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## *Editor's Preface*

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“*Fixing Your Earth*” is the first of a four-part series that explains a revolutionary and in-depth approach to *tikkun hamiddos* (rectifying our character traits), and it can be considered the sequel to the author’s popular *Getting To Know Your Soul* (“*Da Es Nafshecha*”), which explains to us a solidly grounded Torah approach towards character development and self-improvement.

The series is based on the system of “the four elements of the soul” of earth, water, wind and fire – the approach of *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* of sixteenth century Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital – we can learn about the roots that cause our character traits to be thrown out of whack, by learning how to give balance to our soul’s elements.

This series is an offshoot of the series *Getting To Know Your Inner World* (“*Da Es Yichudecha*”) delivered in 5773, in which the Rav explains the keys that are needed in order to enter our inner and spiritual dimension of *avodah* (serving the Creator), using the powers of our soul.

In this series, *Fixing Your Earth*, we learn how to tackle the *middos* that stem from our element of *earth*: sadness, and laziness. **Chapters 1-3** are a general introduction – the fundamentals in understanding *middos*. The first two lessons are followed by important question and answer session with the Rav which lay out the general idea of the series and how to go about the lessons in general. **Chapters 4-10** are about how we can deal with the different sources of **sadness** in us, and **Chapters 11-19** are about how we can deal with the different manifestations of **laziness** we may notice in ourselves.

The Rav breaks down the causes for sadness and laziness into 16 unique scenarios, and the reader is encouraged to discern on his own which are the specific kinds of sadness\laziness that manifest in his own personal life.

## 1 | *Fundamentals of Middos Improvement: Part 1*<sup>1</sup>

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### 1) *Learning How To Think When It Comes To Matters of “Avodah”*

The first point we need to know [before we embark on this series of improving our *middos*] is to realize the fundamental way of thinking that is behind all of these methods we are presenting here.

When we learn Gemara, we are usually used to the way we were learning when we were younger. This is called our “*girsas d’yankusa*” – the way we learned as children. Those who have been learning Gemara since their youth have slowly learned more and more over the years, until they have arrived at a certain way of thinking. Comprehension in our Torah learning comes to you only after many years of learning. It happens slowly and in steps. This is how anyone grows in Torah learning.

When we learn *sugyas* of Gemara, when we learn the words of Abaye and Rava, it’s straightforward; the words are built upon one another. But when it comes to learning about matters of “*avodah*” (“serving G-d”, via spiritual self-improvement) all we know about it is certain general terms (*kelalim*). This is our “*girsas d’yankusa*” when it comes to *avodah*.

Compare this to a person who’s not immersed in Torah, who can certainly know a little Torah, but his knowledge of Torah is very general - because he’s not ‘*there*’ [he’s not “into it”].

When it comes to *avodah*, people usually know only the *kelalim*, the general terms of *avodah*. This doesn’t mean that those *kelalim* general terms are not true, but they are not more than a general understanding of the concepts.

In order to absorb anything when it comes to matters of *avodah*, one has to acquire a way to think. It takes a lot of time to acquire a way of thinking, just as we know from learning Gemara. It takes time to become aware of the *sugya* and its details. So too, when it comes to matters of *avodah*, it takes a long time to acquire the way to think about these matters.

Just as we learned Gemara in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and then in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade – and each grade was another step in the process – so, too, when it comes to learning about our *avodah*, it takes time to learn how to think of these matters. Even if a person didn’t remember the Gemara he learned in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, he retains the way to think and is still in touch with it. When it comes to *avodah*, we need to train our souls to acquire a certain way of thinking about these matters. It is slowly acquired.

#### 1a) *Focus On Thinking About These Things, Not On “Doing” These Things.*

Therefore, the purpose of these *shiurim* is not so that you will attempt to “work” on all of these matters and try to carry them out practically as soon as you hear about them.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-middos-001-fundamentals-middos-improvement-part-1>

### ***1b) Get Used To Listening To Hundreds of These Shiurim.***

In addition, even the parts you don't understand or the parts that are not of interest to you, are still necessary for you to hear about, because as we said, the point is not for you to try to first *practice* them; the point of all these *shiurim* is so that you will *learn how to think*. In hearing these *shiurim*, you are slowly hearing about a way to think, when it comes to concepts of inner *avodah*.

After you start learning how to think from these *shiurim*, you will need to get used to listening to **several hundreds of *shiurim***, just so that you can get used to learning how to think when it comes to these subjects. We all know that in order to understand Gemara, it takes hundreds of *shiurim* of listening to get you used to learning how to think. When you get used to hearing hundreds of *shiurim*, you slowly acquire the ability of how to think when you learn Gemara.

This is the first step you need, and it is a purpose unto itself.

After a person feels that the ability to think has become opened in himself, he can then proceed to the next stages we will describe. But when you are first hearing these *shiurim* – whether it is about the *middah* of sadness, laziness, desires, or idle speech – it doesn't matter which topic it is – the initial reaction will be about “what to do”, but this is not the goal in the beginning stage. This is because you don't relate to it if you aren't ‘*there*’. The beginning stage is to *learn how to think* about these matters.

### ***1c) It Takes Time.***

It takes a lot of time in order to develop the power to think in an inner way. How much time it takes depends on each personal soul; each person has a different situation. But the point is to get used to listening so that you can slowly acquire the ability to think about *sugyos* of *avodah*.

After listening to about 20 *shiurim* or so, you can ask yourself if you're beginning to feel a change in how you think. This is not about memorizing the details of these *shiurim*; it is about the ability to open your mind.

### ***Why We Must Learn 'How To Think'***

To illustrate, let's say a child hears a *sevara* (logic) of *lomdus* (abstract thought about the Gemara, which requires in-depth analysis), in which two possible options of thinking are presented. He asks, “What is the difference between the two options?!” When he gets older he begins to see, that there *is* a difference.

Thus, in the beginning stage, as we are getting used to listening to these *shiurim*, and we are acquiring the way to think about these matters, the point is not to fully *understand*. The point is to get used to *learning how to think*, which, in turn, will refine your understanding along the way.

There are very subtle points presented in these *shiurim*, which will seem at first to be of no practical relevance to you when you hear them. But the point is not to see how it is of practical relevance right now in your life, because as we said, the very first point of listening to these *shiurim* is to learn how to think when it comes to these topics.

At a later point, you will be able to understand how everything said here is of relevance. You will have acquired a way to think by then, which will enable you to become interested and to explore all of the matters in-depth, and then you will be able to feel the matters in your soul.

So the first step here is to acquire the way to think. Just as “*lomdus*”<sup>2</sup> in Gemara is acquired through learning the *sefarim* of Reb Shimon Shkop and Reb Chaim Brisker, so does learning about *avodah* require a person to develop a way of thinking.

In these *shiurim*, we are not implying that this is the only way of thinking when it comes to *avodah*. There are many methods in *avodah*, as is the way of Torah, which are all true. **There are many true ways, and each person needs to choose the way that is for him, with Hashem’s help.**

### *In Summary*

So the first step is to get used to hearing these matters, in order to learn how to think. This helps you absorb the general method of *avodah* here. Even if you work to implement these *shiurim* week by week and there is no planned *seder* to your *avodah*, it is still of gain to you, and certainly if you give *seder* to these matters.

### *2) Training Ourselves To Become Clear.*

The second point we need to understand about these *shiurim* is that at first, the things we hear about in these *shiurim* will not be perfectly understandable and clear to us.

When we learn a *sugya* of Gemara, we don’t know about it, and we need to know what we are clear in and what we aren’t clear in. When it comes to discussing *avodah*, these matters are not clear to us, because we are only aware of general terms that we have heard about; that is the first problem – *girsas d’yankusa*. But we have another disadvantage: we are missing familiarity of what it means to live in a “clear world.”

This stems from the fact that because we are used to general terms of *avodah*, we think we know these matters. We think we know what *chessed* is, what *zerizus* (zeal) is, etc. A child says that *zerizus*

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<sup>2</sup> abstract logic of Gemara

is to do things quickly, and an adult often has the same understanding as the child. The knowledge of it is in very 'general' terms. We open a *Mesillas Yesharim* and we learn about *zerizus*, and it seems that we know what it is, and that we are just not acting enough upon that knowledge.

But the truth is that we don't even know what it is unless we have learned about it in-depth. We are not clear about it. It seems to us that we are clear about it, but we are not.

Sometimes we see a noted speaker who comes to deliver a *shiur*. If he is giving a *shiur* on the Gemara, only adults can understand, not children. But when a speaker comes to give a *shiur* to children and he talks about self-improvement and *middos*, we can see adults listening in too - and their understanding of the *shiur* is often on the same level of understanding as the children. This is because when it comes to matters of *avodah*, an adult's understanding is often not that different than a child's understanding. This all results from not living in a "clear world."<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the second purpose of listening to these *shiurim* is to get used to living in a "clear world". When you learn Gemara, you need to give *seder* (order) and *birur* (clarity) to the many *shitos* (opinions\views) of what you are learning about; in *cheshbon* (review of the body of the material) and in *sevara* (logic). So too, in learning about *avodah*, you need to get used to giving *seder* and *birur* to these matters, and that is how you learn these matters in-depth. (You need to give *seder* just through your using your *seichel* (intellect) alone, at first.)

### ***Summary of the First Two Steps.***

So the first part of this is to acquire a way to think, and the second part of this is to give *seder* (orderliness) and *bechirus* (clarity) to these matters. The first part is to hear more and more *shiurim*, so that you can simply absorb. The second part is more difficult: it takes real learning.

The first part slowly develops your mind, with the more you hear and absorb. But the second part requires you to actually learn about these matters. It is much deeper than the first part. We need both of these steps together when we begin these *shiurim*.

Of course, you won't be able to understand everything, just as you can't understand an entire *sugya* in all its details. But you need to get to the roots of these matters as much as you can.

We need both of these steps together, when we begin these *shiurim*. Every person therefore will need to see which step he is personally holding by: "Am I at the first step, or at the second?"

At the first step, one is listening to these *shiurim* so that he can absorb, and the intention is not to try to understand these matters fully; and he surely can't attempt at trying to work on these matters. It can happen that a person gets confused as he is in the first step. One who passes the first stage,

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<sup>3</sup> *Pesachim 50a*: "You see a clear world." (The Rav often quotes this concept of *bechirus* (clarity), also called "olam barur" (clear world), as a fundamental in our *avodah*: that we must learn how to gain clarity in matters. See also "Getting To Know Your Inner World\_01\_The Roots of Our Inner World and "Getting To Know Your Happiness\_011\_Happiness For The Entire Year).

though, and feels that he has acquired a way to think, can now proceed to learn about these matters in-depth, in all the details, *sugya* after *sugya*, with clarity.

In the second step, one still cannot arrive at the practical conclusions yet on how he should act. It is simply unrealistic to try to work on all of these matters at once, even if you were to understand all of them in all their details.

### ***3. Understanding Matters of “Avodah” Requires A Fusion of “Intellect” and “Heart”.***

The third part we will need is deeper. There is a big difference between learning Gemara and learning about *avodah*. The two steps we mentioned thus far are similar both when it comes to learning Gemara as well as when it comes to learning about *avodah*. But the third part which we will need is unique to *avodah*.

When learning Gemara, your understanding is based on *seichel* (intellect). It can be either human logic, or it can be the higher logic that comes from the *neshamah* for those who merit it<sup>4</sup>, but either way, it is the mode of the *seichel* intellect. But learning about *avodah* requires a fusion [of both “intellect” and “heart”].

If someone just learns the *kelalim* (general rules) of *avodah* and he does not learn its *peratim* (details), he might be able to understand them in his heart as well as in his intellect, but he will only know the *kelalim*. But the inner kind of *avodah* is for one to know the *kelalim* and *peratim* of *avodah*, and it combines intellect with heart. It is not intellect alone, and it not emotions alone. It is a fusion of intellect and heart.

Most people do not know what this is. People usually think that being ‘strong in intellect’ means to be strong in learning Gemara, and that being ‘strong in heart’ means to be strong about *davening*...

I won’t get into whether this mentality is correct or not, but it is true that there are people who only excel at learning and not with *davening*, and vice versa. Most people identify learning and prayer as being two different times – “the time for Torah is one thing, and the time to pray is another thing”; the time to pray is usually seen as the time of the day in which pours out his heart’s emotions to Hashem). So the intellect and the feelings in the heart are usually seen by a person as separate functions of the psyche, and as a result of thinking this way, a person does not know how to fuse intellect and feeling together.

Inner *avodah*, though, requires one to fuse the modes of intellect and heart together. It is to understand things with a palpable awareness. This is a deep concept: it is to have awareness towards a concept, which can be palpably felt.

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<sup>4</sup> See *Tefillah #052 – Asking For Understanding*.

Herein lays the reason why it is difficult for one to enter the depth of *avodah*. Most people recognize a concept either on an intellectual level or on an emotional level, whereas palpable awareness to a concept is rare.

The concepts we are discussing here are subtle. If someone has an intellect capable of plumbing to the deepest subtleties, he can keep listening to one subtle point after another. But intellectual comprehension alone doesn't mean that a person is experiencing what he knows. When one makes sure to approach *avodah* with a feeling of awareness towards what he is learning, the person can feel the subtleties, the intellect sharpens the feelings, the feelings in turn sharpen the intellect, and the cycle repeats. This is the kind of ability we need in order to learn about improving in *avodah*.

When it comes to learning a *sugya* of Gemara, all we need is intellect to refine our subtle understandings we come across. But when it comes to *sugyos* of *avodah*, we need a fusion of intellectual sharpness as well emotional sharpness, which feed on each other.

### **3a) 'Avodah' Requires 'Adinus' (Refining Our Understanding) and 'Dakus' (Noticing Subtlety)**

In Gemara, one has to work on comprehending it according to his level of intellect. In *avodah*, one needs "*adinus*" (refinement of understanding) in order to comprehend the '*dakus*' (subtleties) of these matters.<sup>5</sup>

The *baalei avodah* (those *Gedolim* who taught about *avodah*) essentially used these abilities of '*adinus*' and '*dakus*' in order to approach matters of *avodah*. There is *adinus* within *adinus* (refinement within refinement) and *dakus* within *dakus* (subtlety within subtlety).

It's possible that a person reading the words of the *baalei avodah* doesn't see the *adinus* and *dakus* in their words, but that's only a superficial understanding. So we need to approach these matters with thought, but a more subtle kind of thought than how we learn Gemara: being aware of a concept intellectually, as well as being able to feel the concept. This ability will show you the *dakus* of every *sugya* in *avodah*.

Thus, it is difficult the first time we learn *sugyos* of *avodah*. Most people remain with the first step, learning how think of these matters; the second step, thinking into the details of each of these *sugyos*, is far from most people. And surely most people don't reach the third step, of being aware to these concepts with both intellect and feeling and developing the ability of *adinus*.

Therefore, it is very far from we are actually holding. However, just as we learn Gemara as much as we can try to understand, so too when it comes to *avodah*, we must try as hard as we can. Obviously, if a person never decides to enter it, it never starts, because he remains where he is.

But if he enters it and progresses stage after stage, he begins to learn about these matters and think about them although he's not 'there' yet; '*sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah*', as we explained.

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<sup>5</sup> Editor's note: these concepts were first mentioned in *Fixing Your Wind\_003 (Living In Denial)*



This approach helps a person penetrate into *avodah* and experience the “clear world”. He becomes clear in a way of thinking, in the rules and details of each *sugya* of *avodah*, and he becomes consciously aware of the ideas he is learning about. To a certain extent, this clarity will become sharpened more and more.

Therefore, one must be aware of the following facts throughout this series. There are two parts when it comes to learning about matters of *avodah*: the knowledge about the rules (*kelalim*) and the knowledge about the details (*peratim*).

If one is only interested in knowing the general rules of *avodah*, then obviously, he doesn't get to the details. The inner perspective is to understand is that all of the details of *avodah* are contained within the rules of *avodah*. Therefore, one has to amass knowledge of the rules and details, all of them. The secret of inner *avodah* is to arrive at more and more ‘*adinus*’.

### ***3b) Finding Your Weakest Trait.***

Even more so, each of our souls contains the four elements (earth, water, wind and fire), and each of us has a particular *middah* (trait) that dominates, which is causing all the problems. First one has to learn about the elements, and then identify which *middos* come from which elements.

We all have four elements, for good and bad. We have all good and bad *middos* in ourselves. Reb Yeruchem said that we are all like a full zoo, full of many wild animals. But we each have one particular bad *middah* element which is the main source of the problems.

If one doesn't work on getting to the *dakus* of these matters, he won't know his worst *middah*, and then he won't know what to work on. But even if he does know his worst *middah*, the *middah* itself consists of many different factors – he will work on one part when he should be working on a different point of the *middah*. Not only won't he fix it, but he will damage himself, because he is mixing up different *sugyos*.

Therefore, the depth of *avodah* is not possible unless a person is aware of the different parts of the *middah*. One must know which element the *middah* is rooted in, which bad *middah* it is, and which part of the bad *middah* needs to be fixed.

It's easy for a person to label his worst *middah* with terms like “I'm lazy”, “I get angry”, “I'm a glutton”, “I chat too much”, “I am haughty”, etc. but these are all general terms which do not explore the root of the bad *middah* at hand. They are all true descriptions, but they are each complex, consisting of several factors.

One has to be aware of each part of the bad *middah*. It's possible that a person is working hard for many years at trying to uproot a bad *middah*, but he is working on the wrong point. After a person is clear what he has to rectify, comes the step of how to go about rectifying.

### ***3c) Balancing Your Elements.***

Another fact we bear in mind is that our *middos* are not just ‘bad *middos*’. We are made of the four elements, and each of the four elements needs to be balanced with each other. Each soul needs a balance of the elements.

Besides for our worst *middah*, we also need to have balance in our souls. The elements, when unbalanced, are a separate cause for detriment in the soul. A bad *middah* can cause an imbalance, which is obvious, but even a good *middah* can cause detriment to the soul, when it is unbalanced with the other elements. Too much of one good *middah* can make a person unbalanced.

If one has the general picture of the information (*tzurasa d’shmaatsa*) and he is missing knowledge of the *kelalim*, how can he hope to work on the bad *middah* he needs to work on, and all its parts...?

Most people are unclear about their souls, and therefore, there is a degree of internal suffering experienced by most people. Some people are very emotional and they suffer more, some suffer from imagination, and some are suffering from their own conceit. But we all suffer in our souls, and the only question is, how much. We also have suffering from external situations, such as our health, livelihood, and issues with children. And we all have internal suffering. The amount differs with each person. One who never clarified his four elements will never know what his worst *middah* is, and he will be unbalanced as well in his soul.

Here we come to the core reason of why people suffer in their souls. There is no other way for us to improve (unless one learns Torah with *mesirus nefesh* and he learns Torah *lishmah*, which gives a person *siyata d’shmaya* to find the truth without having to understand himself) - unless we work to understand the elements of the soul. Without being clear about the elements of the soul, a person doesn’t know how to trace which *middah* stems from which element, and he won’t be able to fix his bad *middah*. He won’t fix the bad *middah* in all its parts, and he won’t know how to balance his soul’s elements.

### ***Improving Our Middos: Our Lifelong Challenge***

People ask: “Why does this require so much difficult inner work? It is time-consuming, and it is draining to work on acquiring so much knowledge about the soul.” It’s certainly true. It takes a lot of time and energy and hard work.

But if a person really wants to fix his worst *middah* – as the Vilna Gaon says, that the main reason why we are here on this world is to fix our [personal] worst *middah* – then he understands that one needs to balance his soul, and this requires clarity about the soul; to know all the parts of each bad *middah*.

***Summary of the Three Steps Needed In Learning This Series About Middos Improvement.***

1) The first step one needs is to simply acquire the knowledge about the soul (we are not referring yet to practical change), [as we are presenting in these *shiurim*].

2) The second step is to get used to learn to recognize the parts of the soul. It is possible that a person has knowledge about the soul, but this is not enough. When learning Gemara, one has to know what it says in the Gemara. But when learning about *avodah*, one has to first learn about the matters with his intellect, and then he needs to see how these matters exist in his own personal life. This is the idea of “conscious awareness” that we described before.

Most of the time when a person learns a *mussar sefer*, he is learning knowledge and gathering facts, and at best he makes a personal *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting), but he doesn't get to the depth of the matters he is learning about. Therefore, he is not that affected by what he learns. By contrast, the inner method of *avodah* is to become clear about the matters and then see how they manifest in one's own life, and to be aware of them and feel them.

So the first step is to get used to acquiring a way of thinking. The second step is to gain clarity of these matters, *sugya* after *sugya*, each to his own; if one tries to grab too much, he won't gain anything. Even if a person understands 5%, 10% or 15% of these matters, it is worthwhile. The point is to get used to learning about matters with clarity.

3) The third step is to see how these matters manifest in oneself. This is not referring to seeing our qualities or shortcomings. It is to simply become aware of how these matters manifest in your life. We also are not yet dealing with how to practically work on changing at this point. We are talking about the *prerequisite* of change: to recognize the soul, its parts, to be aware of them, and to feel what we are aware of.

***In Conclusion.***

So we are not yet dealing with how to practically act upon these matters. We are explaining (1) How to acquire a way of thinking, (2) To be clear about these matters, and (3) to become both intellectually and emotionally self-aware of these matters in one's own life.

After doing this for several years, can one then become eligible to actually implement these matters in his life [and begin the rectification process of his *middos*].

This doesn't mean that a person cannot act upon these matters at all in the beginning stage. There are certainly resolutions one can make as he hears these *shiurim* which will help him change, and this is wonderful. But it is just that the main focus should be on the three steps we have laid out here.

To emphasize again, it takes several years to work on these steps! If someone is impatient, he must know that it takes a long time to work on these steps (even before a person actually changes his *middos*), and for this reason, we have an entire lifetime of inner work!

*Questions & Answers with the Rav*

Q1: Is this true only with regards to learning the Rav's sefarim [and shiurim]?

**A:** In order for a person to succeed at understanding anything, he needs to amass a general picture of the information of the subject. **First, one needs to learn the information simply without trying to analyze it**, and after going through all of the information on a superficial level, he should **then try to understand** what he has learned. Chazal say that there must first be "*ligmar*" (learning) and then "*lisbar*" (analysis).

For example, right now in the *Kolel* we are learning *Sefer Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar Daled*. It would be a good idea to go through the entire *sefer* during the upcoming *Bein HaZemanim* and just see all of the words, without trying to understand them yet. The point is to first acquire a "*tzurasa d'shmaatsa*" (body of knowledge), a general understanding of the information. Just read through the *sefer* quickly, from the beginning of the section until the end of the section.

**You can do the same with *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*. First go through the entire *sefer* from beginning to end and read through it quickly, so that you can at least get a general picture of it. After that, you can delve more in-depth** into the *sefer* and try to understand each thing you have learned about.

Q2: How much should one try to understand material when he's first reading it?

**A:** The first time you read about something, your understanding towards it cannot go further than a child's understanding. "*Tzurasa d'shmaatsa*" doesn't mean that you are trying to delve into the words in-depth.

Q3: How does it work that each person has one particular negative character trait that stems from a dominance in one of the four elements?

**A:** Each person has one element that is his strongest, an element that is second-to-strongest, and element that is third-to-strongest, and fourth-to-strongest. It is different with each person's soul makeup. The worst character trait of a person is found in his strongest and most dominant element. By some people, their best character trait and their worst character trait is found in one element. With others, their best character trait is located in one element and their worst character trait is located in a different element – that would mean that their souls are more complicating to understand.

Q4: Does one need to be on a high spiritual level in order to determine what his most dominant element is?

**A:** One cannot identify what his most dominant element is if he hasn't studied the four elements of the soul. As we have said here, the very first step is to amass the information about the four elements of the soul, and after that one can attempt to identify which element is most dominant in

his own soul. There are a few people who have penetrating insight into themselves and they are able to begin at the second stage, but most people are going to have to go through the first stage.

Q5: Why is it that there are almost no sefarim that mention the four elements of the soul?

A: We must know something very fundamental about *mussar sefarim*. There are all different types of *sefarim* written by our previous Gedolim. *Sefer Orchos Tzaddikim* talks about the *middos*, but there is no order of what to work on first. Each *middah* is explained about in a separate chapter, but there is no order. It is unclear why this *sefer* was written this way, but there is no orderly path of what to work on first when you learn that *sefer*. The Vilna Gaon said that all the *mussar sefarim* are good, but *Mesillas Yescharim* is the best *sefer*, because it is arranged in an orderly fashion. However, we emphasized here in this *shiur* that even *sefer Mesillas Yescharim* can be problematic to learn, because it is a ladder of ten steps based on the Ten Expressions, and we will not be able to navigate through these steps without knowledge about our four elements of the soul.

The truth is that there is no one *seder* (order) to follow when it comes to *avodah*. We are not either implying that one must work on himself on the order of these *shiurim* which explain to us about the four elements of the soul. We are coming to explain here what we have to work with as we work on ourselves, and it is this area which we seek to clarify and understand. There is no one set *seder* (order) to follow in *avodah*; it's an entirely different matter to discuss. What we are emphasizing here is that if a person never becomes clear about his own soul, he will never be able to be clear about what the *seder* of his *avodah* should be.

Q6: Is it worthy for a person to work on the middos based on the system of the four elements?

A: Not only is it worthy, it is absolutely necessary.

Q7: Why isn't this spoken about in our sefarim?

A: The *sefarim* speak about the *middos*, but most of the *sefarim* do not discuss our *avodah* in a step-by-step manner, so there is no *sefer* that tells us what the *seder* (order) of one's *avodah* should be. The Torah was not written in chronological order either. There is an argument amongst the Sages if the *Mishnayos* have a specific order to them. In most places, the words of our Rabbis that discuss *avodah* are not arranged in a step-by-step manner; thus there is no *seder* to their words.

For example, open up the Alter of Kelm's *sefer*, *Chochmah U'Mussar*. Do you see any *seder* to the words there? It is a collection of all hundreds of his talks and there is no way to know which area to work on first. Some of the talks have *seder* to them and you can see how one talk leads into the next talk, but most of this *sefer* is not arranged in an orderly and step-by-step manner.

Take a look at Rav Dessler's five-volume set of *Michtav M'Eliyahu*. Is there an order of what to work on first in that *sefer*? There is no order there to follow.

*Chovos HaLevovos* is the one *sefer* that is arranged with some order. He writes in the introduction that he has specifically arranged the chapters according to the specific order that it's in, but this doesn't apply to all of the chapters of the *sefer*; there are some chapters which are meant to be learned

consecutively, but a large part of the *sefer* has no specific order to it. Additionally, the ladder of steps presented in *Chovos HaLevovos* is not necessarily the order that everyone must follow in their *avodah*.

What about *sefer Shaarei Teshuvah*? Is there a *sefer* to his words? Are his words arranged in a step-by-step manner? Does one have to work on himself starting with the matters discussed in *Shaar Aleph* (Gate I) and ending with *Shaar Daled* (Gate IV)...?

Even the Talmud Bavli was not arranged in an orderly fashion. The Rambam came and attempted to give order of what to learn to learn first in the Gemara. The *Tur* and the *Shulchan Aruch* followed suit and also gave order to the *halachos* found in the Gemara. But the Gemara itself has no order to it. Both *Agadta* and *Halacha* parts of Gemara are not arranged in any specific order. The Rambam and others who came after him were the only ones to give any kind of order to the Gemara, but when it comes to our *avodah*, there is no *sefer* that has arranged what the order of our *avodah* should be.

Q8: Does that mean that there is no *sefer* which discusses any topic completely and perfectly?

A: There is no *sefer* which we can tell anyone to learn that will provide him with the answers he is looking for. Because nothing is arranged in a completely step-by-step manner, there is no *sefer* that can completely calm you.

Let me ask you a question. Let's say you are trying to learn the *halachos* of *borer* (the laws of mixing on Shabbos). If not for the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah*, would you know where to look in the Gemara in order to learn these *halachos*? Would you just look at the *Ein Mishpat*'s commentary? If we have no Rambam and no *Shulchan Aruch* on it, where will you find these *halachos*? If a person wants to learn the *halachos* of *netilas yadayim* or *tefillin*, where in the Gemara is it discussed? The *halachos* are spread out all over the place. Some areas in the Gemara are more concentrated and you can find all of the *halachos* there, but other *halachos* of the Gemara are spread out in ten different places in the Gemara.

Just as we can understand that was no *sefer* given to the Gemara before the Rambam came along and gave *sefer* to it, so can we understand that there is no *sefer* given of our *avodah*. The Rambam only arranged the *halachos* of the Gemara in an orderly fashion; he didn't do this was the *Agadta* parts, which explain to us about matters of *avodah*. Therefore, we are left without a *sefer* in our *avodah*.

Q9: How can a person have a *sefer* to his *avodah*?

A: A person needs to become clear about what the four elements of the soul are, within his own soul. Then he should slowly begin to study the words of Chazal that discuss matters of *avodah*, and gradually he will be able to amass all of the words together and see what the order should be. This is a very difficult task to do, of course. It is the depth of exile.

Q10: If it is so important to know about the four elements of the soul, why doesn't *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* talk about it and emphasize it?

**A:** *Sefer Mesillas Yescharim* is a path that is based upon working our ways upwards, from the bottom up. The author of *Mesillas Yescharim* is not writing a sefer that describes anyone's personal *avodah* on this world. Rather, the author of *Mesillas Yescharim* has presented a general path of growth that applies to us in a more general sense. The four elements of the soul are a personal and private matter with each person, because the order of the four elements is arranged differently in each person's soul.

*Mesillas Yescharim* is the sefer written for the collective of *Klal Yisrael* and it is our general path of growth, but there is a private map of our growth which is not explained in sefer *Mesillas Yescharim*. There is no *sefer* that can guide a person in his personal makeup of his soul. Thus we have no sefer that tells us what the *sefer* in our *avodah* should be.

Why is this so? It is because each person needs to begin at a different point. So there is no *sefer* that can tell each person what he should work on first and what he should work on next. We can give order to the four elements themselves, but there is no *sefer* that will tell us what the *sefer* of our personal *avodah* should be. It is simply impossible for such a *sefer* to exist.

Q11: The *Mesillas Yescharim* states where we all need to begin: "Torah leads to *zerizus*, etc.?" [so obviously that is where we all need to start from]?

**A:** Let's ask a simple question. If someone's strongest element is earth, does that mean that learning Torah will lead him to have more *zehirus* (alacrity) and then to have more *zerizus* (zeal), in the same way for a person whose most dominant element is water or wing or fire? Surely the Torah has the power to bring a person to the level of *zehirus* and then *zerizus*, but does that mean each person will be acting the same with regards to this? The fact that Torah brings a person to *zehirus* is not going to have the same exact effect on all people equally, because since the soul makeup is different with each person, the *sefer* of each person's *avodah* is not the same.

Surely the stage of learning Torah must come first in the *avodah* of all people, but *how* a person succeeds in this stage, is different with each person, depending on which element is most dominant in his soul.

Q12: The Rav has said that a person might be making a mistake if he's working on a certain negative trait he wants to fix, when he lacks knowledge about the elements of his soul. But didn't the yeshivos always have a *Mashgiach* who would give mussar *Vaadim* (discourses on self-improvement), which focused on one *middah* at a time?

**A:** You are asking a very good question. Certainly it would be the best thing if each boy in yeshivah and each man in the *Kolel* had a private *vaad* with his *Mashgiach*. Now, if there are 200 boys in a yeshivah, the *Mashgiach* would be able to give a private discourse to most of the boys of the yeshivah at least twice a year. But a day or two of the year wouldn't be nearly enough for a person to really work on himself. The Chazon Ish that it used to be that there was one *Mashgiach* for 100 boys in the yeshivah, and today there is one *Mashgiach* for 1000 boys in the yeshivah, and that there should really be 100 *Mashgichim* to oversee each boy personally! If there were 100 *Mashgichim* available in each yeshivah for each of the boys, then he would be able to get a *vaad* with a *Mashgiach*

once a day for every day of the year. But Hashem made the world in a way that this does not happen.

