are often switching their jobs, in stark contrast of previous times, when people usually kept the same job their whole life. A person needs to think, before starting the job: "What can happen here? What is likely to happen, and what is not so likely to happen? What are the good parts, and what are the not-so-good parts here? How many years do most people stay in such a job?"

Although one cannot predict what will happen, this type of thinking provides a person some kind of picture of limitations and bounds. No one can be exact when it comes to this, but the point of this thinking is to get used to the idea of limitations.

- 2) The above example was a bit extreme, but the following is easier to relate to. A person is sitting in the *succah* on Succos, and he finds himself enjoying it very much. He may wish it could be like this the whole year. But before entering the *succah*, he should know that it will only last for seven days. He will need to leave it when Yom Tov is over. He must know that there are limitations to this reality, even though he has pleasure in it and it is a precious *mitzvah* to him. This helps a person develop the soul's power of placing boundaries.
- 3) Another example: If a person has a family member who is ill, he should think of how long it can last for. Sometimes it is not clear, but he should try to think of the average time span.

³⁰ *Nedarim 32a*

- 4) Another example is when a person wishes that a certain thing or a certain relationship would be forever. One must tell himself that nothing is forever, and that everything is limited.
- 5) The weekly *parshah* is only this week, and then it is gone, until a year later.
- 6) Children should be taught that the boys in his grade will not be with him forever.
- 7) When one enters Chanukah, he should be aware that it will only last for 8 days, and then it is over.

The point of all these examples is that one should always be aware of the limitations of the situation he is in. This kind of thinking is not just an idea, but an actual way to live life.

The Two Extremes - Always Feeling Limited vs. No Limitations

In this lesson, we are describing the nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth**, which causes a person to undergo a cycle of excitement, exhaustion, and loss of excitement, where a person finds it difficult to place limitations on his excitement. Others have the opposite problem than this: they will always think of the limitations involved in something. They are skeptical about everything because they will immediately think of what can go wrong here, how they are limited, and what can prevent them. They take the concept of limitations too far. What they really need is to experience more freedom from limitations. They need to learn how to take more risks.

In this lesson we are discussing an opposite problem than this: when a person doesn't know how to place limits on what he's excited about. His work in repairing this nature is to become aware of the idea of limitations.

This idea, of always being aware of the limitations and bounds of each thing, should not be taken to an extreme level, or else a person places himself into an inner state of "Egypt" - he becomes too confined, as if he is exiled, by placing too many boundaries on himself (the word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, from the word *meitzar*, "narrow confine"). Nor should a person always try to go from limitations. There must be a balance, so that one is aware of limitations yet he isn't becoming too confined by them, and so that he is also able to go free from limitations, by being able to take risks, but not to an extreme.

A more balanced way of becoming aware of limitations is, that whenever a person begins to pursue anything out of excitement, he should place some kind of limit on this excitement, such as by making sure to always act "on condition" that he can only continue if *Moshiach* doesn't come. One should enter into any endeavor "on condition" that he can only continue it if *Moshiach* isn't going to come in the middle. With this kind of thinking, one becomes aware that whatever he is doing is limited.

Repairing Water-of-Fire-of-Earth – Through Being Aware of Limitations

When a person feels lazy and he is finding it difficult to begin any activity, part of the difficulty is because he doesn't see the limitations of what he is doing. He can feel overwhelmed already before he starts, because he has no idea when the activity will end, so he avoids beginning. Therefore, one should become aware of the limitations of something, and this will make the task feel less daunting to begin.

On a specific level, this repairs laziness, but on a more general level, it also provides order (*seder*) for the soul. In this way, a person gains the power of *seder* in his soul. It places bounds on his fire, by preventing it from exploding outward. Without any limitations, fire has no restraint. By becoming aware of limitations, a person puts some restraint on his fire, so that it doesn't explode outward as much, and even when it does, it will be more restrained and controlled.

In the beginning of this lesson we explained that **water-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul is when one's water is 'cooling off' his fire, meaning that his excitement wanes. But there is a different way to 'cool off' fire, which is more balanced: by becoming aware of the bounds and limitations of something, a person can 'cool off' his enthusiasm so that he doesn't go overboard with it, and in this way, he saves himself from unexpected disappointments, because he knows that he can expect limitations on his excitement.

Here is an example of what it means to be aware of bounds and limitations, and the lack thereof. Recently I knew of a couple that unfortunately got divorced. It was a complex situation, and it is not possible to fully present all of the factors that led to the divorce, but one thing was certain. The two sides did not do any research about the other side. They went blindly into it, without bothering to ask any important questions, which are considered normal to ask about, when looking for a *shidduch*. The girl's mother was asked why she didn't want to find out information about the other side. She said, "By us, the custom is that we don't try to find out information about the other side. Because as soon as we hear anything negative, we would want to break the *shidduch*. We don't want that to happen, so we don't try to find out anything." The boy and girl got married, serious problems were discovered, and eventually they got divorced.

A person needs to be realistic and do his research, and he must find out what he has to find out. When a person is not prepared to hear or find out anything important about what is entering into, this means that he isn't prepared to place any boundaries on the situation. This is careless and irresponsible, because a person must be able to set limits when it comes to deciding who he will marry, and he must find out what he needs to, and to be prepared to step back if he finds out anything alarming. If a person cannot do this, it means he doesn't want to deal with any limitations, and he prefers to run away from limitations rather than deal with them.

In Summary and In Conclusion

Thus, in order to repair the nature of **water-of-fire-of-earth**, one needs to think before entering into an endeavor and do some research about it, to try to think of the reality that it will entail, to become aware of any of the limitations involved, and to be prepared to acknowledge those limits and take a step back when he must. This weakens the excitable nature of his fire, so that it doesn't completely overtake him.

