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UPGRADING YOUR SIMCHA

JOY FROM THE FOUR ELEMENTS

UNEDITED TRANSLATION
V5 01.25.2023



DEVELOPED BY THE FOUR ELEMENTS INSTITUTE

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1 | INTRODUCTION¹

THE ROOT PATH OF SELF-IMPROVEMENT: WORKING WITH THE FOUR ELEMENTS

We will begin to study the four elements. There are many different approaches when it comes to self-improvement. In these lessons, we will be taking the path of the *Gedolim* throughout the generations, which based all of *avodah* on the system of the “four elements”. Although there is truth to all other paths of the *Gedolim*, which did not place any emphasis on the four elements, those paths dealt with the “branches”, whereas the path we will be taking in these lessons is the root of all those paths. Let us first cite the sources for this path.

THE SOURCES

The Rambam (in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 4:1) writes that all of Creation consists of fire, water, wind (air), and earth. The nature of fire is hot and dry, air is hot and moist, water is cold and moist, and earth is cold and dry. Earth is the heaviest element, water is lighter, air is even lighter, and fire is the lightest of the elements. All matter in Creation is formed from a combination of these four elements. This is not only true for the physical body, but also for the soul.

Rav Chaim Vital (*Shaarei Kedushah* 2:1) writes that the four elements are also in the soul, and they are the root of all character traits, whether good or bad. Thus, all of our good and bad *middos* are rooted in the four elements of fire, water, air and earth in our soul.

The *Maharal* (in *Derech HaChaim* 1:2) writes that there are three active elements, water, air, and fire, as stated in *Sefer Yetzirah*, and that all creations come from these elements. *Sefer Yetzirah*, attributed to Avraham Avinu, is the earliest source for the three active elements. The *Tikkunei HaZohar*, and R' Chaim Vital, the student of the *Arizal*, established that the four elements are the pillar of all our *avodah* (Divine service). In these lessons, we will also be taking this path.

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EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL WAYS OF AVODAH

There is an external way of *avodah*, and an internal way of *avodah*.

The external way contains many details. The internal way consists of one structure, an all-inclusive structure which includes all details, like a puzzle that contains all the pieces. We can see in the physical world many different things, but from the inner perspective, all of Creation is nothing but the four elements of fire, water, air and earth. This should become the way we view Creation. Superficially, we see many different things in front of us, but when we have the inner perspective, we can see it all as four elements. This is an overhaul to our entire perspective on how we view things.

It is the same when we consider our soul. From a superficial perspective, we are aware that there are thousands of abilities in our soul – such as joy, sadness, silence, anger, patience, etc. There are good *middos* and bad *middos* and we need to fix each *middah*. That is the external, superficial perspective, and one might have this perspective even after many years of learning many different *sefarim* about improving *middos*. But according to the inner perspective - Rav Chaim Vital's view - there are only four possible sources in the soul for every possible character trait: the elements of fire, water, air and earth. There are only these four elements, and the interplay of the four elements produces all of the many different aspects of the soul.

One way of *avodah* with our souls is the external way, and it does not involve the four elements. There are many such ways of *avodah* we recognize.

For example, there is one method of *avodah* which bases all of our *avodah* on the ability to think positively. This is based on the Chassidic statement, “Think good, and it will be good.”² Another way of *avodah* bases all of our *avodah* on using the imaginative faculty.³ There are many other methods of *avodah* as well, which essentially base all of a person’s *avodah* on a particular power of the soul. The gentiles in particular tend to take these approaches, when it comes to self-improvement and working with the soul. Some of these ways are more truthful, and some are less truthful, but all of them attempt to solve all issues in the soul through using one particular ability in the soul.

² Editor's Note: attributed to a statement of Rabbi Nachman of Breslev.

³ Editor's Note: This was the approach of Rav Klonimis Kalman Shapira, in sefer Chovos HaTalmidim and in sefer Hachsharas Avreichim.

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Another way of *avodah* is for a person to take apart each aspect of the soul and to work with it individually, such as by trying to uproot one's conceitedness, or by trying to uproot anger, etc.⁴ This way is also truthful, but it is only working with the branches, and not with the root.

There is another way of *avodah*: to work with the four elements. This approach works with the roots. The elements are called *yesodos*, the "foundations", because they are the basic foundations of the soul – they are the roots to work with.

THE MIDDOS ARE RESULTS OF THE ELEMENTS

Each of the elements has its own properties which produce different *middos* (character traits). The *middos* in the soul are essentially the results of the various properties of the elements.

Even more so - and even more importantly - the elements are not simply independent from each other. Rather, they each relate to the other elements and combine with them. Therefore, fire also contains water, air and earth, and water also contains fire, air, and earth, etc.

For example, water breeds the trait of desire, the nature of seeking pleasure. But water also contains the other elements, so the trait of desire will also contain the "fire" of water, the "air" of water, and the "earth" of water. If desire would only come from the element of water and with no other factors involved, then we would only need to understand the element of water in order to tackle the trait of desire. But there is also desire that comes from the "fire" within the element of water, and there is also desire which comes from the "air" within the element of water, etc. So there are different kinds of desires - even though they are generally rooted in 'water'.

Whether we are dealing with a good *middah* or a bad *middah*, any *middah* consists of all four elements. For example, the trait of love primarily comes from the soul's element of water, but since water contains the other elements, there is also a love that comes from the "fire" of water, and a love that comes from the "air" of water, etc. So whenever we analyze any *middah*, we need to know its root element and how it is composed of all four elements. Whenever we deal with improving a *middah*, we need to work with its root element.

Also, since all the elements contain the other elements, we also need to know the other divisions of the elements within each *middah*. The *Arizal* taught that each of the elements contains all four,

⁴ Editor's Note: This was the approach of the baalei mussar. See for example sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh

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and each of those four divides into another four, endlessly. However, we find that our Sages defined a total of 16 divisions for each element. So if we are examining joy, or love, or enthusiasm, we need to see the 16 different types of that trait, which are the roots of that trait.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS SERIES

We are learning about this for the purpose of studying, although we won't be able to actualize the lessons right away. So what is the purpose of this studying? The first stage is to learn about it in general, on an intellectual level, the second stage is to identify it on a personal level, and the third stage is to actualize the lessons. By studying this series, you will be able to accomplish the first two stages – learning about these ideas, and later identifying with them personally – but the actual inner work will be your own.

We will also be giving advice along the way, but the main purpose for now is to study these matters and personally relate to them. The eventual goal is to act upon these lessons, of course, but practically speaking, we cannot do that right now, so we will mainly be studying and identifying with the concepts. It is essentially about developing our souls. Eventually we will aim to be fixing the issues in our souls, but the first step is to learn about the issues that come from our four elements, and to personally identify with them.

Understandably, for every new matter we learn about, there will be difficulties. The Sages said that "All beginnings are difficult." But long before we arrive at the practical conclusions from each lesson and how to apply it to ourselves personally, we will certainly gain a certain pleasure, clarity, and stability just from studying about these matters.

2 | ACTUALIZING OUR POTENTIAL⁵

INTRODUCTION

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we have merited to begin learning about the four elements. We will learn about several of the *middos* (character traits), but we will not just be learning about each of the *middos* per se. Rather, we will be learning about each of the *middos* at their root, which lies in the four elements. We are now embarking on a series, with the help of Hashem, of studying several *middos*, and in this particular series, we will be studying the trait of *simchah*, joy.

First we will present several general intellectual definitions of the meaning of joy, which are all truthful. Then we will proceed to explain the deeper definition of joy, which deals with the root of joy, and thereby define which of the elements the trait of joy is rooted in - and why.

SEVERAL DEFINITIONS OF JOY

When a person is joyous, he feels lighter. When Yaakov Avinu received the good news that his son Yosef was alive, Rashi states that Yaakov's feet felt lighter as he ran to embark on the journey to reunite with his long lost son. When a person is joyous, he feels physically lighter, and his feet can lift him very easily.

Another way to define joy is that when a person feels joyous, he leaves behind negativity and he adapts a more positive attitude. He goes from having a "bad eye" to a "good eye". When people are in a joyous mood, they will focus on whatever is good and positive, and they will overlook anything bad or negative.

Another definition of joy is that whenever a person is joyous, his heart becomes opened, and he finds it natural to bestow kindness on others and to nurture others. The heart is expanded and the person feels more inclined to help others, when one is amidst a state of joy.

Another thing we can notice about joy is that when people feel joyous, they find it more natural to include themselves with others and to rejoice with others' joy. When people are joyous, they will

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naturally initiate conversations with other people. This is because joy makes the heart expand, causing a person to leave his ego, and include himself in the lives of others.

Another way we can define joy is by analyzing the contrast between joy and sadness. When a person is sad, he contracts into himself, and when one is joyous, he expands.

We have so far given several definitions of joy, and there are in fact even more ways to define joy. All of these definitions contain truth to them, but they do not address the root of joy. We will now explain, with *siyata d'shmaya*, what the fundamental definition of joy is, by explaining which of the elements the trait of joy belongs to. Then we will be able to understand, with the help of Hashem, what the root cause for joy is.

THE INNER ROOT OF JOY: ACTUALIZING OUR POTENTIAL

Joy is essentially the result of actualization of potential. When a potential force becomes actualized, the result is joy. The feeling of expansion itself does not create joy. Rather, expansion is a sign that some potential force in the soul has been actualized. Expansion in the soul produces joy only because there has been an actualization of potential.

The *Maharal* explains that mankind is called *adam*, from the word *adamah*, earth, because just as the earth actualizes the potential of the seeds planted within it, by nurturing the seeds and enabling the plants and crops to grow, so does man actualize his potential, by activating the inner forces within his soul. This is the also meaning of “*Asher yatzar es ha'adam b'chochmah*”, the fact that man was created with *chochmah*, wisdom. The word *chochmah* is from the words *koach mah*, which means, “What is this potential?” This implies that the *avodah* of man is to utilize his *koach*, his potential.

Man was created from the earth, and just as the earth is an element which actualizes the potential of something, so will man’s joy come from actualizing potential. Man was cursed with the “sadness” of laboring with the earth. After the sin, the earth does not always produce the crops that it was meant to produce. One may plant seeds in the earth hoping to get grain, but in the end, only thorns will grow there. This was the result of the sin, when the earth became cursed. So too, man doesn’t always produce the desired results. This happens whenever man doesn’t utilize his potential,

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and this is the root of all sadness in the soul. And, by contrast, the root of joy is whenever man utilizes his potential.

JOY COMES FROM THE ELEMENT OF EARTH

Based upon the above, it is now very clear which of the elements the trait of joy belongs to. Joy comes from the element of earth. This does not mean the impaired kind of earth, which leads to sadness, but the repaired kind of earth, which leads to joy. Whenever man utilizes his potential – a use of the element of earth in the soul – there is resulting joy. If man utilizes his potential only partially, there will be partial joy, and when man utilizes his potential fully, the result is the complete level of joy.

Let's make the definition clearer. When one finishes actualizing his potential, his joy can be complete. Even more so, it is the joy itself which is like the “final-hammer blow” that actualizes one's potential, totally finishing it. Meaning, when one has actualized his potential and there is resulting joy from this, that is when he has truly actualized his potential, and that is when his joy becomes complete. Thus, actualization of potential leads to joy, and the joy itself completes the actualization process [which further increases the already existing joy and allows for a more complete kind of joy].

In each of the four elements - fire, air, water, and earth - there are traces of all four elements of fire, air, water, and earth. With regards to joy, complete joy can be derived from the “earth”-of-earth. This is the more precise intellectual definition of joy.

JOY FROM WITHIN VS. JOY FROM THE OUTSIDE

Let us now elaborate upon this definition, so that we can not only know this intellectually but also feel how it is true, and thereby make this concept practical in our lives.

Every person has unique abilities. No two people are alike. Every person has certain qualities which are linked with his *shoresh haneshamah*, his personal soul root. The soul is clothed by the body, and every person has *bechirah* (the power of free choice) if he will release these qualities in his soul or not.

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Let us understand that there are two roots of “movement”. There is a movement that comes from within, which extends to one’s outside. This movement is known as joy, as in the verse “*For with joy, they go out*”. This movement stems from one’s deep inner root, and then it becomes actualized within and extends outward, becoming manifest on the outside of a person. This is the inner movement known as joy, and that is one kind of “movement”. Another kind of “movement” is when a person draws the movement in from outside of himself. Either a person draws in materialism from the outside, such as by buying food and drink and consuming them, or he draws in something spiritual from the outside, such as by accepting honor, etc.

As mentioned earlier, the superficial perspective of joy is whenever a person has “expanded”. A person may feel “expansion” either by drawing in various stimuli from the outside, which provides him with joy, or he may get “expansion” from within himself, and when this expansion extends outward and it becomes manifest on his outside, this makes him joyous. If joy would be limited to expansion, then either of these two movements would be the two true options to get joy. But since joy is defined as actualization of potential, true joy can only come from within, not from the outside. Joy which comes from outer stimuli can be a “spark” of joy, but it is not true joy.

This is a very fundamental way of understanding the difference between true, precise joy, with joy that is only being imagined. Many times people want to be happy so they search for various outer stimuli to make them happy. They will look for a new item to buy, and they feel some happiness when they get new things, and they think is true joy. But this can only be a spark of joy, and it cannot be the root joy. The root joy can only be experienced when one actualizes potential. So if a person is experiencing joy when he buys things or receives new things, this is only partial joy. It is the joy of expansion, which is not true joy, but a spark of joy. It is temporary joy, because it is like a ‘branch’ without the ‘root’.

The big mistake that the world makes is that most people are seeking joy which comes from their outside, and they are not trying to get joy from the root.

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The Depth of “He Who Rejoices In His Portion”

Now we can understand a statement of the Sages, “Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in his portion.”⁶ One way to understand this is that when a person has *emunah* that Hashem gives him whatever is good for him, and that whatever Hashem doesn’t give him isn’t good for him, such a person will be happy with whatever he has. While this is certainly a true understanding of this statement of the Sages, there is more depth to the matter.

The deeper understanding is that joy comes from actualization of your own inner potential. If you don’t have something, that means it is not within your potential to actualize, and therefore, you cannot be happy with it. But when you actualize your own portion, your G-d given abilities, only then can you have true joy. That is the deeper meaning of “he who rejoices in *his* lot”. It is because joy can only come to you when you actualize your own unique abilities, your own lot. Thus, joy is about actualizing your own inner potential.

BECOMING CLEAR ABOUT OUR INNER ABILITIES

Therefore, if a person isn’t clear about his own abilities, he won’t know how to actualize them, and he won’t be able to reach true joy. Since most people do not understand clearly their own abilities, they don’t utilize their true potential and thus they never come to experience true joy. That is why they seek joy from the outside: because they don’t know how to get it from within. Our *avodah* is to reach *simchah*, for the Torah rebukes those who don’t serve Hashem with *simchah*. The fact that we are charged with the obligation to reach *simchah* is what necessitates us to become clear about our own inner abilities, so that we will know how to actualize our powers and then reach true *simchah*.

Based upon the above, we can see that the trait of *simchah* is therefore not just another trait to acquire, but a more all-inclusive trait. Through *simchah*, a person actualizes all of his inner powers. Thus, *simchah* is an all-inclusive trait which is relevant to all abilities in the soul. In order to reach true *simchah* we need to recognize our souls, and that is the path we are taking in this series. Each person will need to know his own inner abilities, and the better a person recognizes his own individual qualities, a person will know better how to actualize them. Then a person can reach true

⁶ Avos 4:1

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and inner joy. But, as we are explaining, in order to reach true *simchah*, one needs to become clear about his individual powers, and then he must know how to activate them.

There are several parts to this process. Therefore, we will be explaining throughout these lessons in a step-by-step manner of how a person can keep accessing joy, through different powers in the soul. In this way, a person can keep releasing a bit more of his potential, and thereby keep coming closer to true joy.

THE PROBLEM WE FACE IN TRYING TO ATTAIN JOY

There is also a more subtle point for us to know. Whenever we are joyous, we are completing the actualization of potential. Therefore, if a person actualizes his potential and he doesn't feel joyous, he is preventing himself from fully actualizing the potential, and this will be a huge obstacle in his path to reach *simchah*. This is the depth of sadness - when one isn't actualizing his potential completely.

An even more subtle point than this is that since all of us have countless abilities in our soul, any forces which haven't been actualized cause us to be sad, while any forces which have been actualized cause us joy. We can all recognize within ourselves, whether consciously or subconsciously, that are some abilities in ourselves which we haven't yet actualized, and this causes us a certain degree of sadness. This is the ongoing battle that each of us face, as we try to attain joy. We are always being reminded of any of our potential we haven't yet utilized – or any abilities we haven't yet utilized fully - and this prevents us from attaining joy. Many times people find it difficult to be happy with any abilities that we have actualized, because they are aware, whether consciously or subconsciously, that there is so much more potential within themselves that haven't yet been utilized.

EARTH-OF-EARTH: JOY FROM USING OUR STRONGEST POINT

Therefore, in order to counter the aforementioned issue, the *avodah* of a person is to find his current strongest point and to keep actualizing it, more and more. This will create great strength for the soul and it will become a great source of joy to us.

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One way for a person to keep finding joy is by being happy with even the smallest bit of success that one has, and, particularly, a person can find joy in any bit of potential that he manages to release. Even though it may only be a little bit, our Sages teach that in this lowly generation, even the smallest success is very important.

A second way to arrive at joy - which is the way we are taking - is that person should identify his strongest point, and keep making use of it. In contrast to the first approach, which is about focusing on your smallest successes, this approach focuses on big success of yours, because it's about the strongest power in your soul right now. When you activate your strongest ability, it has much meaning to you. It's like a foundation upon which a home stands. That is where you will find true joy. The more you access your strongest point and you are aware of it, you slowly gain a sense of activating your potential, and this will be a great source of joy to you.

IN SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, the external source of joy is when you feel expansion, whereas the inner source of joy is when you actualize your potential. Sadness is when your potential remains inactive, and joy is when you have released your potential by activating it. You actualize your potential only when you are getting joy from within yourself, and not when you are getting joy that comes from outside of you, which is merely expansion. Actualizing your potential is a general key to accessing the powers of your soul, but its main use is when you are actualizing the strongest current power of your soul.

Every person needs to find his or her strongest point and try to use it at least once a day, even if only a little, whether in action, speech, or in thoughts. One needs to be aware that he is activating his potential, as he does this. This is how we reach joy. When we gain joy from this, we are activating our potential and then our joy will increase, and the cycle will keep repeating.

This is the joy that we can derive from the power of repaired earth-of-earth. In the next lesson, with the help of Hashem, we will learn about the joy we can derive from water-of-earth.

2/Q&A

Q1: The Rav explained that a person cannot be happy if there is a factor preventing him from releasing his potential. My strongest point is giving, but there are factors that sometimes make it difficult for me to give. So how can I be happy with my strongest point, which is giving, when I sometimes find it too difficult to give?

A: Giving is a result of a root power in your soul, which is love. If you think your strongest point is giving, then you should know that your strongest point is not giving per se, but love, which giving is a result of.

When you are able to give, be happy with the fact that you were able to actualize your desire to give, but when you aren't able to give, try to give a little bit, and be happy with the little bit that you have been able to give, even though you cannot give fully, and in that way you will be able to find joy in your ability to give, no matter the situation. You will be able to find joy in the fact that you have overcome your evil inclination not to give.

Q2: What does it mean to actualize the abilities of your soul? Does this refer to middos or a different part of the soul?

A: Very good question. We did not elaborate upon that in the lesson, so let's elaborate on it now. There are generally three garments of the soul: action, speech, and thought. One can actualize his potential in any of these three areas: either through action, speech, or thought. In addition to this, there are also personality traits of the soul which one needs to actualize. One needs to actualize both the outer and inner layers of the soul. One needs to actualize the abilities of his *neshamah* (Divine soul), the abilities of his *nefesh habehaimis* (animal level of the soul), and his *guf* (physical body). Certainly it is more fundamental for a person to actualize his more inner and spiritual abilities, but there is what to be gained from activating the potential of even the less spiritual parts of oneself. So one should be actualizing the full spectrum of his abilities [his spiritual, emotional, and physical abilities].

*Q3: One needs to also actualize the powers of his *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul)?*

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A: The *nefesh habehaimis* also has some good parts in it, which need to be actualized. To illustrate, the Gemara says that a person can learn proper conduct from a cat or from an ant. So there is what to be gained even from the “animal” part of the soul.

One needs to find any of the good abilities that exist in his *neshamah*, as well as in his *nefesh habehaimis*, as well as in his *guf*, and to release all of the good potential that is in any of these areas.

Q4: Are the abilities of the neshamah, nefesh habehaimis and guf all interconnected, or are each of these abilities separate from each other?

A: That is a fundamental question. At the perfect level of mankind, the *nefesh habehaimis* is connected with the *neshamah* and is perfected by the spiritual rays of the *neshamah*. But ever since man ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), the world has become a mixture of good and evil. This caused a split in the internal makeup of man. Therefore, in most people, the *neshamah* stands on its own, and the *nefesh habehaimis* is unaffected by the spirituality of the *neshamah*. This is part of the difficulty in one's *avodah*, because one's *neshamah* is separate from his *nefesh habehaimis*, and a person can feel the contradiction between his spiritual parts and his baser parts, and he needs to deal with this contradiction.

Q5: Is there any possibility for a person to reach a level where his nefesh habehaimis is connected with his neshamah?

A: Generally, with most people, their *nefesh habehaimis* is not connected with their *neshamah*. In order to reach the level where one's *nefesh habehaimis* is connected with his *neshamah*, one has to undergo a lot of exertion and holiness to get there. Even when one reveals his *neshamah*, this does not necessarily mean that his *nefesh habehaimis* has become connected with his *neshamah*.

Q6: In the past, the Rav has explained how even sadness can be used for good, but here the Rav is saying that sadness is always detrimental because it is the absence of utilizing potential. How are we able to use sadness for good, if sadness is essentially the absence of utilizing our potential (hence sadness is always a bad thing)?

A: Good question. Let's elaborate. There are abilities in the soul which are good, and abilities in the soul which are evil. If we are not utilizing the forces in the soul that are evil, then it is good to be sad about this absence of utilized potential. In addition, a person is always going through a cycle of expansion and contraction. When one contracts in his soul, as a result of sadness, and as a result he is able to utilize his potential better, this is a good kind of sadness. Holy sadness is whenever a

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person doesn't utilize the evil forces in the soul. Another form of holy sadness is when a person contracts for the purpose of being able to utilize his potential better at a later point. An example of this is Shabbos Kodesh, when we are not active. Although we are not being active on Shabbos, our serenity on Shabbos is a holy kind of contraction for our souls, which enables us to fulfill our potential better during the week.

Q7: Is sadness in essence a good thing or is it a bad thing?

A: Every power that Hashem has created is good, and only when misuse a power does it become evil. We call it evil not because it is intrinsically evil, but only because it is being used in the negative sense, since it isn't being used correctly.

Q8: I gain joy just by listening to the Rav's shiurim, because I feel that it gives me an approach to find joy, even though I'm not there yet. Is that enough, or do I need to do more than that, in order to arrive at joy?

A: It is good that you feel clarity, but it won't be enough. You need to do at least one small action a day that will generate joy for you.

Q9: I feel that my strongest point is that I don't give up, because I am able to withstand difficulties and I don't fall into despair. How can I make more use of this power throughout my day, and not only when I encounter majorly difficult situations?

A: There is a general kind of despair, and there is also a more personal kind of despair. The way to counter general despair is by awakening hope, but there is also a more personal kind of despair, on a lesser scale, such as when you feel like you don't have any energy left to do something and you want to give up on doing it. For this, you can try forcing yourself to do a bit more than you think you can do right now. In this way you can keep make use of your strongest power - not giving up - more often throughout your day.

Q10: The Rav explained that complete joy comes from fully actualizing a potential. How do I fully actualize my potential? Is it by being happy whenever I release my potential? Or is it by actualizing my potential more and more?

A: Complete joy is mainly achieved by focusing and concentrating on the fact that you have released your potential, when you do. This generates more joy and causes you to release your potential more, whereupon the cycle can keep repeating.

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Q11: Does joy come from the act itself of actualizing my potential, or does it only come after I have succeeded in concentrating on the fact that I am actualizing my potential?

A: There are three parts to the joy. Actualizing your potential creates joy. After you have actualized your potential and you concentrate on the fact that you have just actualized your potential, you gain another degree of joy. This completes your joy, and then you can an added degree of joy after you have actualized your potential and you have also focused on your success. So there are three parts to the joy. There is joy in the process itself of actualizing your potential, there is another joy which comes after you have focused on the fact that you have actualized your potential, and the resulting joy from this creates another degree of joy for you.

3 | INJECTING NEW LIFE⁷

WATER – THE ELEMENT OF VITALITY-GIVING NOURISHMENT

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we have begun to discuss how we work on improving our *simchah* (joy). In the previous lesson we studied the joy that we can derive from our “earth-of-earth” [of earth] element. Now we will deal with “water-of-earth” [of earth] element.