Q13: So is the Rav saying that it's pointless to give mussar vaadim?

**A:** This is the reality of things. It doesn't result in that much improvement. The question is, however: is giving a private *mussar vaad* to each person better than nothing? Or perhaps it would be better to give one *vaad* to a bunch of people and they will work on themselves together?

This issue was brought before the *Gedolim*. In Kelm they would join a *vaad* together and work on themselves together, and not one-one-one with a teacher. However, a person must consider the following. If he doesn't know his own soul, he will not know how to imply all that he learns about. If he joins a mussar *vaad*, he will be like a sheep following the herd.

Surely we need to work on ourselves together and strengthen each other in self-improvement, but a person needs to first know his own soul, what he can work on and what he can't work on. Ten boys in yeshivah and ten *Kolel* men cannot all work to improve on the same character trait all on an equal level. Each person reacts differently to the subject material being taught. Each person has his own background and personality – you can't expect all the people in a *mussar vaad* to all work on the same trait equally. It's not like a *sukkah* where a bunch of people can sit underneath one *sukkah* and fulfill the *mitzvah*. Each soul is very different and built very differently.

If you have a suggestion of how *mussar vaadim* can be made more practical to accommodate each person's particular personality, to the contrary; go ahead with it.

Q14: If a person has a certain negative character trait that he has a hard time fixing, does that mean that this situation is being sent to him from Heaven as his tikkun (rectification) on this world?

**A:** Not only is his difficulty with his character being “sent to him from Heaven”, but he was born that way to begin with, to complete his life's mission.

Q15: After a person gets to understand his soul, will he require help in improving himself?

**A:** Most people cannot deal with their problems by themselves and they need someone else to help them. There are a few rare individuals who are both with sharp self-awareness and they can work on themselves without confiding in another person. There are also some people who were born with a natural power to act *lishmah* (for the sake of Hashem) and they are capable of great *mesirus nefesh* (altruism), which enables them to penetrate deeply into their souls, without the assistance of others. But most people are not capable of acting *lishmah* and with *mesirus nefesh* and they do not have that much self-awareness; therefore, most people require help from others in order to understand themselves.

Q16: Is there any sefer one can learn which teaches him about how to use his soul's abilities?



**A:** Part of this study can be attained through the *sefarim* that explain the [four] elements of the soul.<sup>6</sup> But as for knowing one's personal soul, one will never know it through any *sefer* that is found in the world. One has to pray to Hashem to reach self-understanding. Either he can pray to Hashem that he merit to understand himself from within himself, as the Gemara says that the "two kidneys of man are his advisors", where one can learn Torah from within himself; or one can pray to Hashem that he merit to be guided by someone who will help him understand his soul.

If one prays for this, truthfully and earnestly, and he cries to Hashem from the depths of his heart, Hashem will surely guide him to success. How? That is up to Hashem. But if someone is truly searching for this and he is sincerely trying very hard, Hashem will guide him and he will attain what he desires.

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to sefer *Shaarei Kedushah* of Rav Chaim Vital

## 2 | *Fundamentals of Middos Improvement: Part 2* <sup>7</sup>

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### *Summary of Previous Lesson*

Previously, we began to discuss the prerequisites we will need [before embarking on this series of fixing our *middos*.] Now we will mention some more points which complete the discussion, so that we can get to practical outcomes from this - which is the purpose. We will briefly review the previous lesson.

There are three steps we need throughout this series of fixing our *middos*.

The first step is to get used to learning how to think, through hearing these lessons. Just as we need to acquire a way of thinking in order to learn Gemara, so do we need to acquire a way of thinking when it comes to the *avodah* of working with our soul.

The second step we need is to acquire the ability of putting together all of the information, becoming aware of all the different aspects of a topic, so that we can become clear in these matters – to live in a “clear world.”<sup>8</sup> (Although we cannot attain perfect clarity, we can still become clearer and clearer about these matters with the more we seek to clarify.)

The third step is to develop self-awareness towards these concepts, becoming palpably aware in our heart of the information we are learning about with our mind. Unlike learning Gemara, where you are learning about things that do not relate to you personally (whether it’s an abstract kind of Gemara or a *Halacha*-focused kind of Gemara), when you learn matters of the soul, you need to see how the information about the soul relates to you on a personal level.

These are the three steps we explained previously. We also explained two root reasons behind the *avodah* [of knowing our soul’s *middos*]: We each need to fix our personal worst *middah* (character trait), based on knowledge of the four elements; and we also need to balance our soul’s elements even when they are not producing any bad *middos* in particular.

We explained this briefly, but we didn’t yet get to how we can work on this on a practical level. We hope to explain now how we can practically work on the concepts.

### *All Inner Work is Based on the System of the Four Elements*

The following important point must be explained, and it is being asked about: Why must we work on our *middos* specifically according to the system of the soul’s four elements (earth, water, wind and fire)? Let’s expand upon this question a bit more.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-middos-002-fundamentals-middos-improvement-part-2>

<sup>8</sup> *Pesachim* 50a

Anyone who is familiar with the methods of *avodah* that exist knows that there are many different approaches, especially in our generation. There are many different and valid approaches of how we can do inner work with ourselves. Can we say that there is one specific way which everyone must use? The answer is clearly “No.” So why is it, then, that these classes are always based on the system of the four elements?<sup>9</sup>

The answer is: the system of the four elements is brought in a *sefer* attributed to the authorship of *Avraham Avinu*.<sup>10</sup>

So if you were wondering if the system of the “four elements of the soul” comes from our generation or if it came before our generation, you should know that it has been around since the times of our *Avos*. It is the system which Chazal based their words upon, as well as the system used by our many wise leaders who came after them.

However, not every *sefer* written in previous generations openly dealt with this system. But the system of the four elements is the backbone behind all of inner wisdom of Judaism. The four elements are rooted in the four letters of Hashem’s Name of *havayah*. The name of *havayah* is the root that Hashem used to create everything, and from it came everything else that we know of.

Therefore, all of the other systems [of *avodah*], besides for the system of the four elements, are considered to be ‘partial’ systems, which are not all-inclusive. The only system which is all-inclusive is that of the four elements. The other systems [of *avodah*] are of course rooted in holiness; and there are also other systems that do not stem from any holiness at all, which people in our generation are using.

Thus, the fundamental way of how we work with our soul is based on the system of the four elements, which comes from our *Avos*. Since it is the root system, I try to mainly work with it when I teach about *avodah*.

### ***Giving Order***

Therefore, we must know the following.

When you open a *sefer*, you should know that not every *sefer* is openly working with the system of the four elements. Rather, there are certain details, based upon the system of the four elements of the soul which each *sefer* tells you; but the system is not being presented in any specific order. Therefore, there is no *sefer* which tells you how to go from A to B, from B to C, etc. It is up to each person, as his personal *avodah*, to give order to all of the details - using the system of the four elements.

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<sup>9</sup> Editor’s Note: For those unfamiliar with the Rav’s approach in using the system of the four elements of the soul, refer to the previous works of the Rav: *Getting To Know Your Soul*, the series *Understanding Your Middos* and, more recently, the ‘Fixing’ series: *Fixing Your Earth*; *Fixing Your Water*, and *Fixing Your Wind* (and, *b’ezras Hashem*, in the forthcoming series, *Fixing Your Fire*).

<sup>10</sup> The “*Sefer Yetzirah*”

The difficulty of this, which you have raised to me, is that there is no *sefer* which gives you an exact order of what to work on. Our world is called “*olam*”, as our Sages state, from the world “*he’elam*”, concealment; everything is concealed from us. We cannot tell a person to learn a certain page of one *sefer* and a certain paragraph of another *sefer* until a complete picture forms. The inner world, as our Sages describe it, is scattered throughout the pages of many *sefarim hakedoshim* that describe it: “a little here and a little there.” It is like fruits scattered all over the place.

The first difficulty involved in it is that one would have to know the order to all of the information. And even if a person would have that order, to know how to connect all of the details is daunting. Therefore, there is no *sefer* which we can recommend that each person should learn so that he can see an exact order of what he needs to do.

The approach that I use is based on the system of the four elements, which is described in the beginning of Rav Chaim Vital’s *sefer, Shaarei Kedushah*. The words there briefly describe an orderly system based on the four elements, but it is only a small amount of content in comparison to the many words of our Sages that describe *avodah*. Rav Chaim Vital briefly describes what we need to do based on the roots of the four elements, but there is much order that is needed after that.

The matters are spread out all over the words of our Sages, like scattered fruit. If a person has the structure to work with, he can use it as a compass to guide him that will enable him to connect all the details he comes across. He knows how to connect all the details to the root.

But when a person is missing the structure, he sees a myriad amount of details, and he sees the details, without knowing how to connect them. He gets the false impression that our *avodah* is to work on a bunch of random details, with no structure to it. As we are explaining, though, all matters of our *avodah* are based on the system of the four elements.

(Of course, this doesn’t mean that all of the *Gedolim* in the past used the system of the four elements.)

### ***Learning Mesillas Yesharim - In Conjunction With Using The Soul’s Elements***

Now we come to the following question, which you are also asking about.

Let’s take *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*, for example. This is a *sefer* which describes ten levels in a ladder of growth (based on the Ten Expressions which Hashem used to create the world with). It is a *sefer* which shows you which step to start from and how to progress to the next stage. However, being that all *avodah* is based on the system of the four elements, as we explained - you need to bear in mind, as you learn *Mesillas Yesharim*, that the system of the four elements must be incorporated as you move along the ten stages.

*Mesillas Yesharim* starts with the level of [Torah], *zehirus* (watchfulness), then *zerizus* (alacrity), then *nekiyus* (cleanliness), then *taharah* (purity), then *perishus* (abstinence), then *chassidus* (piety), then *anavah* (humility), then *yiras cheit* (fear of sin), then *kedushah* (holiness), *ruach hakodesh*, and

*techiyas hameisim*. There is also practical advice contained in the *sefer*, and there is also much to be gained from reviewing the chapters again and again. But it is describing our *avodah* in very general terms.

If someone is trying to serve Hashem based on *sefer Mesillas Yescharim* alone, he will not be successful. We can see this apparent from the fact that there are many people who try to become a living *Mesillas Yescharim*, and it doesn't work. (And there are others didn't succeed due to various other reasons).

It is most difficult to practically implement the words of *Mesillas Yescharim* in your life. This is because *Mesillas Yescharim* is telling you the general facts, but the details of what he is discussing aren't being told to you.

It's like if you were to learn *Shulchan Aruch* without the commentaries (such as *Bach*, *Taz*, etc.); can anyone know the *halacha* properly if he just learns *Shulchan Aruch* alone, and he doesn't explore the commentaries in-depth? Even if a person looks in the commentary of the *Beis Yosef*, which contains all the main information you need to see, it is not nearly enough. The *Beis Yosef* is telling you general information. The commentaries need to be learned and discussed, so that you can absorb it and notice the details that are not seen at first glance.

The same is true with learning *Mesillas Yescharim*. The author of *Mesillas Yescharim* was holy and saintly, and he doesn't need our approval; it goes without saying that every single word he says is holy. But just because that is true, does that mean that the words of *Mesillas Yescharim* alone tell us all the rules and details of *avodah*? Clearly, the answer is "No." So if a person is trying to serve Hashem using the path of *sefer Mesillas Yescharim* alone, it will be too difficult.

But if a person understands his four elements of the soul and he is in touch with them, and he knows how to use his strongest element and how to avoid his most negative element, he has a structure to work with as he's learning *Mesillas Yescharim*. When he learns about *zehirus* (watchfulness), he works on it according to the nature of his elements, and the same goes for when he learns about *zerizus*, etc. The point is that he is works on acquiring levels through a clear awareness of his four elements.

### ***Example: Trying To Acquire "Zehirus"***

Let's explore how we use the system of the four elements when we are learning about how to acquire *zehirus*, for example.

*Zehirus* is that a person is careful in keeping the Torah, so he avoids certain acts that will prevent him from *zehirus*. If a person's most dominant element is earth, he is drawn towards sadness. If he begins to become consciously aware of trying to acquire *zehirus*, his sadness will become activated as he tries to be more careful. Without getting into the depth of *zehirus* right now, this is what will happen.

Let's use an example of an opposite kind of person to see how this is true. If a person is very strong in his element of fire, he is more energetic and enthusiastic; when he begins to work on acquiring *zehirus*, every time he is more careful, it is not *zehirus* which is being awakened; it is rather his hotheadedness which is being awakened. The difference is that *zehirus* comes from the light of the *neshamah*,<sup>11</sup> whereas being energetic comes from the element of fire in the soul, located in the *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer) area of the soul.

So although the *sefer Mesillas Yescharim* is based on ten steps of a ladder of growth, the ladder of growth is really built on the four elements of the soul. If one has properly built his elements, he has the firm basis of his ladder, and he can progress, step-after-step. But if one hasn't properly built his elements, the ladder is based on shaky ground, and then he cannot really progress on the ladder of growth described in *sefer Mesillas Yescharim*.

### ***The Basis: Working With Our Elements***

Without a clear picture of the four elements of the soul, a person is missing the inner wisdom which Hashem used to create the world with, which means that he will be missing the main wisdom. The system of the four elements is the wisdom from Hashem, which was given to our prophets. All of the other systems of *avodah* that are brought in our *sefarim hakedoshim*, while certainly being valid [for they are brought in our *sefarim* of our *Gedolim* of the past], are not based on the system of the four elements, therefore, those systems are not working with the roots.

To illustrate what we mean, there is one system of *avodah* brought which is based on 5 parts of man; another system says that man is comprised of 9 parts; and another system says we are comprised of 11 parts. There are many approaches that describe our *avodah* which differ from each other, and we cannot say they are incorrect, but what we *can* say is that none of those systems are a root system.

To further illustrate, there are many languages in the world, and our Sages even validated these languages (as we learn in *Tractate Nedarim*). But the root of all languages is *Lashon HaKodesh* (the holy tongue). The root language, *Lashon HaKodesh*, doesn't invalidate the other languages; but although this is true, the other languages are still not a 'root' language. The only root language is *Lashon HaKodesh*.

Along the same lines, we can understand that since the system of the four elements is the root wisdom Hashem used to create man, it is the main structure of man; thus, the system of the four elements form the backbone of a person's *avodah*.

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<sup>11</sup> Refer to the Rav's two-volume commentary on *Mesillas Yescharim*.

### ***Balance In Our Avodah***

In previous generations, there were *Gedolim* who based their *avodah* mainly on *emunah* (faith in G-d). Others mainly based their *avodah* on *temimus* (earnestness). However, any sensible person understands that we cannot serve Hashem today entirely through our *emunah*, or through *temimus* alone, or through *tefillah* alone, etc. There are people today who attempt this, and we will not mention their names, but anybody who is sensible understands that those people are misguided.

This is because it is impossible to truly serve Hashem when we work with just one point of our soul. If someone were to only use his *emunah* and he doesn't work with the rest of his soul's abilities, his *emunah* will become extreme, and he cannot succeed.

Of course, we can say that each *beis midrash* and each private soul in *Klal Yisrael* can have a particular fundamental point that it excels in. But that doesn't require everyone else to mainly work with one quality.

For example, you can have a place in which *tefillah* is their strongest area; let's say it's a shul in which 200 people *daven* beautifully. Can we say that each person is *davening* in the same exact manner? It is not possible, because each soul is built differently. Even if they are all striving to *daven* as best as they can, they cannot all *daven* on the same exact level.

There are people today who feel that the *avodah* of the final generation is *tefillah*, so *tefillah* must be everything. (There is some basis for this in the words of our Sages, but it is not definite, because not all of our Sages had this view.) Even if this is the case, does that mean that everyone *davens* in the same exact way?

Other views maintain that our main *avodah* now is learning Torah. Does that mean that everyone must learn Torah in the same exact manner and with the same methods of thinking? Others are of the opinion that our main *avodah* now is *chessed*. Does that mean we all need to do *chessed* in any one way? There are other examples as well that we can use, but the point is, there is no way to work on something.

This is because each person's soul is comprised of the four elements, and in each person the makeup is different, so it is not possible for everyone to act in the same exact manner.

The system of the four elements is therefore not just another concept you hear about when it comes to *avodah*. It is the fundamental system of all wisdom. It is the backbone of all wisdom that Hashem used to create the world with, and it was used to form the makeup of man. Thus, it is the system which each person's *avodah* is based on; all the words which our Sages said are really meant to become aligned with the system of the four elements and to work together with it.

This answers another question you may be asking: Why are we choosing this particular path of working with the four elements, when there are so many other ways to work on ourselves? Why must all our inner work be based on working with the four elements of the soul? According to what we explained here, this question now falls away.

Again, the system of the four elements is not my own invention. It is the system which is first attributed to Avraham Avinu, and from there everything is based.

### ***Maintaining A Positive Self-Image As We Work On Self-Improvement***

An additional point to know is as follows.

Our *avodah* requires us to work with our soul, which is the makeup of man. We must know the general makeup of the soul. In our soul, there are several layers. There is the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul), which is the external layer of our soul; and there are the spiritual areas of our soul.

When you begin to learn about what is contained in your *nefesh habehaimis*, which describes the negative and evil aspects contained in man, you must be aware that it is not all there is to your existence. If someone identifies 'himself' as being a '*nefesh habehaimis*,' he will develop a terrible and negative self-image of himself! Upon discovering the depth of his traits of conceit, anger, idle speech, desires, sadness, laziness, etc., if he thinks that is who "I" am, he will become terribly broken upon all these discoveries.

Surely we need to learn about our weaknesses so that we can see how to fix them, and we can even derive a sense of vitality from this. But we need to have a deeper approach towards self-improvement: that we are comprised of both a *neshamah*, (a Divine soul), as well as a lower layer of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*.

When we work to improve our *nefesh habehaimis*, we must realize that our "I" is not entirely evil, even before it is improved. We have a *neshamah* in us that is pure, it is "a portion of G-d from above", and there are garments that cover our *neshamah* which need to be rectified, all the way down to the lowest elements of our "I." We need to become aware of those 'garments' that are in need of being fixed, and we must become clearly aware of them - but at the same time, we must realize that our "I" is not defined by these negative attributes that we discover in our personality.

A person is not defined by his conceit, even if he is terribly conceited; he is not defined by his anger, even if he has a big temper, and he is not defined as a glutton even if he has little self-control over his desires. First of all, we have aspects of our personality which are tolerable, and even our bad *middos* have already become rectified to a certain extent [as we work on our *middos*]. Even more so, there are parts of our self which are entirely pure and spiritual.

To illustrate what we mean, a person is *davening* and standing before Hashem in prayer, and he is aware that he has a problem of being gluttonous. Must he *daven* to Hashem the entire time thinking about how he needs to uproot his evil desires? Is that all he needs to focus on? When a person *davens*, now is not the time to fix the *nefesh habehaimis*. Prayer is the time to talk to Hashem and pour out one's heart to Him, and as a *result* from this, he can also speak to Hashem about his problem of desires.



One certainly needs to consciously focus on fixing his *middos* and with awareness of the four elements that are present in our *nefesh habehaimis*, but he must not think that this defines his entire “I.” It cannot be the definition of one’s self-image, because it focuses too much on the negative aspects of man. Although self-improvement is a major part of our task, it is not everything.

Without this perspective, a person will come to look at himself as a lowly being, with the more he learns about his *nefesh habehaimis*. He will lower the entire spectrum of his soul to the level of *nefesh habehaimis*, and whenever he discovers a fault in himself (even a small fault, and all the more so if he discovers a big fault in himself), he will lose the basic healthy perspective towards self-awareness.

One must always be cognizant of the fact that his essence is that of a pure *neshamah*. There are parts in oneself which are totally spiritual and pure, and there is a middle area of the soul which is not as perfected, and there are lower parts to the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*, which are in need of rectification. But the *nefesh habehaimis* area of the soul is just one part of the soul! It is not your entire self.<sup>12</sup>

We are emphasizing this point specifically, because we have spent much time in this series<sup>13</sup> discussing the negative aspects of the soul and how to fix them; it can mislead a person to erroneously think, at least subconsciously, that he is evil. When learning about our *nefesh habehaimis*, one becomes aware of all the negative aspects of his personality and all of the bad *middos* in himself, and he might come to think as a result from this that all of his Torah learning is negatively affected from all his bad *middos*, and other such erroneous beliefs that he might form.

Although it is true that the bad *middos* exist in oneself, it must be viewed as being part of the *nefesh habehaimis*, our lower aspect, and it must not be considered to be the general whole of the person. There are higher parts to our existence than our *nefesh habehaimis*! Although we have been focusing the discussion on our *nefesh habehaimis*, this should not imply to you that you are entirely a *nefesh habehaimis*, even though we are specifically focusing here on the area of the *nefesh habehaimis*. You must realize that your *nefesh habehaimis* is only a part of who you are; it is not all there is to your “I.”

This enables you to work on improving yourself with a perspective that is both truthful and healthy at the same time.

### ***Learning About The Soul: More Than ‘Patience’ Required***

Now we will discuss the more practical points of this discussion.

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<sup>12</sup> See *Fixing Your Earth*, Chapters 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> This is referring to the Rav’s newest series on self-improvement which began in 5773 with *Getting To Know Your Inner World* (‘Da Es Yichudecha’), *Fixing Your Earth* (5774) *Getting To Know Your Imagination* (‘Da Es Dimyoncha’) (5774-5775), *Fixing Your Water* (5775-5776) and *Fixing Your Wind* (5776) which will continue, b’ezras Hashem, with the series of “*Fixing Your Fire*.”

In the previous class, we said that just as we are used to learning Gemara in the way we are used to from our youth, so do we tend to approach learning about our soul with the kind of thinking we are used to from our youth. However, there is a big difference between learning Gemara and learning about the soul.

When learning Gemara, if you don't get to the next page of Gemara, you need to be patient. When you learn about the soul, and you become aware of certain concepts, you might also think that it is upon you to remain patient before you get to learning about the next step. But it isn't quite like that.

When learning about your soul, you might wonder how you can make the concepts practical, and then you become impatient; but it is not merely upon you to become patient. According to what we have been explaining in the previous chapter, the entire path we are taking here in working on our *middos* is a path that deliberately requires a gradual process. It is simply not possible to work on all of the advice within these pages as soon as we hear about them.

### ***Identifying Soul Concepts, Within Yourself***

When you become aware of concepts that have to do with the soul – whether the information is coming to you via learning a *mussar sefer*, or because you heard a *mussar shmues*, or because a thought or feeling came to you, or because you feel a concept from within yourself – in either case, you are coming into contact with various aspects of the soul.

Therefore, you can become aware of a feeling in your soul as soon as you feel it, and your job is to simply recognize it and acknowledge it. You don't have to learn what to do with it right now and how to work with it.

Understandably, if you find yourself sensing 10 new things about your soul, you won't be able to register so much information and identify with it at all, because of the information overload. But let's say you notice something new about yourself once a week, or twice or three times a week; you can take note of it and simply learn how to recognize it in yourself, as follows:

(1) Ask yourself if what you feel is a good *middah* or bad *middah*. (2) When you hear or learn about a certain good *middah* or a certain bad *middah*, try to discern how it is personally found in yourself.

### ***Basic Awareness***

This is not referring to yet to the ability of acquiring conscious and palpable awareness of the *middah*, [which is a deeper ability that we discussed in the previous class]. It is something else entirely that needs to come way before that: to simply ask yourself how the *middah* is manifest in your life.

For example, if you hear about *zerizus* (alacrity), try to recognize how there is *zerizus* in yourself. If you hear about *simcha* (happiness), ask yourself where *simcha* is found in your life. This slowly gets you used to acquiring information and how to recognize it within yourself.

We are not talking about simply ‘amassing knowledge’ of these matters when you have no connection to it. A person might learn about *simcha* or about the topic of fixing desires, but he is simply hearing it for the sake of inspiration, and he isn’t even attempting to recognize how the matters are manifest in his own personal life. So we are not speaking about simply acquiring information for the sake of amassing knowledge.

Nor is the intention to acquire the art of conscious awareness. It is a stage that must come way before that: to simply identify in yourself the concepts that you are learning about, whether you are learning about a good *middah* or a bad *middah*. This is a general kind of recognition you need to acquire.

[To be more specific], as an example, if you hear about *simcha* (happiness), ask yourself if you can remember three times this past year in when you felt *simcha*. If you hear about *zerizus* (alacrity), try to recall if you recently acted with *zerizus* in anything. There are many more examples as we can give. The point is to learn how to identify aspects of the soul you hear about, in your own life.

### ***Discovering New Things About Yourself***

By getting used to this, week after week, month after month, you slowly will gain an overhaul of perspective towards yourself and towards life. Instead of merely becoming inspired for a few minutes before *tekias shofar* (when you were far from any *avodah*) or from the superficial inspiration you were used to from trying to learn *mussar* passionately by *mussar seder*, you will suddenly begin to recognize yourself.

As time goes on and you continue like this, you will see a new person in yourself. It will feel like you are experiencing your soul, as opposed to just amassing knowledge about what the soul is.

When you are happy, for example, you will be able to discern what exactly is making you happy. When you are sad, you will be able to discern what is making you sad. You will begin to experience your emotions; it will be a change that happens from within. It is hard to explain this in words; it is a path of deep, inner change that a person experiences within himself.

A person then slowly begins to see the world differently, to see his life differently, and to see himself differently; he gains a new lens on reality. After you become clearer about your soul comes the next step we will soon describe. Some are already there as we are giving this lesson, and some haven’t even begun the first stage.

### *In Summary*

To summarize briefly, the first step is for one to identify the concepts within himself, as much as he can, until he sees that inner changes are taking place in himself - to the point that this ability comes to him naturally.

Of course, reaching this stage does not mean that one has reached the complete depth of knowing his soul. If one thinks that he knows the entire depth of his soul, he has fooled himself, and it is a sign that he doesn't recognize his soul at all. The sensible approach is for one to keep revealing more depth about his soul, becoming aware of the many faculties of the soul, subtlety upon subtlety.

The point is to that a person acquires a whole new perspective towards himself. He begins to see things in himself he never knew about until now. He begins to see beyond the superficial layer of things. As opposed to viewing himself from a mirror, he begins to *see himself* from *within himself*.

This ability is developed slowly, as a person gets used to the process of inner change we are describing.

### *Making A List of Qualities and Shortcomings*

After this stage, a person must then give order to what's going on inside himself - by becoming aware of all his qualities and shortcomings.

This cannot be done in merely 2-3 hours of reflection; that would be like trying to take a shortcut. It takes at least 1-2 months of thinking about one's personal qualities and shortcomings, until a person can become aware of all of them. Each time he realizes he has a quality or a shortcoming, he should write it down.

Sometimes it is hard to determine if a certain part of his nature is a good quality or a negative quality, but generally speaking, one needs to give order to his soul, by writing them down. On one side of a paper write down all your qualities, and on the other side of the paper write down all the shortcomings.

After doing this for about 1-2 months (and you don't have to do be involved with this for an hour each day – just go slowly with this, and go about it calmly), you now have a list of all the qualities and shortcomings you recognize in yourself up until this point. Now you can give even more order: Ask yourself which of these abilities are more dominant in yourself, and which are less dominant.

It is hard to figure out which is your strongest ability, your second-to-strongest ability, your third-to-strongest ability, etc. It requires deep thinking to be accurate about it. But with the more you attempt to figure it out, you become clearer about yourself.

### ***Learning About The Four Elements of the Soul***

After this, a person has gotten past what we can call the ‘first’ stage, which was all the beginning to the ‘*avodah*’ stage. Now a person can progress to the ‘second’ stage, to a certain extent: One must learn about the four elements of the soul.<sup>14</sup>

One must understand how each element can contain the other three elements. Although there are four root elements – earth, water, wind and fire – those are the general roots. There are more details to those roots.

After one knows which *middos* can stem from each of the four elements, and he is aware of his own good and bad *middos*, and how dominant they are in himself, he should know try to trace the *middos* to their elements that they come from. This takes time to figure out. It is a process of inner learning.

### ***Most of our ‘Avodah’ Is Gradual Clarity, Not Practical Change***

There is a statement in our Sages, “The question of the wise, is half the answer.” What we explained until now can bring a person to the “question of the wise”, but it is ‘half the answer’ – it is half of our *avodah*, and perhaps even more so. Most of our *avodah* is not practical work; most of our *avodah* is when we *recognize* our true self (this is called “*hakarah*”).

*Hakarah*, recognition [our soul], is the essence of our *avodah*. Without *hakarah*, a person is impatient and he wants to immediately get to the practical outcomes of what he’s learning. This comes from a lack of *hakarah*. If one would know what *hakarah* is, he would know that the very process of recognizing oneself is the root of *avodah* itself. *Hakarah* of our self is already halfway towards the finish line of our *avodah* - and in fact, it’s even more than half.

Therefore, as one is working at this process of inner recognition of himself, he becomes clearer about himself, as time goes on. He will discover that many problems that he had before will suddenly disappear on their own.

Anyone who has persevered with this path of inner change can testify that many of their problems went away on their own, even without any actual *avodah*! I don’t mean that there was no *avodah* at all, but since they had been unclear about themselves before they started and they became clearer about themselves as they went along, many of their problems went away on their own, from the clarity they gained.

After reaching that stage, there is still *avodah* to be done, of course. The practical changes still need to be implemented, which haven’t been implemented until now, being that the beginning stage of *avodah* was a learning process.

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<sup>14</sup> see *Understanding Your Middos #01 – Elements and Traits*

### ***Giving Order To Your Personal Four Elements***

When one is tracing each *middah* to each of the four elements, a person comes to the following challenging stage, the most difficult of all: What is the order of the four elements in your personal soul? Which element is your strongest, which is your second-to-strongest, which is your third-to-strongest, and which is the weakest? And, more specifically, which is your strongest *middah*, your second-to-strongest *middah*, etc.?

This particular point is the aspiration and goal of anyone who wishes to serve the Creator through his soul.

Reb Naftali Trop ז"ל once said that our most difficult issue in serving the Creator is that we don't know which part of ourselves are our greatest quality, our second-to-best quality, and our third-to-best quality. If we would know ourselves like this, it would be clear to us what our *avodah* is, and the problem is, we don't know ourselves. The lack of knowledge about our soul is the core reason why we have difficulty in serving the Creator with our souls.

Failures in one's *avodah* are usually contributed to "My *yetzer hora* overcame me", and this might be true, but it is not the entire reason. It is usually because a person doesn't understand his soul – either he didn't realize that he has misconceptions, or he was overdoing himself; which sets him up for failure.

As we said, the process we are describing takes time and effort. But as time goes on and a person perseveres, a person becomes clearer about himself, and he begins to see clearly and precisely what he needs to do to work on himself. Although complete clarity is never possible, the aspiration of every one who wishes to serve the Creator with his soul must be: to reach more and more clarity about the soul.

### ***In Summary***

In summary, we must first give order to our elements, then to our *middos*, then to our personal qualities and shortcomings, and then we can become clear in the order of our own personal soul, by seeing which aspects of our soul are balanced and which are unbalanced. (As we mentioned earlier, imbalances in the soul are caused not only by bad *middos*, but even by good *middos*, when they are extreme.)

### ***A Change of Perspective Towards Hearing 'Mussar'***

To conclude the discussion here, we must be aware that there is a big change of perspective which we need to get used to, as we are learning this series of fixing our *middos*.

People are usually interested in hearing a “*mussar shmuess*” only if there will be a practical tip or resolution at the end that they can work on, to actualize what they heard. But if one understands deeply the words of Chazal, he knows that there is a more inner approach than this.

The inner approach is to first amass knowledge of these matters and think into them, until a person recognizes the matters from within himself. This takes a while. Thinking into these matters is at least half of our *avodah*, and the practical part comes at a later point, after one has already thought and reflected deeply into the concepts.

If someone seeks only practical advice of how he can change and he is not interested in doing any of this long process of thinking and reflecting on the material he is hearing, the path here is not for him, and he must seek something else.