There are many different applications of **water-of-fire-of-earth**, and here we have honed in on just one of them. We have explained here how a person can have a repaired kind of **water-of-fire-of-earth**: by thinking and becoming aware of the bounds and limitations of a situation, from the start. This prevents one's fire from 'bursting out' too much, creating a balance between the clashing elements of the water-of-fire that is within **water-of-fire-of-earth**.

15 | *Escape*

Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about the element of earth and its trait of laziness. In this lesson we will discuss laziness that comes from **wind-of-fire-of-earth**.

The element of earth is the root of laziness, which comes from the “heaviness” of earth. The element of fire will burst out, as is the nature of fire, and it contradicts the element of earth.

“Fire-of-earth” is when the fire bursts out more intensely, due to being stifled by the element of earth. The earth stifles the fire and restrains it too much, and eventually, the fire bursts out with intensity.

How does a person react to the contradicting natures of his fire and earth? There are two possibilities. Either a person will choose to deal with the contradiction, as explained in previous chapters. Or, he will try to “run away” from the contradiction and try to escape it. This is the impaired nature of **wind-of-fire-of-earth**.

Although it is not really possible to “run away” from a contradictory nature in oneself, a person will try to run away anyway. One is able to temporarily ‘take his mind off’ his problems (this is called *hesech hadaas*, lit. “removal of the mind”), but this of course does not mean that he can actually run away from the problems.

Running Away

Part of ‘running away’ from issues is that a person finds a place of “escape” so that he can take his mind off what bothers him. A person might ‘run away’ to various actions, emotions, conversations, thoughts, or desires, so that he can become engaged in something else that will take his mind off things. [This lesson will focus on how a person escapes into various actions].

Actions of Escape

There are three kinds of actions a person might “run away” to, in order to take his mind off things: (1) Actions that are *mitzvos*, (2) Actions that are permissible to do, but not *mitzvos*, such as things we need to take care of, (3) Actions of sin (G-d forbid).

In any case, whenever a person runs away into any action that will take his mind off things, it is as if he is running away into a different world. A person will “escape” into the “world” of action so that he can take his mind off the issues caused by his inner contradiction of fire-of-earth, so that he calm himself a bit, at least temporarily.

Escaping Into Speech

Or, as an alternative means of “escape”, a person might run away into the world of “speech”. People can chat a lot, and it is not always because they have a dominant element of wind (the root of speech), but because they are afraid of being quiet, since the quiet causes them to think more inward, which they don’t want to do. Their talking is a way for them to take their mind off important things.

Escaping Into Thought

A person might also escape into the world of thought. A person might be thinking deeply of Torah thoughts all day, but it’s not always because he loves the Torah. It may be because he’s running away from his problems, into a world of thought, and not because he’s interested in the words of Torah. He may become a more intellectual kind of person, but he’s just running away from his issues, under the guise of his Torah learning. He doesn’t have a true yearning for Torah – it is just that he’s trying to run away from something and find a place of “escape”.

Escaping Into Action: When a Person Chooses Stressful Activities, In Order To Run Away From His Own Life

Most people, when “escaping”, will “escape” into the world of action. What happens in the process? They don’t find an activity or job that’s good for them, but anything that will take their mind off their problems. It’s better than doing nothing, but they are still not involved in actions that are suited for their nature. They do this so that they can attain some feeling of calm. But, not only don’t they become calmer, they only become more stressed. This is because they were being extreme in their pursuit to get away from their issues, and they ran to any place of escape that would make them feel better. They can’t deal with their inner contradictions, so they run away into actions that are not suitable for them. They “run away” constantly from their issues – by running away from themselves - and this is how they live. Their life becomes a situation of always running away from themselves.

In this way, a person “escapes” to a different world, and in an extreme way. He also won’t get pleasure from what he’s doing. He might seek stressful kinds of jobs, even though it’s not suitable for him, because he just wants to get away from his issues and take his mind off his problems.

When a person wants to run away from himself, so he becomes a taxi driver, for example, he may enjoy all of the action involved, as well as the social aspect of this job, always meeting new people and conversing with them. But not all taxi drivers enjoy their job. It is stressful. People do not always show up on time when they are supposed to be there. He has to deal with a lot of unpleasant phone calls, with a lot of yelling and screaming. He has to deal with all kinds of people with difficult personalities, people who do not act that kindly, and people who are self-absorbed and uncommunicative because they are busy on their smartphones. Why did the taxi driver choose this job, if he knows that it’s so stressful for him? It can only be because he wanted to choose an activity that will keep him busy all day, so that he can run away from his own life and from his own self.

Most people are not taxi drivers, but they still live in a similar way, by subconsciously ‘running away’ all day from themselves. Throughout the day, a person will suddenly become ‘reminded’ of different errands he needs to take care of, either real or imagined. The deeper reason for this is because people are really running away from their own

selves all the time. They will usually imagine that they need to take care of something they forgot to do, and then they find themselves suddenly being ‘reminded’ that they need to go take care of a certain errand.

Where are these ‘reminders’ coming from? Reminders come from the faculty of memory, which is usually coming from one’s imagination. While there are some people who have a deeper kind of memory, which is coming from a deep imprint on their *neshamah*, most people are not remembering things from this deep place in themselves, and instead, their memories are sourced in their imagination. People find themselves suddenly ‘remembering’ throughout the day of different things that they have to take care of, but it’s really a means of running away from oneself! This does not only happen to a few people. There are a large number of cases. This is all the more so when a person doesn’t really need to take care of something, and it is only because he imagines that he needs to.

