

UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION

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**FIXING
YOUR
FIRE
[HONOR]**

**Torah Manual to
Fixing Traits of Honor**

**Collection of Drashas from the
author of Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh**

<http://www.bilvavi.net/sugya/daes.fire.honor>

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1 | *Heavy Honor*

Introduction

With *siyata d'shmaya* (the help of Heaven), we will continue to learn about the soul's element of fire [and its resulting character traits]. Previously, we have learned about the “root” traits which stem from the soul's negative fire: the traits of conceit and anger. Now we will learn about the “branching” traits of fire. One of the branching traits of fire, Rav Chaim Vital writes, is *kavod* (honor).

The Sages teach that “Jealousy, lust and honor take a person out of the world” – that is, these particular traits remove a person from his own [inner] ‘world’.

Since *kavod* is a trait that stems from fire, and each of the elements contains aspects of all four elements, there is *kavod* that stems from earth-of-fire, water-of-fire, wind-of-fire, and fire-of-fire.

The Four General Kinds of Honor

- 1) When *kavod* stems from **earth-of-fire**, a person is pursuing *kavod* due to *k'veidus*, “heaviness”. The word “*kavod*” is related to the word *kaveid*, “heavy”, which implies that *kavod* can be associated with “heaviness”, which is a property of earth, for the earth is a heavy substance.
- 2) When *kavod* stems from **water-of-fire**, a person is pursuing *kavod* because he enjoys it (water is the root of pleasure), and on a more subtle note, because he is ‘dragged’ after it (similar to the nature of water, which drags things with it).
- 3) When a person is pursuing *kavod* that stems from **wind-of-fire**, he will “move” towards *kavod* so that he can attain it (wind is the root of movement). He is the kind of person of whom it is said, “One who runs after honor”.
- 4) *Kavod* that stems from **fire-of-fire** is when a person feels the elation and pride from the *kavod*, when he feels exalted above all others, similar to the nature of fire, which rises.

Those are the four general roots of *kavod*. Now we will go into the details, starting with *kavod* that stems from **earth-of-fire** and its four subdivisions: earth-of-earth-of-fire, water-of-earth-of-fire, wind-of-earth-of-fire, and fire-of-earth-of-fire.

The Four Branches of Kavod That Stem From Earth-of-Fire

1) *Kavod* stemming from **earth-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person wants to remain “heavily” and firmly in the place where he is found in.

2) *Kavod* stemming from **water-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person enjoys staying there.

3) *Kavod* stemming from **wind-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person has deliberate, heavy movement; as an example, the *Mesillas Yesharim* says that when a person pursues honor, he will walk in a precise manner with deliberation in his movements.

4) *Kavod* stemming from **fire-of-earth-of-fire** is the elation that one feels when he remains heavily attached to what he feels is his rightful place.

Understandably, these terms sound mysterious when we first hear about them, because we haven’t yet explained them, and we have only outlined them briefly. Now we will explore each of these in detail.

Earth-of-Earth-of-Fire: The ‘Heavy’ Effect That Results From Honor

We will begin with examining *kavod* that stems from **earth-of-earth-of-fire**.

As we mentioned, *kavod* is from the word *k’veidus*, heaviness. There are different kinds of *k’veidus*/heaviness which stem from the elements in the soul.

There is *k’veidus* which stems from the element of **earth** in general. Earth is a heavy substance, and in terms of the soul, earth breeds heaviness. The heaviness of earth is also the source of the trait of laziness [and soon we will explain how there is a connection between honor and laziness].

The element of **fire** also contains an aspect of *k’veidus*/heaviness. Fire rises, and when one is “rising” due to honor that he is pursuing, he is rising beyond his simple place. When a person is receiving honor, he is disconnecting from his normal place, and he is rising to a place of honor, which is not the simple place that he belongs in. *Kavod* is therefore a way to enlarge one’s reality.

As an example, Rav Yochanan said that “a person’s clothing is his honor”. A person weighs a certain amount and he takes up a certain amount of space, but when he wears clothing, he weighs a bit more and now he takes up more space. That is what *kavod* is like. It expands one’s own personal space and makes him feel that he is ‘worth’ more. Therefore, *kavod* causes a person to have *k’veidus*, “heaviness”.

The simple understanding is that when a person receives *kavod*, he feels as if he has become bigger and more prominent. But the more precise way to understand it is that *kavod* gives a person a feeling of self-expansion.

An even deeper understanding is that *kavod* is like a space that envelops the person from all directions. As an example, Rabbi Yochanan said that a person's garments are called his honor, and we know that the clothing is what surrounds a person's body.

On a deeper level, there was the *Ananei HaKavod* (Clouds of Glory) which surrounded all of *Klal Yisrael*, so *kavod* is something that surrounds and envelops man from all sides, which expands his own space. In other words, the area that surrounds the self can be viewed as an expansion of the space of the self.

That is the general concept, and now we will explain the simpler ramifications of this concept.

When One Is Tied To A Certain Place/Position That Provides Honor

Kavod causes a person to feel an inner *k'veidus* (heaviness) in his soul. This *k'veidus* causes a person to want to stay in his place, due to the *kavod* that he receives there.

We find two possible kinds of movement towards *kavod*. One kind of movement is when a person is simply pursuing it. Chazal describe such a person as “One who runs after honor.” This is a person who always looks to receive honor, wherever he is, and if he does not get enough, he will feel, “*All of this is not worth anything to me*” [as Haman said]. The person wants to ‘move’ out of the space of where he is, so that he can receive more and more *kavod*. The one who “runs after honor” is a person who is not content to stay in his own space.

There is another way entirely, however, in how a person pursues *kavod*: When a person is receiving *kavod* and therefore he remains in his place, so that he can continue to receive *kavod* there. Chazal say, “It is not the place which honors a person. Rather, it is the person who honors the place.” In other words, the place where a person is found in can cause him to feel honored there, and therefore he may not want to move from there. Because the person receives *kavod* there, he doesn't want to move away from that place.

It can simply be understood as an attachment to the *kavod* he gets there, but the deeper understanding is because the *kavod*/honor is actually ‘weighing’ him down - for *kavod* can cause *k'veidus*, “heaviness”. For example, if a person is honored to sit in a certain place, where he will receive *kavod* there, and he doesn't feel like leaving such a place, we can simply understand that he doesn't want to leave the place because he is receiving honor there.

That is certainly true, but the more precise way to understand it is that the *kavod* has caused him to have *k'veidus*/heaviness, and this “heaviness” that has been created from the *kavod* is making it hard for him to leave the place, so he will want to remain there forever. This is not just because he is scared of losing the *kavod* if he were to leave his place. Rather, he is found in that place where he's getting *kavod* and it is sort of “weighing” him down, gluing him in place.

The Contradiction Contained In Honor

Based upon the above, let's understand the following.

Fire is the lightest of the elements, and that is what allows it to rise higher. Fire destroys something and then it is fueled further, which allows it to rise higher. Fire in the soul is the root of the traits of conceit and anger. The trait of conceit is a product of the 'light' aspect of fire, which allows it to rise quickly, and the trait of anger is the product of the 'dry' aspect of fire, and therefore when a person doesn't feel inner vitality, he gets angry, because he has dried up inside.

Fire also contains the property of heat, and heat allows it the fire to rise quickly. The 'dryness' of the fire, however, can weigh down the fire, connecting it to the element of earth. We explained about this in the series ***Fixing Your Fire: Anger***.

Now we are learning about the trait of *kavod*/honor, which contains both aspects of fire at once. Honor is about rising higher, which reflects the property of heat in fire, for heat rises. At the same time, honor also contains the 'dryness' of fire, which causes 'heaviness' to the 'fire', and therefore, honor brings 'heaviness' upon a person.

For this reason, the trait of honor contains a deep contradiction. When a person is receiving honor, he wants to rise higher, and this is similar to the trait of conceit. A conceited person is regularly seeking to be honored. But on the other hand, the person who is pursuing honor is also weighed down heavily to the place where he is in, and in this aspect, honor works in a similar way to anger, causing one's 'fire' to connect to the level of 'earth', by drying him out on the inside.

So when we take a look at the deep inner workings of honor, we see a contradiction. Honor contains an aspect of wanting to rise higher (like fire), and honor also contains an aspect of "heaviness" that causes a person to stay in his place (like earth).

The Fallacy of Pursuing A Prestigious Position

Now we shall this apply this practically.

Any sensible person understands that the world is full of examples of people who pursue honor. The details of seeking honor can be endless. There are people who think that a person is only successful if he receives a prestigious position in life, and that if a person doesn't get this prestige, then his life is considered worthless. But this mentality is entirely a product of fantasy.

Sometimes honor takes on spiritual forms, which seems to make it look like a holy pursuit. There are teaching positions available in yeshivah that are regarded as prestigious, for such positions enables a person to teach Torah to others. There are public positions in which people assist in communal affairs, and these positions are also desired and considered prestigious in the eyes of people. But Hashem knows what's in the heart of each person, and He knows how much truth the person is really pursuing – as well as his how much motivation for honor that the person is in it for.

These positions of prestige are what many people are seeking. Understandably, a person will seek to attain a position that is within his own current level to reach. After a person gains the position of prestige that he wanted – whether it is a position of being a Rav, or a *Rosh Yeshivah*, or a *Rosh Kolel*, what will happen if he is taken away from this position? Any sensible person knows that that is like when “Hashem builds words and destroys them”: When any of these prestigious positions are either offered to a person or taken away from a person, it can break out into a war that resembles “the war of Gog and Magog”!

Why does this happen? Obviously, it is because the person’s *kavod* is at stake. But based upon what we have explained here, it is because there is *k’veidus*/heaviness that is weighing upon the person who is comfortable in his position, and that is what makes it so hard for him to leave his place.

Parents Who Want Their Children To Continue Their Position/Business

We find that in the laws of *yerushah* (inheritance), it is not only monetary affairs which are inherited. Positions of status are inherited as well. The *kehunah* (priesthood), the status of *Kohen Gadol* (the high priest) and the *malchus* (royalty) are also inherited from father to son.

Similarly, there are people who have certain positions or businesses, and they wish for their children to continue their position or job, after they die. Many people make sure that their children will continue the family business or position. Often there is resulting dissension between the children about how to divide this kind of inherited status, with endless details involved. But why do these fathers wish in the first place for their children to continue the position that they began?

On a simple level, we can say that the father has the best interests of the child in mind, and he wanted that his child should have everything good, and be financially secure, and enjoy an honorable status. But the deeper motivation of the father is because there is a “heaviness” upon him that isn’t letting him budge from his own position. He knows that one day he will die and he’ll no longer have the position. So in order for him to remain in this position, he makes sure that his child will continue the position, which will keep it alive, for children are a continuation of the parents.

It would make sense for a *rebbe* to want his *talmid* to continue his own path, because that is coming more from a motivation for truth. It is of a spiritual nature and it is much closer to having inner content to it. But any kind of position, standing, or title of a more material nature which is being forced by the father upon the child, most of the time, is simply because deep down the father doesn’t want to leave this position behind, and the only way for him to continue it after he dies is to make sure that his child continues it.

This is usually what is motivating the person in most of these situations. It is usually not like how Moshe Rabbeinu desired to have the *Kehunah* status continued through his children. Rather, it usually stems from “heaviness” that has resulted from the honor he has received in that position, and that heaviness is causing him to feel that he is unable to part from his position.

Dealing With The Truth

Let's say we have a person who became an esteemed Rosh Yeshivah on this world, and he lived a long life, teaching Torah to many *talmidim* in a big and famous yeshivah, who continue to listen to him even after they are in *kolel*. When he leaves the world eventually and he comes upstairs to Heaven, imagine if he's offered the following choice: "Either you can go back down into the world and have another yeshivah with many *talmidim*, or you can become a *talmid* of Reb Akiva Eiger." What will he choose?

We are taught by the Sages, "Be a tail to a lions, rather than be a head of foxes." It's better to be the least prominent in a group of people who are on a higher level than you, rather than be the most prominent in a group of people who are on a lower level than you. But if this Rosh Yeshivah is too attached to *kavod*, he'd rather remain a *Rosh Yeshivah* than be a *talmid* of Reb Akiva Eiger. He would probably choose to be a "Rosh Yeshivah" even in *Gebinnom* ! He might have the nature of being unable to part from the position he was in, where he was in charge of things. This means that he didn't live a life of truth! Even if he leaves over children who will continue his position, that doesn't mean that he'll get any reward for this when he gets upstairs. It's harsh to say that he won't get anything at all for it, but he'll see the truth.

At some point in a person's lifetime, a person has to deal with the truth. He has to be able to part from a certain situation and to know that it will end one day for him.

This is only one example, but anyone can add on his own examples, which bring out this idea. The point is that a person can develop the problem of "heaviness" which is tying him down to a certain position he is in, due to the honor he receives there. The honor gives him a sense of permanence, and he feels unable to leave that place where he receives honor or prestige. Indeed, it is very tough for a person to detach from such positions, because he has become heavily attached to the situation.

The Solution: The Concept of "Halbashah" (Wearing) and "Hafshatah" (Removing)

Now let's see what the proper way to go about life is. We have mentioned the following concept in the past with regard to other situations, and here it will be especially applicable, when learning how to detach from positions of honor.

There is a concept of "wearing" and "removing" our "garments" on This World (*halbashah*/wearing and *hafshatah*/removal). In other words, we have to be able to "wear" something, by using it, and we also need to be able to "remove it", similar to how we get dressed in the morning and we undress at night to wear different clothes. *Kavod* (honor) especially is called a "garment" by the Sages, which was mentioned earlier. Therefore, we need to view *kavod* like a pair of clothes that we must be able to "remove", after we "wear" it.

Any situation we encounter on This World, in fact, needs to be viewed with the perspective that we "wear" it and then we "remove" it. For example, there is the normal period of the year which we

call “the *zman*” (the season), and then there is *Bein HaZemanim*, the break in between the seasons of the year. We “wear” the normal season and then we “remove it”, when we are in *Bein HaZemanim*; then we “remove” *Bein HaZemanim* and we go back to “wearing” the regular *zman*.

The Vilna *Gaon* and others wrote that time is like a ‘garment’ that we wear – we pass through certain times of the year, such as the festivals, and then we leave them. There is *Erev Yom Tov*, then we enter Yom Tov, and then we are in *Motzei Yom Tov* – we keep “wearing” one kind of “garment” and then we “remove” it, putting on a different “garment”.

In whatever situation we are in, we need to view it as a “garment”, which we “wear” temporarily, which we eventually remove. When you absorb this concept, not just in your mind but as a way to live life, you will be able to view every situation you go through like a pair of clothes that you wear and then remove.

Example 1 – Different Stages of Life

To illustrate, a person starts out life as a child, then he becomes *bar mitzvah*, then he enters high school, then *Beis Midrash*, then he enters marriage, and then he becomes a father. Then he marries off his children, and soon he is a grandfather, and sometimes he merits to become a great-grandfather or even a great-great-grandfather. He goes through many different stages in life, and each time, his status changes. A person needs to be able to identify the change of status and realize that it is subject to change: “Am I child right now, or am I a teenager? Am I more mature than that? Am I father, or a grandfather, or a great-grandfather?”

Each stage in life brings a different status of identification, and one should notice the change of status. The status keeps changing throughout life. And when moving on to the next stage, as a person is beginning a new stage or a little before entering it, a person should realize that he is about to enter a situation that will not be here forever. It is all temporary and it can change.

When one has this perspective, for every situation he finds himself in, he will be able to disconnect from it when the time comes. He has become aware that every situation in life is always temporary, like a pair of clothes that we wear one day and remove the next day, for he has the understanding that there is no situation which is permanent. This perspective needs to accompany us throughout all of our life.

Example 2 – How A Father Relates To His Grown-Up Child

Consider also the following example.

When a young child grows up and he is more mature now, sometimes the father has a hard time adjusting to this reality. The father may want to keep relating to the child as if he is a young child, speaking to him as if he’s talking to a little boy, because deep down, he still feels that this is his

young child. When he has to reprimand him, it's as if he's asking his 'little boy' to act more mature, and it's because he still relates to his child as if he's that little boy. The child, however, has already grown up and matured, and he wants to be spoken to on a more mature level. But the father may not be able to accept this transition, and he may keep relating to his grown son as if he's still his young child.

We can bring more examples, but the point is that a person must be able to realize that there is no situation which is permanent. One needs to make the transition from one situation to another. Without this awareness, a person will feel that a situation must be permanent and that it must never change. But as we are explaining, one must know that every situation in life is temporary, like clothing that we wear and later remove.

Example 3 – Marriage

The following is also a fundamental example: When a person gets married, does he feel like this relationship will be here forever?

If he thought it will be forever, he will have a very difficult time adjusting one day if his spouse leaves the world before he does. And since most spouses do not die together, but leave the world at some point before the other, this is a situation which a person must know how to deal with when the time inevitably comes. Do spouses stay together in Heaven, in *Gan Eden*? Not everyone merits this. It is usually a temporary connection for This World, and not permanent.

(An exception to this is if their souls are rooted in the same root, and they are a true “*zivug rishon*” (first marriage). This would not apply in the case of *zivug sheini*, a second marriage. In most cases, the marriage is like a *zivug sheini*. Not only in This World is there such a thing as a second marriage, but even in their very soul root, a couple can be in the category of a *zivug sheini*, which will mean that their connection is not forever. That being the case, most marriages are a temporary connection, which a person eventually takes leave of.)

These are some fundamental examples, but it is true of all connections that we have on This World, which are all temporary.

Removing The 'Heaviness' Caused By Situations Of Honor

When one absorbs this perspective, it becomes easier for him to detach from certain situations or positions that he have become too comfortable for him to part from.

The Torah says that Avraham was “heavy” with all of the silver, gold, and flocks that he owned. If we look at a person in the world today, we can also see “heaviness”, but it is not because he owns money. Rather, people are “heavy” in the sense that they are ‘weighed down’ from having a spouse, children, a certain position or status, money, financial assets, and all other aspects of life which

‘weigh’ a person down. All of these aspects of life cause a huge amount of ‘heaviness’ to weigh upon the soul.

Most people do not actually feel this heaviness, though. They might feel weighed down by the various stresses of life only in terms of how it affects them financially. But the truth is that there is a great heaviness that is formed upon the soul, due to all of these aspects of life.

In contrast, when a person realizes that all situations must be ‘worn’ and then ‘removed’, as we explained, the ‘heaviness’ he feels in all situations of life will become lightened. He will feel as if he has become lighter, as a result of this new perspective. This is a subtle concept, but we should know that it is a way to actually live life. When one feels reaches this awareness deeply in his soul, he will feel that has become “lighter” (because his “heaviness” has been removed). As the Sages state, “Be light as an eagle.”

Without this awareness, a person goes through life and he becomes more and more weighed down, and the more he is weighed down, the more of a pull he will feel towards this materialism of This World, because the ‘heaviness’ causes him to have a downward pull. This will cause him to feel more connected to certain situations on This World, and he will feel unable to detach from it.

Being Able To Detach

Now let us return to discussing how to deal with *kavod*/honor when we find it too difficult to leave a certain honorable position, which stems from **earth-of-earth-of-fire**.

When *kavod* weighs down a person and he feels unable to leave a place where he is honored, he needs to be able to disconnect from it, in the blink of an eye, if need be it. If he is prepared to do that, the ‘heaviness’ of the situation will be greatly lightened, and then it won’t weigh him down that much. Since he is prepared to quickly leave it if he has to, he will have a much easier time letting go of it if the time comes to leave it.

The Alter of Slabodka, who headed the yeshiva of Slabodka in Europe, taught the study of *mussar* in his yeshiva, where he also developed a unique approach in *mussar*. There were people at that time who opposed his particular methods, and he was told that either he should give in to the opposition and abandon his style, or he should leave the yeshiva. They made a *goral* (raffle), and the *goral* said that he should leave the yeshiva. When he left the yeshiva, he said, “Thank you, Hashem, for giving me the great merit all these years of helping people, by teaching them”, and he left in a content mood.

How can a person reach such a deep level in the soul? Naturally, a person feels like he is in charge of his situation. If he is in a position of power, naturally he will feel that he is in charge, and that it’s his. If he becomes too attached to the place or position that he is in charge of, and he is somehow forced away from it, he will feel like half of his flesh is being eaten.

In contrast, the proper way to live life is for a person to realize that this entire world is Hashem's world, and not his. As the Sages teach, "Anything that is within your power to do, do. But the task is not upon you to complete, and neither are you exempt from it." One must do all that he can, he must do "his" personal share on this world, but even that share still belongs to Hashem. If Hashem would want a person to leave what he's doing and do something else, would he do it? That is the question one must ask himself.

In order for a person to make the transition, he needs to go through a deep, inner process in his soul, of getting used to the perspective that every situation we have on This World is temporary, and that we are never connected to anything forever. The more that a person becomes a more inner kind of person, the better he can know of this subtle point, of how much he needs to be connected to a situation verses how much he needs to disconnect from it.

It is a very subtle point in the soul to traverse, but the basic outline of it is, that if you know that you won't be able to detach from a certain situation, don't enter it in the first place. Consider it forbidden to you. The truth is that will anyways leave everything behind one day, because death disconnects a person from This World. But in one's own personal *avodah* that he has on this world, he should consider it forbidden for him to enter a situation if he knows he won't be able to part from it. One should be prepared to calmly leave it, with a content kind of acceptance, and even more so, one should be prepared to do it happily.

The Meaning of True Kavod/Honor

If one deeply reaches this perspective, he will live a life of the true "*kavod*". This is also the depth of "One who runs away from honor."¹

What does it mean to "run away" from honor? Does it mean you should run to a faraway place when people seek to honor you? That is not what the Sages meant. Rather, it means that when people are giving you *kavod*, you should be prepared to quickly leave this situation, in the blink of an eye, to go to a place where there won't be any *kavod*. (As for being willing to endure insults instead, that is a different matter).

Running away from honor means that a person isn't weighed down by the 'heaviness' that results from honor, because he is prepared to quickly detach from it, if need be it. He knows that if Hashem would want him to leave the situation, he would do so easily. Surely if he is forced away from his honorable situation and he is thrown out of there, or if they ridicule him there and they sadden him, he does not blame this on the people who have caused him grief, and he is aware that they didn't do anything to him. Instead, he is aware that it is "Hashem told him to curse." He can leave the situation as readily as he entered it. That is what it means to run away from honor.

¹ Erwin 13b

The Honor That Enables One To Truly Rise

Based upon the above, we can now understand the following point. When a person lives with this perspective, he also eases the inner contradiction that is contained in *kavod*/honor, which we mentioned earlier.

On one hand, honor is a motivation to rise higher, but at the same time, honor weighs a person down. When a person isn't able to run away from honor, instead of rising higher from the honor he is receiving, he is pulled downward. It will be like the suffering of Iyov. He is rising and falling at the same time, as he receives the honor. These contradicting movements within him will cause dissension between the forces of his own soul.

But if a person is able to run away from honor, meaning that he can detach from the situation if need be it, then he will be able to truly rise higher from honor. Since he is ready to leave it in one moment, he will feel "lighter" in this situation, and when something is light, it can rise easily (unlike something heavy, which is naturally pulled downward). Such *kavod* will elevate him, and it will not pull him downward.

The Honor of The Neshamah: When It Is Prepared To Detach From The World

This is the depth of the words of Chazal that the *neshamah* (Divine soul) is called "*kavod*", honor. What is the *kavod* of the *neshamah*? The *neshamah* is clothed by the body. It can enter the body and be clothed by it, and it can leave the body. That is its *kavod*.

Hashem has decreed upon the *neshamah* that it must go into the body and be 'clothed' by the body, as the Sages state, "Against your own will you were created, against your own will you were born, and against your own will you will die." This refers to the concept of *halbashah*/wearing and *hafshatah*/removal which we explained about here, and this is the "*kavod*" of the *neshamah*. The *neshamah*, by its very nature, rises. The body weighs down the soul and prevents it from ascending. But the *neshamah* by its very nature is ready to exchange its 'garment' in one moment and rise to Heaven, and that is its *kavod*.

False Honor Vs. True Honor

Now we have learned the difference between true *kavod* and false *kavod*. False *kavod* causes a person to be pulled downward, whereas true *kavod* is when a person is ready to easily detach from the *kavod* he is receiving, and such *kavod* elevates the person. This is also the true meaning of "the honor of Torah scholars", which are really a reflection of the "honor of the Torah".

Practically Actualizing This Concept

This concept contains much depth and subtlety, and it is a long inner process to traverse, throughout life.

Practically speaking, one should begin getting used to detachment by disconnecting from things that aren't that hard for him to detach from. He shouldn't begin by trying to detach from honor altogether, because in most cases, this will be unrealistic, and it will be too hard for him to do. Instead, a person can try detaching from small kinds of honor, or he can try detaching in general from certain aspects of his life, which do not have to be related to honor.

Slowly as a person gets used to this, he will get used to “wearing” and “removing” the parts of his life, which in turn lessens the “heaviness” upon him. His pull towards this materialistic world will gradually be lessened and lightened, and then he can become “as light as an eagle....to do the will of Hashem”.

2 | *Fantasizing About Honor*

Water-of-Earth-of-Fire: The Pleasurable Feeling When Receiving Honor

Let us continue, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to learn about the trait of *kavod* (honor), which stems from the element of fire in the soul. Now we will discuss *kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *kavod* stemming from **earth-of-fire** is when *kavod* causes a person to have *k'veidus*, “heaviness”, meaning that the person receiving honor will have a hard time leaving the place where is found in, so long as he’s receiving honor in that place. It is the depth behind the desire in a person to stay in a place where he’s receiving *kavod*.

There is the trait of *kavod* in general, and on a more specific level, there is a kind of *kavod* where a person pursues *kavod* through remaining in a certain place/situation, so that he can continue to receive *kavod* there. That is the idea of *k'veidus*/heaviness, where a person can’t pull away from the place or situation where he’s receiving *kavod*, like a person who has climbed to a high place and now he doesn’t want to come back down.

Kavod stemming from **water-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person is having *taanug* (pleasure) in the honor when he’s remaining in his place. Later we will discuss *kavod* that stems from **water-of-fire** in general, which is the general *taanug* that one has in *kavod*. But here we are discussing a different and more specific kind of *kavod*, where a person is having pleasure in the honor he’s receiving when he remains in his place. This is the *kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**, and that is what we will discuss here in this chapter.

The Depth Behind Kavod/Honor: A Spiritual Pleasure Found On This World

Rav Chaim of Volozhin said that although the Sages state a rule that “There is no reward for *mitzvos* on This World”, it is possible for a person to get his reward for *mitzvos* on This World when he receives *kavod*. Receiving honor is Heaven’s way of repaying a person on This World for *mitzvos*. What is the depth behind this? Why is *kavod* a way of receiving one’s spiritual reward for the *mitzvos*, on This World?

It is because the higher realms are spiritual, whereas the world we live on is material. The *mitzvos* that we do contain a spiritual light (as in the term “*Ner Mitzvah*”, the “flame of a *mitzvah*” – its spiritual light). The physical “garment” of a *mitzvah* is a physical act that we do on This World. We can’t receive the spiritual reward for a *mitzvah* on This World, because This World is a material dimension. But there is one thing that serves a ‘bridging point’ between This World and the upper realms, which the Sages mention in many places: the idea of *kavod*, honor.

Each of the realms that Hashem has created is bound to its dimensions, where they are each contained in their own space, and none of them interfere with the other. But there is a point where the upper realms can extend into the lower realms, where the lower realms can have some grasp of the upper realms. That point is *kavod*, honor.

A good example of this concept is the *mitzvah* of honoring one's father and mother. The child, who is at a point below his parents, must honor his father and mother, who are above him. A child has a *mitzvah* to be in awe of his parents, for a higher realm is generally viewed in awe by the lower realm. The *mitzvah* to honor one's parents is the idea of revealing a higher, spiritual dimension upon the lower realm; this revelation takes place through the act of honoring them, *kavod*.

(We mentioned in the previous chapter that this idea also exists on a deeper level, that when the *neshamah* is revealed and it overcomes the bounds of the body, this in turn reveals the *kavod* of the *neshamah*.)

This is a very clear principle: *Kavod* reveals a higher realm amidst this lower realm. When the lower realm “honors” the higher realm, based on its own understanding of the higher realm even though it isn't actually grasping the higher realm, this is *kavod*. The lower realm is giving *kavod* to the higher realm. The truth is that we do not comprehend anything of the higher realms. Any honor we attribute to it is based on the feeble and limited understanding that is available to us on this lower realm we are on. Just as we don't understand Hashem - and all honor that we accord to Him is only from our own understanding – so don't we understand any of the spiritual realms that are above this lower realm we are on.

The *mitzvah* of honoring parents is “*Honor your father, and your mother*” – the emphasis is on the “*your*”, for the honor that a child must give to his parents must come from the recognition that they are above him and that he is below them. The *Gemara* says that the father and mother each provide five different aspects to the physical makeup of the child. The child needs to honor them because they gave certain things to him, and since they gave to him, they are higher than him, and he must recognize that it is upon him to honor their higher status.

Kavod is also from the word *k'veidus*, “heaviness”, because when something heavy, it descends. *Kavod* is thus the revelation that something higher has ‘descended’ to a lower plane, when the lower plane acknowledges the higher plane, thereby revealing the presence of the higher plane within the lower plane. That is the depth behind the concept of *kavod*, and it is a fundamental understanding about *kavod*.

Therefore, *kavod* is not simply another kind of *taanug* (pleasure) of our soul. We have *taanug* when we enjoy any of the physical senses, but *taanug* in *kavod*/honor is, in essence, to enjoy who we are. The enjoyment in honor is a power that “bridges” the lower realm with the higher realm, allowing a person to experience something of the higher realm amidst this lower realm. *Kavod* is therefore a deeper kind of pleasure. It is a pleasure of the higher realm, which one can experience on this world.

The Ramchal in *Mesillas Yesharim* says that if not for *kavod*, a person would eat and drink only in order to survive, and he would only wear enough clothes to keep himself from harm. The pursuit of food, drink, and extravagant clothing all stem from a person's desire for *kavod*. These words of the Ramchal are hard to understand, at first glance. Why should a person pursue these physical and materialistic things, in order to receive *kavod*? What does *kavod* have to do with it? But it is because when the *neshamah's* desire for true spiritual pleasure isn't being met, it will be interpreted by the body as a desire for pleasure in the physical. The body will then seek all kinds of sensual pleasures. But it is all rooted in a desire for spiritual pleasure, which is *kavod*.

We have discussed the general concept of the pleasure of *kavod*. Now we will explain the more specific concept that we will discuss in this chapter, which is *kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**. In summary, the pleasure that one has in *kavod*/honor is the fundamental root of all pleasure that a person can have on this world.

Kavod/Honor – A Spiritual Pleasure

In some people, the desire for *kavod* is very strong, especially for a person who has a dominant element of fire in the soul. A fire-based personality can strongly identify with the idea of *kavod*. A strong desire for *kavod* is usually found in people who overcame their physical desires in their younger years, and when they hit old age, they feel a powerful desire for *kavod*.