As mentioned, earth actualizes the potential of something, which is the idea of joy, because the joy is a movement of the soul which actualizes the potential in the soul. Joy is accessed whenever earth in the soul actualizes something. Water gives nourishment to something and keeps it alive. Plants are nourished by the water and are able to grow and remain alive due to water. Earth actualizes the potential of something, whereas water provides life-giving vitality and nourishment.

The element of “water”-of-earth in the soul is utilized whenever a person receives added nourishment due to the actualization of potential.

ACTUALIZATION OF POTENTIAL IN DOING, SPEAKING, AND THINKING

There are three “garments” to the soul: action, speech and thought. Each action, word or thought of a person is really an actualization of some potential.

When a person does an action, he is not just doing something. Rather, he is actualizing a garment of the soul, the power of the soul, that is called “action”. The soul’s power of action becomes actualized from its potential state, via action.

The same is true for speech. When a person speaks, he is not simply verbalizing words. He is actualizing the soul’s power of speech, activating it from its potential form. This is reflected by the verse, “*My soul leaves when I speak with Him*”. Speech causes the soul to become actualized from its potential state.

Whenever we think a thought, it is not just a thought, but an actualization of the thought from its potential state. Although thought is generally a “potential” force, in comparison to action and

speech, thought is also an actualized force. A thought becomes actualized from its potential state, as soon as one thinks of the thought. Before one conjured the thought, the thought was in potential form, and when one thinks of it, the thought becomes actualized, experienced as a thought [it can be further actualized through an action].

Thus, action speech and thought are garments of the soul, and they are all different ways to actualize the potential forces in the soul.

EARTH – THE FORCE OF ACTUALIZATION

Earth actualizes the potential of something. The element of earth plays an important presence in our lives. Although the soul's element of earth contains heaviness, which produces the negative traits of laziness and sadness, the soul's element of earth is active in our souls at all times, whenever we actualize something.

For example, even now, when we are learning about how to understand joy, the mere study of this is already actualizing our potential, as we slowly gain knowledge about it through these lessons. Thus, the element of earth is not limited to laziness and sadness (though the element of earth is usually discussed in that context). At its essence, earth is more about actualization of potential.

Earth is a dry and cold element. The dryness in earth breeds the trait of sadness, and the coldness of earth breeds the trait of laziness. Joy, the opposite of sadness and laziness, is essentially about using the power to actualize potential. When we actualize potential - whether through the means of actions, words or thoughts - there is accompanying joy. When we don't actualize potential, there is sadness. Whenever we don't do enough, or if we haven't spoken enough, or if we didn't think something through enough, we become sad. We are not using our potential.

SADNESS CAN ALSO COME FROM TOO MUCH ACTUALIZED POTENTIAL

While sadness generally is the result from a lack of actualized potential, there can also be a sadness that results from actualized potential. How? If we actualize more than our potential, this also makes us sad.

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Here are some examples of how actualizing too much potential can actually make us sad. After the sin, Adam was cursed with labor. Adam was told that he will have to eat through sadness. Thus, actualizing our potential does not always make us happy. Through laboring in the fields, mankind is able to eat and survive, and although the earth produces fruit which enables man to eat, this ultimately causes man to be sad, because it involves a lot of hard work. It is an actualization of potential that comes along with sadness.

Another example is childbirth. After the sin, Chavah was cursed with the sadness and pain that accompanies pregnancy, labor and childbirth, and post-childbirth. The greatest product that a woman can produce is the birth of a child. There can be no greater actualization of potential. Yet, in spite of this, childbirth is saddening and painful to a woman – it is the curse given to Chavah and to all women.

WATER – THE ELEMENT THAT ENABLES PROPER ACTUALIZATION

The ability of earth to actualize potential is an ability that normally produces joy. But if one is sad or lazy – both traits of earth – he will not actualize his potential in the proper way. What is the remedy for this?

This is where the element of water comes in.

Water nourishes earth. When we balance our water with our earth, we lessen our sadness and laziness. Of course, if we apply too much water, the results are detrimental. Too much water ruins the earth. But if we use a balanced amount of water, we can improve the earth and nourish it properly, with good results. We will be actualizing our potential in a way that does not bring sadness or laziness, but a kind of actualizing that gives us vitality and joy.

APPLYING THE ELEMENT OF WATER: EXAMPLES OF VITALITY-GIVING ACTIONS

Here is an example of a good kind of actualization, which we can use to see how we can balance our elements of water and earth.

A person can choose any action that he or she loves doing, and then focus on the enjoyment he or she has, while doing it. For example, any women can choose something she enjoys doing, whether baking, cooking, tidying the house, etc. She doesn't only enjoy the results of it – she actually enjoys doing the very act itself. This is an action that actualizes some potential, but in addition to this, it is also an action that provides her with vitality and enthusiastic movement. This is joy-giving to her, and the opposite of sadness and laziness.

Another example. After giving birth to a child, mothers find it easier to take care of the children when they are not acting difficult. A mother has much more enjoyment doing things for her children when they are at an easy stage. She will run to take care of the child, and she does it energetically and with enthusiasm. In contrast to the above, when the children become difficult to take care of, like when a child is at a difficult stage, it becomes harder to take care of them, and a mother will feel somewhat heavier, and not as energetic, when she's taking care of them.

For example, when the child wakes up in the middle of the night crying, this is difficult for a parent, and although the parent will take care of the crying child in middle of the night, it will

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often be done in a sad or begrudging manner, and the parent doesn't feel enthusiastic to do it. It will either be done with sadness, or with laziness, and without joy.

INFUSING ENTHUSIASM INTO OUR ACTIONS

Consider the following. What is the difference between the movement of a ferris wheel, with the movement of a person who is running? A ferris wheel is an inanimate object. Although it moves, it is basically dead, because there is no life in it. A person, though, is alive when he moves. He is not just moving, he is moving with enthusiasm. These are two very different kinds of movements.

Action, speech, and thought, when done without vitality, breed laziness or sadness. Joy, which comes from vitality, water, is when one actualizes either an action, word, or thought, with enthusiasm, which in turn brings joy.

Now let's see how to apply water to our earth in our everyday actions, and thereby attain more joy, in our everyday actions.

INTRODUCING JOY INTO YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Let's first examine our actions. We do many actions a day, but let's try to do one thing a day, whether big or small, and to do with enthusiasm and joy. Is there a certain action we don't enjoy doing? Much of what we do is simply out of habit, out of responsibility and because we have no choice. But we can pick one action and introduce joy into it.

Let's first pick something we like doing and focus on the joy that we can think about and feel, when we do it. Concentrate on the joy you have in the action, while you are doing. Think about it and feel it. This brings water into your earth. It will be a movement of joy, which brings you joy.

EXAMPLE 1 – WHEN YOU HAVE TO GO TO A WEDDING

Here is an example. We may need to go to a wedding of a relative or friend, out of duty, and not because we really want to go. It may be far away and it is tiring to get there and come back late, and we may have to buy a gift which we really don't feel like buying, but we have to do it anyway. We

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have no desire to go the wedding, but we have no choice, and we have to go to the wedding. We go the wedding – we use our element of earth – but we have no desire in doing so. This is a common scenario. How can we infuse joy into this?

After we realize that we have no desire to go to the wedding, let's try to discover some aspect of excitement in going to the wedding. Now that we are going, let's be happy about going. Maybe we will be seeing some of our friends by the wedding – that's something joyous to think about. Or, maybe by going to the wedding, there's a good chance that that the people making the *simchah* will also come to a *simchah* that we make. That's also something joyous to think about. Or, instead of focusing on what we will be getting out of it personally, we can focus on the joy that we will be giving to the *chosson* and *kallah*, or to their families.

In summary, before going to the wedding, let's awaken some joyous feeling in going to the wedding. This introduces “water” (vitality) into our “earth”.

EXAMPLE 2 – PUTTING THE CHILDREN TO BED

Here's another example. When the children need to go to sleep, in most homes, this can be somewhat stressful. One child doesn't want to go to bed, another child wants you tell him a story, and another child is scared of the dark, etc. When that is the case, we usually don't put the children to bed with that much joy. Instead, we usually do it with no interest, somewhat begrudgingly, and only because we have to and because we have no other choice.

Here are some suggestions to infuse some more “life” into the act of putting the children to sleep, which also makes it more joyful. When we tell the story to our child, think about your love for your child. Or, think about how you are calming down your child. Or, give a kiss to your child and express your love to the child. Or, say *Shema* with your child and think how you are ingraining *emunah* in your child. A mother especially can derive great satisfaction from this, because it is greatly satisfying for a Jewish mother to know that she is taking care of her children, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Another option is that you can think of the calmness that will be in the home after all the children are sleeping, when you will have peace and quiet. You can think about that as you are putting the children to sleep.

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Through any of these ways, you can infuse some vitality into the act of putting the children to sleep, by thinking about any of these things beforehand.

IN CONCLUSION

These are just examples but there are many more examples throughout the day of how you can infuse some joy and vitality into the routine acts, and thereby avoid laziness or sadness, and instead experiencing joy in your daily responsibilities.

3 | Q&A

Q1: *All of these examples employ the use of shelo lishmah (ulterior motives). What about a person who wants to act more lishmah?*

A: Most people are at the level of *shelo lishmah*, that is why we gave examples that involve *shelo lishmah*, such as going to the wedding for your own good, etc. Also, *shelo lishmah* is about doing something in order to receive good for yourself. But here the focus is not on doing the act to receive good from the act, i.e. to do the act with enthusiasm because you want to receive more energy and enthusiasm for it, rather, the focus here is on how to do the act amidst enthusiasm. That is not *shelo lishmah*, because you are not doing it for the joy, you are rather learning how to do it amidst joy. That does not contradict *lishmah*. So, if one is at the level of *shelo lishmah*, he can do any action and derive vitality from it, for the purpose of getting vitality from it. If one is at the level of doing things *lishmah*, he or she can do the action amidst a state of vitality, as opposed to doing it to get vitality.

Q2: *Can I also use my talents, in order to infuse more joy into what I do?*

A: First clarify what your talents really are in the first place, and then think about which talents you can use in what you do. Become clearer about your talents and then think about which actions you can apply to your talents to.

Q3: *Do I need to do actions that utilize my talents?*

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A: Seek how you can to actions that utilize your talents, so that you can attain more joy in your actions, but even before that, you can learn how to infuse joy into your everyday actions which you need to do anyhow.

Q4: *How can we know what our main element is to work with?*

A: The more you listen to these lessons the clearer you will become with what area you mainly need to work on, by becoming clearer about the four elements.

Q5: *Practically speaking how do we apply the concept that earth is dry and cold?*

A: Earth is the power of action, the power to do things out of habit, which is dry, or to do something slowly, which is cold.

Q6: *When I wake up in the morning and no one is home I get up lazily because I know that no one is home so I'm not excited to get up, but when others are in the house then I get up more quickly because I am more excited when others are around. What can I do about this?*

A: You still need to find anything that gives you more vitality. Take a pen and paper and write down any actions you enjoy doing and what gives you more energy.

Q7: *In the previous lesson it was explained that anytime we actualize our potential, we gain joy, but in this lesson it was explained that joy is not possible unless you actualize your potential together with enthusiasm.*

A: Every action that actualizes potential brings some degree of joy, but there are levels of joy. When we do it with vitality and enthusiasm, it is more joyous. When we do it without enthusiasm, it is less joyous.

Q8: *Are actions, speech and thought the only aspects of the soul?*

A: They are the garments of the soul, not the essence of the soul itself. For example, a person wants something, so he will think about it, speak about it, etc. The will is garmented in any of these manifestations of action, speech, or thought.

Q9: *Is this about attacking sadness? Is there anything else we need to do about combatting sadness?*

A: Part of it attacks sadness, but a person will also need to clarify what makes him sad, and to deal with those issues.

4 | FINDING THE JOY IN CHALLENGES⁸

WIND-OF-EARTH: THE MOVEMENT PROCESS THAT LEADS TO ACTUALIZATION

With *siyata d'shmaya* we have begun to continue to learn about *simchah*. We have so far discussed “earth”-of-earth and “water”-of-earth. Now, with *siyata d'shmaya*, we shall learn about “wind”-of- earth and how it contributes to *simchah*.

Earth actualizes the potential of something and this brings joy. The wind is the power of movement, which moves and motivates something. **Wind-of-earth** is the moving force within the actualization process. It is the process itself, that brings something from potential to actualization.

Whenever anything has become actualized, this is the constructive use of earth. The detrimental use of earth is when the heaviness within the earth weighs a person down, preventing a person from actualizing potential. This is the source of the trait of laziness. In addition to this factor - besides for the heaviness of earth which prevents a person from actualizing his potential - a person will also be prevented from actualizing any potential whenever there is any halted movement in his element of wind.

TWO FACTORS THAT PREVENT ACTUALIZATION: LAZINESS/HEAVINESS (EARTH) AND OPPOSITION (WIND)

Let’s explain the depth of how this works. The Gemara says that for everything Hashem created, He created it with male and female forces. Man and woman are called *eizer k’negdo* to each other. They are opposite forces, which either help each other or oppose each other. This is a rule for all forces of Creation as well. Earth and wind are opposing forces to each other. The heaviness of earth prevents a person from using his wind, his force of movement.

There are two factors which prevent a person from utilizing his potential. The heaviness of the element of earth breeds the trait of laziness, and in addition to this, any obstacles in a person’s path prevent a person from using his moving force, his element of wind. When one isn’t utilizing his

wind properly, this is called *ruach shefailah*, a “downed wind”, a dispiritedness, which also breeds sadness.

OVERTCOMING OPPPOSITION CAUSES JOY

Any actualization of potential, for example, doing an act of *chessed*, or using the power of speech to perform a *mitzvah*, or using any of the abilities of the heart to do a *mitzvah* – in any of these scenarios, if one is being prevented or opposed, and one overcomes the opposition, the result is that there will be greater actualization of potential, because there was more effort involved. Increasing one’s efforts, in order to get to the actualization of anything, is also a factor that increases joy. That is the joy which we can derive from “wind”-of-earth: when we overcome our oppositions, in order to get to our goal.

This is the concept, and now we shall give examples.

EXAMPLES OF JOY FROM CHALLENGES

Let’s say a person is involved in various projects of *chessed* and he helps others. He has actualized a potential, by wanting to help them and then actually helping them. But then he encounters some opposition or challenge in what he is doing. Now he has to try harder. Someone else gets angry or insults him, or someone else tells him that he should really be doing something else. When he persists and he finally gets to his goal and he actualizes his potential, overcoming all of the obstacles, oppositions, and challenges that were in his way, he not only has the joy of actualized potential, but he also has the joy of having overcome his challenges.

Another example is when a person is raising his children. He begins to see that a lot of effort and awareness is needed in order to raise children properly, so he makes various increased efforts to raise his children better, employing certain methods and applying certain advice. Often he will be faced with certain challenges along the way, which make it harder for him to raise his children. Other people may criticize him, either telling him that he is overdoing it, or that he’s not doing enough. When a parent hears this, it makes it much more difficult for him and he may begin to feel flustered from the whole thing. The parent may lose his motivation in trying to raise his children right, and he may stop applying his energy, because others are challenging him. It becomes too hard

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for the parent to feel joy in raising his children. But when parents persevere with their children, in spite of the many challenges involved in raising them, they gain increased joy in raising their children.

Another example is the *mitzvah* of honoring parents. A person may try very hard to honor them, physically and emotionally, and one day he realizes that in spite of all that he does for his parents, they are not so satisfied. From seeing their unhappiness or dissatisfaction, he loses the energy to honor them. When he sees that they are totally unhappy, honoring them becomes very difficult and he loses his drive in this *mitzvah*.

In another scenario, the more effort a person puts into raising his children, the less he has time to honor his parents, and the same is vice versa – the more he is taking care of his parents, the less time he has for his children. So besides for taking care of his parents, which is difficult enough, he suffers in his soul because subconsciously he knows that he doesn't have enough time for his children. This is his dispiritedness, his impaired **wind-of-earth**, his oppositions which are preventing his joy.

TACKLING OUR CHALLENGES

Firstly, a person should make a list of which scenarios aren't challenging to him, and which situations he finds challenging. This creates awareness to the situations where his **wind-of-earth** (oppositions) are preventing him.

The Gemara says that each of the winds oppose each other. Everything in Creation has many possible opposing forces to it. Sometimes there is a lot of opposition to something, and sometimes there is less. When we contemplate the idea that there is always some opposition towards everything in Creation, this can give us an idea of **wind-of-earth** in the soul: the oppositions that prevent us from actualizing our potential.

REACTING TO CHALLENGES

How should we view challenges and oppositions to us? First, we need to 'take a step out' of the situation for a bit, and contemplate the following.

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Whenever a person encounters challenges, he may react to this by thinking that he can't succeed, that he is an unsuccessful person, etc. These feelings increase with the more challenges that he encounters. He begins to think that he can't do things, and he develops a low self-image of himself. There is also an opposite reaction a person may have: One may conclude that if he isn't succeeding at something, it must be the "*Sitra Achra*" (the Other Side of Evil) that's preventing him. Alternatively, a person may react that it's "a sign from Heaven" that he shouldn't continue what he's doing.

However, there is an entirely different reaction to have, which is deeper and more truthful than any of the above reactions to the situation: A person can think that if he is running into problems and challenges with what he is doing, it may be an indicator that he has involved himself with something that is not suitable for his soul to do. That is why he finds himself limited in this situation – he simply doesn't have the energies for it, because it's not tailored to his soul or to his current level.

However, what if a person concludes that he is indeed involved with something that he should be doing, and that he is simply facing a challenge? How should he view the challenge? He should view the opposition of something that's part of the plan, not something happenstance. For Hashem has designed the world in a way that we are always being challenged. It's part of the natural design of things that Hashem has built into Creation.

So instead of viewing this as *yissurim* (suffering) and that one needs to "accept suffering with love", one can instead view it with a more basic attitude, that he's being challenged because it's simply the way that things are supposed to be. It is a basic part of one's *avodah* in actualizing your potential: to overcome the challenges along the way, in order to get to the end goal. It is part of your *avodah* to go through the challenge, and it was meant for you to traverse, as part of our task on This World, and because this is the way Hashem has designed things to be.

THE DEEP JOY THAT CAN BE DERIVED FROM OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

This is actually the depth of the words of the Sages that one should "rejoice in suffering". There are two types of suffering. Chazal state that "There is no suffering without sin". That is one type of

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suffering: when the suffering is an atonement for sins, which caused by sins. Another kind of suffering is the suffering of *tzaddikim*, who encounter various challenges and oppositions due to the very design which Hashem has made. The rejoicing of the *tzaddikim* in their suffering is essentially because the *tzaddikim* recognize that it is part of their *avodah* to be opposed and challenged in this way. These oppositions really bring a deep kind of joy.

When a person actualizes his potential he has some joy, but when he overcomes challenges along the way, his joy is unequalled. The movements of the soul which one uses, in order to overcome the various factors that oppose him, increase his joy. This is the depth of the joy that can be experienced on This World.

Even when suffering from sins, which purifies a person, a person can also derive joy, from overcoming the challenges involved. It is hard for a person to know if his suffering is coming from sins or if it's the suffering of *tzaddikim* which is purely for the sake of the challenge. Our Sages do provide definitions of how to know it, but practically speaking, it is hard for a person to apply this knowledge to himself. But in either case, a person can derive joy from actualizing his potential together with overcoming challenges.

This is the depth of the *avodah* on this world, which is essentially to engage in actualizing our potential, in spite of challenges.⁹ The more one absorbs this perspective, the more one can bring an overhaul to his entire life.

All of us encounter challenges, which have the potential to make us become saddened, and removing any of our joy. The root of sadness is the dispiritedness of the soul, which comes from an impaired element of "wind" in the soul, whereas the root of joy is a repaired element of wind. This brings a person a constant inner flow of true, deep joy.

We have given examples of how to view challenges of life and how to deal with them, from a perspective of joy, and in a way that can bring us increased joy when we go through challenging situations. This particular lesson was very, very fundamental.

⁹ Editor's Note: As the *Mesillas Yesharim* states in Chapter One, "For life is a *nisayon* (test)."

4 | Q&A

Q1: *What exactly am I actualizing when I actualize my potential?*

A: Excellent question. There are two parts. There is the power itself you are actualizing, as well as the opposition you are overcoming, which additionally actualizes your potential. There is actualization of deeds, middos, thoughts, will, and pleasure. This requires a study of its own.

Q2: *Can I actualize potential even if I don't know what I'm actualizing?*

A: Your awareness of what exactly you are actualizing can deepen as we go along with this, but at first, you can be generally aware that you are actualizing your potential.

Q3: *How do we awaken the good kind of wind when we encounter challenges?*

A: The more a person acquires the perspective that a person's avodah is to actualize his potential and that part of this includes encountering opposition, this is the depth of our task on this world when trying to actualize our potential, and this changes our perspective. This enables us to overcome the challenge, with joy.

Q4: *We don't always have enthusiasm to go through challenges so how can we go through them?*

A: Very good question. When a person lives superficially, he lived with sadness, the more difficult it is to go through challenges. When a person lives more internally, he can go through challenges with a deeper perspective and that is where he can find deep joy. In the inner depths of each person, a person can find joy in facing oppositions and challenges.

Q5: *What do we do when we are in a situation of doubts?*

A: That is a general question. Chazal state that a person should make a *rebbei* to remove himself from doubt. Understandably, a person cannot always call a *rebbei* when he is in doubt, and if he does so, he will remain an ignoramus his entire life. Whenever a person has doubts, the Ramban says that a person should learn Torah *lishmah* and then he will know the answers to his doubts. Alternatively, a person can connect himself deeply to thoughts of *emunah* in Hashem, and from that new perspective he can become clearer about how to face his doubts.

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Q6: How do we overcome the subconscious voice that is nagging at us, for example, when we are taking care of our kids and therefore we feel guilty that we aren't honoring our parents enough (and vice versa)?

A: There are always contradicting forces within a person, and a person needs to overcome the inner contradictions. There is always a contradicting force taking place whenever we do anything. We need to overcome the challenge of these contradictions.

5 | JOY FROM RENEWAL¹⁰

FIRE-OF-EARTH: INTRODUCING RENEWAL INTO THE ROUTINE

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about *simchah* (joy). Previously we studied how we derive joy from earth-of-earth, water-of-earth, and wind-of-earth. Now we will discuss fire-of-earth, which is essentially the excitement that can be derived from our element of earth, and we will see how we can derive joy from it. This “fire”-of-earth is the general source of joy.

Earth actualizes the potential of something, which brings joy. The movement involved in trying to actualize our potential, and the completion of actualized potential, is the general description of how the element of earth provides joy. Now let’s learn about the element of fire and how we can draw joy from it. Understandably, fire contains many different aspects. We will focus the discussion on one particular aspect of fire: its ability of renewal.

The element of earth cannot renew itself. Earth stays as it is and where it is, and it doesn’t change. Water also stays the same. Air moves around, but it essentially stays the same. The only element which changes itself and renews itself is fire. Fire is constantly renewing itself, in order to stay burning. Fire continues to burn only by renewing itself every moment.

Applying this to ourselves: When a person gets used to the routine of life, even if he is always doing good things, if he has no renewal, he becomes sad. When the same things are done again and again, as part of routine and with nothing new involved, this dries out the soul, causing the element of earth in the soul to dominate, and bringing on sadness. In order to counter the sadness that comes upon a person from a “dried out” soul, we need to introduce renewal – the element of fire - which can thereby remove a person’s sadness.

Fire is all about renewal. When a person keeps to the same course and he is simply performing everything out of routine and out of habit, this causes the element of earth in the soul to dominate, and it brings “dryness” upon the soul. One needs renewal in order to counter this. Although we also need the stability and permanence of the element of earth in our lives, we also need to introduce renewal into what we are doing. This “renewal within the routine” is essentially the “fire”-of-earth. This actualizes one’s potential in a way that brings renewal, and subsequently, joy.

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On one hand a person needs to act in a way that is stable and consistent, but a person also needs to have some renewal in what he's doing, even if only a little. Here are some examples.

EXAMPLE 1 - INTRODUCING RENEWAL INTO OUR DAVENING

Chazal state that *tefillah* (prayer) is called the “service of the heart”. It is a matter of the heart. On one hand, we *daven* the same words every day, as the Sages established. These words were established according to *Ruach HaKodesh*, and each word recited as part of this routine is vital for us. But if a person merely says the same words every day during every *davening*, never adding any prayers of his own, his *davening* becomes dry. Every day he feels like he is just saying the same words, again and again, as if he is on monotone. On an intellectual level, a person finds this boring, because he never arrives at any additional understanding or insights in the words of the *davening*. And on an emotional level, one finds this uninspiring and unfulfilling. For this reason, one needs to introduce some renewal into his *davening*.

One can introduce renewal into his *davening* in the following ways. One can prepare private words of prayer beforehand, and insert his private prayers at the end of *Elokai Netzor* in *Shemoneh Esrei*, or at any other times of the day. In addition to this, a person can pick one word of any of the blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* or any other parts of *davening*, and try to add something new to it, perhaps by thinking of a novel insight about the word he is saying.