Adam’s Sin - Running Away From Reality

Before the sin, Adam lived above the realm of action. It was a state of Shabbos, a spiritual state, where there was no need for physical activity. When Adam was cursed with the need to earn livelihood, this really meant that he now become ‘demoted’ into the realm of action, our current dimension. Thus, the entire concept of action is all a result of Adam’s sin. [See footnote³¹]. Before the sin, man lived on a higher level, where was no need for action, and as a result of the sin, we now live in the world of action, where action is necessary. (Ever since then, speech, which comes from a higher realm than action, has also become part of the realm of action. Now speech is always about getting something done.)

Whenever a person finds himself facing a difficulty, and he chooses to deal with it rather than run away from it, he is engaging in repairing the sin of Adam. But if a person ‘runs away’ from difficulty by escaping into the world of action – any activity or job that will get him to take his mind off his problems, where he further avoids dealing with his issues - he is repeating the sin of Adam, on his own level.

It seems that when Adam was told by Hashem to leave Gan Eden, it was a result of his sin of eating from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) and because he hid from Hashem and didn’t confess his sin. But the truth is that as soon as Adam chose to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*, this was already considered to be an expulsion from Gan Eden. How? By choosing to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*, he was trying to escape the reality that Hashem had commanded him with, which was to only eat from the *Eitz HaChaim* and not from the *Eitz HaDaas*. Therefore, from a deeper perspective, Hashem didn’t send him out from Gan Eden – rather, Adam had already sent himself out, for by choosing to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*, he was choosing to run away from all that Hashem had commanded him with. This was the depth of Adam’s sin.

And later, when Adam hid from Hashem, it was because he was once again trying to hide from the reality and escape from it. From the fact that Adam hid only after the sin, we learn that the entire idea of hiding is a result of sin. The sin caused a person to want to escape from everything – from reality, from one’s life, from oneself. Adam heard Hashem’s voice and he hid – he heard the reality, and he ran away from it. The prophet Yonah also hid from Hashem’s voice, by running away to the city of Tarshish, because he did not want to receive a dire prophecy from Hashem. This was also an example of running away from reality.

³¹ There are four realms of existence, in order of lowest level to highest level: (1) *Asiyah*\Action, which corresponds to the realm of action. (2) *Yetzirah*\Formation, which corresponds to the *middos*\character traits. (3) *Briyah*\Creation, which corresponds to thought. (4) *Atzilus*\Emanation, which corresponds to closeness with the Creator.

What caused man to want to run away from reality? Before Adam was tempted with the sin, he had the power of *daas*, an integrated and heightened awareness of Hashem. As soon as Adam and Chavah were tempted by the Serpent, the evil “*daas* of the Serpent” entered them³² and corrupted their pure thinking. It was the “*daas* of the Serpent” which they listened to, which convinced them to run away from the reality, to run away from their higher level of existence and into a lower level of existence, the world of action. It convinced them to run away from their higher level of perception to a different kind of perception that altered their thinking.

After listening to the Serpent, man learned how to run away from reality and pursue whatever he feels a pull towards. Before the sin, man’s power of *bechirah* (free will) was on a higher level, when the entire choice given to man was to choose to be on the level of choosing in the first place. After the sin, the power of free will exists on a lower level. Now man has to choose between his own will, which pursues various desires of This World, versus doing the will of Hashem.

This is all the more so in our times, when people today are choosing to show anything and everything to everyone [through means of social media], without any sense of shame. The depth of this is because in today’s times, the power of *bechirah* given to man is that he must choose either between doing whatever he wants, or to do Hashem’s will.

It is said that Adam’s mistake was that he “chose to choose”. Instead of remaining on a level where he didn’t have to choose between his own will and Hashem’s, he chose to be on the level of *bechirah*, meaning that he chose to run away from doing only Hashem’s will, and now he had to choose between doing his own will versus following Hashem’s will.

In terms that apply to us, this is when a person runs away from the entire concept of *bechirah* altogether. Adam’s initial test was either to live totally in the presence of Hashem, where he would not even think of doing anything against the will of Hashem, or to choose to run away from this reality and instead live in a different reality, where evil was possible. This was a very subtle kind of test than what we are faced with. Adam’s test included two aspects: Choosing to run away in the first place, and where to run to. Today, most people are not on the level of rectifying the first mistake of Adam. Instead, most people today are dealing with the second challenge of Adam: Now that they have run away from living solely in Hashem’s presence, their test is about choosing to avoid running away into places that are improper and unbecoming.

Running Away Into One’s “Below Free Will” Area

Rav Dessler wrote about the concept of *nekudas habechirah*, the point of the free will – and that every person contains three parts:

- 1) The area of one’s free will [where it within his capability to choose between good and evil, and he is responsible for his choice],
- 2) The area above one’s free will [a level which he cannot naturally attain, and he is not held accountable if he doesn’t reach it],
- 3) The area below one’s free will [the areas in which it is expected him to refrain from sinning, because it is natural for him to refrain from sinning in these areas].

³² *Beraishis Rabbah* 21:4

In spite of the fact that a person naturally will not sin in the areas that are below his point of free will, people today are choosing to ‘run away’ into this point (below the free will). When a person lives at this level, he will not be able to deal with contradictory natures in his soul, when he finds them unpleasant to acknowledge and accept.

(There is also a higher use of the power to ‘run away’: when a person “runs away” to seek refuge with Hashem, as in the verse, *“In the shadow of Your wings, they take shelter.”* But most of the time, a person misuses the power to “run away”, and when he chooses to escape anything unpleasant, he usually runs away into an unsavory place, so long as it enables him to run away from dealing with the issues in his soul.)

When a person is using the nature of impaired **wind-of-fire-of-earth**, a person ‘runs away’ into various movements (wind) or activity, as a result of the contradictory forces of fire-of-earth in himself. He does this so that he can calm himself from the unpleasant discovery of contradicting forces in his soul. The person simply tries to ‘escape’ from his inner contradictions, by engaging himself in various movements that will get him to take his mind off the issues in his soul.