Most people in their younger years are excitable, and therefore their physical desires are at their full strength, causing “boiling of the blood” (an excitement) whenever they desire something. As a person matures and gets older, though, even if he didn't have a strong pleasure for *kavod* in his younger years, he will feel a stronger desire for *kavod*. When he was younger, he was more materialistic, so his main desires were physical in their nature. Now that he is older and he feels more spiritual (or even if he didn't age yet, and he has matured spiritually), he is much less interested in physical desires and pleasures. His pleasures will mainly be spiritual in their nature, so he will feel a desire for *kavod*.

If a person has truly risen spiritually, he receives the honor attributed to the wise Torah scholars, and the more he has matured spiritually, the more he merits this honor. But it is the same idea as the above: When a person is no longer that interested in physical, material pleasures, his desire for pleasure will become more spiritual, which translates into a desire to experience more honor.

If a person has a very strong amount of fire in his soul, he will have a strong desire for *kavod* even in his younger years. There are a few people who are like this. But even if a person does not have that much fire in his soul, as long as he has matured somewhat in life, he will feel a stronger desire for *kavod*. Therefore, I want to emphasize here that the words we will explain here are only for those who strongly identify with the desire for *kavod*.

There are some people who can strongly identify with the words here, and there are others who feel very far from what we are discussing here, because they don't feel such a powerful demand for

kavod, so they can't understand why a person would make such a big deal about it. But, as we have explained earlier, the pleasure in *kavod* is the deepest pleasure of the soul. If a person doesn't feel a demand to have this deep desire for *kavod*, it is really because he is not yet connecting to the spiritual dimension within him.

The desire for *kavod* can either be channeled in a holy direction, which is the honor attributed to Torah scholars, or it is used for evil motives. But the actual desire itself for *kavod* is the root of all pleasure in the soul. We will explain more about it, with the help of Hashem when we discuss the general pleasure in *kavod* [when we will discuss *kavod* that stems from **water-of-fire**].

The Two Approaches In Tikkun HaMiddos (Character Improvement)

Now let's continue to discussing our topic [*kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**].

We've mentioned this in the past with regards to how we should understand fixing our *middos*. We understand simply that fixing our *middos* means that we have good *middos* and bad *middos*, and that our challenge is to try to weaken our bad *middos* and reveal our good *middos*. But the depth of our *avodah* in fixing our *middos* is a totally different attitude than this.

There are two deep approaches when it comes to fixing our *middos*.

1. The Rambam's Approach: Working On Our Middos and On Our Da'as - One way of *tikkun hamiddos* is the Rambam's approach. The Rambam explains all about *middos* in "*Hilchos De'os*" (the ethical laws), which is from the word "*da'as*". Therefore, the 'external' aspect of fixing our *middos* is to fix the *middos* themselves, but the 'inner' aspect of fixing our *middos* is to work with our "*da'as*".

Our Sages have written explicitly that the core and inner essence of all our *middos* is "*da'as*". This is based on the verse, "*And with knowledge (da'as), chambers will be filled.*" These 'chambers' refer to the "chambers of the heart", meaning that all of these 'chambers' are clothed by our *middos*. Therefore, there is an *avodah* to work on our *middos* both by directly working on the *middos* themselves, as well as working on our *middos* via the means of working with our *da'as*.

But we will not be dealing with this approach here. Here we will use a second, alternative approach to how we work on our *middos*.

2) Reb Yisrael Salanter's Approach: Rectifying The Imagination. The other approach to working on our *middos* is by working with our powers of *seichel* (intellect) and *tziyur* (visualization), in order to overcome the power of *dimayon* (imagination).

Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that the imagination is the root of all evil character traits, for it causes the mind to roam around free in the realm of fantasy, and this leads to all evil². In these words, Reb

² *Ohr Yisrael: 30*

Yisrael Salanter was not just giving us the picture about our *middos*, but he is teaching us about the root of all our *middos*, which is the imagination.

The depth of one's task of self-improvement is to repair the imagination. If one works on the *middos* alone, he is improving only the “branches”, and he is missing the “root”. Working with the “branches” would be, for example, by working upon one's *de'os* (his various beliefs) alone, and that is not what we will explain here.³ Working with the “root” can only be achieved by working upon the imagination.

Working With Our Imagination

To give a brief outline of the imagination, a person has the mental abilities of *chochmah/seichel* (wisdom/intellect) and *tziyur* (“visualization”, an improved version of the imagination), which are challenged by the ability of *dimayon*, the “imagination.” The ability of *tziyur* (visualization) comes from the *seichel*, but the ability of *dimayon* (imagination) does not.

These forces are pitted against each other. Just as the *seichel*/intellect is challenged by *dimayon*/imagination (and on a more specific level, the *seichel*/intellect contains the power of *machshavah*/thought, *haskalah*/intellectualization, *hisbonenus*/reflection), so is the power of *tziyur*/visualization) challenged by the power of *dimayon*/imagination.

So the core of one's task of self-improvement does not lie in fixing the *middos* alone or in fixing the *de'os*/beliefs, but in fixing the *dimayon*/imagination, which is accomplished through developing the power of *tziyur*/visualization. That is why many of the works of *mussar* focus on building the power of *tziyur*/visualization [an improved version of the imagination].

Most people have a misunderstanding of the power of *tziyur*, and they think that *tziyur* means the fantastical kind of imagination that they know of since they were children. But that is not what the teachers of *mussar* were referring to. Those *Gedolim* worked many years on developing their power of *tziyur*. They would contemplate something in their minds which could not be seen with the physical eyes, and they would use their *seichel*/intellect in combination with *tziyur*/visualization, to reflect into what they were thinking about and trying to have a vivid, accurate picture the matter.

For example, Reb Yisrael Salanter based all of man's *avodah* on the concept of fear of punishment, which involves visualizing the fire of *Gehinnom* (it is a separate discussion for itself as to why he chose fear of punishment as the main aspect of man's *avodah*, but this was his core principle). This is *tziyur*, and not simply imagination, because a person has never seen *Gehinnom*.

How indeed can a person visualize *Gehinnom*, if he has never seen it? He can use various parables that Chazal have given, in order to conceptualize it. One of the examples (explained by Reb Yisrael

³ Editor's Note: The *avodah* of fixing one's *de'os* (erroneous beliefs) is explained by the Rav in *Getting To Know Your Imagination_009_Imagined Desires – And The Solution*

Salanter) one can use for this is to feel a physical fire, and the like. There are many details involved with this approach, but the point is always to develop the soul's power of *tziyur*.

Honor – A Pleasure Based Upon Imagination

Now let's return to discussing our current topic, the pleasure that one has in *kavod*/honor.

Whenever one has pleasure in honor, he's really enjoying an imaginary kind of pleasure, a *dimayon* (fantasy), which is ultimately rooted in the power of *tziyur* (mental visualization). Honor is not a reality like the sense of taste, which you can experience sensually. Rather, it is experienced through the imagination. (The sense of sight comes closest to this, for it enables a person to visualize and experience the pleasure of the vision.)

On one hand, *kavod* (honor) is rooted in *tziyur*/visualization, but it can also be rooted in *dimayon*/fantasy. The depth of *kavod* is experienced, on a higher level, through one's power of *tziyur*. When *kavod* is experienced on a lower, unrefined level, it is experienced through *dimayon*/imagination, where a person will experience honor on an imaginative level. (This is really the *k'veidus*/heaviness that results from *kavod* which we spoke about earlier.)

Based upon the above, we can understand the following deep point. *Kavod*/honor is not a feeling based in reality! For example, a *bar mitzvah* boy or a *chosson* [sitting at his *Sheva Berachos*] will be showered with all kinds of compliments that are not reflective at all of the reality (perhaps because they want to "expound and receive reward" for it), and it feels good for him to hear it. If not for the imagination, he wouldn't enjoy these compliments. He is mentally visualizing and also imagining that the compliments about him are true, and that is what allows him to enjoy the honor being accorded to him. He is imagining that the words being said about him are really true, and that is how he enjoys the "honor".

Here is another example. A person is a regular part of a certain place and he is honored there, and he enjoys it. What happens? Just as "a *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah*, and a sin leads to another sin", so does pleasure lead to more pleasure, and the person will want to be honored again. The person is consciously (and many times it is subconsciously) trying to return, through his imagination, to the situation where he was honored, which he had enjoyed very much. The honor he had in the past is what he is experiencing now.

Recalling the pleasure of honor is not just imagining a past memory. It is not like the pleasure of tasting and eating something, which becomes a thing of the past after it has been experienced. With the pleasure of taste, there is some imprint left in one's memory of what the pleasure was like, but not more than that. But the pleasure of honor is a pleasure based on imagination to begin with, so every time the person wants to experience the pleasure of the honor again, he is consciously (or subconsciously) returning to the same imaginary pleasure that he has experienced in the past.

This can also be described in the following terms. Physical, material matters are always subject to changes, whereas spirituality remains as it is. Honor, which is a spiritual feeling, doesn't disappear

after a person has experienced it. It remains in place, so a person will continue to re-experience it long after he originally experienced the feeling of honor. (This is a more general definition of honor. Earlier, we gave a more specific definition of it.)

Identifying The Sense For Honor

In light of the above, one should understand and recognize: “Where is the force of *kavod*/honor found in my soul?”

Most people will not be able to relate to this, however, and there is a simple reason for this. Honor is a very refined and spiritual kind of feeling, so there are a lot less people who can feel it. People identify and relate very well to material matters, but honor is a subtle feeling that is rooted in the spiritual realm, so it is usually concealed from the awareness of people. Some people have a very strong demand for honor, and they can feel strongly what honor is, but this doesn't always mean that they understand what they are feeling. Certainly this is the case with anyone who doesn't demand honor that much, who will be much less sensitive to the feeling of honor.

In spite of this, all people can conceptualize honor at least on an intellectual level, then on a more inner level, and after that comes the stage of *avodah* of fixing this trait. The first step, then, is for one to identify the force of *kavod*/honor in his soul, by asking oneself how and where and when he experiences it. Only after we absorb where it is manifest in our lives can we then fix it.

Honor is a pleasurable feeling, but it is not simply a branch of the general force of pleasure (*taanug*) in the soul. It is not like any of the other pleasures we experience. Therefore, the way to deal with the trait of honor is not in the same way that we fix the faculty of pleasure in the soul. As we are explaining here, honor belongs in the category of imagination. Therefore, we should identify the force of honor in the soul as a part of the imaginative faculty.

A Prerequisite Before Continuing: The Power of Tziyur (Mental Visualization)

That being the case, when we want to fix the honor that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**, which is when one is enjoying the honor he is receiving in a place where he is tied down to, the first part of rectifying this trait of honor is by using the power of *tziyur* (visualization), which can counter the *medameh*/imagination that fuels the feeling of honor. Therefore, whatever we will explain in the following lines can only be implemented if one has previously developed the power of *tziyur*, mental visualization.⁴

If one hasn't yet developed the power of *tziyur*, he is skipping an important stage, and there is less of a chance that he will see any results from the *avodah* we will soon explain. In contrast, the more a person has developed his ability of *tziyur*, the more he can succeed with the following *avodah*.

⁴ Refer to the Rav's series *Getting To Know Your Imagination*

“Fleeing From Honor” – Externally and Internally

Practically speaking, when a person finds himself in a situation where he is receiving honor and enjoying it, there is both external and internal work to do.

The external part of one’s *avodah* is to “flee from honor”, as Chazal say. This counters the “heaviness” of the honor, because the heaviness ties him down, and by running away from honor, a person is removed from the “heaviness” of the situation. However, it isn’t always possible for a person to actually run away from honor, because it is not always possible for a person to leave the place he is in. Many times Hashem has placed a person into a certain situation, and that is where he has to be right now, so he cannot run away from it.

However, even though a person cannot always run away from where he is in order to avoid getting honored, there is still internal work that a person can do, in order to counter the honor that he is receiving. One can use the power of *tziyur* (mental visualization) to counter the *medameh*/imagination which fuels the honor, as follows. When he finds himself in a situation where he is receiving honor, he should imagine something else that will take his mind off the honor. The honor is being fueled by an imaginary feeling that feels pleasurable, but by thinking of something else as he’s receiving the honor, he won’t experience the pleasure of the honor.

To illustrate, when a person is eating food and he’s thinking about something else, he enjoys his food less. Pleasure is experienced only when we are consciously focused on the pleasure. If our mind is elsewhere as we are receiving the pleasure, we don’t experience the pleasure, or only on a minimal level. Therefore, when a person is tied down to a certain situation where he’s getting honored, and he is not able to escape it right now (if he can get away from it, then by all means he should get away from it, but here we are talking about a situation where he has no choice but to be there), he can “flee from the honor” using his own mind, by imagining something else as he’s receiving the honor.

1) Hesech HaDaas (Taking Your Mind Off The Situation)

There are two ways to accomplish this. One way is to simply take your mind off the honor that is being accorded to you (*hesech hadaas*/removing the thoughts), and to get busy thinking about something else instead. We know that a person can be sitting in a certain place yet his mind can be in a different country, by thinking about events taking place somewhere else in the world. If one’s mind is thinking about Torah thoughts as he is receiving honor, that is even better, but even if a person cannot muster that level, any person has the ability to mentally disconnect from the physical place he is in, by replacing his thoughts with something else.

Even if one cannot be creative with his imagination by imagining something else while receiving honor, a person can still take his mind off the place where he is in and “be” in a different place, in his mind. The Ramban said that a person is where his thoughts are. In this way, a person “moves” away from the place where he had been tied down to, where the “heaviness” of honor had been previously weighing him down.

2) “Tziyur” – Using The Holy Imagination

A second method, which is a more developed approach, is for a person to get busy with the power of *tziyur* (mental visualization) in order to counter the fantasies that accompany the honor that one is receiving. For example, a person may imagine the *Kosel* or any holy picture. This is an example of *tziyur*, a holy visualization, and this doesn't allow the power of *medameh*/fantasy to function, because if the mind is busy with *tziyur*, the power of *medameh*/fantasy cannot take hold of the mind.

2a) Imagining Death

Even more so, along the lines of the above method, a person can use an alternative approach, in order to mentally “free from honor”: as he is being honored, he can try imagining that the opposite is happening to him.

As an example, one of the Sages, as he was being accorded honor, would bemoan the inevitable reality of death. This was not just a chant to recite, but a power that can remove one's mind from honor: One can think about death, which can immediately diffuse the pleasure of honor he is receiving.

(On the other hand, there are some people who, when they think about death, are thinking of how much honor they will receive at their funeral....)

2c) Imagining Times In Your Life Where There Is No Honor

Taking this further, when one is in a situation where he has to receive honor, he can try imagining anything which diffuses the honor. Here are some examples: He can try imagining times in his life in which he was not very deserving of honor – for example, when he was a baby in the crib, when nobody attributed any honor to him yet. Or, he can imagine that he will one day be an elderly, bedridden person, unable to do anything, and that nobody cares then about all of the honors he has received.

He can try thinking that after 120 years when he goes back to Heaven, he might get sent back in another lifetime. He can also try thinking that if people would really know his own personal weaknesses, they wouldn't honor him, and that even if people don't know about his shortcomings, Hashem knows his shortcomings and what the truth of his situation is.

There are many different thoughts as well that a person can think about which totally diffuses honor. Chazal say that one should contemplate the fact that he came from a rotten droplet and that he is heading towards the grave, where his body will decompose in the earth. There is a lot that one can imagine in order to counter the feeling of honor, and these are all examples of using the power of *tziyur*, focusing on his own shortcomings and limitations, which dissipates the pleasure of the honor that he is receiving.

Who Should Not Be Implementing This Concept

To complete our understanding of this matter, we should point out that if someone doesn't care that much about *kavod*/honor and he is not that hurt if he doesn't receive enough *kavod*, if he focuses on his shortcomings, he will develop a very low self-image, which is the negative trait of the soul known as *shiflus* (lowliness). This type of person, when he thinks about his shortcomings, will not be rectifying himself, and instead, he will only be harming himself.

This is because the “animal” level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*) is not capable of the lofty trait of humility or of accepting its lowliness (*shiflus*), so if a person focuses magnifies his *shiflus* by thinking of his various shortcomings, he will constantly be lowering his own self-perception, further and further, and this is detrimental to the soul. One needs to reach true humility (*anavah*), and this does not mean the *shiflus*/lowliness found in the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul).

If a person has a very conceited nature, though, he is the kind of person who has an *avodah* to think about his shortcomings and thereby magnify his *shiflus*, in order to counter the trait of honor.

There is another kind of person, who is drawn towards *shiflus*/lowliness, and he is also drawn towards conceitedness. Many people are like this, and they have a deep inner contradiction in themselves, of constantly going through cycles of feeling lowly, then conceited, then lowly, etc. – this kind of person has a very subtle, inner kind of work to do. On one hand, this person will need to avoid conceitedness, but on the other hand, he also suffers often from feelings of low self-worth.

These kinds of people usually have a very strong imagination which heavily impairs them, causing them to sometimes feel lowly about themselves and at other times to feel haughty about their self-image. It is like the expression, “Sometimes a *malach* (angel), sometimes a *galach* (priest).” These people have extreme inner movements in their souls. A person like this needs to be very careful when he tries to awaken his *shiflus*/lowliness in order to counter *kavod*/honor, because as soon as he focuses on his *shiflus*, he can get pulled down very easily into the negative *shiflus* of the “animal” level of the soul, which already dominates him as it is.

In Conclusion

To conclude and summarize, *kavod*/honor is a spiritual feeling, and therefore it requires very subtle inner work in order to fix, much more than any of the *middos* which we have explained about until now. One needs to understand what the definition of *kavod* is and to identify how it manifests in the soul, how it is used negatively, and accordingly, one can then go about fixing this *middah*, with the help of Heaven.

3 | *Deliberate Body Language*

Wind-of-Earth-of-Fire: Deliberated Movement

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are up to discussing *kavod* (honor) that stems from **wind-of-earth-of-fire**.

We have explained that honor stemming from “earth”-of-fire is the effect of “heaviness” caused by honor. **Wind**-of-earth-of-fire, in particular, refers to a nature to perform certain deliberate movements, due to the “heaviness” caused by the honor. A classic example of this is what the *Mesillas Yesharim* describes, that a conceited person who is self-conscious about receiving honor will walk in a certain deliberate, slow manner, in order to appear humble.

The Inner Workings Behind Deliberate Body Language

The root of this matter is because the word “*kavod*” (honor) is from the word *k'veidus*, “heaviness”, and there can be “heaviness” within one’s movements. When a person is showing heavy, deliberate movement, this can either be his own doing, or it can be because he is trying [consciously, or subconsciously] to imitate another person.

Often teenagers and adolescents will imitate someone older than them, whom they consider to be an honorable person they admire, such as a person of status, and they will want to imitate the body language of that person. They will move in a certain deliberate way, changing their own body language, in order to imitate the person they admire.

In some situations, a person will consciously imitate another person’s movements. In other situations, it is a result of learned behaviors that were absorbed by the person on an unconscious level. People might teach themselves, unconsciously, to imitate the movements of the person whom they wish to be like. In some cases, it is the person’s nature to act this way, but in other cases, it stems from the trait of false honor, and it is an example of the “world of falsity” which dominates the lives of many people.

It is especially common with teenagers as they begin to mature, who may alter their body language in a certain way and move in a certain way, so that they can fit into the image in their minds that they have formed for themselves, which they believe will enhance their esteem in the eyes of others. In any case, these learned movements become deeply absorbed into their subconscious. These movements entirely learned behaviors that came from outside of their true self. They are imitating and copying the movements of others, absorbing the movements that they pick up from outside of themselves and bringing these various movements into themselves.

However, there are other cases in which the deliberate movements of the person are stemming from the “heaviness” contained in the trait of honor, which is coming from the person’s nature, as opposed to a learned behavior. That is what we will be discussing in this lesson.

As we know, there is holy honor and there is impaired honor. Here we are discussing the impaired use of honor, and one of the impaired uses of honor is when a person is acting in a way that isn’t stemming from his true self.

Often a person will be unable to explain, on an intellectual level, of why he acts with these deliberate movements. We can see that when people get older and they are more mature, they generally move slower. It seems to people, for some unexplainable reason, that the more dignified a person is, the more deliberate and heavy his movements are.

But if we understand this deeply, it really stems from the trait of *kavod*/honor in the soul, which will manifest in the form of *k’veidus*/heaviness. This is the deeper reason of why people usually attribute slow, deliberate movement as a sign of honorable, dignified status. Although logically this cannot be explained, this is the subconscious belief in the person, when he has taught himself to copy a certain kind of body language. A person might be aware that this is his belief, and he won’t be able to explain why he thinks that way.

Thus, deliberate movements, which are a form of *k’veidus*/heaviness, are rooted in *kavod*/honor. The movements will differ with each person, so they are not always the same.

If the movements were picked up from external sources, the movements of the person will imitate exactly the source that they were picked up from. If the movements are stemming from one’s nature, the movements will resemble whatever the person perceives will make him appear more dignified and honorable in the eyes of others. He will move his hands and feet in a certain way and adopt certain facial expressions, accordingly.

Let us understand the following about these particular kinds of movements: the kind of movements that stem from the person’s nature, which is shown outwardly.

The Three Factors That Affect Physical Movement: The Soul, The Body, and Honor

There is a “*ruach chaim*”, (lit. the “life spirit”), an inner energy flow that is deep within the soul, which is the source of all a person’s movements. Above that inner flow of energy is the physical body of man (the *guf*).

When a person’s movements are “as light as an eagle” – the ideal kind of movement, which Chazal describe – the flow of movement coming from the “*ruach chaim*” will be light, fluid movement, and the body’s movements will follow accordingly, so the body will move lightly. The movements of the soul are always lighter than the body’s movements, of course, because the body is heavy, whereas the soul is not.

The heavier a person's body is, the heavier his movements will be. For example, a heavy person usually moves slower, whereas a skinny person who doesn't weigh that much will usually move quicker. But when *kavod*/honor becomes dominant, another source of heaviness enters the scene. We will explain what this is.

Before we proceed, let's review that every person has movements that stem from an inner source, the soul, which is called "*nefesh chayah*" (a living spirit) and which contains an inner energy flow [*ruach chaim*] that causes a person to move. There is also the physical body which covers the soul, which is another source of movement, which can [either] slow down the movements of the soul [or become aligned with the light movements of the soul]. In 'between' the movements of the soul and the movement of the body is another source of movement, which can cause heavy movement: the trait of *kavod*, honor. When honor is a dominant force, the physical movements of the body will become slower, heavier, and more deliberate.

Thus, the root of a person's movements come from the soul, so a person's root movements are lighter in their nature, just as the soul is light and delicate. A person's movements can become slowed down, however, by an external layer: the trait of honor. Movement can be slowed down even more by the physical body, which covers the external layers of the soul, making the body move slowly and heavily. This is not simply because the body is moving slowly. It is coming from the "heaviness" contained in the trait of honor, which is in the external layers of the soul (in the "animal" layer of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*) that can become manifest in the physical body which wraps around it.

How Deliberated Movements Can Breed Laziness

That being the case, sometimes *kavod* (honor) can breed the trait of laziness. Laziness is a form of heavy, deliberate movement, and it is rooted in the element of earth, and honor creates its own form of inner heaviness. The honor that stems from **wind-of-earth-of-fire**, which causes the body to have deliberate movements, is really an expression of "*ruach chaim*" that has become impaired by the trait of honor that exists in the "animal" level of the soul, and when it manifests in the physical movement of the body, it awakens laziness. Laziness can be connected with honor, and this forms a different kind of slowed physical movement. The person will then teach himself to believe that these movements are his own.

Now, if a person is aware of himself, he is aware of the "world of falsity" that lays inside him, and he knows that he is apt to adapt certain movements which aren't true to who he is. But the less self-aware that a person is, the more his earth-based movements will combine with his honor-based movements, which will cause his body to move in a heavy, deliberate manner. The person will move slowly and in a deliberate manner due to two factors: because of the impaired use of honor which is stemming from his "animal" level of the soul, and because of the trait of laziness.

Where will the difference between these two sources of movement come to play? There is a big difference, as we will soon see.

Repairing Deliberate Body Language (Externally Sourced)

Let us consider how we need to begin rectifying the issue of learned, deliberate movement.

If one's movements were picked up from external sources, that means that the person taught his body language to imitate another person's, and the *avodah* upon the person is avoid stop imitating other people, to "be who I really am". But if the deliberate body language is stemming from within the person (the "heaviness" rooted in the trait of honor, which can also be linked with laziness), what is the way to fix this?

Repairing Deliberate Body Language (Internally Sourced)

The external part of the job here is for a person to learn how to act and move normally whenever he is amongst others, and not to show any signs of body language which are considered strange. But there is also inner work that the person has to do: one needs to let the "*ruach chaim*" (the inner energy flow) within him to start expressing one's natural movements.

The following is a subtle point about the soul to know. Most people are not of their inner forces that are beyond their actions, words, and thoughts. But there is an inner source which provides vitality to all of one's actions, words, and thoughts, and this is the "*ruach chaim*" (the inner energy flow) found deep within man.

The "*ruach chaim*", at its foundational level, is as "light as an eagle", and it is revealed within the soul's abilities in the form of *ratzon*, the will. The word "*ratzon*" is from the word "*ratz*", to "run", because the will moves very quickly. The thoughts, the speech, and the deeds of a person can constrict the will and prevent it from being actualized, but in its initial state, the will moves very quickly, and if it wouldn't be prevented by any of the thoughts, speech, or deeds that 'intercept' it, it would manifest itself very quickly, and even instantaneously.

The will 'runs' very quickly. But since the will has to pass through the outer garments of the soul, which are the thoughts, the emotions, the speech, and the deeds, the will becomes slowed down. However, with the more that a person gains control over his power of "inner silence" (*sheket*), in addition to the ability of deep mental reflection (*hisbonenus*) into his soul, he will become aware of not only his deeds, emotions, speech and thoughts, but he will even identify the quick movements that characterize his will.

This does not mean, of course, that one should quickly fulfill the desires of his will when he discovers them. Understandably, one will need to carefully consider following his will or not, using his power of free will. Sometimes one's will wants something good, and sometimes the will wants something that is not good. The point is that part of one's inner *avodah* is to identify his inner movements, which are stemming from his deep flow of energy that sustains him, the "*ruach chaim*".

If a person identifies it and connects to this inner point, he will also have an easier time when old age arrives. When the body is old and weak, it cannot perform as much, which can feel very

disheartening, but if one has learned to connect to his will as the source of all his actions, he is aware of the will within him which is constantly active, and this revitalizes him in his old age. In fact, old age is an opportunity for the will to become exposed, and if a person had been used to identifying the will already from before old age, it will only get stronger in old age, when a person cannot perform as much in the area of action and instead he is left with the power of the will.

If one has already uncovered the will by listening to himself deeply, amidst inner silence and deep reflection into his soul, he has revealed the source of his energy and all of his movements in his life. He reveals the inner “wellspring”, the energy source found deep within him, which only increases with time, the more it has been exposed.

If a person’s movements are stemming from this deep source - the *ruach chaim* - he will then see how *kavod*/honor greatly weighs him down, and as a result, he will begin to abhor the “heaviness” caused by *kavod*/honor, which stops his natural, energetic movement.

How Connecting To The Inner Energy Flow Can Change Deliberate Body Language

When a person is living by rote, he will not realize how his movements are deliberate and heavy, just like most people around him, and that’s how he lives and he feels fine. But if a person gets his vitality in life from his inner source of vitality, from his inner energy flow, he will find that his physical movements have become lighter.

As an example, when Yaakov Avinu heard the good news that Yosef was alive, he suddenly felt lighter and he was able to move very lightly and quickly to go see Yosef. This is just an example of the idea, that when the inner source of movement is exposed, the person’s movements become lighter, and he will naturally be drawn towards light movement, so he will find himself recoiling from the heavy movements that stem from *kavod*/honor that slow him down.

Understandably, the point we are describing here cannot be applied by all people. First of all, most people will have a difficult time understanding what exactly we are describing. Most people are aware of the area of our deeds, speech, and thoughts, and they certainly know what the will is, but the source of the will is not identified by most people. Here we are describing an inner kind of awareness, where you are aware that your inner will is responsible for all that motivates you in how you act, and that it is the “*ruach chaim*” which is always active within you. It gives you vitality and it moves you to act.

This is not something to merely be intellectually aware about. It is an inner, palpable kind of awareness, which is motivating you to act. When you become aware of it, you will feel that the deliberate movements which are rooted in the trait of honor are like an iron wall that prevents your inner movements of the soul from moving fluidly as they should.

The lack of awareness to this is greatly amplified in children, who are not aware of the source of their movements at all. Children eat, drink, move around and jump around without any awareness of the source that is causing them to move. They have not yet uncovered their “*ruach chaim*”. When

a person gets older, he can purify his character, which will let his inner movements come forth. Of course, no one can be perfect at this. But one can succeed in preventing the outer layers of the soul from slowing down the inner movements of the soul.

When one reveals the “*ruach chaim*” from within him, he will develop a natural sense that inspects his own movements which makes sure that they are true to his self. The more a person connects to it, the more he weakens the deliberate movements that are stemming from impaired **wind-of-earth-of-fire**.

The Difficulty In Changing Deliberate Movement/Body Language

However, we explained earlier that there is an additional factor contributing to deliberate body language, which creates an additional difficulty when trying to improve this: the trait of laziness, which serves as its own source for heavy movement.

Every person has some degree of slowed movements that are a result of laziness, because the inner movements of the soul are not always the movements that the physical body will exhibit. If a person realizes that the source of his slowed movement is due to laziness, this will feel bothersome to him, but if he realizes that the source of it is due to **wind-of-earth-of-fire**, it will feel even more bothersome. Let us explain why.

Laziness is a negative trait, as we know. But **wind-of-earth-of-fire** is a source of “false movement” in a person, movements that do not reflect who he genuinely is. So while laziness is certainly a negative character trait, the **wind-of-earth-of-fire** that fuels **honor** is [even worse, because it is] the “world of falsity”.

The less a person cares about truth, the less this will bother him, because he doesn’t recoil that much from falsity. But the more a person pursues truth, the more he will recoil from honor, especially the kind of honor which results from **earth-of-wind-of-fire**, the source of deliberate and learned movements or body language, because he will realize that these movements are emanating from falsity, for they alter his movements and make him move in a way that is not genuine to who he is.

Living Superficially Vs. Pursuing Truth

Reb Elya Lopian *zt”l* once told a story that there was a student in Kelm who was *davening* for the *amud* one *Shabbos Minchah*, and when he reached the words “*V’taher libeinu l’avdecha b’emes*” (“And purify our hearts to serve You in truth”), he said the words with great *kavanah*. After *davening*, the Alter of Kelm asked him, “On which word did you have more *kavanah* by – the word “*l’avdecha*” (to serve You), or the word “*b’emes*” (in truth)?

We should know that there are two kinds of people [there is a kind of person who naturally searches for *emes* (truth), which is not necessarily connected with serving the Creator, and there is a kind of person who is serious about serving the Creator, but he is not necessarily being truthful.]

One kind of person is a born with a natural sense for truth. He is born with an inner sense of integrity (*yashrus*). There is a strong spark in his soul of the understanding that “*G-d made man upright*”. There can be gentiles born with this nature, or people who don’t keep Torah and mitzvos, who are naturally honest in their dealings with people, at least according to how they understand what integrity should be (which, according to the Torah, might not be considered integrity). They are born with a truthful nature.