These *shiurim* are not the kind of *shiurim* you hear in which you resolve afterwards that from now on, you will say “*Amen*” with concentration, or some other resolution. Although those are truthful points to work on, this should not be the goal in hearing these *shiurim*, because the purpose here is different. The purpose of these *shiurim* is to help a person slowly gain more and clarity about his *avodah*. Although there is no such thing as perfect clarity, we can become clearer and clearer as we go along, as much as we can.

Thus, when you take the path being presented here - which is the path that our Sages took – you must know that it is not merely about ‘remaining patient’ until you can get to the practical *avodah* part. It requires you to see the gain of just learning this information and in becoming clearer as you go along.

That, itself, is the main and desired part of our *avodah*. It is supposed to be a long and gradual process of inner change; it is not supposed to result in immediate changes in your life. The practical changes will only come after you have persevered for a long time learning and studying the information, because this enables you to become clearer and clearer about the matters, as you spend time on learning these matters.

Compare this to a person who learns a *sugya* of Gemara very quickly, so that he can get to know the *halacha* that results from the Gemara he is learning. He quickly learns the Gemara, *Rashi*, *Tosafos*, *Ran*, *Rosh*, *Rif*, *Tur*, and *Beis Yosef*, until he gets to the *halachah* of the *Poskim*. He learns all of this very quickly [which means that he is learning it superficially]. But if a person really wants to learn the *sugya* well, and he also wants to know the *Halacha* that results from the Gemara, he understands that he will only be able to do so if he learns it slowly and analytically. Of course, he wants to get to the *Halacha* of it also, but he understands that he first needs to notice all the subtleties.

Does this mean that he’s being ‘patient’? It’s more than just patience. It is because he knows that in order to really understand what he’s learning, he must take his time in trying to understand it, slowly, patiently. It’s not because ‘he has no choice’ otherwise. Rather, he understands that this is the ideal way to learn Gemara and then the *Halacha*.

So, too, when it comes to learning about *avodah*, which is a long learning process, the purpose is to become clearer as we go along in our learning of these matters, long before we get to the practical changes. It is the very clarity that we gain, as we persevere with this long process of learning, which eventually helps us get to the practical outcomes from all of this.

We have briefly outlined the main points we need to understand before we approach our *avodah* [of *tikkun hamiddos*].

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### *Questions & Answers with the Rav*

**Q1:** In the previous lesson, the Rav explained that a person will need to hear hundreds of lessons [of the Rav on the series of the four elements] before he can know how to put these lessons into practice. However, in this lesson, the Rav seems to imply the opposite, that a person needs to begin immediately with practical change.

A: I must repeat again, that practical action cannot be implemented based upon these lessons, until a person has heard at least hundreds of these lessons. However, it is possible for a person to gain proper self-recognition from these lessons, and that is the path which we have explained here. This is not about practical change in action, so it is not what people are referring to when they say “*l’maaseh*” (“practically speaking”).

When a person takes the inner approach described here, he should realize that this is not about looking what to do “*l’maaseh*”. Certainly, that should be in the plan, but if a person comes and tells me that in another 10 years he will arrive at practical change in his actions, for the 10-year learning process that comes before that, he will certainly gain tremendous clarity, which will change everything. 10 years is really a more exaggerated case. It can probably take around 5 years. **But for those 5 years of learning, a person will be traversing a lot, and he will change dramatically, and a large amount of self-improvement will come by default, without even putting in the hard work to get there.** Of course, there will be some self-work that is needed, but it will only be a small percentage.

When a person thinks superficially, he thinks, “I need to improve in this area, that area, and another area. How long will all of this take?” The true answer to this is that a person’s entire inner structure changes [as he gets used to hearing and studying these lessons], and sometimes, this inner change causes a person to re-calculate his thinking. What he thought he needs to work on, he really doesn’t need to work on – it was just that he needed to re-organize [the different abilities in his soul]. There is an inner perspective here which needs to be absorbed.

**When people enter this kind of learning with any of the erroneous mindsets mentioned before, they will immediately seek how to make all of the lessons practical, and then it will be most difficult for them to listen to all of these lessons, because they want to get the practical part already.** Some people like to hear razor-sharp intellectual definitions of something, others enjoys these lessons because it helps them unwind once a week for 45 minutes from the normal



routine learning sessions of the *beis midrash*, etc. But if you understand how the approach here is supposed to work, you see a different perspective. **It is a certain journey we are traversing here. The results will not come only at the end. The results will come even in the middle of this learning process, because you will further advance in your clarity [about matters of the soul].**

Of course, you will not always see instant results every moment, but you may find for example that in 2 months' time, you have become much clearer about yourself. Another 2 months will pass and you will notice that you have gained even more clarity. **The progress is slow, but it is consistent, for the entire time [that you will be hearing and studying these lessons], and that, itself, is the factor that will bring about personal change.**

**Q2:** How much time is needed to be set aside, in order for a person to test himself on any of the points which the Rav addresses? And how much time does a person need to set aside to learn practical halachah?

A: There are no clear definitions. The factors change, depending on each person's unique soul, on the particular period one is in, such as if it's in middle of the season or during a break [*bein hazemanim*]. During the time that a person is immersed in Torah study, he should not be involved with these matters [of studying the soul] at all. At others times, a person needs to spend more time on studying these matters [of the soul]. To illustrate the idea, there is a statement of Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l, who learned for half a year in the yeshiva of Kelm, that every person should learn at least for half a year in Kelm – but only for half a year, and not more.

**Q3:** Should a person spend time learning about [the four elements of the soul] for 10 minutes before he begins his Torah learning session?

A: 10 minutes will not suffice for this [so there is no point in doing just learning about the four elements for 10 minutes before you start learning Gemara]. A person would have to be exceptionally brilliant to study this for 10 minutes and then immediately enter into the Gemara. Each person has his challenges, based on his unique circumstances, with many complex factors, and while some have more complex situations than others do (more or less), the common denominator is that most people are coming from a complex life. Before arriving at the Beis Midrash, a *kolel avreich* may need to be busy with babysitters, the bank, preparing meals for his children, etc. Each person has what to take care of, so each person is coming here with his fair share of 'noise'. 10 minutes of inner silence before opening the Gemara is the bare minimum, just to help a person leave all the 'noise' and be able to enter into the world of Torah learning. But of course, the inner world of a person is not developed based on 10 minutes, and certainly not on 5 minutes.

**Q4:** There are sefarim which write that when a person changes his will, by transforming the egoistic will into a caregiving will, this enables a person to recognize his own inner evil, because his inner senses become heightened, and as a result he gains more clarity about how he needs to serve Hashem. In turn, he also will intuitively know what to work on first, second, etc. in his avodas Hashem. Does this approach contradict the path presented here [of working with the four elements of the soul] or can it also work in tandem with the approach here [of the four elements]?

A: Those are two different ways of thinking which were taught in two *Batei Midrashos* (schools of thought), as you mentioned. The approach [you mentioned] was taught by Rav Ashlag and also by Rav Dessler, and it is one of the core fundamentals that they taught. But let us repeat again that a person needs to understand the four elements of the soul, in order to attain any inner clarity. There are many other ways, besides for the way you mentioned, which bring a person to inner clarity. But in any case, the inner clarity can also be reached when one has given order to his soul [through balancing one's four elements]. When a person doesn't use the four elements as his 'map' he cannot get anywhere. When a person changes from being a taker to becoming a giver, this definitely gives him inner clarity in his soul, but that clarity can only be attained through using a 'map' within oneself. A person needs to give order to his soul's four elements, and then he can navigate himself through his inner world, by using the clarity he has attained. When we need a 'map' to navigate our way through, let us use the map which Hashem has created.

**Q5:** If a person has done inner work on himself and he has reached a point where he recognizes his soul well, does that mean that the evil inclination won't have any control on him?

A: Three people merited a level in which their evil inclination had no control over them – Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. One must say “When will my actions touch upon that of my forefathers?” One can touch upon their level, but one cannot actually attain it.

**Q6:** Will a person still encounter spiritual failures [after clarifying his four elements]?

A: Certainly one can still fall.

But, much of what a person thinks he needs to work on really stems from poor self-recognition, and from confusion about oneself. And there are some areas a person thinks he needs to work on which really does need to work on. When a person traverses the approach [of the four elements] we spoke about here, he will become clearer about the first two parts [proper self-recognition as opposed to poor self-recognition, and clarity versus confusion]. Then one can discover the areas which he truly needs to work on. That is where one will have to do much difficult inner work – it will be very, very difficult. This is not to say that there isn't any inner work that needs to be done before this, but in the beginning stages it is more about clarifying to oneself, precisely, the unique aspects of one's personality. Then one's avodah will be more precise and organized. And certainly there will be failures, because “a righteous person falls seven times, and rises.”

**Q7:** Is it possible for a person to work with approach by discovering these matters from within himself? Or does he need external factors for this?

A: It was mentioned at the start that a person is able to reach these matters from within himself, but we only mentioned this briefly, because most people do not have the inner tranquility to reach self-recognition from a quieted self. This is because most people have a lot of 'noise' in their lives which prevents them from attaining inner quiet. Whenever it's chaotic, such as Erev Pesach when there's a lot of tumult in the house, a person doesn't have to be particularly brilliant to recognize the powers of the soul, but in order to reach subtle points about the soul, a person needs inner quiet.

That is surely the inner and truer way, but it is not within reach of most people, and that is why we only mentioned this briefly and we didn't elaborate upon it.

**Q8:** After a person begins to recognize his personality, are there any areas which a person certainly needs to work on improving?

**A:** I will repeat again that there are areas which a person definitely needs to fix, and each person needs to figure out what he needs to mainly fix. There are areas which a person thinks he needs to fix, but the reason he thought about those areas is because he doesn't have proper awareness about himself, or because there is a lack of order in his soul. It's not a question of giving order to the soul or repairing the soul [rather, it is about knowing how to work with the elements of the soul]. To illustrate the idea, a person is in a house and suddenly an appliance stops working, he calls a repairman to fix it and shows him what isn't working. The repairman shows him that there is nothing wrong with the appliance - it is just that you have to know how to use it...

**Q9:** If a person is often getting angry, does that mean that he needs to mainly work on his anger?

**A:** That is an excellent example. There are some people whose anger doesn't stem from anger, but from a lack of order in their soul, which causes them to feel pressured inside themselves. Their displays of anger are a result of the pressure they are feeling. But their anger isn't coming from the actual trait known as anger. There are many people who have feel pressured from all that goes on in their life. This is not to say that they don't have what to be angry about, but it's very possible that their frequent anger is not because anger is their dominant trait, but from a lack of order in their soul. Certainly a person will need to work on his anger, but when he needs to deal with the actual trait of anger at some other point, he will see a whole different kind of anger than the one he was used to experiencing before.

**Q10:** Should a person learn mussar in the interim, in order to deal with his anger, or will this just prove unhelpful?

**A:** It will not help much. It's impossible to say that it won't help at all. In the end of the day, Reb Yisrael Salanter said that there are two ways to repair any of the character traits – either by fixing it, or by conquering it. If one tries to learn *mussar* because he wants to fix a certain character trait, this will cause confusion in his soul, because he doesn't even recognize the character trait he is trying to fix. If he tries to learn *mussar* because he wants to conquer a certain trait, this can certainly help, but why should a person spend so much energy on an area which isn't the main issue? First he needs to give order [to his elements] and then he can be helped. I am not speaking right now on a practical level. Certainly, if a person gets very angry about something on Erev Shabbos or Erev Pesach, he should make use of any techniques that will help him overcome his anger right now. He needs a short-term solution for right now. But a person needs to engage in a program of long-term help, to try to build and develop the structure of his personal soul. Because if a person doesn't uncover the root of what's causing his anger – for example, if his anger is coming from his element of fire or from pressure in his life, whether external pressure and internal pressures – what will happen? He may be working all the time on areas which he doesn't really need to work on, and his avodah is lacking in precision.

**Q11:** Can it be said that all of Gedolim, who lived with *mesirus nefesh*, were able to ‘skip’ working with the four elements of their soul [since *mesirus nefesh* enables a person to skip levels]?

A: Generally speaking, our Gedolim who had *mesirus nefesh* reached the level which the *Mesillas Yescharim* describes, in which a person is standing above a garden-maze and directing another person below, since he has traversed the maze and he is above it. When a person is above the ‘garden maze’, he can see the four elements from above [without learning about them]. This doesn’t mean that the *Gedolim* didn’t recognize the four elements. It is possible that they did not traverse the path of the four elements, but after they reached a view from above, they were then able to see their four elements [from above].

**Q12:** Is it possible even in our generation for a person to be ‘above the garden-maze’?

A: Who says that any given point can only be applied to a certain generation and not to another?

**Q13:** Why then should a person use the approach of *avodah* explained here [about the four elements]?

A: Because [if a person tries to bypass the approach of the four elements and he tries to be above it all], “Many did like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and didn’t succeed”. Chazal didn’t say that it’s impossible to do like Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, they said instead that many did like him and didn’t succeed. A few succeeded, because there are certainly a few individuals who can take an extreme path and succeed. But it is not the way for most people. As another example, there are instances where a zealot may attack a sinner, but is that a *halachah* for all people to follow? It is only applicable to certain individuals, but it is not the way for the majority. It is a very dangerous path to take. Most people who took that path didn’t succeed, and in some cases, they fell very low, because they brought chaos to their souls.

**Q14:** The Rav is implying that all the advice given by our Sages is because they reached a view from above, and they didn’t need to utilize the four elements in their souls. But when the Sages give advice, they do not specify if the advice is for a specific kind of person. If so, since each person’s main element is different, not every statement of the Sages will apply to him equally, and it may even be harmful to him, if it doesn’t suit his main element...?

A: Yes. This point is elaborated upon in the *sefarim*, such as in the *sefarim* of the Ramchal. “The words of Torah are poor in one place and wealthy in another place” – if a person uses a particular advice of Torah in the wrong place, the results will be detrimental. An example which the Ramchal uses for this is an expression that is oft-mentioned in the Talmud: “*Hacha b’may askinan*”, “What are we dealing with here?” One needs to always know the specific case that the advice of the Torah applies to. This is the implication of the statement, “Those who learn Mishnah confuse the world”, because when a person only learns a Mishnah, which states general rules, the results are detrimental. The Sages of the Gemara came and explained in what exact circumstances the Mishnah is speaking about. When one doesn’t know the circumstance that a statement of the Sages is applicable to, he will come to transgress the Torah. In the Gemara, it is clear that one needs to know exactly in what circumstances the rule of the Mishnah is talking about. When it comes to *avodas Hashem*, though, it

is not spelled out that clearly. But the rule of “What are we dealing with here?” applies to all areas of Torah [including areas of *avodas Hashem*].

**Q15:** To clarify, did the Rav explain in this lesson that one of the problems a person may encounter in self-recognition is that the more issues he discovers about himself, the more he will come to identify his ‘animal soul’ as his “I”?

A: Yes, this is a problem that may occur.

**Q16:** What, then, is the true “I” of a person?

A: There are two fundamental approaches of how we can define the “I” of a person. According to one approach, the “I” of a person is his power to choose (*bechirah*), and this is also called the “*Ruach*” [spirit] level of the soul, as the Gra writes. According to a second approach, the “I” of a person is his pure *neshamah* [Divine soul] which Hashem has given him. These are two different approaches explained in the words of our Sages, in how to understand the “I”. The Sages who took the path of the Gra would emphasize that the “I” of a person is his power to choose, otherwise known as the *Ruach*, whereas other Sages emphasized the *neshamah* as the “I” of a person. This second approach is based on the statement, “Your world can be seen in your life”, and it is the approach that the “I” of a person is defined as “*My G-d, the soul gave to me is pure.*”

**Q17:** In order for a person to properly identify his “I”, does he need to know about the four elements of the soul? And does a person need to set aside time in order to see and feel what his true “I” is, no less than how senses anything else?

A: Recognizing the “I” is not like how you sense anything else. It is the root of everything, because it is the root of how a person can sense and feel the existence of the Creator. And yes, a person needs to set aside time in order to recognize his “I”.

But I want to emphasize that it is more than this. This is not simply about setting aside time to discover the “I”, because we need to realize that it is not our “I” which is at the center, but *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. The center of everything is *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah. After one recognizes that as the center, he should then work on self-recognition.

There is a holy implication of the “I”, as well as a detrimental implication of the term “I.” The detrimental implication of “I” is when a person uses his element of fire for evil, and he becomes conceited. The holy use of the “I” is the root that all *avodah* is based upon. Eventually there is a later stage in which a person learns how to nullify that “I” to Hashem. But self-nullification can only come after one has properly built his “I”, and not before he has built his “I”. So, in the beginning stages of self-recognition, one needs to focus on building his “I” and relate to it as the “I”, rather than focusing on the weaknesses of the animal soul (*nefesh habehaimis*) and defining oneself as such. Perhaps while a person is trying to fix a negative character trait he can relate to it as a problem in his “animal soul”, but this should only be temporarily. As a general rule, one needs to keep the focus of his self-work on building his true “I”, as opposed to relating to himself as the “animal soul” (*nefesh habehaimis*).



### 3 | *Fundamentals of Middos Improvement: Part 3* <sup>15</sup>

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#### ***Learning About Our Middos***

It is written, “*Your thoughts are very deep, a fool does not know them.*” All of the Torah is very deep, but the study of the *middos* (character traits, as well as our emotions), is a particularly very deep subject.

Firstly, we need to understand each *middah*, and then we need to understand how each *middah* relates to the other *middos*. We can then learn how to “wear” them and how to “detach” from them when we need to.

Then, we can truly work on, and fix, our *middos*.

#### ***Figure Out Your Main Element***

Rav Chaim Vital wrote that all of our *middos* come from the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire.<sup>16</sup>

A person needs to see which element he has a tendency towards. How a person can figure this out is a separate discussion, but the point is, that a person must figure out what his root element is.<sup>17</sup>

After a person figures this out, he should realize that whatever his main element is, there are four elements contained in it. In other words, after you find out what your main element is, figure out which is your main *middah* that comes from it. Identify your best *middah* that comes from your most dominant element, and identify your worst *middah* that comes from your most dominant element.

Your best *middah* and your worst *middah* are the opposite of each other. If you figure out that your best *middah* is not the opposite of your bad *middah* (and vice versa), it is a sign that you haven’t figured out what your main element is. This is because your best *middah* comes from a certain element in you, and your worst *middah* has to be the opposite of this.

Therefore, besides for that we have to study the four elements and all their many branching details, each person has to really know well what his main element is. Even after you figure out what your main element is, you need to know it very well and identify it strongly.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-middos-003-fundamentals-middos-improvement-part-3>

<sup>16</sup> Shaarei Kedushah, I:I

<sup>17</sup> See *Getting To Know Your Soul*.

### ***Figuring Out Your Worst Middah***

If this is too hard to figure out, then at least figure out what your most common good or bad *middah* (character trait) is, and then learn about that *middah* very well, in-depth.

### ***Studying The Middos With Depth***

Reb Yisrael Salanter said that when a person wants to work on a certain area he needs improvement in, he should learn and study that area of the Torah very well. For example, if a person sees that his most common bad *middah* is *gaavah* (conceit), then he has must learn about the topic of *gaavah* well, in-depth, and to recognize what it is very well. Or, if a person sees that his main bad *middah* present in his life is the trait of anger, then he has to learn about anger and know all about it in great detail. It should be a “*sugya*” (discussion) to him, just like a *sugya* of Gemara that he learns very well and in-depth, which he regularly analyzes and studies all the intricacies of it.

Most people like to take shortcuts when it comes to working on their *middos*. If someone wants to learn how to control his anger, he is tempted to take the easy route, reading up on it a little and perhaps doing some minimal research on this topic, looking for “tips” on how to avoid getting angry. A person naturally feels comfortable doing this when it comes to working on any bad *middah* he notices in himself.

But this is not the truthful approach of the Torah. The Torah method is that we must work for many months on understanding what the *middah* in question is, in concept, before we can even begin to actually “work” on it and fix it. Without studying our *middos*, it’s like becoming a *posek* without learning *Halacha* beforehand.

### ***Discovering Your Personal Weakness***

Also, it is impossible to say that everyone must work very hard at fixing one particular *bad middah*. This is because each person’s soul is built differently, so each of us has different qualities and faults that are unique to our personal circumstances.

But at some point, we will need to cover all of them, so that each person can figure out where his main weakness lies in. We will therefore discuss all the *middos* that come from all four elements, and as you go along with these classes, you can see for yourself which is your own personal worst weakness.

We will learn about each *middah* in detail. The details are really endless, and it is like an endless ocean. But we will try, as hard as we can, to learn about them.

So each chapter will be covering a different *middah*. The disadvantage to this is that not everyone will be able to listen well and follow each chapter, because you might be hearing about a particular



*middah* that is not of much interest to you right now, for you know that you have other areas to mainly put your focus on.

If someone is very motivated to understand the whole picture of our *middos*, then he won't have this problem. But anyone else who just wants to find out what his particular weakness is and how he can work on it will have a hard time learning all of these classes, until he hears about his particular bad *middah* that he knows he must mainly work on; and then he will lose the desire to continue. So patience is required from you, as you go along this series. We have no choice but to go through each *middah* and then give advice on how to work on each *middah*, and at some point, each person needs to find himself in all of this, where he fits in, and what he has to mainly work on.

That is the purpose of giving over the whole picture of our *middos*, as opposed to concentrating on one topic the entire time.

There is general advice here in these chapters that can apply to everyone, but there is some advice which cannot be written in any *sefer* - and it can only be arrived at when you use your "understanding of the heart".

### ***Working On Our Middos: "Breaking" and "Removing"***

When a person wants to get rid of a bad *middah*, there are two possible options he can try. One of them is the correct and sensible approach; the other method is detrimental.

One way is to simply try to fight and squash the bad *middah* at hand. For example, if a person has an evil desire, maybe he should try to hold back from giving it to his desire and practice restraint. He is attempting to kill off the desires. Or, if he gets angry a lot, he could try to pause before getting angry, and wait until his anger subsides. The point of this method is that the person attacks the bad *middah* directly head-on.

There is another way to deal with bad *middos*, though, which is based on the first method; without the first method, it will be impossible to implement this method. The second method is, that besides for practicing restraint over our bad *middos*, we can 'remove' the very *middah* itself, regardless of it is good or bad right now.

The first way is an attempt to "break" one's *middos*. There is a statement from the Kotzker Rebbe that if someone breaks his bad *middah*, he will be left with two of them, just like when you smash an item and you are left with two pieces of it. Thus, a person has to make use of another way to deal with bad *middos*: he needs to remove the very *middah* itself at its root, rather than attempting to break it.

According to the second approach, which is the ideal method, even a good *middah* would have to be removed, at times. It is about removing the nature of the "*middah*" itself, and it is not focused on getting rid of the "bad" in the *middah*.

For example, *Chazal* say that if a person has mercy on the cruel, he will come to act cruel even to those who are deserving of mercy. A person has to act ‘cruel’ to his children sometimes, like when he disciplines them. In such a case, it is not the time to use the *middah* of *rachamim* (compassion). This is an example of ‘removing’ yourself from a good *middah* – in this case, by withholding the *middah* of *rachamim* (compassion).

So on one hand, while we must certainly work to break our bad *middos*, we must also remove ourselves from even good *middos* sometimes. That is one fundamental point in our discussion here.

### ***The Roots of Middos***

Another important point we must know here is that we need to have the whole picture of *middos* as we work on our *middos*. There are different kinds of *middos*. The root of the *middos* is the *middos* of Hashem; the 13 *middos* of Hashem, of which *Chazal* say we must cling to His *middos*. The lesson of this is that we must realize that our *middos* come from Hashem. Lower than those are the 13 “*middos* of the Torah”. The *middos* of the Torah are the revelation of the *middos* of Hashem. Lower than those are the *middos* of a person.

The Sages state, “Hashem looked into the world and created the world”. So if we want to examine our *middos* and work to fix them, we need to realize their roots – the *middos* of Hashem, which are manifested in the *middos* of the Torah.

Without this outlook, a person’s view on the *middos* is superficial and immature. We need to bear in mind the whole picture of *middos* – the roots, and the branches. If we have the ‘roots’, we can arrive at the ‘branches’.

### ***Three Layers of the Middos***

Some of our *middos* come from our soul, while some come from our body. The *middos* from our Divine soul (our *Nefesh Elokis*) are entirely good and have no bad in them. *Middos* of the body come from the ‘animalistic’ part of our soul - the *nefesh habehaimis*. They are a mix of good and evil. There is a lower source of *middos* within then *nefesh habehaimis*, though, which is entirely evil.

A person has in himself a pure and lofty part in his soul that has entirely good *middos*. This is the *nefesh Elokis* (G-dly soul).

A person also has inside himself a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) and a *yetzer tov* (good inclination), mixed together. The natural evil found in a person is in the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul), and it is essentially the *yetzer hora*. The *Chovos Halevovos* writes that the *yetzer hora* is mixed up with the good in your soul. This evil manifests itself in one’s bad *middos*.

The third layer of a person is the part of a person which is totally evil, and it is present in the lower area of the *nefesh habehaimis*.

A person has to recognize that there are three layers in himself – a part in himself which is entirely good, a part in himself which is a mixture of good and evil (it can be used for either good or evil), and a part in himself which is entirely evil.

If a person is only aware that he has a mixture of good and evil in himself, and he isn't aware that there is a part in him which is totally good, then he has nowhere from where to draw forth his inherent good that he was created with. It is not enough for a person to separate the good from the evil in himself; he has to also realize that there is a part in himself that is totally pure and good. The way we work on our *middos* involves all three layers. Therefore, in our *avodah* of being able to 'wear' and 'detach' our *middos*, we need to be aware that we have all of these three layers.

### ***Desire for Food – Good or Evil?***

For example, if a person feels a desire (*taavah*) to eat a certain food, how does a person look at this?

If a person hasn't yet become aware of the mixture in himself as well as the good in himself, then he considers desire to be totally evil. If that is his attitude, then his desire to eat food is indeed always evil, because he has never revealed any good about desire. When he fights the evil desire, he will feel like he is fighting evil, but he doesn't know how to reveal any good in such a situation.

But if he becomes aware that he has in himself a mixture of good and evil, then he can be aware if his desire is coming from an actual need to eat, or if it is just coming from a lack of self-control.

If a person becomes aware of the highest part of himself – the part in him which is completely good – then he has an even higher reaction when he feels a desire to eat food: he is able to view it as a reflection of his desire to be close to Hashem.

### ***In Conclusion***

We only gave one example, but we need to become aware of our soul's three layers in every bad *middah* we discover.

In order to do this, we need to learn about the *middos* from the words of *Chazal*, and it takes a lot of time. We have to learn about the *middos* so we can work on them, and then we can learn when to use them and when not to use them. This is part of how we can wear and detach the layers of our soul, which is necessary in the path of trying to reach the essence of our soul, our very *havayah*.

# *Tackling Sadness*

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*Tackling Sadness***4 | The Root Causes For Sadness** <sup>18</sup>

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***Three Kinds of Middos***

We will try to explain the material here in a way that is very practical in our life.

We have explained that there are three kinds of *middos* in ourselves: the *middos* that come from our *nefesh habehaimis* (the lower, animalistic part of our soul), which are entirely base and evil; we have the *middos* that come from our *nefesh Elokis* (the higher, G-dly part of the soul), which are always pure and holy; and we have the *middos* that stem from a middle layer of the soul, which contain a mixture of good and evil.

To go a bit more into detail, the middle layer in the soul, which resides between the *nefesh habehaimis* and the *nefesh Elokis*, is called the point of “*medameh*”. The “*medameh*” part of the soul is where we can purify the *middos* of our *nefesh habehaimis* and get them to become more like our *nefesh Elokis*.

Everything has within it the four elements of Creation. Both the higher and lower parts of our soul contain the four elements, and from the elements stem our *middos*. There are four elements in the higher part of our soul as well as in the lower parts of our soul. The elements of our higher soul (our *Nefesh Elokis*) are already perfected, whereas the four elements contained in our lower soul (our *nefesh habehaimis*) are in need of rectification.

***The Element of Earth: The Source of Sadness***

The element of earth in us, as we have mentioned from the words of Rav Chaim Vital, is the main source of sadness. Since Hashem created the rest of the world from the earth, earth also contains aspects of the other three elements within it: water, wind and fire. Therefore, there is sadness which comes from the ‘earth’ itself in us, as well as sadness which comes from the elements of water, wind and fire within our ‘earth’ itself.

***1: Feeling Lazy and Heavy (Earth-of-Earth)***

The first kind of sadness comes from the actual earth that is within the element of earth (“earth-of-earth”). The earth is a heavy material, and when a person’s element of earth becomes too

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-004-root-causes-sadness>

dominant, it makes a person feel a sort of inner heaviness. The person's soul feels 'heavy' inside, he becomes sad as a result.

This is one source for sadness: feeling an inner heaviness.

### ***2: Feeling Like a Failure (Water-of-Earth)***

A second source of sadness can come from the 'water' within our element of earth. The nature of water is to descend and drop downwards; it comes down from the sky, and it flows downward from the mountains.

This shows us that when a person feels like he has gone 'downward' – in other words, when he feels that he has had some failure or descent - he is feeling his element of **water-of-earth**. This is the deep reason behind why failures make a person feel sad.

### ***3: Unfulfilled Wants (Wind-of-Earth)***

A third cause for sadness can come from the 'wind' aspect that is within our element of earth. Wind is a moving force; when a person wants something and he doesn't fulfill it, this causes him pain. The very fact that a person wants something makes him already sad, because he doesn't have it.

This kind of sadness – unfulfilled desires – is a very common cause of sadness.

### ***4: Doubts (Fire-of-Earth)***

A fourth source for sadness comes from the 'fire' aspect within our element of earth. Fire causes division and separation; Hashem created fire from the separation of the upper and lower waters on the second day, thus, fire causes separation. Strife amongst people comes from the element of fire. When people have strife, this causes sadness with it; it comes from the 'fire' aspect within the element of earth.

Even when a person is just having doubts about something, this also makes him sad, because being in doubt is like an inner kind of 'strife' within oneself. That is also why "There is no happiness like the clarification of doubts.<sup>19</sup>." When there is doubt, there is sadness, so when the doubts are cleared, there is happiness.

### ***5: Figure Out Your Source of Sadness***

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<sup>19</sup> Torah HaOlah

So far, we have given four possible reasons why a person is sad. All of these possibilities come from the four elements found in the lower part of our soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*. Think about them and then try to discern which of these might be the source of your sadness.

It is imperative to pinpoint the exact cause of your sadness, and not to make generalizations. There are people who are sad and aren't even aware that deep down they are sad, because they do not know how to identify what is bothering them. It is advised to write down all the possibilities and then see which of these you experience the most in your life. It will also take a lot of *siyata d'shmaya* (help from Above), as well as personal holiness, in order for a person to arrive at knowing it.

If a person is lazy, which is also a negative trait rooted in the element of earth. Does that mean that his laziness is stemming from earth-of-earth, being that laziness stems from earth? It is not always the case. Some people who have more earth in their soul, which makes them feel heavier inside themselves, and that is why they act lazy; they feel heavy and thus lethargic. This stems from **earth-of-earth**. Others, though, are lazy for different reasons entirely. For example, a person might be lazy due to a failure he recently experienced, which is causing him to act lethargic. This stems from **water-of-earth**. Or, he might be lazy because he sees that he's not getting what he wants in his life; this stems from **wind-of-earth**. Or it can be that he's acting lazy because he is always having regrets and doubts, which stems from **fire-of-earth**.

So one must know very well which element in particular is mainly the cause of his sadness. This is not figured out so fast, and it will take wisdom about life in order to discern.

## ***6: Imagination***

A fifth cause for sadness, which is also coming from a negative area of the soul, can be coming from the faculty of imagination. Many times people imagine that they need something, and are anxious because they haven't gotten it yet, and this brings sadness with it.

This is not to be confused with the sadness that stems from the element of wind, which is also a sadness caused by unfulfilled desires. Earlier, we spoke of someone who has a real need, and he isn't fulfilling it, which makes him sad. But now we are speaking of a different kind of desire: when a person imagines that he really needs something, and really, he doesn't need it. A person's imagination is responsible for exaggerating a person's needs. This is actually the most common kind of sadness found among people: unfulfilled desires, most of them being extraneous and unnecessary for a person to have.