Work was a curse given to mankind, as a result of the sin. The *Mesillas Yescharim* explained that ever since the sin, man is given the “penalty” of having to work for a living, in order to rectify the sin. Yet, in spite of this, people are choosing all the time to run away from their life, by pursuing jobs that aren’t really suitable for them to work in. Clearly, when a person chooses to work at a job that isn’t for him, it’s rooted in the desire for money, and sometimes it is also a desire for prestige and honor, but there is also another reason why a person is choosing such a job: A person doesn’t realize that he is being motivated by a desire to run away from himself.

The Solution: Examining Our Motivations

In order to repair this part of human nature which seeks to run away from reality, a person needs to contemplate and discover this part of himself that seeks to run away from reality into the world of action. The problem of running away is not only limited to escaping into action – a person might also escape into various desires, thoughts, memories, emotions, or conversations. Here we have mainly spoken about how people run away into the world of action, because that is where most people run to, as a result of the sin of Adam (who ran away from reality by escaping into the world of action).

How can one stop this habit of running away into actions? One needs to get used to examining his motivations. He should wonder why he is doing something now: “Why am I really doing this? Is it because of the reason I think it is, or is it perhaps because I’m trying to escape and run away from something?”

When a person gets up in the morning, he should ask himself, “Why did I get up this morning?” If he has a job, did he get up in the morning only because he doesn’t want to get fired from his job? Why does a person *daven* – is it because if not, he will get punished by Hashem? Or is it because he doesn’t want his children to think poorly of him? If he looks deeply into his motivations, he might discover that he got up because he just wanted to have his cup of coffee in the morning...

These are just some examples of taking apart one’s actions and seeing one’s motivations. Through regularly getting used to this kind of thinking, one will discover that he does things because he’s really trying to run away from his inner world.

The *Gemara* says that most people are not on the level of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his colleagues, who separated from the world in order to be entirely devoted to learning Torah. Therefore, realistically speaking, most

people do need to be involved in the world of action. But they often do so by “running away” into the world of action, as a form of escaping, from their inner world. People are simply running away from themselves!

When one examines and discovers his motivations in what he does, he gets deeper and deeper, until he gets to the real reason - he did it so he could run away from himself! The deeper a person gets into himself, by analyzing his motivations in what he does, he discovers more and more that he is doing things in order to run away from the inner contradictions in his nature, which he would rather not think about.

Each person has his own inner contradictions, but there is also a general inner contradiction which all of us are born with, and it is the main inner contradiction that we run away from: the contradiction between our body (*guf*) and our *neshamah* (soul). We were all once souls that came from Heaven, where our sole desire was to do Hashem’s will, and when our soul came onto This World, it becomes joined with a physical body, which is pulled toward its desires. We live a contradictory existence of body and soul. Usually, it is our body which is dominating our soul, unless we have uprooted this perception. Instead of dealing with this very great contradiction in our life, most people choose to run away from it, rather than deal with it.

Repairing Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth: Uncovering Our “Higher Free Will”

After one becomes aware of how he runs away from his inner contradictions, he can then reach the very root of his *bechirah* (free will), the higher use of our *bechirah*, where he once can ‘choose’ to live totally in Hashem’s presence, and be above “choosing” altogether.³³ Then he can truly “escape” all of the ruination that has entered into existence ever since the first sin.

This enables a person to touch upon the repaired element of wind in the soul, the very air which Hashem breathed into man. This wind is the *ruach chaim*, the “breath of life”, and it is synonymous with man’s very soul, the “*ruach Elokim*”, the “spirit of G-d” which returns to Hashem after death. When one accesses this repaired element of wind in the soul, he can be in a state of living entirely in the presence of Hashem. This repaired “wind” is the true place for the soul to “escape” to, and it repairs the **wind-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul.

³³ Editor’s Note: Refer to *Reaching Your Essence. 012. Havayah – Beyond Choosing*

16 | *Lethargy & The Solution*

Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth: Laziness From Lack of Vitality

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will conclude in this lesson about the element of earth and its trait of laziness. We will now examine laziness that comes from **fire-of-fire-of-earth**.

As explained in the previous lessons, the element of earth is the root of the nature of heaviness, which prevents a person from moving. The element of fire jumps out of its place, and in the soul, it enables a person to expand past where he was. **Fire-of-earth** is when earth and fire collide and oppose each other, where the “fire” bursts out with greater intensity after it has been stifled by the non-moving nature of earth.

Fire-of-fire-of-earth is when the “dry” natures of both fire and earth combine, forming a “dryness” that is more total. Although fire is a hot element and earth is cold, their common denominator is that they are both dry elements. Therefore, the dryness of earth and fire are able to combine with each other (forming a more total level of dryness).

When a Person Becomes ‘Dried Out’

In this lesson, we will learn about the laziness that comes from **fire-of-fire-of-earth**, which is a kind of laziness that comes from becoming totally “dried up” in the soul. We find that the more inner vitality (*chiyus*) a person has, the less he will become ‘dried up’ in his soul, and in contrast, the less inner vitality a person has, the ‘drier’ he will become in his soul. When a person is lacking in *chiyus*, he will become lazy.

The element of water is moist, while the element of earth is dry. When a person feels pleasure (water) in what he is doing, he feels inwardly alive about it, he will feel more motivated, and he will move more. But when a person doesn't feel pleasure in what he does, he is ‘dry’ about it, his motivation ‘dries up’, and he becomes lazy and apathetic in his actions.