Another kind of person is serious about serving the Creator, but he can still be very far from pursuing truth. It is wonderful to serve the Creator, but without being truthful, a person will not serve the Creator in the precise way. There will be much falsity mixed in with his self-work, and he might stumble in all kinds of areas, and then he struggles to understand why he’s failing to improve. One of the main reasons why this happens (one of the reasons, not the only reason) is because he does not have a strong motivation to do what’s truthful.

Instead of acting from truth, he is acting from his *ratzon* (will) to attain something. In his case, his *ratzon* wants to attain something spiritual, such as a higher level of spiritual understanding, or attainments in Torah, or in becoming close to Hashem. Each person on his own level has something else he wants to attain. He might not be doing it in a genuine or precise manner, but it doesn’t matter to him, because the point for him is not to do what’s truthful, but to attain what he wants. It will be a mixture of good and evil, and he is far from genuine, precise *avodas Hashem* of the inner world. True *avodas Hashem* requires the “seal of Hashem is truth”, it requires a pursuit for *emes/truth*, so without a burning desire for truth, a person’s entire *avodas Hashem* will be sorely lacking from the start.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand how it could be that certain people have reached such high spiritual attainments, with much knowledge in Torah and doing much *chessed*, along with other qualities that they have attained, and yet when it comes to certain things that they want, they will do anything to get it and they won’t care if they have to diverge from the truth along the way, as long as they get to what they want. Even worse, others may even come to this person for spiritual advice and he will even advise them accordingly, and then an entire public is following his approach that doesn’t place truth as the priority. His behavior of diverging from the truth cannot be excused with “If he has reached such a high level in Torah, he doesn’t have to conform perfectly to the highest standards of *yashrus* (integrity).” That is a superficial attitude towards living.

There is a vast difference between a person who wants to merely “serve” Hashem, with a person who wants to serve Hashem “in truth”. They are not experiencing the same world. One of the major mistakes many people make when they want to serve Hashem is that they are only interested in the part of “*l’avdecha*” (to serve You), but they are not focused on the part of “*b’emes*” (in truth).

It Is Very Difficult To Change Deliberate Body Language

The above is true in the general sense, but it has particular ramifications in our current subject, honor that stems from **wind-of-earth-of-fire**, which is the source of false movements. It is like one big joke, for it represents this “world of falsity”.

We can all see people who exhibit a particular kind of body language that is noticeably different from others. There are people who born with a nature to perform deliberate body movements that are not really true to who they are, and they have gotten so used to these orientations that they are unwilling to cease these mannerisms which they have so deeply engraved into themselves. If they would try to give it up, it would feel to them like Rabbi Elazar ben Dordaya who acquired his entire share in the World To Come in one hour, by giving up all of his behaviors at once. They would prefer to die with these deliberate movements that they act with, rather than change the orientation. They have formed a belief that this is how it has to be. It is the “world of falsity” in the fullest sense of the word!

The exceptions to this are those who reached genuinely high spiritual levels, who sometimes exhibited noticeably different kinds of movements and body language. As for everyone else, who are not on a very high spiritual level, in many cases, deliberate movements and body language are a clear example of the “world of falsity”. The more a person lives truthfully, the more he will have distaste for the movements that stem from the **wind-of-earth-of-fire** [which motivates honor].

In Summary

Let us review and summarize the points we discussed until now. The first point emphasized here was that there is an inner source of movement in a person, the “*ruach chaim*” (inner energy flow), which are light, fluid movements that are perfect at their source. The more deliberate a person’s movements are, the more this inner source is prevented from reaching the body. In order for a person to access the *ruach chaim* within him, he needs to be willing to live with the simplicity, pleasantness, and lightness of it, letting his natural movements flow from within him, as they are.

The second point we explained was that the more a person is pursuing truth, the more he will avoid deliberate movement and body language (which stems from wind-of-earth-of-fire), because he will develop a natural distaste for this false source of movements in him.

Is Self-Consciousness A Good Thing Or A Bad Thing?

In the end of day, though, it is hard to draw the line of how exactly we should behave in front of others, with regards to our body language and movements. [At what point does our body language go beyond preserving our dignity in the eyes of others, which is fine, to the point where it becomes self-conscious and it stems from an exaggerated pursuit of honor?]

Consider the following question. What is wrong if a person walks out in the street in his pajamas? This is not prohibited by the Torah, nor is it prohibited Rabbinically. It presents a problem with *davening* [because one is not allowed to *daven* in his pajamas, as it is not a dignified kind of clothing to *daven* to Hashem in], but is there anything wrong with going out into the street wearing pajamas? Is it wrong because it will cause people to make fun of the person? Let them make fun, who cares? How should we behave in front of others, and where do we draw the line?

(There was an actually an *avodah* in Novhardok where the yeshivah students would deliberately act strange in front of others, so that they would be made fun of and learn how to not care about their self-image, and thereby chip away at any traces of conceit in them. But this was a high level of self-work which is not the general path that people should take, as not every path of *avodah* is applicable to every generation).

A person doesn't walk out into the street with pajamas because it's not socially acceptable in the country to appear this way in the street. It goes against the social code, and that's the main reason that motivates him from avoiding any behaviors that are considered "weird" by people.

There are other clear examples of this well which we can identify with. Consider the following. Is there anything wrong with a person in yeshivah who lays down on the bench in the *Beis Midrash* and learns Torah like that, lying down on the bench instead of sitting on it? (There are actually a few people who do that). People usually don't act like this, not because it is forbidden to do so, but because it's not socially accepted to do this. It might be considered acting disgraceful to the Torah, and it makes students of Torah look disrespectful in the eyes of others, but these reasons are usually not the conscious motivation of the person in avoiding this behavior.

People avoid behaving this way, and deep down, it is because they don't want to be shunned by others. This has nothing to do with a pursuit of *kavod*/honor, because it is something much more basic. How, indeed, should a person behave in front of others? What are the unspoken 'rules' of social conduct? It is a tough line to draw. Every person grows up in certain surroundings where there are certain socially accepted norms. People act more comfortable in their homes than the way they are outside their homes, when they are in public and around people, because there are certain social norms to conform to.

The famous words of the *Rema* in the beginning of *Shulchan Aruch* are that just as a person behaves differently when he is in front of a king than when he is in his house, so should a person behave differently when he is in front of Hashem's Presence, for Hashem is the King of all kings. But if a person isn't "standing in front of the King" [when he's not *davening*], he still behaves differently around other people than the way he acts in his home when he has his privacy. In front of others, his hands and feet will move in a different way than the way his hands and feet move in his home.

There is a certain fine line, however, where social norms end, and where an exaggerated need for honor begins. It is hard to know where we draw the line in this, because there are many factors that need to be considered here.

Getting Used To The Idea of Not Caring What Others Think (Sometimes)

But the following is the idea that we want to convey here. Sometimes, a person will need to do something that goes against what's considered socially accepted.

Understandably, this should only be done to a certain extent, and sensibly. It should not become a general approach of living. There are only rare individuals who can live their entire life going against the social norms. Most people of the generation, especially in our more recent generation, would not be able to handle living a life that constantly goes against the social norm. In previous generations, there were more people who could handle living in such a way.

Practically speaking, in our own life, we should be able to sometimes go against the social norm. One should go about this very sensibly, as we stressed before, because without going about this sensibly, a person will be shunned by others and his children won't get accepted to the schools he is applying to. Without acting extreme about this, a person needs to sometimes go against what's considered socially accepted, meaning that he doesn't have to conform his thinking to how others think.

Again, we will emphasize that this idea must not become a general way of living, and it should only be practiced rarely. If a person actualizes this idea too much in his life, he may harm his own self-worth in his eyes when he learns not to care at all about what others think of him, and he is also endangering his social standing in the eyes of others, which will be detrimental for him. Therefore, the idea we are saying here must only be practiced rarely in a person's life, and it should not become a general way of living. The point of sometimes doing this is to learn how act like how you truly are, to "be yourself".

Here is a simple question. If there wouldn't be some kind of established dress code in society, how would you walk out in the street? What kind of pants, shirt, outer dress and shoes would you wear?

Obviously, we do not mean to undermine the established dress code that we each conform to, and each community has its own way of dress that is considered the accepted norm, and conforming to the dress code provides a person with an awareness that he belongs to a certain group of people, which aids his morality and keeps him within appropriate boundaries. But as much as conforming to the dress code has its benefits, there is also a downside that comes with it. When a person gets used to dressing in a certain way solely because that is the norm in his society, his movements have become confined to the place where he is in, and this places him in a state of great inner imprisonment, so something needs to be done about this.

Therefore, as we said, it is very hard to establish clear rules of how we need to appear and behave in front of others. It is a very fine line to draw. The idea we want to bring out here, though, is that a person should be able to have some kind of ability to not care about what other people think (to some extent), and to be able to do something in front of other people even if they will belittle him. (And if it bothers the person that others are making fun of him, he should think about how much of their portion in *Gan Eden* he will be receiving from them in return).

If a person cannot develop this point, he will be forever tied down to the movements that stem from honor, and those movements and body language will copy exactly the surroundings, and he will never move in a way that reflects his true self.

Again, let us emphasize that in general, a person should behave in a way that conforms to the social norms. Our point here is just that in order to chip away at the “heaviness” brought about by the trait of honor that seeks to assert itself through deliberate body language (**earth-of-wind-of-fire**), one needs to develop a space in his soul which can break through the “heaviness” of these learned, unnatural movements. One should reach a point where he feels that he doesn’t care so much about what others think, and this will give him some control over the “heaviness” that has been dominating him and manipulating his body language.

In Summary and In Conclusion

In summary, we have explained here the [four] root sources for bodily movement:

- 1) Much of the movements and body language that a person exhibits are simply being performed by rote [thus they do not emanate from a person’s true self].
- 2) Much of a person’s movements and body language is also stemming from learned behaviors that were picked up from others.
- 3) There are also some bodily movements that are performed by a person in order to conform to the social norms. [The above three sources of movement all need to be repaired].
- 4) And, finally, there are movements that emanate from inner energy flow. These movements are coming from our true self, where our body language is reflecting “who I really am”.

These are the general roots that are motivating our various movements.

Fixing Our Body Language

In order to fix movements that are being performed **by rote**, the *avodah* of the person is, accordingly, to stop acting habitually.

Regarding the movements that are **learned behaviors picked up from the surroundings**, we have explained that this kind of body language is totally a “world of falsity” and that it causes a person to lose his own unique identity. [The *avodah* in repairing these kinds of false bodily movements is to become a more truthful person, which will make us recoil from falsity and thereby develop a disgust for body language that isn’t true to who we are].

When it comes to repairing the **bodily movements and behaviors that are performed in order to conform to social norms**, we need to mainly keep conforming to social norms, but we will also need to develop a space in our soul where we sometimes don’t care what others think, to the point

that social norms aren't controlling us completely. Instead, it is the person who controls his own movements, not society.

The main repair that we need for our soul in this area is to connect to our "*ruach chaim*", the inner source of life energy that is deep within the soul, which is the source of our true movements and which enables us to act naturally with our inborn simplicity. On our outside, we need to conform to the social norms, but within the accepted norms of society, we also need to let our soul have its natural self-expression, so that it can move as it is [with "no strings attached"].

Developing this space in oneself will enable him to act in a certain way one time, and to act differently another time. When one is in a situation that requires seriousness, one will have slower movements that reflect seriousness, and when one is amidst a *simchah* (celebration or festive time), one will have light movement. In contrast to this, if someone exhibits the same emotions in every situation, [like if he is always happy, even when he's by a serious event, or if he is always serious, even at a *simchah*] this should be alarming, and understandably, it shows that his bodily movements are not emanating from his inner source of movement.

Thus, one needs to be able to act like himself, and his movements should be reflecting his true self, emanating from the inner source of movement, which is the *ruach chaim* ("spirit of life", or inner energy flow) within him. When one is constantly in touch with it, this is the depth of repairing [the honor which results from] **wind-of-earth-of-fire**, because his movements will be true to who he is, stemming from the depths of his soul, for the person will be activating his natural movements from their potential state.

4 | *Inner Contradictions*

Fire-of-Earth-of-Fire: The Contradictory Emotion of Rising Higher While Lowering Oneself

With the help of Heaven, we continue here to discuss the trait of honor, which stems from the element of fire. Here we will discuss honor that stems from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**.

Fire-of-earth-of-fire, on one hand, contains fire, a force that rises. On the other hand, it contains earth, a heavy element which weighs it down and prevents it from ascending as it should. That will mean that even if a person is “descending”, the fire will cause him to feel like he is going higher.

This force in the soul contains contradictory forces. The nature of fire is to ascend, to go higher, whereas earth is heavy, it weighs things down, and it is at the lowest point of all the elements. Earth stays at the lowest point.

The element of water descends towards the earth, but it is originally from a higher source than the earth. From a deeper understanding, the water also originates at a lower point, because the Vilna *Gaon* says that everything in Creation yearns to return to its root. Fire comes from a higher place and therefore it seeks to rise, so that it can go back to its root. Water wants to go back to its root, therefore it goes downward, towards the earth, which it came from. However, the waters are really found above, and it is just that they are drawn downwards towards the earth.

Earth, however, always remains in its place, below. Fire and earth bear similarities and differences with each other. Fire and earth are both dry elements, and in that sense they are similar. They are opposite elements of each other, though, when we consider how fire naturally rises higher, whereas earth stays below, in its place.

Therefore, honor, and especially honor that stems from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, contains a deep inner contradiction. On one hand, honor is an expression of the soul that wishes to rise higher, to become exalted and above everyone else, but at the same time, the “heaviness” contained in honor pulls a person downward. The more there is “heaviness”, the more a person will remain below and he won’t rise, but at the same time, he will also feel that the “heaviness” is actually lifting him higher. This is clearly an example of contradictory forces.

The deeper root of this matter is because “Hashem desired to have a dwelling below”, which was, so to speak, a “descent” from His lofty level, where Hashem “lowered” Himself as it were, in order to allow this world to be a domain for His Presence. This is the holy root of “descending” from a higher level, in which one is “lowered”.

The “Baal Kavod” – A Person Who Has An Inflated Sense of Status About Himself

The trait of *kavod*/honor is the negative, twisted form of the above concept. An example of it is as the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, that when a person is a *baal kavod* (one who is obsessed with his own status), he will belittle others even if others insult him in return, because he believes that he is so honorable that he is even above the need to feel honored by them. In doing so, he doesn't care to lower his esteem in the eyes of others, because he thinks that he will always be above them anyway. Hence, he “lowers” himself as a result of his self-inflated sense of *kavod* that he has for himself.

When this power is used for holiness, a person will allow himself to be belittled by other people and to “lower” himself in the eyes of others, in order to do Hashem's will. In the side of evil, a person will use this power to be completely insensitive to others' feelings as he belittles them, which “lowers” himself in the eyes of others, because he believes that he will always be above them anyway, and that he is even above the honor that people accord him.

Contradictions In The Soul

The contradiction contained in honor is stemming from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, which makes a person feel a downward pull, and the more “heaviness” he has, the higher he will feel about himself.

This particular point in the soul is one of the major areas in which we notice contradictions in the soul. The concept of contradictions in the soul is a much broader topic that goes beyond this particular point we are discussing.

The soul which Hashem created us with contains many different kinds of forces. The Vilna *Gaon* writes of 70 forces of the soul, and those are just the roots. There are many more branching forces, which are endless. However, the forces in the soul are not just a myriad group of details thrown together. If we view them as intrinsically separate from each other, this is a view that comes from the “world of disparity”.

Also, there is no particular order (*seder*) of forces in the soul. Although order (*seder*) can be given to the soul's forces, every force in the soul contains an opposing power to it (this concept is known as *dovor v'hipucho* – a “thing and its opposite”). There is a verse in the Torah, “*Man and woman He created them*”, and Chazal expound upon this verse that for everything Hashem created in this world, there is a “man” and “woman” to it, meaning that in every force in Creation we find, we can find a force that opposes it. Similarly, Hashem created the forces of good and evil, which are constantly at opposition with each other.

Thus, each of the root soul abilities, as well as their branching abilities - all of them without exception - contains an opposite force that contradicts it.

Here are some examples. If we want to work with any force in the soul and improve it, we need to understand the force that opposes it. For example, in order to know what love is, one needs to know what hatred is, and in order to understand hatred, one needs to understand love. In order to

fix laziness, one must know what *zerizus* (zeal) is, and in order to know what *zerizus* is, one must know what laziness is. In order to know what *simchah* (joy) is, one must understand what sadness is, and in order to understand how sadness works, one needs to understand what joy is.

There are countless examples we can give about each of the traits in the soul. The point is clear: Every force in the soul has a power that contradicts it.

The Mixtures of Forces Within Us

During childhood, one tends to think in terms of extremes, where everything is seen in terms of either black or white, happy or sad, etc. As a person gets older and matures, a person can understand that life is complex. Whenever things are left impaired, everything remains as an unsorted mixture, and when things are rectified, there is harmony and balance between the many differing forces present in a matter.

Ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* which contained a mixture of good and evil, the entire Creation has become a mixture of good and evil. Before the sin there was always a concept of opposing forces, but the opposing forces were not mixed together. Only after eating from the *Eitz HaDaas* did all of the opposing forces in Creation become mixed with each other. In any case, every force in the soul has some other force that opposes it, whether for good and for evil.

Since there are contradictory forces built into the soul, as a result, when a person attempts to recognize his own soul, this work will not only entail recognizing the soul’s forces and working with them, but to recognize each opposing force in the soul. After a person uncovers the two opposing soul forces, his work is then to uncover how they are mixed with each other. Every force in the soul will mix with another force in the soul, and every force in the soul is actively working with an opposing force at the same time, because they are mixed together.

On a more subtle note, whenever a person activates the potential of any of the soul’s forces, there is always a mixture of forces manifest. A person with little self-awareness will not notice this, however, even when it is apparent that the two contradictory forces have been working together.

Here is an example. There is a point in our soul which acts *shelo lishmah*, for non-altruistic motivations, and there is our point in the soul of acting *lishmah*, for pure motivations. Rav Chaim Volozhiner wrote that there is always a motivation of *lishmah* present even in our motivations of *shelo lishmah* when learning Torah. The same is true in the converse as well – in every act of *lishmah*, there will always be some trace of *shelo lishmah*.

When a person has not yet matured, whenever he feels inspired to do something holy, he might feel “I am doing this entirely for the sake of Heaven”. When a person says “I am doing this entirely for the sake of Heaven”, it really means that he doesn’t recognize himself at all. As for how much the percentages of *lishmah* versus *shelo lishmah* are present in our act, that is a separate issue, and it depends on the level of each person. But there will always be both *lishmah* and *shelo lishmah* in every person’s act.

Another example: When a person hears of the death of a parent, he must say “*Baruch Dayan Emes*”, expressing the seriousness of the situation, but at the same time, if he is receiving an inheritance, he must make the blessing of *Shehechyanu*, because there is some joy he feels upon receiving inheritance. There are contradictory forces here at once. He has both grief and joy in the same moment.

There are countless examples as well we can give of this concept, of how there are contradictory forces in everything. In some cases, it is apparent, and in other cases, it is not as obvious, but it’s all the same reality.

When a person becomes familiar with this concept, his self-concept will greatly change. Whenever he notices a certain characteristic about himself, he will see an opposite aspect of this characteristic as well that is in him, and he will also see how the two opposing characteristics are mixed with each other. He should become clear about which aspects are on one side of himself and which aspects are on the completely opposite side of this aspect of himself, and he can find how they mix with each other when he sees the middle point between them, where he can clearly see how they mix.

The Difficulty In Accepting Our Own Inner Contradictions

Thinking into this matter requires intellectual contemplation, and it also requires an ability of self-acceptance. It may be very difficult for a person to accept the reality of his own contradictory emotions about something.

For example, when a person is about to get married, he is joyous, but if he is very self-aware of the contradictory forces in him, he will also connect to the sadness of remembering the destruction of Jerusalem, which we mention when standing under the wedding canopy. As an example, there is a custom (for some) to wear ash on the head when standing under the canopy, and there is also the *halachah* of leaving aside a corner in one’s new home in remembrance of Jerusalem. So even as we are in a time of joy, there is also sadness present, but a person might not be aware of it.

This sadness is present even in the height of one’s joy, but it may be very hard for a person to deal with this and to accept this reality. Most people, when walking to their wedding canopy, are so immersed in the joy of getting married that they do not have the self-composure to reflect about the ash on their head or on the mention of Jerusalem under the wedding canopy, regarding it as a mere custom to fulfill and get over with, but with no desire to connect to this sad feeling. The soul of a person has a struggle with dealing with this sadness, amidst its joy.

The same goes for an opposite kind of situation, where a person is amidst a situation of sadness, but there is also some inner, subtle kind of joy that is present with him at the same time, which he may not want to think about. He is instead immersed in his sadness and he has a difficult time accepting that there can be any joy right now.

Here is another example: when a person feels enthused to do a *mitzvah*, he would have a hard time admitting that there are any traces of laziness are present in him at the same time.

The Soul's Self-Denial

It is difficult for a person to admit while experiencing one kind of emotion that he is also experiencing some trace of an opposite emotion than what he's feeling. In most cases, a person is not prepared to accept that he is full of contradictory forces.

A person may have a certain self-concept of himself, thinking of himself as being a generally “depressed” kind of person, thus he thinks that he is truly pathetic, or, to the opposite extreme, he may view himself as a “happy” person. But most of the time, he will not be able to accept that there are contradictions in him. This is because if a person thinks of himself as being full of contradictions, he will feel very confused about himself, and he doesn't want to think this way about himself.

A person wants to feel clear about himself and clear about where he belongs, so he would not want to deal with the reality of inner contradictions. He would not want to think that there's another “half” to himself which may be Chassidic, Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Mizrahi, or Chareidi. He'd much rather prefer to view himself as being entirely one kind of person, but admitting that there are other “parts” to himself can be too difficult for him to accept, so instead he prefers to deny these other parts of his personality.

This is usually because people prefer clarity about themselves rather than to be confused about themselves. However, this is not coming from an inner search for clarity (*olam barur*, a “clear world”), but a superficial kind of clarity about themselves, which is not interested in internal, truthful discoveries. The external part of our soul is usually not prepared to accept that we may be full of inner contradictions, because that would mean that we have no clear self-concept about ourselves at all, and no one wants to think that way about himself.

As we explained, this all takes place in our subconscious. But even if a person would consciously recognize that he has inner contradictions, deep down his subconscious still does not want to accept this.

In light of the above, there is a fundamental concept about the soul which we must know about, which affects our entire inner work: The soul, deep down (in its external layer, that is) denies what is taking place inside itself. The soul would rather fool itself and feel clear about itself, rather than admit to the contradictory forces that take place within it, which would make it feel confused about itself.

This denial, which takes place on a subconscious level, causes most people to run away from the reality that takes place inside themselves. This is not done consciously, of course (except for a few poor souls who, sadly, are consciously running away from themselves, by various means of ‘medicating’ their painful situation – either by taking pills, going to sleep, and other external ways that will get them to run away from themselves). Deep down in the subconscious layer of the soul, a

person prefers to run away from himself. This is a jolting revelation about our own reality, but it is the simple truth.

Running Away From Ourselves versus Facing The Truth

Chazal say that three things remove a person from the world: Jealousy, lust, and honor. Simply speaking, these negative traits take a person out of the world, but the deeper meaning of this is that a person who pursues these traits isn't prepared to deal with his own "world", with his own inner reality. The traits of jealousy, desire, and honor were just various means of getting him to leave his own inner reality, but the real issue is that the person deep down cannot accept his own inner reality, which is full of contradictions. As a result, the soul of a person runs away from its own inner reality.

As we explained, this takes place on a very subconscious level in all people. Many people only know of the external layers of their soul, but if you would tell them about certain deeper layers in their soul that are difficult for them to hear about and accept, they will immediately deny that these deeper parts to themselves exist. Either a person will say:

1. "I never heard of such a thing. This is not the ways of our *rebbeim* (teachers)!"
2. "We did not receive this as part of our *mesorah* (tradition)!"
3. "Thinking about such a thing will cause a person to become sad, so don't think about such things."
4. "Thinking about such a thing will cause a person to become confused."

These arguments are not always incorrect, but in many cases, there is a large part of the person that prefers to run away from dealing with the simple truth that takes place inside of him. If anyone learns the writings of the Alter of Kelm in-depth, he would see a new perspective about his soul, and then he would identify with what we are saying here. But even then, it would still be hard for a person to accept his own inner contradictions, because it is a painful discovery about oneself.

Dealing With Our Inner Contradictions

In order for a person to recognize and deal with his inner contradictions, firstly, he will need intellectual clarity in recognizing them, and he will also need to be prepared for a very painful kind of self-discovery.

It is, in fact, very painful to deal with, and if one isn't ready to accept it, he won't be able to handle the discoveries, preferring instead to deny them. When a person discovers it, it can shake him to the core, and nothing is ever the same again. The most painful thing that a person can ever discover about himself is that he contains in himself a mixture of good and evil forces at once, and this is the reality that has entered us ever since the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas* that brought this mixture into the world and into our psyche.

The reality, then, is clear. The soul contains contradictions, and in fact, it consists entirely of contradictions. Getting used to this realization will bring us to a major, fundamental change in our inner work. (We should know that this is not just another detail in our work to know about, but a fundamental concept that concerns all of our inner work).

But when one doesn't want to accept his inner contradictions, he will form a false self-concept about himself. What about the contradictions he sees in himself? Either he will attribute it to a mere coincidence that happened, due to some external factor, or he will simply teach himself deny his own feelings. If one is prepared to work on himself, he will recognize a contradiction in himself, and although it will feel painful to him, this won't deter him from working on himself and doing what he has to fix the contradiction.

On a deeper level, this is the meaning of one reaches the state described as the "broken heart", which bring a person closer to Hashem. The truly "brokenhearted" person recognizes that he is full of internal contradictions, thus he feels "broken" on his own inside, and since there is a rule that "Its breaking is what purifies it", this brokenhearted state is actually what purifies a person. When the heart is purified, Hashem's Presence is revealed within the heart. But what enables a person to reach the state of a "broken heart"? The very idea of accepting one's own internal contradictions enables this "breaking".

Without this self-acceptance, a person will run away from the reality, by forming an alternative, false self-concept about himself, or by making various excuses for his behavior, attributing his contradictory behavior to external factors.

Becoming Aware of Our Contradictory Emotions

The following is a very important example that illustrates what we mean.

When a person has a family blessed with children, and we ask him if he loves his children, he will say, "Of course, I love them". But if we ask him, "Do you ever hate your children?" he might quickly respond "G-d forbid! What kind of question is that??" But the truth is that a person is a little bit in denial, because every person also experiences some hatred towards his own children!

First of all, nobody has complete *ahavas Yisrael*. Only Mashiach will have complete *ahavas Yisrael*. So there is no person who can say that he completely loves every Jew all the time. In addition to this reason, the soul of a person contains many contradictory forces. If a person hates everyone around himself, he is clearly a person who only loves himself, but even towards one's children, whom one certainly loves, he not always love them. There are all kinds of situations that arise in the home where the children aren't always bringing their parents *nachas*. When a child brings *nachas* to the parents, it awakens the parents' love for his child, but when the children cause any grief to their parents, it grinds on their nerves and it causes the parent's love to dissipate [at least for some time]. There are alternating periods of being proud and loving of them, or being upset with them and resenting them.

Usually, of course, the parents will feel love for their children much more than they feel any hatred. But there is no such thing as a parent who never feels any hatred towards a child. Any parent can identify a situation with his children that he finds intolerable, in which hatred takes over. However, the quick reaction of the parent to this feeling is to deny it. The parent might acknowledge the feeling only a little bit, saying “I only feel hatred to my child in this particular instance, but normally, I only feel love to my child”. Or, the parent will begin to deny the feeling altogether, saying: “No, no – I only love my child! I never, ever feel hatred to my child.”

There are many more examples as well that we can give, but the point is that in most people, there is a very large gap between their reality with what they are actually experiencing, and this gap can be as distant as the sky from the earth. The reason for this, as we explained, is because it is a very painful discovery for the soul to come to terms with its own inner contradictions. One needs to be a very truthful person in order to deal with his own inner reality, and in addition, he also needs to agree to work hard on improving himself.

Someone once complained to Reb Chatzkel Levenstein *zt”l* that the study of *mussar* causes a person to become depressed, because it causes a person to discover all of his weaknesses, which saddens a person. Reb Chatzkel replied, “To the contrary. Discovering one’s weaknesses and qualities makes a person very happy.” Why? If someone searches for truth, he doesn’t want to run away from himself. There is no difference to him between discovering his weaknesses and discovering his qualities, if it will be easy or difficult, because that is not his concern. He is only interested in the truth, and he wants to deal with it, and he is ready to do so.

Even more so, if a person is prepared to serve Hashem and he is ready to do inner work with his soul and attain self-correction, he doesn’t get upset at himself when he discovers his weaknesses. He is aware that these weaknesses are not due to himself, but that they have been given to him from Hashem, Who has created him this way and Who wants him to fix himself, for that is the *avodah* he has been given. He is aware that all of our life is a war with the evil inclination, and, that being the case, he is prepared to work hard and improve himself.

But if a person isn’t prepared to work hard at the challenges of life, and he is not majorly concerned for the truth, what will be the result? When he inevitably does discover contradictions in himself, and when he notices that there is more evil in himself than good (for the “animal” level of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*, contains mostly evil and only a little bit of good), he will find this so saddening and disappointing that he’d rather not think about it, and he will conclude that self-improvement is only for special individuals who aspire for very high levels. And he will just live his life as he sees fit. The result of this will be that there will be a huge gap of a difference between what his *reality* really *is*, with the way he’s *experiencing* his reality.

In contrast to this, the more a person is concerned for truth, the less he will want to deny what’s taking place inside himself, and he will be ready to face all of the internal contradictions that look ugly. It doesn’t matter to him how many qualities he has versus how many deficiencies he has, because that is not his concern. He doesn’t wallow in his own self. Instead, he realizes that whatever deficiencies and qualities he has are granted to him from Hashem, and the same goes for all others

that he sees. Some people have less qualities and deficiencies than others and some have more, but this makes no difference, because all of these qualities and deficiencies are entirely from Hashem, and not from the people that you see.

As a person gets used to this perspective, along with being prepared to work hard at the struggle of our life [which includes fighting against the evil inclination and improving our inner character], a person becomes more self-aware, he becomes more and more aware of truths, he then works harder on himself, and he will discover more and more contradictions in his character. He will grow closer and closer to his true self, because he will recognize himself with better accuracy, and his *avodah* will become more sound and precise.

The Contradiction Contained In Honor of Fire-of-Earth-of-Fire

Until now, we explained here the concept of inner contradictions in general, which is a broad topic. Now we will focus on a particular application of this concept, which is the subject of this chapter: Honor that stems from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, which contains one of the most fundamental contradictions in the soul.

Fire-of-earth-of-fire, as we explained, is a contradictory force. Its fire causes a desire for ascension, its earth weighs it down, and there is also a third factor here: The ‘heaviness’ within the element of earth weighs down the fire, which propels the fire higher. The ‘heavier’ the soul becomes, the more it will feel like it is ascending! How can this be? How can a person feel as if he is ‘ascending’ higher, through being ‘weighed’ down? But that exactly the depth of the contradiction here.