The classical example of this sadness is Adam *HaRishon*, who desired to eat from the *Eitz HaDa'as*. This was something he did not need, yet he desired it anyway. It was all in his imagination; what came about from this? Nothing but sadness came upon Creation.

## ***7: Spiritual Failings (Spiritual Water-of-Earth)***

The next four reasons for sadness are higher kinds of sadness which come from the inner, G-dly layer of our soul; these are spiritual kinds of sadness, and if one is sad for any of these reasons, it is actually coming from a holy and pure place in himself.

The *nefesh Elohis* - the G-dly layer of the soul – also contains the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. But these are completely spiritual kinds of elements, so they are pure and spiritual kinds of sadness, which, in essence, do not need to be fixed. [However, one must know very well if his sadness is really coming from these sources, or if it is perhaps coming from lower elements in his soul that are in the *nefesh habehaimis*].

One source of spiritual sadness is from the element of ‘**water**’ within the element of earth in the G-dly layer of the soul. This is when a person feels a spiritual failure: when he feels that he is failing in his service to Hashem. Unlike the sadness caused by the water of the lower part of the soul that we spoke about before, which was about a feeling of physical failure, this kind of sadness is when a person feels that he has spiritual failings.

#### **8: *Spiritual Doubts (Spiritual Fire-of-Earth)***

Another spiritual kind of sadness comes from the element of **fire**-of-earth in the G-dly part of the soul. This is when a person is in doubt about what the right thing is; doubt is rooted in the element of fire (as we will explain later).

#### **9: *Spiritual Frustration (Spiritual Wind-of-Earth)***

A person might also be sad from his element of **wind**-of-earth in the G-dly part of the soul, like if he feels that he is not revealing his potential in spirituality – the true desires of a person. This sadness comes from our “wind” (of earth), since wind moves things and gives direction, a lack of fulfilled potential is essentially a lack of wind in the soul.

#### **10: *Spiritual Restlessness (Spiritual Earth-of-Earth)***

Finally, a person might be sad because of the ‘**earth**’ aspect of earth in his G-dly soul. This is when a person is sad about his very situation on this world – the fact that are confined to this physical earth, where our soul does not belong. Our soul is actually very sad that it has to be confined to a materialistic body. When one feels this sadness, he is feeling the holy kind of sadness that comes from **earth-of-earth** of the G-dly soul.

“A pious individual longs for his day of death,”<sup>20</sup> and the depth behind this is that the soul longs to return to its Creator. When a person truly feels this, he feels the spiritual kind of sadness present

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<sup>20</sup> *Chovos HaLevovos*



in the soul, in the earth of his G-dly layer in the soul. This is a holy kind of sadness; the more a person purifies his soul, the more he feels this sadness.

### ***In Conclusion***

Most people, who have not yet revealed their souls, are sad from either one of the first four reasons we have said. To be even more specific, most people are sad because of their element of wind in their lower part of the soul – unfulfilled desires, especially desires that a person *imagines* he really needs.

To summarize, there are altogether nine root causes for sadness in a person. Five of them are materialistic kinds of sadness: the four elements in the lower part of our soul, and the imagination, which is an altogether different cause for sadness. The other four kinds of sadness are spiritual kinds of sadness that are holy.

Recognize these nine causes of sadness in your life, and clarify to yourself which of them are mainly present in your experiences. Then you can know which kind of sadness you mainly need to rectify in your life.

Before you begin to actually work on solving your sadness, you first have to undergo this self-analysis. You cannot begin to work on yourself unless you know what exactly makes you sad.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *In this series, we will focus on the four kinds of negative sadness which come from the nefesh habehaimis, which will add up to a total of 16 different kinds of sadness. The imagination-based sadness is discussed in the series **Getting To Know Your Imagination**].*

*Tackling Sadness***5 | Sadness Caused By Earth, Water, and Wind of Earth** <sup>22</sup>

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***A Word of Caution Before Continuing***

The lessons of this chapter and the chapter before it are not for everyone. Anyone who reads this has to determine on his own if it speaks to him and if it's for him to work on this. If you come to the conclusion that the style here is for you, it is then upon you to figure out which of it can apply to you and which of it doesn't.

We have to emphasize this point, because if the approach here is not for you to work on, then trying to work on this will only cause a lot of frustration and anxiety for you.

***Summary of Previous Chapter***

Earlier, we explained that sadness is rooted in the element of earth in the soul<sup>23</sup>, and that earth itself subdivided into four different possibilities: earth-of-earth, water-of-earth, wind-of-earth, and fire-of-earth. Each of these can be a different cause for sadness in a person, though they are all rooted in our element of earth.

The 'earth' aspect of earth, when it gets too dominant, can cause a person to feel a kind of "inner heaviness" in himself, which breeds on sadness. It can also come from feeling that you have fallen or failed in some way, which comes from the "water" aspect within our element of earth. Sadness can also come from having pain over unfulfilled desires, which comes from the 'wind' aspect of our earth. Sadness can also come from separation and strife, either in oneself or with other people; this comes from the 'fire' aspect in our earth.

These four possibilities for sadness can be subdivided endlessly; there is no end to how many details there are to this. We can't go into every detail, so we will have to just explain the roots. It is up to each person to think about this information, and then to try to see which of these are the root causes for his own personal sadness in life.

We have mentioned the four main roots of sadness. We will first explore the lower elements and work our way upwards, in the order of earth, then water, then wind, and then fire.

First we will begin with the sadness that comes from our **earth-of-earth**, and the four kinds of sadness that are contained in it. What these will all have in common is that they are all forms of sadness caused by "inner heaviness".

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-005-sadness-caused-earth-water-wind-earth>

<sup>23</sup> In the "nefesh habehaimis" area of the soul

## [SADNESS CAUSED BY EARTH-OF-EARTH]

### ***1. Messiness (Sadness Due To Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

Within **earth-of-earth**, there is the earth itself. One of the aspects of earth is that it is dark and murky. Thus, feeling “dirtiness”, or a lack of cleanliness, can awaken the sadness caused by earth-of-earth in the soul. It is the ‘earth’ aspect within earth-of-earth, hence, such sadness is stemming in particular from earth-of-earth-of-earth [in his *nefesh habehaimis*].

To give an example, if a person always lives in a messy or dirty house, this causes him to feel certain sadness at this. Seeing messiness or dirtiness, and being bothered by it, causes a person to contract inside himself and feel sad at this. The messiness, or the dirtiness, can awaken him to feel sad when he sees it. It is a form of “inner heaviness”, because the dirtiness or messiness that he sees is weighing heavily upon him, bothering him, and he is suffering from it.

### ***2. Desires (Sadness Due To Water-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

A second kind of sadness comes from the “water” within earth-of-earth. This is a sadness caused by one’s desires, which are rooted in the element of water.

When a person has a desire for something materialistic, such as a desire to own a nice house or to eat good food, he experiences sadness at this, because the desire connects him to the materialism, which makes him sad. The very connection itself to the materialism makes a person sad.

On a more subtle note, though, desire causes sadness because a person becomes engrossed in what he wants, and that itself is a factor which contributes to the sadness. Being very engrossed and concentrated into the desire causes a person to have certain “heaviness” in the soul, which is rooted in the element of earth; and earth causes sadness. The stronger the desire is, the “heavier” a person feels because of this.

We can find this by many people, who suffer from *pizur hanefesh* (a ‘scattered soul’) – they are ‘scattered’ inside themselves due to their very desires. Most people are full of many different desires, and all of these desires weigh upon him and make him feel ‘heavy’ inside.

The classical example of this is Amnon, who lusted after Tamar and became so engrossed in his desire for her, that he had melancholy from his very desire.

### ***3. Despair (Sadness Due To Wind-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

A third cause of sadness comes from the “wind” within earth-of-earth. This is the feeling of despair – when a person wants something but he despairs upon getting it, he has pain at this. This doesn’t make him stop wanting; he still wants it, but he has pain at not getting what he wants. This causes sadness with it.

The despair a person has from this also creates in him a kind of ‘inner heaviness.’ It makes the soul feel ‘heavy’ upon despairing from what one wants, and this in turn makes a person feel sad. This is also called “*ruach nishbar*” – a broken spirit (a power that is manifest both in the side of holiness as well as in the side of evil. Here we are describing how “*ruach nishbar*” is evil: when it becomes evil and negative despair).

If a person works on nullifying his will, he feels lighter inside as a result, and he would avoid the inner heaviness (which was caused by his despair) that’s causing the sadness. But if a person doesn’t work to nullify his will, he suffers, because he experiences despair when he doesn’t get what he wants. This makes him sad.

### ***4. Lack of Clarity (Sadness Due To Fire-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

A fourth cause for sadness can be coming from the ‘fire’ aspect within earth-of-earth: when we are sad due to strife in our life, which casts darkness upon our life. This also breeds on ‘inner heaviness’ in the soul.

How does this come from the ‘fire’ of earth? The *Ramban* says that fire is dark. Although we know that fire is bright and it is illuminating, the *Ramban* says that the term “black fire on white fire” [by the fire of Har Sinai] connotes that the nature of fire is really to be dark. In terms of the soul, the ‘fire’ aspect of earth can make a person feels ‘dark’ inside. We will explain what this is.

In the previous chapter, we mentioned that fire causes sadness because fire is the root of separation, strife, and doubt. Doubt causes sadness because it is the same idea as strife, which produces two opposing sides. Right now we aren’t discussing this particular aspect of fire; that is the element of fire itself, which we will discuss later when we get to discussing the element of fire. Here we are explaining the aspect of ‘fire’ that is found within the element of earth.

This is something else. We are talking about when a person feels “dark” inside – meaning, when he feels a lack of clarity in general, as if everything in his life has gone dark. This can happen, for example, when a person is learning a *sugya* in *Gemara* and he isn’t finding it enjoyable. Or, whenever a person feels a general lack of clarity in his life, it comes from a “darkened” soul. The soul feels ‘darkened’ and it becomes unclear about things.

If a person is sad and he doesn’t even know why he is sad, and he tries to figure it out according to the possibilities we have mentioned thus far (earth, water and wind within earth-of-earth), but he still cannot figure out why he is sad, it is a sign that he is very doubtful about his life in general.

This is exactly what we are talking about right now, and it is a nature that comes from a dominance of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**: sadness created by doubts, which makes a person's life feel dark and uncertain. The lack of clarity itself is a reason for sadness.

This is the sadness that comes from the fire in our earth, and it is a feeling of 'darkness' that the soul experiences and feels.

If a person figures out why he is sad (either due to earth, water, or wind within earth-of-earth), then at least he knows why he is sad, and he succeeds in solving this kind of sadness. But if a person doesn't even know why he is sad, that itself makes him sad. If that is the case, his sadness stems from fire-of-earth-of-earth.

People who have a strong amount of fire in them usually experience this kind of sadness more often, because they are usually more clarity-oriented, and when they don't feel clarity in their life, it is very painful.

Really, this kind of sadness is an all-inclusive kind of sadness. It is a kind of sadness which includes all of the kinds of sadness which we mentioned until now. Anyone who is sensitive to soul matters knows what this is – a kind of "darkness" that the soul feels.

If you think about this deeply, you will discover that this sadness is coming from your mind. It's a mental kind of sadness: your mind feels a lack of clarity.

We find this kind of sadness when a person is tired. Being tired is related to sadness, as we find that the word *etzev* can mean both "sadness" as well as "tired." Adam was cursed with hard labor which would make him tired, which was part of the sadness that he would have to endure as a punishment for the sin. When a person feels very tired, he can feel the tiredness coming from his head. This is because when the mind feels stressed, it makes the head tired, and a person can sense his tiredness coming from his forehead. It shows up even more acutely in his eyes, and he can feel the tiredness coming from his eyes.

In the same way, a person who feels a lack of clarity in his life can feel how this is a mental kind of sadness, and he can identify that the sadness is coming from his mind.

This is the general description of this kind of sadness, and there are more details to it. We have only been brief in explaining it.

We have explained all the possibilities of sadness that comes from earth. Now, we will go through the next four possibilities of sadness: sadness which comes from the element of water in us.

## [SADNESS CAUSED BY WATER-OF-EARTH]

We have so far discussed **earth-of-earth** as the source of sadness, and now we will progress to discuss the second main source of sadness: **water-of-earth**. This is sadness caused by failure.

Since all of the elements contain all the other elements as well, water also contains earth, fire and wind. There is sadness that can come from the earth within water-of-earth, as well as sadness stemming from water-of-water-of-earth, and wind-of-water-of-earth, and fire-of-water-of-earth.

The nature of water is that it descends. Since water descends, a person can feel sad when he feels some kind of ‘descent’ or falling, and if this is the case, his sadness is coming from the aspect of **water** that is within the element of **earth**.

There can be different aspects of the descent, however, which are bothering him, and there are four possibilities in this.

### *1-2. Sadness Due To Failure*

‘Water’ can be a source of sadness in a person whenever a person feels a ‘fall’ from a previous level that was higher than where he has currently fallen to. In this, there are two factors that can contribute to the sadness. Firstly, the *actual fall* from the previous situation can make a person feel sad at this – the fact that he has had a failure, and the nature of the failure. Secondly, the *place* where the person ends up falling to is also a cause for sadness – the situation he is currently in, which reflects his failure.

If a person is sad because of the first reason – the fact that he had had a failure – his sadness comes from the “**water**” of his water-of-earth. This is because he is sad due to the very ‘fall’ that he experienced, which is similar to the nature of water, which naturally falls. But if someone is sad after a failure for the second reason – he is sad because of *where* he has fallen into - then his sadness comes from the “**earth**” within the water-of-earth.

The second person only feels sad only if he feels that he has totally failed in something, because the sadness is based on *where* he has fallen to. But the first kind of person feels sad at the very fact that he had even a minor failure, because the very fact that he has failed/fell makes him sad.

### *3. Sadness Due To “Ups and Downs”*

If failure makes a person sad because he does not like the feeling of ups and downs, he is mainly bothered by the movements that failures cause. Movement is rooted in wind; therefore, when one is sad at failures because he is mainly disturbed at the turbulence in his life, his sadness is stemming from the **wind** aspect of water-of-earth.

On a higher level, this is the sadness experienced by *b'nei aliyah* -- those who are always involved in spiritual growth. People who are always involved in spiritual growth feel pain every time they have even the slightest fall from their progress.

The *Vilna Gaon* writes that we are always either ascending or descending in our spiritual level. Those who are more involved in spiritual growth feel this all the time, and therefore they have sadness whenever they feel even a subtle fall from their level.

Most people do not feel their constant ups and downs, and therefore they only feel sad upon experiencing a major failure. But those who are more spiritually oriented are sad even when they have any degree of failure, even if it's just a little descent from their level. They feel more their ups and downs, and it is that particular aspect which saddens them – more than the “failure” itself.

#### ***4. Sadness Due To Non-Growth***

Another kind of person is sad even if he feels that he isn't growing higher, even if he isn't failing. The very fact that he isn't ascending makes him feel like he is failing. This kind of sadness is more painful than the other kinds; this comes from the **fire** within the water-of-earth, because fire seeks to ascend.

If a person feels sad because he had a failure, his sadness is rooted in the water-of-water-of-earth. But if a person feels sad because the day went by and he didn't feel any spiritual growth, his sadness comes from 'fire' of water-of-earth, which is a more acute and sharper feeling of sadness.

#### ***Which of These Makes You Sad?***

We have described subtle differences between sadness caused by failure or non-growth. Therefore, if a person feels pain at the fact that he had a failure, he needs to figure out what exactly about this is making him sad.

He should ask himself: “Am I sad because of the *way* that I failed? (Which would be earth-of-water-of-earth)? Or am I upset at the very fact that I had a failure (which would be water-of-water-of-earth)? Am I sad because my failure has taken me in a different direction than I would like to be (wind-of-water-of-earth)? Or am I sad simply because I feel like I am not growing higher (fire-of-water-of-earth)?

This is a deep self-introspection that a person must make. If a person isn't clear what exactly about what makes him feel sad when he experiences a failure, he will keep feeling very confused inside himself.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *The sadness caused by wind-of-water was not covered here, because it will be explained in the next sub-section, which will explain the difference between sadness caused by wind-of-water with sadness caused by water-of-wind.*

## [SADNESS CAUSED BY WIND-OF-EARTH]

The element of wind, which is the root of movement, is the source of sadness caused by unfulfilled desires. This can also have four different ways how it causes sadness. There is ‘earth’ in wind, ‘fire’ in wind, ‘water’ in wind and, of course, the ‘wind’ of wind.

### *1. Lack of Motivation*

The aspect of **earth** within **wind-of earth** that causes sadness is when a person wishes deep down that he should have spiritual goals, but he can’t get himself to reveal more this inner will. He feels that he doesn’t even “want” to “want” in the first place – and this makes him feel sad at this. He knows that he is *supposed* to want a worthy, spiritual goal – but he doesn’t see himself revealing this will. The will of a person indeed has to first become revealed, in order for a person to even “want” it in the first place.

When a person doesn’t reveal his will, this causes sadness. This comes from the element of earth, because the person just stays where he is and doesn’t move – he doesn’t move his soul to reveal what he should want.

If a person just wishes that he could want something spiritual – but he doesn’t reveal this actual will – he will have sadness at this. It’s not enough to “want”; a person has to actually reveal his actual will, or else it is just blissful wishing. It’s not enough to want; a person has to *want* to want, and the only way to do that is by revealing his actual will.

Once a person reveals his will, he will be able to truly want what he the worthy goal he is pursuing, and he will then be able to actualize his will. As long as a person doesn’t reveal his will, and he just remains at his wishful thinking, he will feel sad inside.

Many people who learn Torah in-depth all day and do all the *mitzvos* usually feel this sadness. They feel frustration at the fact that they know that they are supposed to want spiritual goals, but that they don’t feel like they really *want* it. They know that they should want more levels, but they don’t feel this desire, and this makes them feel sad inside: “Why don’t I feel like I really want more levels? How come I don’t feel a great desire to want more and more spirituality?”

All people who are connected even a little to spirituality know what this sadness is. They know that they are supposed to want higher levels in spirituality, but they also feel like they don’t really want it. A person knows that he wants to become the next Vilna *Gaon*, but that’s the problem – he only **wants** to be like the Vilna *Gaon*; he’s not doing anything to get there (This, understandably, will breed despair in a person when he sees that he’s not becoming the next Vilna *Gaon*).

This is the sadness caused by the **earth-of-wind-of-earth**. It can manifest itself in one of two ways: either that a person wants something but he hasn’t succeeded in utilizing his potential, or it could be that the person has succeeded in revealing some of his potential, but he is sad because doesn’t feel



that he really utilized it in the way he could have, and his success only feels partial to what it could have been.

## ***2. Unfulfilled Aspirations***

Another cause for sadness is the **water** within wind-of-earth. This comes from the very desire. To be more specific, the desire itself is rooted in wind, and the pull toward fulfilling it is rooted in water. When a person feels himself fulfilling what he wants, he is happy, but when he feels that he isn't fulfilling his wants, he becomes sad.

This we can find by people who, when they were younger, were very idealistic and felt themselves pursuing their goals and dreams, but later in life they lost their drive to pursue what they wanted, which made them become sad.

## ***3. Contradicting Desires***

Another kind of sadness is the actual **wind** within the wind-of-earth. When wind encounters other opposing winds, it faces a contradiction to itself. When a person has contradictory desires – like when he wants something that contradicts a different thing he wants – this makes him feel inner contradiction, which makes him sad.

## ***4. Lack of Enthusiasm***

Another kind of sadness is the **fire** within wind-of-earth. This is when a person wants something, but he lacks enthusiasm in it. He feels sad at the fact that although he wants something worthy, for some reason he doesn't feel enthusiastic at this, and this makes him feel sad inside.

## ***In Conclusion***

We have mentioned that there are 16 possible factors that can cause sadness. There are 4 root causes (earth-of-earth, water-of-earth, wind-of-earth, fire-of-earth), but they each have 4 possibilities, which ends up for a total of 16 possible causes for sadness.<sup>25</sup> So far, we have only explained 12 of the 16 in detail. We described the kinds of sadness that stem from **earth-of-earth**, **water-of-earth**, and **wind-of-earth**; in the next chapter, we will cover the remaining kinds of sadness we didn't discuss yet, which stem from **fire-of-earth**.

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*25 The sadness caused by the element of fire will be explained in the next chapter, and it will also explain the difference between fire-of-earth with earth-of-fire.*

Try to discern which of the reasons listed until now is mainly present in your life, and which of them makes you sad the most often. Don't do this by looking back at the last week or so and reflecting which of these kinds of sadness you felt the most. What you need to do is go through your *entire past!* Look back at your whole past and see which of these reasons caused you to be sad the most.

When you do this, you will see that each situation that made you sad was actually made up of many of these factors. There is never one cause alone that made you sad – there were a few factors involved that made you sad.

Again, we must mention that all of this is only for one who feels that the method here is for him. Don't want this because you know that you should want it; only use these methods here if you feel in yourself that you really want it. And don't force yourself to want it, if the path here is too challenging for you. If you feel that you really want to use the methods here, you can work on this.

We haven't begun yet to explain how we work on removing our sadness – we are still exploring the causes for sadness in us, which we must know before we begin to work on ourselves.

*Tackling Sadness***6 | Sadness Caused By Fire-of-Earth** <sup>26</sup>

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***If You're Not Sure What Makes You Sad***

We have so far described different sources for sadness, and it is up to each person to determine which of these kinds of sadness are mainly manifest in his own personal life. Then he can know what to mainly work on.

What happens if a person is trying to figure out the cause of his sadness, using the list we have outlined so far [we gave 12 out of 16 reasons so far], but he cannot determine the main cause of his sadness? If a person is not sure and he's in a lot of doubt about what makes him sad, his sadness is probably coming from **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, which we explained about before. This is when a person lacks general of clarity about himself and he finds himself in darkness and doubt.

**[FIRE-OF-EARTH]**

We have mainly explained the other three kinds of sadness, which stem from the aspects of 'earth' of the element of earth, the 'water' of earth, and the 'wind' of earth. Now we will elaborate upon the sadness which comes from the **fire-of-earth**: the sadness caused by separation.

When it comes to **fire-of-earth**, there are four different subdivisions, as well: the "fire" aspect of fire-of-earth, the "water" aspect of fire-of-earth, the "wind" aspect of fire-of-earth, and the "earth" aspect of fire-of-earth. We will go in the order of lowest to highest of the elements. We will begin with earth, then water and then wind, and then we get to the highest aspect, which is fire.

***Fire-of-Earth: Sadness Due To Separation***

Fire is an element that causes dividing and separation. When there is fire, people jump back, and the fire creates a wall of division in between its two surrounding sides. When a person feels sad due to some feeling of separation and division, this is coming from the 'fire' aspect within the element of earth, because it is a feeling of "separation" (fire) caused by sadness (earth).

All of the kinds of sadness which stem from **fire-of-earth** are sadness that comes from some feeling of separation; there are four particular branches of this type of sadness.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-006-sadness-caused-fire-earth>

### ***Sadness of Mourning (Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth)***

A classic example of the sadness which comes from a feeling of separation is the sadness one experiences upon mourning. Mourning is brought about by the death of another, and death is the greatest kind of separation. Death is the ultimate kind of separation that there is, thus it causes pain to the person who is connected to the one who died. It is a feeling of total separation from the deceased, whom the person felt connected to. The deceased has been separated from the “earth”, which makes us feel that the person is permanently gone.

(Of course, we know and believe that even death is not yet the total separation, because our souls continue to exist even after physical death. Death is only a temporary separation, because the soul will eventually return to the body. Death only makes us, from *our* perspective, to feel separated from the deceased. Later, when we discuss the solutions for sadness, we will see how this concept contains the key to the solution and healing process over the sadness of mourning).

When we feel sad from mourning the deceased, the sadness is coming a “fire” within our element of “earth” – a separation (fire) caused by the sadness (earth) of death, in which the deceased has permanently been separate from the earth (hence, the sadness we are feeling here comes from “**earth**”-of-earth-of-fire).

### ***2. Sadness from Feeling Lack of Unity (Water-of-Fire-of-Earth)***

There is another kind of separation that exists, and that is when one feels a lack of love revealed in his life. Not only do we feel separated when there is separation in the simple sense (fire), but even a lack of connection with others makes us feel separated.

The element of fire is the root of separation and strife, and the element of water is the root of love and connection. Love is the opposite concept of separation; love, which is “*ahavah*” in Hebrew, has the same *gematria*<sup>27</sup> as “*echad*”, one. When we feel one with others, there is love. When we are separated from others, there is no oneness, and then there is no love.

This results in a different kind of sadness, and it comes from the water within fire, because water is the root element of love. When there is a lack of water – a lack of love – this causes its own feeling of separation, which results in sadness.

We aren’t talking about hatred. We are talking about something else: a situation in which there is simply no love going on. It is like people who live with each other and don’t hate each other, but there is no love between them – an uncomfortable feeling to live with.

This is the situation of most people’s lives today. The usual situation with most people is that they live amongst each other with neutral feelings. People don’t often hate each other, but they don’t usually feel a love for each other either.

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<sup>27</sup> Numerical value in *Lashon HaKodesh* (the holy source of the Hebrew language)

On a deep note, if someone doesn't love others, deep down, his heart is full of hatred for others; he "hates the whole world", deep down, but he is not conscious of this. (Anyone as well can discover this in himself when he reflects deeply). But this deep hatred isn't revealed out in the open, and people just live amongst each other with "neutral feelings". People also have a power deep down to love everyone in the world, but they don't either reveal this power. So in terms of how revealed the soul is, people usually don't feel a hatred for other people; nor do people usually feel a love for others.

This sounds like a neutral kind of existence, but really, what it does for the world is make this world into a very cold environment. When people don't feel anything toward each other, even though they don't hate each other, everyone is cold toward each other, and this creates a divide among people.

If a person is strong in his element of water-of-fire-of-earth in a spiritual way (which stems from his *Nefesh Elohis*), he senses the general cold atmosphere found on this world. It bothers him (and any person that thinks about this) that most people are absorbed in themselves and only worry for themselves. This doesn't bother most people, but someone who is sensitive to it is very bothered by it. It bothers him deeply that there is not enough love on our world.

Again, we are not describing hatred. We are speaking about a different kind of separation amongst people, which is more subtle and not as easily noticed: when there is simply no love and mutual closeness between people.

The general coldness that people have towards each other only bothers a few people (who are strong in their element of fire) when they realize it, but there is a kind of 'coldness' that most people can relate to: when there is coldness amongst family members when they act hostile to each other, or if someone live in an apartment buildings where the neighbors are cold and unfriendly.

The more a person has a nature to be loving and friendly toward others, the more pain he experiences whenever he feels this "coldness" in the world. The more this bothers a person, the sadder it makes him. He also feels a big complaint on the whole world: "Why can't people just love each other more?!"

On a deeper note, it is written, "*And Hashem mourned in His heart.*" This shows us that there is an inherent sadness going on about the entire Creation; Hashem is sad, so to speak, because there is no unity going on in the world. When one feels this kind of sadness in Creation, it is coming from **water-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul

The more a person feels the lack of love and unity going on in the world, the more of a state of 'mourning' he feels like he is in. A person is apt to feel like he is in a state of 'mourning' when he feels coldness from family members, or when his neighbors in his apartment building are cold towards him, or when he wishes that he could be closer with other Jews. When a person doesn't see the love and closeness from those whom he wants to be close with, this causes a kind sadness that feels like a state of mourning.

It is written, “*Seeking desire causes separation.*” When each person worries and cares only for himself, there is a separation amongst people, and although there is no hatred, the lack of love creates a rift between people, causing certain sadness. Although the trait of desire can be holy when it is channeled towards desiring a relationship, desire is misused for evil when people become absorbed in themselves as they pursue their various desires, and this brings with it the sadness of separation. (This is referring to pursuing spiritual desires, not material desires.)

### ***3. Sadness Caused By Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth: Inner Contradictions***

There is also sadness which comes from the ‘**wind**’ aspect of fire-of-earth. This is when a person has contradictory desires, similar to the nature of wind, which clashes when it meets with other directions; and the person feels sad at the very fact that he wants two different things. He feels a kind of separation inside himself due to his contradictory wishes, thus, his sadness is coming from the ‘wind’ (contradiction) within his ‘fire-of-earth’ (sadness of separation).

We mentioned a similar kind of sadness before, but now we are discussing a more inner kind of sadness. This is when a person feels an inner contradiction inside his soul; it is caused by the **wind** within the **fire-of-earth**.

To give an example of this kind of sadness, a person has a body and a soul. The body has its desires for materialism, and the soul wants spirituality. The desires of the body and the soul contradict each other. A person who is very strong in his element of **fire-of-earth** (in particular, ‘**wind**’-of-fire-of-earth), will feel this contradiction a lot. The fact that he has these two different desires within himself makes him sad. He feels like his very self is split up into different directions. We aren’t talking about low self-esteem; we are referring to a more inner kind of frustration.

In the same way that a person can be bothered and sad at the lack of unity amongst people (which stems from **water-of-fire-of-earth**), a person with dominant **wind-of-fire-of-earth** is bothered and sad at *lack of unification within his own soul*. Since the soul itself is by nature unified, a person who has contradicting desires in himself feels a disparity and separation inside himself, so he might be sensitive to this and feel like he is split into two beings. This makes him feel sad.

### ***4. Sadness from Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth: Feeling Separation***

We mentioned earlier that mourning the deceased – when a person felt a connection with the deceased - causes sadness; it is caused by ‘earth’ in fire-of-earth. This affects a person only if he felt close and attached to the person who died.

If the person is feeling sad, though, at the very fact that someone died – even if he didn’t feel close to the deceased – this is a different aspect of the sadness. The very fact that a death took place is what bothers him, because he is bothered by the very separation. He is a kind of person who is

sensitive to any situation that contains an aspect of separation. He is bothered by any separation that takes place in Creation.

Separation is rooted in fire, thus, if a person is sad at the very concept of separations in Creation, his sadness is stemming from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**.

This kind of sadness - which is when one feels sad upon any kind of separation – is a very deep point which we need to explain more about.

### ***The Power of “Echad”***

In the future, Hashem will unify the entire creation. *“And it will be on that day that Hashem will be one (echad) and His Name will be one.”* The power of *echad* (“oneness”) will be revealed onto the world and everyone will be unified – it will be the power that will unify all of Creation together one day.

The more firmly a person has revealed his *Emunah* and believes in this, the more it bothers him that there is currently a lack of unity in the world, that the state of “*echad*” hasn’t been revealed yet.

“*Echad*” will not be fully revealed until the future, but it is still a power that lies deep in our own soul, in which we are able to view everything in Creation as one unit, and in turn, to unify Creation together. Understandably, we cannot ever attain total unity on our current level, since “*echad*” hasn’t been revealed yet. But “*echad*” can still be revealed somewhat to a certain extent, to shine some unity upon Creation.

It is accessed when a person deeply desires that there should be unity in the world. There are only a few rare individuals who have revealed this power.

To give an example of the concept, a person who desires that there should be more “*echad*” revealed in the world is bothered when he has to break apart things. If he wants to cut his *challah* on Shabbos into two different pieces, and by mistake he cuts it wrong and ends up with some crumbs, it bothers him that he caused unnecessary dividing. There is almost no one whom this would bother, but those who have are sensitive to the point in the soul we are describing here is bothered by this unnecessary cutting: “Why should I separate more than I have to?”

When it comes to a lack of unity amongst people, which is the kind of sadness we spoke about before, most people can identify with being sensitive to this kind of separation, and therefore it is understandable to most people that a lack of unity amongst people can make a person feel sad. But to feel sad at any kind of separation, even to separate items unnecessarily, is a very sensitive point which most people cannot relate to. It is only felt by those who are sensitive to the concept of *echad*, which comes from **fire-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul.

This deeper kind of sensitivity that there should always be “*echad*” therefore only exists by those who have revealed a deep power of love for all of the *Creation* – not just a love for all *people* in Creation.