In many cases, laziness is coming from the dryness of the element of earth. With fire-of-earth, the two dry elements meet other and the dryness becomes more total. But there is a difference between the dryness of earth and fire. Earth is dry by its very nature, whereas fire dries out other elements. In terms that apply to us: Either a person doesn't have sufficient *chiyus* to begin with, or, he used to have *chiyus*, but he has become dried out.

When a person is doing anything that is constructive, he will generally have more *chiyus* when he does it, and if he is doing something detrimental, he usually has less *chiyus* from it (and if he does get *chiyus* from it, it is only imagined *chiyus*). With a nature of fire-of-earth, though, a person's dominant nature is earth, so he is generally unmoving, and when his fire bursts out, the earth still dominates the fire somewhat, and this doesn't allow the fire to move in a balanced way. As a result, the person's behavior is negatively affected. The person becomes ‘dried out’ from this imbalanced burst of fire, and the negative cycle is repeated.

Additionally, the dry nature of earth causes even more ‘dryness’ in the soul after the person has acted upon his fire. This explains why there are some people who don’t enjoy what they do to begin with, while others begin to do something with enjoyment but later they lose their enjoyment in it. The second kind of person has a nature of **fire-of-fire-of-earth** – he becomes very ‘dried out’ after he has acted upon his intense fire.

When “Chiyus” (Inner Vitality) Is Missing From Torah Learning and Mitzvah Observance

When a person does the *mitzvos* or when he learns Torah, he is able to do so with pleasure in it. But there are people who will do *mitzvos* and they don’t have pleasure in it, and there are people who regularly learn Torah but they don’t have any pleasure in it.

When it comes to learning Torah, there are different levels of pleasure in it. There is intellectual enjoyment in it, which gives pleasures to the mind, and there is also a more spiritual kind of pleasure in Torah learning: to feel the sweetness in learning Torah. But there are people who regularly learn Torah and they still have no pleasure in learning it. They don’t have *chiyus* (vitality) in it. After they finish learning, they become even more ‘dried out’, from the lack of *chiyus*. A person may feel intellectually connected to his Torah learning, because his mind can revel in the wondrous wisdom of the Torah and in the analytical aspects of the *Gemara*, but inwardly, he may not feel connected to it, in his soul.

A person may perform all of the *mitzvos* with meticulous observance, but he can find himself constantly doubting or regretting what he did. He doesn’t have a pleasure in doing the *mitzvos* – instead, he always feels doubtful about what he did. Although he understands intellectually the importance of the *mitzvos*, he doesn’t feel connected in his heart, to the *mitzvos*. This resembles the statement, “The wicked are full of regrets.”³⁴ A person is full of regrets, which are doubts about what he does, when he lacks pleasure and inner vitality in what he does.

Because he is somewhat apathetic about what he does, this attitude slowly ‘dries out’ his soul, as he continues to perform the *mitzvos*. It is really stemming from the lack of *chiyus* in his soul, which causes him to ‘dry himself out’, in the form of doubting everything he does. He begins to act from a ‘dry’ place in himself, and with the more he continues to act, he becomes even more ‘dried out’, as a result of performing apathetically. This is **fire-of-fire-of-earth**.

There is a fundamental difference between the way the element of wind moves, with the way the element of fire moves. A person may perform work in the heat and ‘work up a sweat’, yet this doesn’t dry him out, because he is using the element of wind, which is a moist [vitality-giving] element. When a person moves by using his element of fire, this is an intense burst of movement, but the person does not feel energetic about what he does. Although he is acting out of excitement, he is not actually feeling more ‘alive’ inside from his progress. So he will be excited, but that still doesn’t mean he is getting *chiyus* from what he does. It is because his ‘fire’ is drying him out.

If a person is more goal-oriented – for example, if he is trying to get to a certain goal and purpose in his Torah learning - then it will not bother him that much if he isn’t getting *taanug*/pleasure or *chiyus* (inner vitality) throughout every step of the way in his Torah learning. But if a person isn’t that goal-oriented, and he is acting out of fire, then it will depend on the following:

- 1) If his nature is **water-of-fire**, he will be able to find pleasure in his progress, even if he is far from his goal.

- 2) If his nature is more **fire-of-earth**, there will be an ongoing contradiction between his earth (non-movement) and his fire (intense movement). He will always begin his Torah learning and *mitzvos* performance from a ‘dry’ place in himself. He will have no *chiyus* to begin with, and later he finds himself having doubts and regrets over the fact that he even began.

The Total Laziness That Results From An Absence of Chiyus

This is the laziness that results from **fire-of-fire-of-earth**: the person acts from a ‘dry’ place in himself, and this only dries him out even more – and at some point, it turns into laziness. A person like this lives with no *chiyus* - no inner vitality - in his life. Physically he is alive, and he is moving, but it’s as if he is dead inside. Deep down, his soul is sorely lacking in vitality.

At some point, this absence of ‘feeling alive inside’ increases a person’s laziness, and eventually, when things continue like this, it can make him become totally lazy. When **fire-of-fire-of-earth** dominates, the dryness of earth and fire meet and combine with each other to form total “dryness” in the soul, which causes a person to become ‘dried up’ in himself and to lack pleasure and vitality in what he does.

Three Main Categories of Laziness

The laziness that comes from **fire-of-fire-of-earth** does not stem from the actual trait of laziness itself, but from a lack of inner vitality. The problem here is that the person lacks pleasure in his basic movements. He isn’t getting pleasure from any of his movements, because if he would, it would infuse him with enthusiasm.

In previous lessons, we have explained that laziness usually stems from an inner feeling of “heaviness” – the person feels “heavy” inside himself, and that is why he acts lazy. A person may be physically heavy, but if he has inner vitality, he can still move quickly and he doesn’t get lazy. But if a person has “inner” heaviness – if he feels “heavy” and weighed down, in his soul – then this will make him lazy. Some people are born with a nature to be inwardly heavy, in their *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul).