Upon reflection into this concept, we can notice the following insight about human nature [in particular, with regards to the trait of honor]. A person might have two negative character traits taking place at once, which are contradictory forces of each other, yet he denies the negative character trait that is contradicting the other negative character trait. He can’t contain the contradiction in himself of being weighed down and feeling honored at the same time. But if a person has developed the idea of accepting his own inner contradictions, he is able to live with the contradiction – and that is exactly what empowers his desire for honor.

This is the meaning of the term *nefesh chareivah*, “desolate soul”. The word “*chareivah*” is from the word “*churban*” (destruction), which can also mean “contradiction”, as in the term, “He builds worlds and destroys them”. The soul can [negatively] thrive on destruction/contradiction.

A Contradictory Force

Let us explain this concept better, so that it should be clear.

Until now, we explained that there are contradictory forces in the soul, which a person tends to deny, in order to avoid dealing with them. Now we are pointing out an additional insight: there can be a contradictory force in the soul, in and of itself.

Fire-of-earth-of-fire in the soul, which on one hand is “weighed down” at a low point and on the other hand seeks to go higher, is not simply a contradictory force in the sense that it denies one of these aspects. If there would be a denial here of one of these forces, a person wouldn’t feel any desire for honor, because if the person only views himself as being at a lower plane, he doesn’t feel honored, and if he views himself as being on the higher plane, he doesn’t need the honor. Rather, it must be that the person views himself both as being lower as well as higher. And yet, a person is able to learn to live with this contradiction and not be bothered by it, and that is what enables him to feel honored - in spite of the fact that he is not actually elated, and instead ‘weighed down’ by the ‘heaviness’ of earth.

This sounds illogical, because why would a person feel honored if he views himself as being at a low point? But the truth is that this desire for honor is not logical! It cannot be comprehended, logically, why a person would feel honored in this way. It is like any of the other forces in the “animal” layer of the soul, such as lust, which does not make sense logically. Just as lust cannot be understood as anything other than simply a lust, with no logical reason to explain why it exists, so is it impossible to logically understand how the trait of honor works, especially in the case of honor that stems from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, which is a contradictory force in and of itself.

When a person realizes the contradictory forces in himself and he doesn’t want to face them, either he will take his mind off it, by “thinking in learning” (which means that he is simply running away from his inner contradictions) or, he may instead choose to live with the contradictions, picking and choosing certain aspects of his character that are comfortable for him to live with – a clearly negative outcome.

Repairing The Issue: Becoming Pained Upon Noticing Inner Contradictions

By contrast, if a person has become more self-aware and he is prepared to accept his own inner contradictions, he will learn how to see contradictory forces within each thing he encounters, and then he will be pained by the contradictions, and then he will not want to live off these contradictions.

This is the depth behind all of the *machlokes* (argument) that we come across in the words of our Sages when learning *Gemara*. It is because there are always contradictions in everything we come across. The *Gemara* is full of *machlokes* between the Sages, so that we can be trained to see contradictions in each thing we come across. (On a deeper level, there is no *machlokes* at all, for

there is a rule that “Their words and their words are the words of the living G-d”⁵; and when one is missing this perspective, his arguments are on a level of Korach and his assembly.)

If one is not aware of this, though, he may have learned *Gemara* for many years and he has been through many arguments of the Sages, but all he has done is gathered more and more arguments together, without understanding what all of this *machlokes* about.

First one needs to absorb this concept on an intellectual level, and then sense it in his heart, that we are meant to see contradictions in each thing we come across. This must be coupled with a search for truth.

After a person gets used to uncovering contradictions in everything, he will develop a sensitivity to contradictions, and when he discovers his own inner contradictions, he will find them painful. This is the meaning of the verse, “*An increase of knowledge, is an increase of pain*”.⁶ The more inner contradictions a person discovers in himself, the more painful it will feel.

When a person is pained by inner contradictions, he will then have a hard time living with inner contradictions. He will then have an easier time rectifying the honor that stems from **fire-of-earth-of-fire**, which is fueled by a contradictory feeling of being higher and lower at once, because he will be pained by this contradiction and he will wish to disconnect from it.

This will not get a person to stop pursuing honor entirely, but it will certainly take away the strength of this kind of honor, which gets its fuel from making use of contradictory forces.

This will only work, however, if a person has gotten used to recognizing contradictions in everything he comes across, which, in turn, can weaken one’s habit of living with contradictions.

⁵ *Gittin 6b*

⁶ *Koheles 1:18*

5 | *Dependent On Honor*

Earth-of-Water-of-Fire: The “Heaviness” and “Permanence” That One Attaches To The Pleasure Found In Honor

With Hashem’s help, let us continue to learn about the trait of *kavod* (honor), a branch of the element of fire. Now we will discuss honor that stems from **water-of-fire**, and we will begin with “**earth**”-of-water-of-fire.

Honor stemming from **earth-of-water-of-fire** refers to the heaviness and the permanence that one has in the pleasure found in honor. The honor itself is “fire” within honor. The “water” aspect of honor is the pleasure that is found in honor. The “earth” within this “water” is the heaviness and permanence that one may have in the pleasure of honor.

Honor (Fire) Is More Dominant In Old Age

Let’s explain this matter at its roots.

Our life is divided into two stages: Childhood and adulthood. During childhood, we do not have mature minds, for we are small-minded then (*katnus mochin*), and when we get older, we mature and we gain some level of maturity of mind (*gadlus mochin*).

In our childhood and teenage and adolescent years, our most dominant element is usually water (pleasure). The trait of desire, which stems from the element of water, is most apparent in the younger years of our life. Although fire can also be an active element in the younger years, it is mainly water which is active during this stage of life. Understandably, the element of water will manifest differently in each person, according to his unique nature and soul root. But in general, the childhood and teenage years are dominated by the element of water.

When a person matures, especially when he is in the second half of his life, his element of water usually weakens. Chazal state that “When desire ceases [in old age], peace in the home ceases.” The element of water is strong in one’s younger years and at a certain point in one’s life, it weakens, and this is the case with most people.

When water weakens, its opposite element, fire, becomes stronger. That is often why adults, who have usually matured since childhood, will have more displays of the traits of conceitedness, anger, and honor. Their element of water has weakened, and in its place, their fire has increased. The traits of fire are conceit, anger, and honor, so when people get older, these traits are much more manifest.

This is a deep, internal change that one goes through in life. However, not all adults become aware of this change. If a person remains immature and his mind hasn’t developed that much since

he was younger, he has a ‘disparate’ view towards everything, and he doesn’t see “a bigger picture” of things. But when a person gets older and is now more mature, he sees things from beginning until end.

An immature person sees only from his current point, so he will only see his own desires, wants, and yearnings of this moment. He lives more for the moment, and this is all the more so with children, who live in their current desires and can’t see past them.

In contrast, a person who has matured in life has become a bit deeper, and he doesn’t only live in the moment. He sees the bigger picture of life, the beginning and end of things, and also the point in between, which he is currently found in, so he’s not “stuck” in the moment. He is capable of thinking about death, of the fact that we are heading towards the grave, as Chazal teach, that one should always be cognizant of the day of death.

The “Sudden” Changes of Old Age

If one is unaware of this concept, he will find the various situations and stages of life to be unmanageable, finding himself “suddenly” in a new stage of life. Such a person, when he hits old age, will find it unbearable.

Reb Yisrael Salanter said that there are two stages in improving our character: “Changing” the character traits, and “conquering” the character traits. But when old age arrives, a person has a weaker amount of control over his character, and when he “suddenly” finds himself in this stage of life, he will have a tough time dealing with it. He may not want to admit to the changes that have suddenly arrived. If he does admit to it, it will feel sudden to him and thus very difficult to handle.

If you keenly observe the world around you, you can see many old people in the world who are in a pitiful situation. They have realized that old age has suddenly come upon them, as if it has fallen on top of them.

In childhood, a person played games and had fun. In the intermediate stages of life, either a person sits and learns Torah during the day, or, if he doesn’t merit this, he goes out to work. But one day he may suddenly find himself out of his job. Or, if he was in *Kolel*, he suddenly realizes that he is “just another older *avreich*” who is not really needed by anybody (this is most likely to happen in the case where he is not an exceptional Torah scholar, and he has no more individual life of his own anymore, for whatever reason.) He finds himself one day suddenly “gone” from the world [as the Sages say of who is a hundred years of age, who is considered “gone” from the world], feeling that he has no purpose on the world anymore.

If one has children and grandchildren who give him honor, he will be fine, but if this honor is not a consistent basis, he feels unimportant, not needed, with nothing to live for, with no reason to get up out of bed in the morning for anything.

If a person lived an inner kind of life, he will not have this problem in old age. But here we are speaking about a person who has lived superficially before old age set in. He may have even learned Torah and *davened* every day and he kept all of the *mitzvos*, but with each passing day, he was simply taking life as it comes. He did what he had to do, whatever was necessary to be done and whatever was desired from him, but he was simply “flowing” along with the various “movements” of life. *Baruch Hashem*, he has raised children, he has made them *Bar Mitzvah*’s and weddings, and he even has grandchildren. “*Baruch Hashem*”, “*Baruch Hashem*”, “*Baruch Hashem*”.... ..

One day he suddenly finds himself in a situation where everything has changed. He finds himself getting easily irritated, and no one around him knows what’s making him angry. He has become more obsessed with his pride, and he suddenly is demanding more honor from others. People don’t understand what he wants, and they are at a loss of trying to understand what he really needs.

Most people do not develop this problem when they are younger, but if you ever speak to some of the older people in the world, not a superficial kind of conversation but a soul kind of conversation, where you speak to them about what’s going on inside them, you can see that they are choosing to ignore thinking about what lies ahead of them. They would rather think about their past, instead of thinking about what will be with their future.

This is not an issue of how much Torah learning a person needs to fill up his time with when he gets older (although that is also a very important issue). The real issue is with the entire perspective that the person has towards his life. If a person before old age has never thought about what he must do with his life, he will have a very hard time dealing with the changes that old age brings.

In contrast, if he had been clear of how life is supposed to look, he will have a much easier time settling into old age. Of course, Hashem can bring changes to any person’s life in spite of all a person’s planning and thinking. But Hashem has given us free will, and within our free will, we can choose what kind of life we will want to lead, and to plan and direct ourselves accordingly.

We have been brief here about this, but it is describing a more all-inclusive perspective towards life, of how a person must see life, of how he goes about his own reality.

Avoiding The Disillusionment In Old Age: Awareness About The Path of Life

Most people, when they think about old age, will think about it in terms of how they will benefit from their pension. But if someone is deeper, he thinks about what his life in general will look like, what it will look like until then, and what it will look like after that – and even more so, to think about what will be with his soul after he is buried in the grave, and before Whom he have to give an accounting to, in the world of truth.

To describe this briefly, if a person is able to have a mature perspective towards life, this is called *gadlus* (“greatness”, or maturity). He sees all of life as a “*tahalich*” (path), and therefore he sees the details of life as all being interconnected, as opposed to seeing it all as random, scattered information. He is aware that our reality began with the six days of Creation, with the creation of

Adam, and that it continued throughout all of history until now, and that it will continue with the era of Mashiach, the resurrection of the dead, the World To Come. That is how he sees creation, and his own life.

This is a more basic kind of awareness, and we are not referring to high levels of perception and wisdom, which are only reached by those who have *ruach hakodesh*. Here we are talking about a simpler level of awareness towards what life is about, of the inner meaning of life, where one *experiences* the interconnectedness of the details in his life.

Why Honor May Dominate In Old Age

Therefore, if a person had a strong amount of “water” (desire and passion) in his soul in his younger years, when he hits old age, where the element of fire gets stronger, the “water” and the “fire” will clash unpleasantly, as they are contradictory forces. The “water” will weaken to the “fire” which gets stronger in older age, and the “fire” will become dominant.

For this reason, even if a person wasn’t that prone to the traits of anger, conceit and honor-seeking in his younger years, when he gets older, it is very possible that he will now become prone to these traits. This is what is meant by the words of the *Gemara*, “An elderly man in the home, is discord in the home.”

A new stage begins when a person hits old age. It is not simply a change in *middos* (character traits). The person remains with the same *middos* as before. It is just that now, everything will be weighed by him in different terms, and therefore the way he handles things now will be different, based on the various circumstances in his life.

Knowing Your Source of Pleasure

Therefore, let us understand the following deep point.

A person really cannot live without receiving some kind of pleasure. If a person would live without pleasure, he would be kind of dead. Each person needs different amounts of pleasure, and the source of pleasure differs with each person. But every person must know where he gets pleasure from.

Most people, when they think about where they derive pleasure from, will discover that that it is a physical, material kind of pleasure. If a person mainly gets pleasure from the various physical pleasures available on this world, he must know that this is a big problem for the soul. His soul will have a hard time making the transition to the Next World, and when the soul has become attached to physical pleasures of this world, it suffers from this in the grave (*chibut hakever*). But besides for this problem, he will also find himself suddenly one day without a source of vitality. He had been

getting his vitality from a materialistic source, and when he finds himself in a stage of life where he can't get those pleasures [such as in old age], he will feel no reason to live.

Unfortunately, anyone who is familiar a bit with what goes on in the world today knows that there are people who are lax in the area of *shemiras habris* (moral purity), *Rachmana litzlan* (may Hashem save them), and when they enter old age, they require medication to calm their nerves. They had been living in order to fulfill certain lusts, which they derived their entire pleasure in life from. As soon as they are in a situation where they can't get those lusts, they find it so unbearable that they wish they could die. Some people even think that it is a kindness to help these people die, to put them out of their misery, *Rachmana litzlan*. Indeed, they are miserable, because they see no reason to live anymore, when they can't get their lusts that they are used to. There are even places in the world today where people who wish to die can go to others for help in ending their lives.

It is shuddering to think about this. But there are people who have nothing but lusts and materialistic desire in their life, and they feel that this is their entire life, so they feel there is no point in living if they can't get those desires anymore. Most people do not get to that extremity, of course. But the problem can exist on a smaller degree with many people, where the attitude is the same: to live for various physical desires. When old age arrives, those desires are no longer within their reach, and it becomes very hard for them to live. Most of the time, a person is not conscious of this attitude when it exists. He might not be aware that he is living for physical desires, especially if he keeps Torah and *mitzvos*. If he does not observe Torah and *mitzvos*, this is certainly the case.

But in either case, the person considers physical desires to be his main source of vitality and pleasure in life, and when old age arrives, he will feel like a dried-out tree, with nothing to live for. Even if he learns Torah and keeps all the *mitzvos*, if his main source of vitality did not come from his Torah learning, from doing Hashem's will – at a certain point, there will come a time when, sadly, he will feel that he has nothing to live for.

When he does reach that point, there are either one of two possibilities. Either he had such strong desires until now and therefore his element of "fire" has never been exposed, and now that he cannot fulfill his physical desires, he sees no reason to live. Or, since he cannot fulfill physical desires anymore, his "fire" will now make its appearance, and therefore he will greatly pursue honor, as we have been discussing here. He will also find himself more irritable, and more conceited, which are both negative results of fire.

In Summary

In summary, we find two kinds of people. One kind of person has a strong amount of "water" and he doesn't have that much "fire", and therefore he is more drawn towards physical desires, and less drawn towards spiritual desires such as honor. When such a person reaches a point where he can't get his desires, he will lose his zest for life. Others are born with more "fire" in their souls – even at a younger age, when the physical desires are stronger, they are more drawn towards the spiritual desire of honor. When they get older, their desire for honor greatly increases. The

pleasurable feeling of honor is not introduced to a person at the age of seventy. Rather, a person identifies with it already at a younger age, and slowly he begins to identify with it more and more, deriving pleasure from it. Although physical desire is stronger in a person's younger years, one will still be able to enjoy honor, even though honor will not be his strongest experience of pleasure.

When a person gets older and he is at the point where he is less interested in physical desires, honor will gain more of a place in his life. Usually, the loss of interest in physical desires is not a result of spiritual self-work. Rather, it is a natural byproduct of getting older and becoming more mature. If a person had learned in his younger years to identify with the pleasure in honor, it will get stronger as time goes on, and when he gets older, he will suddenly find himself placing great importance on receiving honor, and he won't be able to understand how this situation has come upon him so suddenly.

But as we are explaining, it does not come suddenly. Rather, it is because when a person gets older, his element of water becomes weaker and his fire becomes stronger. In addition, it is also because the desire for honor had been there all along, and it has slowly made its appearance, and now when the person is older and more mature, it has become stronger. These two factors together cause honor to become the main point of a person's life, in his older years.

When People Become Dependent On Honor

A large amount of older people live entirely off honor. They don't have that much physical desires to fulfill, so they will live off the good feeling of whatever honor they receive. (This is in contrast to a person who formed an inner connection to his Torah learning and to the *mitzvos*, he has true spiritual vitality, and that's a different story altogether.)

Most people, in their old age, live off the honor that they receive, from the way they are being treated by others, from the way others are relating to them, from the good feeling that others give to them, from the honor that others give to them - and that is where they get their vitality from. If an old person is doing nothing with his life all day, there are some kind and caring people who try to recruit others to befriend him, to say a kind word to him, to give him a compliment, to give them some form of honor. One kind word can keep him going from one Shabbos to the next.

If a person understands what we are saying here and he doesn't want to run away from true life, he understands that unless he lives deeply and he makes inner improvement, there is a likely chance that he will end up like most people, as described above.

1- Enjoying A Higher Form of Pleasure

In contrast, the ideal way for a person to live is as follows.

The words we are about to say are particularly relevant to repairing **earth-of-water-of-fire**. The “fire” here refers to honor, the “water” refers to the pleasure in honor, and “earth” of water-of-fire is when a person is regularly used to the pleasure in honor, to the point that he is tied down to it, with a kind of permanence.

The way a true life looks like is as follows: A person needs to be able to develop some kind of pleasure in life that is not physical. As long as a person only knows of physical, sensual pleasure, it will be unbearable to him when he can no longer get his physical desires, such as when he gets older, when his physical desires weaken. Therefore, a sensible person makes sure to develop a higher, deeper, spiritual kind of pleasure.

Examples may include deriving pleasure from Torah learning, from doing the will of Hashem, from love for others, from prayer, from kindness. Each person can find his own higher form of pleasure. The common denominator between all situations, however, is that a person should be able to have a form of higher pleasure in his life that is consistent. This is necessary for anyone who wishes to live a true life.

Of course, to reach a level when a person is divested of all physical desires, is a very high spiritual level, which only rare individuals reach. But every person must be able to enjoy a higher form of pleasure than the physical, and it is absolutely necessary. If not, what is the point of living? He won't be able to traverse life correctly.

So the first, basic point one needs is to find a higher form of pleasure, which he gains vitality from. The gain of this will be that when he gets older and his physical desires weaken, he will still retain his deeper sources of pleasure, and even more so, those higher pleasures will become stronger. Old age weakens only the physical body, not the inner forces of the soul. Therefore, deep pleasure can remain even in old age.

Many times a person's soul faculties are also weakened in old age, because when a person lived life with a very physical orientation, the physicality of the body dominated the soul so much that the soul is subjected to the body, which causes the soul to descend to the level of the physicality of the body, and it is thereby “weakened” along with the body. But if a person developed his inner, spiritual world, old age only increases his spiritual maturity, as it is said of Torah scholars, who become wiser with the older they become.

The idea of developing a source of inner pleasure that goes beyond the physical is the rectified form of the element of “water” (pleasure), which, when developed in the younger years of life, can last into old age as well, even after the physical body and desire are weakened. Such “water” never weakens, because it is not subject to the physical body – it is a deeper, inner form of pleasure which was beyond the physicality of the body to begin with, so it will remain even after the physical energies of the body weaken. That is the first part of the remedy.

2- Learning How To Detach From A Need For Honor

However, developing a deeper form of pleasure alone will not be enough to counter the desire for honor which becomes more dominant in old age. This is because even the rectified kind of “water” (spiritual pleasure) cannot completely douse the element of fire that has become stronger in old age. When the physical body weakens in old age, the element of water/pleasure is always somewhat weakened by this, and therefore “fire” will dominate. In the lowest part of the soul - the “animal soul” (*nefesh habehaimis*), which is connected to the physical realm - the element of water will become weakened, and in turn, the element of fire is strengthened.

Therefore, in addition to the first part of the remedy explained earlier, a person must also work on trying not to become too attached to the pleasure of receiving honor.

When the pleasure of honor is experienced, naturally, a person will want to continue to experience it, on a permanent basis. This will create a dependency on honor, the problem that we have described here at length. One should therefore train himself to detach from the need for honor.

Even if one is not on the level of “Run away from honor”, and certainly if he isn’t yet on the level where he doesn’t care about insults, one can reach this more basic level, of detaching from the need for honor. A person can form a space in his soul where he doesn’t need to be constantly honored, just as we discussed with regards to desire, where a person can form a space in him where he doesn’t need to always fulfill a certain desire.

Even if a person is in a place where he is always receiving honor, he can form this space in himself, which doesn’t need honor.

Being Able To Endure Insults

Taking this further, one can have a space in himself where not only he doesn’t need to be consistently honored, but he can even feel okay with insults. (And the truth is that every person anyhow will need to form a space in himself where he can handle insults.)

Of course, this will not help for handling extreme shame, and it is a high level if one can endure major insults (though there are certainly ways to accomplish it as well). But any person needs the basic level this, of having a space in himself which can handle insults. One can try working on this in areas where it is easier for him to accept the insult.

At first, it will feel painful to endure an insult, and one will inwardly cringe at it. When one is at this first stage, he should bear in mind that the suffering atones for any sins. But after getting used to this idea, one should then realize that the ability to endure insults is really building his soul, because it is helping him detach from the need to always be honored.

Each person is insulted on a different degree, depending on the situation and his personality. There are times where Hashem sends embarrassing situations to a person, where he will hear himself being insulted. Some are capable of being silent to insults, because they know that it is the will of

Hashem to remain silent and not respond to the insult. Others can reach a deep place in the soul which does feel the pain of the insult, but they are happy even as they are being insulted, because they are aware that it is helping them detach from a need to always be honored.

This very idea (enduring insult), as any sensible person can recognize, is the root of rectifying the trait of honor.

Practically Working On This Concept

Practically speaking, one should work on this in two stages. The elementary stage of it is to be silent to insults, bearing in mind that it is the will of Hashem not to respond to the insults. The deeper level, after working on the first level, is to do so with the awareness that it is helping you detach from a need to always be honored. The goal of this is to form a space in your soul which can endure the pain of insults.

Summary of the Two Steps in Detaching From the Dependency on Honor

One therefore needs to develop the two points in him that we mentioned, which are two opposite extremes from each other: Higher, non-physical pleasure, as well as knowing how to detach from the pleasure of honor.

If honor controls a person and he cannot detach from it, he is totally in the hands of the evil inclination. But if one can identify the pleasure in honor and also detach from it, he is balanced between the two extremes, and although he is still far from being detached from the need for honor altogether, he will at least be on the level of being able to endure insults. He will be able to receive the insult, just as much as he can receive the pleasure of honor.

Of course, the insults will still feel hurtful to him. At times, it will certainly feel very painful. But at least he will know how to detach from the pleasure in honor. He can be above honor, because he has come to the realization that the need for honor doesn't have to control him.

Thriving In Old Age

If a person works on these two points together – developing a space in the soul that knows of higher pleasure, which is not connected to the physical, along with developing a space in the soul that can endure insults – when he reaches old age, his spiritual element of “water” will strengthen, so his higher source of pleasure will remain intact. And although his “fire” will inevitably increase in old age, at least it will not control him completely, when one takes this approach. He might identify more with a need for honor, but the need for honor won't control him, because he will also be able to have a higher pleasure in enduring insults, for he can feel some degree of joy in it, when he knows that honor doesn't control him.

When this is all worked upon with an inner awareness about life, each year in a person's life will be seen by a person as another step in this lifelong process, and one will gradually mature, on an inward level, throughout his life. In this way, when a person reaches old age, he will understand that his element of "water" has naturally weakened, and that his element of "fire" has strengthened. He will have an inner awareness of where he must get to.

Understandably, the element of fire is always stronger in old age, but as we have explained here, it doesn't have to cause a person to be completely controlled by a constant need for honor. Instead, a person in old age can be well-equipped to deal with the need for honor when it comes, and he can train himself from his earlier years to detach from this need for consistent honor. He can have an inner awareness towards it already from before, resembling the teaching of Chazal, "Who is wise? The one who sees what will be": To prepare the way for himself which he needs to traverse, when the time comes to traverse it.

Then he will be able to detach from the need to always be honored – before it arrives, as well as while he is going through it – and through this, he will not be permanently attached and weighed down by a need to be constantly honored.

In Conclusion

In the younger years of life, often a person isn't that driven by a desire for honor, and therefore much of the words here will seem far from a person when he's in the earlier stages of life. Others will strongly identify with the words here, because they have more fire in their souls and therefore they identify well with the desire for honor.

But even those who don't identify with the words here should understand that the time will come when these matters will be relevant, when old age arrives and the need for honor will then make its appearance. One needs to become aware of how life is supposed to look like, the long path that life is - and to build his life accordingly, now, so that when the future arrives, he will be well prepared for it. Then he will thrive and be energetic even in his old age.

6 | *The Pleasure In Honor*

Water-of-Water-of-Fire: The Pleasurable Feeling In Honor

With the help of Hashem, let us continue to learn about the element of fire and its trait of *kavod*, honor. Here we will learn about **water-of-water-of-fire**. Honor is “fire”, and “water-of-fire” refers to the pleasure in honor. “**Water-of-water-of-fire**” in particular is the root of all pleasure in honor, and, to understand this in subtler terms, it means to become “dragged” after the pleasure of honor.

We have explained in the past that honor is a deeper kind of pleasure, which stems from the spiritual realm, and although honor is of a spiritual nature, it extends onto this physical realm, where it can be experienced. Whenever a person feels honor, he is feeling a revelation of spiritual, heavenly pleasure that has extended into this lower realm we live on.

Honor does not come from our own realm. It comes from above this realm. It is therefore the most fundamental experience that a person has. All souls of *Yisrael* are rooted in the *Kisei HaKavod*, the Throne of Glory, thus the highest experience of man is *kavod*/honor, an offshoot of the *Kisei HaKavod*.

Honor – A Subtle, Refined Pleasure

Based upon this, let’s understand that the pleasure in honor is a concept that envelopes all of the world, and it can be found on any level.

There are coarser kinds of pleasure and refined kinds of pleasure. The material world contains coarse kinds of pleasure, and the more we elevate our level, the more refined our pleasure becomes. Honor, which is of the spiritual realm, is the most refined kind of pleasure that exists.

When a person is enjoying a pleasant dream, the pleasure feels tangible. It feels real to him when it’s happening. His intellect has gone and his imagination has taken over, and in addition, his physical body doesn’t have a hold on him, so the pleasure in the dream feels more subtle.

Therefore, the more refined and subtle that a person becomes, the more one can feel the pleasure of honor. Hence, the more drawn he may become after honor. It is as if he has acquired different taste buds, which can enjoy a new taste that others aren’t experiencing.

(The Hebrew word for “refined” is *eden*, from the word *adinus*, “refinement”, a hint to “*Gan Eden*” (Paradise) – the place where there is heavenly, spiritual pleasure. The more refined a person’s pleasure becomes, the more he is connected to the level of *Gan Eden*, a subtle, spiritual level of pleasure.)

Honor is the most refined kind of pleasure within one's experience. However, as mentioned previously, there is both "coarse" honor as well as "refined" honor. If honor causes a person to become 'weighed down', to the point that he has become heavily tied down to the honor he's receiving [see Chapter 1, "Heavy Honor"], the honor then becomes a very coarse, gruff kind of pleasure. For example, a person can feel how honor weighs him down in the way he walks, in the way he sits, and in the place where he chooses to settle.

But most of the time, honor is such a subtle and refined kind of pleasure that it cannot be tangibly felt. When a person eats and he is enjoying it, he feels the pleasure tangibly. The same is true when a person sees something that he enjoys, where he can feel the pleasure, tangibly. But honor cannot be tangibly felt. Therefore, even the pleasure one receives from honor cannot be tangibly felt. That is why the pleasure in honor is the most refined kind of pleasure there is. The coarser and less refined that one is, the more he will seek material kinds of pleasure, and if he ever seeks honor, he will seek a coarser, gruffer kind of honor, so that he can feel it tangibly.

To give an example, during a dream, a person is enjoying it, and this is a tangible kind of pleasure. When one is awake, the intellect is stronger than the imagination, so the imagination will not be felt that strongly. The bodily senses are gruffer while being awake, so the pleasure of the imagination is not as easily felt while being awake. But in a dream, when the bodily senses go to sleep and the imagination overpowers the intellect, the pleasure of the dream will feel sharper.

That is why if a person imagines in a dream that he is eating, he might enjoy it even more than when he was awake, because the experience of the dream feels sharper, for the feelings are more refined there. Refined pleasure is a more powerful experience of pleasure than enjoying the physical.

Thus, from all the pleasures that can be experienced on this world, the most refined pleasure is the pleasure in honor. It can be experienced when awake, when the body's senses are coarser and where it is harder to sense more refined kinds of pleasure, and in spite of this, a person can experience the refined pleasure that is honor, even while being fully awake.

That is why the more refined and attuned a person becomes, the more he will be drawn towards the pleasure of honor. To illustrate the idea, a taste-tester has far more enjoyment than others when tasting something, because his sense of taste has become much more refined, and therefore his pleasure in the taste is experienced more powerfully. The same is true for one who has become more refined and attuned, who is able to have more pleasure in the feeling of honor. His experience of pleasure is more refined and subtle, but it is also more powerful.

Rectifying The Pleasure In Honor: Tracing The Honor To Its Heavenly Source

So far, we have explained how this applies to evil honor. Now we will see how one can use this idea to rectify evil honor.

We explained earlier that honor stems from the heavenly realm, and it is experienced on this world. When honor is used for evil, a person uses honor for himself, experiencing the honor only

with regards to himself [and therefore he feels that others should honor him, so he will demand it from them, at least in his mind]. In contrast, the holy, true kind of honor is when a person at a lower level appreciates and “honors” a person on a higher level.

Thus, honor is holy when the lower level is “honoring” the higher level. For example, when a child honors his parents, the child is the “lower level” who honors the parents, who are “the higher level” in relation to the child. Similarly, when honoring a *melech* (king), the people who honor him recognize that he is above their level, and therefore they accord him honor.

But when a person uses honor for his own purposes and he enjoys it, this is where honor becomes evil. When a person demands his own honor, he is not demanding the honor of the heavenly source that it came from. Rather, he is demanding honor of the “lower level” that it has extended to - the person himself. That is when honor becomes evil.

Therefore, the rectified way to use honor is for a person to recognize its higher source, as opposed to recognizing himself as the source of the honor.

These are subtle ideas, and this is especially because honor in general is a subtle and refined concept to understand.

Impaired Honor Vs. Rectified Honor

It is impossible to live without honor in our life. But we must know that there is impaired honor, and rectified honor.