This is a very important example, because most people find the daily prayers to be uninspiring, and their *tefillos* feel dry to them as a result. By applying **fire-of-earth**, the power of renewal, into one's daily, routine actions, one infuses new life into these routine acts. This adds *chiyus* (vitality) to the *davening*, and it is the true realization of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, which is also called the *chai berachos*, the “18 blessings”, which is a hint that our *Shemoneh Esrei* is meant to become a source of spiritual *chiyus* (vitality) to us.

EXAMPLE 2 – INTRODUCING RENEWAL INTO RAISING CHILDREN

The following is another very important example of applying “fire-of-earth”: when a person has a big family full of children.

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Raising one's family, on one hand, involves tremendous joy. On the other hand, there is tremendous responsibilities of the parents towards their children, which involves a lot of stress and pain. Chazal call it *tzaar gidul banim*, the pains of raising children. There are various responsibilities we have towards the children, such as feeding them, clothing them, taking them to the doctor, keeping them healthy, etc. Sometimes this becomes very stressful - especially for the mother, who is generally more involved with their physical care. It can eventually turn into nothing but a monotonous routine, which feels nothing but stressful, with no joy in it. When raising children feels like nothing but a routine for the parents, this is not good for the parents or for the children.

How can we introduce joy into the home when raising the children? There are many ways.

One way is for a person to contemplate the following: "How would I feel if I didn't have children? Would that be better...?" After all, we know that there are people who haven't merited children yet, and they are sad from this. By thinking about the opposite kind of situation than yours – the fact that there are others who are pained at the fact that they don't have children – you can gain a new perspective towards your children, and you find it easier to raise them.

Another way to ease the burden of raising children is that we can awaken our love for them, whenever we give to them. Deep down, every parent has a very deep love for his or her child, though the parent is not always conscious of this love. Since every parent has a "hidden love" for his or her child, a parent can try bringing this love more to the forefront of his or her consciousness, whenever doing anything for the child, by thinking of the love.

A third way to ease the situation is: By introducing small things that are new, exciting, and interesting to the children. Raising children should not just be limited to giving them food, clothing, etc. When that alone is the focus, raising children certainly becomes monotonous, routine, and eventually stressful. Besides for providing for the basic needs of our children, we also need to introduce something small that is new and exciting.

For example, a parent should serve a new kind of food every once in a while to the children. Instead of giving them the same breakfast every day, we can give something new, every so often.

(Of course, in some homes there is an opposite problem, where they just feed the children with whatever is available in the house. If there is pizza in the house, that is what the children are served, and there is no particular menu of what to give the children. This is an imbalanced fire, because it

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is fire (renewal) with no earth (stability). Here we are discussing the opposite problem: when there is earth (routine and stability) without any fire (renewal).

The basic idea is that every so often we should introduce something new into the home. It should be a small thing. We can also buy new clothing for them every so often (and of course, we shouldn't overdo this. If a person feels that this will make the children too focused on clothing and on being stylish and trendy, one should be sensible about this and perhaps avoid buying new clothes for the children). Or, one can take the family for a walk, or for a trip. The idea is to introduce something new, which makes the entire home situation more exciting. This calms the soul and brings us joy, even amidst all of the pain and stress involved with raising children.

EXAMPLE 3 – APPLYING RENEWAL TO MARRIAGE

Another important example of applying **fire-of-earth**, adding renewal to the routine, is when it comes to the context of marriage.

At first, when a *chosson* and *kallah* become engaged, and for the beginning of the marriage, there is renewal between them. As the weeks and months go on, though, they become used to each other, and there is no more renewal. They also have to deal with a lot of challenges and oppositions with each other. That is the way of the world. However, there can be another problem which adds to the stress: when they are simply living routinely with each other, never doing anything new together.

When a couple disagrees with each other, even if they are both good-natured people and they both have good **middos**, they can clash with each other. In addition, if they have any bad *middos*, this will also be a problem in their marriage. A third factor is the monotonous routine of life which they get used to with each other. They are each busy, whether with good things or bad things. The Gemara says that the Torah made a woman into a *niddah* so that she should become beloved again to her husband. With this, the Torah acknowledges that a man and woman need renewal in their marriage. This is **fire-of-earth**: the need for renewal, within the routine.

When a couple learns how to introduce new things into their marriage, they will find more joy in their relationship. This doesn't mean that they need to do extreme things like moving into a new house, or going on exotic vacations, etc. They should just do small things together that will add

some flavor of renewal into the marriage. This practice, of adding some small renewal into their marriage, can vastly improve their relationship and change their marriage for the better.

We have so far given three very common examples of how to use **fire-of-earth**.

JOY IS ATTAINED THROUGH ACTUALIZING OUR STRONGEST AREA AND PROVIDING OURSELVES WITH RENEWAL

Every person has his or her strongest quality, which comes from his or her strongest element. A person first needs to use his strongest element and see how he can actualize it. This helps a person find true satisfaction and joy in life, and it brings a person to stability and helps him build his inner world. One needs to learn what his strongest ability and actualize it. The more one actualizes it, the more stable one's soul will become and the more he will properly develop his inner world.

When a person learns how to actualize his main ability, one needs to clearly identify that this actualization should be 'multi-colored'. Meaning, he shouldn't stick to doing one thing alone, just because it's his strongest point. This is because a person also needs renewal. Although the main source of joy is utilizing our strongest talent or element, we also need to do new things, in order to keep our joy going, so that we don't become dried out from doing the same thing again and again.

A person needs several kinds of renewal. Otherwise, he is constricting himself. If he only uses one kind of talent or one of his abilities, he won't have renewal. Although he will still be actualizing his potential, he will only gain a limited kind of renewal, and he may become dried out, and eventually, he will be saddened. Therefore, a person also needs to introduce new ways of how he can utilize his capabilities, so that he can provide himself with renewal and enable his joy to keep becoming renewed.

The more a person introduces renewal, the greater his joy will become. One should mainly be using his main ability and actualizing his potential in that area, and that is how a person will reach inner joy.

May each of us merit to be written for a good new year, a year of renewal, a year of consciously renewing ourselves in our souls.

5 | Q&A

Q1: How exactly by doing something new does a person access the element of fire in the soul?

A: Anytime a person adds renewal to something, he is accessing the fire in the soul. For example, when a person does the *mitzvah* of honoring his parents, either he does the same thing every time, which keeps him in monotone, or he seeks how to add something new to how he honors them. When one adds to how he honors his parents, by thinking of some new way to honor them, he is accessing the element of fire. One can introduce renewal either through action, or through speech, or through thought.

Q2: Practically speaking, how can we introduce something new for children which they will enjoy?

A: It depends on each child's needs. Some children require more excitement, and if the parents may present something to the children which they think is exciting, but which the child finds no interest in. So the parents need to provide something for the child which he, personally, will find exciting. However, the other children in the home also need to be taken into account – the parents need to introduce something in the home, every so often, which will satisfy the interests of all the children, not just one of the children.

Q3: What can we do for a child who doesn't have that much fire, who isn't that interested in anything new or exciting?

A: Provide him with something that he finds interest in, which will awaken his curiosity.

6 | JOY FROM CONTINUOUS ACTUALIZATION¹¹

THE "WATER" WITHIN THE ELEMENT OF EARTH

We have so far discussed the joy that can be drawn from the four elements within the element of earth [which branches out from the element of earth, hence the previous four chapters discussed the branches of “earth”-of-earth]. Now we shall discuss the joy we can draw forth from the element of water [which branches out from the element of earth, hence we are discussing “water”-of-earth].

DERIVING JOY FROM WATER/VITALITY

Generally speaking, there are several properties in the element of water. One of the aspects of water is that it revitalizes. It gives *chiyus* (nourishment). Just as water nourishes the earth in the physical life and keeps things alive, so does water in the soul nourish the soul.

The better quality a person’s *chiyus* is, the better quality joy he will have. If *chas v’shalom* a person is gaining his main *chiyus* from negative sources, the more he will be led to sadness.

As a fundamental example, the difference between death and life. Death is associated with sadness, with earth and life is linked with vitality, with water. The birth of a child brings untold joy to the parents. An addition of life, a new life, brings vitality and joy. The more vitality and life a person gains, the more joy he will gain.

JOY COMES FROM VITALITY, SADNESS COMES FROM BEING FORCED

True life comes from deriving vitality from what we do, speak, feel, think and want. But when we do things because we have to, when we think because we have no choice, when we speak because we have to, we are distanced from true joy.

We don’t mean that a person shouldn’t do things if he doesn’t get vitality from them. If a person is obligated to do something, he must do it whether he feels like doing it or not. Certainly we must

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keep the *mitzvos* whether we feel like we are getting vitality from it or not. Rather, what we are speaking about here is how to live a life of happiness, and how to derive vitality from what we do. If a person does only what he enjoys, he lives a hedonistic life, with no acceptance of the yoke of Hashem's *mitzvos*. We must emphasize this point, before continuing. Together with doing all that we must do, we must also find life and joy in what we do.

How do people get joy and vitality? When people do things they enjoy, such as eating what they like to eat, they feel vitality and joy from it. This is superficial joy. It is not true joy. True joy and vitality is gained by doing what you personally need to do. This is what utilizes your true personal soul potential. That is where you will find your true vitality and joy.

WATER (VITALITY) NEEDS EARTH (STABILITY)

Here are some examples of the idea.

Where do the fruits and vegetables get their vitality from? From water. But what about fruits that are disconnected from the ground? All the water in the world cannot grow them. They need to be in the ground, and only then can the water nourish them further. So, it is not enough to get watered. They also need to be connected to the earth.

Another example: a fetus in its mother. A fetus is kept alive from its mother. It is being nourished by its mother, but it cannot survive unless it stays inside the mother, connected to its source of life. When a baby is born, he needs to be connected to his mother, in addition to getting fed. He needs his mother. He may be able to nurse from another mother, but he needs to be around his mother, in order to truly become nourished. He needs his source.

It is written, "*For with You is the source of life.*"¹² True *chiyus* (vitality) in life comes from being attached with the Source of our life, Hashem. Therefore, whenever we receive vitality that isn't from our true source, we must realize that it is only a 'partial' vitality. It is not the true vitality we need. Only when we connect to our inner source, within, will we find true vitality. Therefore, the better a person recognizes himself and he is actualizing his potential, the more he derives vitality from himself, from his soul. He gains true vitality and true joy.

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Why is there very little joy in the world? It is because most people are deriving only superficial joy, not a joy that comes from their inner self. The more people would actualize their true potential, the more they would reach true joy.

DERIVING JOY FROM “EARTH”-OF-WATER-OF-EARTH

Now that we have explained in general how joy is drawn from the element of water, our main source of vitality, let's now explain how we draw forth joy from “**earth**”-of-water [of earth].

One of the main aspects of earth is its permanence, its consistency, its precision. The more a person uses his element of water without earth, he becomes spread out, like the water which doesn't settle in any one place but which flows all over the place. By revealing earth, one directs his water with precision and stabilizes the water.

CONTENPLATING THE BEGINNING, MIDDLE, AND END POINTS OF OUR STRONGEST AREA

Here is an example of how we can use earth-of-water [of earth] in the soul to access joy.

We have explained in previous lessons that one first needs to become clear about what his strongest area is, and then one should become clear about what to do with it and how to direct it properly. Finally, a person needs to become clear about how he should go about actualizing it.

In this way, one contemplates the beginning point, end point, and middle point. The beginning point is to become clear about what your strongest area is. The end point is to actualize it. The middle point is to figure out what to do with your strongest area and how to direct it.

This kind of contemplation brings a person a source of joy.

JOY COMES FROM THE PROCESS OF TRYING TO REACH JOY

Another example of the idea is the three festivals, Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos. The climax of the festivals is Succos, which is called *zman simchaseinu*, the time of our joy. However, joy is not limited to the festival of Succos. The Torah commands us to celebrate with joy on the first festival,

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Pesach, and also on the festival between Pesach and Succos, which is Shavuos. There is joy on Succos because it is the climax of the festivals, the end point, and there is joy upon completion. But there is also joy throughout the festivals, which begins with Pesach and continues to Succos. There is joy in the beginning, Pesach, and joy in the middle, Shavuos, and joy at the end, Succos. Thus, the festivals are essentially a continuous process of joy.

While the goal and climax of the festival is Succos, it begins with Pesach. There can be joy throughout all of the festivals, because there is a joy that comes at the end, and therefore there can be joy already from the beginning and throughout the entire time we are heading towards the goal.

Thus, joy is not only for the end. Joy can be experienced throughout the entire process of trying to get the endpoint, to the climax of the joy.

DERIVING JOY FROM TRYING TO ACTUALIZE OUR STRONGEST QUALITY

Now let's try to make this idea more practical. We have spoken in the past about how we each need to utilize our strongest quality. After the first step, which is to identify our strongest power, the second step is to clarify what we need to do with our strongest power: to know how to use it, and what we want to use it for. After that, there is a third step: to think how we can practically go about actualizing our strongest quality.

(We cannot go that much into the details about each of the steps here, because each person is different when it comes to the strongest quality. So we have left it at the general outline for each person.) When we are living like this, we are living aligned with our souls, and we will mainly be using our strongest quality and actualizing it [and this will be a source of inner joy to us].

JOY FROM THE OUTSIDE VS. JOY FROM THE INSIDE

The Gemara teaches that a person prefers one measurement of his own land that he worked on, rather than 90 measurements of land from another's.¹³ But if a person has a great desire for money, he will find it very difficult to understand this statement of the Gemara. Such a person desires more and more possessions and acquisitions, whether they are his, or another's. Why? This is because the

¹³ Bava Metzia 38a

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Sages teach that the trait of desire is one of the things that remove a person from his own world: “Jealousy, desire and honor remove a person from his world.”¹⁴ When any of these negative traits dominate a person, the person is living externally and very superficially. Such a person has a superficial perspective, and therefore his joy does not come from his own inner world, but from the external world. That is why he will find it very hard to understand why a person would desire his own land more than another’s.

Here is another example, which is very important, and also very subtle. It illustrates the idea very well. Every person has times of *simchah* in his life, such as the birth of a child, making a *bar mitzvah* or *bas mitzvah*, marrying off a child, having a grandchild, etc. Certainly, these are true times of joy in one’s life. However, this is a joy of “going outward” from oneself. It is a joy of connecting to something outside of us. Why? Our children are not *us*. They are external to us. Certainly we feel very connected with our children, and we feel as if our children are a part of us, but ultimately, our children are separate beings from us and they are independent from us.

In contrast to the joy we experience upon the birth or a celebration of our children, there is a deeper kind of joy, which we can derive from our own inner self. We can derive this inner joy when we understand how to use our strongest quality. When we do so, we are using our soul’s **earth-of-water-of-earth**.

Now, let us ask: What makes us happier? When we utilize our potential, or when we celebrate in the joy of others, such as when we make a wedding for our children? When is our happiness greater? When we rejoice from a source within us, or when we rejoice in something outside of us?

Of course, there is a high level of feeling others’ joy even more than our own joy. We are not addressing this high level. For most people, who are not that high level, what is their greatest joy? Is it a joy that comes from within them, or is it the joy that they get from their children? The truer kind of joy is the joy experienced from one’s own inner world, whereas the joy of a birth of a child is external and not as deep as the joy that one gets from within.

For anyone who is not in touch with themselves, this will be very difficult to hear. But for someone who is in touch with his inner world, this will make a lot of sense. There is an inner, subtle perspective of the soul, which is that the true source of joy comes from within ourselves. That is our true source of vitality and joy: when our joy comes from within ourselves.

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Our children come from our body, and only minimally from our souls. Our children are very connected to our physical being, but not that much with our spiritual being. Since we are physically connected with our children, there is some degree of joy which we have in their joy. But for the most part, the joy we can get from within our very own selves - from our inner power and capabilities of the soul - is a much more inner and deeper kind of joy, because it is *us*.

EGOISTIC JOY VS. JOY FROM WITHIN

Let's explain the subtle difference between egoistic joy, versus the inner joy we are describing. An egoist has joy only when it's about him. If it somehow relates to him, he will have joy. The joy begins with him and ends with him. This is impaired, egoistic joy. In contrast, true inner joy begins with actualizing one's potential, and it is a joy that continues and expands.

To illustrate the idea, the Rambam says that one's joy on Yom Tov is not complete unless he makes others happy, such as by inviting the poor to feast with him. This is a joy that starts with oneself [celebrating with oneself and with one's own family] which is being extended to others [the poor].

PURSUING OUR TRUE SOURCE OF JOY

Many people pursue money all day, because they think that this will be the true source that will give them happiness. On the same level, we should pursue a joy that comes from within ourselves - because that is where our true source of joy is. In the same way that people seek vanities and pursue them endlessly, we should seek the true source of joy: the joy that comes from actualizing our inner potential. This is the power which we can derive from our soul's **earth-of-water** [of earth].

ASERES Y'MEI TESHUVAH: DAYS OF SEEKING TO ACTUALIZE OUR TRUE POTENTIAL

The days of repentance between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, are days when we should become clearer about our souls, and that is what ultimately leads us to true *teshuva*. We each need to see what our most positive quality is, and how we can actualize it. Accordingly, we can then set

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goals in our *avodas Hashem* for the coming year, in a way that will be more aligned with our personal soul. Then we will be able to find true joy, and to reach our true selves.

May we all merit to be sealed for a good year, for with You is the source of life. May we draw forth our true source of vitality and joy from the true Source of life, Hashem.

6 | Q&A

Q1: Regarding the strongest power we have – which realm of the soul is this in? In the realm of action, emotion, etc.?

A: Every soul is different. Some are stronger in action, some are stronger in emotion, and others are stronger in the area of thought. Clarifying this area is a part of clarifying our souls.

Q2: If someone is stronger in the area of action, does that mean he is more obligated in the mitzvos, whereas others who are not as strong in the area of action aren't as obligated in mitzvos?

A: Everyone is obligated in the *mitzvos*. But some people have souls which are rooted in the realm of action, which is *Asiyah* (action), while others are rooted in the realm of feeling, which is called *Yetzirah*, and others in the realm of thought, *Beriah*. Those are the three main kinds of people we find. Those whose souls are rooted in *Asiyah* are stronger in the area of action, but every Jew is still obligated in the *mitzvos*, even if his soul is not rooted in the realm of *Asiyah*.

Q3: I am not sure if my strongest power is organization or loving and caring about others. How can I figure out what the strongest of my powers is?

A: Figure out what you would do if you were in a situation where you would have to choose between organization or caring about others.

Q4: I would pick love and caring about others, at the expense of organizing.

A: Does the love stem from organization or does it flow instinctively with no restraint?

Q5: It is definitely a love that stems from helping others get more organization in their lives.

A: Is there any kind of organization to this love, or does it come impulsively and without any restraint? For example, is it a specific kind of love, for certain kinds of people, such as a love for children or a love for friends or neighbors? Or is it a love with no boundaries?

Q6: It is a love that comes from an intellectual place not from an emotional place. It is a love to help others, wherever I go, whenever I feel a need to show this love to others.

A: What do you do if you are forced to choose between love or organization? What is harder for you to stomach – when others are egoists and they don't care about others, or when they are not organized?

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Q7: When I see others who are not loving, this bothers more than when people are not organized.

A: From all of your answers it seems that your ability to love is your strongest quality.

Q8: What is a good goal I can set so that I can use my strongest power (in my case, my strongest power I identify is my power to love)?

A: Take one person you love only a little bit, and begin to increase your love towards him/her. Don't only express love to someone you already love. Take someone you love a little, but whom you don't express love to, and begin increasing your love towards him.

Q9: How can be I get joy out of my main ability in a way that doesn't make me egoistic and channel it more for Hashem?

A: The above answer helps you use your power of love for *avodas Hashem*. On a subtler level, there is also *shelo lishmah* and *lishmah* in this *avodah* of loving others.

Q10: How do you increase love towards another person? By doing things for others?

A: There are external and internal ways to love others. On the external level, you need to do actions for others, but internally, you need to do things for others out of a feeling of love for another. On a higher level, you can make sure give a little more than you originally wanted to give to the other. Do so with the intention of increasing your love to another. After you are doing that, you can progress to a higher level: you can think of how bad it is to only love yourself and to not love others. Even more so, you can think of the other's good qualities and thereby awaken a love for him. On the highest level, awaken your love for all of the souls of *Klal Yisrael*.

Q11: Is this avodah (actualizing my strongest area) also connected with the avodah that we have during the days of the Yomim Noraim?

A: A person is judged on Rosh HaShanah for how much he actualized his potential. A sin, in essence, is a result of misused potential. On the external level, we need to do *tshuvah* during the *Yomim Noraim* and to stop doing the actions of sin, but along with this *avodah*, in our inner world, we need to get to the root of our sins – misusing our powers – and therefore, our inner *avodah* when doing *tshuvah* is to learn how to actualize our powers for the right reasons.

Q12: Are we able to determine our strongest point by knowing what our biggest challenge is?

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A: That can only be a ‘partial’ proof, but it is not total proof, of what your strongest area is. Just because you have a struggle in this area does not necessarily mean that your strongest power lies in that area. A person may struggle in certain areas because he is affected by sins committed in previous lifetimes, and he will continue to struggle with those sins or areas in his current lifetime, until he repairs them, but these challenges do not necessarily show a person what his or her strongest point is. R' Tzadok of Lublin does write in the name of the *Arizal* that a person’s main challenge on this world is with the sin that he committed in a previous lifetime, but this is still not proof as to what a person’s strongest point in.

Q13: I'm a bit confused. In previous classes the Rav has been explaining how joy is derived from the element of earth. In this class the Rav seems to be saying that joy comes from the element of water. Does joy come from the element of earth or water?

A: The general source of joy is in the element of earth, the force that actualizes our potential. The 16 different kinds of joy which we are in the middle of discussing all come from the element of earth. Before this lesson, there were 4 lessons about the joy which comes from branches of “earth”-of-earth, and next 4 classes are about the joy that comes from branches of water-of-earth. After discussing the 4 kinds of joy that come from water-of-earth, we will then progress to explain the joy that comes from “wind”-of-earth, and then “fire”-of-earth. Earth is the general root of joy, and it divides into 16 types, with 4 general categories: earth-of-earth, water-of-earth, wind-of-earth, and fire-of- earth. The first lesson (chapter 2) was about earth-of-earth-of-earth, the second lesson was about water-of-earth-of-earth, the third lesson was about wind-of-earth-of-earth, the fourth lesson was about fire-of-earth-of-earth, and the fifth lesson (this one) was about earth-of-water-of-earth.

May you all be written and sealed for a *gmar chasimah tovah*, and to merit a general salvation and a personal salvation.

7 | JOY FROM EXPANSION¹⁵

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about joy. Through this study, we hope to extend the joy of the festivals into the rest of the year, so that we can arrive at a deeper kind of joy.

In this lesson, we will learn about the “water”-of-water [of earth] in the soul, and how it relates to joy.

I. WATER – THE EXPANDING ELEMENT

Water, as we can see, does not stay in place. Water is an element that expands, as in the verse, “*Longer in measurement than the land, and wider than the sea.*”¹⁶ The nature of the water is that it widens and expands further. Just as this is true with physical water, so is this true about the water in the soul. The water in the soul makes a person to want to expand.

2. WATER CAN EXPAND AND CONTRACT

For everything that Hashem created, there is always a force that opposes it. This is called the concept of *dover v'hipuco*, a “thing and its opposite.” Since water has nature is to expand, there is also a nature in water to contract itself – the very opposite of expansion - due to the rule that everything in Creation also consists of its opposite.

3. RATZU V'SHOV – PROGRESSING AND RETREATING

The soul of a person follows a pattern called *ratzu v'shov*, “progressing and retreating”. These are like two different extremes of the soul: at one extreme, there is “*ratzu*”, our point of progressing, and at the other extreme, there is our point of “*shov*”, our point of retreat. Our “*ratzu*” is our point of expansion. Our “*shov*” is our point of contraction. These two extremes are in every person’s soul.

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It can be likened to inhaling and exhaling. We need to inhale, which is contracting, and we need to exhale, which is expanding. Just as with physical breathing we are either expanding or contracting, so is our soul expanding and contracting.

4. JOY COMES FROM EXPANSION, SADNESS COMES FROM CONTRACTION

The word *middos* (character traits) is from the word *medidah*, measuring. There is a measurement called *amah* [about 2 feet]. The Gemara describes two kinds of these measurements: an *amah atzeivah* (exact measurement) and *amah sochakas* (smiling measurement).¹⁷ An *amah atzeivah* is an exact measurement which stays in place - it is contracted - whereas an *amah sochakas* is a measurement that can be expanded to include more room. The concept of *atzvus*, sadness, is therefore connected with the power of contraction, whereas *simchah*, joy, is connected with concept of expansion. When one is sad, his soul has contracted. When one is joyous, his soul has expanded.

In the previous lessons, it was explained that joy comes from actualizing our potential. Now we are adding on that joy is also about expanding. These are two different ways to describe joy, but they are really one and the same, as we will explain.