When a person feels heavy, either this is coming from the body (being overweight), or it is coming from his “animal” soul (lethargy). But here we are talking about a third source for heaviness: a lack of inner vitality, which increases a feeling of heaviness coming from the soul. That is **fire-of-fire-of-earth**: it adds heaviness onto the heaviness that’s already there.

Becoming Lethargic In Old Age

The laziness that results from **fire-of-fire-of-earth** causes a general imbalance in a person’s movements, leading a person into an extreme state of lethargy.

For example, a person may have been very active when he was younger, and he was involved in productive activities, and when he gets older, he can’t be as active, and he moves less, and he also moves slower. But in others, this will manifest in a more extreme way: they simply lose their drive for life when they get older.

This is especially the case if they didn't learn Torah in their younger years. If a person lived a materialistic kind of life, if he was very ambitious his whole life about attaining worldly financial achievements, and his main goal of life was to receive his pension when he retires, and the like - such a person will feel like he has nothing else to live for when he gets older. He does not possess any real *chiyus* in his life. As a result, there is a feeling of 'heaviness' that develops in his soul, causing him to become slow-moving and lethargic.

When people like this enter old age, they feel that there is nothing to live for. Physically, they can be 100% in shape, and all of the doctor visits and blood tests show that they are perfectly healthy. But on their inside, in their souls, they are dead. They feel unneeded, because their children don't really need them anymore and have moved on with their own lives, busy with their own families now. They find no compelling reason to get out of bed in the morning. They become lethargic, not because their element of earth has gotten heavier on them, but because they lack *chiyus* in their life. And their *chiyus* continues to be drained from them with the more that they perform, increasing the negative cycle of the lethargy.

Additionally, if a person is also physically heavy, he will feel even more lethargic. The combination of his physical and inner heaviness will produce a kind of lethargy/laziness that is total. 'Heaviness' comes from the element of earth, and there can also be inner 'heaviness'. From **fire-of-fire-of-earth**, there is an additional kind of heaviness, of not feeling satisfied (*sippuk*) in what one does, which adds to the feeling of heaviness that is already there.

Repairing Lethargy (Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth) and Laziness In General

As mentioned in previous lessons, much of the solutions that we are presenting in these lessons are not only a solution for the specific issue discussed in the particular lesson, but they can also be used to solve other issues. The concept we will now explain is not only a solution for laziness that comes from **fire-of-fire-of-earth**, but a solution for laziness in general. We are mentioning it though with regards to how we repair **fire-of-fire-of-earth**, because it is more effective in dealing with this particular kind of laziness.

Identifying Your Basic Sources of Chiyus (Vitality)

A person has two parts of his life: his physical side of life, and the soul part of his life. One must always clarify what gives him personal *chiyus*: "What revitalizes me?" Getting more specific, a person needs to know: "What gives vitality to my physical body? What gives vitality to the 'animal' part of my soul³⁵, and what gives vitality to the more spiritual parts of my soul?"

We are not talking about just the needs of the physical body alone, but also the needs of movement for the body. Some people feel calmed when they sit in a certain position, others feel calmed when they run, and others feel calmed when they lie down. Others feel calmed when they eat certain 'comfort foods', and others feel calmed by eating slowly and calmly. We know that the physical body is revitalized from relaxation, rest, eating, and other things. One must know what gives him this basic level of comfort and relaxation.

The "animal soul", the *nefesh habehaimis*, gets vitality from various physical desires, including desires that are called "the impurity (*zuhama*) of the Serpent."³⁶ Although these desires are not holy, a person still enjoys them, and

³⁵ *nefesh habehaimis* (the animal soul) – the lower level of the soul, which includes basic physical and emotional needs.

³⁶ Explained extensively in *sefer Tanya*

this inevitable due to our current state, in which we are affected by the “impurity of the Serpent”. Not everyone will want to admit to it, but a person still gets some degree of *chiyus* from these base desires. One needs to acknowledge that he does have enjoyment from these base physical desires, so one should not deny that he enjoys certain physical pleasures. He must know which particular physical desires give him this basic kind of ‘feeling more alive.’

Yet, although this is a basic level of *chiyus*, many people are not aware where they get basic *chiyus* from. Instead, they live their whole life without knowing what gives them *chiyus*, and they suffer from this. To comfort themselves, they may convince themselves that they are “accepting suffering with love”.... but this is just ignorance.

Getting Spiritual Vitality

Above the “animal” level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*) are the more spiritual parts of the soul: the *nefesh Elohis* (G-dly soul), the *Ruach*, the *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*. In this lesson, we can’t go into detail here about those higher parts of the soul³⁷, but in general, a person must know how to give vitality to each of these parts of the soul.

One must know where he consciously gets *chiyus/vitality* from – he must be aware of the *chiyus*, when he is getting it. To give an idea of what we mean, we know that “the Torah is our life” - learning Torah provides a person with spiritual energy, with *chiyus* - and one must be aware if he is indeed getting *chiyus* from Torah learning, or if he isn’t.

There are people who honestly feel that they do get *chiyus* from their Torah learning, but they cannot always name the specific kind of *chiyus* that it gives them. If that is the case, then they are not aware of the *chiyus* when they are getting it, so they are not really getting *chiyus*. It is not enough if a person “knows”, on a general level, that he gets *chiyus* from his Torah learning. He must be consciously aware of the *chiyus*. Otherwise, it is no different than knowing that you withdrew money from the bank, which is just a factual piece of knowledge.

Getting Your Basic Needs of “Chiyus” - Through Proper Self-Care

Most people aren’t getting sufficient *chiyus* in their life. They don’t know where they get *chiyus* from, and even when they do know what gives them *chiyus*, they are usually not consciously aware of the *chiyus* when they are getting it.