Impaired honor is when a person demands honor for himself, because he is attributing himself as the source of the honor, whereas holy honor is that even as honor is being experienced within oneself, the person traces it back to its heavenly source. Others may honor him because they believe that he is deserving of being honored, but the person himself who is being honored must think that the honor that he experiences is coming from Above, and not from himself.

Rectified Honor – When The Lower Level Connects To The Higher Level

Let us understand this idea better.

Honor is the connecting force between the lower and higher realms, for it allows one on this lower realm to have some perception of the higher realm and begin to understand the higher realm. When the lower realm is allowed a perception of the higher realm, that itself is *kavod* (honor), and when one experiences this kind of *kavod*, one can experience the rectified form of pleasurable honor, which is **water-of-water-of-fire**.

Thus, honor exists in order to serve as a connecting point to the higher, spiritual realm. The lower realms are sustained by the higher realms, and one of the ways in which the lower realms are connected to the higher realms is through *kavod*.

For example, the *melech* (king) had special royal clothing, so that others can see his honor and thus be in awe of him. There is a *halachah* that it is forbidden to see a king unclothed. A king can only be seen by others in his royal garments, and when others behold the sight of his royal clothes, this is how they connect with the king, who is really above them. Clothes are “*levush*” in Hebrew, which has the same letters as the word “*shvil*”, “way”, because through clothing, a person is enabled the “way” by which he can connect to something honorable.

Thus, the pleasure in honor, which is rooted in **water-of-water-of-fire**, is not just another form of honor. It is an entirely different kind of honor. In its evil use, a person enjoys honor for his own purposes, demanding that others honor him. In its holy use, a person attributes the honor he is receiving to a higher source, (as opposed to himself), and that is how he connects to the level above him.

The Power To Enjoy Honor is a Necessary Quality of the Soul

It seems simply that in order to rectify the trait of honor, we must destroy our pleasure in honor. But the truth is that we must know how to enjoy honor, in the right way. The pleasurable feeling in honor is a fundamental force in all of our spiritual success, which we need to channel in the right direction. Therefore, the main part of rectifying the trait of honor is not to destroy the pleasure in honor (although there is certainly a place for this in our inner work), but to enjoy it in the right way, as we are explaining.

Woe to the person who has no pleasure in honor! It may seem to us initially that honor is an evil trait which we must learn how to stop enjoying, but the truth is the very opposite than this. The pleasure of the soul in the spiritual is essentially a pleasure in honor.

The Torah, which is Hashem’s light that can be enjoyed and understood by people, is essentially a form of enjoying spiritual honor. Honor comes from above, and we need to “return” it to its source above. The souls above have pleasure in the honor being accorded to them – that is, the honor of Hashem, which they can taste. That is what the soul yearns to experience.

(There is also a higher level, where the soul yearns only for Hashem Himself, which is higher than the pleasure in the honor).

It is written, “*Show me, please, Your glory.*” This is the deepest pleasure of the soul, to enjoy seeing the glory of Hashem. Thus, one must know what glory and honor is, in order to appreciate this spiritual blessing of enjoying the glory of Hashem.

Spiritual Progress Is Through “Honoring” The Higher Level

Since honor is what enables a person to connect to the level above him, if one does not have pleasure in honor, he will not be able to rise to a higher level.

How can person reach a higher spiritual level? Simply speaking, it is through exertion to get there. But the more precise way to get there is through “honoring” the higher level. When you “honor” the higher level, you are then connected to it, and now that you are connected to it, you can reach the “honor” of the higher level, and then, you can aim for an even higher level than before.

Example 1 - Honoring Parents

Here is an example of this idea. In the *mitzvah* of honoring parents, the child is “below” his parents, for the parents are “above” the child. Through honoring them, the child actually becomes connected to them. How does a person connect to his parents? The parents are the root of the child, so if the child honors the parent, the honor itself will connect him to them.

It is also true that parents are the child’s root simply because the child has been born from these parents, but what connects a child to his parents right now? One of ways of how a child connects to his parents (I emphasize here that it is only one of the ways) is through honoring them. When the child honors the parents, he “rises” to their level, which in turn enables the child to connect to the parents.

To understand this in subtler terms, the first step is that the child becomes connected to them, through honoring them. After connecting to them, the child can rise to their level, a higher level than before.

Therefore, if the child would try to become a father without first honoring the father, he is attempting to rise to a higher level than his current level, through skipping the stage of honoring the parent [and since he is skipping a level, he will not succeed].

In order to connect to any higher level, one must first “honor” the higher level, and only then can he connect to it. In order to connect to the *havayah* (essence) of something, one first has to be connected to the *kavod* (honor) in it, by “honoring” its reality.

Example 2 – In Learning Torah

Here is another example of this idea, and a fundamental one.

When one learns the Torah, day and night, how does he reach comprehension in Torah? Simply it is because when we exert ourselves to understand it, we can then reach understanding in it. But the deeper reason is because the more honor one accords to the Torah, the more one can comprehend it. Honoring the Torah is what connects one to the Torah, and then one can have comprehension in

his own Torah learning. But if a person learns Torah and he doesn't have a respect for the Torah, he will not understand his learning, because if he does not honor its reality, he cannot connect to it.

It is not enough just to enjoy what you are trying to acquire, if you don't have a respect for it. That is why even if a person enjoys learning Torah, if he doesn't have a respect for the Torah, he won't reach understanding in Torah, because if he doesn't honor the Torah, he won't be able to connect himself to it.

This applies as well to anything you want to reach. In order to reach anything, one must first "honor" it.

“Run Away From Honor” By Returning Honor To Its Root

Therefore, when one needs to fix the pursuit of enjoying honor, the *avodah* is not simply to uproot the pleasure of honor, but to return the honor to its root. There is also place for uprooting some of the pleasure in honor, but this is not the main part of the rectification. The main aspect of the rectification here is to avoid attributing the honor to yourself, and to instead trace it back to its higher source.

Chazal state that when one runs away from honor, honor will run after him. To where should a person run to, when running away from honor? Simply speaking, it means to go to a different place, if one finds himself in a situation where others are according him honor. But the depth of this matter is that one should run away from the honor that is being attributed to him, and to “run away” to the higher source of the honor that is above him – the *kavod* of Hashem.

This is the root of rectifying honor. Instead of avoiding honor, we can learn how to use it in the right way, by “returning” the honor to its proper root. One should run after the “honor” that is the Torah, which is the same honor accorded to Torah scholars, and such honor is the pleasure of the soul.

The Key To All Spiritual Ascension: Understanding The Concept of Honor

When one understands this, he has the root of spiritual ascension. The proper view towards the concept of *kavod*/honor is the root of all spiritual ascension.

Honor feels exalting. It is evil only when a person wants others to honor him, because he wants to raise his own ego, which is stemming from conceitedness, which can also be contained in honor. But true, holy honor has nothing to do with conceit. It is a revelation of the heavenly realm within this lower realm. Thus, true *kavod*/honor is a necessary force for the soul, in order to have any spiritual ascension. That is why a person should not belittle the idea of *kavod*/honor.

The Holy Use of Water-of-Water-of-Fire: Yearning To Reveal The Glory of Hashem

The very idea of *kavod* is central to our entire spiritual dimension, because any and every soul of the Jewish people must reveal a yearning to know and recognize “the *kavod* (honor, or glory) of Hashem”. The purpose of Creation is to reveal the *kavod*/glory of Hashem: “*It is all called in My name; For My glory, I created it.*” One must reveal a yearning in the soul to know of this *kavod* of Hashem.

This is the holy use of **water-of-water-of-fire**: When the soul is moving towards this *kavod* of Hashem, this is the root of all spiritual ascension. The soul yearns for its root. It not only yearns for the *Kisei HaKavod* that it was carved from - it yearns to reach the very *kavod* of Hashem. Therefore, the concept of *kavod* must envelope all of a person’s life’s work.

Many times a person can learn a lot of Torah, yet he doesn’t gain an appreciation of *kavod HaTorah*, an honor for the Torah. He can be busy with trying to understand the Torah’s wisdom, its purely intellectual aspect – yet in spite of all his study of Torah, he may not gain a greater sense of respect for the Torah. He may “know” what “*kavod haTorah*” is on an intellectual level, but it is mostly pushed to the side in his mind, in favor of simply studying the Torah on an intellectual level, which certainly must occupy his mind.

But the more a person contemplates and understands that the purpose of Creation is to recognize the glory of Hashem, the more the soul will want to be in touch with it, and it will even become “pulled” after this, to the point that it is naturally thinking about this concept on a regular, ongoing basis.

When it comes to this point, of regularly contemplating “the glory of Hashem”, there are two kinds of people who are interested in knowing about this [either of them are proper and good]. One kind of person will express this yearning by trying to learn more about it, so that it gains greater definition in his mind. Another kind of person will actually do certain actions in order to increase the honor of Hashem in the world. Each of these are expressions of the soul of this yearning to reveal the honor of Hashem, to know of the *Melech HaKavod*, “the King of Glory.”

But as long as this concept only remains on an intellectual level, it will be hard for a person to relate to, and even if he does understand it a little, he will feel like this concept is very far from him. One may easily relate to learning Torah and to doing all of the *mitzvos*, and he can relate to his own honor, but to be involved with revealing Hashem’s honor can feel way above his grasp. But when a person bypasses the thick layers that have developed on his heart, when he is in touch with his *neshamah* which yearns for the revelation of the *Kisei HaKavod* (and, even more so, the *kavod* of Hashem), it will become a part of the way he lives and how he understands life.

Example of Using Holy Water-of-Water-of-Fire: Declaring Malchiyus (Hashem’s Kingship) On Rosh HaShanah

A clear example of where this idea will manifest itself is on Rosh HaShanah, which is a day that is mainly about declaring Hashem’s *malchiyus* (Kingship), which is all about the *kavod* of Hashem. If a person is not in touch with the ideas described here - the **holy** use of **water-of-water-of-fire** - what will happen when it comes Rosh HaShanah? He won’t know what to do with himself, when he starts contemplating the idea of declaring *malchiyus*. He never thinks about what this higher *kavod* is, so he will have a hard time trying to get in touch with it on Rosh HaShanah.

Rectified Water-of-Water-of-Fire Is To Feel Pleasure In The Desire To Reveal The Glory of Hashem, His Torah, His Sages, and His People

Indeed, the ideas described here in this chapter will be far from the level of most people. But the more a person gets used to the idea of tracing honor to its higher source when he is experiencing it, and he “runs away from honor” in this way – that is how he can get in touch with the higher *kavod*, the glory of Hashem. His yearning for the revelation of this glory will increase, and he will also be in touch with the *kavod* of the Torah, the *kavod* of the wise sages, the *kavod* of *Klal Yisrael*. He will wish that all of this *kavod* be revealed.

When he feels the pleasure in this *kavod*, it is the pleasure contained in the holy kind of **water-of-water-of-fire**, and when he doesn’t feel this pleasure, this is what is meant by “joining the pain of the *Shechinah*”, which mourns the lack of the revelation of Hashem’s Presence on this world.

Without revealing this pleasure in Hashem’s glory, a person will only be to cry and mourn over it when reciting *Tikkun Chatzos* (which itself is a worthy level, and only if we would all be even on this level), but he would not be crying over the absent *kavod* of Hashem. Rather, he would just be sad over the various things that are missing in life which are painful.

But when a person gets in touch with the holy **water-of-water-of-fire** in his soul, a person reveals a deep pleasure in desiring the revelation of the *kavod* of Hashem upon the world, the *kavod* of His Torah upon the world, the *kavod* of the wise elders and sages of *Klal Yisrael*, and the *kavod* of *Klal Yisrael*. When a person has pleasure in these concepts, he can then feel pained over their absence.

This is all the depth behind the holy, rectified use of **water-of-water-of-fire**.

7 | *Breaking Rules*

Wind-of-Water-of-Fire: Breaking Bounds In Order to Enter Into a New, Unbridled Realm

Let us continue with the help of Hashem to discuss the element of fire and the trait of honor. Here we will discuss the particular root of honor that is **wind-of-water-of-fire**.

Honor is rooted in the element of fire, and “water”-of-fire specifically is when a person is “dragged” after honor. **“Wind”-of-water-of-fire** is when a person “moves” after the pleasure of honor.

As mentioned earlier, honor is essentially an experience of leaving the normal bounds and limitations that one is used to, and to instead enter into a different world with different rules, where the limitations are broken. Honor is called “*kavod*” from the word *k’veidus*, “heavy”, because since honor is a force that is drawn down from the higher, spiritual realm and into the lower realm, it is called “heavy”, just as a heavy thing descends from a higher place to a lower place. A person runs after honor when he connects to the honor as his own honor, instead of connecting to its higher source. That is a brief summary of the idea explained in the previous chapter.

In the particular kind of honor that stems from **wind-of-water-of-fire**, a person will pursue honor in a way that breaks bounds of his current reality, and entering into new realms.

The Power of Malchus (Royalty)

This is also known as the trait in the soul of “*malchus*”, royalty.

Malchus (royalty) is connected with *kavod*/honor, as in the term “*Melech HaKavod*”, “King of honor”. The *Gemara* speaks about “*kavod melachim*”, honoring kings. *Malchus*/royalty is the main area where *kavod*/honor is revealed. Of course, there are many other manifestations of *kavod*/honor as well. The *Kohen Gadol* wore special priestly clothing that was for the purpose of *kavod*/honor, and there was also *kavod* accorded to the *nasi* (prince), which is also the same *kavod* that must be given to one’s parents. And on a general level, there is honor that must be accorded to the Sages. But the main area where *kavod* is revealed is when there is *malchus*/royalty.

Chazal state that “A king can break fences, and no one may protest him.”⁷ What is the depth behind this? One of the reasons is because it is the *kavod*/honor that lays in *malchus*/royalty, which can break through boundaries.

The Torah says that the Jewish people may appoint a king over them who will be “upon you”, whom you will fear and respect. The king is above the people and he is on a higher plane than the

⁷ Tractate Bava Metzia Chapter Six

rest of the people. He is part of a different realm than they. Honor, the inner force behind royalty, descends from the higher realms and into the lower realms, and this is why a king can break bounds with no one protesting him. It is specifically the *kavod*/honor within the *malchus*/royalty that has the power to break bounds, because it is a power that comes from Above.

That describes the holy power of *malchus*, but there is also an evil, impaired use of this power to “break fences”. Chazal say about the Serpent that it “broke the fence of the world”⁸, which refers to the evil power to break the rules and limitations we have on this world.

There are two ways in which a person breaks limitations and rules. One of the ways is when a person breaks the rules and limitations with which Hashem has created the world with, which is clearly evil. In order for a person to develop the idea of keeping to proper boundaries, one needs to develop the element of earth in the soul, which stabilizes the soul and keeps it within proper bounds. When a person is breaking the rules and limitations which Hashem has created the world with, this is actually the evil power of the Serpent. In contrast, when a person uses this power in a holy manner, it is *malchus*/royalty.

Royalty vs. Rebelliousness

What is the difference between the Serpent’s use of this power, with the power of *malchus*? When the Serpent broke the rules of the world, it didn’t want to accept Hashem’s rule over the world. It didn’t want boundaries altogether.

On a very deep level, there is also a holy use of this power: the desire in the soul to resemble Hashem and become connected to the Infinite, which enables the soul to transcend all boundaries. But here we are describing the simpler manifestation of this power, which is evil. Usually, when a person wants to break boundaries of this world, it is evil.

Specifically, it stems from an impaired element of fire in the soul. Fire jumps and skips from place to place, and it will burn through anything in its path which contains it, and then continue on its path, unbridled.

This evil power is also known as rebelliousness (*meridah*), or opposition (*hisnagdus*), or brazenness (*azus*). Here we will not get into the subtle differences between each of these terms, but the common denominator is that all of these terms are describing the human nature of the soul to rebel.

It begins to become manifest in young children, usually around the age of three years old, where a child will begin to show signs of rebelling and not listening to rules. When a child is rebelling, this is not because he has a deep feeling of enjoyment in breaking rules (which would be the adult level of this power). A child isn’t yet capable of this mature kind of emotion. It is simply a desire to rebel and oppose rules, to do the opposite than whatever the reality demands. This evil nature is what we will explain about in this chapter.

⁸ *Yerushalmi Peah 1:1, Vayikra Rabbah 26:2*

The desire to break rules stems specifically from the element of water in the soul. Water can pull and drag things with it. When water drags something, it brings the item past where it is and it doesn't let it stay in place. Therefore, one of the deep roots of the nature to break rules is the element of water. **Wind-of-water-of-fire**, specifically, is the desire to break rules in the form of honor.

The idea of breaking rules stems from the traits of evil brazenness (which is an impaired form of the element of earth), whereas the holy use of breaking rules (*malchus/royalty*) is when one moves after the pleasure which results from expansion beyond the normal bounds. This idea can be seen in honor, which stems from a higher realm and is revealed in the lower realm. Honor (when it is holy) reveals the holy use of the power to break bounds.

Now let us see, with *siyata d'shmaya*, how we can go about using these powers of the soul.

A Deeper Understanding of The Power To Break Bounds

What is the deep root of the holy power to break bounds?

Let us clarify that we are interested now in learning about the holy use of the power to break bounds, and not the evil use. The evil use of this power, *azus/brazenness*, is not what we are dealing with right now. First let us analyze the holy power of breaking bounds. What is this power, and what is its deeper root?

We will first give the definition of it, which will be difficult to grasp at first, and then we will go on to the simpler and more fundamental definition of it, which will be of more practical relevance.

The bounds on this lower realm do not exist in the higher realm. The power to break bounds, at its holy root, is when one has reached a higher realm, and then he is no longer bound to the rules of the lower realm. On a more subtle level, the rules don't exist by him at all. He has reached a higher realm, where the rules of the lower realm do not exist. This power can be used for holiness, when a person overcomes the limitations and bounds of his current reality.

Transcending Your Current Reality

Even more so, there is a deeper understanding of this concept (this is only true when using this power for holiness, where one breaks the limitations of his current reality when those limitations are confining him and not letting him achieve higher, as opposed to simply trying to break the rules that Hashem has placed us in, which is forbidden). How is the power of breaking bounds used for holiness?

Every person has a point in his life where he realizes that he is no longer at the beginning of his life, but at the current point he is in. One realizes that he is at a middle stage of his life - he is not at the beginning of his life, nor is he at the end. That is his reality, and he cannot move past it or go

back in time. He can only move within it, and adhere to all the rules there. He will never be able to go past the bounds he is found in.

This is indeed how life looks like for a person who lives in a very organized way. He follows all the rules and he never has an aspiration to escape the bounds he is in. However, if a person remains at this level, he loses the entire beginning stage of his life! In his childhood, he did not have *daas* (understanding), so that doesn't count as the beginning part of his life. He has rather begun from somewhere in the middle, so where is the "beginning" part of his life? He has "begun" from the middle of his life, but he has no actual "beginning" of his life, and he continues to live from there, without a beginning. Then he will be forever confined to whatever reality has happened since then: this life of his, which has no solidly developed beginning.

For this reason, most people do not identify with any "beginning" part of their [mature] life. The beginning part of a person's life is out of the person's radar, because the person is unaware of it taking place, and by the time he becomes aware of it, he is no longer there, because it is now many years later, so he does not really relate to it. As a result of this, a person has no solid 'base' to continue from. He is only starting his life from the middle of his life, but not from its beginning.

In contrast to the above, the truer way to live is to keep going back to a beginning, to always begin again anew, and on a regular, ongoing basis. This is also known as the power of "Avraham Avinu" in the soul, for Avraham started a new beginning on this world. He was an individual on this world who began a new path, which the entire world then did not have.

The world keeps becoming renewed, and this is the inner point in Creation. One can keep accessing the renewal in his soul, and to keep beginning again anew. In this sense, the "rules" can keep becoming renewed as well. This power in the soul allows a person to keep entering a place where there will be "new" rules. It means that one isn't dependent on the surroundings and on the generation that preceded him. Instead, he can forge his own new path.

This concept is only to be used with regards to holiness, and not towards rules that are forbidden to break, which includes the rules of the Torah or as ordained by the Sages. We are speaking of a holy power in the soul, which can break bounds and form new bounds and new rules, as a way to move past one's current limitations that are not allowing him to achieve higher levels. It is only holy when it is used to break the rules and bounds which should be uprooted, not the rules which need to be kept, such as the rules of the Torah and the Sages.

Example of "New Beginning" When Learning Torah

This perspective in the soul, when reached, causes a deep change in the soul, and all of one's life. The following is an example of how it is manifest.

When a person begins to learn a *sugya* of *Gemara*, instead of remaining limited in his thinking to understanding the information in front of him – the words of the *Gemara*, *Rashi*, *Tosafos*, the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, and then thinking about their words – he can instead think originally,

from an entirely new beginning. Just as the Sages in the *Gemara* thought in an original way, so can a person think originally. This does not mean that one should argue on the words of the Mishnah or the *Gemara*, *chas v'shalom*. That is just being foolish. Rather, the idea here is that just as the Sage in the Mishnah or in *Gemara* used a power of independent thought, so can you think, from an entirely new place, of beginning your thinking.

The superficial perspective towards learning Torah is that after one has seen the words of the *Gemara* and the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, he then thinks of what he understands in their words, what questions he can ask, and what he can answer, etc. But the deeper perspective is to think originally about the topic being learned about. For example, he can ask himself: “What is the logical understanding here?” One might find a verse that he knows of, as an answer. But the point is that he can begin to think about a matter from a new beginning, an original place of thinking.

In actuality, it takes a long time to develop this ability, and it cannot be used immediately when learning every *sugya* of *Gemara*. For example, when learning Tractate *Yevamos*, a person cannot think, “What would be, theoretically, if there wouldn't be a *mitzvah* of *yibum*?” If there wouldn't be a *mitzvah* of *yibum*, there is nothing to think about when it comes to *yibum*. The same goes for the *mitzvah* of *orlah* - a person cannot think anything about *orlah* if there is no *mitzvah* of *orlah*. But when it comes to the laws of stealing, let's say there it's possible to think originally, with theoretical thinking.

Example 2 – Thinking About A New Life

Here is another example of how this idea can be worked upon. Let's consider the creation of Adam HaRishon. One can imagine: What would I be like if I was Adam HaRishon? What would I do, if I was the only person in the world, with no friends, no wife, no obligations to anyone on the world?” This is a very deep thought to think about.

Another example is that a person can think, “What would I do if I was born again, with a whole new life? How would I begin my life, as well as the rest of it?”

Here is another example. If a person would go back in time, what would he choose to do differently? Which habits would he choose to get rid of? Which gadgets would he choose not to buy? How would he begin his home differently, and how would he raise his children differently?

Getting used to this thinking helps a person acquire the ability to think anew, from a new beginning, and it enables a person to forge new beginnings for himself. This kind of thinking helps a person free himself from the unnecessary bounds that he has brought upon himself throughout his life, which tie him down and which limit him.

The following is a more dramatic example of this idea. A person can think: “What would I do if I would be born to a non- Jewish family?” Would he wish to remain as a gentile, or would he want to start his life over being Jewish?

There are many different examples of this kind of thinking, but the point is to begin thinking from an entirely new beginning. We can do this in spite of being at the middle of our life, which almost all of us find ourselves in. We can go back to a new beginning, by thinking from an entirely new beginning place to think. We don't have to think about our life from the way it began – rather, we can think of a whole new way to begin it!

How To Use This Power Correctly

While this is certainly calming to think about, it can also lead to delusions, if a person goes too far with this kind of thinking. But if done correctly, a person can see what his beginning has led to, how his current point is affected by that beginning, and then he can reconstruct the beginning as it should be.

This ability to begin again anew does not mean that a person can undo the past and act as if it never happened. It just means that there is an inner light that exists which enables one to transcend one's current life and its limitations, by forming new beginnings for himself.

This is the holy use of **wind-of-water-of-fire**: to expand one's current bounds, to make new rules, enabling a person to reach higher levels. This is also the understanding of the concept explained earlier that *kavod* (honor) is an imprint from the higher realm into the lower realm. By overcoming the bounds of the current realm, a higher realm can be accessed even within this lower realm; limitations can be broken, and new rules are formed.

This concept is not just a mere thought to intellectually consider. Going back to a new beginning point in the soul, by thinking from a new start entirely, awakens an inner flow of life (“*ruach chaim*”) that is deep in the soul, allowing for endless and expansive possibilities.

Understandably, using this power requires much sensible thinking, and much prayer for assistance from Heaven, in order to use this power correctly.

Practically Working On This Idea

Practically speaking, in whatever situation a person finds himself in, such as in a particularly difficult situation, a person should make quiet time for himself and contemplate: “How would I begin my life again anew? How would I do things differently? How would I want things to happen, after doing so?” Observe how you would want to act, in that different possibility.

In Conclusion

Most people would not care about this “theoretical possibility”, because they cannot see past their current reality. They remained confined to their current reality, with all its limitations and all that

this places upon them, because in their minds, that is the reality and there is no way around reality. But this is actually an erroneous attitude. By thinking of how you want to do things differently, you can see better where you stand now, and you can then gain creative solutions on how to approach your current issues.

Those who know how to use this power well are those who realize the meaning of “There is no light except from darkness”⁹ – they see how their past failures show them how to succeed now. They view the past failures as pure inspiration of how to improve in the now.

This is an inner way of living, a way of constantly accessing new beginnings, and it allows for a person to have a deep connection to Hashem, the Torah, and to oneself. It is a very fundamental way of living, and it is about how a person can connect to his own personal, rightful portion on this world.

⁹ *Zohar II 184a*

8 | *Attention Seeking*

Fire-of-Water-of-Fire: Random Expectations of Honor

With the help of Hashem we continue to discuss the element of fire and the trait of *kavod*, honor. Now we will explain honor stemming from **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

Honor is a trait that stems from fire. The pleasure in honor stems from “water”-of-fire, and “**fire**”-of-water-of-fire specifically refers to the unruly, jumpy and skipping movements that burst out from the water-of-fire.

To give a brief description of how this manifests, there are two kinds of people that seek honor: There is a kind of person who seeks honor in a methodical manner (which is the normal case), with a plan of how to get it, and there is a kind of person who will seek honor in a more “random” kind of manner, with no plan of how to get it. The second kind of person is seeking honor that stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

Normal Seeking of Honor: Methodical, Step-By-Step Plan of How To Get It

A person, ever since he is young, may be deeply concerned of how others view him and how he appears in the eyes of others. He might even direct the entire course of his life around this drive to appear honorable in the eyes of others, and he will do various things in order to feed this deeply ingrained desire. A person may go to live in a certain place if it will somehow make him appear more dignified in the eyes of others, or he will try to attain a certain dignified status, either in the material world or even in something spiritual, if this will cause others to notice his accomplishment and honor him more for it. Each person has various fantasies of honor that he may be wishing to receive.

Eventually, this can become the very way of how he leads his life. As a young child, he will seek honor in the world of children, doing things and accomplishing things that he knows others children will admire him for. When he is a teenager, and later an adolescent, he will seek accomplishments that are considered honorable in the eyes of teenagers, and later, in the eyes of other adolescents.

He will be very goal-oriented on attaining this honor in the eyes of others. Whether he succeeds or not at attaining this goal is a different issue. In addition, his goals in life may change. But he may go for a long amount of time, or for his whole life, being set on this goal of gaining approval and honor in the eyes of others, and he will do various things to get himself there, step by step. Even if he doesn't try attaining his goals for honor in a step-by-step manner, he will still formulate some kind of long-term plan which he believes will help him reach honorable status. That is the case with someone who seeks honor in a methodical, step-by-step manner.

With some people, this nature will affect them on a smaller scale, and it will only be manifest in certain areas of their life, where they feel they are deserving of honor. Every person has certain talents and qualities which Hashem has granted him with, and a person may come to believe that others should honor him specifically for having the particular quality that he has been blessed with. He may demand honor [mentally] from others when it comes to a certain specific area of his life, and he will not feel a need for honor in other areas of his life. He just wants to be honored for the area that he shines in, which he believes he should be honored for.

Fire-of-Water-of-Fire: Random Expectations of Honor

In this chapter, though, where we are discussing honor that stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire** - which is random “bursts” of honor - we are discussing someone who feels a spontaneous need to be honored, for no particular quality that he has.

For example, a person may ask a question in middle of a class or *shiur* and then expect to be honored by others afterward for asking a good question, or he might have done something for the *minyán*¹⁰ of people which helped the *minyán* run smoothly, and he wants others to accord him honor for this. There are other examples as well of this idea. The point is that according to his understanding, he feels deserving of some honor because he has done a certain thing.

This is like a random “burst” of a need for honor, which he had no previous plans for. He was not trying to get this honor with a methodical, step-by-step plan – rather, he believes that an opportunity for honor has come his way, and he feels entitled to it, even though he did not previously plan on trying to get this honor.

This random “burst” of a need for honor may manifest in a material area or spiritual area, or in immature or mature people – and in many different forms. The common denominator between all of these cases is that there is a random “burst” of a need for honor. Once the person feels it, he will seek to get the honor that he feels deserving of.

There are varying degrees of this “burst” – it may be minimal, or it may be more extreme. If a person doesn’t have a strong amount of **fire-of-water-of-fire** in his system and he has more self-control over his emotions, even if he seeks honor, he will go about it very methodically, instead of trying to get it instantly. But if a person is more on the impulsive side and his mind is not in that much control over his emotions, and especially if this is joined with a strong amount of **fire-water-of-fire**, he will have an impulsive demand for honor, and he will try to get it very quickly, as soon as he does something which he feels others should acknowledge him for and honor him for.

Anyone who observes this kind of behavior in another person can feel sorry for him. Not only doesn’t the person receive the honor he’s expecting, he is simply to be pitied, because you can easily notice what kind of lowly situation the person is in. The stronger amount of **fire-water-of-fire** that a

10 quorum of ten men for prayer

person has, the more occurrences he will have in which he feels these “bursts” of an impulsive need for honor.

Fire-of-Water-of-Fire (Random Expectations of Honor) vs. Water-of-Fire (Impulsive Pleasure Seeking)

Let us also understand that there are two different kinds of people who experience an intense need for the pleasure of honor: There is **fire-of-water-of-fire** specifically, and there is also a more general root, **water-of-fire**.

Fire-of-water-of-fire is a “burst” of a desire to experience the pleasure of honor, but there are also many people who greatly pursue the enjoyment of honor for a different reason: they have a lot of **water-of-fire**, in general, in them.

Most people have a consistent source of enjoyment in their life, and honor may be on their list of pleasures that they regularly enjoy. There are also a large amount of people who do not experience consistent honor in their life, but when honor does come their way, they enjoy it. If it is possible for them to get the honor they are seeking, they will do so. But others will want the honor as soon as they feel a need for it. This is **fire-of-water-of-fire** which we are discussing in this chapter.

When a person has a strong amount of **water** (of fire), his sense of stability in life is of a very complex nature, and therefore, he will have a difficult time leading a stable life. He needs pleasure to keep him going, and as soon as he feels a need for pleasure, he becomes unstable, until he gets the pleasure. His life temporarily becomes dysfunctional until he can get the pleasure he is seeking. On a deeper note, this kind of person has no understanding of life. He just follows his impulses. If it is the pleasure of honor specifically that he is impulsively trying to get, he is following his “bursts” of **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

These kinds of people lead very unstable lives. Usually, their unstable approach towards life takes its toll on their minds as well, and it weakens their thinking process, as they keep moving towards pleasure and following their impulses. They feel chaotic inside, and they don’t settle down where they are. They are usually switching where they live, switching their *chavrusos*, switching jobs, etc. They have no stability. This is the problem created by an imbalance in **water-of-fire**.