As we said, most people do not feel the point of “*echad*” in the soul. However, all people according to their respective level can reveal this point in themselves somewhat and become sensitive to separation, to desire more unity in Creation. All people need to reveal some more *achdus* (unity) in their lives, even if they can’t fully relate to the depth of the concept, and they should come to a point in which they feel sad just from how there is a lack of unity with others, even when we aren’t on bad terms with others.

### **“Echad” – To Desire Unity Even When There Is Hatred**

What will happen if it never bothers a person that he has a lack of feeling unified with others (even if he doesn’t hate anyone)? There are people who don’t hate anyone, but they don’t feel a love for others either. What will result from this?

We can see what erroneous attitude will develop in the person, in the following example.

We have a *mitzvah* to hate a sinner; “It is written in *Tehillim* (139: 21), “*I hate those who hate You, Hashem, and I will fight with those who fight You; I hate them with utter hatred, they are enemies to me.*” There are certain people who are considered enemies to us, and we are commanded by Hashem to hate them.<sup>28</sup> The word for “enemy” in Hebrew is called *oiyav*, which is similar to the word *oihev* – “beloved one.” This shows us that in order to have the proper attitude toward our enemies, we have to at least be able to have some *ahavah*/love on the agenda. If we can love him, then we can deal with the enemy properly. If we have no goal of loving the enemy, then we won’t know how to properly deal with the enemy, and we will just view the sinner as someone who’s like another “Haman” to us....

Let’s say that a person has never developed a sensitivity to want to have more unity with people. If we tell such a person that he has a *mitzvah* to hate a wicked sinner, the person won’t go about this with the proper attitude, because he has never revealed his power to have unity with others. It doesn’t bother him that now he has to hate another person, so when he hears that he is commanded by the Torah to hate a sinner, he will hate the sinner with the same kind of base hatred that he has for anything else he hates.

If a person doesn’t know how to love another, then he won’t know how to reveal any love for the person he hates.

Really, it’s not supposed to be the same kind of baseless hatred. Even when we are supposed to hate a sinner, it doesn’t mean to hate him just like how people have *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred). If we have to hate someone, such as a sinner, then we are supposed to wish that we could somehow come to bond with him in the end. We shouldn’t just hate him without the goal of eventually unifying with him.

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<sup>28</sup> See *Pesachim 113a* in which, when certain conditions are fulfilled, we are commanded to hate a Jew who sins.



On a more subtle note, even when we have to hate, there are parts of the enemy which we should hate, but there are also parts to him which we should love, and it is just that we have to know which parts of him we need to love and which parts of him we need to hate.

By contrast, if a person is strong in his love and connection to others, he is able to separate from others in the right way. He doesn't hate a sinner with a base kind of hatred; he knows how to have a separation from them, and he knows how to love and hate a sinner at the same time. He will actually be able to reveal more unity from the separation, because he knows how to approach separation.

We mentioned before that there is a deep sadness and mourning inherent in Creation; as it is written, *"And Hashem was sad in His heart."* The deep sadness going on in Creation, which Hashem is in mourning about, is that there is lack of unity in the world, only separation. This was the real sadness that came onto the world ever since the first sin; sin caused the world to become a place of separation (*alma d'piruda*), in which each person only lives for himself.

### ***In Conclusion***

We have gone through the 16 possibilities of what makes a person sad. See which of them are mainly applicable to you. If you really work to understand it, you will find that you can break up these matters more and more into endless additional details. But the point of this study is to be able to figure out your own source of sadness.

Before you begin to work on ourselves and discover how we can solve our sadness (which we will explain in the coming chapters), you first have to know these matters very well, in order to first see what the causes of your sadness are.

All of this is for the sake of getting clarity in what makes us sad; it is not meant to cause confusion. We are only trying to gain clarity here in ourselves. If this is just confusing you, it's a sign that this isn't meant for you to work on.

*Tackling Sadness***7 | Solutions for Sadness Caused By Earth-of-Earth** <sup>29</sup>

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***Introduction***

Let us briefly review what we have learned until now.

There are *middos* of Hashem, *middos* of the Torah, and *middos* of a person. The *middos* of a person have three parts to them – the base *middos* which come from the *nefesh habehamis* (lower, animalistic part of the soul), the higher *middos* which come from our *nefesh Elokis* (deeper, G-dly layer of the soul), and the *middos* that are formed from *medameh* imagination, which is the part in the soul that is in between them. These are three sources of our *middos*.

We are discussing the lowest kind of *middos*, *middos* which stem from our *nefesh habehamis*. This lower part of our soul contains our four elements – earth, water, wind and fire. Each of the elements serves as the roots for our different *middos*.

Until now we have discussed the *middah* of *atzvut*/sadness on a general level. Now we will discuss it in more specific terms.

Sadness is rooted in our element of earth, as Rav Chaim Vital writes. Earth itself also contains within it earth, water, wind and fire. The earth in the earth produces a kind of sadness that has to do with feeling heavy. The water in our earth produces sadness that comes from failures. The wind in our earth causes sadness that comes from unfulfilled desires, and the fire in our earth produces sadness that has to do with strife or doubt.

We said before that sadness itself has sixteen possibilities, since there are four elements, and each of the elements contain four elements within them, for a total of sixteen possible reasons for sadness.

The Rambam writes a fundamental rule in serving Hashem: a person has to go to the opposite extreme direction (of his problem), until he eventually arrives at the middle path. When it comes to working on our *middos*, this will apply as follows: since we are dealing with the bad *middah* of sadness, which comes from the element of earth, if we want to fix it, we need to use the opposite of earth, and we need to keep using it until we eventually arrive at the middle point.

We will be using the natures of the different elements to help solve problems that come from our element of earth (sadness), and this will involve the unique nature of each element. Each element contains many details to its nature (for example, fire is hot and dry, while water is cold and moist). Without getting into all the details of each element, we will explain how to use the other elements to fix our sadness.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-007-solutions-sadness-caused-wind-earth>

This is the general formula. Most people have to work slowly and in steps in order to get to their opposite element, until they can arrive at the middle point of balancing out the uses between the elements.

### ***Solving Sadness Due to Messiness (Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

The first kind of sadness which we mentioned earlier is when people feel sad because they feel like there is some messiness or dirtiness in their life, and the fact that they have to see this causes them to feel certain sadness inside. If a person is sad due to messiness, what can he do about this?

Earth is dark, and it is dirty. Fire, by contrast, is clean by nature (unless you put in some earth in it, which makes it smoky and thus murky).

If a person is sad, because he is used to seeing messiness in his life, the solution for him is to find some area of cleanliness in his life and focus on it.

For example, if a person is sad that his house is very messy, he can solve this sadness by finding a place in his house that's clean and focus on that. If a person can't find a clean place in his house, he can find a nice looking *sefer* and look at it, concentrating on the beauty of the clean *sefer*. A person who does this will find that this settles his mind.

How does this work? Until now, he was sad because he was thinking all the time about messiness, and this bothered him. Now he has removed his mind from thinking about messiness and dirtiness, and he has thoughts only about something clean. The concentration he has on cleanliness will serve as a light to the darkness in his mind, and it will make him feel more at ease.

It's not enough for this just to look at a clean place in your house or to look at a clean *sefer*. You have to concentrate on it and really let your mind be there. When you do this more and more, your sadness at the messiness in your life will weaken. The problem until now was that the soul was attached to messiness and dirtiness, and now it is attached instead to cleanliness, because you have put your mind to think about places that are clean.

### ***Solving Sadness Due To Feeling Heavy (Water-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

The next kind of sadness we mentioned is sadness which comes from the aspect of **water** in our **earth**, which is when a person has an intense materialistic desire, and the desire itself allows a person no inner peace, making him feel sad inside at the very fact that he has a desire.

This kind of sadness we can find by people who have strong cravings for food. A person feels sad inside at the very fact that he has the craving – the desire itself for something physical makes him feel tied down to it, resulting in his sadness.

When a person is eating a meal and then he finishes, what does he feel? Many people feel heavy at the end of a meal. But this isn't the healthy feeling we are supposed to have from eating. It is written, *"A righteous person eats to satisfy his soul."* We eat in order to survive, not for the sake of indulging. Yet many people, when they finish eating, do not feel satisfied – they feel rather a sort of heaviness.

Even when people eat the Shabbos meal, they feel "heavy" afterwards, instead of feeling satisfied from it.

Some people eat a lot because they have a problem of overeating, and this is a desire which comes from the element of water in the soul, the root of desire. Others don't necessarily overeat, it is just that when they finish eating, they do not feel satisfied from the meal and just feel heavy afterwards. This feeling of "heaviness" comes from the water of the earth in the soul. How can a person deal with this sadness?

There are two kinds of food we eat – thick foods, and light foods. Usually, eating thicker foods increases the desires of the body, while lighter foods don't produce cravings. The soul, deep down, recoils from thick foods, because since the soul by nature is very refined, it doesn't want to be connected to the thick materialism that the body naturally likes. If we eat lighter foods, we will find that it doesn't make us feel heavy afterwards, and our soul will be more at ease with this, the more we get used to this.

Another solution that can solve this kind of sadness is to leave over some food on the plate. Get used to leaving over some food, and then you can eventually work on eating less and less until you are only eating what you need to eat.

### ***Solving Sadness Due To Despair (Wind-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

Now we will address what to do about the kinds of sadness which comes from the "**wind**" aspect in our **earth**, which is when a person has something he wants very badly and then he gives up on it, this feeling of despair can create sadness in him.

The wind can take something and lift it up; when a person doesn't feel that uplift, he is sad, because he is missing that "wind." This is the feeling of sadness that comes upon a person when he despairs from getting something he wanted very badly. Without wind, a person has nothing to uplift him, and he remains in his earth, causing him to despair.

What can he do about this? He needs to find hope in some area, and that will increase his wind. When a person feels that he has given up on much on his life, he can still find hope in some area in his life.

A deeper level than this is for a person to place his hope in Hashem, but a person can also use the power of hope on a basic level. Hope is a power found even in the *nefesh habehamis*, the lower part of the soul.<sup>30</sup> Any person can find hope in some area in his life.

### ***Solving Sadness Due To Doubt (Fire-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

The sadness which comes from the “**fire**” aspect of our **earth** is when a person feels “darkness” in his life – when he feels a great lack of clarity in his life.

This can manifest itself in either one of two ways. Either he feels that his life in general is full of darkness – he doesn’t have any clarity in his life – or he finds that his mind cannot think properly, because he is full of doubt. Let us now see what can be done about this kind of sadness.

When a person feels a great darkness in his life, the solution for this is that he has to give himself some “light”. Looking at a candle light can increase the light of the soul and shed some light on the inner darkness one feels. This is a superficial solution, but it can work. This should be done with the intention of increasing light into your life; merely looking at a candle won’t help with this. Although it is a superficial solution, it can only work if you put thought into it.

The more inner solution, though, is for a person to return to the points in his life that he can receive “light” from. He can focus on the parts in his life that are clear to him, which will soothe the unrest in his soul that comes from his lack of clarity. Focus on those areas in which you do have clarity in your life, and that can shed some light onto the darkness in your life.

### ***In Conclusion***

In this chapter, we have given solutions to sadness by learning how to make use of the opposite elements of earth. There are more solutions to earth which we did not cover here. We have explained here how to use the opposite of earth in specific terms of earth-earth, water-earth, wind-earth and fire-earth. In general, though, wind and fire are the opposites of earth, and they can be used to help solve earth-based problems.

There are deeper solutions as well that can solve sadness, such as by coming out of one’s ego and learning how to love other Jews, or by learning more Torah, or by connecting more with Hashem. These are solutions that are drawn from the deeper, spiritual power of our *nefesh Elohis*. What we have addressed here, however, are solutions that come from even the lowest part of our soul - the *nefesh habehaimis*, therefore, they can be utilized by a person on any level.

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<sup>30</sup> The Vilna Gaon lists “*tikva*” (hope) as one of the 70 forces of the soul that are contained in the “*nefesh habehaimis*”, the “*animalistic layer of the soul*”. Therefore, hope is a basic human ability which does not require high spiritual levels. It can also be used for spiritual reasons, such as by placing one’s hope in Hashem, but here the Rav is explaining how it can be used on a very basic level: to simply infuse yourself with hope.

## *Tackling Sadness*

### **8 | Solutions for Sadness Caused By Water of Earth<sup>31</sup>**

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#### ***Getting Over Your Failures***

Now we will go through the solutions for sadness that is caused by the element of water within the element of earth. First, we will address sadness caused by earth in water-of-earth.

Water falls down to the earth. When a person falls from his level, he is either sad due to the fall itself, which is the nature of the water in the soul, or he is sad due to the ground he has fallen to – the earth, which he has landed on from his fall.

How can a person deal with the sadness he feels from his failures?

The solution for this sadness is what Rabbeinu Tam writes in *Sefer HaYoshor*.<sup>32</sup> He explains how every person has good times and bad times, and he gives guidance on how one can deal with failures: since every human being has failures, one should prepare before he fails with something he will be able to take with him even after he falls from his level. This will help him get through the time in which he feels low. In this way, even when a person falls, he won't totally fall into the "earth".

So when a person experiences a failure, even if it's a very big failure, he should strengthen himself by reminding himself of his successes. This will help him get up from his fall, and he won't feel as if he has totally failed, even though he is aware that he has experienced a failure.

This can help even a person who has gone through his biggest failure possible.

#### ***The Solution to Being Upset at Yourself***

There is another kind of sadness (which is rooted in the "water" in water-of-earth), and that is when a person is upset at himself at the very fact that he has had a failure.

This sounds similar to what we just described above, but it's actually a different kind of sadness. Before, the kind of sadness described is being caused by what the failure has *led to*, and now the person is sad as he tries to deal with his failure. But there is another kind of sadness that has to do with failure, and it is not about the actual failure per se; it is a sadness that comes from *the very fact* that one has had a failure. It bothers the person that he *even had* a failure; it's not about *what* he failed in, but it is about the very concept of failure: "How could it be that I failed?!"

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-008-solutions-sadness-caused-water-earth>

<sup>32</sup> *Sefer HaYoshor*, 6. For more detailed guidance in this subject, see also *Alei Shur*, Vol. I, Chapter Five: "Days of Love and Days of Hate" (p.36). See also the *shiur* of the Rav entitled *Rosh Chodesh Avodah: Sivan*

The fact that a person has even *had* a failure to begin with can bother a person and make him sad. This is kind of sadness is coming from the water in water-of-earth.

If this is the reason why the person is sad, the solution is to see how somehow it is good for him that he has gone through this failure. A person has to see how the failure was somehow needed to happen. The only reason why the person is sad at failure is because he thinks in his mind that failure is unnecessary. If we can show him however that the failure is somehow needed, he will be calmed by this, because now he sees why he had to go through the failure.

### ***Two Kinds of “Good” Failure***

This is similar to (but the not the exact same thing) as the concept known as “failing in order to grow” (*yeridah l'tzorech aliyah*), which is a concept of seeing how all failures are constructive. That is a sadness rooted in wind-of-earth, and it can be treated by the wind-of-earth, which is not what we are currently discussing; “failing in order to grow” will be discussed later, when we deal with sadness caused by wind-of-earth. Here, we are discussing a different point, which is sadness caused by the water-of-earth, in which a person feels that his failure is pointless. Such sadness can be solved by showing him how there was some need for him to go through the failure.

So if a person is sad because he's upset at himself that he has failed, the solution is for him to see how this failure was somehow necessary. In order to work on this, it will not suffice for a person to come up with ludicrous reasons why it was necessary to go through the failure. The person has to see sensibly how this failure was necessary to go through.

### ***Example 1: Yosef in Egypt***

For example, Yosef “descended” to Egypt. At first, this seemed like a terrible thing, a “descent” – a failure that could not seem to have any good to say about it. Yet, because he was sent to Egypt (which was indeed a descent from spirituality into impurity), that was the catalyst for him to become viceroy of Egypt, which helped the situation of the Jewish people. This was a “failure” that ended up being a necessity. It wasn't a “failure in order to grow”, but it **was** a failure that was needed.

(If someone gets carried away with this concept and sees how every failure he goes through is **totally** good, this is wrong, and he's just imagining things. The point of what we are saying is that in every failure, a person should find just **one point** in which he can see how it was necessary for him to go through the failure.)

### ***Example 2: Father Stuck in the House Babysitting***

Another example: a person is stuck at home babysitting his kids, and he feels sad that he can't go learn in the *Beis Midrash*, and he is feeling sad about this, because he is disappointed that he can't learn Torah as he would like to. What can he do to calm down about this disappointment?

He can calm himself down by seeing how this situation is somehow a necessity. The fact that he is sitting at home with his children can have a positive effect on them, since he is around them and can be a figure for them. This is something that is needed for the children. So even though he has "descended" from his spiritual level by sitting at home and babysitting, it was a descent in order to enable a necessity. When he thinks about this, he realizes how this "failure" is necessary, and thinking about this can solve his sadness.

How is this working? It is using the element of water to solve the sadness, because water comes and nourishes and gives sustenance; water necessitates things. When a person sees how his failure is somehow necessary, he uses the "necessitating" of water to help himself.

### ***1) Sad Because I'm Failing And I'm Not Growing***

A person can still be sad from failures, though, for a different reason other than what we have said: in addition to the failure, he feels like he isn't growing from it.

This is another kind of sadness, and it is coming from wind in water-of-earth. The previous two kinds of sadness are able to be soothed when we show a person that he has somehow growing, in spite of the fact that he has had a failure. But what do we tell a person who is sad at both the fact that he has had a failure as well as that he isn't growing now, due to his failure?

The solution is for such a person is that he needs to see how he is somehow growing even right now from the failure. This is the concept of *yeridah l'tzorech aliyah* – a "descent in order to ascend." The whole reason why he is sad is because he doesn't see how he is growing from the failure. If we can show him that somehow his failure can lead to some growth, then he will be comforted.<sup>33</sup>

### ***2) The Solution to Being Sad Because I'm Not Growing***

Another kind of sadness is sadness caused by the "fire" of the water-of-earth. This is when a person is upset at the fact that he isn't growing higher, even if he isn't necessarily falling from his level.

In other words, he's not upset at the fact that he's failing; that is not the point that is bothering him. Even if he wouldn't be failing at something, he still feels like he isn't growing higher, and that is what is bothering him and making him sad.

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<sup>33</sup> Editor's Note: At the end of chapter, this matter is more clarified.



On a deeper level, a person might have pain at the very fact that there is a decrease in spirituality as the generations continue, because there is *yeridas hadoros* (spiritual descent with the generations). The fact that Creation is not growing higher spiritually causes him pain, and he is sad at this.

For the first kind of person, the solution for his sadness is that if he would somehow see how he is growing higher also through this failure, then the failure wouldn't make him sad.

How indeed can the person feel that he is somehow growing even though he doesn't see that his growing higher? The fact that he has pain over his situation of non-growth is itself something that he can use to heal himself from the pain. He can say to himself, "At least it bothers me that I'm not growing." If it bothers you, it shows that your spiritual level is important to you. That is already a way how you can gain from feeling very down and dismal at your period of non-growth.

As for the second kind of person we mentioned, this is a deeper kind of sadness – he's sad over the situation of the world, which is sinking more and more as the generations go on. What can a person do to relieve himself of this horribly depressing thought (and he truly feels pain at this)?

Again, we can use the same solution: he can think to himself that the fact that he has pain over this is a kind of growth. By feeling pain over *yeridas hadoros*, a person grows from this; as he's feeling dismal when he thinks about *yeridas hadoros*, he can remind himself that the fact that he has pain over this is itself a spiritual accomplishment.

This solution, to always see how any situation is somehow making you grow, can be utilized on two levels. In the superficial use, a person can imagine how somehow this situation will lead to something good. The inner use of this solution, however, is for a person to realize that since Hashem is found everywhere, He is found with a person even when he feels totally down in the dumps. Therefore, there is really no such thing as "failure", because it can't be a lowly situation if Hashem is still found with him.

## *Tackling Sadness*

### *9 | Solutions for Sadness Caused By Wind-of-Earth* <sup>34</sup>

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#### *Sadness Due To Wind-of-Earth: Unfulfilled Aspirations*

Now we will discuss the sadness caused by **wind-of-earth**, which will branch into earth-of-wind-of-earth, water-of-wind-of-earth, wind-of-wind-of-earth, and fire-of-wind-of-earth. We mentioned earlier that this is a kind of sadness which stems from unfulfilled aspirations.

#### *When I Wish I Could Want the Right Thing (Earth-of-Wind-of-Earth)*

First we will discuss sadness coming from **earth** within wind-of-earth. This happens when the *ratzon* (will) of a person is not met. When a person has a *ratzon* (will) for something, when he “wanted” to “want” - but he doesn’t end up keeping to his motivation – this can make him sad inside.

This is not to be confused with a person has a *ratzon* (will) for something and he doesn’t get what he wants. That is a different kind of sadness, and it is a more general kind of sadness, which is a simple feeling of frustration of not getting what we want. We aren’t discussing this here. Here we are discussing a kind of sadness in which a person loses his drive in having a *ratzon* for something worthy. In other words, he wishes that he could still be motivated to pursue something worthy, but he finds that he has lost his motivation, and he’s sad from this.

#### *The Solution: Consolation*

To solve this kind of sadness, a person can console himself with the fact that he at least has a *ratzon* to want something worthy. So he hasn’t really lost his motivation, even though he thinks he did. He needs to realize that the fact that he is bothered shows that he still has his *ratzon* intact. He still “wants” that worthy goal he wishes he could be motivated more to do.

Although this doesn’t totally solve the sadness he is feeling, it is somewhat soothing to know that at least he hasn’t totally lost his motivation. It is an accomplishment in and of itself to at least have a *ratzon* for spiritual growth, even when a person knows that he isn’t yet at the “actualization” stage. This can comfort a person when he thinks about it.

A person can try to use the power of *emunah* in order to help himself realize this concept. He can tell himself that although he wanted a certain goal, that doesn’t necessarily mean that it was good for

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-009-solutions-sadness-caused-wind-earth>

him. Or, he can realize that what he wanted was simply above his current level to actualize, so it wasn't realistic. This is the solution for a sadness that comes in general when a person doesn't fulfill what he wanted.

### ***Sadness Coming From Imaginary Frustration***

What is the solution, though, for someone who is sad that he no longer even has a *ratzon* for a *ratzon* – someone who has lost his motivation entirely? Such a person isn't able to console himself with the fact that at least he wants a worthy goal, because he has lost his *ratzon* altogether. If so, what can he do about his sadness?

It is a sign that he is sad due to his imagination. A person imagines that he doesn't even want any more spiritual growth anymore, and that is the root of the problem. If a person ever says that he's totally not interested in growth or in improving, it's a sign that his imagination is dominating him. By nature, our soul wants to grow and improve; if a person claims otherwise, it's his imagination talking.

### ***The Solution: Making a List of What I Should Want Out Of Life***

The solution for this, then, is for a person to sit and think about what he is supposed to want from himself in life. He has already identified in himself a thought that he doesn't want to grow, and he clearly feels that he is not motivated, so what can he do about this? He can at least think to himself, "Although I don't want to grow higher in life, I know that I am *supposed* to. What am I *supposed* to want? What should I want in life, and what shouldn't I want in life?" This will get him started to think.

*Chazal* say that a person should say, "When will my actions reach that of my forefathers?" There is a holy desire in every soul to connect to spiritual growth. If a person doesn't have this yearning in himself, and it bothers him that he doesn't have this aspiration, he can at least reveal in himself a desire that he *want* such a goal; to get himself to have "a *ratzon* to have a *ratzon*".<sup>35</sup>

To work on this practically, a person should become aware of everything that he wants in his life, and make a list. Then, he should think about what he is supposed to want in life [which is to grow in spirituality and holiness].

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<sup>35</sup> See also *Bilvavi Part 4, Chapters 15-21*. The *Rav* writes in the name of the *Arizal* that when a person feels uninspired, he should pray to Hashem especially that he be given "a *ratzon* to have a *ratzon*"!

***When I Can't Hold Onto My Inspiration (Water-of-Wind-of-Earth)***

There is also sadness caused by 'water' within wind-of-earth. This is when a person is sad because he sees that sometimes he does want to grow spiritually, and sometimes he doesn't. The nature of water is to flow, which symbolizes continuation. So when a person sees that there is no *continuation* of his *ratzon* (will), this itself can make him sad.

***The Solution: Awakening the Inspiration A Little More***

What is the solution to such sadness?

*Chazal* say that Hashem desires to stay with the Jewish people even after Yom Tov ends. "Stay with me one more day." For this reason, we have *Isru Chag*, the day after Yom Tov – a day in which we can continue our *ratzon* for holiness, even though the level of Yom Tov has gone.

From this we can learn the solution to the above mentioned sadness. When a person sees that his *ratzon* for growth is leaving him, he can awaken his *ratzon* again so that it doesn't weaken. A person can keep his *ratzon* to continue for just a little more, each time that he feels that he is losing his *ratzon*. This gives a person a power of continuation, and ability to keep continuing even as he feels his motivation weakening.

It doesn't totally remove a person's sadness, because there will still be sadness that most of the *ratzon* has gone away. But it can still remove some of the sadness by giving a person hope for the future – that in the future, his *ratzon* will return.

***Torn Between Contradicting Desires in Life (Wind-of-Wind-of-Earth)***

Another kind of sadness comes from the 'wind' within the wind-of-earth. This is when a person runs into inner contradictions; when he sees that he has two contradictory desires. When a person has two different desires that contradict each other, this makes him sad.

Compare this to a person who is married to two wives who hate each other (in the times of the Gemara, when they were allowed to marry more than one wife), and he's stuck in middle of all the clashing.

Most people have two different desires that totally contradict each other. This creates an inner struggle inside a person. A person can go a long time with this war inside himself, and what happens when there is a war? Each side strengthens itself. When a person goes for a long time in his life with two contradictory desires, the war gets stronger and stronger as his life goes on, because each of the desires get strengthened to oppose each other. The internal war inside a person, as it goes on, causes sadness with it.

Many times a person knows he is sad inside, but he can't identify what is making him sad. This can be because his soul senses it, even though he doesn't see it; just like the *Gemara* says that a person can become afraid of something very suddenly even when he doesn't see something scary, because even though he doesn't see something scary, his *mazal* (astrological sign) sees it. That is one option. Another reason it can be, though, is from his imagination - he is *imagining* that he is sad.

How can a person figure out what he wants and then solve the sadness that this contradictory desires cause him?

### ***The Solution: Becoming Aware of Your Subconscious Thoughts***

A person's *ratzon* is rooted in his subconscious. People usually don't know what they really want, but their true desires are hidden deep in their subconscious. Most people are not aware of what's going on in their subconscious, so they don't know what they want. But their *ratzon* is there, and it just hidden away somewhere in the deep recesses of their mind.

If so, the way to get into the *ratzon* is to access the mind's thoughts. A person can become aware of his various inner desires by becoming more aware of his thoughts. He can then discover more about what he really wants. After that, a person can uncover different desires in himself that contradict each other.

This is a very subtle kind of ability that a person has. The more a person becomes aware of his thoughts, the more he becomes aware of subtle thoughts that pass by very quickly, and he can catch them. He will then discover his hidden desires - and he will see his inner contradictions too.

A person should therefore take one root desire he has (which he can discover, through becoming aware of his thoughts) and then focus on that one desire, which will weaken all his other various desires. This is a way to "kill off" all of the various desires in a person: by becoming aware of his root desire, he realizes that all his other desires are like nothing when compared to his main *Ratzon* in life.

So when a person feels sad, he can get used to nullifying his various desires in life, by discovering within himself one very powerful *ratzon* that makes all his other desire like nothing. This is also called "*bittul*" (nullification) of the *ratzon*. The more a person nullifies his *ratzon*, the more he can take away the sadness that his desires cause him.

### ***When I Don't Feel Excited About What I Do (Fire-of-Wind-of-Earth)***

Another kind of sadness is caused by **fire** within wind-of-earth. This is when person feels a *ratzon* (will) for something, but even though he is motivated, he doesn't feel enthusiastic about it.

The fact that he doesn't feel excited about what he wants can also be its own cause for sadness. It comes from the 'fire' aspect, because the nature of enthusiasm comes from inner fire. Hence, when

one is sad when he doesn't feel enthused about what he wants, the sadness is coming from **fire-of-wind-of-earth**.

Some desires in a person are calmer and quieter in their nature. Calm desires are rooted in **water**, and they are referred to as "*mayim shekaitim*", "calm waters." Other desires in a person, though, are of a 'louder' nature, and they are rooted in **wind** (of water), which is noisy. You can see this from two different kinds of people who pursue desires. Some people, while being very persistent in pursuing their desires, are pursuing desires that are quiet and calm. Other people have desires that are very noticeable to others, which are "noisy" kinds of desire. These desires can make a person sad, and we explained this before.

But there is another kind of sadness, and that is when a person has a *ratzon* for motivation and for growth, and he even is able to keep his *ratzon* to continue and hold onto his inspiration, but he doesn't feel enthusiastic about what he wants. If a person is motivated but he is sad because he notices a lack of enthusiasm in himself, and he's wondering why he doesn't feel so excited, this stems from **fire-of-wind-of-earth**.

When people don't feel enthused about what they do, the natural result is that they look for new things. This is very damaging to a person, and it causes many a downfall, especially to young people who are in the midst of their development of what they want in life. When a person doesn't feel enthused and he wants something to feel enthusiastic about it, he will look for "*chiddushim*" – something new, in order to stir up his enthusiasm.

What indeed can a person do to become more enthusiastic towards what he does and in what he wants?

### ***The Solution: The Powers of "Hisbonenus" (Reflection) and "Shinun" (Repetition)***

One solution that can work is to use the power of "*hisbonenus*" (mental reflection). A person can reflect into a certain concept many times, until he becomes enthusiastic just when he thinks about it, and in this way, he won't need new things to get him excited. However, *hisbonenus* is hard for most people to implement, because it requires a lot of mental strength and perseverance.

There is another solution that is simpler to utilize. This is called the power of "*shinun*" – to repeat the same words, again and again, each time attempting to say it more enthusiastically. This helps a person get used to becoming excited even the same old thing, and that he doesn't have to come onto new things to get him excited.

For example, when a person reads a few lines of *Gemara* or *mussar*, he should repeat it again and again, each time with a little more excitement than before. He can use a *niggun* (melody) that he enjoys which can spur on his excitement.

However, a person should choose one *niggun* and stay with it; if a person tries to use a different *niggun* each time, he's still searching for something new each time, and he's back to the old problem. It will make him become very scattered inside.

Enthusiasm is different each time, and there is no "set" way to become enthusiastic. It is something that changes each time. In this way, it refreshes a person who doesn't have what to feel enthusiastic about.

### ***In Conclusion***

Any of these solutions are only partial solutions. For example, if a person is sad because he's not enthusiastic about what he wants, then he can help himself become more enthusiastic, but he will still remain with the other kinds of sadness we spoke about before. Yet, when a person uses any of these solutions (after discovering what the cause of his sadness is), he can remove some of his sadness and be helped to a certain degree.

Even after we work on removing ourselves from sadness, there will always be some sadness left in us. This is a result of the sin of Adam, who was cursed with, "*And with crushing labor you shall eat.*" There was a general curse of sadness given to mankind after the sin, and there is nothing we can do about this. So there is always some sadness inside us which we can never totally remove, and we can only help ourselves remove our sadness partially – through the solutions we have given.

When a person works on removing his sadness – whether it is rooted in earth, water, wind or fire – he will be left with the inevitable deep sadness that all human beings have to deal with: the general curse of sadness that was given to mankind, which is that we have to work hard in life.

What should we do about this discovery? We must "accept suffering with love", as *Chazal* say. There is always some sadness left in us, and this is the curse given to mankind; we have to accept it, but lovingly.

## *Tackling Sadness*

### *10 | Solutions for Sadness Caused By Fire-of-Earth<sup>36</sup>*

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#### *Sadness Due To Fire-of-Earth: The Sadness Caused By Separation*

Now we will discuss sadness caused by **fire-of-earth**, which we have explained before as sadness that stems from a feeling of separation.