The following is a sharp statement, about the situation of today. Most people are suffering terribly, because they don’t get enough *chiyus*. Just as we understand that the physical needs to be nourished with the eating properly, so must we understand that there are basic emotional needs for the soul which give vitality to a person (specifically, this is referring to *nefesh habehaimis*, the ‘animal’ level of the soul), and if these needs are not met, a person suffers. This is a more basic kind of issue, which needs to be dealt with before we consider all of the many spiritual problems that people have today (which most people are also suffering from). Many people are suffering on a simple emotional level, in their *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) – the level of the soul that most people are at - because they don’t know where they get basic vitality from. This is like a person who isn’t aware that his body needs water, so he doesn’t drink.

³⁷ Refer to “Torah Way To Enlightenment” (*Da Es Nishmatcha*)

The more a person is aware of what gives him basic physical and emotional *chiyus*, he must then seek how he can nurture these parts of himself. It is impossible to say exactly how a person should do it, because it depends on each person's needs. But the idea is that every person needs to get his basic needs for physical/emotional *chiyus*.

Each day, a person needs to make sure that he is getting his basic physical/emotional needs, so that he can have a basic level of *chiyus*. One should begin by making sure to feel a sense of satisfaction after he has provided himself with any of his basic physical/emotional needs. This may sound very unspiritual, because it is not about taking care of one's spiritual needs, but about taking care of oneself on a basic level: the basic needs for physical nourishment and emotional well-being. These are not the actual needs of one's *neshamah*, but the needs of the body and *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul), and they need to be nourished properly, before one gives his *neshamah* its spiritual needs.

Of course, a person should not turn this basic self-care into the main part of life, because that would be the antithesis to a truthful kind of life. But a person will certainly need to provide nourishment for the basic needs of his physical body and his base emotions, so that he can acquire a basic level of *chiyus*. Sadly, many people today are not aware of where they get *chiyus* from, and this means that they aren't getting sufficient *chiyus*, because they don't know how to give it to themselves. It is written, "*The righteous person eats to satisfy his soul*"³⁸, and so does any person need to satisfy his soul on a basic level, by providing vitality to the "animal" level of his soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*.

Practically speaking, a person needs to make sure that not a day goes by in which he doesn't take care of his basic needs. If the day is over and he is ready to go to sleep, and he remembers that he did not provide himself with enough *chiyus* that day, he should make sure to get it right now, before he goes to sleep.

People today aren't getting enough *chiyus*, and they are just doing whatever they 'have to' do, because they know that they "have to" do it all, and because they have no other choice, etc. People feel like they 'have to' go to sleep at night, wake up on time the next morning, *daven*, learn Torah (or go to their workplace), and do all the *mitzvos* - but only because they "have to" - without getting any *chiyus* from all of this. They aren't aware of the *chiyus* they are supposed to be getting from all aspects of their day. People are not even aware of what gives them a basic level of *chiyus*.

If a person wants to start providing himself with a basic level of *chiyus*, he should make sure to "nourish" himself physically each day. As an example, a person should make time each day to eat a certain food, or spice, or some treat, which he likes. A person should discover whatever calms him on a physical level. This is just an example of the idea, and it does not have to be practiced in all cases.

Certainly, we do not mean here that a person should become gluttonous with these desires. The idea is that a person needs to become aware of the little things that provide him with physical enjoyment. This helps a person identify what gives him *chiyus*.

This idea will work better for those who have a dominant element of water (pleasure), and it will be harder to implement for those who are dominated by the nature we are discussing in this lesson, **fire-of-fire-of-earth**, a 'dry' nature which doesn't like to try new venues of pleasure. Even so, a person with a nature of **fire-of-fire-of-earth** will need to take this route, in order to repair his 'dried out' nature.

³⁸ *Mishlei 13:25*

Laziness In Most People Does Not Come From The Element of Earth

The element that opposes the dryness of fire is: the vitality-giving element, water. The element that opposes the dryness of earth is: the moving element, wind. Therefore, when a person has a lot of fire and earth in his soul, he will need to make a lot of use of the elements of water and wind. He will need to provide himself with pleasure (water), and he will need to provide himself with movement (wind), in order to lead a life of *chiyus*, life-giving vitality, to counter his dry nature.

When most people are lazy, it is not because their dominant nature is earth. Rather, it is because they lack *chiyus*, and this ‘dries out’ their soul, causing them to avoid performance. That is the laziness that stems from **fire-of-fire-of-earth** which was described in this lesson. When the soul becomes ‘dried out’ from a lack of inner vitality, this in turn will prevent a person’s *ratzon* (will) from being active. So the laziness that manifests in most people is not coming from a dominant element of earth, but from an inactive *ratzon*, which is a result of a ‘dried out’ soul that comes from a lack of *chiyus*.

Even in those who do have a dominant nature of earth, it is not that common for a person to have a nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, and that is why their laziness cannot be coming from a dominant nature of earth. Rather, their laziness comes from a lack of sufficient *chiyus* – a dearth of “water” in the soul. And if a person also does not have that much wind in his soul, his element of earth will surface, and by default, it will dominate the person’s soul.

As a result of lacking *chiyus*, some people become dominated by their element of earth (lethargy and laziness), others become drawn towards seeking various lusts and other improper desires (water), or they become easily angered (fire), or they will overwork themselves with different activities (wind). In any of these cases, it is because they don’t have enough *chiyus* in their life - they aren’t getting their basic needs of physical and emotional well-being - which leads them towards any of the above undesirable reactions.