Here, however, we are discussing **fire-of-water-fire** specifically. This is when a person is impulsively seeking honor, and it is of a different nature than the general **water-of-fire**.

Obsessed With A Need For Approval

Fire-of-water-of-fire can usually be seen in children [when they do things to get attention], many times. But it is also commonly found in young adolescents, when they are beginning to solidify their identity by gaining the approval of others.

A boy in yeshivah might wish to be noticed for his *hasmadah* (diligence in learning), or he might wish that others view him as a *tzaddik* (a pious individual), or he might dress very stylishly in order to appear dignified and important. Or, he might want others to be in awe of his family and view them as prestigious people. There are many different ways of he may seek to be honored in the eyes of others, which may randomly come his way. When his friends are talking together, he might wish to stand out in the conversation and mention some quality he has, so that they will be in awe of him.

The stronger that a person feels this need for honor, the less individuality he really has. His own individuality has become a prisoner of the strong amount of **fire-of-water-of-fire** in him, so his true self is buried. He will always try to blend with his friends and with his surroundings in any way that will bring him more honor and prestige from others.

If we examine this deeply, we can discover that it really comes from a tremendous inner emptiness in a person. The person has truly emptied out his soul from all of his individuality [he is not being his true self]. This is the depth of the words of Chazal, “Jealousy, desire and honor take a person out of the world”¹¹, which is explained to mean “out of his own world.” When a person exists only for honor and approval from others, he has no individuality of his own. His “individuality” will be entirely copied from others. His individuality doesn’t exist. This is the case with one who is dominated by a strong amount of **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

Honor: Living From “The Outside”

Let us understand the following point, which is an expansive point about the entire topic of honor. It can also apply to other specific areas of honor, but we are explaining it here specifically, because it is here where this point can be seen most dramatically. So while we are only discussing this point here, we should understand that it is a major point which applies to the entire subject of honor.

(As for the problem of instability discussed above, this is part of the subject of the element of water, which we are not discussing in this series.)

Honor, when it is evil, is essentially an erroneous perspective, where a person *isn’t viewing himself from inside himself*. Instead, he is viewing himself from outside of himself: *in terms of how others view him*.

We mentioned above that honor removes a person from his own individuality, from his true self. When a person lives for honor and esteem in the eyes of others, he will think: “What do others think about this? How do they view this? What will they say?”

He will then align his own behavior according to how *he* thinks *others* think. The way he acts is but a result of a certain way of thinking that he has. It is all stemming from his erroneous, honor-seeking perspective, which is busy with: “What do others think?”

¹¹ Avos 4:21

Living Within The Self Vs. Living Outside of The Self

There is a way to experience life from within, and there is a way to experience life from outside of the self [which is a disconnection from the self, and is a superficial way of living].

Living “within” oneself certainly includes the spiritual dimension of life, the “inner world” of a person. In contrast, a person who lives “outside” of himself and disconnected from his own inner world is essentially living in the world outside of us, which is an evil, ruined place. However, while all of this is a true difference between living on the “inside” versus living on the “outside”, there is a more precise definition of it, explained in the works of our Sages: There is a part of a person’s soul which needs to remain inward, and there is a part of the person that needs to go outward.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that the *seichel* (the intellect) is compared to an inner “light” within a person, which shows a person his qualities and shortcomings, etc. In addition to this light, there is also another “light”, found outside and above the person (this “above light” is called “*A light upon my head*”¹², and it is also said of a fetus, of which it is said that “a light is illuminated above his head”¹³). The “light of the intellect” is essentially the “inner light” (*ohr penimi*) described by the *Chovos HaLevovos*, and there is also the light outside and above a person’s head, which is called the “surrounding light” (*ohr makif*).

In simpler terms that apply to us on a personal level, there is a way to see things from within yourself, and there is a way to see from outside of yourself.

We have explained so far that the impaired state is to see things from outside of yourself, and that the rectified state is to see things from within yourself. Now we will explain how we can go from the impaired state (seeing things from outside yourself) to the rectified state (seeing things from within yourself).

Thinking Based On What Others Think: Towards Self, and Towards Others

Let’s begin by examining the ability in a person to be concerned of how others think. It divides into several aspects.

1) A person may view *himself* in terms of *how he thinks* others view him. 2) A person may also use his “thinking from outside the self” to view others, as opposed to viewing others from inside of himself.

The power to “think from the outside the self” is used by the person to view himself, as well as how he views others. Let’s understand that the power to think about yourself based on what others think is a fundamental, necessary ability in life. However, viewing others based on what others think is where the problems start. This is where impaired honor comes in, which we are discussing here.

¹² *Iyov 29:3*

¹³ *Niddah 30b*

Honor is one of the traits that remove a person from the world because when a person is always thinking from outside of himself (about what others are thinking), instead of thinking from within himself, he is removed from his own inner world. It is beneficial to be concerned of how others only when this ability is kept within its proper boundaries. If a person views himself from outside of himself, and he can also see himself from within, he has the correct balance, and this is the ideal way of living. But when a person views the outside only from outside of himself, this is usually detrimental.

Of course, this power is holy at times, and that is when a person thinks of what goes on in the world in order to help people and to become sensitive to their needs. But when a person views others based on what others think, and therefore he comes to be concerned of what they think, this can lead him to the evil pursuit of honor.

The View From Within and The View From Outside

To be brief about this, while it is true that the inner layer of life is experienced when you are living from “within” yourself, this inner view is ultimately a narrow, constricted view when it remains without the aid of the view from the outside.

To illustrate the idea, the *Mesillas Yescharim* says that a person cannot make his way through the “garden maze” of life without the help and direction of a person who has been through the maze already, who is above the maze and who can help him from there. Every person has within his soul the ability to be “within” the “garden maze”, as well as the ability to be “above” the “garden” maze. The ability to view yourself from *within* yourself is your soul’s ability to stand within the garden-maze, which is a limited and narrow view. The ability to view yourself from *above* yourself is your soul’s ability to be above the garden maze.

There is a deep ability to see yourself from the outside. If you can only see yourself from inside of yourself, your view is limited, because you cannot see past the bounds of your own soul. But when you look at yourself from outside of yourself, you receive a more inclusive view, which includes both an expansive, collective view as well as a detailed, individualized view.

This is a deep perspective of life: To acquire the ability to see yourself from the outside of yourself. There is your inner world, and there is also the realm outside of your own world. The following are some examples to help us understand this concept (understandably, one also needs to have a certain inner understanding in order to absorb what we are saying here).

1 - Awareness of Your Thinking

When a person is thinking, there are two aspects: 1) Whatever he is thinking about, and 2) He can also be thinking of the very fact that he is thinking right now.

It seems as if these are both the same kind of thought – you are thinking of what you are thinking about, and you are also using this very same ability to think in order to think of the fact that you’re thinking right now. However, these are actually two totally different abilities of the soul. The first is really the ability to think from the inside, and the second is the ability to think from the outside.

There are people who recognize this and they can notice these two simultaneous thoughts appearing at once: You can be thinking of something, and at the very same moment, you are also aware that you are thinking.

If you have control over this thinking process, it also plays a big role in prayer. When a person is praying and he’s not aware of the fact that he is praying, his thoughts will naturally think about something else. But if he has the ability to think about the mere fact that he is thinking, he will be able to quickly catch himself when his thoughts float away and begin to think about something, and he will immediately return the thoughts to concentrating on his prayer.

Without this ability, a person will only catch himself spacing out during prayer much later, and it will suddenly dawn on him that he spaced out, and now he will start concentrating again. But with the ability to think about the mere fact that you are thinking, you can quickly return your thoughts to what you were thinking about before, because you immediately become aware of where your thoughts have gone.

This is one of the strongest abilities that can enable a person to have concentration in prayer. The more a person acquires the ability to become aware that he’s thinking, the more powerful concentration he will have in prayer. This is not to say that he will never space out when praying. Rather, the person will be aware as soon as it happens, and in turn, he can quickly return to place. (Understandably, the ability to do this will also vary according to the level he is on, so it will not always be done perfectly.)

2) In Torah Learning

Another example where we can see this idea is in learning Torah. While learning Torah, a person presents his way of logic, and he is thinking of whatever he is thinking. Why does he trust his way of thinking? He might trust his thinking either because he has a solid way of thinking, or because he has “heart understanding” of a matter. Yet there is a deeper power of thinking than this. A person is able to see what is missing from his own thinking. He can see his own thoughts from above the thoughts, and then he can see his logic from above. He gains a more expansive view of whatever he was thinking about, and more importantly, he sees further what is contained in his own thoughts.

If a person has a problem of *katnus mochin* (immature, undeveloped mind), he does not really budge from his initial way of thinking. He has said what he has said, he has thought whatever he thought, and he doesn’t see past this. He can certainly re-analyze his own thoughts, and perhaps he can think of an opposite logic than his own, or at least he tries to. But if a person has developed the ability to think about his own thoughts, he can analyze his own thoughts from “above” the thoughts,

and uncover greater depth to the thoughts. If he takes it further, he can use this ability to surround a thought from all of its angles.

The Power of Outside Thinking Enables A High Level of Introspection

This power, even when it is not on the perfected level (and indeed, there is nothing perfect in Creation), gives a person a higher view on things, a more expansive view, a view that sees things with greater clarity – and it can be used towards any thought that a person thinks about.

One who develops this ability is able to make deep self-accounting with himself, even while he is in the midst of doing something. Most of the time, a person is not able to make a self-accounting on his deeds unless it is before the act or after the act, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* describes. But there is also a deeper ability a person can develop: the ability to make a self-accounting about one's deeds, even in the midst of the deed.

Thinking about what you did, before the act or after the act, is a simpler ability of thought. You think about what you did, and you think what you are about to do. But when you think of what you are doing as you are in middle of doing it, you are not just thinking, but you are also “seeing” what you are doing.

In the language of Chazal, the simpler ability to think is called *machshavah*, and it is in the category of *katnus mochin*, (or *mochin d'katnus*), the lower level of the mind, whereas the higher ability to think is called *re'iyah*, “seeing” and it is in the category of *gadlus mochin* or *mochin d'gadlus*, the higher level of the mind (in the words of the *Chovos HaLevovos*, it is called *einei haseichel*, “eyes of the intellect”).

The higher level of the mind, *gadlus mochin*, is when one can “see” his thoughts, by viewing them from above and outside of them. It is like being an onlooker towards your own thoughts, watching them from the side. It enables one to see what he is doing, feeling, saying, and thinking.

When one gets used to this ability, he is able to inspect his own deeds, feelings, words, and thoughts with a high level of precision. This is not simply because he has become a more truthful person. It is a natural outcome of developing the ability to see your thoughts from above, enabling you to see your entire spectrum from above.

Understandably, even after reaching this level, you will still have difficulties and you are still prone to all kinds of ulterior motives, which can still affect you. But you will have at least developed an ability to greatly influence and move all aspects of your personal *avodah*.

Seeing Deeply Into Others

Through developing this power, you will also see deeper into others. You will not just see what they are doing and try to help them from there. You will be able to see a more expansive view of

others, and see a greater picture of the person before you. This is because you will be seeing others from outside of yourself.

Chazal state, “A prisoner cannot release himself from his own jail”¹⁴. A person is stuck inside his own view, so he cannot see outside of himself and therefore he cannot see the solution to his issue. By asking a wise sage’s advice, the wise sage can show a person a view that is outside of the person. The simple understanding of this is that the wise sage isn’t going through the suffering of the person coming to him for advice, and therefore he is not stuck inside the suffering of the other person’s situation, so he has the advantage of seeing properly. But the deeper understanding of this is because the wise sage can see the matter from above, so he sees a higher view.

However, if the sage has this ability but he cannot delve into the details of the view, he won’t be able to help the person, because his view will still be limited. He needs to be able to see both the expansive view which sees the matter from above, as well as an individualized, detailed view, which hones in on the details. By combining the two views together, the view from the outside and the view from the inside, and then he can see the complete picture.

Thus, when a person develops the ability of seeing his thoughts from above, he has a much higher, clearer perception towards his view of the world, and towards the souls of people. Chazal taught, “Who is wise? The one who learns from all people”¹⁵, and this is explained to mean “Learn all people” – to study each person. When you see a person, don’t just focus on a particular detail about him, but on a more collective view of him. For example, you can try to discover what is motivating him, what he is striving to achieve, etc.

In Summary

We have briefly described here a certain inner perspective, a power of the soul, which is especially applicable to the subject of this chapter. Understandably, the more a person is in touch with this power of the soul, the more he can relate to what we have described here, and the same is true vice versa: The less a person is in touch with this ability, the less he can relate to the ideas here.

So far, we have described the **holy** use of the power to “think from the outside”.

Evil “Outside Thinking” Stems From Inner Emptiness

In contrast, the **evil** use of this power is what we described in the beginning of this chapter: the aspect of human nature to be concerned what others are thinking about him.

When a person is busy with such thoughts, this does not come from the inner power of “thinking from the outside”. Rather, it stems from **an inner emptiness**. When a person’s inner emptiness is

¹⁴ Berachos 5b

¹⁵ Avos 4:1

released outward, what does a person see? The person will only see the people “outside” of him. What will happen then? If he has the quality of a “good heart”, he will see other people and wish to help them, and he may become a great *baal chessed*. But if he doesn’t have the quality of a “good heart”, he will heavily analyze other people’s lives. This will follow with jealousy, desire, and honor. Either he will become jealous of others’ lives, or he will wonder what they are thinking of him and he will seek honor from them, or he will desire what they have, feeling that he should have it too.

The traits of “jealousy, desire and honor remove a person from the world” because they remove one from his own inner world, and they cause him to think about all others outside of him. (Here we are not discussing jealousy or desire, but honor.) When a person becomes busy in his thoughts of other people’s lives, he is essentially entering into the trait of honor, because he will be thinking all the time of what *others* are thinking about him.

And, on a more extreme level, if this is a person who has a lot of **fire-of-water-of-fire** in himself, he will become *totally* obsessed with what others are thinking about him. Going deeper with this, he will become totally disconnected from himself, and instead he will be busy thinking all the time of what *others* are thinking about him.

This is a level of total inner emptiness of the “I” of a person: When a person defines his inner self based on how others are thinking about him. It becomes his perspective in life.

On a more subtle level, this divides into two levels. One kind of person will think that he *is* defined according to what others think about him, and another kind of person will base his *honor* on what others are thinking about him. In either case, though, this is a result of inner emptiness. In the deepest recesses of his thoughts, he is busy thinking what others are thinking, concerning his innermost self.

This will result in either jealousy of others, desiring what others have, or wishing for honor from others, and it is based solely on the thought of, “What do others think, about me?” When one lives in this way, one’s perspective is immersed in his external surroundings. This is all he is busy with, and it is only these kinds of thoughts which fill his psyche. Such a life is a life of destruction, which results from pursuing honor.

The stronger one’s **fire-of-water-of-fire** is, the more obsessed he will be with what others are thinking about him. He is constantly “living” in the thoughts of others and how they think of him, and in doing so, he is constantly going “outside” of himself, becoming removed from his own inner world.

Kavod (Honor) Always Contains Bizayon (Shame)

Let us understand the following point, about when a person wants to receive *kavod* from others in his surroundings. This will be true about pursuing all forms of *kavod* in general, but especially true about a person whose pursuit of honor stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire**, which is a more dramatic form of the problem, for it causes a person to impulsively move after honor.

Let's understand something fundamental about *kavod*, honor. (Here we are not talking about good and holy *kavod*, but evil *kavod*, which is when a person pursues *kavod*). We must know that **all *kavod* always comes together with *bizayon*, shame**. If you have any doubt about this, take a look at the reality of life. There is no person in the world who only receives honor, who is never shamed sometimes.

Even Moshe Rabbeinu, the most honorable person who ever lived, was disdained by the angels when he ascended to Heaven. The angels said, "Should a man born from woman (a human) be allowed here?" They considered him lowly. This is the same Moshe Rabbeinu who merited the *Shechinah* to dwell upon him when he entered the *Beis HaMikdash*. Moshe Rabbeinu was allowed to grasp the *Kisei HaKavod*¹⁶ of Hashem. Yet, in spite of this, when he ascended to Heaven, he was not accorded honor.

The fundamental lesson we learn from this is that all *kavod* (honor) in the world comes together with *bizayon*, shame. A hint to this is that there are 22 letters of the *Aleph Beis*, and 22 in Hebrew is the number כ"ב, two letters which are an acronym for the words כבוד (*kavod*/honor) and בזיון (*bizayon*/shame). This is the way Hashem has designed the Creation: The concepts of honor and shame are always linked together, like ink and paper. If there is honor, there will also be shame that comes along with it.

The Varying Levels of Wishing To Receive Honor

There are two kinds of people with regards to honor. One kind of person, when he is honored (or if he thinks he is being honored...) will be confident that everyone will honor him. If he is a Rav in a *shul*, he may be confident that everyone respects him, and that he won't have any "Korach and his followers" in his congregation, *Baruch Hashem*, and that they are all dedicated to the cause of according him honor. But that is a total fantasy.

Another kind of person is a bit more sensible. He is aware that not everyone will respect him. He knows that some people will respect him, and that some won't. But does that mean that he can deal with the test of being shamed or insulted by another person? When someone comes along and humiliates him, is he prepared to deal with this? He might survive by focusing on those who do honor him, but he is not prepared to go through humiliation.

Another kind of person might be fully aware that not even one person around him feels a respect for him, but he is satisfied with the fact that everyone shows him external displays of honor and respect in his presence (perhaps because they are afraid of him, for whatever reason). He might be powerful or wealthy, so people are afraid to start up with him, and everyone will accord him honor, because they have no choice. He may just be like the town *poritz* whom everyone honored, because they were terrified of him. He may be fully aware that not even one person respects him and honors him, but he gains a sense of honor from the external displays of honor that they show him. It is all a

¹⁶ *Throne of Glory*

lie, because it is all external, and they do not actually respect him in their hearts. Even so, he might not be able to part from the external “*kavod*” he receives from them....

The Fallacy of Honor

We should understand that the above shows us the fallacy in *kavod*. Whenever a person receives *kavod*, it is never completely *kavod*. It contains *bizayon* (shame)!

Kavod/honor comes from outside of the self, and it will never enable a person to be in touch with his inner self. Why not? There are two reasons for it.

One of the reasons we already mentioned before: The pursuit of honor stems from an inner emptiness, and therefore when a person gets *kavod*, it will not fill his void. But now we will say a deeper reason. It is because *kavod* is never completely *kavod*. It contains a contradiction. Honor will always include some shame that comes along with it.

When People Aren't Aware That Honor Is A Fallacy

When a person is not aware of the above, these are the options:

- 1) Either a person is delusional, so he will think that everyone honors him.
- 2) Or, he is aware that some people honor him, and some don't.
- 3) Or, he is satisfied with the little bit of honor he does receive.
- 4) Or, he is willing to go through some humiliation in order to receive honor.
- 5) Or – worst of all - he is aware that people disdain him, yet even so, he is satisfied with the external forms of honor he receives from them. He is aware that the honor is only external and superficial, yet even so, he enjoys it. This is the depth of the words of Chazal that honor is one of the traits that remove a person from the world – it is because honor stems from the world of externalities and superficiality, which turns a person into a superficial person when he gets used to it, and he won't care what the truth is. As long as he's getting external honor, he feels pleasure in it.

How To Stop Seeking Attention From Others

When we understand the ruination that lays in *kavod*/honor – the fact that all *kavod* brings with it some *bizayon*/shame – we should also know that this is also the remedy for *kavod*. This is like the rule, “From the wound itself, comes the recovery.”

When a person is less aware of what takes place outside of himself, he will be immersed in *kavod*. But the more a person learns to think outside of himself, the more he can become aware of the idea that all *kavod* also contains *bizayon*/shame.

When a person becomes very aware of this, whenever he receives *kavod*, he will rectify the *kavod* by **focusing on the *bizayon*/shame** that it ultimately contains. Then his enjoyment in the *kavod* will dissipate.

Understandably, this will not cause one's enjoyment in *kavod* to totally vanish. We cannot completely fix any of our *middos* as we are on This World. But if one takes the path presented here, it will greatly lessen the feeling of pleasure in honor.

In Summary

Let us summarize what we have discussed here until now, so that we can be clear about this and then conclude, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

Fire-of-water-of-fire is an inner emptiness in the soul, which impulsively and quickly moves [after attention and honor from others], and it leads a person towards an entirely superficial kind of life. Receiving honor is external and superficial, and for this reason, a person may find himself enjoying honor even when he knows it is empty of any inner content.

Many times the external display of *kavod* which a person receives is empty to begin with. There is nothing there. In spite of this, people are willing to sell their all of lives for this little bit of meaningless *kavod* that they are able to get.

Step One: Understand That All Honor Contains Shame

Thus, practically speaking, in order for a person to rectify the problem of wishing to receive *kavod*, a person should realize that all *kavod* (honor) contains *bizayon* (shame).

After a person absorbs this perspective, the next stage is that as soon as a person feels a desire for *kavod*, or whenever he receives it, he should awaken this perspective that *kavod*/honor really means *bizayon*/shame. The resulting pain that a person feels from this is the beginning of the rectification for *kavod* (honor).

To emphasize, this is the beginning part of the rectification for *kavod*, and it is not yet the total rectification for this trait.

Step Two: Remove The Kavod (Honor) and Uncover Your Etzem (Essence)

Even more so, there is the following very deep point to absorb, which further rectifies the desire to be honored by others.

Hashem is called “*B’kevodo, u’vatzmo*” – “In His glory, Himself”.¹⁷ There are two aspects here: The aspect of “*atzmo*” (“Himself”), or “*etzem*” (essence) of Hashem, and there is the aspect of *k’vodo* (His glory), or the *kavod* (honor) of Hashem. A person [who is fashioned in “the image of G-d”] as well contains these two major aspects, on his own level: his *etzem* (self), and his *kavod* (honor).

Therefore, one should understand that the fact that *bizayon*/shame comes together with *kavod* is what brings a person to his own *etzem*/essence. This is what is meant in the term, “*Atzmo she’maalal m’Kevodo*”, “His essence is above His honor.”

Evil *kavod*/honor is essentially entirely an uprooting of the self. It is an escape outward from one’s actual self. The rectification for *kavod*, on a higher level, is to be concerned only for the *kavod* of Hashem, as it is written, “*For My honor, I created [the world]*.”¹⁸ In terms of our personal soul, the way to rectify *kavod*, on the external level, is to realize that *kavod*/honor always comes along with *bizayon*/shame.

The deeper level of the rectification for *kavod*, however, is not simply to take away your own *kavod*/honor, but to remove your *kavod*/honor and in its place to reveal your *etzem*/essence.

This is actually the deep joy of the soul which one can experience when others shame him. The Sages hinted to this in the term “*yisurin shel ahavah*”, “suffering out of love”, which a person undergoes through *bizayon*/shame. In general terms, a person can have *emunah* that it is the will of Hashem that he should suffer shame from others. If he desires to have purity of heart, shame can also be a *taanug* (pleasure) of the soul if the person is aware that he is exchanging his *kavod* for reward in the World To Come.

But the deeper understanding of the *taanug* one can have in *bizayon* (shame) is because shame removes the “garment” closest to the soul – *kavod* - which directly covers the soul itself (the *etzem*/essence). When the “garment” of *kavod* is removed, through *bizayon* – being that all *kavod* contains *bizayon* – a person penetrates into his very *etzem*/essence.

Rectifying Fire-of-Water-of-Fire

This ability, when developed, is the antithesis to impaired **fire-of-water-of-fire**.

Fire-of-water-of-fire, when left impaired, causes a person to impulsively and quickly move “outside” of himself, where he is busy thinking what others are thinking about him, and in doing so, he keeps leaving his own self and exiting further and further outward from himself.

¹⁷ Recited in *Hagaddah shel Pesach*

¹⁸ *Yeshayahu* 43:7

In contrast to this, the rectified nature of this power is to uncover the *bizayon*/shame that lays in *kavod*/honor. Whenever a person receives *kavod*, he can remove the outer layer of the *kavod* and reach the point underneath the *kavod*, which is his *etzem*/essence.

In this way, one's external layer and one's inner layer unify, and herein begins one's "world of rectification".

In Conclusion

This concept is one of the most important lessons to understand about the entire trait of *kavod*/honor.

9 | *Inertia*

Earth-of-Wind-of-Fire: The Heaviness of The Movements of Honor

Let's continue, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to learn about the trait of honor, which stems from the element of fire. We are now up to discussing **wind-of-fire**.

The trait of honor stems from the element of fire, and **wind-of-fire** refers to the “movements” of honor. “**Earth**”-of-wind-of-fire specifically refers to the “heaviness” of those movements.

We discussed the very opposite angle of this concept when we learned about **wind-of-earth-of-fire** [see Chapter 3]. Now we will see the opposite side of the coin of whatever we discussed about wind-of-earth-of-fire. Let's first mention what we learned about with **wind-of-earth-of-fire**, in order to understand our current topic, **earth-of-wind-of-fire**.

Reviewing Some Key Points About Honor

We explained about two kinds of honor: “higher honor” and “lower honor.” Honor is a force that stems from a higher dimension, which can be felt on our own lower dimension that we stand on. When honor is holy, a person feels the higher source of the honor even within the lower dimension. Honor becomes evil when it descends from the higher realms and into the lower realms, where it translates into a self-focused kind of honor. When a person descends into that kind of honor, he is using honor for evil (refer to Chapter 6).

The evil side to honor can also be understood as the “heaviness” of honor, which pulls a person down to a level that was beneath his current level.

As people get older, honor becomes a stronger force in their lives. During youth, the element of water/desire is stronger in a person, as opposed to fire/honor, and that is why younger people struggle more with physical desires and lusts, as opposed to the desire of pursuing honor, which is a more spiritual kind of desire. The element of fire becomes more manifest in a person slowly as he gets older and he matures, and that is why aging people will experience more anger, conceit, and honor – traits that all stem from the element of fire (see Chapter 5).

The Relationship Between Heaviness and Honor

Now we will explain an additional point, relevant to our current topic. Besides for the aforementioned difference between old and young people, there is another difference. When people are younger, they are also lighter and looser in their movements, whereas the older a person gets, the

heavier his body feels upon him. His movements become heavy and slowed, and this also makes honor a more dominant force in their lives, because *kavod*/honor descends upon *k'veidus*/heaviness.

In slightly different terms, when people get older, they are more drawn towards honor because they feel heavier, thus they become more of a “container” to hold honor. The heaviness acts as a “container” for the honor, and that is why honor will be a more dominant force in old age, where there is more “heaviness”.

Now let's understand the following. This idea – that honor becomes dominant when there is more “heaviness” - is more clearly seen when a person gets older, as we have just explained. It can also be seen in one who is physically heavy. Because he is heavy, there is also more room for honor to take hold of him. His movements become heavier, and so he is more likely to become dominated by honor. For the same reason, honor can also become dominant in one who has a very lazy nature, because laziness is also linked with “heaviness.”¹⁹

In all of these scenarios, the common denominator is that there is more room for honor to take hold of the person and to become more of a dominant force in his life.

Rectifying Heaviness-Related Honor: Becoming Light

In order to rectify this, one will need to develop the power that opposes heaviness, which is contained in the words of Chazal in the *Mishnah* in *Avos*: “Be light like an eagle.”²⁰

Man is comprised of a spiritual soul and a physical body. The soul is called “daughter of Heaven”. It is spiritual, and therefore, it is also of a light nature, and it is not weighed down by any materialism of its own, so it has no “heaviness”. In contrast, the body is of a heavy nature. It was taken from earth, a heavy substance. The more spiritual that a person is (or becomes), the lighter and looser he will be. In contrast, the more gruff that a person is, the “heavier” he will be.

“Be light as an eagle”, on a superficial level, means for a person to awaken his physical movement and to thereby awaken the will, to perform quickly and energetically. But the deeper understanding of this concept is to make one's very orientation (the level he is at right now) lighter. It doesn't just mean to move lightly in the physical sense. Rather, it means that the “lighter” a person's level becomes, in turn, the lighter his movements will be. Thus, the depth of one's *avodah*, in overcoming the dominance of the trait of honor, is to become “lighter” (*kal*).

Heaviness of the Body

“Heaviness” is influenced by a number of factors. The first factor we need to consider is how the physical body contributes to feeling heavy. Every person has been given a different body from

¹⁹ Laziness stems from the “heaviness” of the element of earth.

²⁰ *Avos* 5:23

Hashem, and some have been born heavier or skinnier than others, but each person must try as much as he can to make sure that he isn't physically heavy. A person has the free choice to decide if he will become a heavier kind of person or a lighter kind of person, by watching what he eats. Part of one's *avodah* is to use the natural means which Hashem has placed on this world [by maintaining a light diet] to make our physical bodies lighter.

When we say that a person needs to become a lighter kind of person, we do not mean for a person to be “in shape”, as our world of superficiality stresses for its own sake. Rather, we mean that one must become physically lighter because it is a part of his *avodah* to become a “lighter” kind of person [who isn't weighed down by heaviness, who will be able to move enthusiastically in serving the Creator].

Heaviness In The Soul

Even more so, however, is that there is “heaviness” in the movements of the soul.

For example, some people speak slowly or think slowly. Although this has its gains to it, for Chazal say that “the words of the wise are heard slowly”²¹, and a person who thinks slowly can think calmly and with *yishuv hadaas* (a settled, composed mind) – these abilities are only commendable when they are balanced. If a person can only move slowly and he can never move quickly, if a person can only talk slowly and never quickly, and if a person can only think slowly and never quickly, this is a problem. It can cause a deep kind of “sleepiness” to come upon a person's soul.

(In certain situations, slow acting/talking/thinking has its benefits. Here we are speaking about the downside to the slowness, which causes a person to be ‘asleep’ inside himself).

But besides for this problem of becoming sleeplike, it also causes “heaviness” to come upon the person, and he will have a very “heavy” orientation.

Talking Slowly

We should understand that in certain people, slow talking is a symptom of increased “heaviness” which is dominant in their soul.

Of course, it is understand that if a person is talking slowly when he is speaking a foreign language, because he is not familiar with it, this does not mean that he has a problem. But if a person is talking slowly in his own language, we must wonder: Why is he talking slowly? There can be different reasons:

- 1) He might have a slow thinking process, and therefore he talks slowly as a result.

²¹ *Koheles 9:17*

- 2) Others talk slowly because they find the act of talking to be straining for them, like the opinion in the *Gemara* that “the moving of the lips is an action”²².

In any case, however, the common denominator is that when a person gets used to talking slowly, he will also move slowly, in all of his movements, as a result.

Slow Thinking

There are also people who think slowly, and there can be a few reasons for this.

- 1) Sometimes this is because the person’s thinking process is very constricted, and as a result, the person thinks slowly. For example, when learning *Gemara*, a person like this may have a tough time grasping the flow of thought in the *Gemara* and he may forget the structure, so he will have to review the structure several times, until he finally gets it. He simply has a slow thinking process.