When a potential force begins to become actualized, the potential force has expanded. When a potential force is not being actualized, it is contracted. Joy is all about the idea of expansion. True actualization of potential is when one properly “expands”, and this leads a person to joy.

GOOD EXPANSION VS. EVIL EXPANSION

The Sages teach that one of the traits of the wicked Bilaam was that he was a *nefesh rechavah*, a widened [haughty] soul.¹⁸ A “widened” soul is describing the concept of the soul’s expansion. If this is a trait of the wicked Bilaam, it seems to imply that expansion is evil. When is expansion good and holy (whereupon it leads to joy), and when is expansion evil? When one is properly expanding, in accordance with his soul’s powers, this is holy expansion, which leads to joy. When one is expanding past his soul’s actual limits, like it he is using his powers too quickly or in a high amount, this is evil expansion, and it does not lead to joy. It can be likened to a miscarriage.

¹⁷ Eruvin 3a

¹⁸ Avos 5:19

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For example, Chazal state that “Beautiful utensils, a beautiful home, and a beautiful wife expand a person’s mind.”¹⁹ Most commentaries understand this statement of the Gemara that these things are constructive to the mind (affording a person a certain degree of peace of mind), while the Chazon Ish understood that these expand the mind in a way that is spiritually detrimental. According to most explanations, however, this kind of “expansion” is constructive to the soul. This expansion to the mind is an example of the soul’s use of **water-of-water**.

However, if a person is expanding in a way that is not accordance with his soul, or he is expanding too much, this is called the negative trait of *taavah*, lust, and it is the trait of Bilaam, the “widened soul”.

PROPER EXPANSION – ONLY WHEN BALANCED WITH CONTRACTION

When is expansion good? As long as one can contain *dovor v'hipucho*, “something and its opposite”. When one can balance out his expansion with some contraction, the expansion is kept within healthy limits and then it is good and constructive. For example, when it comes to breathing, one expands and contract, by inhaling and exhaling. Both movements are needed. So too, in the soul, expansion in the soul is only good when one is also able to contract.

Here is another example from our physical world. A person needs to work by day, and sleep at night. There is a verse, “*Man goes to his action at morning, and to his work until evening*²⁰”, and there is a statement of the Gemara, “Night was not created except for sleep.”²¹ The daytime is meant for action, and nighttime was given for rest. In other terms, the day is the time for expansion, while the nighttime is for contraction. This is because there must be a balance between expansion and contraction.

The Gemara says that a person cannot go without rest for more than 3 days²², meaning that a person cannot keep expanding. But a person cannot either sleep all day, because “sleep is like a sixtieth of death”²³. A person cannot be in contraction mode all day. Every person needs both, expansion and contraction, and the balance between them. The evil trait of lust, *taavah*, is

19 Berachos 57b

20 Tehillim 104:23

21 Eruvin 65a

22 Nedarim 15a

23 Berachos 57b

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whenever has “expanded” too much in his soul [by going over the limit with his various desires]. It is also a kind of expansion which isn’t balanced by any contraction, resulting in too much expansion, at the expense of contraction.

Thus, we need the correct balance between expansion and contraction.

USING THE POWER OF CONTRACTION

Within the power of contraction itself, there are two important parts to understand.

One part of contraction is the power to establish clear boundaries for our soul. Another part of contraction is the ability to allow for shrinking, as the Gemara says, “It shrinks, and this is good for it.”²⁴

Let’s explain more about the second aspect of contract, which is its aspect of “shrinking”. Just as expansion enables actualization of potential, so is contraction (the essence of *atzvus*/sadness) a return of the actualized force, to its potential state. The Sages define this concept clearly in the statement, “Building of children is demolishing, and demolishing of the elderly is building.”²⁵ The building of children represents expansion that is imprecise, without any contraction to balance it, which eventually leads to destruction. The destruction of elderly people, which leads to building, represents the power of contraction, a return to the potential state, which enables the expansion to remain intact.

Thus, the power of expansion in the soul is only ‘one side of the coin’, and it is only proper when balanced by the power of contraction, the power to establish boundaries.

EXPANSION/FIRE AND CONTRACTION/EARTH

In terms of the elements, the power of contraction is rooted in the element of earth, whereas the power of expansion is rooted in the element of fire, which returns something to its potential form [just as fire reduces anything into ash and turns it back into earth]. Hence, when the soul’s elements

24 Shabbos 37b

25 Megillah 31b

of earth and fire are balanced, one can actualize his potential forces (expansion), as well as return a force to its potential state (contraction), and this balance leads to true joy.

EXAMPLE OF EXPANSION BALANCED WITH CONTRACTION

The Gemara says that one of the Sages, Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya, expounded every word “*es*” in the Torah. According to Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya, every time the Torah says the word “*es*”, it is coming to include something else. This is an example of the concept of expansion.

However, when he reached the verse “*Es Hashem Elokecha Tira*”, which says that a person must fear Hashem, he couldn’t expound the meaning of the word “*es*”, because there is nothing else that a person should fear except for Hashem (thus the word “*es*” in this verse could not be coming to include anything). After this, he stopped expounding the word *es*, and he retracted all of his teachings about the word “*es*”. His students asked him, “What will happen to all of your other teachings about “*es*”? He responded, “Just as I received reward for expounding, so will I receive reward for abstaining from expounding.”²⁶

The depth of his words was that when he expounded the verses of *es*, he was using the power of expansion - of actualizing a potential - and when he stopped expounding the word *es*, he was using the power of contraction, by returning the actualization back to its potential form. When he was explaining the meaning of *es*, he was using expansion, and by refraining to explain *es*, he was contracting.

He was saying that he will receive reward for both, for explaining and also for stopping to explain, and the depth of this was because the expansion and the contraction are really ‘two sides of the same coin’ that are each needed. How are expansion and contraction both ‘two sides of the same coin’? It is because, as mentioned earlier, there is a rule of *dovor v'hipucho*, that “each thing is also comprised of its opposite”. The opposites are both integrated with each other [each completing the other].

Based upon the above concept, we can learn that true joy comes to a person only when a person expands and he can also contract: when he can actualize potential, and he can also return the activated potential back to its potential state. One can only build a structure if he also knows how

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to demolish when he needs to, and one can only demolish properly if he knows how to build. The idea is that a person must know how to “expand” when he needs to, and also know how to “contract” when he needs to.

Thus, the idea of “expansion” only brings joy to a person if he also knows how to contract, when necessary. If a person cannot stop himself from expanding, he will not arrive at true joy.

Now we can understand more about the soul’s **water-of-water** [of earth]. The element of water, by nature, expands. **Water-of-water** is when there is continuous expanding. Water itself expands according to how much it needs, but **water-of-water** keeps expanding. Since expansion brings joy, a person who uses his **water-of-water** will derive great joy, but only if he knows how to balance his expansion with some contraction. Most people, when they expand, will expand too much. One needs to balance this extra expansion with some contraction.

SEVERAL WAYS TO UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT OF REJOICING IN SUFFERING

Chazal also refer to this concept (joy from the balance of expansion and contraction) as those who “rejoice in suffering” (*someiach b'yissurim*).²⁷ There are many different ways to understand the concept of rejoicing in suffering.

- 1) One reason is because the suffering cleanses a person from his sins. One can rejoice in the fact that suffering is purifying him from the harmful effects of sin.
- 2) An additional understanding of this is because a person can rejoice in the fact that he is acquiring the power of endurance (*savlanus*), the power to bear through suffering.
- 3) Another understanding is because the suffering purifies and subjugates the body, and this in turn reveals the light of one’s *neshamah*. This gives a person joy amidst the suffering. As an example, the Gemara says that some of the Sages became sick in the stomach, which purified their bodies and cleansed their souls.
- 4) Another understanding is because when a person reveals the power of *emunah* (faith in G-d): the fact that “everything which Hashem does is for the best”²⁸. When one contemplates this, he can draw joy onto himself, even amidst suffering.

²⁷ Maseches Derech Eretz 7:23, Yalkut Shimeoni 837, Talmud Yerushalmi Berachos 9:5

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- 5) On a subtler level, it is because a person can rejoice even amidst suffering because he recognizes that everything is ultimately the will of Hashem.
- 6) Another understanding of the concept – one that applies to our current discussion - is because in order for a person to have joy from “expansion”, he must also undergo some “contraction”. Thus, suffering enables a person to contract [since pain causes a person to contract more into himself and to become more inward], and this ultimately enables a person to derive more joy from his expansion, because now he will have a balance between his expansion and contraction. This particular understanding is the very depth behind the concept of rejoicing in suffering.

HOW TO BALANCE OUR EXPANSION WITH CONTRACTION

Now let us apply this idea practically.

All of us have merited to some degree to attain some recognition of our souls. Some people, by their very nature, are more inclined towards contraction, which is also called *gevurah* (restraint). This means that their souls are more rooted in *middas hadin* (the attribute of judgment). Others are more naturally inclined towards expansion, which means that they have a soul which is more rooted in *middas hachessed* (the attribute of kindness).

One needs to know what his personal soul needs are. One needs to know which things expand his *daas*, which settles and calms his mind, providing him with *yishuv hadaas* - as opposed to things which are merely *taavos*, unnecessary desires. Then one needs to figure out what the boundaries of these needs are, and how much he really needs of it - as opposed to the way of thinking of the world, which seeks all kinds of pleasures and comforts for their own sake. One will have true joy when he knows how to ‘contract’ his ‘expansion’: when he knows how to place limits on his expansion and on his comforts.

Most people, by nature, are expanding more than necessary – they are pursuing too many comforts which are beyond their true needs. This can either be a result of (1) The environment today, which has an unhealthy pursuit of too much pleasure and comfort, or (2) if a person has a lot of money to spend, so he pursues every kind of comfort available which money can buy, or (3) If a person is simply drawn towards many different *taavos*/desires that are available today.

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The more a person recognizes his soul, the better he can recognize which kinds of “expansion” give him *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind), and which kinds of expansion are simply unhealthy *taavos*.

The following is a very subtle point, but it is very fundamental. One should be prepared at any moment to “contract”, by being willing to give up any of his desires, in deference to the will of Hashem. There is a very fine, subtle line between “expanding” when we need to, versus “expanding” when it’s not necessary. One can know how to draw the line when he is willing to submit himself at any given moment to do the will of Hashem. Only when a person is prepared like this, can one truly “expand” in the right way, and thereby derive true, holy joy from the soul’s power of expansion.

7 | Q&A

Q1: The Rav used the example of sleep to illustrate the idea of contraction. But what happens when a person has difficulty sleeping? Does this mean that he cannot “contract” right now (and therefore it’s possible for a person to be in a situation where “contraction” simply isn’t possible)?

A: Trouble with feeling asleep doesn’t mean that a person cannot “contract” right now. Rather, trouble with feeling asleep can be a result of any of the following factors: (1) The person was overly active beforehand. Too much activity can sometimes prevent a person from falling asleep later. (2) In other situations, trouble falling asleep can be a sign that the person’s body doesn’t require sleep right now. (3) It may also be a result of bothersome thoughts or emotions, which are disturbing him and therefore keeping him from falling asleep.

Q2: How many powers in the soul are there? Are there 4 elements, or are there 16 elements?

A: There are 4 general forces in the soul, which are the 4 elements. They are the roots of all other forces in the soul. Within each of the 4 elements, there are another 4 elements, adding up for a total of 16 branches. Each element also contains many different properties. For example, the element of fire can illuminate, and it can also burn. Fire will always have these qualities, but when it comes to “earth-of-fire”, the fire will not only illuminate and burn, it will also cause “scattering”, because the “earth” within the fire causes fire to have a “scattering” effect, just as the earth itself is a scattered element. “Water”-of-fire will add an additional aspect to the element of fire, by adding properties of

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water to the fire's properties, and "wind"-of-fire will add properties of wind to the element of fire, etc.

Q3: What does a person do if he's stuck in contraction mode and he wants to get into expansion mode, like if he's stuck in earth or sadness?

A: This is a very important and fundamental question, and it has a very important and fundamental answer. Every person has a point he is always opened towards [i.e. reading or listening to music]. One can always expand towards that point, even if only a little, and this will be helpful to him to create some "expansion" and come out of his "contraction" mode.

Q4: What if a person is in a situation where he is so contracted – because he is so sad that he cannot find anything he's open to right now?

A: That can only happen when a person is in a very deep depression! In a normal case, any person should be able to find a point that he's open towards, and he will be able to create some expansion for himself. But if a person is in a very deep depression, he will need to take medications and he will need psychiatric assistance, along with doing inner work with his soul.

Q5: If a person becomes sad whenever he thinks of his troubles, is it better for him to avoid thinking of his troubles altogether? Or should he try to force himself and learn how to rejoice in his suffering?

A: Sometimes a person should "run away" from his troubles, to a certain extent. One certainly doesn't need to be focused all the time on his troubles. Only a person who cannot stand any bit of suffering at all should run away completely from thinking about any of his suffering. But the average person, who is able to handle a bit of suffering, is able to learn how to cope with his suffering and to deal with his troubles, and at times, he can also "run away" a bit from his suffering, by engaging in various activities that will take his mind off his troubles. There is certain validity in doing this, at least for a short amount of time. In a usual situation, a person will need to learn how to cope with troubles and learn how to accept his suffering with love, and at other times, he should also take his mind off it and 'run away' a bit from his troubles.

Q6: If a person doesn't love to cook, should she force herself to cook even though she doesn't feel like cooking right now, or should she ask someone else for help?

A: Is your question based on this lesson or is this a separate issue?

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Q7: Yes, because the Rav said that one can learn how to rejoice in his suffering, but I am not sure if I should do this, or if I should just take my mind off it. I have the option of either facing my suffering, by forcing myself to cook even though I'm suffering right now and I don't feel like cooking – or, I can work around having to cook, such as asking someone else to cook for me.

A: A question like this is very complex. It seems that there is also a separate issue here, the fact that you hate cooking. We need to know other factors in order to answer this question, such as why exactly you don't want to cook, if you are being affected by something from your past, etc. Also, even if someone else would cook for you, would this bother your husband and children...? So there are other factors which we would need to know, in order to answer this question. Usually, as a general course of action, it is not advisable to run away from a difficulty, and it is better to cope with it, at least somewhat, instead of completely running from it.

Q8: If the element of earth brings joy by actualizing one's potential, how do we explain sadness, which also comes from the element of earth? Is sadness the result of earth when there is no actualization of potential?

A: Sadness either comes from a lack of actualized potential, or it can come from too much 'movement' of the soul, which is too much 'expansion', and this causes the soul to revert back to its potential state, when there is no more actualization. In either scenario, whether there is absence of actualized potential, or whether the actualized potential has reverted back to its potential state (due to too much expansion/actualization), there is currently an absence of actualized potential. Thus, sadness always comes from a lack of actualized potential, which is an issue in one's element of earth.

8 | JOY FROM DIVERSITY²⁹

WIND-OF-WATER: DERIVING JOY FROM DIFFERENT DIVERSE SOURCES OF PLEASURE

We have merited thus far to learn about *simchah* (joy). In this lesson we will learn about joy that we can derive from “wind”-of-water.

The element of water in the soul is the source of pleasure. What is “wind”-of-water?

(This is not referring to the general element of wind (which we will discuss later, with Hashem’s help), but to the aspect of wind that exists within the element of water.)

Wind scatters into the four directions of the world. In this aspect, it is very different than the other three elements. Whereas the elements of fire, water, and earth are essentially one unit, which are kept together, the wind moves all over the world. It is never in one place. The four directions of the world enable four different directions of wind. Wind is never limited to one particular direction. It can move in opposite directions at once.

Since the wind in the soul moves the soul in different directions, and the water in the soul is the source of pleasure, “wind”-of-water is when a person receives different kinds of pleasure and vitality, even from things which he isn’t used to. It is an ability which enables a person to get pleasure from all different angles.

In contrast with “earth”-of-water restrains a person’s pleasure, causing a person to limit himself to certain pleasures, “wind”-of-water enables a person to try different venues of pleasure: to draw vitality from other, diverse kinds of pleasure. It frees a person from his “earth”, opening up new sources of joy to a person. Through “wind-of-water”, a person can overpower the “earth” within his element of water, and go free from being too restrained, so that he can try new kinds of pleasure.

EXAMPLE 1 - UNWILLING TO TRY NEW KINDS OF FOOD

Practically speaking, the following are some examples when people lack “wind-of-water” in their soul. There are people who only enjoy doing the same thing since their childhood. Even when they

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stop pursuing their childhood antics, their pleasure in adulthood will still closely mimic what they enjoyed as children. There are also some people who will only enjoy the kind of food they grew up with. They have difficulty trying other kinds of food. On Shabbos, when other kinds of food are on the table, they won't want to try anything new that they didn't grow up with since childhood. By a family celebration, this kind of person will only look for the kind of food he is used to eating.

Usually this problem will become more magnified after a person marries. If a man only enjoys the food he grew up with, and his wife serves him a kind of food that he isn't used to, he may not want to try it all, simply because he isn't used to it. Understandably, this is very difficult for the wife who has worked so hard to prepare his meals. The wife may think that her husband's refusal to try her dishes is because he thinks his mother's food is better than hers, so she feels hurt and insulted. But the reality may be completely different. It can very well be because the husband has a nature not to try new food that he isn't used to, because he sticks to the familiar [his nature is earth-of-water, which limits his pleasure to the familiar, and he is missing wind-of-water in his nature, which would enable him to try new venues of pleasure].

On the other end of the spectrum of those who have a lot of wind in their souls, who are always looking for new experiences. When wind dominates the soul, people seek all kinds of pleasure and exotic kinds of food, etc.

So there are two extremes. Wind-people are will go to any extreme in order to try new and exotic forms of pleasure, and at the other extreme are earth-people, who are too stiff and will never try anything new. For those who are dominated by earth, we cannot tell them to change their nature and start eating new things every day that they aren't used to. But they should certainly try to eat something new on *Shabbos Kodesh*, which is an appropriate time to taste new pleasures. We certainly should not be deriving our main pleasure from food, but on *Shabbos Kodesh*, a person should be open to try new kinds of food.

EXAMPLE 2 – COLORS

The above examples were more related to physicality. Now we shall talk about subtler, more spiritual examples of the idea.

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Each of us can think of a certain color that we like. What is the source of enjoying one particular color more than another? There are several deep reasons behind the mystery of what draws us towards certain colors.

A person may be drawn towards dimmer and darker colors [i.e. black or deep blue], colors that are more “confining” by their very nature, because the person may desire the sense of confinement that dark colors convey. Why would a person feel a desire for confinement? It may either be because the person prefers to stay reserved, because he doesn’t enjoy socializing with others, or it may be the opposite, that a person is socializes too much with others and deep down he wishes he could find privacy and be in a confined space.

Alternatively, a person may desire colors which are expansive, such as white, or other light colors [i.e. yellow]. This may be because a person feels an expansion when he looks at these colors, just as light colors shine brighter and are therefore more “expansive”, or, a person’s liking towards these expansive kinds of colors may be coming from a desire to expand so that he can break boundaries.

But there are some people who are drawn towards certain colors simply because that is what they are used to since they were children. Later in adulthood, a person may choose to have his house painted with the colors of the home that he grew up with. The person just wants to keep things the same way he is used to. Others are always changing the color scheme in their house. They always want a new look in their home, because the same old colors become boring to them. Understandably, when a person keeps changing the design of the home whenever he grows tired of the old look, this is not a sensible way to live.

If a person keeps changing the home in order to keep up with latest styles, he is simply being superficial. But here we are dealing with a subtler reason why a person may want to keep changing the look of his home: because he has a personality to keep switching and replacing things, because he likes to keep trying new things by his very nature.

EXAMPLE 3 – MUSIC AND SONG

Another example of the idea is when it comes to listening to songs. There are calm, classic songs and there are livelier kinds of songs, and there are slow songs and fast songs. Everyone feels drawn towards certain songs.

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One should clarify why he is drawn towards certain songs. A quiet, slow song may be saddening, and sometimes a person likes to hear sad songs because the sadness in his soul wants to hear these songs and to feel more validated in the sadness. Or, a person may desire a loud or fast song, because he finds that the liveliness of the song takes him out of his sadness.

There are also different styles of music and song, such as Eastern-style or Western-style, etc. In most cases, a person likes to hear the kinds of songs and music that he grew up with. This is an example of being stuck and confined, a dominance of “earth”-of-water (restrained to the routine forms of pleasure). With the correct use of “wind”-of-water, a person can try listening to new styles of songs and music and he can enjoy them, and he becomes freed from his inner confinement.

The following example is more relevant to men. In *shul*, on Shabbos and on Yom Tov, people like to hear the same old *niggunim* (tunes and songs), as well as the same old *nusach* of *davening*, which they grew up with. Sometimes a person has to be in a different *shul* on Shabbos or Yom Tov, and often a person will find it difficult to *daven* in a *shul* with a different *nusach* than what he is used to. It is even harder for people to get used to the different *niggunim* of another *shul*. To some degree, this lack of openness is really a “confinement” for the soul. A person really needs to be open to hearing and enjoying different *niggunim*, so that he shouldn’t become so stuck in the routine that he is used to. (Of course, a person should only be open to hearing *niggunim* that are sourced in *kedushah*).

EXAMPLE 4 – NEW WAYS OF THINKING

Now we will give an example that is more delicate, pertaining to one’s world of thought. Every person has certain thinking patterns. Chazal state that every person has different *de’os*, different ways of thinking.³⁰ No two people think exactly alike. In a family, sometimes there can be siblings who think alike, but it’s only because they grew up in the same house. The siblings will think in a similar way to each other, not because it is their own thinking, but because they know that in their home, this is the way to think.

While it is certainly true that a person must listen to his parents and accept the *mesorah* (chain of tradition) which they are giving over to him – “*Do not forsake the Torah of your mother*” - there is

³⁰ Berachos 58a

still a world of holy individuality which each person must uncover within himself. Each person has a uniqueness which must be uncovered. Therefore, in addition to whatever a person has received from his parents and teachers and from his environment, a person needs to open new ways of thinking for himself.

A person with too much “earth” in his soul will not want to accept anything else that he didn’t hear from his parents or teachers. He will never want to hear a new perspective and he will not want to be original. When a person uses the “wind” of his soul, he becomes open to new directions of thinking, as long as they are sourced in holiness. On the practical level, he can keep acting as he is used to, and he doesn’t need to change his behavior just because there are other ways of thinking. But in his mind, he can certainly accept that there are different ways of thinking and he can attribute value and importance to new ways of thinking that he isn’t used to.

Yehoshua was called a “man of spirit”, which meant that he knew how to lead the people according to each person’s particular spirit (*ruach*), he knew how to relate to each person’s particular ways of thinking and guide them accordingly. Every person on his own level can also understand other ways of thinking. A parent needs to be able to relate to different kinds of children, who have different ways of thinking, even though this may go against his particular way of thinking. This is the wind in the soul which frees a person from being too confined to his earth.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN “EARTH” AND “WATER”

We have so far given examples of the difference between earth and wind. Earth is when a person sticks to routine. When earth is impaired, a person becomes stuck and confined to the patterns he is used to and he won’t be open to change. Wind is when a person is open to new directions and he is willing to make changes. When wind becomes impaired, a person always wants to change and replace things, and the same old routines become boring to him. As explained here, each of these powers can either be used in a constructive way, or in a detrimental way. From wind, we can expand ourselves and derive joy from other sources that we aren’t used to.

DERIVING JOY FROM MAKING USE OF OUR BEST ABILITY IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

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As explained in the previous lesson, each person has his best ability, and one needs to also actualize it. One needs to first identify what his strongest ability, and then he must seek how he can actualize it. It was also explained that one should not limit actualizing his best ability to one area alone. This confines the soul. Instead, one should seek different ways of how to actualize his best ability. After each of us merits discovering our best ability, we then need to seek how we can actualize our best ability.

Here is an example. If a person identifies that his strongest power is giving and being kind to others (which shows that his strongest element is water), one should think: What are the different ways of how I can utilize my ability of giving? A person can be giving to others in the form of kind actions, by helping others when they are in need, or by assisting them financially, or by delivering food to others in need, or by gladdening a *chosson* and *kallah*, etc. A person may give to others in the form of kind words, or in the form of a smile, etc. A person should identify in which particular scenario he is more giving in.

After identifying the main scenario in which you are more giving in (or the scenario where you are using your best ability), the next step is to try to expand upon that giving (or whatever your best ability is).

For example, if you identify that you are mainly giving when it comes to financially assisting others, though you may already be giving to others financially – like if Hashem has blessed you with a lot of money, and you give a lot of it to *tzedakah* - you can still think of new ways to help others financially. Others may need financial assistance when they are making a *simchah*, or when they are making *Yom Tov*, etc. There are also different amounts of money to give: there are small amounts you can give to others (which you haven't yet given), and there are bigger amounts you can give to others. You can also try giving anonymously, when in the past you were not. There are many other ways as well how you can expand upon your giving.

Generally, you should only be making use of your best ability (in this case, giving) when it will work for you and when it makes sense for you to do, and when you are comfortable doing so. This is the general way of how a person can make use of his best ability in different situations. On a more individual level, though, a person should also try using his best ability in scenarios he isn't used to, so that he can make more use of his "wind" and expand more. One should do this for the purpose of expanding his soul.