Therefore, the way to repair the laziness that stems from **fire-of-fire-of-earth** is not only a remedy for a person who has a dominant nature of earth (though such a person will be more helped by the solution described in this lesson). When a person lacks *chiyus*, this is a more universal kind of problem, because it applies to almost all people, and therefore, repairing **fire-of-fire-of-earth** is also a way to repair a much broader issue in the soul.

Drawing Forth Spiritual Energy From All That We Do

Moshe ascended Har Sinai for 40 days. How did he ascend from the earth to Heaven? He had to transcend human nature. In elemental terms, he had to leave behind this world, which is the element of earth, and ascend into Heaven, the spiritual, which is represented by the element of wind. In order to do this, he had to become an entirely “moving” being, because wind is a moving force. The element of wind is spiritual in its nature, and it is above the materialistic element of earth. Moshe’s power to receive the Torah from Heaven, and to give it to the Jewish people, was enabled to him because he had already acquired the ability to receive *chiyus* from everything. This was the “movement” of Moshe Rabbeinu: he was able to receive *chiyus* from all of the “movements” of Creation – everything that there is – and this gave him the power to ascend to Heaven and receive the Torah.

In terms that apply to our own souls, a person is able to receive *chiyus* from everything. A person is able to receive *chiyus* on a private level, when a person finds his own “private spiritual share” on this world - a unique area in Torah learning. One can become connected to his personal area in Torah learning, and then he can receive his personal *chiyus* from it. When one finds his unique source of spiritual *chiyus* on this world [his personal area in Torah], this

will also weaken his laziness (when it stems from lack of *chiyus*, such as in the case of **fire-of-fire-of-earth**), depending on how much *chiyus* one absorbs. But one will need to become consciously aware of the *chiyus* he is receiving.

In this “world of action” we live in, many people ‘train’ themselves to “do” what they have to do, but without enough putting any feeling into it. The general attitude on this world is that the main thing is “to do”, and that putting feeling into it isn’t important. Although it is true that a person needs to fulfill all of his obligations to Hashem, it is not enough to “do” them alone – one needs to put feeling into it and derive *chiyus*, an inner vitality, from it. Even when people lead a life of “serving Hashem”, it can just be an all external actions, devoid of vitality. It is certainly true that one must be careful to do all of the *mitzvos* in all of their details, but to remain at that level is external, and it is not the completely true way of living. One must certainly do all that he needs to, and carefully observe all of the *mitzvos*, even when it is difficult for him - but he must also make sure to receive *chiyus* from it.

There are different ways of how a person can receive *chiyus*. One way is, that whenever a person overcomes his nature in order to fulfill any *mitzvah* or *halachah*, he should become consciously aware of the *chiyus* he gets, from overcoming his nature.

Even if a person isn’t getting *chiyus* from doing a *mitzvah*, he can still receive *chiyus* from anything on this world. A person can even receive *chiyus* from the act of eating his food, when he is feeling the physical enjoyment in it. Although this appears to be very unspiritual, it is still a form of *chiyus* to the person, as long as the person is aware of that it does give him some *chiyus*. A person can train himself to receive *chiyus* from everything. (There is also a higher level than this, which is when a person does it all *lishmah*, for the sake of doing Hashem’s will, and not because he gets any vitality out of it.)

It is always possible for a person to derive *chiyus*, in anything he does. A person can derive *chiyus* from overcoming his nature in order to carry out his obligations towards Hashem, as explained above. Or, a person can get *chiyus* from the fact that he has nullified himself to Hashem’s will, even though this does not feel pleasurable to him. As an example, a person asks a question to a Rav and he must abide by the Rav’s answer, even if the Rav’s answer makes no sense to him and it goes against his logic. He can get *chiyus* from the suffering of his mind, which cannot understand the Rav’s logic, by subjugating his personal will, in order to nullify himself to Hashem’s will from him.

One get derive a satisfying feeling of *chiyus*, whether from pleasure or from suffering, because one is able to get *chiyus* from everything and anything. When a person receives *chiyus* from everything, this weakens his laziness. There are many different responsibilities of life that a person has, between raising a family, earning livelihood, and taking care of various responsibilities of life, and a person should learn to get *chiyus* from all of this, as opposed to living monotonously. Of course, a person only gets *chiyus* from all of the aspects in day-to-day living only after he is living in the ideal way in the first place.

There is no event or part of life where a person cannot draw forth vitality from. Here is a strong example. Even when one visits mourners and one is contemplating about death and grieving, one can still receive vitality from this, because it is written, “*It is better to go to a house of mourning, than to a house of festivity, and the living will take to heart.*”³⁹ A person is able to draw forth more “life” even from the dead, when visiting the house of a mourner, because thinking about the deceased causes him to contemplate the meaning and purpose of life, and he can derive great *chiyus* from this.

³⁹ *Koheles 1:18*

In Summary

This is how a person can weaken laziness, and specifically, the laziness that stems from the dry nature of **fire-of-fire-of-earth**. The contradicting elements of fire and earth within this nature will normally 'dry' a person out, but when a person learns how to draw forth vitality from everything, both from pleasure as well as suffering/pain, he learns how to get vitality and pleasure even from contradicting forces. The ability to receive vitality from contradictory forces is also the depth behind the future Redemption, when every person will be able to derive inner vitality from everything.

In Conclusion

In this lesson, we discussed the contradicting elements of fire and earth and how it contributes to a lack of *chiyus* (inner vitality) in the soul. However, there are additional aspects of this contradiction between fire and earth (such as the fact that fire causes a person to elevate himself, while earth causes him to lower himself), which were not discussed here. One needs to study all of the aspects of all of the four elements (earth, water, wind and fire) and how they clash with each other, and it is not possible to explain all of it in one lesson. Here, we have focused the discussion on just one of the main aspects of the contradictory forces contained in the nature of **fire-of-fire-of-earth**.