- 2) In others, slow thinking is stemming from a learned behavior, as a result of getting used to thinking slowly. It is like a “slumber” of the brain, which the person has gotten used to the habit of slow thinking.

As mentioned earlier, slow thinking has its advantages. Often a person who thinks slowly has more organized thinking patterns, and his thoughts are more on-the-mark. But, this is not always the case, and the person may just be a slow thinker whose thoughts are anyhow off-mark, who has a sleepy kind of thinking process, so he gains nothing from this slow thinking process.

Let’s consider the person who does gain from his slow thinking: He has a very organized way of thinking, which takes him time but which offers clear results. However, even if his thinking does bring him to a clearer understanding of a matter, the problem is that he will take too much time on any step he needs to think about. It will him take too long to think about something. He may take 4 or 5 times longer than most people when he thinks about something, but when he does arrive at the understanding, his understanding is clear. While there is certainly an advantage of clear thinking here, the problem is that it causes a great amount of “heaviness” to come upon his soul.

As an example, there are often people who cannot grapple with a new reality, or with a new way of understanding something, or with a new perspective on life. It might take a person 30 days to even absorb the new reality or the new perspective at hand. This is a result of getting used to slow thinking.

In contrast, there is a totally different way of how a person can live life [which one should ideally achieve]: to move and think quickly.

²² *Temurah 3b*

The Detriment of Quick, Superficial Thinking

There are two kinds of people who already are able to act quickly and think quickly.

1) Some people are simply born with a nature to move and think quickly. 2) Others, though, are able to move and think quickly because they have a very superficial orientation to begin with. They use their minds only very lightly, without thinking too much into anything, and therefore, they are able to absorb things very quickly.

But, as a result, they do not use their minds that much, so they do not know how to work their minds through a matter. If they are asked if they understand what they have just absorbed, we can tell from their response that they do not understand at all. It is as if a bunch of pictures have quickly passed through their thoughts, which they have absorbed in their minds but without understanding any of these thoughts. They do not really perceive the reality of the thoughts that have passed through their mind, and therefore they aren't able to think things through and to digest what they have thought about. They haven't understood their own thoughts – rather, they have just gathered together bits of knowledge that they don't actually understand anything about.

To give an example, there are some people who can be tested on many pages of *Gemara* that they have learned, which is wonderful, but while this certainly is advantageous, the drawback of it is that they can only remember the details superficially, without understanding all of the knowledge that they have gathered.

A person may be tested once a month on 20, 30, or 70 pages of *Gemara* and he may remember many details he has learned, he might gather much knowledge together, but how much of this does he understand? He has seen all of this information from “outside” of it, without actually immersing himself in it, and that is why he was able to gather together so much bits of information. His memory of it is impressive, but it is superficial.

There are many people who have a good memory, but they have a slow thinking process. It is rare to find people of this type who have a clear, deep understanding of what they have learned.

That is why many people are capable of reviewing pages and pages of *Gemara*, 30 or 40 or 80 pages of *Gemara* or so, and to be tested on it, reviewing for only 2 hours before the test, and while they are able to quickly absorb all of the details they have learned, their understanding is superficial, because they have gotten their minds used to “quickly absorbing” information [which means that they have not actually exerted their minds in understanding what they are learning].

The Balance Between Quick Movement/Thinking and Slow Movement/Thinking

The truth is that to a certain extent, one must be able to reach a point in which he can quickly absorb information. Life, on our inside, is really a quickly moving force, with light, loose movement (see Chapter 3).

A person needs a balance of both slow and quick movement in his life. On one hand, one must be able to move patiently and slowly. He needs to progress step after step, which is a methodical process and which takes time. But along with this, a person also needs to be able to move and think quickly, to be able to quickly absorb.

A person needs the balance between these two extremes, and the balance will be different with each person, depending on his personal level. If a person stays too long on the extreme of “heaviness” of the soul – where he can only move and think very slowly – his inertia will dominate him and he will be asleep and lethargic inside himself [and this kind of person has an *avodah* to learn how to move quickly and think quickly].

But if a person goes in the other extreme, and he can only move and think quickly, he will only be able to think in a superficial manner, and he never really uses his mind to think things through. Such people have the opposite *avodah*: they must learn how to think slowly and methodically, to talk slowly and calmly, and to perform slowly and with composure.

So one has to know himself well, of which the above categories he fits into, or else he will be trying to “improve” himself with any of the above methods of *avodah* when he will only be harming himself. As the Rambam says, a person must go in the opposite extreme of the behavior that he is trying to improve, until he reaches the “middle point” in between the two extremes.

In summary, there can be a problem of slowness in action, speech, and thought. One needs to be able to act slowly and calmly, yet he must also be able to act quickly at times. One needs to be able to speak slowly, and at other times, he must know how to speak quickly. One needs to be able to think slowly, and at other times, he must be able to think quickly.

Fixing Heavy/Slow Action - By Getting Used To Doing Things Quickly

Understandably, if a person is drawn towards slowness in his actions, speech, or thoughts, he needs to learn how to quicken the pace of his actions, speech, and thoughts. If he is a person who only performs quickly, speaks quickly, and thinks quickly, he must train himself to start doing things slowly, to speak slowly, and to think slowly. But, generally speaking, **in the beginning stage of one’s improvement, a person needs to be able to do things quickly - even without *yishuv hadaas*** (a settled, composed mind)!

I must emphasize that this is only true in the **beginning** stage of one’s self-improvement, and it is not meant to stay as a long-term practice.

Who Should Work On This Idea, and Who Shouldn’t

Why, indeed, should a person first learn how to do things quickly, without being composed? Won’t this make him frazzled? Isn’t this far from our purpose of self-perfection?

The answer to this is because at first, a person needs to get rid of the “heaviness” of the soul which causes him to move and think slowly. For this reason, he needs to come out of the “heaviness” of this inertia, by getting used to doing things quickly and thinking quickly. After that stage, a person can then work on the concept of *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind), where he does things slowly and calmly and where he thinks in a composed state of mind.

Any person who feels the soul’s “heaviness” in his movements needs to first get used to moving quickly. There are no exact rules of how much to do this and which areas one needs to practice it in. There are many areas in which one can try working on this, and examples can include walking fast, quickly moving the hands, etc. The point is to get used to performing quick movements.

Understandably, it is best to work on this idea when it comes to running to do a *mitzvah*, but this should also be done sensibly, and not impulsively. After one has learned how to do things quickly, he can then work on doing things slowly and calmly.

Again, we should emphasize that there are some people who should not work on this idea: Those who are already used to doing things quickly. Such people need to go in the opposite direction and learn how to do things slowly. Here we are discussing the *avodah* for a person who is drawn towards heaviness of the soul, who tends to do things slowly. Such a person, whom we are discussing, has an *avodah* to learn how to do things quickly.

Therefore, the *avodah* being outlined here is not for every person to work on. It is only applicable to those who feel a “heaviness” in their souls which makes them have inertia and slow movement.

In Summary

Thus, in summary, the first stage in rectifying “heaviness” of the soul, which causes a person to always act slowly, is to get used to doing things quickly, even without *yishuv hadaas* (composure). One should be sensible with this idea and not act dangerously.

After one works on that stage, one should advance to the next stage: to try to act quickly while being able to maintain *yishuv hadaas*. The goal is to reach this point, where one can act quickly without losing his *yishuv hadaas*.

Of course, sometimes a person will have no choice but to act slowly, and sometimes a person needs to act quickly. Not all times are the same. But as a general rule, the goal should be to be able to act quickly and with *yishuv hadaas*.

If one reaches that point, he is mastering a truthful way of living. Without reaching this point, if a person moves too slowly, he will be wasting away his time and life, and if a person moves too quickly, he will not be composed as he acts. Therefore, the correct balance in life is to make use of these two contradictory forces – to be able to act quickly, and to be able to maintain *yishuv hadaas* at the same time.

Certainly, this point cannot be reached in the same way by each person, because each person has a different nature. But the common denominator between all people is that they will all need to somewhat reach this balance, of being able to act quickly while staying composed at the same time.

The Problem of Slow Talking

Now we will discuss the problem of “slowness” in the realm of speech, and what a person should do about it.

It is clear that not everyone speaks in the same speed. Some people will keep repeating the same idea over and over again, with each word that they say. Surely this is the case when a person keeps repeating what he said several times in the conversation. This is also a form of “heaviness”, and it is manifesting itself in his speech.

(On a deeper level, the ability to repeat the same words over and over again is used in prayer, when a person attains a high level of *d'veykus* in Hashem, and he does not want to part from the words he is saying. This is a higher level of this power, and here we are speaking about the lower, impaired use of this power, in which a person has a problem of simply repeating the same words, again, and again.)

Sometimes the person will not repeat the same exact words he has just used, and instead he will repeat the idea of what he is saying, in many different angles. He will keep repeating the idea, describing it from all of the directions – from above, below, behind, in front, south, north, east and west. In certain instances, this is sometimes necessary, for example, if a person is trying to convey a very subtle point which needs to be explained from several angles. Here we are discussing the usual scenario, where repeatedly conveying the same words or point is unnecessary.

Fixing Heavy/Slow Talking – By Getting Used To Reciting Tehillim Quickly

Chazal taught, “One should teach his students in a brief [concise] manner”.²³ Therefore, one should train himself to talk quickly, at times.

For example, one can try reciting *Tehillim* very quickly. This might seem like a superficial act of rattling off the words with no concentration, which seems pointless; there is certainly some argument to this, and there can be more opposition as well to this idea. In spite of those arguments, however, one still needs to know how to talk quickly at times.

Some people do not need to work on this idea at all, because they are anyways used to *davening* very quickly. But this kind of quick talking is done without any thought at all. What we want to acquire here, in contrast, is an ability to talk quickly while being able to maintain awareness in our thoughts of what we are saying.

²³ *Pesachim 3a*

Quickly Reciting Shemoneh Esrei Vs. Quickly Reciting Tehillim

There are people who *daven* slowly even though they are not concentrating on the words, and this clearly shows us that *davening* slowly is not necessarily concentration. This is the problem of “heaviness” we are describing. They move slowly and they talk slowly anyhow, so when they are *davening Shemoneh Esrei*, they are also saying the words slowly – but not because they are greatly concentrating on the words.

The idea we want to convey here is that at certain times, a person needs to be able to talk quickly. Let’s clarify what is meant by this, though. To talk quickly, with no self-awareness at all, is an easy feat to do. It is very easy for a person to quickly rattle off the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* from beginning until end when he isn’t aware at all that he is saying anything.

In the case of saying *Tehillim* quickly, however, a person does have some awareness of the words he is saying. He may not be familiar with the words he is saying and therefore it is hard for him to say these words quickly. For this reason, he does have some awareness when he says the words quickly. Even if he doesn’t understand every word he is saying, and he doesn’t have enough time to concentrate on everything he is saying, he still has some level of awareness to his act, as he recites the words. Most people find *davening Shemoneh Esrei* quickly to be easier than reciting *Tehillim* quickly – first of all, because they are more familiar with the words of *Shemoneh Esrei* than *Tehillim*, so they are used to these words; and also, because they do not focus their minds much on the words of *Shemoneh Esrei*, and therefore they find it easier to quickly recite it.

Therefore, if one has a problem of talking too slowly, *davening Shemoneh Esrei* quickly won’t be enough to improve this, because it will not help him increase awareness in his speech. If a person is *davening* too slowly, he should try davening more enthusiastically, and if he is *davening* too quickly, he should try davening slowly and with concentration, and mainly with awareness, of what he is saying.

It is not that important to acquire an ability of quick talking. Unlike the realm of action, which is detrimental when a person cannot perform quickly, the realm of speech doesn’t require fast-paced movement. The only problem is if a person is talking too slowly, and we explained that a person should fix this by learning how to recite *Tehillim* quickly, which will give him an idea of talking quickly when he has to. But there is not that much of a need to develop an ability to talk quickly. There is certainly a place for it, but it is not that relevant, so it is not an area that is in that much need of fixing.

Fixing Heavy/Slow Thinking

The problem of slow thinking requires much effort to fix.

We should know that most people are able to think much quicker than the current pace they are at. There are two factors here to consider. First of all, there is the **amount of thoughts** that pass through one’s mind. When one has too many thoughts in his brain at once, this is a problem, but we

are not dealing with this here. Here we are speaking about a different problem: the **speed** of the thoughts passing through the brain.

Most people are not thinking as quickly as they really can. Here is an example. There is a brother and sister who grew up in the same home, both receiving a solid Torah education. The boy learned in *cheder*, and the girl learned in a *Beis Yaakov*. The boy is now in seventh grade, and his sister is in sixth grade. But for some reason, the boy can think much faster than his sister can, even though they are around the same age (although each child is different, let's consider that they are both capable of the same mental capacity). What is the reason for this?

The boy has been taught to recite tons of *Mishnayos* by heart, so his mind has been trained to think much quicker than his sister can. His younger sister, though, was taught to say each word slowly, with concentration, then to review it many times. Pictures were always drawn for her to help her understand, and it was explained in detail to her, or it is written for her, etc. Her mind has been trained to think only very, very slowly. At the age they are both at, their mental pace should be at about the same level, but the sister can't think nearly as fast as her brother can, because she has been taught in a way that slows down her thinking process.

Let's understand that a person has the free will to choose to think at a quick pace - much quicker than the pace he is at right now. This is a subtle point to understand, because if a person can only think quickly and never slowly, he will never develop a complete understanding of whatever he is thinking about; he will overlook details, and his mind has been trained to think only superficially.

Steps 1-2: First Think Slowly, Then Quickly Think About It

Therefore, practically speaking, it is recommended that a person should first think about something well, and after he has taken apart the matter with his thoughts, he should then quickly review what he has just thought about. This is so that he will be able to acquire the power of quick thinking.

I will emphasize that if a person switches the order - if he begins with quick thinking and then tries to think slowly about what he has just thought about - he will train his mind to think only superficially. His understanding of a matter will lack orderly thought, it will be off-mark, and it will be incomplete. Even worse, he might even skip details. As an example, there are people who will say four words and then they skip the word that should have followed.

(On a deeper level, there is an inner power in the soul of "skipping", where a person is able to skip words, in order to use lesser words to convey what he is saying. The gain of this is that the person doesn't have to talk as much in order to relay what he is saying. However, it is insensible to try to access this level, because often skipping words in a sentence will make the sentence sound completely different from what the person is trying to say, and it won't be understandable to the person hearing it. For example, there are some *sefarim* which write brief rulings, and each of these rulings can be explained in four different ways by those who study it. When a person gets used to

reading line after line, word after word, he might get into the habit of skipping words, and he will not have a complete understanding of the matter.)

In any case, a person needs to reach the point in which he can think quickly. First a person should think carefully and slowly about something, making sure he understands it, and only after that should he make a quick mental review in his thoughts of what he has just learned.

Quick Review Vs. Quick Understanding

Quick review is not as detrimental to the mind in comparison to “quick understanding” of a matter, which causes the thinking process to become superficial. This is because a person has already learned and thought well about the matter, by the time he is quickly reviewing it. The only thinking he has left to do now is to review the matter, and although reviewing will usually not be an in-depth understanding of the matter, at least the person has thought well about the matter by now. Therefore, quickly reviewing it will not be that detrimental to his mind, even though he is not trying to understand it further right now.

For example, a person can learn a *sugya* of *Gemara* in-depth, and then he organizes all its details in his mind (and perhaps he write it also), and then he reviews it quickly. Or, a person can review the discussion of the *Gemara* quickly, after he has learned it and thought about it. This helps a person develop the ability of quick thinking.

Step 3: Quick Understanding

After a person has mastered this ability (the stress here is on “after”, and not “before”), the next step for him is, that **at times, one should also try to understand a matter quickly**. This is a very subtle point, because if this is not done correctly, a person will fall into the mistake of superficial thinking which we discussed above.

Step 4: Go Back To Understanding It Slowly

After a person has worked on the stage of trying to quickly understand, and he is aware of what he has just quickly understood, the next step is **to review what he has just thought about it and to slowly try to understand it**. After getting used to this, he will slowly realize what he hasn't understood yet and which details he hasn't yet paid attention to.

The Goal – Seeing What You Didn’t Understand & Realizing The Detriment of Quick Thinking

This is a very inner kind of self-work, when you learn about which details your mind has overlooked, and it shows you what you haven’t yet paid attention to as a result of quick thinking. You begin to see how detrimental quick thinking is.

Some people, after getting used to this, will discover that they overlooked certain words in front of them, and others will discover that although they were aware of the words written in front of them, they didn’t think it through enough. Others will have thought it through, but they will discover that they don’t understand the matter yet, at all. Whatever the outcome, the point is that every person needs to see for himself what he loses as a result of quick thinking.

The common denominator between all people (understandably, not everyone will be interested in working on this anyhow) is that all people need to discover how quick their minds think, and that it is way more than the speed that it should be at. This is true at whatever level a person is at, even though every person has a different speed of thinking. In most people, the speed of the thinking is way faster than the pace it should really be at.

But, as we said, this is a point which not all people will be interested in working on. (We have a *Kolel* here in which a large part of the style of learning is specifically built on this argument [the need to undo this habit of quick superficial thinking, and to instead learn how to quicken the pace of the mind in order to arrive at quicker understanding]. However, although it is an argument, the majority of the world will not relate to the point we are raising here.)

In any case, the point is for a person to arrive at a point in which he can quickly think of a matter [as well as quickly understand it: based on the outline of the steps above, first think into something well, then quickly review what you have concluded, and then you should try at times to quickly understand what you learn].

The Final Stage: Quick Will/Motivation For Holiness

When a person gets used to the ideas of quick action, quick speech, and quick thinking – as elaborated upon here – he will become a “lighter” kind of person, leaving “heaviness” behind.

Even more so, he will then be able to reach a level in which he is always awakening his will (*ratzon*), for the word “*ratzon*” is from the word “*ratz*”, to “run”.

When a person is “running” too quickly (either in his actions, words, or thoughts), he will skip and overlook important details, and the results will be detrimental. (It can be compared to a miscarriage.) But if a person correctly awakens his *ratzon* (will), he awakens the soul’s element of wind, the root of *ratzon*; then the “movement” of his soul will greatly accelerate.

When the level of the *ratzon* is strong, it influences the thoughts, speech and actions of a person, resulting in quick thinking, quicker words, and quickly acting. A person will then be able to fulfill

the words of the *Mishnah*, “Be light like an eagle, and swift like a deer - to do the will of your Father in Heaven.”

How indeed can a person reach the point where his swift to do the will of Hashem? The *Mishnah* elsewhere says, “Nullify your will before His will”²⁴, and then it will be revealed to you that “Our will is to do Your will”. A person can reach this level of nullifying his will for Hashem’s will even without removing himself from the evil inclination and the subservience of the nations, which prevent us from doing Hashem’s will.

A person can reach the point where he is quickly moving because he has revealed his power of *ratzon*. There are some people who are in any case very inspired, and their will is very active, but they have an imbalance in their actions, and they will want to quickly do something without first seeing if it is proper to do according to *halachah* or not, if it is proper behavior or not, or if it might cause damage to others or not, and etc. They just throw themselves into their inspiration and quickly act, before asking anyone else if what they are doing is proper or not. This is being impulsive and it is an improper use of the power of *ratzon*/will.

But if a person follows the order of steps laid out here, first beginning with quickening the pace of his actions, words, and thoughts – the *ratzon*/will can be then be awakened properly after all this, and its quick pace will properly motivate the rest of the forces in the soul. A person will then be able to move quickly and properly to do the will of Hashem, because he has a strong will that can quickly motivate him, for holy purposes.

This is the final and complete level, and we have taken a look at this final step so that we can know the eventual goal which we should strive for as an ideal.

Rectifying “Heaviness” of the Soul – Becoming A “Light” Person

When one lives the kind of life outlined here in this chapter, he greatly lessens the detrimental kind of “heaviness” in his soul that is rooted in [impaired] **earth-of-wind-of-fire**, for he will become a person who can act lightly and quickly [which is the antithesis to being slowed down by all of the inertia that is created by the inner “heaviness” in the soul].

In Conclusion

The words here are about a broad topic, and we have tried to briefly explain it and cover it on a general level, of how it applies to all the major areas of life [will, thought, speech, and action].

In summary, all people need to work on this point of trying to act at a little bit of a faster pace than the pace they are at now. It has been explained here how to slowly reach this point, in steps, but

²⁴ *Avos* 2:4

the goal is to reach an ability of being able to act quickly – and to be able to maintain one's *yishuv hadaas* (composure) as well, to hold onto an inner connection to oneself, while acting.

The goal here is not so that we should be able to do many things quickly (which clearly has detrimental results). The goal of acting quickly, speaking quickly, thinking quickly, and being quickly motivated is to be able to maintain composure even while acting quickly.

As mentioned earlier, our *avodah* contains contradictory aspects [quickness and deliberateness/composure] which we need to balance. On one hand, a person needs to be able to maintain his inner connection to himself as he acts (*yishuv hadaas*/settled mind/composure), but at the same time, one also needs to develop a strong will that can quickly motivate him, and to be able to think quickly, speak quickly, and act quickly.

And as we explained, there are times when one needs to act and think quickly, and there are times when you should act and think slowly, depending on what the situation requires of you at the moment, so that one can direct all of his movements according to Hashem's will at the particular moment.

10 | *Impulsive Pursuit of Honor*

Water-of-Wind-of-Fire: Impulsively Dragged Towards Any Honor

With the help of Hashem, let us continue to learn about *kavod* (honor), which is rooted in the element of fire in the soul. In this chapter, we will learn about honor that stems from **water-of-wind-of-fire**.

The “fire” aspect refers to the ascension in the honor, the “wind” aspect here is the movement towards the honor, and the “water” aspect here is the fact that the person is “dragged” towards the honor.

To be brief about how this manifests, when **water-of-wind-of-fire** is impaired, it means that whenever a person sees an opportunity for honor, he will immediately be “dragged” towards it, impulsively. As opposed to thinking hard for a long time of how to receive honor, this kind of person will immediately pursue any possibility of honor, when he realizes that it’s possible for him to get honor. By the time he realizes it, it’s too late, and he has already acted impulsively.

To say this in sharper terms, such a person doesn’t live his own reality. Instead, he lives whatever his surroundings are thinking, or at least according to whatever *he* thinks *they* are thinking. As a result, he will become immediately “dragged” after any situation where there is even a slight possibility that others will honor him.

As explained in the previous chapter, living for honor stems from a superficial orientation towards life. The three traits that remove a person from his world are jealousy, desire and honor. From all of these negative traits, the trait of honor makes a person the most superficial. With jealousy, a person wants to be another person and live another person’s life. With desire, a person wants to connect himself to something that he badly wants. But when a person wants honor, it is *entirely about what others* are doing for him. Honor is therefore the trait that makes a person the most external and superficial.

Living On The Outside Vs. Living On The Inside

In the previous chapter, we explained that living for honor is essentially to live outside of the self. In this chapter, we will expand further into this concept. Here we are discussing **water-of-wind-of-fire**, which is when a person does not live in his self at all, because he becomes totally dragged after honor as soon as he thinks he can get it.

In contrast to this, there is an entirely different, inner kind of life that a person can live, in order to counter and fix the above impaired nature.

There are many ways to experience life. The most external way to experience life is to live on the outside, where a person only experiences what takes place outside of his self. There is another way to live entirely: When a person lives his deepest, innermost desires. Such a person may also spend his entire life “outside” of himself, as he tries to pursue his deepest wishes [and constantly running away from his own inner world], but at least he is acting upon his own desire, which is some degree of connection to his own inner world.

The first kind of person is not conscious of himself. He lives entirely outside of his own inner world, never experiencing his own. Such people do not have any original opinions of their own. They live based on what others do and what looks good in the eyes of others. This kind of person will ask a few people what they think before he decides to do something, first seeing what they think about the subject. He has no inner world of his own. This is true even about their physical matters; he doesn’t think on his own, and anything he does is based on what others are thinking.

If this kind of person goes to a wedding and the waiter offers him a choice between schnitzel or chicken, he might take a look at what others have on their plate and only then will he decide what to order, thinking that whatever others ordered must be the better choice. He doesn’t even know what he likes or not. Of course, if he is on the level where he doesn’t need to enjoy any taste in his food, he is on a high spiritual level. But it’s very possible that he doesn’t know at all what he likes. This is problematic, because he doesn’t have any of his own opinions and he gets all his thinking from others. He is inwardly empty, and he lives entirely on his outside.

Most people are not like this, but there are still a considerable amount of people like this. Sometimes a person is consciously aware that he has this problem, but many times, a person is not conscious of it at all. He is empty inside, and what he says and thinks is based on what others say and think.

If we understand this deeper, it is because he has formed a certain thinking pattern in himself, of “I believe that I must think according to how others think”. This is an impaired state. The healthy state of the soul, in contrast to the above, is when one has his own original thoughts and desires, when he thinks from within himself. True, he may have erroneous beliefs and lowly desires, but at least he has a sense of his own self. He might be jealous, or lustful, or honor-seeking, but at least these desires are part of his own inner world. The negative desires he has might land him in *Gehinnom* if he doesn’t fix them, and he must certainly learn how to rectify his negative character traits, but at least we can say about this kind of person that he has an inner “life” of his own.

To bring out the idea better, some people are very far from anger, but it is not because they worked on their humility so much. It can very well be because they have no inner world of their own, and therefore, there is nothing in their life that upsets them that much. As long as they don’t get really hurt to their core, nothing will bother them that much. An onlooker might view this kind of person as a pleasant person who never gets angry, when in reality, it is simply because the person is inwardly empty, so he never encounters anything to be angry about.

In contrast, other people have an inner world in themselves which contains their deep thoughts, dreams, and desires. These might not be holy dreams or holy desires, but at least he has some kind of

inner world taking place inside him. This kind of person is generally in a healthier state than the first kind of person described. Such a person lives his own inner world [albeit unspiritual], even when he is with others.

We can all understand that the first kind of person is in an unhealthy state, whereas the second kind of person is more solid. However, the second kind of person should not remain his whole life on that level, because he still has inner work to do. He lives his own life, his own inner world, but he may be very self-absorbed, caring only about himself and never about anyone else around him. He will end life on the level of the “animal” soul, and at a very low level of it.

The truer way to live - the higher level of existence - is for a person to get in touch with his uniqueness. Each person has his own physical and spiritual place on this world. A person has his own spouse, his children, his possessions, etc. He has his own intellectual powers, and his own personality and character traits. The more inward that a person is, the more that he will live his true unique characteristics. He also aspires to get to higher levels, but he mainly lives his own uniqueness. (One should not live off his aspirations. That is also a form of impaired honor, which will be discussed later.)

Living Off Aspirations and Living For Honor: Living “Outside” The Self

What is the connection between living off aspirations, and a life of living for honor? They seem to be two different problems, but in actuality, these two problems are interrelated. Living off honor is living “outside” of oneself, and living off aspirations is also a way of living outside the self, because the person is not living off what he has actually achieved, but off what he wishes to achieve.

A boy who is 17 or 18 years old has certain aspirations, and when he gets older and more mature, his aspirations change, and even when he becomes elderly, he still aspires, but for different things. In all these stages, though, he may be living off these aspirations. His goals and dreams change, but the problem stays the same: he is always living off his aspirations. Most of the time, living in this way causes a person to constantly pursue “aspirations”, and the person does not get vitality from what he has actually achieved. This is a superficial way of living.

In contrast, the inner way to live is to get vitality from the unique characteristics which Hashem has endowed you with, and from the achievements you have reached. Upon that, you can certainly aspire to try to reach a higher achievement. Indeed, it is pitiful if a person doesn't have any aspirations to reach for a higher level. The Vilna *Gaon* says that if a person isn't ascending, he is falling. A person is always in movement. But the question is: Where are you living from? You must live who you actually are. You should always be trying to move on to the next level, but only after first being connected to your current situation.

One should not try to move on to a higher level out of a disconnection from his current level, or out of a feeling of emptiness. Rather, he must be a “full vessel, which can hold”. After first becoming “full”, after first achieving, one can move on to the next level that he wants to achieve.

This inner way of living is unclear to most people. What is the reason for this? It is because when a person doesn't live the inner world as described here, and he hears about the concept of living "who you are", he will think that this means that one should worry about yourself, think about yourself, and go for what you want, as opposed to being concerned for others. With such a mentality, when he begins to live his own reality, he will have a huge misconception about what this means, and indeed, he will become grossly self-absorbed. He might be conscious of this problem, but he won't know what to do about it.

The difference between the above two perspectives is worlds apart, but they might appear to always be the same thing, to anyone who views his surroundings through a superficial perspective. But they are really two entirely different worlds.

The impaired use of the power described here is when a person is immersed in his own inner world, with no concern for others. All he is concerned about is if he has a good *chavrusa* for himself, if he has *parmassah* for himself, if his health is okay, and if he has getting *nachas* from his children. Anything he wants is solely about him. Such a person, when he is told to live "who you are", will simply become self-absorbed.

In contrast to this, the inner way to live is totally different. It is not about living in your various wishes (*retzonos*) of life, but from what you have actually reached and achieved. It is about the existent. This greatly calms the soul.

If a person goes too far with this idea, he will not aspire for anything at all, which is detrimental. But if he uses this power in a balanced and sensible manner, he will be calm inside, living and experiencing whatever he has.

The Problem of Self-Absorption

However, a person should not remain at that level. If he does, he will become too self-absorbed.

One of the big problems in people who have become "*oivdei Hashem*" [those who engage in intense self-work and improvement in their service towards Hashem] is that they become too immersed in their own selves. To illustrate the problem, there is a famous story where Reb Yisrael Salanter met a certain pious individual on Erev Yom Kippur, and when Reb Yisrael Salanter greeted him, the person didn't respond. Reb Yisrael criticized the behavior of this individual for becoming too self-absorbed in his spiritual improvement.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* states that "man must know and clarify his obligation on his world", and "world" implies man's involvement with the world outside him; in addition to this aspect, there is also the aspect of "man was created individual". A person might either be immersed in his aspirations, or, he is immersed in his actual achievements. But in either case, the person is living his own inner world, and this can create a very problematic attitude.

If a person is living his own inner world and he is very in touch with what he wants in life (as opposed to what others want), he might feel that he has a world of his own, his own Torah learning and his own *avodah*, and therefore he may not feel any concern for others. Although he isn't actually hurting anyone, the problem is that he is deeply immersed in his own inner self. He isn't aware of how his self-absorption is really hurtful to others around him. Others may need his help, and he is unaware of this, because he is so self-absorbed in his own inner world.

Even worse, sometimes he actually hurts others along the way, when he is not paying attention to his surroundings. We can compare this to a person walking in the street who tramples over an item made of glass that someone else is looking for, and it breaks. He simply wasn't aware of what was in his surroundings, and as a result, he ended up causing damage.

So there is a problem that when a person becomes deeply involved with his own inner world, he may become too self-absorbed and he will be neglectful towards others.

There are two possible extremes, which are both evil. If one is immersed in his aspirations, he is being detrimental to himself, because he is living outside of himself, as explained before. And if he is immersed in his own actual achievements, or if he feels fine because he thinks that he is heading towards *Gan Eden* while everyone else around him will go to *Gehinnom*, and he doesn't really care, because the main thing is that he has gotten somewhere with his own life. Although he is a very inward kind of person and he lives a life that is the antithesis of *kavod*/honor, any sensible person can understand that this is not either a truthful way of living.