There are four types of this kind, as with the others: there is (1) ‘**Earth**’-of-fire-of-earth, (2) ‘**Water**’-of-fire-of-earth, (3) ‘**Wind**’-of-fire-of-earth, and (4) ‘**Fire**’-of-fire-of-earth.

As we have done in the past, we will go in the order of lowest to highest element, beginning with earth, then water, then wind, and then fire.

#### *Sadness of Mourning (Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth)*

Sadness stemming from **earth**-of-fire-of-earth is the sadness of mourning over someone whom we felt closeness with. The deep source of the sadness of mourning is contained in the verse, “*And Hashem mourned in His heart*”. Even Hashem “mourns”, so to speak.

On our own level, we also experience the sadness of mourning, when we mourn a loved one. What is behind the sadness of mourning? It is really caused by a feeling of separation. We feel that the deceased has become ‘separated’ from us. Whether the deceased has been separated from us temporarily or permanently from us, we still feel sad, at the feeling of the separation.

The element of earth symbolizes permanence. When we feel that we have become ‘permanently’ separated from another – through his or her death - we are feeling a sadness coming from the aspect of ‘**earth**’ within our **fire-of-earth** (separation). Thus, the sadness we feel when we mourn a loved one or someone whom we are close with, is stemming from a dominance of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul.

#### *Sadness Over a Severed Connection (Water-of-Fire-of-Earth)*

Another kind of sadness is from ‘**water**’ of fire-of-earth. We explained that this is when a person feels a lack of love in his life. When there is no love, it shows a lack of the element of water. Although it feels like a separation from others, it is not coming an actual separation from others; it is

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-010-solutions-sadness-caused-fire-earth>



rather coming from a lack of love that we feel from others, which feels to us like a feeling of separation.

This is more of an internal kind of sadness. It is unlike the sadness that comes from the general element of earth, which is to be sad over materialistic reasons, like when someone is sad when he loses an item he was fond of. It is rather a sadness that comes more directly from the soul: when he loses a feeling of connection and love with someone.

This can also be experienced during mourning. Not only is he sad that the other is gone (which stems from **earth-of-fire-of-earth**); he is sad that the very *connection* he had with the other is gone.

This is a different element in the sadness of mourning that we spoke about earlier, a sadness stemming from **earth-of-fire-of-earth**. There, we spoke about the feeling of permanent loss that a person feels, when he is mourning someone whom he was close with.

But there is also a more intense aspect of mourning that a person can feel, in addition to what he's already feeling: the fact that the death has severed the *connection* he had with the other person. This comes from the '**water**' aspect of fire-of-earth, because 'water' in the soul is the source of love and connection. The more connected a person feels to another person, the more intense this sadness is.

In the event of mourning, this kind of sadness is a normal kind of feeling, and someone with a dominant amount of **water-of-fire-of-earth** will feel it strongly.

### ***Severed Relationships***

But there are other scenarios in a person's life in which **water-of-fire-of-earth** can be manifest, where it is an unhealthy kind of 'mourning'.

An example of it is a severed friendship. When a person was friends with someone and then the relationship became severed, the one who was 'dumped' might feel a very intense kind of sadness – he might feel like he is in mourning. This is an unhealthy feeling which stems from a dominance of **water-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul, and it is not a 'holy' kind of feeling. It needs to be addressed and fixed.

If the friendship only ceased because one of them went to go live in a different country, this can be saddening also, but it's a sadness that comes from **earth-of-water-of-fire**, because they still have a soul connection, and they are only *physically* apart. But when a person gets dumped by his friend, it is the *soul connection* that is broken, and the sadness that results from this is more intense; it feels like being in a state of mourning. This is the sadness that comes from an imbalance in the 'water' aspect of fire-of-earth.

### ***Physical Connection vs. Soul Connection***

There is another example that brings out the difference between the two kinds of sadness we are describing (**earth-of-fire-of-earth** and **water-of-fire-of-earth**).

If a person's friend dies, and he goes to visit his grave, sometimes, this is greatly consoling to him. There is a certain calming feeling that many people have upon visiting a friend's grave. What is the deep reason for this? It is because since they know that the body is buried here, this is somewhat comforting, because it feels like they have something to 'hold on to' from the relationship.

Someone with a lot of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** in himself will feel consoled upon visiting the grave, because he has some kind of 'permanence' to hold onto in the relationship. But if someone felt a strong soul connection with someone else, he isn't calmed even when he goes to his friend's grave, because what does he care that the *body* is buried here? He has lost the soul connection, and being by the grave doesn't bring the soul connection back. His sadness stems from **water-of-fire-of-earth**, which shows that he considers his relationships with others to be *soul connections*, as opposed to *physical* connections. Therefore, it is much harder for him to be consoled over a loss of a relationship.

If people are only connected to each other on a *physical* level, then visiting the grave of the deceased can calm them down, because they will still feel like they are holding on to some 'physical' feeling of connection with the deceased. This is, indeed, why most people are comforted upon going to the grave - because most people only have relationships with others on a physical level, a relationship of bodies, and not a relationship of souls.

But when a person is more spiritual in his connection with others, he builds a very strong soul connection with others. The relationship existed on the realm of the spiritual, and the loss of the connection with the other person causes a state of mourning in the person that cannot be comforted just by visiting the grave.

### ***The Solution: Belief In The Future Resurrection***

However, this very feeling of sadness contains the key to healing over the loss. When one is sad over the loss of a close friendship (when a friend dies), the love still remains, because although the other person's body has left the world, there is always a hope in one's soul that the relationship will return one day in the future. It is painful, but it can still give hope to the person.

If a person has more water in himself than earth, then he needs to be able to hold onto the soul connection, in order to feel consoled. By having *emunah* in the resurrection of the dead in the future, he can be consoled, because he will be reminded that the connection will return in the future.

### *Sad Because I'm Being Opposed (Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth)*

Another kind of sadness we mentioned is from the 'wind' aspect of **fire-of-earth**. This is when a person encounters clashes with others, and he is sad because of this.

When something he wants is opposing what someone else wants – when he will is opposing someone else's, and because of this, he finds himself in a clash with another person – this is apt to make him feel sadness at this. He is feeling sadness (earth) at the clashing of directions (wind) with another, which makes him feel separated (fire) from the other. So this feeling stems from **wind-of-fire-of-earth** between his will and another's will.

This is unlike the sadness that comes from the general element **wind-of-earth** (sadness due to contradicting desires within oneself), which is more intense. Here, we are addressing 'wind' within **fire-of-earth**. Let us explain the difference.

When a person's sadness is coming from **wind-of-earth**, then his sadness is coming from the fact that he has encountered some kind of opposition to his will. The way he can stop being sad is by being shown that he's not in a total opposition.

But someone whose sadness comes from **wind-of-fire-of-earth** will not be comforted by this, because the very fact that there is still some opposition is what is bothering him. The fact that his *ratzon*/will is being opposed by another is what makes him sad, and it bothers him that there is even any opposition here at all.

To give an example, if he is in the midst of a family disagreement, and some of the family members get into a heavy *machlokes* (argument and dissension) with other family members. What happens when there is a family *simcha*? Normally, everyone pastes a smile on their faces and act as if there is no strife amongst them, so that everything will look fine and so that the guests won't discover that there's a family *machlokes* going on. If someone's soul is rooted in **wind-of earth**, he will calm down, because even though he is opposed to his other family members, he is comforted at the fact that they can at least get together on a superficial level and appear as if they're getting along. He comforts himself with the fact that at least they're talking to each other.

But if someone contains more **wind-of-fire-of-earth** in himself, he will not be comforted knowing that his family members are superficially smiling back at him. He is very bothered at the very fact that his will is being opposed in the first place. This makes him very sad inside, and just because everyone in the family is being quiet about it and hiding their dissension, is not a consolation to him. He finds himself inconsolable over the fact that people in the family disagree with what he feels, even though they're not openly fighting with him.

### ***Sad Because There Is a Lack of Unity***

The next scenario of sadness we will discuss is when it is coming from **fire-of-fire-of-earth**. This is when a person is sad at the very fact that there is strife taking place, which comes from ‘fire’ aspect (within ‘fire-of-earth’), for strife is rooted in fire.

Returning to the above scenario, in which a person is upset over a family dispute, here, the person is not being saddened by the fact that people are in disagreement with him and that they oppose his will. A person with a dominance of **fire-of-fire-of-earth** is rather upset over the very fact that there is a *machlokes* (dissension).

He is not necessarily about the fact that the *machlokes* is causing anything bad. Even if there wouldn’t be any hard feelings between the arguing parties, he is very bothered at the very fact that there is *machlokes* taking place.

On a deeper level, this kind of sadness is mostly experienced by someone who always wants there to be *achdus* (unity) in the world, and therefore, any lack of *achdus* he sees in Creation bothers him. Such a person is bothered even if people aren’t necessarily fighting in the world. He is upset at the fact that the world isn’t unified yet and that there is mostly disparity amongst Creation. He is deeply awaiting the coming of *Mashiach*, in which *achdus* will finally be brought to the world, when all of Creation will become unified at last.

### ***The Solutions to Sadness Stemming From Fire-of-Earth***

We have described different kinds of sadness that stem from **fire-of-earth** (which branched out into four divisions: earth, water, wind and fire) and how they can each be solved:

#### ***1) Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth: Sadness of Mourning***

The first kind of sadness we described in this chapter, which stems from the ‘earth’ aspect of fire-of-earth, is the sadness experienced when we mourn the loss of a loved one. Regularly visiting the grave of the deceased can be comforting for this.

#### ***2) Water-of-Fire-of-Earth: Sadness From A Lack of Connection To Others (Also Experienced In Mourning)***

The second kind of sadness we described, which stems from the ‘water’ aspect of fire-of-earth, is when we are pained from a lack of connection with others. This can also be experience during mourning, if we are missing the relationship that we once had with the one who has passed on. The solution to this is for a person to deeply believe in the future *techiyas hemeisim* (the revival of the dead), which will give a person hope that one day the relationship will return again.

### ***3) Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth: Sad When I'm Opposed***

When someone is sad because he feels opposed by others (wind-of-fire-of-earth), the solution to this kind of anxiety is two-fold.

Firstly, he needs to minimize what he wants into one single will. He should try letting go of his many desires, and instead concentrate himself on one particular will that he wants in life. This will lessen his chances of being opposed by others. By lessening all the things he wants in his life, he avoids many would-be confrontations with others, because the chances of him getting opposed will now be much less.

The second part of what he needs to do is deeper. He must deeply realize the words of *Chazal*, "Just all faces are not the same, so are all *de'os* (opinions) not the same." One must know that this world is full of many opinions, and therefore, disagreements are very normal. The person should lovingly accept this fact that Hashem has implanted in the design of Creation. In fact, for whatever reason, Hashem wants it that way, that people should disagree with each other.

When we deeply accept this, it is a deep form of consolation.

### ***4) Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth: Sad At Disputes***

The fourth kind of sadness we mentioned is sadness that a person feels whenever there is dissension and disputes taking place. This stems from **fire-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul. Here, the person is mainly upset at the lack of unity in the world, which is intensified at a time of strife.

To soothe himself, he can contemplate the concept of "*Ain Ad Milvado*" – "there is nothing except Him (Hashem)". The deeper layer of Creation, which we cannot plainly see, is that there is nothing other than Hashem's Presence. Therefore, all of Creation is really unified, in essence. It is just that we cannot see it. By believing more in the unity of the world that is contained in the deeper dimension of this world - *Ain Oid Milvado* – we can slowly internalize, more and more, that all is unified.

In the deeper layer to reality, there is really *achdus* (unity), in the world - even now in our times, when we see much strife taking place. Although it doesn't appear that way, the *achdus* is there, albeit not perfectly; it will be revealed fully in the future, when its full reality will be revealed. But even now, before it has been fully revealed, there is still some degree of *achdus* in Creation - because Hashem's Presence fills everything: "There is no place that is empty from Him."

When one believes firmly in this concept and he feels it, this can heal the sadness he feels over the lack of unity and the dissension and strife that he sees on This World.

### *In Conclusion*

We have laid out the outline of 16 kinds of sadness, as well as their specific solutions.

Each person who hears\reads these words will have to personally figure out what his own personal source of sadness is, and this can take a long time until it is discovered.

In addition, what a person also needs to do is to see all of this information we have said at its root – where it is in the Torah and in the words of *Chazal*<sup>37</sup>. Meaning, in whichever aspect you are studying here, you need to research it fully, seeing all the background of it in the words of *Chazal*, so that you can become well-versed in the particular area of the soul that you are trying to rectify.

This is based on the words of Reb Yisrael Salanter, that a person working to improve a certain area of himself needs to learn that part in the Torah which speaks about the issue. This will provide you with two gains. In the simple sense, it provides you with a “*segulah*” – it is a spiritual method which will draw you closer to the desired results. Reb Yisrael Salanter explains this clearly. Secondly, there is a more inner gain: it will serve to help you gain clarity in these matters, as opposed to merely knowing about them superficially.

So besides for trying to work on these matters, you need to learn about them in-depth. You will need to research the verses of the Torah and the words of *Chazal* that pertain to each of these subjects we discussed here. This can take several months of learning. If you do so, you will see a clearer picture of the information, and you are much closer to a truer *avodah* [of fixing your *middos*].

If one just tries to implement any of these solutions without studying the roots of this information in the Torah and *Chazal*, then he will be lacking clarity to his situation. We cannot say it is pointless, but it will be an incomplete picture if a person doesn't see how this information is contained in the words of Torah and *Chazal*.

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<sup>37</sup> Refer to the series *Understanding Your Middos*.

# *Tackling Laziness*

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*Tackling Laziness***11 | The Root Causes For Laziness** <sup>38</sup>

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***Introduction***

Until now, with the help of Hashem, we discussed the trait of sadness, which is rooted in the element of earth. We also discussed imagination, which can also come from our element of earth. Now we will discuss the next trait which comes from our element of earth: laziness.

As we mentioned earlier from Rav Chaim Vital, the soul consists of four elements – earth, water, wind and fire. Each of these elements can produce both good and evil traits.

Besides for this, each of the four elements consists of the other four, as we mentioned previously. For example, there are sixteen different kinds of sadness, as we explained in previous chapters. The same goes for laziness; there are sixteen different kinds of laziness.

The elements can keep subdividing endlessly. Each of the four elements contain the other elements, adding up for a total of sixteen; and each of these sixteen can subdivide even further, since every element always contains some amount of the other elements.

***The Two General Kinds of Laziness***

Let us give a general introduction to the concept of laziness. There are two general kinds of laziness. One kind of laziness is when a person moves slowly. The second kind of laziness is when a person doesn't move at all and stays where he is. (When this power is used for holiness, it is called *menuchah*, and it resembles Shabbos. But when it is used for evil, it becomes evil laziness).

***The Four Basic Sources of Laziness***

- 1) The first kind of laziness comes from **earth-of-earth**. This is when a person doesn't move at all, due to the heavy nature of his earth which is dominant.
- 2) The second kind of laziness comes from **water-of-earth**, which is when a person cannot free himself of the direction he finds himself flowing towards. Water tends to flow downwards; when a person can't deal with the "flow" of life, there is a problem with his water-of-earth,

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-011-root-causes-laziness>



and this causes him to be lazy. (We can find this with people who find it very difficult to change their way of life, because they have gotten used to a certain way of living.)

- 3) The third kind of laziness comes from **wind-of-earth**. The nature of wind is that it clashes with other winds. This is when a person despairs upon realizing that he has desires that contradict each other. Most people who encounter contradictions have a hard time dealing with.

(Someone on a higher level will be able to unify with whatever is challenging him, similar to the idea of how a man and woman, if they are worthy, merit the *Shechinah*. But most people aren't like this, and they can't deal with anything that contradicts them.)

The person then feels despair from this, and becomes lazy. His laziness causes him to despair. It is not that he is lazy because he despairs which would essentially be sadness (that we discussed earlier). It's the other way around: his laziness is breeding on his despair.

We find these people who, because they despair, they come to a point in which they don't feel like doing anything. Sometimes the person will claim that it's better not to do anything than do something which is a risk, as *Chazal* say – "Better not to do anything". But that's just the excuse the person is saying; the inner reason is really because the person feels a despair inside, since he has encountered a contradiction that he can't deal with.

- 4) The fourth kind of laziness comes from **fire-of-earth**. Fire tends to rise; when one is lazy and he doesn't feel like progressing, his fire-of-earth has become impaired, because he has a hard time with wanting to ascend and progress.

These four kinds of laziness each subdivide into another four kinds of sadness. Therefore, **earth-of-earth** subdivides into water, wind, fire, and earth. They each produce a certain feeling of inner heaviness in the person, which results in the laziness. We will now explore each of these more in detail.

#### ***1-A) Lack of Movement (Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

When a person feels that he doesn't want to move at all, the inner heaviness he is feeling is stemming from the **earth** itself of his earth-of-earth, because the earth in the soul has gotten so dominant that it has become total. He feels totally heavy inside, and therefore he doesn't move at all. That's one kind of laziness: earth-of-earth.

#### ***1-B) Lack of Self-Control (Water-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

When a person's desires are overpowering him, his element of water is impaired. His desires have become too "heavy" upon him – a nature of earth. The ensuing laziness is coming from the **water** in his earth-of-earth. When a person can't overcome a desire he's facing, he feels heavy inside, and he can't get himself to pull away from it – he becomes lazy.

Desires make a person feel heavy inside. If a person wants to stop indulging in his desires, it might be because he wants to attain spiritual perfection, but it can be for a much more simple reason [which isn't spiritual]: it's because he feels heavy from all his desires. When faced with a desire, he feels heavy inside when trying to fight it, and that is why he gets lazy and falls into indulgence.

### ***1-C) Overwhelmed (Wind-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

**Wind**-of-earth-of-earth has to do with contradictory desires, and this can also create heaviness in one's soul, resulting in laziness. The fact that a person has so many desires can make him feel 'heavy' inside. (Just as our body can feel heavy, so can our soul feel heavy). Most people who are heavy in their souls will feel sad, but besides for sadness, it can also result in laziness. For example, many people like to see how they weigh on the scale. Some people are doing this for health reasons, but most people who do this are really doing so because they feel an inner heaviness, and they wish to feel lighter.

There are also many people who feel bombarded by all their responsibilities in life, and this causes them to feel heavy inside. If a person is living a very physical kind of existence and he doesn't live an internal kind of life, then he simply will feel physical fatigue from all his various responsibilities. He has to go to work and support a family, and this is straining. He has to attend many *simchos* (celebrations) even when he's tired, and this strains him even more. And then he has to open up a *Gemara* after all this – and he finds himself utterly tired. That's one kind of heaviness.

If he is a more internal kind of person, he also experiences inner heaviness with life. He is trying to grow in his *Avodas Hashem* and he's working on many *middos*, but he feels like he's caving in from all of this internal work. If a person develops his soul more, he will be able to bear all his responsibilities in his life, just like how the "Aron lifted its carriers." The more a person refines his soul, the lighter he will feel inside.

Indeed, most people are not in touch with their *middos*. They just go through life and aren't aware of what their soul is experiencing as they go through life. But if a person lives a more internal kind of life, he will feel inner heaviness from all the *middos* going on inside him as he goes through his life experiences.

On a more subtle note, only bad *middos* cause a person to feel heavy inside, while good *middos* are light to carry; a person who feels heavy from all that's going on in his soul is really feeling this heaviness due to all his unrefined *middos*. When a person purifies his *middos*, he will only have good *middos*, and he will feel lighter inside. Only bad *middos* make a person feel like he's carrying them.

Many people want to improve themselves in *Avodas Hashem*, but they feel that there is so much to improve in, and as a result, they feel like they're carrying a huge burden. They feel an inner heaviness from all of their *Avodas Hashem*. When people want to keep adding onto their growth, this can actually create a huge burden upon them, if they're lacking proper orderliness in their life.

For example, a person might be in turmoil over how much sleep he needs in order to be able to learn properly, so he accepts upon himself that he will go to sleep on time in order to get his sleep and be able to function properly the next day. When it comes down to action, though, people don't always act upon their resolutions, and then they find themselves in a vicious cycle of learning for hours on end, then oversleeping, and then repeating the cycle. It's all coming from a lack of orderliness. The person finds that he has a hard time moving on.

When a person feels fatigued from his life, due to all his various responsibilities he has, this results in being fatigued. This is the kind of laziness that is coming from the wind in his wind-of-earth.

### ***1-D) Pampered (Fire-of-Earth-of-Earth)***

There is one more cause for laziness\inner heaviness: **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, which is when a person gets too "warm" inside, which is coming from an imbalanced element of fire in the person; the nature of fire is warmth. Sometimes, a person feels very warm, and this can increase his inner heaviness.

To give a physical example of this concept, a father might have a hard time waking up his son in the morning to get up for *davening*, and his son doesn't budge. Why doesn't the son want to get out of bed? It is because he feels heavy as he lies comfortably in his bed, and he feels like he can't move. But why does he feel like he can't move from his bed? It's because the warmth of the covers is increasing his feeling of heaviness, and that is why he feels like he can't move.

From the above case we can see how warmth can increase a person's feeling of heaviness. We can see how this problem can affect the soul as well, for example, when parents caress their little child and hug and kiss him. The child will not want to budge from his place, because he feels warmth. When a person feels warmth, it causes him to want to stay where he is.

### ***In Conclusion***

We have explained the four root causes for laziness, and the common denominator between them is that they all have to do with causing a feeling of heaviness to descend upon a person. We have not yet given the solutions to laziness. We have only said what the causes are, and each person has to find out which causes for laziness are mainly going on in his life.

Each person should figure out which kind of laziness he sees mainly manifest in his life; he can come up with his own examples. One should see which of the information here applies to him, and

which of it doesn't; he can use his own examples, of course, and he does not have to limit himself to the examples we gave. We have only laid out the general outline here, but it is up to each person to find out his personal cause for laziness, from within the outline we have laid out here.

*Tackling Laziness***12 | Countering Laziness** <sup>39</sup>

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***Introduction***

We have begun to explain that the nature of laziness is caused by a heaviness that the soul feels. There is laziness that can be coming either from our earth-of-earth, our water-of-earth, our wind-of-earth, or our fire-of-earth.

In the previous chapter, we explained four kinds of sadness that **earth-of-earth** subdivides into: earth in earth-of-earth, water in earth-of-earth, wind in earth-of-earth, and fire in earth-of-earth. What all have these had in common is that they can cause the soul to feel heavy, which will manifest in laziness. We have so far explained that the root causes for laziness, but we have not yet said the solutions.

We will first discuss sadness that is caused by our **earth-of-earth-of-earth** – which is when a person doesn't like to move.

***Countering Laziness with Its Opposite Element***

Generally speaking, we can solve every problem with its opposite element, similar to how a man reaches his perfection through his *eizer k'negdo*, his “helpmate opposite him” (his wife). When we discover the element that is responsible for the laziness, we can counter the laziness by making use of an opposing element.

***1-A] Solving Laziness Due To Lack of Movement: The Advice of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l***

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l gave two alternative methods to counter this particular kind of laziness, in which a person doesn't feel like moving.

One way is to get used to moving around even when you don't need to get something done; a person should do three small acts a day, in order to get used to it.

An alternative method is that a person can get used to moving quickly, and he should practice this for three times a day; these should also be acts that a person doesn't have to take care of, and he is doing them specifically because he wants to overcome laziness.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-012-countering-laziness>

There is also a third solution, and that is to get used to doing things quickly which we need to take care of. We will come back to this solution later; first we will focus on the first two alternative solutions.

### ***Methods 1-2***

In either of the first two solutions – doing something we don't have to do, or doing something quickly - we must emphasize that the solution can only work if a person does something that he *does not have* to take care of. The point is to get used to doing something *even when you don't have to* take care of something.

Of course, it is commendable to take care of things you have to do, but if we only move in order to get things done, we won't solve laziness. Our needs and necessities can make us overcome our laziness; when we need to get something done, we will naturally overcome our laziness.

For example, if we need to do errands before Shabbos, it is natural for us to overcome our laziness, since we need to get things done.

So if we want to overcome laziness, we will have to get used to doing things that we don't need to take care of [using either of the two methods we have presented]. We should get used to doing these exercises for three times a day.

Understandably, a person should only start making sensible changes, and he should not do weird things in order to go against his nature. (We also have to make sure that we aren't damaging other areas of our soul, such as our thoughts, and therefore, we have to do actions that are not thoughtless.) The point of this exercise is to get our soul used to the idea of movement, which counters the nature of our laziness.

### ***Method 3 – Doing Our Obligations Quickly***

A third solution is that when it comes to doing things we have to do, we should get used to doing them quickly. The best area to work on this is when we get up in the morning – we should quickly pull ourselves out of bed. It is the first *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch*: “*Yisgaber K'ari* – “Be strong like a lion” when you get up in the morning.

If someone doesn't have a problem with getting out of bed in the morning, he can still use any of the other approaches on other areas in his life where he finds that he gets lazy. Each person can find areas in his life where he knows that he gets lazy.

How is this working? Laziness is from our element of earth, and when earth gets too dominant, it slows down our movements. The element that opposes earth is wind, because wind is the moving force in Creation. When we get ourselves to move, we are essentially using some wind to counter our

earth. Even if a person has a particularly dominant element of earth, he can access some of his “wind” and get his soul used to moving.

### ***Summary***

To summarize, when a person is lazy because he doesn't like to get himself moving, there are three solutions. The first solution is to get used to doing things that you don't have to do. A second solution is to do things quickly, and these should also be things you don't need to do (or else it defeats the whole purpose). The third solution is to carry out our obligations quickly, such as quickly getting up out of bed in the morning, as well in any obligation of life in which we find ourselves getting lazy in: do it quickly.

The point of all these alternate approaches is so that we can get our soul used to the concept of movement.

### ***1-B] Solving Sadness to Water-of-Earth-of-Earth: Light Eating***

Until now we discussed laziness coming from our **earth** within earth-of-earth. Now we will discuss the next kind of laziness, when it is coming from **water**-of-earth-of-earth. This is referring to the heaviness a person feels in himself when he is losing control over his very physical desires.

We are not referring to the actual physical heaviness a person feels after he gorges on food or when he weighs himself on the scale afterwards. We are referring to an inner kind of heaviness. The physical feeling of heaviness can spread to the soul as well, and we are addressing the heaviness that the soul feels from this.

For example, when a person tends to indulge in food a lot, he feels lazy inside, because he feels heavy inside. Why does he feel an inner heaviness? It is because his very desire for the food makes him feel heavy.

Of course, there is no one who does not have any physical desires. We all have desires, but some people have a stronger amount of physical desires in them than others do, and they feel heavy inside from this.

To counter this inner heaviness, the outline of the solution is to do light movements. The light movements will counter the inner heaviness.

For example, on Shabbos, we have a mitzvah of *oneg* (pleasure), and we must enjoy the Shabbos food. But instead of gorging on the food, we should instead taste a little of the food and no more. *Oneg Shabbos* is not about gorging on the Shabbos food; the point of *Oneg Shabbos* is to taste new foods – to taste them, but not to indulge in the food and get stuffed from it.

Shabbos is a taste of Gan Eden, and “Eden” means “refined.” The food which we eat on Shabbos is meant to give us pleasure, but only if we eat the food in a refined manner. *Oneg Shabbos* is not about getting stuffed; it’s not about *eating* - it’s rather about *tasting*. Taste is a different kind of pleasure than eating, and it is a lighter kind of desire.

Therefore, the solution is to curb the desire. We need to refine our physical desires and calm them; we can do this by tasting things. We should taste new foods, and we should enjoy the taste - but we should simply taste it, and not more than that. This “lightens” the heaviness caused by desire. The point of this solution is to get used to enjoying the taste of a food, rather than just gorging in the actual food for the sake of eating it.

When we learn how to enjoy a taste – as opposed to enjoying the eating – we access a lighter kind of desire, and we learn how to find enjoyment in light kinds of pleasure. The more we get used to enjoying light pleasures, the less we will need to engage in heavier kinds of pleasure.

We should mention that we aren’t discussing now about how to uproot our physical desires; that is a separate discussion, and it is also something commendable to work on. Here, we are discussing a different point: the heaviness that a person feels from his desires. To counter this inner heaviness, a person needs to get used to lighter kinds of desires, such as tasting.

The more we refine our desires, the more we will lighten our inner heaviness inside. This will give us two gains. Firstly, we will feel better that we are eating lighter. It will also help us gain more self-control over our desires. But in addition, it improves our soul as well, because it takes away the heaviness that our soul feels inside from all our physical desires.

From using this solution, a person will be able to see how even his mind has improved as well, because when we remove our physical desires for indulgence, our mind becomes refined in the process, and we are then able to think better, and our emotions as well will become more subtle. Generally speaking, the more a person refines his physical desires, the better he can think and feel (However, we are only mentioning this a side point, and it is part of a separate discussion).

### ***1-C] Solving Laziness Due To Wind-of-Earth-of-Earth***

The next kind of laziness is rooted in **wind** coming from earth-of-earth, which we explained is the despair that is caused by having many, contradicting desires. The despair that a person feels from his contradicting desires breeds on laziness.

There are levels to how much a person can fall to despair, of course; but despair always comes from unfulfilled desires, which makes us feel an inner contradiction: we want something, and we aren’t getting it. This makes us despair, and that in turn can make us lazy.

Every person has many desires, but we all have an inner [G-dly] will of the soul which is the source of all our desires. This inner will is universally applicable to every person’s soul. As long as we



haven't yet revealed our inner will, our various other desires we have will clash with each other and cause us to feel many inner contradictions.

When a person gets to know his soul better, he is able to recognize that he is an inner will, and he also sees that he has many other various desires. But at least he is self-aware. Understandably, each person is at a different level when it comes to this, but all people who have become familiar with their psyche are able to identify that we all have various desires that contradict each other. If we at least become aware of all our desires, we have begun the remedy.

Therefore, discover your strongest will, and realize that everything else you want is not as strong as your deepest will. With the more and more you do this, you will be able to slowly extinguish all your desires, when you measure its importance to your strongest will. This will weaken the despair you used to feel from all your unfulfilled desires.

Eventually, when you keep doing this, you will be able to discover your innermost will of the soul (*Retzoneinu Laasos Retzoncha* – “It is our will to do Your will”) – and you will realize that all your various desires are not as important as your innermost will. This will make all your desires vanish, and this in turn takes away all the inner contradictions you were feeling.

This can help even if you discover what your strongest physical desire is. For example, if you discover that your desire for honor or for money is your strongest desire, you can see how all your other desires pale in compare to this deep ambition of yours.

However, it is not the way of the Torah to remain with your strongest physical desires, and you must uncover your inner will of the soul and realize that this is really your true desire in life. But the point we can take out from this is that by discovering what we want the most in life, this can extinguish all the other desires we have. This will eliminate the despair we used to feel from all those desires.

### ***1-D) Solving Sadness Due To Fire-of-Earth-of-Earth***

The next kind of laziness we will address is laziness which comes from **fire** within our earth-of-earth. As we explained, this is when a person feels very comfortable, and then he doesn't feel like moving from his place as a result. He feels 'warm' from all the comfort he is getting, and then he gets lazy from this and doesn't want to away from his comfort zone.

Warmth is a nature of fire; the fire can get too dominant, resulting in non-movement. This is how one's fire\warmth can work together with earth [in a detrimental way] to increase his element of earth\non-movement. He doesn't feel like moving because he likes being in this warm and comfortable place he is in.

The solution for this (for those who identify with this problem) is that a person should try to avoid those situations in which he feels too warm. For example, if a person can't get out of bed in the winter because he's enjoying the warmth of his bed, he can try going to sleep without his feet

covered, and in this way, he doesn't get too warm. (This advice is brought in the words of our early Rabbis). The point is to get used to decreasing our indulgence in a desire.

When a person fulfills every last drop of his desire, he gets too comfortable in his situation, and then he can't escape it. Therefore, a person should make sure that he never gets 100% physically comfortable in any situation, because if he gets too comfortable, he won't be able to escape his comfort; he gets too pampered.