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A person needs to know what works for him personally and to use his best ability in the situations that work best for him, and this should be one's general approach. This is a use of the element of earth, because it enables a person to act with precision and accuracy. In addition to this, sometimes a person should also try to make use of his best ability, even in situations which he isn't used to. This activates the "wind" in the soul, and it provides an expansion for the soul, by affording a person new ways to make use of his best ability.

To illustrate the idea of being open to trying new experiences, there is a famous statement in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* that a person will be judged for not enjoying the appropriate pleasures of this world, such as the scenic views of nature. This implies that a person needs to expand in his soul, by being open to try new things.

In summary, a person needs a balance between his elements of earth and wind. A person needs to make use of his "earth" by being precise, by using his best ability in areas that work best for him. And along with this, a person also needs to make use of his "wind" by trying to use his best ability in areas which he isn't used to, because this expands his soul. True joy can be derived from this balance.

8 | Q&A

Q1: The Rav said that a person should be open to new ways of thinking, in addition to receiving his mesorah. What if a person was raised to think that the only correct way of thinking is the way of his mesorah (chain of tradition), and that everyone else is incorrect?

A: Even when people are raised to think in a certain way and they are taught that all other ways of thinking are not correct, this does not mean that everyone else who doesn't think like them is going to *Gehinnom* when they will arrive in the world of truth. It just means "This is how we live. This is how we are choosing to live our life." Dispelling the ways of thinking of other people is just a way of conveying that "this is how we are choosing to live our life", but not that the other people are simply and completely wrong.

Q2: If I try understanding that there are other ways of thinking, I am afraid that I will come to act like them.

A: This is a very, very, very good question.

If a person is a totally immature level, he will become confused when he thinks about all the other ways of how people think, and it will be jolting to him. He will think that only his way of thinking is correct, and that everyone else in the world is mistaken. When a person gets a bit mature, he understands that there are two different ways of thinking. Moshe was truth and Aharon was peace. Just because Moshe's way was "truth", did that mean that Aharon's way of "peace" was wrong? Some people have an *avodah* to be more truthful, which is the way of Moshe, and others have an *avodah* to be more peaceful, which is the way of Aharon.

Certainly a person should not be open ways that are against the Torah. But if we are analyzing a way that any of our *Gedolim* throughout the generations took, then we must realize that any of these ways are valid. Each person has his own private *cheilek* that he should become connected to, which is his individual path, and he must remain with it and not give it up, in favor of another approach.

A person may become shocked somewhat by the different ways he comes across, and it will shake him up a bit, and there is always a danger of becoming a bit unstable because one may want to try other paths. However, if a person is already somewhat mature and stable, he will only be getting closer to a world of truth, as he takes this path of trying to understand valid other ways of thinking.

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Now, when exactly is a person ready for this? That is a very subtle point to know. That is why there are many communities who shun any other way of thinking other than their own, because they are afraid that people will become too shaken up when they understand the truths in the approaches of others. There is certainly truth to this, because there are indeed some people who do not take to this well, and they become confused by other approaches.

Therefore, when we are dealing with the general public, people should stick to the approach of the way they were brought up and they should not try to understand the thinking of others. But, as individuals, each person is able to become more truthful, and to begin understanding others' way of thinking. This doesn't mean that anyone has to change his path and adapt the paths of others, because in the end, each person has his own personal *cheilek* (portion) that he must cling to.

Q3: Why is understanding the way of thinking of others a way to bring joy?

A: By understanding opposites a person comes closer to completion and this is what brings him joy. For example, man and woman are opposites and they have very different natures, yet their happiness comes through marriage, through the combination of opposites.

Q4: How can a person have joy when he realizes that he needs to change his way of thinking? How does this bring joy to a person...?

A: We shall emphasize again that it was a very subtle point. A person has to be somewhat settled and stable in his soul, in order to begin understanding the ways of thinking of others, without getting harmed in the process. It can be compared to picking a fruit from a tree before it is ripe. We need to wait until the fruit ripens before we can pick it, so that we can enjoy a sweet-tasting fruit. So too, in order to gain from understanding the ways of thinking of others, a person first needs to make sure he is somewhat stable and settled, and then he won't become too fazed when he discovers other ways of thinking that he wasn't to. One must be able to stick to his own path, even after understanding that there are other paths. Otherwise, he isn't ready to understand other ways of thinking. If one isn't ready, he should not try it, and he should remain with the understanding of his own path, and he should not try to understand the paths and thinking of others, because it will just shake him up too much and it will just harm him. Such a person should avoid the approach of "thought", of understanding new ways of thinking, and instead he can bring some change into his life through "action", by using the other examples we gave, such as by trying new foods, or by getting used to different colors, or trying different kinds of music, etc.

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Q5: What is the meaning of understanding different ways that are truthful? Does it mean that we should understand all of the truth, or different ways of truth?

A: The word *emes* (truth) begins with the letter *aleph* and ends with the letter *tav*, the first and last letters of the *aleph beis*, implying that the truth must cover everything, from beginning until end. *Emes* includes all possibilities. Most people only see the beginning of a matter, or the middle of a matter, or the end of a matter, but they not see all three. *Emes* is only when one has the comprehensive view, when he sees and the full picture – the beginning, middle and end of a matter. Only when one sees the complete picture can he see the truth. For example, for every *possuk* in the Torah, there is the commentary of Rashi, the Ramban, and the Ibn Ezra. If a person only studies on these commentaries, he isn't aware of the other possible meanings of the *possuk*, so he won't arrive at the true understanding of the *possuk*. This is the implication of the term “*Toras Emes*”, “Torah of truth”.

Q6: After a person identifies his or her strongest ability, how long does it take for a person to strengthen it to the point that he can be in touch with it freely, as opposed to only specific situations, so that he is “free” to use it any time?

A: The first way, as explained in this lesson, is to take your best ability and “break it” up into different categories of how it can be used, and to see many the different possibilities of how you can use it. A second way to use it freely is to sometimes use your best ability even in areas that you aren't used to. This is not a matter that takes a specific amount of time. This is an inner process, and it takes a lot of inner work, so we cannot give a specific amount of time to calculate it.

Q7: Would any person on any level able to use their strongest ability whenever they want to? For example, a person identifies that their strongest power is connection, but there is a difficult person in his life who he finds difficult to connect with. How can such a person use his strongest ability in this situation?

A: It means that even his strongest ability has its limits. It is too high of a level for a person to be able to use his strongest ability in any scenario. In this particular case, where one's strongest point is his ability to love people and connect with others, but he finds it too difficult to connect with a certain person, he can still try finding at least one way to connect to that person and thereby increase his love towards that person. Although it won't be the full level of connection that he enjoys with all other people, it will still be some form of connection to the other person that will be

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satisfying enough. A person should take note of any progress that he has in trying to connect to that person who he finds difficult.

Q8: Is this an ordinary level for any person to reach?

A: It is a long process that one needs to traverse. There will be many challenges along the way, even when it comes to using one's strongest ability.

Q9: Can one use his strongest ability in every possible situation and use it to overcome any obstacle?

A: That will only be possible in Mashiach's times. No one today can be perfect.

Q10: Is it possible for a person to connect to his strongest ability in any situation and he isn't dependent on any other external factors to make it work?

A: The more a person is activating his best ability, the more he is revealing it and actualizing it, so he will be more in touch with it, and it will become more natural for him to access it more often, and he won't be dependent on any outer factors in order to make use of it. By contrast, if one isn't revealing his best ability that much, he will be dependent on outer factors in order to make use of his best ability.

9 | JOY FROM NEW BEGINNINGS³¹

FIRE-OF-WATER: GAINING VITALITY FROM RENEWAL

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about *simchah*, joy. In this lesson we will learn about joy that can be derived from “fire”-of-water.

Water, as explained earlier, is the source of vitality in the soul. Fire is the source of the soul’s renewal. When one uses the element of fire in the soul, he can draw forth renewal. We can see that earth stays in place, and so does water. Air is also constantly in existence. Fire, though, needs something to burn, in order to continue existing. When there is nothing to burn, fire ceases to exist.

“Fire-of-water” is when a person finds renewal and thereby gains vitality. When a person has the birth of a new child or he makes a celebration, or even when one buys new clothing or a new house, there is a certain feeling of renewal, and this gives a person vitality. That is the power of “fire-of-water” at work.

THE POWER TO START FROM A NEW BEGINNING

In the previous lesson, when we discussed wind-of-water, we described the ability to find several different sources of vitality (water) which can provide a person with joy. In this lesson, where we are dealing with fire-of-water, we will apply this concept to the idea of fire/renewal. Whereas wind-of-water is the ability to find different sources of vitality, which is to keep adding on different sources of vitality for oneself, fire-of-water is not about finding different sources of vitality, but about creating a new, original source of vitality.

“Fire-of-water” is about finding a new beginning. This is because fire is about newness and renewal. When one finds a new, original source of vitality, this is the “fire” of water. With wind-of-water, one adds on to his already existing vitality, by finding different angles to get vitality from. With fire-of-water, one starts from a new beginning.

CONTINUATION VS. BEGINNING ANEW

There are two different perspectives when it comes to viewing Creation [and how we go through our life experience], which are each fundamental. One fundamental power is called “continuation”, and another fundamental power is called “beginning”. The *Avos* (forefathers), Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and the *shevatim* (12 sons of Yaakov) who came after them, were all continuing the path which came before them. We are charged with the obligation of “When will my actions reach that of my forefathers?”³² We need to continue the Divine service which our forefathers began. We are each a continuation of our *Avos*, of the collective whole of the Jewish people. This is also called *hishtalshelus* (the chain).

In terms of time, there are the concepts of past, present, and future. The present is a continuation of the past, and the future will be a continuation of the present. In terms of the soul, this concept is manifest in “*Ask your forefathers, and they will tell you*”, meaning that one needs to ask his parents about the *mesorah* (chain of tradition) which has been passed down to us throughout the generations, all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu. Everything we have in our hands today is a “branch” that continues from the “root”.

Whatever we do today is an addition (*tosefes*) upon what was already done. This is also hinted to by the verse, “*And these are the offspring of Yaakov, Yosef*”, meaning that Yosef was the *tosefes*, the “addition”, the continuation of Yaakov Avinu.

A second perspective is that we are a new beginning. Chazal state, “Man was created individual.”³³ Each person is an individual, so each person is a new beginning of something. Chazal also state, “A person is obligated to say that the entire world was created for me.”³⁴ Chazal also teach that all souls were once part of the soul of Adam HaRishon.³⁵ This means that just as Adam HaRishon was the only person in the world at the beginning of Creation, so is each of us, who were all contained in his soul, like the only person in the world – meaning, that each of us has our own individuality, and we are not merely a continuation.

³² Tanna D'vei Eliyahu 25

³³ Sanhedrin 37a

³⁴ ibid

³⁵ Nahar Shalom (Reshash): 112

NEW BEGINNINGS IN PLACE, TIME, AND SOUL

Our Sages teach that everything in Creation manifests in time, place and soul. Let's see how there can be renewal and new beginnings in each of these three areas.

In terms of "place", the first beginning was, simply speaking, the fact that Hashem created the heavens and earth. From the perspective of **continuation**, the heavens and earth today are a continuation of the original heavens and earth which Hashem created. When a person builds a house, it is merely an addition to the earth, a continuation of the earth. The earth already existed before us, and when we make a new house, we are merely continuing the earth and adding upon it.

But there is also another perspective: **renewal**. We say each day in *davening* that Hashem renews Creation every day.³⁶ Therefore, in the inner dimension of reality, there is constantly a new Creation. The sefer *Nefesh HaChaim* states that every moment, there is an entirely new Creation in place of the one before it. Therefore, the sky and earth which we see every day is not the same sky and earth as the day before it.

In terms of "time", the beginning of time was the first day which Hashem made. All of time that exists today is a continuation of the original six days of Creation. Time, itself, is a continuation of the original time that Hashem first made. That is all from the perspective of "**continuation**." But from the perspective of "**renewal**", Hashem renews time every *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, and [on a smaller scale], every *Rosh Chodesh* is also a renewal of time. As a hint, the very word *Chodesh* (month) also means "new", because *Rosh Chodesh* is a time of renewal, and it is also a renewal of time itself.

In terms of "soul", from the perspective of **continuation**, a person is a continuation of his father, grandfather, and ancestors, all the way back to the *Avos*. But from the perspective of **renewal**, each person is renewed every day when his soul returns to him upon awakening, and it is as if he is being born anew. Hashem is constantly creating every person anew, as it were.

One who converts to Judaism was previously a gentile, and a moment later, upon converting, he becomes a Jew. Chazal state that this conversion to Judaism is like becoming born again³⁷. Just as a gentile can become a Jew and he becomes an entirely new creation, so can a Jew become a different reality, an entirely new person. This is also called the power of *tshuvah* (repenting).

³⁶ *המחדש בכל יום טוב מעשה בראשית* – "He renews, in His goodness, the act of Creation"

³⁷ Yevamos 48b

The depth of *tshuvah*, as the Rambam says, is that the person is no longer the same person as before. Through *tshuvah*, one becomes “a new creation”.³⁸ Doing *tshuvah* essentially enables a new beginning for the person. This is also the depth of why the Ten Days of Repentance are at the beginning of the year [immediately after Rosh HaShanah]: just as the beginning of the year is a renewal of time, so can a person become a new person entirely, at this new beginning.

The power to become new again means that a person at any given moment can become new. The more a person connects to this power of renewal in the soul, he accesses the joy that can be gained from “fire-of-water”. How does this provide joy? This is because, as explained in the previous lessons, joy is essentially the actualization of potential, and there is no greater actualization than becoming new again. Thus, when one becomes new again, this provides a person with a very deep joy.

I. REMINDING OURSELVES THAT WE ARE BEING CREATED ANEW

Until now we have been explaining the concept of **fire-of-water**: the renewal that brings about vitality. Now we shall see how we can use this power practically.

Every person has these two different powers in the soul: continuation, and newness. Either we are continuing something from before, or we are starting again anew.

An important example is waking up in the morning. Some people when they get up in the morning will think about what yesterday was like and how they can continue as yesterday. They plan their day today based on what they did yesterday. While this has some gains to it, a person cannot look at today purely as a continuation of yesterday. While you do need to continue today what you began yesterday, your day should not be limited to that perspective.

Others get up in the morning with a feeling of renewal, and they view today as a new beginning. They feel in their souls how they can begin again anew. That is indeed what the morning is meant for.

Practically speaking, upon getting up in the morning, a person should remind himself that Hashem has created him anew, and that he can begin from a new place today. This is a deep, subtle point in the soul to access, because generally, a person is stuck in the past and he views today as a

³⁸ Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4

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continuation of yesterday. Instead let's access the deep power within us to view today as an entirely new beginning.

The following is an example to help us relate better to the idea. Let's say a person was in a life-threatening situation, G-d forbid, and he was saved. After going through this, he can feel like a whole new person, because he has a new appreciation for life now. He is accessing his power of beginning again anew.

Every person as well is also able to access this power of renewal, after going through any setback or whenever when he feels exhausted or down. This is a subtle power in the soul. One can stop what he's doing, compose himself, and access the renewal in his soul, and thereby begin again anew.

In summary, there are two parts to how we can access the power of renewal (or beginning again anew) every day. Upon awakening, one should think that he is starting a new beginning today. One can continue to access this renewal throughout the day as well, whenever he's in the middle of something, especially when he's in the middle of something difficult. In that way, one extends the renewal of the morning into the rest of the day as well.

2. THINKING OF HOW WE CAN RESTART OUR LIFE FROM THE BEGINNING

Another way to access the power of renewal is by thinking each day of how we can start over again our life. Each person can think to himself, "How would I want my life to look like, if I can start over again?"

Of course, a person might say that this is pointless, because it doesn't help him. While that is certainly a logical argument, the gain of this thinking is that it connects a power to the power of renewal. Even if you cannot renew your life totally right now, you can certainly renew it somewhat, by accessing the power of renewal, which is when you think about how you would want your life to look like if you could start over again.

Firstly, thinking about this connects you to the power of renewal, and secondly, it helps you think of ways to actually renew your life, and you will see how you can make positive changes in your life.

3. THINKING OF YOUR PROGRESS UNTIL NOW

An additional way to access renewal, which is very fundamental, is to reflect on your progress. Instead of simply thinking “How can I go on from here, at this point...?”, think: “How far have I come until now?” By reminding yourself of the progress you have made until this point, you gain more renewal than simply thinking of how you can move on.

Here are some examples. You can set aside time during the day and think of where you have come until now. Think about all that you have gained from the earliest age you remember. Try splitting it up into 10-year periods: for example, what gains and accomplishments did I have through the age of 30-40 and 40-50, etc.?

If you are married for many years, it is important to remember from time to time: “What was I like when I got married, and how have I changed since then, for the better?” Go through all the different areas and see how you have grown. This is not simply a way to bring back memories, but a way to go back to the beginning of things. In this way, you can remove yourself from being stuck in the present, by bringing yourself back to the beginning. You can keep going back to the beginning of things, through your soul. You thereby gain the power to begin again anew, in any situation.

Most people find it too hard to begin again anew, because they only know how to live in the moment, and they see today as a continuation of yesterday. But the more a person trains himself to think about beginnings, he is able to take himself out of the present and begin again anew as he is the midst of anything. One can do this in the morning, and also throughout the day.

JOY FROM THE BALANCE OF CONTINUATION AND RENEWAL

Doing *teshuva* includes reflecting about the past, such as regretting sins committed in the past. But *teshuva* also includes becoming new again, becoming a whole new person. One needs to balance out these two abilities. On one hand, a person needs to be aware of the past and how to continue from there (and what not to continue), but on the other hand a person also needs to know how to make a new beginning. If one only thinks about his renewal, he will become imbalanced. He will only seek renewal, more and more new things, and he will lose inner stability with this. One needs to balance this out with the power of continuation. With this balance of newness and continuation, one will gain true joy.

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So there are two parts to joy, of actualizing potential. One part is to keep actualizing our potential, and this process itself gives us continuous joy. This joy comes from the power of continuation. Another part to joy is when we find renewal in ourselves, when we keep becoming new again. This joy comes from renewal. With the balance of these two powers together, continuation and renewal, one can derive joy from **fire-of-water-of-earth**.

9 | Q&A

_Q1: Can one's strongest power change, if one is strengthening other powers in the soul?

A: Every person has a strongest power and it doesn't change. It may not always be obvious, though. Other abilities in the soul can also be accessed and they may take temporary center stage as they are being manifest, but the strongest power never changes. Although temporarily it may seem like other abilities in one's soul are stronger, that is only for the time being. In essence, the strongest power in the soul never changes. It is just not always at the forefront.

Q2: Can a person work on more than one power in the soul at the same time?

A: It is possible to do, but generally, this is not recommended because it makes a person lose focus. One needs to be focused throughout any of his inner work, so he needs to work on developing one power at a time, and he should remain focused on working with only his strongest power. Sometimes a person needs to work on developing more than one power at once, when the situation calls for it. But generally, one needs to remain focused on working with one power of the soul.

Q3: Is there any way to know when one is ready to move on to developing another power in the soul?

A: This is a very fundamental question. Usually if a person feels that he no longer wants to work with one power in the soul and he is ready to move on to working with another power, he may do so, but that is only when he feels that he has become worn out by working with the same power, and it is not the ideal situation. Generally, the proper time to move on to another power is after you have worked with a power in the soul and it has become natural and simple for you to use.

Q4: Is there a way for a person to know when he can access specific powers in the soul?

A: There is a level called "soul", and a level called "time". In the level of "soul", a person can access any power in the soul depending on his own personal level. In the level of "time", a person can access powers of the soul depending on the time of the year. For example, in the level of time, Rosh HaShanah is a time to access the power of *yirah* (awe), Yom Kippur is the time to access *rachamim* (compassion), etc. Certain times are meant to access certain powers of the soul because there is a spiritual illumination available during those times which enable a person to access certain powers in the soul more easily.

10 | JOY FROM FULFILLMENT³⁹**EARTH-OF-WIND-OF-EARTH: WHEN THE ACTUALIZATION OF POTENTIAL IS LONG-LASTING**

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we will now discuss the joy that one can derive from the element of wind (of earth), and specifically, we will discuss joy that we can derive from the “earth”-of-wind-of-earth. The element of wind is all about movement, the motivating force behind this.

Movement is the force that brings about the actualization of a potential. We can see from the physical world that when one moves, he becomes happier. Children move a lot and therefore they are usually happier. This is because their element of wind dominates, so they move more. Their excess movement and energy activates their element of wind and puts them in a happy mood. If we learn how to use the power of movement to bring out our potential, this is wind-of-earth, and this is where we can derive truer joy from.

In a previous lesson, we dealt with “wind-of-earth”-of-earth, but here we are dealing with “earth-of-wind”-of-earth. Let us explain the difference between these two different sources of joy.

Earth is different than the other elements in that it has permanence. Fire eventually burns out, and wind dies down and stops blowing. Water will stay as it is, but if the water heats up, it will evaporate. Earth is the only element which stays intact. The other three active elements are temporary, whereas earth is consistent and permanent. A mountain, or any solid block of earth, will stay in its place for thousands of years.

Now let’s understand earth-of-wind-of-earth. A person may activate his potential, but it is only temporary. This is the element of wind, which has a temporary effect and which doesn’t last. With the element of earth, a person activates his potential and it continues to last afterwards. Here is an example of the difference between temporary actualization of potential, with long-term actualization of potential.

To illustrate the idea, on Erev Pesach, when a person lights the fire to burn the chometz, or on Chanukah when a person lights the menorah, or he prepares the wicks and oil for the menorah, this fire does not last. After some time, it burns out. For a temporary amount of time, we have released

the potential of the fire when we light the menorah. But it is only a temporary actualization. When the fire goes out, there is no longer any actualization. Another example is any of the foods we eat throughout the year, such as the fried doughnuts on Chanukah. If we don't eat it, it spoils, and if we do eat it, it is gone.

Compare this to a sefer Torah which one has written for him. The written sefer Torah lasts for a very long time. This is a lasting actualization of potential. Another example is the difference between a tent and a house. A tent is temporary, while a house is lasting. In the USA, houses are demolished much more quickly, but in Europe, there are many buildings that have been in place for hundreds and thousands of years. The Kosel HaMaaravi is still around. This is an example of the element of earth, the stability and permanence, a long-term actualization of potential.

We have explained the idea of earth-of-wind-of-earth: an actualization of potential which is long-term. With water-of-wind or wind-of-wind or fire-of-wind, there is only short-term actualization. With earth-of-wind, the process of the actualization (the wind) has a longer-lasting effect, due to the permanence of earth.

PRACTICALLY APPLYING EARTH-OF-WIND-OF-EARTH

Now let us make the idea more practical.

In most of the actions that we do, are they long-lasting, or are they temporary? Do most of our actions revolve around things which are more permanent and long-term (which resembles earth)? Or do most our actions revolve around things that are temporary (which resembles wind)? If we take a look at the world, we will see that most of the world is usually involved with actions that are about temporary things. Very little of the world is involved with actions that have long-term effects.

There are two aspects to long-term actions. One part is the examples we gave earlier, of actions that have long-term effects, such as writing a sefer Torah. A second part of this is that there are actions which externally disappear, but internally, they continue to last. This is like the statement of the Sages, "These are *mitzvos* of which one eats the fruits in This World, but the essence of it remains in the World To Come."⁴⁰ In the external sense, a *mitzvah* disappears after we have done it. We light the menorah and eventually the flame goes out. But the internal effects of a *mitzvah* are

⁴⁰ Mishnah Tractate Pe'ah 1:1

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forever. We will get reward for lighting the menorah, long after the menorah has gone out, so the effects of lighting it are forever.

Essentially, there are three categories of long-term actions which utilize a potential. The first category includes actions that have a temporary effect. These are actions which use either the elements of fire, water, or wind. The second category includes actions which have a long-term effect. These actions use the element of earth. The third category includes actions which only externally disappear, but internally, they are forever.

DOING ACTIONS THAT GIVE US SIPPUK (SATISFACTION)

If we reflect, we can understand that whenever we do actions, we need to be able to derive a sense of fulfillment (a *sippuk*) from it. Fulfilling, satisfying actions bring us joy.

There are two factors in how we can derive joy from fulfilling actions. There is a factor of joy from the sense of fulfillment that results from actualizing potential, and there is also a factor of joy which comes from doing fulfilling, satisfying actions.

Since joy is all about actualization of potential, in order to derive joy from our actions, we need to do actions which actualize our potential, and our actions need to be fulfilling and satisfying as well. These two parts are essentially using the power of “wind-of-earth”. The process of actualization is the use of the element of wind, and the resulting actualization is the element of earth.

The *Gra* says that a person is mainly a combination of the elements of wind (the spiritual element) and earth (the material element). This is because man’s body was taken from the earth, and his soul was breathed into him by a *ruach Elokim*, the “spirit of G-d”, which the Torah refers to as *ruach*, wind. This combination of earth and wind, which is the general makeup of a person according to the *Gra*, can also be a source of joy: when one learns how to combine the elements of earth and wind together.