### ***How to Work With Our Soul Faculties***

This leads us to the following point – a general point about how we work with our soul. First we will describe this idea in the general sense, and then we will show it applies to the particular detail we are discussing.

We have to constantly be making use of our different soul abilities. As we say in *Tefillas Maariv*, “He changes the times.” We have to constantly wear and then remove our various abilities of the soul; if we use any one of our abilities too much, it will become too dominant and overtake us.

If we are using any one of the soul's abilities all the time and we are never making use of our other abilities, what will happen? Our element of earth will overtake us, and we will be restricted to our “earth.” This is true when it comes to any of the elements of earth, water, wind and fire; if we use any of the elements too much, and we never make use of the other elements, then it will always increase the earth of the soul, and we will be overtaken by our earth.

For example, if we use our element of wind all the time and we never learn how make use of our other elements, then the constant use of our soul's wind will in turn make our earth overtake us. Our element of earth will then be controlling us and it will completely dominate, which is of course detrimental.

When it comes to working with our soul, we have to make sure that we are never overtaken by any of the four elements. We have to constantly be making use of the other elements, back and forth, so that none of the soul's elements are controlling us too much. This is true even for someone who perfected any of his soul elements; even if any of one's soul elements has become perfected – that element still should not be allowed to take over. We need to constantly be making use of all our various positive abilities.

To illustrate, we go through many different kinds of *Yomim Tovim* throughout the year in which we do different *mitzvos*. On *Sukkos* we shake *lulav*, on Pesach we eat matzah, etc. Not only in time do we pass through different actions, but in our soul as well, we have to pass through our various abilities all the time.

This concept is only true when it comes to making use of the positive uses of our soul's abilities. As for the negative uses of our soul abilities, we should not be accessing them. The fact that we have to always be using our other abilities is only true when it comes to using the positive uses of our soul.

The more one improves in working with our soul, the more he will be able to pass through his soul's abilities all the time, making use of all of them.

This will give us two gains. The first gain is that this will help us realize that our soul's abilities are just garments of the soul, and that they are not our soul itself. The second gain in this it will help us be in control of our soul, as opposed to our soul controlling us. When we are in control of the uses in our soul and we don't let one particular ability become too dominant in our life, it decreases the inner heaviness of the soul.

Without doing this, what will happen? A person will get trapped by even his good abilities, and he will find that he's stuck due to his own qualities. For example, you can have a person who teaches Torah to others and he also does great acts of kindness with others, and if it ever comes a day that he has to stop from all this, he will find it unbearable. Why? It is because he never trained himself to detach. People don't always understand that detachment is necessary even from our good qualities. If we never learn how to detach from our good qualities, then we will be trapped by them. And then it will be very difficult to come out of these situations.

So we need to train ourselves to not let any of our qualities become too dominant in our life. This will help us be able to detach when times come in which we can't use those qualities, because we will have already trained ourselves to make the transition to new situations.

This is the general way of how we fix the inner heaviness in the soul, caused by the element of earth.

### ***Using One Kind of Evil to Fight Another Kind Of Evil***

Now that we have explained that point, let us go back to the case we were discussing, which is when a person has a hard time leaving a warm and comfortable place. The problem is really that he has become stuck. What he can do, practically, to get out of this, is that he should leave the warmth of the room and go outside, where it is colder. The person should get used to the idea of passing between warm and cold places, back and forth. This will get a person used to the idea of cooling off his warmth sometimes, and therefore, his laziness will decrease as a result.

If a person gets used to this, he will discover that his desire for warmth will increase, as his needs for warmth go up after being in the cold. Yet, although his desires to be in a warm place will get increased as a result, the gain is far better, because he will have trained himself to be able to leave warm places, and this helps him weaken the inner heaviness of the soul that's causing his laziness. This reflects the concept we have been describing, that when we work with our soul, we have to constantly be making use of our soul's abilities, back and forth.

Even if a person is doing this with the intention that it will increase his pleasure he gets from being for warmth and comfort – which awakens the base desires of one's *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic drives of the soul) it is still an achievement if he is able to leave warmth and go into the cold. If a person is more spiritual, he will do it with the intention that he is trying to overcome his

laziness; but even if he isn't doing it for that reason and he's doing it for personal gratification, as we said – it is still a constructive solution.

Sometimes we have to counter evil by using good, but sometimes we can use evil to counter another kind of evil! The above example is a case in which a person is able to use evil to counter evil; he's using the evil of desiring more physical gratification [and therefore he'll leave the warmth where he's enjoying himself] to overpower the evil laziness.

Of course, one should not be careful not to do this in a dangerous way and be too drastic with this. We just mean that as a general idea, one should get used to the idea of passing between warmth and cold, so that a person's need for physical warmth shouldn't get too strong.

As long as the person is aware that he is doing this so he can overcome his laziness, even if he knows he will end up enjoying the warmth even more as a result, it is still constructive. If he is someone who has a particularly strong need for physical warmth, then he will of course use this solution as a way to increase his physical desires, but this is okay for now, as long as he's doing it because he also wants to uproot his laziness\inner heaviness at the same time. It should be viewed as a situation of *mitoch shelo lishmah, ba lishmah* – “From ulterior motives, one can lead to pure motives.”

Eventually, at a later point, a person should also work to uproot his excessive physical desires, but right now we are not working on this point. For now, we are working on how to uproot laziness, and we are saying that a person is able to use his physical desires and gratification as an incentive to be willing to uproot his laziness. So even if a person is using this solution (of passing between warm places and cold places) as a way to enhance the experiences of his physical desires (because now he will enjoy the warmth of these places even more), he is allowed to do this, since he also wants to uproot his laziness.

We have given the solutions here to the four kinds of laziness which come from our earth-of-earth. If Hashem merits us, we will discuss the next four kinds of laziness (which come from water-of-earth).

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### *Questions & Answers with the Rav*

**Q1: *If a person is lazy in his thinking – for example, if he is lazy when it comes to learning Torah in-depth and he’s not willing to strain his mind so much in learning – is this related to the discussion here on laziness?***

**A:** Both our materialistic and spiritual layers to our self are composed of the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. Just like when we can have physical heaviness, so can there be a heaviness in our thoughts. Someone who generally has calmer thoughts has a more dominant element of water in his soul; someone who thinks quickly has a dominant element of wind; someone who is more orderly has a dominant element of earth, and someone whose thoughts are very jumpy is a person whose soul is rooted in fire. Our brain can have physical heaviness, because it’s part of the body; as well as mental heaviness. If a person isn’t willing to strain his mind, this is called “laziness of the mind” – *atzlus hamachshavah*, and it is also coming from an imbalance in our element of earth. It is just a more spiritual kind of element of earth than our regular element of earth which we are familiar with from our physical actions.

**Q2: *How can a person know how far the definition of laziness goes?***

**A:** No one knows how far the definition of laziness goes. When the Alter of Kelm was on his deathbed and he felt that he was too weak to move, he suspected that perhaps this was coming from laziness; he wasn’t sure. When we feel like we are incapable of doing something, we are not able to know for sure if this is out of laziness or simply because we cannot do it. In the words of our Rabbis, this concept is called “*kelipas nogah*.” There are areas in which we do not know if they are coming from good or evil.

This is also the depth of the concept called *safek d’kedushah*, “holy doubt” – we have to always be in doubt if we are doing the right thing or not.

**Q3: *Is laziness in our thoughts related to any of the four elements that affect or materialistic layer? For example, is it possible that our mind is being dominated by our element of fire, while our body isn’t being dominated by our element of water?***

**A:** This is a very fundamental question. A person is made up of a body and soul, and they can each be made up of different elements that are dominant. Generally speaking, if someone has a body and soul that are both being dominated by different elements, this is called “mamzer”, because when there is an imbalance like this, our soul is pure but our body isn’t, similar to the situation of a mamzer: his soul is pure, but his body hasn’t been conceived from holiness.

The ideal way we are supposed to look like is that both our body and soul should be equal in their amounts of the four elements. Most people are experiencing contradictions between the amount of the four elements going on in their body with their soul. This is due to a number of factors. First of all, our souls have gone through several lifetimes (*gilgulim*), and have accumulated

elements that are different from the amount of elements going on in our body. In addition, our souls have received parts from other souls. Our body's elements are also affected by the nature of the marital union of our parents; if the parents have holy thoughts as they conceive their child, the child will have more holiness.

It is hard to see how much our soul and body contradict each other.

There are people who are suffering from tremendous internal contradictions going on in their soul. The more a person gains clarity in his soul, the more he can realize that the various natures which his soul has acquired are not really part of himself – even if he has inherited certain base, negative natures from his parents' unholy marital union. The more a person realizes that his soul has received certain negative natures that are not part of his actual soul, the more he clarifies his true internal self, and he can improve his soul as a result.

We cannot understand ourselves fully, though. This is impossible. It is written, "Your thoughts are very deep." We cannot understand anything in Creation, because everything is so deep. We cannot even understand any of our learning to its full depth. We cannot even understand the full depth of one act of kindness in Creation. But, we have to try to understand things and gain clarity, as much as we can, so that we can improve and perfect ourselves.

...We must first know who we are, before we attempt to work with our soul's abilities.

*Tackling Laziness***13 | Changing Routine** <sup>40</sup>

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***Laziness Stemming From Water-of-Earth: When the Flow of Life Comes To a Halt***

Previously, we spoke of how to solve laziness due to our element of **earth-of-earth**. Now we will progress to address the four kinds of laziness that come from our **water-of-earth**.

The nature of water is to flow; thus, when a person experiences a halt to a certain flow he's used to in his life, this can breed on laziness. This will be the general outline of the laziness we will discuss here; there are four kinds of branching laziness that this can become.

***2-A] Laziness from Change in Routine (Earth-of-Water-of-Earth)***

Earth in the soul provides a person with the power of *Seder*, orderliness. The other elements are jumpier in their nature; fire is jumpy, wind moves, and water flows. But earth stays in its place; this helps a person maintain his orderliness and being organized. However, sometimes the 'water' within the element of earth can cause a person to be lazy, when the "flow" of his regular life has changed in some way, and then the power of *Seder* in a person actually contributes to his laziness.

For example, a person is used to a certain way of living; he does the same thing every day and sits in the same seat every day in his *shul*. This can be a cause for laziness, because is very used to the same things every day, and as soon as he goes through some change in his lifestyle, he gets lazy. The "flow" of his lifestyle gets stopped and he becomes lazy. This is how the earth-of-water-in-earth in the soul contributes to laziness.

The person is used to living his life a certain way, and as soon as he goes through even the slightest change, he finds it very hard to think about how will now go about his lifestyle – a kind of laziness.

***2-B] Lazy From Slight Changes (Water-of-Water-of-Earth)***

Another kind of laziness which branches out from water-of-earth is laziness stemming from **water** within water-of-earth. This is when a person finds it hard to go through even a very slight change. It is when a person gets lazy as soon as anything in his life comes to a halt, when he has to take a different direction.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-013-changing-routine>

For example, a person gets stuck in traffic, and he has to take a different route to get to his destination now. He's upset that he has to take a different route, and he gets lazy at the thought that he will have to take a different way to go, and he finds this very hard.

### ***2-C] Lazy Because There Is A Major Change of Direction (Wind-of-Water-of-Earth)***

Another kind of laziness can come from **wind** within water-of-earth, and this is when a person experiences difficulty when there is an overhaul to his lifestyle. Most people can identify with this kind of laziness – that it's hard to change your direction in life.

This kind of laziness can be felt easily by any person who becomes a *baal teshuvah* or a convert; he has to change his whole lifestyle in order to live a Torah lifestyle, and he finds the change of direction to be very hard.

### ***2-D] Lazy From Feeling Uninspired (Fire-of-Water-of-Earth)***

Another cause for laziness is coming from **fire** within water-of-earth. This is when a person is constantly seeking to be elated, wherever he is; and as a result, the person is constantly uninspired from his surroundings.

For example, sometimes a child in seventh grade wishes he could be in high school already – he has a nature to grow, but he takes this to an extreme and wishes he could escape the level he is currently at so he can ascend it.

A person who gets lazy in his life because of this reason is acting jumpy with his need for growth. He sort of feels like he is in mourning even as he is with others, because he always needs elation wherever he is, and thus he wishes to give himself constant elation.

These are the four kinds of laziness that come from water-of-earth. Now let us go through the solutions to each of these.

### ***2-A] Solving Laziness Due To Earth-of-Water-of-Earth***

Laziness coming from our **earth**-of-water-of-earth is when a person is lazy as soon as he experiences some small change in his life. This can either be because a person is simply immature and he can't deal with changes, or it can be because he used to a certain *Seder* (schedule) in his life, and a change in his *Seder* bothers him and he can't deal with the change.

To counter this, a person should get used to changes in his *Seder*. For example, he can get used to waking up at a different time of the day; he should counter his *Seder* in life by developing a different *Seder*.



Another example: if a person always walks a certain path to his shul, he should deliberately take a different route. Or, if he always *davens* in a certain *shul* on Shabbos, he should try a different *shul* sometimes. Or, if a person always sits on one side of the table, he should sit on a different side of the table.

Many more examples can be added on to the ones we gave; the point is to change the *Seder* he's used to, which gets the soul used to the concept of a change in routine.

On a deeper note, the transition of death is most difficult for someone who is used to his *Seder* of life, because he is leaving this world and going into a completely different one. It's terrible suffering for someone who is used to routine. By getting used to changes in routine, one can lessen this suffering.

### ***2-B] Solving Laziness Due To Water-of-Water-of-Earth***

The next kind of laziness we discussed was laziness stemming from **water**-of-water-of-earth. This is when a person finds even the slightest change to be difficult, because he has become so used to a certain routine in life.

To counter this, when a person is walking, he should suddenly stop and stay where he is for a bit, and then he can continue walking. This gets him used to the idea of halting sometimes, which is hard for him, since he is always so used to continuing his routine without interruption. A person can try this either with his actions, words, or thoughts – he should get used to stopping them sometimes.

If a person doesn't know how to put a halt on any action he does, then his action is controlling him. If a person doesn't know how to stop talking, his talking controls him. If a person never learns how to detach from a thought he's thinking about, then he's being controlled by his thoughts. We must be in control of what we do, say and think.

For this reason, a person has to get used to the idea of detaching sometimes from what he's doing\saying\thinking, as this will get him used to putting a halt on routine. In this way he will slowly learn how to adapt to changes.

A person should start only with small changes and not try to begin making drastic changes. The concept of stopping our actions will help a person be in control of his actions, and the same goes for speech and thoughts. When a person gets used to thinking, stopping, and then returning to thinking, his power of thought becomes more developed, and he develops more *yishuv hadaas* (a settled frame of mind).

With the help of Hashem, we will continue in the next lesson with the solution of the last two kinds of laziness stemming from water-of-earth (wind in water-of-earth, and fire in water-of-earth).

## 12 | *Laziness Due To Water & Wind of Earth*

### *Summary of the Solution to Laziness Due To Water-of-Earth*

When one's laziness is stemming from **water-of-earth** in the soul (and any of its four divisions), the basic solution, which we began to explain in the previous class, is to get used to stopping in the middle of doing something, taking short breaks every here between our various **actions, speech and thoughts**.

This also helps us learn the art of "*halbashah*" and "*hafshatah*" – "wearing" and "removing" our soul layers<sup>41</sup>; in this case, we are learning how to detach from sometimes from our various **movements**.

Since we are usually moving, we need to learn how to pull back from movement; besides for helping us counter laziness, it also serves another gain, which is that it helps us identify with the concept of *halbashah* and *hafshatah* which we have begun to discuss throughout this series. The main point of the classes we are discussing is essentially to help us know when to use our soul's abilities and when to detach from them, "wearing" and "removing" them depending on the situation – to acquire the art of *halbashah* and *hafshatah*, knowing how to use our soul's abilities.

This also serves to help us gain *menuchas hanefesh* – inner serenity – which is the ultimate goal of all of these classes. By learning how to detach from our actions when we must, we attain a certain level of calmness. When we pause a bit from what we are in middle of doing, we can use this time to think into what we are doing and to reflect.

This solution applies as well to someone whose laziness stems from fire coming from his water-of-earth, which is impatience. This kind of person seeks constant elation in whatever situation he is in, and he gets frustrated if he can't find something exciting to do. He also needs to calm his "fire" by learning how to detach from movement sometimes.

Most people are moving, stopping, then moving. Creation is like this, because we have the week and then Shabbos, and then we are back in the weekday. Our soul is also like this – we move, then we rest from movement, and then we continue back to movement. But even when we rest from movement, like on Shabbos, it's not for the sake of resting. It's because we want to return to our movements refreshed. A person who doesn't know how to stop should use the time of Shabbos to work on this. He should learn how to rest sometimes from movements – not to become lazy and sleepy, but for the sake of refreshing himself.

We have finished discussing laziness that stems from water-of-earth. Now we will discuss the next four kinds of laziness, which stem from wind-of-earth.

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<sup>41</sup> Refer to *Da Es Yichudecha (Getting To Know Your Inner World) Chapters 6-11*. See also *Bilvavi Part 5, "The Concept of Detaching."*

### ***3-A} Laziness Due To Earth-of-Wind-of-Earth: Lazy Movement***

Laziness stemming from **wind-of-earth** is when a person's movements are lazy; he gets somewhat lethargic even as he is performing, and as a result, he does not complete the task at hand. Within this kind of laziness, there are four types – earth, water, wind and fire. Let us begin with the first kind of this laziness: laziness stemming from **earth-of-wind-of-earth**.

The Kotzker Rebbe *zt"l* said that sometimes a person who is moving quickly is really being lazy, because it could be that he wants to get things done already so he can rest. This is how our even “movement”, a nature of wind, can really be coming from our “non-movement”, our earth. Although it seems that the person is moving, it's really a lazy kind of movement, because he's only moving so he can get something done without having to exert himself – resulting in a half-baked action.

For example, many times people learn the *masechta* very quickly so they can make a *siyum*. A person wants to feel like he has finished something, so he might choose to learn *Meseches Tamid* – a short *masechta*, which is very difficult – so that he can get to the end already and make a *siyum*. Then he finds it's not so easy, and he feels like he can't get to the end; he gets lazy.

When a person has a hard time getting to completing something, even as he's moving towards it, he's not moving to obtain *menuchah* (serenity) at the end. His movement towards his goal really reflects a subtle kind of laziness. It seems that the person “moving” to get to his goal is utilizing his elements of movement (fire, water or wind), but it's really a subtle kind of non-movement, so it's coming from earth, the source of laziness in the soul. This is the “wind” within earth – there is movement here, but it's coming from non-movement, so it's a lazy kind of movement.

### ***3-B} Laziness Due To Water-of-Wind-of-Earth (Lack of Actualization)***

The next kind of laziness is caused by **water-of-wind-of-earth**. This is when a person has a hard time actualizing his many *retzonos* (desires\wants\aspirations) that are holy. He always has a *ratzon* for something worthy, but he just can't get himself to really act upon his *retzonos*. He wants very badly to do the right thing, but he has a hard time getting there. He knows that he needs to put a stop to certain bad habits, but he gets lazy about trying to take action.

Of course, we are supposed to eliminate our various *retzonos* to begin with and only want to do the *ratzon* of Hashem, but the point of what we are saying here is that there can also exist a problem in a person that he has a hard time *actualizing* what he wants. He keeps trying to “want” what he wants, but he's really being lazy in doing so – the “water” of his earth is being used for laziness. So although it appears like he's moving toward fulfilling his *ratzon*, it's really stemming from his laziness, which is rooted in his element of earth.

### *3-C] Laziness Due To Wind-of-Wind-of-Earth (Lack of Control)*

The next kind of laziness we will discuss is caused by **wind**-of-wind-of-earth. This is due to a person's contradictory desires, which can also breed on laziness. When a person feels contradicting desires, he might get anxious and lose control over them, acting rash and irresponsible.

For example, a person only has enough money to buy one thing in the store, and he is torn between having to choose one item over the other. The contradiction he feels can cause him to become somewhat lazy in gaining control over what he wants, and then he makes a rash decision.

We have explained the outlines of the different kinds of laziness stemming from **wind-of-earth** (all except for fire from wind-of-earth), and in the next class we will hopefully get to the solutions.

*Tackling Laziness***14 | Laziness Due To Water & Wind of Earth** <sup>42</sup>***Summary of the Solution to Laziness Due To Water-of-Earth***

When one's laziness is stemming from **water-of-earth** in the soul (and any of its four divisions), the basic solution, which we began to explain in the previous class, is to get used to stopping in the middle of doing something, taking short breaks every here between our various **actions, speech** and **thoughts**.

This also helps us learn the art of "*halbashah*" and "*hafshatah*" – "wearing" and "removing" our soul layers<sup>43</sup>; in this case, we are learning how to detach from sometimes from our various **movements**.

Since we are usually moving, we need to learn how to pull back from movement; besides for helping us counter laziness, it also serves another gain, which is that it helps us identify with the concept of *halbashah* and *hafshatah* which we have begun to discuss throughout this series. The main point of the classes we are discussing is essentially to help us know when to use our soul's abilities and when to detach from them, "wearing" and "removing" them depending on the situation – to acquire the art of *halbashah* and *hafshatah*, knowing how to use our soul's abilities.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-014-laziness-due-water-and-wind-earth>

<sup>43</sup> Refer to *Da Es Yichudecha (Getting To Know Your Inner World) Chapters 6-11*. See also Bilvavi Part 5, "The Concept of Detaching."

We have finished discussing laziness that stems from water-of-earth. Now we will discuss the next four kinds of laziness, which stem from wind-of-earth.

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Of course, we are supposed to eliminate our various *retzonos* to begin with and only want to do the *ratzon* of Hashem, but the point of what we are saying here is that there can also exist a problem in a person that he has a hard time *actualizing* what he wants. He keeps trying to “want” what he wants, but he's really being lazy in doing so – the “water” of his earth is being used for laziness. So

although it appears like he's moving toward fulfilling his *ratzon*, it's really stemming from his laziness, which is rooted in his element of earth.

### ***3-C] Laziness Due To Wind-of-Wind-of-Earth (Lack of Control)***

The next kind of laziness we will discuss is caused by **wind**-of-wind-of-earth. This is due to a person's contradictory desires, which can also breed on laziness. When a person feels contradicting desires, he might get anxious and lose control over them, acting rash and irresponsible.

For example, a person only has enough money to buy one thing in the store, and he is torn between having to choose one item over the other. The contradiction he feels can cause him to become somewhat lazy in gaining control over what he wants, and then he makes a rash decision.

We have explained the outlines of the different kinds of laziness stemming from **wind-of-earth** (all except for fire from wind-of-earth), and in the next class we will hopefully get to the solutions.

*Tackling Laziness***15 | Inner Order** <sup>44</sup>***3-A] Earth-of-Wind-of-Earth: Lazy Movement\A Fear of Ending Something***

We have begun to explain that the laziness stemming from our **wind-of-earth**, which is when a person performs lazily and he lacks the ability to move correctly.

The first kind of this sadness is when it is coming from the **earth**—of-wind-of-earth. This is when a person doesn't complete what he does. The real problem here is that, for some reason, has a hard time getting to the endpoint of things.

When this is used on a higher level, a person works hard on himself to reach *shleimus*\perfection, so he has a hard time getting to the 'endpoint' of something, for he knows that he will never reach the perfect level of anything. He is always working to improve on himself and never feels like he can get to the end of perfection, and indeed this is a constructive attitude to have, because it comes from the never-ending aspiration of *shleimus*.

But here we are discussing a feeling of incapability that stems from one's *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul), in which a person can't get to the end of things. He will get jumpy and anxious as he is doing something, wishing he can get to the end already, but it's really his way of saying that he cannot do anything on his own to get to the end of what he's doing.

This is actually the depth behind the fear of death. It is difficult for a person to deal with the fact that one day his life will come to an end, and people get antsy when they think about death. It is an inability in a person to deal with "the end".

To give a practical example of this concept, a young boy might be very apprehensive about entering high school, because it's hard for him to deal with the fact that elementary school is ending. He can't deal with endings. This shows that a person might develop an inability to deal with endings.

***3-B] Water-of-Wind-of-Earth: Lack of Actualization***

The next kind of laziness (in wind-of-earth) stems from **water**-of-wind-of-earth. This is when a person continues to like certain things he was used to when he was a child, even though those things are currently bad for him. He wants to put a stop to certain things he is doing, but he finds that he cannot actualize this aspiration.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-015-inner-order>



This is also an inability to put an end to something, but it is being manifested in the fact that the person is continuously sticking to unhealthy habits, which is a sign that the person can't pull away from the flow of his "water".

### ***3-C] Wind-of-Wind-of-Earth: Lack of Control Over Desires***

The next kind of laziness comes from the **wind**-of-wind-of-earth. This is when a person has contradictory desires, and as a result, he is not able to place any limits on what he wants, which breeds its own form of laziness. He loses control over his desires; as soon as runs into a desire, .he becomes anxious, because he lacks a settled mind; he never placed any limitations towards the desires that he wants. It makes him scattered between all his many desires, which results in laziness in overcoming the desire.

### ***3-D] Fire-of-Wind-of-Earth: Total Loss of Control Over Desires***

If one gets the point where he feels a total loss of self-control when he encounters a desire, this is a laziness that is coming from the fire aspect of wind-of-earth. It resembles the nature of fire, which sparks and excites; it is when a person gets so anxious that he totally loses control over himself when he encounters a desire.

A person suffers insanity from his many desires, when he never gives order to them. Without giving some inner order to the various kinds of desires going on inside himself, the contradictions between his various desires increase (wind-of-wind-earth), and if this remains unfixed, at a later point, he will crazily run after one of his desires to fulfill it (fire-of-wind-of-earth). He will have a kind of 'explosion' towards one of his desires - resembling how a fire can spark and explode.

### ***The Solution to All Kinds of Laziness Stemming From Wind-of-Earth***

Now we will go through the solution to these kinds of laziness. The solution we will mention can solve all of the kinds of laziness that stem from **wind-of-earth**; not only that, but it is a solution which is the key to succeeding in our entire inner approach of *Avodas Hashem*.

A person has to learn how to give some inner order to everything that's going on inside himself. There's a lot going on inside of us; we need to give order to all that's going on inside ourselves. The Vilna Gaon says that we have 70 forces in our soul!<sup>45</sup> If we never learn how to give some inner order to our soul, the 70 forces in our soul will clash inside of us and create inner turmoil and confusion.

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<sup>45</sup> Refer to the Rav's audio classes of *ידע את כוחותינו* ("Knowing the 70 Forces of the Soul") an in-depth series that explains the 70 forces of the soul according to the Vilna Gaon.

We can compare this to a house with many items inside it that are stacked up haphazardly. Just like we understand that we need to take all the items in a house and give order to them, so that we can live in a neat and livable house, so must we realize that our soul needs to be given some inner order.

Every person is suffering, to a certain extent, from imbalances of his soul. This is besides for all of the stress we have in our life from our various problems in our life, from our family and children, and from other things that come up in our life. The stress from all of these things can show up on our physical body and make us feel stressed out, and we recognize this kind of anxiety very well. But we are also full of *inner* anxiety from all that has accumulated on our soul, and thus we need to give ourselves some inner order to our soul's abilities inside, or else we will implode inside ourselves from all the pressure going on, as a result of the many imbalanced and contradictory abilities of our soul.

Every person contains some imbalance in his soul. A person without a dominant amount of earth will be drawn towards lethargy or sadness, and a person with a lot of wind in his soul will taking on too many things upon himself that are beyond his actual capabilities. It's like carrying a 50-pound package when you can only carry a 10-pound package.

Here is a common example of what we mean: a person sits down to learn a tractate of Gemara, and he plans on finishing the tractate. He plans to make a *siyum* on the *Masechta* he's learning. Let's say he is learning *Maseches Bava Kamma*; he sees that there are 119 pages of Gemara, so he decides that he will learn from the first *amud* to the last *amud*, whereupon he will make a *siyum* when he gets to the end. That is one way how he might approach it; if he does this, he's taking on too much upon himself, and he won't be able to get to the end. He will fall apart from the heavy burden upon him, and he will never get to his end goal.

The sensible approach is to split it up. He can decide that he will finish a certain amount of pages of Gemara by a certain amount of time, and he can keep doing this until he eventually covers all of *dafim* of Gemara. He should break up his plan to finish the *Masechta* into smaller, realistic goals that he can handle each day. Eventually, the pages of Gemara being learned will add up, and he will be able to get to one day make a *siyum*. But if his plan is simply that he will learn the *Masechta* from beginning till end and he has no way of how he will break it up, he is taking on too much, and he will get flustered at trying to reach the end.

This solution – not to take on too much in our *Avodas Hashem* - is not just a solution that can help a person solve his laziness stemming from wind-of-earth. It is a really a fundamental point which applies to all of one's *Avodas Hashem*. It can help a person give structure to his *Avodas Hashem* in general: to be aware that we must never take on too many things upon ourselves, and instead we should focus on one realistic goal at a time, which helps us give ourselves some inner order to all that's going on inside ourselves.

When people never learn how to give some inner order to what's going on inside themselves, they never reach true *bechirah* (free will). They never even accessed yet their true free will!

This is the general solution of solving laziness of wind-of-earth. We need to learn how to balance our soul's abilities<sup>46</sup>, and this will solve all the inner turmoil that is going on inside of us.

In this class, we covered the kinds of laziness which stem from **wind**-of-earth, and we have laid down the solution to them. In the next class, we will discuss how we fix laziness stemming from **fire**-of-earth.

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<sup>46</sup> Refer to the author's *Getting To Know Your Soul*.

*Tacking Laziness***16 | Losing Inspiration** <sup>47</sup>

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***Laziness Stemming From Fire-of-Earth: Problems with Seeking Spiritual Ascension***

The next four kinds of laziness we will discuss stem from **fire-of-earth**. Fire rises; the fire in the soul seeks elation, and if this desire of the soul is causing a person to become somewhat lethargic or lazy, it is stemming from the ‘fire’ within the element of earth. There are four possibilities of laziness stemming from fire-of-earth.

***4-A) Lethargy Towards Spiritual Progress (Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth)***

When a person feels ‘weighed down’ inside himself because he doesn’t feel like he is growing spiritually – in other words, when he feels lethargic in general about growing spiritually – such ‘laziness’ is coming from the ‘earth’ aspect within his fire-of-earth. Most people in fact do not always feel like they are growing spiritually, and this contributes to laziness in spiritual growth. When a person has a *ratzon* for spiritual growth but he isn’t actualizing it, he becomes lethargic from this.

***4-B) Lack of Excitement (Water-of-Fire-of-Earth)***

When a person loses his desire for spiritual growth after he had experienced an initial desire to attain a certain spiritual goal, his laziness is coming from a lack of desire – it is a lack of ‘water’ within his fire-of-earth.

For example, people who join *Daf HaYomi* were very excited at the beginning, but by the time it comes *Eruvin*, they lose interest. They get lazy because they feel like they are not as enthusiastic as when they started, because they have lost their excitement and inspiration. Even if someone is still showing up to *Daf HaYomi* every day, it can still be that he’s lethargic toward it; he’s only sticking it out because he has to feel that he has finished *Shas* once in his life. But inside, his excitement toward *Daf HaYomi* is gone, and he feels lethargic about it.

***4-C) Lack of Direction (Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth)***

Another kind of laziness can come when a person isn’t interested in any changes to his spiritual situation; he knows that he has to change, but he doesn’t actively seek any changes to the path he has

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-016-losing-inspiration>

been on since he is young. He has aspirations, but he can't deal with changes. He can't budge from the path he has been on all his life. This comes from **wind** (direction) within fire-of-earth.

A person is supposed to seek direction in his spirituality, but not everyone admits to this, because some people have a very hard time budging from the path they grew up with. We are supposed to mature in our spirituality, however, and learn about what it means to serve Hashem – what the different ways there are to serve Him. There are many paths, and we must research them, study them, and know them.

Of course, there are people who get very confused when they study about the different methods of *Avodas Hashem*; this comes from a great deal of *katnus hamochin* (immature mind).<sup>48</sup> But generally speaking, one has to be clear in the general paths that there are in serving Hashem and then seek the path that will help him grow and change. A person has to be ready to take on a path in serving Hashem even if it will totally change the entire way he has been living his life, if need be it.