When one combines his elements of earth and wind together, he gains joy on two levels: from actualizing his potential, and also because he has a resulting sense of satisfaction that comes from this. When one has actualized his potential, one is gaining joy from his wind-of-earth. When one

has joy due to the satisfaction that comes from actualizing his potential, this joy comes from the “earth” within his wind-of-earth.

SHORT-TERM ACTUALIZATION OF POTENTIAL VS. LONG-TERM ACTUALIZATION OF POTENTIAL

The first part of actualizing our potential always exists, whenever we actualize our potential. The second part, getting fulfillment from what we do, will depend on the circumstances. If the effects are short-term, we derive less fulfillment from it, hence our joy will be felt on a lesser scale. If the effects are long-term, we derive more fulfillment from it, hence our joy will be greater.

We can now understand that whenever we actualize a potential, if it is short-term actualization (i.e. if the actions involve are fire-based, water-based or wind-based), we will derive less joy from the actions, whereas the longer-lasting the actualized potential is (i.e. doing actions that are earth-based), the more joy we will have from such actions.

Most actions that people do involve either the elements of fire, water or wind, and therefore their actions have temporary effects. Thus most people are missing a lasting sense of satisfaction from their actions, and that is why their joy is lacking in what they do. If a person would make sure to do actions that have long-lasting effects, he would uncover a source of joy that is incredibly satisfying and consistent.

In order to increase our joy - in order to gain true and deep joy - we need to make sure that we are doing actions that have longer-lasting effects. To the degree that we are actualizing our potential in a way that has longer-lasting effects, we will access more joy.

LONG-LASTING ACTUALIZATION OF PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ACTS

Our practical work in this will involve two parts.

There are actions that have physically long-lasting effects, and there are actions which have spiritually long-lasting effects. One should see how he can do physical actions with long-lasting effects, and this will bring a person long-term satisfaction and joy. One should also do spiritual

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actions which have longer-lasting effects, so that one will derive spiritual satisfaction that is longer-lasting, and hence a joy that is more lasting.

DOING PHYSICAL ACTIONS THAT ARE SATISFYING

When our joy is coming from the element of earth – from permanence and things which are longer-lasting – the joy from it will last more.

Here is an example. A child comes back from kindergarten with projects and drawings for Chanukah. The projects are hung on the wall and eventually they go in the garbage. But a painting of an adult is hung on the wall for a long time. A child is happy with his project, but only for a shorter amount of time, because his projects are hung on the wall only for a short amount of time. An adult, however, can be happier with his painting for a longer amount of time than the child, because the adult keeps seeing his painting on the wall and he keeps deriving a sense of accomplishment from it every time he sees it.

A person should try to do actions that will have long-term effects, so that he can be able to derive joy from it long after he has finished doing it. A person needs to see which kinds of actions he can do that are longer-lasting, which will give him a sense of satisfaction. This will provide a person with satisfaction from actualizing potential (when it comes to his physical actions).

AWARENESS OF OUR SATISFACTION

The second part of deriving satisfaction is to be aware of our satisfaction that we will have, while we are in the process of actualizing potential. Whereas the first part of our satisfaction is derived from the action itself (i.e. finishing the painting and hanging it up on the wall for a long time), the second part is about simply being aware.

For example, we discussed in the past⁴¹ that a person should get used to writing down his thoughts and feelings in a notebook. Even after he has stopped having those thoughts and feelings, he has clarified his inner world in the process, so he has done something with longer-lasting effects. Although the thoughts and feelings are only temporary, the more we write them down, the more

41 In the introductory classes to the “Four Elements” series, titled *Four Elements – Self-Recognition*

we clarify our inner world. Thus, the act of writing down our thoughts and feelings has long-term effects. The more a person writes them down, the more a person becomes aware of them, long after they disappear, and he builds his soul in the process.

We can compare this to placing a brick atop another brick. Each brick becomes another part of the structure. Each thought and feeling that a person writes down is part of developing one's soul. Long after our thoughts and feelings have disappeared, we can still be built from them, if we have written them down, and in this way we have long-lasting effects from writing down our thoughts and feelings. This enables one to live a life of building and developing oneself more and more, to truly live and experience the present, because the past is not just the past, but a part of how we can understand our present.

DOING MITZVOS WITH AWARENESS OF THE SPIRITUAL REALM

The third and final part of gaining joy from doing long-lasting actions concerns our spiritual realm. This is by doing good actions and *mitzvos* on this world, which will last forever. The more a person is connected with the spiritual world, the longer-lasting his good actions will be. This is the meaning of “one who is a *ben Olam HaBa* (destined for the World to come)”⁴²: When one does actions with the awareness that he is connected to the spiritual world, which is forever. This is a source of deep and satisfying joy.

If one does any *mitzvos* or good deeds but he doesn’t feel connected to what he is doing, he derives less joy from it. One needs to be connected to the eternal, spiritual aspect in the various good deeds that he does. In order to relate to this better, one needs to recognize how the physical body is only our temporary state, while the existence of our soul is external. That is where one can find a source of true, complete joy.

⁴² Berachos 4b

10 | Q&A

Q1: There are people who don't know how to think deeply. They are willing to work on themselves in terms of action, but they don't know how to think deeply about what they are doing. What is the advice for them to be able to implement these lessons?

A: Such a person can try practicing some “thinking” exercises. For example, one can think to himself: What will happen to me after I die, and my soul leaves my body? When one gets used to thinking like this, it opens up for him the power to think deeply. This helps one realize that there is an entire inner world in ourselves which goes beyond action, which includes thoughts, feelings, and closeness to Hashem.

Alternatively, a person should realize that the power of doing “action” is a feat that can be accomplished even by animals, and a gentile as well is able to do action. So what is different about a Jewish soul, which a gentile’s soul doesn’t have? Is it simply the fact that we are commanded to do more actions than gentiles, for we have the 613 *mitzvos* of the Torah? Clearly there is more to us as Jews than just being commanded in more actions than the gentiles are. So we shouldn’t be satisfied with our power of action alone. We need to get to the individuality that is in the Jewish soul, and that is only possible when we access our inner world.

Q2: Even for people who are aware that there is an inner world and that it's very important, there are people who still find it very hard to think deeply and to become conscious of their inner powers, because they are simply not used to this. What does the Rav suggest for such people?

A: Such a person can try thinking to himself: “What would my life look like if I was only able to do actions, but I would be missing the powers of thought and feeling? What would happen if I wake up one morning and I wouldn’t be able to think and feel? How would I relate to my family and those around me? I would be able to do whatever I need to for them, but I wouldn’t have any feelings for them, and I wouldn’t think about them.” This kind of reflection can shake a person up, when he realizes how the power of action alone isn’t enough, and much one is missing without developing his inner world.

Q3: To rephrase the question: is there a way for people to access their inner world without putting “themselves” into the picture, and to simply think about things without attaching “themselves” to it?

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A: If you will allow me, I will take apart the question. There are three intellectual abilities: the ability to think about action (*seichel ha-maasi*) the ability to think about what will one say (*seichel ha-dibri*) and the ability to think in the abstract (*seichel ha-iyuni*). Most people, when they think, are only make use of their ability of *seichel ha-maasi*, to think about what they will do. In order for a person to improve his power of thought, a person can try thinking about something that he doesn't have to do, which is more of an intellectual kind of thinking. A bit of a higher level than this is that a person can try thinking about words and conversations. This is a bit more abstract than action alone, so it is a higher use of the intellect. The highest level of thinking is to think in the abstract, to think purely on an intellectual level, about a concept. A person can either start from the lowest level of thinking or from the highest level of thinking. Either a person can begin opening up his thinking by trying to thinking about speech and then advancing to thinking about abstract matters, or a person can begin from the highest use of the intellect, thinking in the abstract, and then thinking about words, and then thinking about what he will do.

Q4: My sippuk (satisfaction) in life comes from doing actions which others will compliment for me for, because I am seeking validation and approval from other people. How can I overcome this and begin to get satisfaction from my actions because they are eternal (as explained in this lesson)?

A: Generally there are three reasons why a person is doing things so that others will know about what he did and compliment him for it. (1) They are lacking in confidence in themselves. (2) They want compliments because they want warmth, and a good feeling, and a feeling of honor, from others. One should first identify which of the above reasons is causing him to seek the approval of others.

Q5: If I am seeking compliments from others because I want to receive warmth from others, what can I do in order to overcome this?

A: Think about the following: Whenever you do something, do you need everyone to know about it? Do you need other people to validate you on everything that you do? Ask yourself: Are you ever able to sometimes do things without getting validated and complimented by others? Do you need approval for everything you do?

Q6: Is there such a thing that a person has nature which requires him to get complimented from others, in order to satisfy his emotional needs?

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A: I will ask you a simple question. Regarding the question you are asking now: Are you asking this question because you want to get complimented for it, or because you really want to know the answer?

Q7: Of course, I want to hear the truth !

A: That obviously shows that you are able to do things without needing the approval of others.

Q8: How does thinking about the eternal effects our actions of mitzvos (as explained in this lesson) activate the element of earth?

A: When one thinks that his actions of *mitzvos* are spiritual and are therefore eternal, he is becoming connected to the spiritual element of earth (because the element of earth is long-lasting).

11 | JOY FROM VITALITY⁴³**WATER-OF-WIND-OF-EARTH: VITALITY AND MOTIVATION WHEN WE ACTUALIZE OUR POTENTIAL**

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we have the opportunity here to continue learning about joy. In this lesson we will discuss the joy that we can derive from our “water”-of-wind-of-earth.

The element of water provides life-giving vitality (*chiyus*) to a person, the element of wind is the motivating force in a person, and the element of earth actualizes the potential of these elements. The more vitality and motivation that one has in what he does, the greater one’s joy will be. The element of water in the soul enables one to infuse vitality into what he does.

In everything we do, there are some aspects which are more primary, and other aspects which are not as needed. In our life, there are actions we do which are necessary, such as our responsibilities and anything else we need to take care of. Throughout the day, there are many actions that we do, with some actions being more important than others. In this lesson we will focus the discussion on how we can derive joy from the actions of our day that are more important and which are a more consistent part of our daily schedule.

The more we succeed, with *siyata d'shmaya*, in finding *chiyus* (vitality) in what we do, to that degree we will gain greater joy in what we do. And the same is true in the converse: The less we are getting *chiyus* from what we do, the more our souls will feel ‘dried out’ from what we do, because we are missing water/vitality in our actions, and this causes to be sad.

GETTING CHIYUS (VITALITY) IN OUR JOBS

Let us see an example of how we can infuse water/vitality into our actions – and what our actions look like when they are missing vitality.

When Adam sinned by eating from the *Eitz HaDaas*, man was cursed with the need to make livelihood. At first, this curse was only placed upon Adam, and on all men who would come after

⁴³ הכרת הכוונות שמהה מים. שברית. ינigkeit. חיית. מהתנוועה

him, and not on Chayah (and all other women). But in our times, the curse of having to make livelihood is being endured by women as well. Today, women go to work, especially women who are working to support their families, from morning until night. Most people today, whether men and women, are working all day in order to support their families. The workplace takes up a large part of one's schedule.

If a man or a woman is enjoying the job that he or she works at, they get will be getting a certain *chiyus* (vitality) in what they do. This activates water-of-wind-of-earth in their actions, and then they can derive joy from what they do. But the less people enjoy their job, the more they are enduring the curse of making livelihood that was given to Adam, and as a result, they are saddened by their jobs.

SEVERAL REASONS WHY PEOPLE WANT A CERTAIN JOB

There are different kinds of jobs a person can pursue. What causes a person to pursue a certain kind of job over another?

1. Some people enter into a certain profession because that is what their parents did, or that is what their siblings are doing, or because this is what their friends are doing. They grow up in an environment where they saw others pursuing this job, so when they get older and they mature, they pursue this very same job. Sometimes this occurs to them naturally, and sometimes they are pressured by their family to work at this job. Such a job is not being chosen by personal preference, but due to family or environmental pressure.
2. Another reason a people pursue a certain job is because of the good pay involved. The higher paying the job, the more the person will want the job. They will go after the job that has the highest salary at the end of the month.
3. Another reason why people want a certain job is because it is high in demand, and it is a more popular kind of job which people are talking about and pursuing at this time.
4. Another reason why people want a certain job is because it requires less work of them, less hours, or more off days. They are lazy and they don't want to work hard, so they will seek the easiest kind of job that they find.

5. Others pursue a certain job because of social factors, because others around them are pursuing this job or because others talked them into it. They didn't pursue the job because they really wanted it, but because they were convinced into it or because they are following the crowd.

6. Others will say that it was purely by luck that they landed their job, and they may attribute it to Divine Providence that they found this job. They feel as if they were led by Hashem to such a job... because, after all, they didn't think or research it enough and they didn't make that much effort to get the job.

7. Others look for any job they can find, out of lack of any other options. They will apply for any job, and they will take any job that's available to them right now.

We can list other reasons as well, but the point is that in all of these scenarios, a person is not choosing a job that's suited to his nature and personality, and it is not because the person feels that it is part of his life's mission to work at such a job. A person is therefore spending most of the active hours of the day working at a job that's not really suited to his nature or personality.

If we think about it, it is mind-boggling. A person is spending most of his day doing something that he has no interest in doing!

There is a lot of "wind"-of-earth here – the person is motivating himself (forcedly) to actualize his potential – but there is no "water"-of-earth here, because the person is not deriving any *chiyus* in what he's doing. This way of living causes one to spend most of his day doing something he doesn't get *chiyus* from, and then it is very understandable why a person would be very saddened from this.

PURSUING A JOB BASED ON KNOWING OURSELVES AND OUR UNIQUE TALENTS

In contrast to this, the *Chovos HaLevovos* teaches that a person should earn livelihood by using the unique qualities and personality traits that Hashem has given him. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says clearly that every person has been given a certain personality trait that is unique, which no one else has. The unique trait that every person has, the *Chovos HaLevovos* explains, has been given to the person by Hashem, Who has willed that the person should earn a livelihood precisely by using this unique trait that he has. It is not simply a gift of talent from Hashem. It is a tool that Hashem has given him, a path he can use, by which he can earn livelihood for his family. It is not by

coincidence that a person has a certain talent or unique personality trait. It is because it is a part of one's individual nature to be like this.

The more one makes use of his unique trait, the more pleasure he will have, because he is using a trait that is closer to his unique essence. In contrast, the less a person makes use of his unique trait, the less pleasure he will get from his personality, he will be deprived of the joy that he could be getting from himself, and the sadder he will be with himself.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* teaches that when a person is pursuing a job, he should first know himself well and be aware of his strongest ability. After knowing that, a person can then know which kind of job he needs to pursue. The better a person recognizes his soul (such as by writing down notes about our personality, as explained in previous lessons), the more successful a person will be at finding a job that's suitable for him.

There are places today which a person can go to which help him figure out what kind of personality and talents he has, and accordingly, a person can use this self-knowledge to know what kind of profession he should pursue. Although these 'personality tests' may not always prove to be 100% accurate, it still helps a person get very far in understanding more about his personality and it can give a person a much better chance of finding the job that suits him.

Now we will discuss the practical outcomes of the idea here.

EXAMPLE 1 – FIND A JOB THAT IS SUITED TO YOU

Any work that a person does in order to earn a livelihood is part of one's obligation to make *hishtadlus* (effort). One's obligation of *hishtadlus* requires him to pursue a job that will be suitable to him. If a person pursues a job that isn't suitable for him to work at, he is overdoing his *hishtadlus* [and compromising on his *emunah*]. Sometimes a person has to make a lot of *hishtadlus* to get a job, much more than others do, and this is due to a person's low spiritual level, which requires him to work harder to find a job. But every person's *hishtadlus* is to pursue the job that's right for him, suited to his nature.

Generally, if one persists in pursuing a job that's personally suitable for him, with *emunah* in Hashem that he will find it, he will succeed in finding his true source of livelihood. Although we can see that many people try to find a job and they are unsuccessful, it is either because they have

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stopped looking for a job, or because they have given up. If one persists in trying to find a job that is personally suited to his nature, together with having *emunah* that he will find the right job, in most cases, a person like this will succeed.

Although the need to make livelihood is a curse placed upon mankind, ultimately, a person is still able to derive joy and blessing from it, when he is working at a job that is suited to his nature.

Pursuing the right kind of job can sometimes become a delicate issue. It may affect one's marital peace or the general atmosphere in the home, or one's relationship with other family members. Every situation needs to be weighed out individually. But we have given the general outline here.

EXAMPLE 2 – JOY IN RAISING CHILDREN

Another example, of infusing vitality and motivation into what we do, which is very important, is when it comes to raising children. Both men and women are involved for a large part of the day with the children, but this largely falls upon the women. For those who are blessed with children, *Baruch Hashem*, raising the family takes up a considerable amount of time in the day. With most people, their daily schedule is divided between two areas: their job, and their children. In other homes, there is also Torah study and *chessed* added into the daily routine.

Certainly, every couple wants children and they have wishes of raising a family. Then the day comes where, *Baruch Hashem*, they get the *Mazal Tov* they were waiting for: a child is born to them. The parents are overjoyed. After the child is born, though, their joy will usually dissipate at some point. The joy they have with their child isn't the same anymore, as when the child was born.

Chavah, and all women after her, were given the curse of pain in childbirth and later with raising children. As much as we wish we could enjoy our children more, the fact is that raising the children has difficulties and it is stressful. It doesn't turn out exactly the way we imagined it to be.

Some homes are more joyful, where everyone is usually singing and smiling, but in other homes, there is a lot of stress, difficult situations, and plenty of screaming. The calmer and more joyous the home is, the happier the children will turn out. The parents need to have the right attitude when it comes to raising their children. If they raise the children with a joyous attitude, they are using the power of "water-of-wind-of-earth", meaning that they are infusing vitality into what they are doing. But if the parents simply "do what they have to do", and without joy, and out of a feeling of

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pressure, they are stressed and unhappy as they raise the children. They will have to endure the curse of the pain of raising children.

Every home has its times of joy and times of difficulty and stress, times that are easier and times that are harder. There is an important fact to remember. Are we making sure to raise our children with joy, with the same joy we had when they were born? Or do we only limit our joy to when they are born, to their *bar mitzvah* or *bas mitzvah*, and when they get married...?

Every so often, a parent should reflect that he or she wanted to have this child, in spite of all the challenges involved with raising this child, and that he or she is happier because of this child. A parent should remind himself of the love that he has for this child, and to awaken the love again, every so often. A parent should seek ways of how he can do more for the child and give more to his child.

It is not enough to think about this once a year every Erev Rosh HaShanah. One should awaken these feelings of love every so often and remind himself that he wants to do a lot for his child and that is happy to raise this child.

In most scenarios, when a parent does this, the home will also become calmer. In addition, the parent will be using “water-of-wind-of-earth”, by adding vitality into the responsibility of raising children, which will be a source of joy. If a parent just lives on monotone, any joy in the home and any joy in living life will weaken, from all the challenges involved in raising children. One needs the right perspective towards raising and educating children: Will one be raising them with the power of water-of-wind-of-earth - which will make the process of raising children more joyful – or will one raise children without making use of this power...?

Of course, one also needs guidance in how to educate children, and we are not speaking about that here. It is discussed in “*Getting To Know Your Children*”.

EXAMPLE 3 – GETTING JOY FROM OUR SLEEP

The following is another important example, of how to infuse vitality into our daily routine. Sleep takes up a large part of our schedule. We spend about a quarter or a third of our time sleeping. From a superficial perspective, it doesn’t appear that we can derive any joy from sleeping. How can sleeping make a person happy? When we feel exhausted, we fall onto the bed and go to

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sleep, and it seems that this is all there is to sleep. Some people are happy to crawl under their covers and get a good night's sleep in the winter, when they can sleep for a longer amount of time.

But in essence, how can sleep make us joyous?

There are two different attitudes a person can have when he goes to sleep. Either he falls onto his bed at the end of a tiring and exhausting day – which is the same way an animal goes to sleep – or, he can go to sleep after making a self-accounting (*cheshbon hanefesh*) of how he spent that day.

This self-accounting includes two parts. The first part is to think about the good things that one did that day. This puts a person into a positive, joyous state, and it activates the power of “water-of-wind-of-earth”. The second part is to think about any sins that one committed that day, and to regret them and do *teshuvah* over them. This attitude allows a person to fall asleep amidst *chiyus*.

Although sleep is called “a sixtieth of death”, this is only for a person who goes to sleep with no reflection beforehand, who falls into his bed thoughtlessly, and he approaches sleep as if it is devoid of any meaning. But one who goes to sleep after making a soul-accounting will enter into his sleep with a calmer state of mind, and in that way he will be infusing *chiyus*, life-giving-vitality, into his sleep. His sleep will then become a source of joy to him.

IN CONCLUSION

There are other important examples as well throughout our day which a person should be infusing more vitality into, such as making our *davening* more alive. Really it would be appropriate to discuss that as well, but there is no time left in this lesson to discuss it.

With Hashem's help, may Hashem shine the light of Chanukah upon us to bring out the light of our *neshamah*.

11 | Q&A

Q1: In my personal book of emotions, I have difficulty defining an emotion, so I check a dictionary. Is that acceptable?

A: As a beginning stage, yes, but eventually you should reach a point where you can give your own definition of the emotion you are experiencing, without checking a dictionary.

Q2: When I get compliments from other people, I use that as an indication of what my strongest point is. Is that acceptable?

A: It is better not to rely on other people's opinions of you. If other people point out to you something and because of that you think about yourself and that gets you to think more about what your strongest point is, that is fine, but if the only way you know you are good at something is because other people complimented you for it, and you cannot identify this strong point from within yourself, then it is not recommended for you to rely on others' compliments in order to know your strongest point. The ideal way is for you to identify your strongest point from yourself, and if you cannot do that, you can try to identify it within yourself after others have complimented you about it and pointed it out to you. Otherwise, you are not identifying your strong point from within yourself, and it would not be wise to rely on others' opinions about you regarding your strongest point, because it is probably an off-mark description of you, being that you cannot identify it within yourself.

Q3: I find that I have a quality of searching for truth, but it doesn't lead me to feel positive emotions. It instead leads me into negative emotions. Can searching for truth still be a positive quality of mine, even though it does not lead to positive emotions?

A: It seems that because you have a strong sense of searching for truth, there is a contradiction between your power of searching for truth and with how you actually act, so you feel like there are parts in your life that are not in sync with your search for truth. The first step for you is to think about any parts in your life that are in sync with your search for truth, and to notice the parts that aren't. Then, be happy with any of the parts in your life that are in sync with your search for truth.

Q4: Is it possible that searching for truth is my strongest quality?

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A: Yes, it can definitely be your strongest point, and it's not enough to be happy with the parts in your life that are in sync with truth, but to also try to align other areas in your life with your search for truth.

Q5: *In a previous lesson the Rav explained that there are many different ways to arrive at truth. Can the Rav explain more about this?*

A: Our Sages state that the word *emes* (truth) is from the letters *aleph, mem, and tav* – the beginning, middle and last letters of the *aleph beis* - meaning that the truth of a matter includes the comprehensive knowledge about a matter, to know the beginning, middle, and end of a matter. Therefore one needs to see the truth in something as well as the falsity in something, since everything in Creation is a mix of truth and falsity. However, many times when people work on becoming more truthful, this compromises on their *ahavas yisrael*. One should only work on becoming more truthful if at the same time he is becoming more loving and peaceful to others, as it is written, “*Truth and peace, together.*”

12 | JOY FROM INNERMOST WILL

WIND/JOY AND EARTH/SADNESS

It is written, “*Serve Hashem with joy*”. There is a great fundamental taught by the *Reshash* that the most ideal level of serving Hashem is *simchah* (joy). We need to understand, then, why joy is indeed so important.

Let’s give a brief introduction from a different angle, in order to understand this with better clarity. When Hashem created man, He fashioned Adam’s body from the ground, from the element of earth, and He gave Adam a soul by breathing into him (so to speak) a spirit of life – the element of wind. So every human being is comprised of both earth (his physical component) and wind (his spiritual component).

When a person lives in the proper, balanced way, the “spirit of life” that Hashem breathed into man is moving his physical body properly. But if one is not living properly, his earth, his physicality, will dominate his wind, his spiritual aspect. The earth is a heavy element while wind is a light, subtle element. When one’s earth is dominant, it overtakes his wind, his spiritual aspect, and he is weighed down by physicality.

We see this clearly when Chavah ate from the Eitz HaDaas, when she was cursed with sadness. By not listening to Hashem’s command and giving in to the Snake’s temptation, her element of earth took over, and the result was that she would be cursed with pain and sadness (a dominance of the element of earth). Whenever one’s earth overpowers their wind, the result is sadness.

WIND-OF-EARTH – ACTIONS DONE WITH MOTIVATION

In contrast, the ideal way to live is when one’s element of wind is in control. Then one’s wind can move around one’s earth, and then one’s earth can actualize the potential in wind - resulting in joy.

When a person goes to sleep at night, parts of the soul leave the body a bit and go up to Heaven, and the body stays on earth with no spirit in it. With no soul, no “wind”, the body, one’s “earth”,

becomes heavy and inactive. During sleep, the element of earth dominates. Sleep is like being in a state of sadness, where the body can't be active and achieve anything because the wind, the soul, has temporarily left the body. In contrast to this, during the day people are active, their "wind" is moving their "earth" and allowing a person to activate his potential, which enables a person to be joyous. This is "wind-of-earth", where one's wind is working together with his earth. When these two elements become connected properly and are working together, the result is joy.

Let's go further now. When a person is active it's clear that he is using his element of wind, as he is moving his body to do what he needs to do. But even when a person is not moving, he can still awaken his element of wind. How? It is written, "*I am asleep but my heart is awake*", meaning that even when the body is asleep and inactive, one's heart – his inspiration and deep wishes – can still be very much alive. This is referring to the power of the will (*ratzon*), and it is a deeper kind of wind (it is wind-of-wind, the will behind one's movements). Besides for the actions and movements we do with our body, there is also the root behind those movements, which is our will that's motivating us to perform. This is really our element of wind – the root, the motivating force, behind our movements.

When wind moves a tree branch, this is just movement and nothing more. The inanimate object has no will to move, and the fact that it can get moved around by wind doesn't mean anything more than that – it simply got moved, but there is no motivation in this movement. But the element of wind which moves a human being, or even an animal, is not just enabling a person to move, it is also a movement that's coming from a certain will to move. This is "wind of wind" – the motivation behind the movement.

WIND-OF-WIND-OF-EARTH

When one is living in the right way, his earth and wind are in balance with each other - his will is present, he wants to do what he does, and in that way his wind will enable his earth to bring out his potential (resulting in joy). This is "wind-of-wind-of-earth".

Now let us think: When does a person have joy, and when is he missing joy? If he is just moving and doing whatever he has to do, but he has no actual desire in doing whatever he's doing, then he is only his wind very superficially. He is merely moving himself but he has no motivation to do what he's doing. The result is that he will be sad, even though he is doing things and getting

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moving. By contrast, if one is moving himself and doing things because he wants to do what he's doing, he is motivated to do what he does, then he is truly activating his element of wind, and then his wind will be moving him, and the result will be joy.

True, complete joy is not reached through merely doing things out of a will to do them, but only when one is connected to a will that is absolute and unchanging. If a person wants something one day and the next day he wants something else, this is not a true will, because it is subject to change and it always depends on whatever the person wants at the moment. Such desires and wishes usually come from the evil inclination. In contrast to this, an absolute will, which is unchanging, is the only thing that can be called a true will, because it stays permanently.

There is only one absolute kind of will that exists, and that is, the will to do Hashem's will. When someone wants to do Hashem's will, he is connecting himself with an unchanging will, because Hashem doesn't change His will: "*I am Hashem and I do not change*". The only true and absolute *ratzon* that exists, from all of our various *retzonos*, is the will in a person to do Hashem's will.

This absolute will exists in the depths of our soul. We all accessed it when it was clearly revealed at the giving of the Torah, when we said "Our will is to do Your will". This was Hashem's own absolute will that became revealed through the inner will in our own souls. Hashem's very will exists is contained in the very depths of our own souls, as the desire to do Hashem's will. It is not merely our desire to do Hashem's will, it's an offshoot of Hashem's Will itself that is being beamed into our own souls.

When one becomes connected to the depths of his soul where the will of Hashem is, and when that motivation is what's moving him to act – when he is doing things because he wants to do the will of Hashem - that is the true complete joy which one can attain. This is "wind of wind", when he is being moved by the inner absolute unchanging will.

JOY FROM DOING HASHEM'S WILL IS ONLY WHEN WE ARE NOT BEING SELF-SERVING

Chazal said, "Our will is to do Your will, but the yeast of the sourdough prevents us."⁴⁴ From this statement of Chazal it seems that although we want to do Hashem's will, we are also being held

⁴⁴ Talmud Bavli Berachos 17a

back by other factors and in the end we don't want to do Hashem's will. But that is only when we are not acting *lishmah* (pure motives, for Hashem's sake). If we are being *lishmah* - if we truly want to do Hashem's will with no self-serving motivations – that is when nothing can get in our way of doing Hashem's will.

Let us now mention a subtle point. When we do Hashem's will and we are doing it *lishmah* – not for any self-serving purpose but purely because we want to do what Hashem wants – this reveals Hashem's own will, as it were, and once Hashem's will is brought into the picture, nothing can stop it [and hence nothing will be able to stop us from doing Hashem's will]. But if we want to do Hashem's will and our motives are also mixed with any self-serving purposes, then on a subtle level this is not completely doing what Hashem wants since it's unconsciously focused on how "I" want to do what Hashem wants, as opposed to focusing purely on Hashem's will getting done. A person can have spiritual motives but he can still be acting with self-serving motives if he has any self-gain in mind, if he's focused on his "I" rather than being focused on Hashem. This lack of *lishmah* will get in the way of trying to fulfill Hashem's will, because it doesn't reveal Hashem's will into the picture and then we can get prevented from actually fulfilling Hashem's will even though we wanted to. It is because we weren't really acting for Hashem's sake, but for ourselves.

The power of using our inner, absolute will (the will to do Hashem's will) only brings us joy when it's a will that's entirely focused on doing what Hashem wants, with no self-serving motives mixed in, and it is only then that we become unstoppable in fulfilling Hashem's will. If there are traces of *shelo lishmah* (self-serving motivations) when we are striving to do Hashem's will, then on a subtle level it doesn't reveal Hashem's will and then we will be prevented from wanting to do the will of Hashem. When one is being motivated by any motives that are *shelo lishmah*, when such a "wind" (will) is moving and motivating our "earth" (body and actions) to do anything, this will hold back our joy, and we will be left sad afterwards even though we wanted to do Hashem's will.

THE POWER OF AYIN – SURRENDERING YOURSELF TO HASHEM

Raboseinu taught us that at the inner core of our soul's abilities is the *ani*, our "I", our sense of self. They also taught that the opposite letters of the word *ani* is *ayin*, "nothing" – to live from a selfless place where we are not focused on the "I." In other words, we are either living an existence of trying to satisfy our *ani* (I) or living in the state of *ayin*. If we are living always in the *ani*, then

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everything we want will always somehow be focused (either consciously or unconsciously) on our *ani*. The “I” is really a barrier between us and Hashem. If we live through *ayin*, though, there is no “I” between us and Hashem, and we will be seeing everything through a clear lens, and then we will clearly see what Hashem wants from us to do.

The following is a clear example of how we can find joy in the depths of our soul.

Whenever a person acts with no self-serving motivations, he will find true joy, and of this it is said “*Serve Hashem with joy*”. What does it mean to serve Hashem with joy - does it mean that we should make ourselves happy when we serve Hashem such as by drinking wine? After all, “wine gladdens the heart”. Is that what it means to serve Hashem joyously...? The true meaning of serving Hashem with joy is when one reveals the Creator’s own will that is deep in his soul – that is, to do Hashem’s will because one truly wants to do it. From that awareness one is able to serve the Creator with joy. To the degree that a person is doing Hashem’s will with the awareness that he purely wants to do Hashem’s will, that is how much joy he will have.

The following fundamental example of joy also teaches us a lot about the connection between joy and *ayin* (selflessness). Chazal taught that the original light which shone on the first day of the world was a light that mankind would have been able to use to see from one end of the world to the other. Hashem saw that wicked people will not use this light properly, so He hid it away for the tzaddikim in the future – and then He rejoiced when He did this, so that this light will only be used by the tzaddikim, and as it is written, “*The light of the righteous brings joy*” (which is referring to the hidden light that will be revealed for the tzaddikim in the future). Why did Hashem rejoice when He hid away the original light?

The simple way to understand this is that at first, this light was already shining in the world (as Chazal said, at first the original light was shining on the first day) and He put it away so that the wicked people won’t use it for the wrong reasons, and that is why Hashem was happy to hide the light. A deeper way to understand this is that that He was happy not just because now the wicked people won’t misuse it, but because now it will be reserved for the tzaddikim who will use it properly.

Yet there is also a deeper understanding of this. We know that light does the job of revealing something and allowing it to be seen, whereas darkness is for the purpose of hiding and concealing something. The original light that shone on the first days of Creation is really referring to the *ani*,

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the “I” of a person. When Hashem hid away this light, this hints to the concept of turning the *ani* into *ayin*, where the *ani* goes into hiding so that the light for the *tzaddikim* - the *ayin* - can be revealed. Thus when Hashem put away the original light to be enjoyed by the *tzaddikim* in the future, it means that we will graduate from *ani* to the state of *ayin*, and that will be the light of the future which the *tzaddikim* will enjoy - the *ani* being turned to *ayin*. This was the depth of why Hashem was happy to put away the light.

With the above insights, we can now understand why the *Reshash* taught that *simchah* is the highest level of serving Hashem. *Simchah* is when one surrenders himself and his wishes to Hashem, because when one is surrendered to Hashem, this reveals forth Hashem’s will from one’s own soul, and of course this will bring joy to the person. In contrast to this, a person may do what Hashem wants but he can still be sad afterwards, since he was doing it not for Hashem but for himself, and in turn this does not bring Hashem’s will into the picture.

When a person does Hashem’s will and that is what motivated him, the result is joy, because such a person has truly revealed forth Hashem’s will from his own soul, and once the Creator’s will is brought into the picture, the result is joy.

12 | Q&A

QUESTION But there is always an *ani*, a person always has motives that are *shelo lishmah*, so will a person always be prevented from *simchah*? Is it a question of percentages, like if there’s more *ani* involved then there is less *simchah*, and if there is more *ayin* involved then there will be more *simchah*?

ANSWER One cannot always live in *ayin* (of always being totally surrendered to Hashem) but it is not good if one lives at the other extreme of only living in the *ani*. One’s *avodah* is to keep going back and forth between the states of *ani* and *ayin*. This is called *ratzu v’shov*, “advancing and retreating”, to go up to *ayin* and then come back down to *ani*, to cycle back and forth between the higher and lower levels – to go back and forth constantly between *ayin* and *ani*. This is the deeper reason of why people cannot have complete *simchah*, because people indeed cannot live all the time in the state of *ayin*.

QUESTION So the more we live in *ayin*, then the more *simchah* we will have?

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ANSWER Yes, exactly, and as it was explained here, it is because *ayin* reveals the Creator's will into the picture, and once the Creator's will is unstoppable so the result will be joy. When one is focused on revealing his own will but not the Creator's, he is not revealing the Creator's will into the picture so he is using a limited kind of will, which won't bring joy.

QUESTION When we go to the state of *ayin*, are we reaching our *tikkun* and doing what Hashem wants us to do?

ANSWER *Ayin* is for the purpose of raising our *ani* to a purified state of existence, which in turn purifies our *ani*, and then afterwards when we return to our *ani* we are acting from a purer place in ourselves now that we have raised our *ani* to *ayin* and we have learned how to give over our *ani* to Hashem.

Ayin is about surrendering our will to Hashem's will – the concept of *bittul*: “Give up your will, because of His will.” Without nullifying one's own will to Hashem, one is merely imagining that he is reaching *ayin* when he tries to access it. The real state of *ayin* is *bittul*, surrendering one's will to Hashem. How can one know if he is really reaching *ayin* or not? One can check this if he sees how he reacts when he wanted something and then it didn't happen and he didn't get what he wanted. Does he merely give up on getting what he wanted and he's disappointed, or does he surrender himself to Hashem now because of this? If he can consciously feel that he has let go of his wishes because he surrendered his will to Hashem, that's an indicator that he reaching *ayin*.

QUESTION: When we are looking at the *ner Chanukah* (the flame on the Menorah) what should we be thinking? What kind of “light” are we receiving from it?

ANSWER: The answer to this is also connected with drawing forth *simchah* from the power of *ayin*. The *Bnei Yissocher* and other *sefarim hakedoshim* as well teach that the *ner Chanukah* is [an aspect of] the *ohr haGanuz*, the original light from the first day of Creation which Hashem hid away for the *tzaddikim* in the future. Therefore Chanukah is really the “light of the future”, which was hidden away for the future. That was the depth of why the jug of oil sealed by the Kohen Gadol was hidden away - and when it was found, it was a fulfillment of the verse, “*The light of the righteous brings joy.*” The miracle of Chanukah came about through the Chashmonaim (Hasmoneans, or Macabees) who were few against many when they fought the Yevanim (Greeks) and there was no natural way for them to win, yet they were willing to give their lives for this and they showed *mesirus nefesh*, which really meant that they give up their personal *ratzon* (will),

because *nefesh* is identified as the *ratzon* and by giving up their own *ratzon* (in order to fight for the *ratzon Hashem*) they were essentially giving up their *nefesh*, and it was this *mesirus nefesh* which made them win and bring about the entire miracle. The “light” revealed on Chanukah is therefore the power of giving up our own *ratzon*, and when we are divested from our *ratzon*, the will of the Creator takes over our will [enabling us to give up our will to do Hashem’s will]. That was the miracle of the jug of oil. Normally, constriction brings sadness while expansion brings joy, yet from this tiny, sealed, constricted jug of oil there was a joyous miracle which came about. The joy was really the depth of the miracle.

As a hint to all of this, the word *Chashmonai* (חשמוןאי) can be rearranged into the words *ayin yismach יישמ"ח אין* which means “through *ayin*, we can be happy”, meaning that joy comes from accessing *ayin*, which is reached through *bittul* (surrendering) of our *ratzon* (our personal will) in order to do Hashem’s will.

QUESTION: What is the connection between *ayin* and the “light of the future”?

ANSWER: Our world is a world of *shelo lishmah*, a world in which people naturally do things for self-gain, where people do *mitzvos* for the sake of reward and getting the Next World, etc. Man was originally created to serve Hashem *lishmah*, completely for Hashem’s sake and with no self-serving motives, but ever since we Adam and Chavah from the *Eitz HaDaas* mankind fell from the level of *lishmah* to the level of *shelo lishmah*. But of the Next World it is said, “*For My Sake, for My sake, I will do it*”, meaning that in the Next World all motivations are focused on Hashem and not on oneself. When a person does a *mitzvah shelo lishmah*, he is rewarded for it on this world, the place of *shelo lishmah* - and when he does a *mitzvah lishmah*, he is rewarded on the next world, the place of *lishmah*.

QUESTION: Though the *tzaddikim* experience *ayin* in the Next World, we also know that in the Next World the *tzaddikim* are enjoying the radiance of the *Shechinah*, so isn’t this experience of enjoyment an experience of the “I”, the self?

ANSWER: The enjoyment of the *tzaddikim* there is from the state of *bittul* of being nullified to Hashem.

QUESTION: But the enjoyment shows that it’s still being experienced through the “I”, the self.

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ANSWER: There is *ani* (the self) and there is *ayin* (the divested self), and there is also a higher level above *ayin*, which is called “above the movement from *ani* to *ayin*”. For more on this see the last section of *Michtav M’Eliyahu*, volume 1 about the concepts of *havayah* and *hasagah* (essence and comprehending), and there the concept is explained more clearly.

QUESTION: If there is indeed this *simchah* on Chanukah (which is reached through *ayin*, or *bittul*) then why is it that terms of *simchah* are associated only with Purim but we do not terms of *simchah* associated with Chanukah?

ANSWER: On Chanukah the joy is [hidden] because there is a light of the future which is radiating even now and which we can feel a spark of. Purim was when we were saved from destruction by Achashveirosh and Haman, we were saved from death to life, but we are still slaves of Achashveriosh so we weren’t redeemed completely then, but we were completely saved from death and that is the celebration of Purim. But Chanukah is coming from the light of the future, and now we just have a spark of that light which will come, and therefore the joy we have on Chanukah is only a spark of the light of the future but not the light of the future.

QUESTION: Should a woman think of all of this as well when looking at the Shabbos candles?

ANSWER: Shabbos is a degree of the serenity (*menuchah*) of the Next World. The Shabbos of now is a semblance of the next world, it is partial taste of that serenity. Chanukah though is a spark of the light of the future, it is a partial light. Shabbos is about the serenity of the next world, and Shabbos is a semblance of the next world so it is a semblance of that serenity of the next world, while Chanukah is a semblance of the light of the future and therefore we have a spark, a partial degree of that light of the future. That is why Shabbos candles, which are for the purpose of shalom bayis, takes financial precedence over buying the lights for the Menorah, because Shabbos is about shalom, peace, perfection, shleimus, the next world. So the Shabbos candles is a semblance of perfection of the next world. Thus, both Shabbos and Chanukah are two different aspects of the same concept – the Next World.

14 | JOY FROM STEADY PROGRESS

TWO REASONS WHY PEOPLE AREN'T HAPPY OR SUCCESSFUL

Let us try here with *siyata d'shmaya* to say a very small point but which has much application and meaning for us.

Who among us doesn't search for fulfillment and joy? We do not always find what we search for, so let us think here of a small but fundamental way which will help us attain the joy we seek.

We see that when people feel successful, it is easier for them to be happy, and by contrast when people feel like they're failing and not succeeding, they are far from being happy.

Part of the reason why people aren't successful is because they are doing a lot of things that are way beyond their actual capacity to do – they are overdoing themselves. Another reason why people aren't successful at what they do is because they aren't being consistent at anything.

Upon some analysis, we can see that these two reasons are really connected. When a person does things beyond his actual capacity, he really can't be consistent either with whatever he's doing – it's impossible to be consistent at something that you don't have actually have the capacity to do. But when a person is doing things that are within his ability, then it becomes possible for him to be consistent at what he's doing. If a person for many years has gotten used to doing things that are really beyond his capacity, that means he has never really done anything consistently.

Ever since childhood, a person has learned and taught himself that whenever he keeps doing something and he isn't successful at it, he has been telling himself that he really cannot do it. After all, he has failed so many times at it. A person teaches himself that he can't work at something consistently, and instead, he tries to grab onto any success that he can, but never really building any one area of success. People like to console themselves with the words of Chazal, "Grab and eat, because tomorrow we will die." They get used to not being consistent with whatever they do. When it comes to making livelihood as well, they keep grabbing onto whatever success they can, never learning how to be consistent at anything.

GAINING STABILITY THROUGH BEING CONSISTENT IN TAKING SMALL STEPS FORWARD

Every person is looking for a good salary, but he also needs a job that's steady and consistent. Just like our physical body needs a stable source of income, so does our soul seek stability. The more we feel our need for stability, the more we can feel the need to progress with steadiness,

The proper way to reach joy – and thereby live a life of regularly experiencing joy - is to take small things that we can do, and consistently work on them.

Every person understands himself at least partially, if not completely. Every person knows what's preventing him from success. With some people it's anger, with some it's impatience, etc. Many times people tried and didn't succeed, and then they give up and they say "This is the way I am. I was born like this, and this is how I will always be."

But if a person really wants to come out of problems and make progress- after he has first identified the problems that are blocking him from success - he will then decide to work on one small point which he will keep being consistent at working on. He should choose to work on one small, easy point that's holding him back from progress, and he should focus on seeking only this small amount of progress that's steady and consistent. It should be something that's possible and easy for him to work on. Then, once he decides to work on this, he should do it once or twice a day and not more. But he should be consistent for a period of time about it.

This way of living brings a person into a certain process, of building and moving forward, taking step at a time, but fundamentally. Whoever will try to do this, working consistently at this, will see progress within the next few months. After a few months he should see how he has grown, how his soul has moved forward.

VALUING THE SMALLEST ACHIEVEMENTS

There are those with a nature to seek big things, big growth, a lot of achievements, etc. So they try moving forward very fast. The idea of taking small steps of growth and steady progress is hard for them to work on, and even when they do decide to work on small steps of growth, it has no meaning to them, because it's only a 'small' achievement and not a big, huge achievement.

Consider the following analogy. A Bar Mitzvah boy is really a result of 4000 days of the hard work that his parents have put him into him. Until his Bar Mitzvah, the parents patiently watched him grow. Even though they could have given him a “wonder drink” to make him get big and mature very quick, they chose not to do that and instead they were patient in watching him grow, because they realized that his growth must be slow and steady. They know that it’s a certain process and that it doesn’t happen quickly. Once one realizes that he needs to work on something slowly because he realizes that such growth fundamental for him, he can have patience to work on it. If a person is patient and he is also consistent, like the parents who are patiently watching their boy grow and mature until he reaches Bar Mitzvah age, then he will be successful.

When it comes to the growth of our inner world as well – the growth of the inner human being that is inside us – we need patience as well, when growing and nurturing our inner world. The clearer we are about this point, the better we will grow.

BEING PATIENT WITH OUR GROWTH – USING EARTH TO STABILIZE OUR FIRE

To say this even more clearly, we all have inner abilities that are hidden and dormant within us, and our *avodah* (our inner work) is to activate that potential. It is like planting seeds in the ground, which later sprouts and develops into a plant. The *Maharal* says that a person is called *adam* from the word *adamah*, the ground, because just as planting a seed will take time until it sprouts and develops, so does a person slowly develop. Chazal said that there is one tree which takes 70 years to develop - the carob tree – and this tree represents the 70 years of life of a person’s life.

If we have patience like that towards ourselves – knowing that we can only grow in a slow process and that our growth cannot come rapidly – then, we can succeed in our growth.

But the nature of a person is that he wants so much and very quickly. The power to grow, from the bottom up, is like the element of fire, which naturally rises upward. Fire quickly rises, but the problem with fire is that it doesn’t stay lit for long, and it can only rise when the source of the fire is strong. When we light a fire it takes very quick to go up, it only stays lit if the candle is well-lit and thick, some can light for 2 or 4 hours, some light for 24 or 48 or 72 hours, some can light for a week, some can even stay lit for a month, but after that it extinguishes. Fire doesn’t last that long. Eventually a person’s fire gets extinguished after some time. So a person needs more than just fire in

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order to progress - he needs the element of earth, the stable ground that will enable him to build himself step after step, and then he can rise properly.

Here is an example to illustrate the idea.

A child can barely do anything when he's born. Then he opens his eyes, and the parents are happy with anything he can do, the smallest progress he shows, the smallest step. But as the child grows, the parents stop being so happy with every small thing he does, and so does the child. Yet, though the parents have stopped enjoying his every small step of success, the child should learn to be happy with his small achievements, and he should do that when he is an adult as well. We need to keep being happy with even our smallest success, just like we are happy with a little child's smallest steps. The more we understand that this is how we grow just like when we are small children, the more we can grow as adults.

Let us explain what changes as we become more mature. When a child starts to walk, everyone is happy with even the smallest step he takes. The child takes a step and falls, then he starts walking a little until he is walking regular and later he is running. Now let's understand deeply, what does the child subconsciously as he progresses like this? He learns that small steps can all be done quickly instead of slowly. Then he stops valuing the small steps, and now he only has value for big and fast steps. Subconsciously he keeps learning that small steps forward are meaningless, and only instant or quick results are important.

This carries into adulthood as well, where he believes that things which can be done quickly are a waste of time when done only slowly and steadily. He stops having value for slow, steady growth and he only values quick growth. Even more so, a person learns that he doesn't have to be conscious of his growth and progress. These thought patterns become carved into us deeply.

When we get bigger, who has gotten bigger? Our body has grown, we have become smarter too, but our heart remains the same as a child's. *Raboseinu* teach that our heart always remains youthful like a child: "*The inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth*", and the word *ra* (bad) is from the word *naar*, child, hinting to how the heart is childish. The heart can only grow slowly, like the steps that a child takes. Even very great people with great minds have hearts that have grown very slowly. A person has an intellect and heart. By a child, the intellect works slowly, and when he gets older his intellect works quicker, so he realizes that he has to work faster. But he also thinks that his heart also has to work fast, while in reality the heart must remain the same as a child's. Even with

older and greater people, their heart can only grow slowly like a child's. One can only grow his heart very slowly – meaning that his inner growth can only be gradual. And, just as he has patience to bring up a child slowly, so must one have patience to grow his heart with the gradual growth process that it needs – he cannot accelerate his inner growth.

When one understands this, he won't have difficulty with trying to grow and progress forward in anything, because he knows that's all growth has to be slow and steady. He has anticipated this already, growing only at the pace that the heart can grow at. The older a person is, the more patience he can have towards his heart – the more patience he can have towards his own growth, knowing that this is the way it's supposed to be.

All those who are successful are those who recognize that their heart can only grow slowly. The more we are *zocheh* with help from Hashem to internalize this deeply that our heart must grow slowly like a child's, we will then speak to our heart – we will view our inner world of growth - with the heart's language, and with the heart's slow, child's pace. The "evil inclination from youth" can then be worked on slowly, and at our heart's child pace that it needs.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Practically speaking, one should identify what's holding him back from moving forward and take small steps forward, as if he is teaching a child to learn one letter after another, and this is how one works properly with himself. And he can be happy with every small step of progress just like we are happy with every small step of a child.

This is a change of perspective which brings us patience and consistent steady development. Like this, we enter into a process of living with joy, of utilizing our potential, like planting a seed in the ground which is constantly in a process of growth, it's earth that stabilizing our fire to grow higher.