As a person matures, he is supposed to amass all the many different root methods in serving the Creator. (Don't get bogged down by all the details, but just know all the **general** ways of thought in serving Hashem).

This is not just limited to differing approaches between *Mussar* and *Chassidus*, for example. Even within the approaches of *Mussar* and in *Chassidus*, there are many paths as well in each of them, and a person has to know what all these root methods are, and then find where he belongs in all of this. He has to find the way that is meant for him to now work with. This of course will require wisdom about life, as well as Heavenly assistance.

Most people do not access their true power of *bechirah* (free will), and remain with the way they grew up with; they never budge from their way of thinking and do not seek to find their true way to serve Hashem. Even *baalei teshuvah*, who chose to become observant, often remain just as narrow-minded in their *Avodas Hashem* just as much as their *frum* counterparts, and they don't research the different ways that there are to serve Hashem.

A person needs to see the general picture of how to serve Hashem – to have a general description of the different paths that there are in how to serve Him.

Of course, no one has the complete picture – only *Moshiach* will have that. But each person according to his respective level should try as much as he can to have the general picture of how to serve Hashem – all the different methods – and then choose which path is appropriate for him. And as we said, one has to be ready to take on a path that will change his entire life. He has to be able to deal with the major change to his life orientations.

To illustrate, many *Gedolim* changed their method of *Avodas Hashem* depending on where they were at in life. The Chazon Ish was one way at a certain time in his life, and at a later time in his life, he was a different way. At first he was a quiet and reserved *Gadol* who wasn't involved at all with people. Later in his life, he was involved with the masses. He changed his way of serving Hashem

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<sup>48</sup> See *Getting To Know Your Thoughts*, chapters 6-12.

depending on what had to be done. What we can learn from this is that a person has to be able to accept changes to his spiritual situation, even if it totally goes against the way he lives his whole life.

If a person doesn't seek to change his path in spirituality and he needs to change, then his laziness is stemming from wind in his fire-of-earth.

#### ***4-D) Lack of Stable Ascension (Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth)***

When a person seeks to be totally different than his surroundings, this is due to his dominant element of **fire** that is within fire-of-earth; the nature of fire is that it seeks to rise, so it can be the cause in a person to demand constant elation. He is not necessarily doing this for spiritual reasons; he's doing it simply because he wants to be different. He wants to transcend all limits in Creation; he doesn't want to feel that he is limited to rules, and therefore he seeks to diverge totally from the rules of life that he recognizes.

Of course, this power can be used for holiness, such as when a person seeks spirituality and he wants to totally transcend Creation, so that he can ascend to Hashem. But it can be used for evil as well: when a person simply wishes there were no rules.

On its evil side, it can become total *gaavah* (arrogance), and the person will seek to be totally different than all people in his arrogance. Or, this nature will be used at least partially for evil, like when a person simply seeks to be different than others so he can feel that he is 'rising' above everyone, not necessarily for evil purposes, but simply because he wants to feel that he is above others.

If a person learns how to use this power for good, he has the key to becoming truly close to Hashem, because he has an ability to transcend Creation and always seek to ascend in his spirituality. He wants to break all the limits of Creation and transcend it, because he wants to reach Hashem. He seeks *shleimus* (human perfection) and thus he wants to break free from Creation.

So when a person seeks transcendence, either he is using this for good – to reach perfection, to totally reach the Creator – or he is using this power for evil, which is *gaavah*.

The difference is that when a person truly seeks human perfection, he wants to go *above* Creation, which is a holy yearning that comes from the pure part of the soul. But when he seeks to break the limits of Creation *within* Creation, such as the wish to be different from all that he sees – then he isn't seeking to go *above* Creation; he is merely seeking to break the rules of Creation as he is *within* it. This becomes the evil trait of *gaavah*.

This misguided kind of spiritual ascension is a lack of keeping to the rules of Creation, causing a person to act differently than others and be "lazy" with his non-conformist approach towards life. It is stemming from **fire-of-fire-of-earth**.

*In Summary*

Until now, we have explained the four kinds of laziness which stem from **fire-of-earth**. All of these kinds of laziness had one common dominator – they are all kinds of laziness which result from man’s nature to seek elation from his current situation, an ability that can become detrimental when it isn’t being steered in the right direction.

We have only described the problems so far, but we haven’t yet said the solutions. With the help of Hashem, in the next class we will list the solutions to these problems.

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*Questions & Answers with the Rav*

**Q1: *What is ever wrong with seeking to rise above the limits of Creation – doesn’t this always come from the desire of every Jew to reach Hashem?***

**A:** The Snake told Chavah that if you eat from the tree, you will become like Hashem. This shows us that the desire to transcend physicality and to become spiritual doesn’t necessarily come from holiness; it can be coming from an evil desire present in our *nefesh habehaimis*. This nature in a person therefore has to be steered in its proper direction. It is rooted in good, but we must make sure that we are using this desire for the right reasons.

**Q2: *Is there anything wrong with constantly seeking to grow in spirituality and not being able to deal with failures in our spiritual situation?***

**A:** This is a fundamental point. The Kotzker *zt”l* said that it doesn’t say anywhere in the Torah that you always have to have *gadlus hamochin* (high state of mind). The way to look at our *Avodas Hashem* is not that sometimes we are Heavenly and spiritual and that sometimes are earthy and non-spiritual. Rather, the proper perspective to have it is that life itself is about ups and downs in our *ruchniyus*. We ascend, then we digress, and then we ascend. It’s a cycle. This perspective helps us deal with all our setbacks in our *ruchniyus*. Without this perspective, life will feel like the suffering of *Kaf HaKela* (an excruciating form of spiritual suffering in which the soul feels like it is being tossed around the universe, as if it was flung from a massive ladle).

...There are people who don’t want to go to sleep at night. They don’t agree with Hashem’s design of Creation; they feel, “How can it be that we should go to sleep at night? We have to keep learning Torah!!” Of course, some people fall into bed at night totally exhausted from their learning Torah, and sleep simply overtakes them and they don’t like this, but there are others who go to sleep feeling very uneasy about going to sleep. Such people are the type to go to sleep when they feel like

it, and get up when they feel like it...they do not want to comply to the rules and system of life which Hashem has designed.

Because of their dominant nature of fire in their soul, they want to always be ascending, and they cannot deal with the fact that sometimes we have to digress from spiritual growth. They experience tremendous frustration all the time in their *ruchniyus*. We all have ups and downs in our *ruchniyus*, as *Rabbeinu Tam* writes - that everyone has “Days of Love” and “Days of Hatred”; but these kinds of people think that “Days of Hatred” means to hate yourself when you’re going through a dismal period. When a person’s element of fire becomes too dominant, he has a very difficult time dealing with the setup of life that Hashem has created; life is really a system of ascending and then digressing in our *ruchniyus*, but there are people who have a very hard time understanding this. They are lacking a very basic understanding of how the soul works.



*Tackling Laziness***17 | Getting Back Your Excitement**<sup>49</sup>

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***Laziness Due To Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth: Lack of Aspiration***

We have so far explained the different kinds of laziness that stem from **earth-of-fire-of-earth**.

The elements of fire and water are opposing elements, and so are wind and earth opposing forces. Earth is dry, heavy and non-moving, while wind by contrast is moist, light and moving.

Earth and fire are different in that earth stays dormant where it is, while fire seeks to ascend. All the elements contain the others, so since earth contains fire, there is also fire-of-earth. The fire-of-earth creates a contradiction in the soul, because earth has a nature to weigh things down, while fire has a nature to ascend.

When a person feels this contradiction and he becomes lazy, his laziness is coming from the fire-of-earth in the soul. When earth weighs down the fire, the person feels laziness from this. He feels ‘weighed’ down and thus loses his excitement to grow spiritually.

We have so far described the problem: when a person feels somewhat ‘heavy’ inside [due to varying factors, as we described in the previous chapters], which breeds on his laziness to feel a lack of aspiration to grow. Now we will describe the solution.

***4-A] Solving Lack of Aspiration: How to Excite Ourselves***

Fire cannot ascend unless it gets ignited from something. Therefore, we need to ignite our ‘fire’, via the means of excitement and enthusiasm, and get our inner ‘fire’ going.

Our soul contains three general layers – action, speech and thought. The actions are on the outer layer of our soul; speech is a more inner layer of the soul, and thoughts are the most inward layer. When we ‘ignite’ our actions with some enthusiasm, we can use that to get further into our realm of speech, and after we have ignited our speech, we can work our way into our thoughts and ignite our thoughts with excitement.

When we give ourselves enthusiasm – using the element of ‘fire’ within our actions, speech and thoughts – we counter our feeling of heaviness/laziness that stems from our element of earth.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-017-getting-back-your-excitement>

### ***Step One: Enthusiastic Actions***

In order to infuse enthusiasm into our words and thoughts, we first need to have enthusiastic actions. When our actions become fiery with enthusiasm, our element of fire is able to ascend into the realm of our words and thoughts.

Therefore, by **doing** something enthusiastically, our enthusiasm can extend into our speech, and from there it can extend into our thoughts. To work on this, whenever we perform an action, we should put our **heart** into it, and that will in turn ignite our action to become enthusiastic.

### ***Step Two: Enthusiastic Speech***

After a person works to put heart into what he does and thus come to perform his actions with enthusiasm, the next step is to infuse enthusiasm into ourselves using our power of speech.

If a person wants to put enthusiasm into how he speaks, he can work on this practically by making sure to be **precise** in his words; so he should think before he talks about what words he will say and how he will say it. In this way, the words he says become more alive and infused with vitality. Without doing this, a person only becomes enthused in the superficial sense, and he will only be able to reach the outer layer of his heart's enthusiasm. Only by being exacting with the words that come out of our mouth can we reach the inner layer of our heart.

For example, when we verbalize the *Gemara* or the words of *mussar*, and we are trying to affect our heart through the words we are saying, it won't suffice just to read it enthusiastically. We need to read the words with precision (which is called "*diyuk*"), and through that, the words can penetrate into our heart, and then we can become truly enthused.

### ***Step Three: Enthusiastic Thoughts***

Infusing our heart with enthusiasm through our action and speech is something that all people can work on, but getting enthusiasm into our very thoughts is harder to accomplish. Therefore, most people aren't able to use their thoughts to enthuse themselves, and they will only be able to make use of either action or words that are enthusiastic, in order to feel enthused.

However, the more a person grows and matures in Torah – not just in knowledge, but when he makes sure that he is always "thinking in learning" – he will be able to bring himself enthusiasm through his thoughts as well.

When we use our layers of action, speech and thought together in order to give ourselves enthusiasm, we use the excitement contained in the nature of our soul's fire to its fullest, and this weakens the heaviness coming from the nature of our soul's earth (in particular, the lack of inspiration, which stems from **earth-of-fire-of-earth**).

*Tackling Laziness***18| Balancing Excitement With Truth** <sup>50</sup>

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**4-B] Excitement in Avodas Hashem: A Tool, Not a Purpose unto Itself**

We have begun to discuss how we need to infuse our actions, speech and thoughts with enthusiasm in order to overcome laziness that comes from a lack of excitement (a problem that stems from **fire-of-earth**).

However, although all of that is true, at the same time, we also need to develop an opposite ability which can counter our enthusiasm from going overboard. This is because we cannot base our lives on enthusiasm and excitement (earlier, we explained that when we lose excitement in what we are doing, it stems from **water-of-fire-of-earth**). So we need to learn how we can restrain our enthusiasm sometimes.

We need to understand that our *Avodas Hashem* cannot be based on enthusiasm and excitement. Serving Hashem is not mainly about being excited.

We can use excitement to enter more inward, but being excited is not the purpose. Excitement is a tool we can use in our *Avodas Hashem*, but when excitement gets overdone, it becomes a purpose unto itself, and then it becomes detrimental. If a person's excitement in *Avodas Hashem* gets too strong and overdone, it can even make a person snap.

***Balancing Our Enthusiasm***

What a person has to do is, to build a power within his soul which can counter his excitement sometimes. Therefore, we need to develop a strong amount of the element of **earth** (stability) which can counter the **fire** which fuels enthusiasm. [Later we will explain that we specifically need to use the **water-of-earth** to counter a strong amount of fire in the soul].

So our *Avodas Hashem* is two-fold. On one hand we need to be excited as we serve Hashem, but on the other hand, we must be able to restrain our excitement sometimes, or else the excitement gets overdone and has detrimental effects on us. The element of water within the earth can counter the fire of enthusiasm.

We cannot say exactly how to do this, but this is the general concept – that one needs to build his water-of-earth in the soul, his power to restrain excitement.

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-018-balancing-excitement-truth>

(Every power in our soul needs limitations. Otherwise, a person is trapped within his own soul, and he's in a personal 'Egypt' within himself.)

### ***Using Our Daas to Affect Our Heart***

In the previous chapter, we discussed how we need to develop our power of excitement and elation. Now we are discussing how to balance our excitement. How can we balance our ability to become excited and elated?

When we feel spiritually elated, this can either come from our heart, or from our power of *daas*, which is in our mind. Most people who experience excitement have excitement that comes from the heart, and this excitement often doesn't last. This is because the entire sense of elation that the person had was based on excitement, and excitement doesn't build a person.

The real kind of elation is when the elation is not based on excitement, but when it is based on one's *daas* (mind). If a person's elation is coming from his *daas*, the elation lasts.

We need some excitement, but we need in ourselves a larger percentage of *daas* in us to keep ourselves elated. Our elation should be coming from a certain recognition coming from our *daas*. Our life of *Avodas Hashem* needs to be mainly based on our *daas*, not on *hislabatus* excitement; when our *Avodas Hashem* is based on this non-excitement kind of *daas*, our spiritual elation lasts.

### ***Accessing Our Daas Through Seeking Emes/Truth***

Some people do recognize the power of *daas*, but they think that *daas* is another way of revealing excitement. They perceive *Avodas Hashem* as being entirely about excitement, and they view *daas* as just another enhancement of their excitement.

What a person really needs is to develop the power called "*emes*" – truth. When a person develops the power to recognize truths, he is able to keep his excitement from getting out of hand. Our *Avodas Hashem* must be based on constantly analyzing what the truth is.

Of course, we need some excitement too, but excitement should not be the basis of our life. Only when we pursue the truth can we feel responsible towards our *Avodas Hashem*. The power of truth helps us feel responsible about our *Avodas Hashem* – in contrast to excitement, which doesn't demand responsibility.

If we are always seeking truth, then we can be excited upon that, and then our excitement will be truthful and lasting. Without developing the power of *emes*, though, any of our excitement in *Avodas Hashem* will weaken after some time and disappear.

When we seek the truth, we are able to then reach the truth that is in our heart, and then our heart become affected to seek truth – and our excitement then becomes truthful.

When a person doesn't develop the power of *emes*, he constantly seeks all kinds of new things to keep himself going in *Avodas Hashem*. But when a person seeks *emes*\truth, all he seeks is *emes* – and of course, he finds constant renewal as well through constantly seeking the truth.

In this way, a person uses the “coldness” of his element of water to build his enthusiasm, as opposed to using the “heat” of fire to build his enthusiasm. Fire is jumpy, while water is collected. Therefore, enthusiasm based on using water in the soul is lasting, while enthusiasm based on the element of fire doesn't last.

When a person serves Hashem his whole life based on how excited he feels, he will end his life after 80 years only with the amount of excitement he had in his life. He never matures in his *Avodas Hashem* beyond that point of enthusiasm he reached. But when a person lived his life always seeking the truth, he ends life based upon how much truth he sought in his life – and the truth keeps becoming sharpened more and more throughout his life; he reaches true *Avodas Hashem* in his life and ends life on a whole different, deeper kind of level than the first kind of person.

### ***How to Develop the Power of “Emes”***

To work on this, a person should keep reviewing what the *emes* (truth) is, like when he reads a statement of *Chazal* as he is learning *mussar*, and he should do this **mentally** as well as **verbally**. Constantly review in your mind – as well as through your mouth – what the **truth** always is. By always doing this, a person builds a plan of *Avodas Hashem* in his life which is truthful and lasting.

In this way, you can reach the truth that is in your heart, and then the excitement in *Avodas Hashem* which comes from your heart will gain a new kind of stability, one that will help you sustain your elation and excitement in *Avodas Hashem* throughout your entire life.

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### ***Questions & Answers with the Rav***

**Q1: *What is the definition of ‘emes’, and what is not considered ‘emes’?***

**A:** *Emes* depends on the level of each person. Even when a person is allowed to deviate from the truth sometimes, it depends on that person's unique situation, as something that is not considered ‘*sheker*’ (falsehood) for one person can still be *sheker* for another person.

**Q2: What about the concept of “*Mitoch shelo lishmah ba lishmah*”?**

**A:** There are people who use “*Mitoch shelo lishmah*” as a way to lie and steal and cheat, all in the name of holiness. For example, people lie in business and feel that it’s justified because they are giving charity with their money to religious causes. It’s *sheker*. People think they can use *sheker* to do worthy actions – and that itself is *sheker*. There can be no greater mistake. We have to clarify how much *sheker* we are allowed to give in to and how much *emes* we need; it is a subtle inner work.

**Q3: How can person infuse enthusiasm into his learning [of mussar]?**

**A:** It depends on how he is learning. Without using *daas* to demand the truth of oneself, a person uses his natural emotions of his heart, and he remains immature. We have to get our mind to control our heart.

Even when a person learns *mussar*, he naturally uses his heart’s emotions that he is born with, and these emotions are off-base. We are supposed to learn *mussar* with both *emes*, as well as our heart – meaning, we have to use our *daas* to awaken our heart as we learn *mussar*. When a person learns *mussar*, sometimes he has to focus on reflecting into what he is learning, and sometimes he has to awaken himself in an emotional way; it is a subtle kind of work. If a person never reflects at all with his mind into the *mussar* he learns, he is simply using his natural emotions he was born with, and these emotions are off-base. So a person has to make sure that he is using both his *daas* to demand *emes* from himself, and he has to also awaken his heart at the same time through the knowledge he acquires; it’s a two-fold process, and it is a subtle *avodah*.

*Tackling Laziness***19 | Stability In Inspiration and Growth** <sup>51</sup>

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**4-C] Laziness Stemming From Lack of Direction (Wind-of-Fire-of-Earth)**

Now we will conclude the discussion about laziness. We have explained earlier about laziness stemming from **fire-of-earth**; so far, we explained **earth-of-fire-of-earth** and **water-of-fire-of-earth** and given the solutions to them.

Now we will progress to discuss laziness stemming from **wind-of-fire-of-earth**, and its solution.

Fire in the soul is the source of why a person wishes to be uplifted, just as fire seeks to rise. Wind-of-fire is the “movement” of that fire, because wind is what fosters movement. It is when the “fire” of a person’s elation moves in all sorts of different directions; when a person wishes to feel uplifted, so he seeks new kinds of inspiration, in many different places, jumping from place to place, always in search of a new kind of elation.

In general, wind-of-fire is expressed when a person seeks many various different kinds of renewal. When it comes to the wish to feel uplifted and inspired, the person will want to feel inspiration in all kinds of new areas. Just as the wind moves in four different directions, so does wind in the soul move in all kinds of directions; when we are dealing with wind-of-fire, a person will seek to be uplifted and elated in many different ways.

What will happen if he doesn’t feel that uplifting feeling he is seeking all over the place? He will get lazy, because he feels uninspired. If that doesn’t happen, there is another possibility as well that can result: because he is always seeking new kinds of elation, he will move quickly from one place to another place in search of elation, and this will cause him to lack stability in his soul. When a person lacks stability, this is a subtle kind of laziness (though it is not as obvious).

***External and Internal Renewal***

There are two kinds of renewal which we can receive: renewal from our external surroundings, and inner renewal that is contained inside our soul.

Renewal from our outside is what we know as enthusiasm (*hislahatus*). Someone dominated by wind-of-fire-of-earth will seek renewal all the time in many different kinds of places, and usually, he will seek external renewal – something new that comes from his surroundings, in order for him to feel inspired. He will keep switching his source of renewal, because he is always seeking a new kind of renewal.

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-earth-019-stability-inspiration-and-growth>

To give some examples of this, there are some people who will keep switching their *nusach* of davening, or their manner of dress, or the shul that they daven in regularly.

These are all forms of one who is always seeking different kinds of external renewal. With external renewal, a person performs certain actions because he is trying to inspire himself.

Indeed, it can work, for we know that “The heart is pulled after the actions.”<sup>52</sup> When a person does correct actions because he is trying to inspire himself and affect his heart, eventually, he will get affected, for the outer actions and have an effect on the heart. However, that is only true if the person does so with conscious awareness that he wants his heart to become affected by his actions. If not, then it just becomes mechanical actions, and the inspiration he feels will not last.

A different kind of problem is when a person is always seeking new kinds of inner renewal. Such a person wants to always feel his soul connecting to all different kinds of spiritual experiences, and he moves from one area to the next, always in search of another kind of inner renewal.

For example, this kind of person might decide that from now on, he will get up at midnight every night and say *Tikkun Chatzos*; he will try this for a few days, then at a later period, he decides that he will immerse a certain amount of times in the *mikveh*.

Or, one day he decides that he will say the entire sefer *Tehillim* every day, and sometime later, he decides that he wants to learn straight for many hours on end without stopping; at a later period, he wishes to acquire for himself friends who are more spiritual and spend time with them, either to eat his meals together with them or to sing *Zemiros* with them for hours on end.

There are many other examples as well that each person can add on, which illustrate the concept: that the person is seeking new kinds of renewal in all kinds of ways, constantly in search of a new source of elation.

So far, we have explained what external renewal and inner renewal are, and both of these are unbalanced. But there is also a third scenario, in which a person can use the outer renewal to stir an inner renewal. This is the proper way to use our power of renewal; soon, we will explain it.

### ***Deriving Vitality from Your Learning Experiences***

There are two ways of how people can go about seeking renewal.

One kind of person keeps switching around his inspiration, because he keeps searching for new kinds of vitality. He is grabbing onto spirituality as if he will die the next day, desperate for more and more spiritual elation, so he is grabbing onto whatever he can, and that is why he is jumpy in his spirituality.

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<sup>52</sup> *Sefer HaChinuch (15) and Mesillas Yesharim (Chapter 3)*



This is a superficial way to receive renewal. There are definitely some gains from acting in this way, but the inner way of *avodah* is not like that.

The inner way of *avodah* is that when you seek a new kind of vitality, you should try to connect your soul to what you are experiencing. In this way, it does not just remain as an external kind of elation, for you are using the external elation to stir an inner kind of renewal in the soul. This is a subtle kind of ability, and a person needs to know how to do it properly.

To give an example of the concept, when a person was a child and he grew up in a certain community, he didn't understand certain *minhagim* (customs) of other Jewish communities or groupings, and the ways other types of Jews act seem strange and foreign to him. When he gets older, he might wish to research those *minhagim* he doesn't understand and try to delve into the sources; he begins to understand those other *minhagim* and he is fascinated by them, leaving behind his superficial understanding as he discovers how others act and think.

If he knows how to use his wind-of-fire properly, he can uncover a depth to his emotions with the more he learns about those *minhagim* that he never understood until now, and in this way, he will receive inner renewal all the time from what he learns about and experiences, because his soul is connecting to what he is seeing.

However, even if one knows how to use his wind-of-fire properly, he still needs a lot of wisdom as well as *siyata d'shamaya* (Heavenly help) in order to know how to research other *minhagim*.

Most people get their inspiration from the way they grew up, remaining at that level, and they never get opened up, because most people do not know how to properly seek inspiration from new sources. People usually have a hard time understanding other ways of life of other Jews, because most people remain satisfied with whatever vitality they received from their upbringing. As a result, most people do not seek new sources of vitality in the soul.

A person with a very stubborn nature will be able to explore and understand other customs or ways of thinking, because his stubbornness will drive him to understand. But most people do not possess a strong amount of stubbornness, so they will not be interested in deriving elation from learning about other *minhagim*. For this reason, most people feel that they do not experience that much excitement in their life.

Wind-of-fire, when it is used properly, is the key to having real and constant excitement in your life. Again, we must emphasize that using outer forms of excitement is only minimally helpful. The point of these experiences is to gain inner vitality from the different sources you come across.

### ***How to Get Inner Excitement***

If one looks deeply into himself, he will see that there are many parts of himself he doesn't understand, for the soul is very complicating. He can make this reflection all the time and derive new vitality from within himself, all the time.

Of course, if one just looks at himself and says “This is how I am, this is how I grew up, etc.” and he doesn’t seek to open himself up, then he will not derive vitality from knowing about his soul.

One should look at himself deeply and truthfully, and realize that his soul is vastly deep, and from just being aware of this, he can understand that he doesn’t know the depth of his soul, and this can actually give him new vitality, when he realizes that he contains inside himself a tremendously deep and vast existence: his soul.

When a person gets used to reflecting about this, his soul has become more opened, and the person will feel like he has discovered a great treasure inside himself. Some people, though, when they reflect about how their soul is so vast and complicating, lose their stability when they discover this; it is dangerous for them to make this introspection.

If someone’s stability is based on superficial sources of vitality, he will lose his stability if something in his external world goes wrong, such as if he doesn’t have certain Shabbos foods he was used to, or if he didn’t have his Pesach *seder* perfectly as he is used to; it greatly disturbs his peace of mind. (This either comes from being dominated by the element of earth and therefore they thrive on orderliness, or it comes from tremendous *katnus* immaturity).

### ***Two Ways of Receiving Inspiration***

Earlier, we described another way how to receive vitality when one feels uninspired: through **earth**-of-fire-of-earth, which is to derive vitality from orderliness. One needs to be stubborn in order to persist with this. Here in this chapter, we have described another way to receive vitality: through **wind**-of-fire-of-earth, which is to gain vitality from all kinds of spiritual experiences you come across - to awaken the soul to connect to each thing.

However, whenever you encounter any new kind of spiritual experience, you should of course first think to yourself if it is proper for you to become connected to it or not.

### ***In Conclusion***

Just as a child and adult wear different clothing, so can the soul experience different colors of vitality. One who lives like this will live a whole different life.

Most people remember their life based on their school grades. An inner life is to remember how you lived life based on the current level of your soul.

We have explained wind-of-fire-of-earth, as well as the two extremes of how it is used.

### *Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth: Those That Have Unrealistic Aspirations*

Now we will explain what **fire-of-fire-of-earth** is. What is **fire-of-fire-of-earth** about?

Generally speaking, there are two ways of how people proceed in life and succeed: either through using the element of earth in the soul, or through using the element of fire in the soul. Earth is the idea of stability. A person can understand well that if he wants to succeed in life, he must become properly built, stage after stage, just like a house is built sensibly, from the bottom floor upwards. Another kind of person mainly uses his fire, his desire to ascend, in order to motivate himself and go higher.

Before we speak about how a person uses his fire, though, we will digress for a moment and discuss why water and wind are usually not the elements that successful people use in their life.

If a person is dominated by water, what will happen? The nature of water is that it flows, and it keeps flowing in the direction it is flowing towards, with no natural means to stop itself. A person dominated by his element of water is someone who takes life as it comes, “flowing” along with whatever direction that his life is taking him in (if he is more spiritual, perhaps it’s because he believes that he will be led in his life according to whatever Hashem decides...)

Someone dominated by the element of wind is someone who always moves in different directions, just like wind is defined as movement. Such a person moves all over the place, with no stability in his life, so he will not be able to that successful.

People dominated by either water or wind in their souls are those who don’t really do that much with their life; they never grow or improve. A water-person just follows the flow of life, never seeking to do anything with himself. A wind-person is too jumpy to ever concentrate on any one area and build it. Both of these people, therefore, will not grow that much in their life.

A fire-based person is someone who always wishes to ascend to a higher level than before [whether for material matters or for spiritual matters], and the nature of fire is that it destroys what is in its path and then rises higher. So too, a fire-based person will nullify his previous level and dismiss it, because now he wishes to attain a higher level. When he wants to succeed, he is not satisfied with his current level, which “destroys” his previous level so that he can now aim for something higher.

Wind and water, though, cannot cause any motivation for ascension. Only through earth and fire can a person ascend. Earth (stable growth) is the element that builds a person upward, step by step, and fire is the element that helps a person ascend. Of course, there are aspects of fire and earth as well within the elements of water and wind, but it won’t be enough to cause a motivation in a person to ascend. Only a firm basis of either earth or fire helps a person ascend in life.

Through using the element of fire, a person can change his current perspective very easily in favor of a new perspective of understanding, and that is how he ascends higher.

A person who works mainly through earth only follows his current level – he cannot change his current perspective. A person who works mainly through fire can easily change his perspective, because he “destroys” his current level and rises to the next level.

One who has a harder time building himself stage after stage has a hard time using his earth, and therefore, he is drawn towards working instead with his fire.

What happens when a person has a strong amount of “fire” in his “fire”, though? Such a person’s fire will be out of control, because he is always searching to ascend higher, with nothing to stabilize the fiery ambitions.

Most people, even those who have dominant fire in their souls, while they always wish to ascend higher, are very still aware of their limits. They know that they are here on the earth and that Heaven is far away, but they still wish to persevere, with aspirations to ascend to the Heavenly levels.

But when someone possesses a strong amount of fire in his fire, he will aim for “Heaven”, or the highest levels, and he wishes to be there right now. He wants to get to the highest levels in Heaven, very rapidly, unaware of his earthly limitations. This is what happens with people who have a strong amount of fire-of-fire. Their aspirations are too high and unrealistic, and these are usually very delusional people.

Interestingly, sometimes we can see that even very delusional people are successful in the world, and this is because This World that we live in is called *olam hatemuros*, “a world of exchanges”, in which success is not always dependent on being sensible and logical. However, even if that is the case, this kind of person is constantly experiencing fiery thoughts in his mind, with no inner order to them.

### ***How Fire-of-Fire-of-Earth Can Be Holy***

If someone knows how to use his **fire-of-fire-of-earth** for holiness, that means that he knows how to balance his **fire-of-fire-of-earth** using the element of earth, which provides him with the idea of stability. Otherwise, the person is in danger, both physically and spiritually, because he lives in delusions. If one has a strong amount of fire in his soul and a strong amount of earth as well that can counter the fire, these are the kinds of people who truly ascend spiritually. They build themselves through earth, stage after stage, but they also have a fire that always pushes them upward.

Most people do not experience a constant ascension, because most people just have one part of their life in which they want to keep succeeding in, but with regards to general growth in all areas of life, they do not know of what it means to constantly ascend to higher levels.

When a person has a lot of fire-of-fire and he doesn’t know how to stabilize himself properly, he will want to get to the highest levels, to the Heavens, immediately. The *dor haflagah* (generation of the Tower of *Bavel*) wanted to build a tower to get to Heaven - but a person with a lot of fire-of-fire will want to get to Heaven right away, this minute! And to the highest level possible! He thinks he is unstoppable, which was the problem that the Snake had; the Snake is called the one who wished to

“break the fences of the world”.<sup>53</sup> (For every evil power that exists, there is a way to use it for holiness; *Moshiach* will know how to use this power for holiness).

Thus, in order to use fire-of-fire, a person needs a very strong amount of earth to balance himself out. Earth can balance the fire from getting out of control, as well as to help a person build himself properly in a step-by-step manner.

Again, to emphasize, this last concept we are describing is only experienced by rare individuals, who know how to use their earth to balance their inner fire-of-fire. These are people who resemble the third *Beis HaMikdash*, which will be a building that comes down in a fire from Heaven – in other words, their earth and their fire are properly combined. They are very close to the level of *Ruach HaKodesh*.

Since it only applies to individuals, we have only mentioned these words for the sake of completing the discussion about the topic of laziness; most people do not relate to these words.

### ***In Conclusion***

To conclude, all of what we have explained with regards to fixing laziness needs to become expressed the areas of one’s actions, feelings, and thoughts.

The chapters here have covered the general picture of the trait of laziness and how it is fixed.

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<sup>53</sup> See also the *derashah* of *Reaching Your Essence\_002\_ Searching*