IN CONCLUSION

May Hashem give us the understanding to be patient with ourselves like a child, to take upon ourselves small steps of growth according to the pace of our heart which can only work slowly, and to be happy with every small step we take. That is a person who lives a life of joy.

14 / Q&A

Q: *But a child is doing his maximum potential not just taking small steps, and the parents are expecting this?*

A When the child gets older, the smallest thing he does should become his maximum growth. His maximum growth should be defined as the smallest step of success that he's currently capable of. We aren't telling the child to only grow slowly, we want maximum success from him, and this is his maximum success – exactly so.

Q *Can the Rav give an example of this?*

A There are many simple examples of this but here is one. For example if a person is lazy, whether a lot or a little, he should do 3 small things a day with the awareness that he's trying to knock out his laziness. It's better to try this with things that he doesn't have to do, rather than with obligations that he has to take care of. Do it for the sake of knocking out your laziness and not simply because you have to do it. Is there anyone who can't do this, is it too hard? Just be consistent at it.

Q *How can we slowly pull out of being connected with media-devices?*

A Anything that was said in this *shiur* does not apply to media-devices. All media-capable devices should be removed, at this very moment. It is forbidden. This *shiur* (about steady growth) was speaking of a certain level to attain, not about what's totally forbidden! If a person wants to slowly disconnect from media-capable devices, then it will take at least 17 years. A person must disconnect from all media-devices at this very moment. Something which is forbidden is by definition forbidden right now at this moment and it has to get removed.

...I don't know what news is like in America, but in Eretz Yisrael it's forbidden to read papers because of *lashon hora*. Reading news about goyim in America isn't *lashon hora* but in Eretz Yisrael it's forbidden to read the papers because of *lashon hora*. I don't know how all these papers are able to be published. If a Talmid Chochom goes through each paper to see if there's no *lashon hora* in there - by the time he's done he can't be called a Talmid Chochom anymore from everything he has just heard. He would also have to clarify each story and decide on each part if it's *lashon hora* or not, and that's impossible. The papers are full of *lashon hora* and *rechilus*. It doesn't make any sense

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at all to have such papers. To write about modern discoveries and space travel is one thing, but most of the papers are full of *lashon hora* about people.

Q: *How indeed can we work consistently on a small area and improve at it?*

A: There are 2 different ways of how to work on ourselves. One way is to pick the area that's getting in your way the most and the other way is to start with the easiest area to work on – to start with something you're good at. There are advantages to either way. The first way makes sense because it's dealing directly with what's getting in the way of your success, but the second way brings out your root strength and gives you the energy to work on what's blocking you. Working against your nature is hard for a lot of people but the second way is easier for most people.

16 | JOY FROM STABILITY

BITACHON AND SIMCHAH

[It is such a *simchah* to be back again in *Aish Kodesh*, a fire that rises higher and higher].

“The tzaddikim (righteous) rejoice in Hashem.” To the degree that a person is found with Hashem - near Him, with Him - his joy will be greater, to that extent.

Who is a person that's found with Hashem? “Those who trust in Hashem forever.” The more a person has *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem, he is then found with Hashem, and then he can merit the joy of the tzaddikim who rejoice in Hashem.

HOW WIND CAN WREAK HAVOC WITH FIRE

The avodah of a person is to rise higher and higher, resembling a rising fire, like the fire of the Mizbeiaħ that doesn't get extinguished. But what happens when a fire is burning and then the wind comes? A strong wind can extinguish the fire, while a light wind will move the fire to a different place by blowing the fire around. Chazal said that no wind could extinguish the fire of the Mizbeiaħ, but it could steer the fire away and prevent it from rising upward in a straight column to Heaven as it normally would. Wind either puts out fire completely, or moves around the fire and scatters it all over the place.

The Mishnah in Avos says that one must be like a tree firmly rooted in the ground, or else a wind can come and uproot him. In our own life, we can visualize this as a person who doesn't have *bitachon*, when the difficulties of life, the wind blows him all over the place. But if he is strong in his *bitachon*, then the various challenges tests of life - the “wind” – will not be able to extinguish his “fire” (his growth).

He first needs to make sure that no matter what situation he goes through, he will remain firm and he doesn't let this extinguish him completely. That is the first step. The second step is that he needs to know how to not get thrown around all over the place and scattered - he has to know how to remain stable and serene.

BECOMING AWARE OF YOUR INITIAL REACTION TO CHALLENGES

Every person has tests and difficulties, facing situations that aren't that easy to deal with, more or less. When one suddenly finds himself in such situations, he should first check into what his "first thought" [initial reaction] is.

For example, he gets a disturbing phone call and is told he has a certain problem now, or he goes to the doctor and they suddenly tell him he has a health issue. Before he thinks into it that deeply, what are his first thoughts going through his mind - how does he initially react to such situations?

Many people react with a groan and they will say something like, "Oh no, another problem!" Others are calm and say it will be okay. They run away and don't want to deal with issues. Others call people and they make connections and find out what to do.

The first thoughts going through one's mind, upon learning of a new challenge he is facing, is the indicator that reveals how much a person is really close to Hashem and how much *bitachon* he really has. If one lives correctly, he first absorbs what he hears and then his first thought is that "Hashem has sent this, Hashem has sent me something new." If one works on emunah and he wants to know how much he's growing one of the ways to know is by seeing his first thought when he encounters a challenge. After that is another avodah, but the first step is to see what his first thought is.

If he sees that his first thought is that Hashem sent this, that means his emunah has penetrated. Such a person is stable and a wind can't uproot him easily. But if his first reaction is just davening,, segulos, and tzedakah – and only he finds Hashem later - that doesn't show he has stability. What will happen when he finds out he really has a problem...? But the clearer emunah he has, his first thought is that Hashem has sent him this (how to deal with it is already the second stage), he is stable, in the land of the living, in emunah. Any of us goes through tests in life. If our first thought turns to emunah, we are calmer, we have *yishuv hadaas*.

Why is there so little *yishuv hadaas* (peace of mind) in the world? Externally it's because people are busy with so much responsibilities of life, such as their work, livelihood, bringing up the children, and the family, etc. While that's all true, there is also a more inner reason why people don't have *yishuv hadaas*. It is because people are full of worry inside their hearts from all their problems. They aren't calm or stable. The more a person attaches to *emunah*, the tests of life can be experienced calmly and with *yishuv daas*, staying stable and firm, for all of life.

The root of succeeding at life is when one properly reacts to sudden challenges. When everything's flowing and things are going well, all is fine and it's easy to maintain one's growth then. But what happens when a person hits a challenge? The difference between a person with little emunah and a lot of emunah can be seen in the way that a person reacts to sudden challenges that come his way. Most people will go through complex situations in life – how does the person go through it? In the ideal situation, he guards his inner calmness and peace of mind throughout all these situations, and as he matures and gets older and goes through more of life, he becomes more and more connected to the true, deep way of living.

But most people, even if they have started to go inward and they have begun serious growth, when they meet with a sudden challenge, they become disoriented completely and they lose all their footing, and they stop growing. I know some people for a few decades already, and they had been growing a lot, and now when I meet them and speak to them about how life is going for them, I don't see the same person that I saw a few years ago. He's not the same person anymore – what happened? He encountered a problem 2 years ago, he got a bit confused and disoriented from it, and he's not the same since then.

How many people stay growing throughout their life? How many people can keep up the growth? Very few. This happens because most people don't have *yishuv hadaas*, they have lost their peace of mind because they weren't prepared to deal with issues that came their way. They can have a lot of fire in them, they are passionate about growth, but then a "wind" comes – the various challenges that can come - and they get confused from it. It stays that away for a few months and continues for years, until all of their fire slowly wanes.

Generally the younger a person is, the more fiery he is, and if he encounters setbacks and failures, he can start again from a new beginning and start growing again. The older one is, the harder it becomes for him to start over again after his challenges have weakened his internal state, and without starting to grow again, he remains stagnant and stops growing.

The stronger one is attached to emunah and his first thought is emunah, his life is more stable and calm. Even if his problems get worse, with the children and with livelihood, he can remain serene inside and getting more serene throughout life.

Realizing How Every Situation Is Tailored For Your Growth

Even more so though is that when one realizes Hashem is with him when a challenge comes, besides for knowing that “whatever Hashem does is for the good”, that’s not enough, one has to know: How has Hashem sent this situation for me so that I can grow and become elevated from it? It’s not that I have to make sure I survive all this somehow and that I don’t completely fall apart from this. My avodah is to see how Hashem has sent me this situation in order for me to grow!”

The first step is to make sure we don’t get uprooted and frazzled - to remain stable, to know that Hashem sent this complex situation to me and that it’s all a test from Hashem. But there’s more. Not only is my avodah to make sure that that this fierce wind (challenge) shouldn’t extinguish my inner fire (growth), but this is ultimately a test that is here to make me grow from it. It’s not just so that I can stay stable and eventually get back to normal again after all this is over. Rather, this is all a test that Hashem has sent me so that I can somehow grow from it. Hashem doesn’t just want me to prevent myself from falling now, He wants me to really grow from this and become elevated to a whole new level from this!

Practically speaking, in order to survive and get by difficult periods, when we are inevitably falling from our normal growth and we can’t maintain our normal routine of constant growth, our avodah is to hold onto one small point of progress and keep at it – for example, if one regularly learns Daf Yomi, he should keep going up the Daf Yomi even during the difficult period he is going through. It can even be a line of Gemara a day (“Shurah Yomi” – daily line of Gemara), as long as he keeps to it every day. He should keep at it with a bit of *mesirus nefesh*. But besides for that, one must know that no matter what we go through, it’s all a way for us to grow higher from it and reveal new strengths.

EXAMPLES OF GROWING FROM SUFFERING

Here are simple examples.

Many people go through family illness, something that can take weeks or months or even years to go through. Many people have said that until their child became ill, or the like, they never knew what it was to have *bitachon* in Hashem. The difficulty opened their eyes because their heart became opened. If everything in their life would have just continued the way it was, with no problems, and through their life would have been easier, they would never grow and they would just end their life on a low spiritual level, everything would have gone on as usual. What did

Hashem do? He brought them a difficulty, a little bit of pain, a new world, and now the person's heart became opened and now he can cry. The pain that Hashem brought has opened the person's heart. Yes, it also causes a person to turn to more *tefillah*, but it was mainly a gift from Hashem to open the heart.

In any situation a person finds himself in, he needs a few seconds to think of how he can grow from it. It's hard sometimes because a person is so busy, but one can think, how will this situation bring me to a new level which I couldn't access until now? This is the way of a ben aliyah to go through all of life, to have calmness of *yishuv hadaas*, knowing it's all from Hashem, knowing it's all good even though its bitter, and emunah that since this is all from Hashem I'm not going to fall from it, instead I will hold onto a small point of growth and keep to it. But even more, the constant fire of the Mizbeach is to realize that every situation of life is so that I can grow.

For some time I had kidney stones, and I was in so much pain from it that for a while I couldn't give any *shiurim*. The suffering was not easy, and sometimes the pain was so great that I couldn't even concentrate at all on anything, I could barely think straight. My child saw me at home and how I couldn't learn, and he asked me, "What are you learning now?" I said, "Now I'm learning *Maseches Yissurim*" (Tractate Suffering)." Anyone can learn such a tractate and even write commentaries on it.

We think superficially that life is simply full of both good and bad situations, but the more inner perspective is that all the time we are in the midst of an ongoing *Masechta* (tractate), and if we aren't *zocheh*, then we are in *Maseches Gehinnom* (Tractate Hell), but when we are *zocheh*, we are learning page after page of an ongoing tractate of how to live life properly, and therefore if Hashem sends suffering our way, we are learning *Maseches Yissurim* – and then we know that we are experiencing life in the right way.

Of course, when we are suffering or facing difficulty, we should certainly *daven* that Hashem should take away the suffering, but we have to also realize that this is an opportunity to learn something.

A person goes through a difficulty – is he the same person afterwards, does he think the same way? Or did he come to a new perspective? Has he progressed?

We are always learning a new *sugya*. We may think that a good life is to learn all day in the Beis Midrash and to *daven* in a shul on Shabbos with a fiery davening, and that suffering is to *daven* in a

shul where we don't have that fire and that better times will come. But really one has to see how this dry Shabbos is really an opportunity for him to grow. Everyone goes through complex situations, even if we can't do what we're saying here, afterwards we should think, how can I learn from this situation and grow from it?

In this way of living, one is constantly in growth, he is a *ben aliyah*. How can one keep rising, if we keep having setbacks when it gets hard? It is when we have the true perspective that every situation is not just for our good, but an opportunity to learn something new, a constant learning process. We can learn from a sefer and from a shiur, and we can also learn a lot from our life itself and what we go through. Certainly in the ideal situation we would choose to learn all day in the Beis Midrash with peace of mind, and grow like that, but life is much more complex than that and there's a lot of hidden, unwritten *Masechto*s to learn – the *Masechta of Chaim*, the Tractate about "Life", which means learning how we can grow from all situations, without exception.

I'll tell you a story. My child came home one day and told me he fell. Then he complained he was feeling pain. I thought he just got a little fall and that it will all be fine. He kept complaining the pain was getting worse. So we decided to check it out by the doctor. The doctor said to take him to the hospital immediately, it's complicated and I don't have time to look into this, so take him to the hospital. I left my wife and kids at home and took my son to the hospital. They made some examinations and they told me, "His life is in danger, he has a hole in his intestines." This was on Erev Shabbos and the last examination was right before Shabbos, so I made up with my wife that I will switch with her for Shabbos, I will go home to be with the kids and she will be with my son for Shabbos and I will come back to the hospital Shabbos morning and probably everything will be fine. I came there Shabbos morning and found that they had moved my son to the surgery room. I asked them, "What surgery?" The doctor there said "It was life threatening so we had to quickly do surgery." I came to him and saw my son thrashing around and found out that there was no time and no one around for my wife to ask if they should do it on Shabbos or not, so the doctors decided on their own to do it. Then they said to me, "The surgery maybe was successful but maybe it wasn't." And I said, "And if it's not successful then what?" This was all on Erev Shabbos Pesach – all the "blessings" coming all at once. They told me "At best, it will be a 10-day recovery the least. And in worse situations, we have no idea how long it will take."

I realized I will have to be in the hospital for Pesach. It was the first time in my life I spent Pesach in the hospital. During the Seder I was busy with my son's surgery. *Halachically* it was

certainly hard for me to be in a hospital on Pesach, but the emotional suffering in my soul was worse, because I knew that tonight everyone else is sitting around with their family by the Seder, the way it should be, with rejoicing in the festival and feeling freedom, and here I am in a hospital for Pesach with all that I have to deal with. I knew it's not pleasant for me and I'll manage, but after some more thinking, I thought: "Why indeed did Hashem send me to this place, and how can I grow from it? I feel like I'm in Egypt for the Pesach Seder!" The simple answer that came to me was so that it was all a test from Hashem that I shouldn't become sad, and that I should be happy on the festival in spite of all the difficulties. But upon a little more thinking, I realized that Hashem sent this so that I could realize that although my situation was difficult, I could still handle this, because I knew that it could be a lot worse. Hashem wanted me to work on all this *emunah* precisely on Pesach night.

Then I met someone else there whose son was born with a problem in his heart, and he has to be with his son in the hospital all the time. I realized that the suffering I am going through with my son is only for a little bit of time, while this man has been going through it for all of his life. When I was talking to him, he told me that he was happy with what Hashem had given him and that now he's going back to his house to enjoy the Yom Tov. I thought to myself, "If I was him, would I be able to be happy on Yom Tov?" I learned something new from having to be in the hospital with my son on Pesach. Until then I had been *zocheh* in my life to learn Torah and be immersed in *d'veykus* in Hashem and to do *zikuy harabim*, but to be happy with suffering? Who can be happy all the time with suffering? Yet here I had met a person with far more suffering than me, and he was happy with what Hashem had given him.

One of the *mashpiim* in Eretz Yisrael, Rav Nisim Yagen zt"l, who had inspired many *baalei teshuvah* with all his speeches, was *niftar* in the prime of his life. He came to a family member in his dream and said, "All the *shiurim* and *zikuy harabim* (benefiting the masses) which I did, which was all done with *mesirus nefesh*, didn't get me into Gan Eden. Only the final period of suffering in my life, which I went through with *bitachon* in Hashem, is what enabled me to get into Gan Eden. That's when I couldn't do anything and something else opened in my heart. Until then, everything was all external. The last illness is what opened my heart."

This is astounding, if you know who Rav Nisim Yagen was, whose shiurim are being listened to by many until today. He had done so much, yet all of that was only inspiration and it wasn't yet the point of truth for him. It was the suffering at the end of his life which brought him to that

point of truth and which opened his heart. (Of course, suffering itself is not a free ticket to Gan Eden, unless a person grows from it. There are those who suffer and gain nothing from it because they didn't grow from it, their hearts didn't open from it.) For Rav Nisim Yagen, all of his *zikuy rabim* was a preparation for his suffering, and it was the suffering which opened his heart and brought him to Gan Eden.

No one in the world is spared from difficulties and complex situations. I just came to America on Sunday and there were times that I burst out crying from all the suffering that people told me about from their personal lives. A *Kolel avreich*, a true *ben Torah*, has three children all with a serious condition.

One needs to know that life isn't easy for anyone, it's always complex. On one hand, a person needs to learn Torah, gain *d'veykus* in Hashem through it, and *daven* to Hashem. But that's only one side to life. The other, second side of life is that a person is learning all the time what suffering is about. We are always in a state of "Shabbos" - sometimes we are learning *Hilchos Oneg Shabbos* (how to enjoy Shabbos) and sometimes we have to learn *Hilchos Pikuach Nefesh* (the laws of life-threatening situations) of Shabbos.

No matter the situation, we can always be learning something new. We need to always see how we are growing from the current situation. Sucos and Pesach and Shabbos are all certain kinds of growth and so is every situation of life. Sometimes life is easier and sometimes it is less easy, and even if we are failing and falling, we can calm ourselves and return to growing.

Without this perspective, each person goes through difficulties and just remains a person who is ignorant of the Torah's values. He will come upstairs and they may even accept his answers of why he didn't grow from his challenges, but although his answers are accepted in Heaven, he still remains an ignoramus. He hasn't learned anything from his problems, he hasn't grown from them.

IN CONCLUSION

May Hashem give us the strength to go through the difficulties and not get uprooted by any winds, but to keep rising like a fire, from any situation, even if we fall as long as we are in a direction of growth, and then we will be renewed with vigor as we get older and mature through life, reaching the joy of *tzaddikim* in Hashem.

16 | Q&A

QUESTION: *What should a person do if he's trying to feel emunah in Hashem but he can't feel it because of his aveiros?*

ANSWER: He should do true *teshuva* on his current level, at that very moment. If his *aveiros* and their aftereffects really bother him, that means he will do *teshuva*. If later he falls again, this doesn't take away his *teshuva*. Chazal said that if someone sincerely wants to do *teshuva*, at that moment he is called a *tzaddik*, and if he betroths a woman "on condition that I am a *tzaddik*", the betrothal is valid, because he is having thoughts of *teshuva* and that makes him a *tzaddik*, at least for that moment. If one ever feels a darkness that comes as a result of his *aveiros*, he should be *makebal ol malchus shomayim* (accepting upon himself to do all the *mitzvos*), and even if afterwards he falls, at that moment he is pure. This will give him purity and he will find some feeling of spiritual pleasure in it, even if only a little.

QUESTION: *There are many people who decide that from today and on they will have emunah but then they fall into anger and various lusts. This cycle goes on for many years. What is the key to open the heart to always have emunah no matter how much a person falls?*

ANSWER: No one can get up in the morning and decide that from now on he will have total, complete *emunah* in Hashem for the rest of his life. This like wishing to fly up in the air to the top of the sky. The mistake is not when he fails eventually, but in making such a decision in the first place. There is no such thing as complete change and transformation in one moment. Most failures are not because the person failed, but because the person took upon himself a resolution or change that simply wasn't possible. Instead one has to try to live a bit higher than yesterday. Sometimes people fall from even that also. One has to try a little harder today to have a little more *emunah* than yesterday. Certainly we must aspire for complete *emunah*, but practically speaking if a person is asked "How are you working on *emunah*? ", the answer is that we can only try to reach a little more *emunah* today than yesterday. Such a resolution can work. Then after a few years a person can grow like this. Wanting to achieve complete growth right away is always a fantasy. Wanting to grow little by little each day – is the proper way to go in. When done consistently and along with *tefillah* to Hashem to succeed, most of the time it will bear results.

QUESTION: How can a person work on *emunah* even when he doesn't have difficulties, and what is the practical advice to take on?

ANSWER: A person has to work on *emunah* in any given situation, how to work on it when he doesn't have difficulties is that either a person can think about the good that Hashem does and also on what Hashem didn't give me. When we are calm we can think of all the good Hashem does for us, that's what *Chovos HaLevovos* says to do and that's what the approach of that sefer is, to connect to Hashem from amidst the positive and good. This is not just to connect to the good that He does for us but to realize that there is a Giver here Who has given us this good, we are connecting to Him by realizing the good He does for us, but the good He does for us is only a revelation of His love to us, but we need to connect to the One Who loves us and that's the main point. To use what He gives us as a way to connect to Him. Like this, when we are going through a difficulty, we can remind ourselves that He loves us. Also when you are calm, think of all the things that are missing from the world, we are missing Mashiach and the revelation of His Name on the world, the world is filled with troubles and suffering, and we can have emunah that Mashiach will come, but generally a person should think about this only when he's going through a difficulty and he is missing certain things, he should think how the world is filled with troubles.

QUESTION: How can a person know for what reason Hashem has brought him the suffering or difficult situation?

ANSWER: The Rambam says that in the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, a person would go to the Navi and find out what his *tikkun* is. Now with no *Nevuah* or *Ruach HaKodesh*, we are all groping in the dark. Practically speaking when a person is going through difficult suffering he should first try to see the *middah k'neged middah* (Hashem's measure-for-measure conduct) and to try to see if it's obvious or not. If it's obvious how Hashem is dealing with him *middah k'neged middah*, then he can know that it's because of *middah kneged middah*. But if it's not obvious, then what does Hashem want from him? To realize what he needed to work on until now and how this situation will enable him to improve that area. Heaven is sending him a message, but if he doesn't decipher the message then what is Heaven conveying to him and why would he get a message? If he understands what Heaven is sending him, fine, but if he can't figure out, he should use it as an awakening to improve on something in his life that he needs improvement in.

Sometimes a tragedy strikes, *Rachmana Litzlan*, and the *tzibbur* (community) is told that they all need to improve on a certain area. An *asifah* of 3 Rabbonim come and each of them says that the *tzibbur* has to improve in a different area and they hear of 3 different areas to improve in. Sometimes the *tzibbur* in that place does need a certain area of *tikun*, but if it is not obvious what

the tikun of the *tzibbur* is, then individually each person needs to use it as an awakening from Heaven to improve in an area that he knows he needs to improve in. And this will be different with each person, understandably.

QUESTION: How can a person change what his initial reaction should be to challenges so that he will react in the proper way, in his thoughts and emotions, to each situation?

ANSWER: There are two parts of how a person can work on it. First a person can purify himself in general and as a result of that, his initial reaction will be purer. The second part is that after he becomes aware of what he is thinking, he can control his thinking and emotions. There are both thoughts and emotions involved, with some people the emotion comes first and with others the thought comes first.

QUESTION: One who is on a very low spiritual level, how can he face a challenge without falling into all kinds of *aveiros* and bad behavior?

ANSWER: The *Gemara* (*Nedarim 32a*) says that “When the *yetzer hora* is present there is no mention of the *yetzer tov*”, meaning that when the *yetzer hora* is burning in all of its intensity, there’s nothing to do. The main *avodah* in winning the *yetzer hora* is rather to prepare before the temptation arrives. While the actual challenge is taking place, one feels strongly connected to evil, and certainly we can tell him “Don’t do it”, but will he listen? There is clear, practical advice to know about before the temptation arrives. (1) The first thing to do is to push off giving in to the *yetzer hora* for a few minutes, for example to delay doing the *aveirah* for another 5 minutes or so – as much as one feels he is realistically capable of doing – and this begins to weaken his *yetzer hora*. (2) The second thing to do is that even as one is in the midst of falling and giving in to the *yetzer hora*, he should keep interrupting what he’s doing so that he doesn’t do it all at once. (3) Finally, he shouldn’t do everything he wanted to do, and he should leave the act unfinished. These are the 3 steps of how to deal with evil temptations when they are burning intensely, and by following these 3 steps one can weaken his *yetzer hora* even as it’s burning intensely.

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- ספר עולם ברור ■ בלבבי משכן אבנה – א-ב ■
- פרקי יסוד ■ דע את ביתך ■
- שאל לבי (שו"ת תשע"ח-ט) ■ דע את גאולתך ■
- תיקון כח הריכוז ■ דע את דמיונך ■
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- Gateways To Hashem For Today's ■ דע את עצמך ■
Jewish Woman ■ התבודדות ■
- Getting to Know Your Feelings ■ הכרה עצמית והעצמה הנפש ■
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