In Summary

In summary, we have explained that there is a superficial way of living and an inner way of living. The superficial way of living is when a person's inner world is empty and therefore he lives outside of himself [his desires and ways of thinking are entirely copied from others]. The inner way of living is to live one's own inner world, one's own deep desires.

There are two impaired uses of this ability. One problem is when a person lives off his aspirations, and the other problem is when a person is too self-absorbed in his own actual achievements. We have explained that living off one's achievements is a more genuine way of living than when one lives off aspirations. But as we have explained here at length, this can be problematic when a person becomes too immersed in his own life.

Striking The Correct Balance Between Inwardness and Relationships With Others

This leads us to the deep gateway towards the true kind of life. The words here will be subtle to understand, but they are describing a life of truth.

When one lives a life of inner purity, life will look totally different for him. He will be connected to who he really is, but it will be viewed by him as nothing but a temporary situation, a “bridge” that he is passing through in order to get to something deeper, and not as an end result to itself.

The *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* explains that when Hashem said He is sustaining the world entirely through the merit of the sage Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, this meant that Rabbi Chanina was the *shvil* (pathway) which all Heavenly sustenance would pass through in order to reach this world. In the same vein, a person can view his own actual achievements as nothing but a *shvil* pathway that takes him to another level.

In other words, one can be connected to his own *havayah* (existence/reality), but in a non-egotistical way. To emphasize, this is a non-egotistical connection to one’s own inner self. When that is the case, anything that is a part of one’s own inner world is viewed by the person as nothing but a receptacle of Hashem’s kindness. When that is the attitude of the person, everything can spread from there onward.

But if a person is egotistical, everything is about “Me”: My own achievements, my own unique portion that I have on this world, etc. He won’t mind if he gets another person’s share in *Gan Eden* as well, because all he is concerned about is himself. If he finds out that someone else speaks *lashon hora* about him, he is very happy, because now he knows he will receive the other person’s share in *Gan Eden*....

That is the state of an unrefined, unpurified soul. But when one has refined his soul and he is not egotistical, when he knows that life does not entirely revolve around him, he will be able to live with a very fine balance. On one hand, he will live his own life and his own achievements, but instead of being egotistical about this, he will view it as nothing but a ‘temporary point’ that he needs to pass through, as opposed to viewing it as a purpose unto itself. Compare this to a father and children. The father provides for the child, knowing that his whole relationship towards them is to be a provider for them and to give to them.

The true meaning of the “inner world” is that the deeper a person connects to his inner self and the more that he refines and purifies himself internally, the better he can live with this great contradiction of being connected to oneself while being concerned for others.

On one hand, one can be deeply connected to his own inner world, and from there he can derive a deep, inner serenity of the soul. He is connected to his own achievements on this world, but he understands that it is not everything. It is only a gateway to something deeper: to be able to relate to others in a deeper and more meaningful way. He uses the deep connection he has to his own inner world as a way to improve the way he relates to others. He has greatly developed a rich, inner world of his own, and as a result of this, he can be very helpful and beneficial to the world outside of him.

If a person only thinks about his surroundings and never about his own inner world, this is total superficiality, for he is living entirely outside of himself, and it is the impaired state of the soul. A more improved state is when a person has his own goals and wishes, and he is not copying what others want, because this shows that he is at least in touch with himself. But he is largely pursuing

worldly desires, so it is not yet spiritual. A more spiritual level than this is when one lives with his own aspirations, but this is still living on the outside, because he is constantly living in what he wants, and not in what he actually has.

When a person is sitting and learning Torah all day in the *beis midrash*, he brings light into the world, and he is found within the inner world [if he is deeply connected to his Torah learning, and not just learning superficially]. But when a person is helping others all day and meriting the public, he is constantly exiting his own inner world and living in the world outside of himself.

The depth of life is to live one's own inner world, and from being connected to there, one can let this spill over into how he helps others; the more he merits it, the more he can help others, from the inner connection that he reaches. When he will be involved with the world in order to help others, it will then be perfected. This personifies the trait of Avraham Avinu, who bestowed kindness upon the world, who was able to shine his own light upon the rest of the world because he had reached his own inner world.

This is a subtle matter, however, because being involved with the world always has its dangers. A person is always susceptible to all kinds of outside influences, and he may lose his own inner world in the process of being involved with others. It takes inner refinement to remain connected to one's inner world and be apart from it, while at the same time being influential upon others and being involved with them.

Being “Yourself” Around Others

Now we will speak of how to practically act upon these words.

There are people who want very much to be liked and adored by others. They want to find *chein* (favor) in everyone's eyes. They have a personality that comes across as very pleasant, sweet, easygoing, and flexible. People are excited to suggest a marriage partner to such a person, because they can see that everyone gets along with him. But then when this kind of person gets married and he has a home of his own, we see a totally different person....

What happened? What changed? It's simple. He was a person who had always been manipulating his own character in order to get along with others, to look like a nice and pleasant person. He could do this quite well when he was acting in front of others, but a person cannot keep on this act forever, such as in the privacy of his own home. That is where his true personality comes out. It had been stifled until now in order to please others, and now it will come out in full force.

What, then, is the correct way of living? We can't tell a person to be his true personality and to always show his true colors around others, because then he won't care to please others at all, acting conceited and irritable around others, etc. That would not be a successful way to live. People need a balanced way to act when it comes to getting along with others. But what does that mean? Does it mean to be sometimes be nice, and to sometimes “be yourself” a little? That is not either a truthful way of living.

The truthful approach to take is that when being around people, one should act entirely from his true “I”. What does that mean? If one shows his true colors, how will others get along with him? But we don’t mean that he should show his dark side to others. Rather, he should be his true self around others, while at the same time, being prepared to give to others whatever they need, to fully give of himself to others. Whenever a person bestows good upon others, it can only be possible when he has what to give them. One cannot give something he doesn’t have. The first, basic part [of relating to others] is that a person be prepared to give of his entire self, to the other.

However, one must be aware that his entire “I”, his entire self, is nothing but a means of transferal of blessing from Hashem to the other person, and in this way, a person avoids egotism even as he is fully connected to himself, while helping others.

Thus, true giving and bestowal of good upon others – whether doing a kindness for them, or helping them, or listening to them, or understanding others – can only come from a strong, inner connection to oneself, along with a person’s awareness that his “I” is but a “garment” that serves as a means to transfer [Hashem’s] good onto others.

In many cases when people want to please others and they are very helpful to everyone, this stems from an inner emptiness, a lack of connection to one’s own inner world. We can see that most people in the world are reliant on others for love. A person initially depends on his parents for love. After one’s parents have left the world, one may turn to his children in order to receive love, if he has no inner world of his own.

In contrast, when a person has already become connected to his own inner world, he has what to lean on for support. On a deeper level, a person can feel that he can lean on Hashem for support. Most people-pleasers do not have this deeper source of love in themselves, however. When it comes to people who are very fragile and insecure inside themselves, this is strongly the case. If the people-pleaser has a more confident kind of personality, others who meet him may suspect him of having a very conceited personality, or as the type to wish to control others, etc.

But if a person is a bit aware of the concept of being connected to one’s own inner world, he will know that true bestowal of good upon others is an ability that comes from being fully present when helping others. One is allowed to be “himself”, while at the same time, being fully prepared to give to the other person whatever he needs. This is how an inner life looks like.

Some people cannot stomach this, and they feel that having this attitude towards others is too much of an overhaul on life. They view helping others and giving others their needs out of respect of the *mitzvah* to do *chesed*, and because they need to maintain minimal peace with others. But this is not supposed to feel like a huge overhaul on one’s entire life. Rather, it is one point for a person to work on - and when this one point is worked upon, it can indeed change one’s life.

Self-Nullification

After a person has built a solid connection to his own inner world, the next step for him to work on is to be able to have self-nullification (*bittul*) to others, as we say at the end of the silent prayer: “*Nafshi k’afar tiyheh*” - “My soul should be like the dust to everyone”.

[This is where one does not feel his own self around others, and instead he feels like nothing around them, nullified to others and being prepared to give fully of himself, to them]. This self-nullification comes from a deep connection to Hashem, from feeling so insignificant when contemplating the smallness of man compared to the Infinite.

However, if a person tries to work on nullifying himself before building a solid sense of self, this stems from a negative trait of “*shiflus*”, “lowliness”, a trait of the “animal” level of the soul, and it will not be true self-nullification (this has been explained by Rav Chatzkel Levenstein). The level of “My soul should be like the dust to everyone” can only be worked upon after one is solidly connected to his own inner world, and only after that should one nullify his sense of self.

After recognizing your own importance and significance, you can now nullify that and make yourself feel like nothing, but if you feel like a nothing in the first place and you never developed your own inner self yet, you have nothing to nullify. To illustrate, before Pesach, we nullify the *chametz*, which was previously of significance to us, and then we make it into nothing. But if we don’t have any *chametz* to nullify, there is nothing to nullify, because there is nothing here in the first place. Only after you have something of value in the first place can you then nullify its value.

In the same vein, only after you have recognized your own value can you try to work on self-nullification towards others. Thus, self-nullification is only genuine after a person has a solid connection to his own inner world.

One must be careful with self-nullification, however. Nullifying oneself to others must not cost him his own self. If he feels nullified to others when he is around them to the point that he has no sense of worth of himself at all, he is losing himself in the process, and this is where self-nullification is detrimental. Also, self-nullification is not meant to become a permanent state to be in. One should not always be nullifying his sense of self. If he does, he is overdoing it, and he is in danger of losing himself in all of this self-nullification.

One should access only self-nullification when he is around others, so that he can feel like “nothing” around others and thus be entirely giving towards them. But as soon as he is done helping others, he should return to his connection to his own inner world. One should “run and retreat” (“*ratzu v’shav*”) between the state of self-nullification (where there is no self) and his own inner world (where there is a self), in a cycle, regressing back and forth between these states.

In this way, one can have a strongly developed inner world of his own, along with being nullified to others, and herein is the complete rectification for **water-of-wind-of-fire**.

11 | *Imagined Honor*

Wind-of-Wind-of-Fire: The Intangible “Air” of Honor

We will continue with the help of Hashem to discuss *kavod* (honor). Here we will discuss the particular kind of honor that stems from **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. “Fire” refers to honor, “wind-of-fire” refers to the movements towards honor.

“Wind-of-wind-of-fire” is when one is receiving honor from the intangible and insubstantial. Wind-of-wind is nothing but air. There is a term called *asifas ruach*, “gathering air”. That describes wind-of-wind, and when one seeks honor from the intangible and insubstantial, it is if he is just gathering air. This is the impaired honor of **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

Honor, as opposed to other kinds of pleasure, is a pleasure that cannot be tangibly felt. It is the most spiritual kind of pleasure that can be felt on our physical world. This is because honor is an offshoot of the heavenly realm, a higher level being revealed onto our own physical, lower realm. Therefore, we, who are on this lower, physical realm, cannot fully understand the pleasure of honor, because honor is really a force that is above our own real, hence it is above human comprehension.

In terms of our personal souls, this concept becomes manifest when a person encounters something where there is nothing substantial, yet even so, the person “feels” something here.

Delusions About Honor

A very good example of this is the power of imagination, where a person is thinking about something that is not real and nonexistent. In the case of imagination, the person is thinking about the completely non-existent. The pleasure in honor is similar to this concept, but not quite. When a person enjoys honor, he is definitely feeling that there is an existing force here. It is just that he doesn’t understand what it is, because it is above his comprehension.

Since honor is above our understanding, a person who feels it is involving himself with something that he cannot fully understand. Therefore, if a person tries to connect fully to the honor, it is a form of fantasy. Although there is something existing here, it is still a fantasy for him to try to reach it. For example, if a person tries to attain a higher spiritual level which he cannot reach right now, he is being delusional, even though that higher level exists. Since he cannot actually reach it, he is pursuing a fantasy if he tries to reach it.

To illustrate further, if a person thinks he has 100 dollars and he only has 50 dollars, he is fantasizing, even though there are 100 dollars do exist in the world. He does not own the 100 dollars, so if he thinks he owns it, he is fantasizing.

Similarly, when a person wants to reach a higher spiritual level and then he tries to live on that level, when it is really above his actual level, he is living in a fantasy. This is a very common kind of fantasy, which envelopes the lives of many people.

This is not the simpler kind of imagination, where a person who doesn't own a car imagines owning the car, or when a person dreams at night that he lives in a bigger house that he wants. Here we are talking about a different kind of imagination, where a person imagines something that exists, but which is not within his reach, and he imagines that he has attained it. When people try to reach higher levels that are not within their reach, they are being delusional.

Honor is the higher realm being revealed within the lower realm. Therefore, the higher level does exist in the lower realm. This is what allows people to have delusions about feeling that they are honored [when, in reality, they are not being honored]. We will soon give some examples of the concept, but the idea is that honor connects a person to a higher level, and therefore the pleasure in honor is not a total delusionary experience, because it is existing. [And since it is not totally delusional, the person convinces himself that he is really being honored, or he exaggerates the feeling of honor upon experiencing a bit of it.]

If a person is experiencing honor and he is aware that it is just an offshoot of something from the higher realm being manifest on the lower realm, and that it is not the actual revelation of the higher realm, then he wouldn't be delusional about the honor. But when a person is missing this understanding about honor, a person will connect himself fully to an intangible experience of honor, which only exists in the world of fantasy. When a person gets used to this, it can eventually lead to fantasizing about things that are totally delusional.

Imagined Honor

To give an example of what this is, if you ask a first grade child who his friends are, and he answers you that it's so-and-so and so-and-so, the child's answer is not necessarily a reflection of the reality, and if you investigate, you may discover that the truth is totally not like what he says. The "friends" that he claims of are not actually his friends at all, and he really has different friends. The child, though, is perceiving his reality in a certain way, because he wishes to have social standing amongst these "friends". This is the trait of honor at work, which can easily fool his perception of reality.

Many people think that they are honored by others for various things they do, but the truth is that if we ask around, we will see that no one is consciously trying to honor those people. If we say to the person, "Do you think that others honor you, and that they know who you are and what you do and value you, and they consider you important?" he will not even be in doubt about this. He is sure that others are honoring him and valuing him for what he does.

Others have the opposite problem, and they think that they are not respected or valued by anyone, because they suffer from a low self-image. But here we are talking about a person who does

have a positive self-image, who may have a problem of being delusional about honor. he thinks that everyone around him honors and values him and recognizes his worth, and if we examine the situation a bit deeper, we may discover that this is not the case at all.

Why would a person fool himself and convince himself that he is so honored by others? It is really because honor is a heavenly force, which is above human comprehension, and when a person does not know how to interpret it precisely, he will connect himself to a revelation of honor that *does not exist*.

Imagined Honor/Good Feeling That Comes From The “Air” (Atmosphere) Around A Person

Usually the person is not being a complete fool when he feels that he is honored by others. If he feels that others honor and value him, it must be that there is a certain pleasant atmosphere around him, which gives him a good feeling about himself. From there, he interprets the general “good feeling” that’s “in the air” around him, expanding upon this feeling and exaggerating it. But the good feeling of honor that he subsequently feels from this is not real, and therefore he is connecting himself to something that is way beyond him, which is not within his actual reach.

This idea envelopes a person entirely, and its root is in the trait of honor, as we are explaining here. So far, we have explained one area in how it manifests in the soul.

A large part of a person’s life is dependent on the “air” (atmosphere) around him. There may be a celebration, joyous event, or some experience which feels pleasant, where it is not possible to actually pinpoint where the pleasant feeling is coming from. It is simply the pleasant “atmosphere” there that the person is enjoying. If a person went to a certain place and he was happy there or sad there, he might be aware if he was happy or sad there, but many times one cannot pinpoint what exactly made him happy or sad there. It all depends on the atmosphere there, the “air” that’s there.

Can someone go to a certain place or event and tell if the “air” there is good or not? This is something inner, which each person interprets differently. If a person went on a vacation to a certain place and he enjoyed it there, sometimes he can pinpoint what he enjoyed, like it if it was a calm and quiet place to be in, it was settling to his mind, etc. But sometimes the answer is very vague, and he says something like, “The air (or atmosphere) was good there.” He is not describing anything tangible.

This is also very commonly experienced on the festivals, such as when sitting by the Pesach *seder*, where most people will feel that there is something “uplifting”, and surely it is, but the feeling is not coming from anything tangible. It is just coming from the “air” there....

We should understand this deep point, that there are people who live their entire lives until their last day, based upon the kind of “air” around them. Sometimes the “air” feels to a person like an “air” of the beginning of the week or season, or an “air” of the middle of the week or season, or the “air” of the end of the week or season, and sometimes this “air” depends on the age of the person or

stage of life a person is at. But in either case, living life in this way is like constantly trying to hold onto something that is not tangible.

Spiritual Elation In The “Air”

In the world of *avodas Hashem* as well, this idea of the “air” (or atmosphere) really comes to play.

For example, a person will say that he received tremendous *chizuk* (inspiration) from learning a certain *sefer*, and he won’t be able to name exactly how he has been inspired. He will just say something like, “It was so uplifting!” But if we ask him what exactly affected him in the *sefer*, he can’t name anything specific. He may say, “Every word in this *sefer* is gold!” But what is it that affected him? “After I learned this *sefer*, my entire reality changed.” He just can’t pinpoint it exactly. There are many other expressions as well a person may use, but the point is that there is nothing tangible in what he has felt.

Sometimes this is only on a smaller scale, regarding a certain stage or event in a person’s life. But in other cases, a person is living his entire life based upon the feelings of elation that come from the “atmosphere”, which cannot be tangibly felt and named for what it is. When a person lives in this way, it is actually destruction to his soul. It is just gathering heaps and heaps of air, and this becomes the person’s entire life! Like this, a person does not live with any clear definitions of anything, just feelings of general elation.

For example, if a person goes to hear a *mussar shmuess* during the Three Weeks, and he is asked what he heard in the speech, he might say something like: “The speaker was bringing us into the atmosphere of the Three Weeks.” Although there is something true to what he is saying, he is not pinpointing exactly why we must mourn during the Three Weeks. He cannot define it exactly, and he just knows that the general “atmosphere” of the Three Weeks is to feel mournful.

To him, Tisha B’Av is defined as the “atmosphere” of Tisha B’Av, a mournful atmosphere. Yom Kippur to him is nothing except an “atmosphere” of purity, something which can be felt in the “air” on Yom Kippur. Although there is something truthful to what he is saying, a person cannot build his life [spiritual speaking, in his *avodas Hashem*] upon what the air/atmosphere around him is like.

There are people who live based upon the atmosphere around them. They feel the “air” and mood of the Three Weeks, then they move on to the “air” and mood of vacationing during *Bein HaZemanim*, and then they enter into the “air” of Elul, and before they know it, they have gone through the “air” of the *Yomim Noraim* and *Succos*. Then comes the “air” of the winter season, etc. That is how they live. Every situation and point in their life to them has no clear definition to it, and the person defined it as the “air” around them. That is **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

The Problematic Attitude Towards Learning Mussar

Any sensible person understands that when a person is always identifying with something intangible, this is clearly fantasy. But what isn't as obvious is when a person is feeling something real, but it cannot be clearly defined or understood. This is a very encompassing nature of the soul which affects many areas.

When it comes to learning *Gemara*, the words of Abaye and Rava, generally speaking, a person will not feel that there is some kind of “air”/atmosphere to the words of Abaye and Rava. The words of the *Gemara*, with the commentaries of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*, are all definitions. There is no “air” here. Though a person can also be amazed on an emotional level when he hears a certain novel Torah insight, generally speaking, a person does not feel the “air” in the words of the *Gemara* he is learning.

The same goes for learning *halachah*, where a person must learn what the definition of the *halachah* is, and there is no way for a person to get a vibe of it based on its “air”, because it is clearly defined. It is defined information which needs to be learned and then acted upon in the practical sense.

But in the area of learning *mussar* (ethics or self-discipline) this concept of feeling the “air” comes more into play, where it becomes a problematic attitude. Reb Yisrael Salanter said that when learning *mussar*, one should learn the words “with a mournful voice”. This is be erroneously understood by many people that learning *mussar* should feel like an inspirational kind of air/atmosphere, or a kind of atmosphere that “demands truth”, or other preconceived notions that people may have about *mussar*.

Mussar is not really a concept that we need to understand. We all “know” the fundamentals of *mussar*. We all “know” the definition of *zehirus*, and *chessed*, etc. So what does *mussar* teach? It seems to many people that *mussar* is defined by the “air” that *mussar* gives off, the atmosphere of learning *mussar*, which causes us to live what we know. This erroneous attitude towards *mussar* is not uncommon, and it affects all of a person's *avodah*.

A person can learn *mussar* for many years, yet he is involved with learning something intangible. With such a perspective, *mussar* will be dependent on the mood, tone, the “air”. When a person feels uplifted, the “air” feels inspiring, and he may perceive this as “greatness of mind” or “opened heart” or “paying attention with the heart”, and when he feels down in his spirits, the air around him feels like “smallness of mind”, or “closed heart”, but he doesn't feel anything tangible.

If a person learns *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* even for a long time [where the chapters are arranged in the form of “gates”], he may view it as “gates” becoming opened to him, without knowing exactly what these “gates” are. Is it the “fifty “gates of understanding”? What new things in *Chovos HaLevovos* has he now learned, which he didn't know beforehand? He may not pinpoint exactly what new things it taught him, and he will just say that the words of the *Chovos HaLevovos* have certain power or potency to them, but he can't define it exactly.

A person should really know what a *sefer* has taught him, what he didn't know beforehand and what he has now learned. If not, he is just gathering air, and any of the inspiration he felt was just temporary and fleeting, with nothing substantial that stays with him afterwards.

Earlier, we described the problem where a person perceives a certain feeling based on the “air” or atmosphere around him. But when this problem is brought into one's *avodas Hashem*, it causes a person to think that all of *avodas Hashem* is based on the inspiration in the “air”.

From a true perspective, any sensible person knows that *mussar* contains certain definitive concepts, no less definitive than the definitions found in the *Gemara*. It is all one Torah, and the Torah is all about clearly defined concepts. But not everyone is aware of this, and therefore they view it based on the “vibes” that they're getting from the “air” around them when learning. This approach clearly will be detrimental for a child, because a child will not be able to feel the elation in the air around him. He doesn't have a developed, mature mind yet, and he will view matters of Torah as nothing but something interesting to think about, but not more than that.

We are describing a problem in which a person connects to something where it is not based upon reality, and it is instead based upon the vibes he is getting in the “air”/atmosphere around him.

Accurately Feeling The Inspiration “In The Air”: Only After Giving Clear Intellectual Definition To Something

Now let's see what the truthful way of living is.

Is there such a thing as picking up certain “vibes” from the kind of “air” or “atmosphere” that's in the place? Of course it exists. But it is only to be considered as real after a person can clearly define what is there, and upon that, one can then feel the elation in the air that's there.

The true meaning of a Torah scholar is that he can give clear definitions to what he's involved with, whether he's dealing with a matter of intellect or a matter of emotional. There are always definitions, whether it is an area of *halachah*, *Gemara*, and *mussar*. Even the elation experienced on a festival has a clear definition to it, and each of the festivals has its own specific points that inspire a person. Pesach contains a certain kind of inspiration, when it comes to certain points; Shavuot inspires a person in other areas, and Succos provides inspiration in other points, etc.

There are always two parts in whatever a person is involved with: The intellectual definition of the matter, as well as the emotion towards that matter. Once there is a clear definition in place, a person can then have a more accurate emotional reaction towards it, and he will accurately feel what's in the “air” there. From a deeper understanding, the intellectual definition of a matter tells us what's in the “air” in a place.

When learning *Gemara* and *halachah*, people are familiar with the concept of giving definitions. When learning matters of *agadta* (ethical teachings of the *Gemara*) though, there is less awareness of this concept that one must give definitions to the concepts he is learning about. If you have ever

learned the *sefarim* of the Maharal, you can see that all matters of *agadta* in the *Gemara* are based upon certain intellectual definitions. The definitions may be too abstract to comprehend, but they are still clearly defined.

When it comes to learning *mussar* as well, many are not aware that these are matters based upon certain intellectual definitions. When a person learns *sefer Orchos Tzaddikim*, he sees the words of Chazal that explain why a certain trait is praiseworthy, and how it can also be detrimental, when used incorrectly. That is the simple perspective, but if a person has a deeper understanding into the words of Chazal, he is aware that the words of Chazal are describing certain definitions of a matter.

It seems to a person when learning *Mesillas Yescharim* at first glance, that the levels of *zehirus*, *zerizus*, *nekiyus*, etc. are just praiseworthy levels to attain, and he sees why these are praiseworthy traits. But the concept of *zehirus*, let's say, can be studied more in-depth in the words of the Maharal in *Nesivos Olam*. Then a person can go back to learning about *zehirus* in *Mesillas Yescharim*, and he will then see a different definition there. When learning *agadta* and *mussar*, and when it comes to all of a person's *avodah*, there are certain definitions. When a festival or a certain time of the year arrives, a person can also give a definition to what is taking place. When the Three Weeks arrive, for example, a person can learn about what the *Beis HaMikdash* was like when it was built, what changed after it was destroyed, what we are now missing – and after that, he can become moved on an emotional level, until he cries. But there are exact intellectual definitions to it, just as in all other areas of Torah.

When a person gets used to this perspective, his intellectual perception of a matter will become sharper and clearer, and then he will know he's feeling something tangible in the air around him when he's feeling it.

Intellectually Connecting To A Festival, Then Emotionally Experiencing It

If the above has been understood, we can proceed to the next step.

The festivals are times of the year that have been sanctified by Hashem, with *kedushah* (holiness). What is the holiness of the festivals? For most people, the "time" is above their actual soul level, so the holiness of the time is also above them and therefore out of their actual reach. But through the light of the festival, a person can receive higher revelations that are really beyond his reach.

There is also a higher level where a person is above time. Although there is a rule "*Yisrael* (the Jewish nation) is above time", mostly a person is "below" the level of time, and therefore he needs certain times of the year to provide him with the holiness that he normally can't reach. So a person is usually below the plane of "time", and the special time (of the festival) can shine holiness upon him. But why is it that many people will feel very high spiritual feelings on the festivals? Is it because they are really comprehending and reaching these high, lofty levels of holiness? Time is really above the person. On a festival, there are people who like to study highly spiritual matters, and they feel that since it's such a special time, they have to grab onto it before it's gone. But since time is above the

actual level of most people, it can shine holiness onto them. However, the revelations available during that time cannot actually be comprehended. This is similar to the concept of honor, as we explained earlier, that honor is really a revelation from Above, and it is above comprehension.

When it comes to gaining from the holiness of the festivals, a person first needs an intellectual definition of a matter about the festival, and only after that can he feel the elation of it. After a person gives some definition to a concept regarding the festival at hand, there are two ways of how he can become emotionally moved and inspired, and to feel the “air” contained on the festival. One way is to review and repeats the matter several times. The other way is for one who possesses refined subtle thinking. Such a person can be emotionally moved in his heart, just from making a subtle reflection into intellectual definitions.

There are two kinds of people who experience elation on the festival. One kind of person hears highly spiritual matters about the festival, which uplifts him, and a second kind of person hears a certain subtle definition which penetrates deeply into him, and that is what inspires him. Two people can hear the same words, but one person will hear the general concepts on an external level, which can lead to inspiring him, and another kind of person will hear something subtle, and that is what penetrates his heart and inspires him.

Maturing Beyond The Level of Childhood Imprints

This leads us to the following point. We all have childhood imprints, where our intellect wasn't developed yet, where there was only a world of emotion and feelings, and that was how we connected then to anything we encountered. Many adults did not mature on their inside yet, and they are still like children, when it comes to how they perceive the spiritual. They continue to experience something based on the “vibes” they got from the air when they first experienced it.

For example, an adult may experience Pesach every year in the same way that he remembers it as a child. Although he has gone through Pesach over 30 times since then, his experience of Pesach is always a return to his childhood perception of Pesach. The same goes for all other festivals and times of the year. One should become aware of what his childhood imprint of something is. There is certainly worth to the childhood imprint one has about something, but when a person has become older and he is now an adult, he must understand that just as a person must mature when it comes to the rest of life, so must he mature when it comes to spiritual matters. He should realize that his current perception towards the festival stems from his childhood experience of the festival, and after realizing that, he should then try to gain a more mature understanding of the festival.

Many times when people lose their childhood feelings towards the festival, they feel that they have undergone a descent in their level, wondering where their inspiration has gone. But the truth is that they did not undergo a spiritual descent. Rather, their imagined feelings have been steadily lessened, and now they have reached a point where they can no longer live with feelings that are not real. They experience this as a spiritual descent from their level, but in reality, it means the person has matured. It is the key to entering the reality correctly. The new change of perception is that there

will first be an intellectual definition given to what they are experiencing, and that is what leads them to emotional reaction.

Solving The Issue of Imagined Honor

Now that we have outlined the idea, let us return to discussing honor, and to see how this all applies in particular to repairing honor that stems from **wind-of-wind-of-fire**.

When a person feels honor, in a large percentage of cases, the person is feeling something tangible. A person goes to a certain place and people are giving him actual honor there, and the honor that he feels is tangible. But in a very large amount of cases as well, the honor that a person feels is being imagined. It is not happening in reality.

Sometimes a person is genuinely honored, and sometimes the honor is false, but even when the honor is false, at least it is happening in reality, and there is someone here being “honored”. But in many cases, the honor is entirely being fantasized, and it is not real. The honor will only exist in the imagination of the person, who thinks that he is worthy of being honored by others.

How does a person leave imagined honor? It is by gaining the perspective we have explained here, by first giving an intellectual definition to the situation at hand, and only after that, attempting to feel it.

When a person reacts to others first through his emotions, he will feel that others are honoring him, whether they are truly honoring him, or whether he is only imagining this. But if a person gets used to analyzing a matter first before reacting emotionally, by getting used to giving intellectual definitions, he will be distanced from having delusions about honor.

This is also helpful in avoiding delusion altogether, but we are not dealing with that here. Here we are only speaking of a specific kind of delusion, the problem of imagined honor. Getting used to applying definitions is a matter that weakens imagined honor. This does not directly attack the power of imagination/delusion. Rather, it is by keeping the focus on giving definition to something, and as a result, the faulty imagination will be weakened as well.

After a person has gotten used to taking apart a matter intellectually, whenever he encounters something that involves emotional feeling and he finds himself in wonder over something, he will see that the emotional feeling doesn't match up with the intellectual definition of the reality before him, and then he will be able to dismiss the emotional feeling of wonder as insubstantial.

The words here are describing how a person can practically work on avoiding the entire problem of delusion caused by the power of imagination. It enables a person to have accurate, definitive thinking into anything before him, and it enables a person to accurately experience what he is feeling, when he encounters an emotion. One can think to himself: “What is the emotion saying? What is the intellectual definition of it saying? What is the contradiction between them?”

After noticing the contradiction, a person will then be able to chip away at the imagination which has been fueling his feelings about the matter: An inaccurate perception, nothing tangible or substantial, like a tower floating in the air which has nothing to stand on. Impaired **wind-of-wind-of-fire** is essentially intangible, the insubstantial, which has no grounding in reality.

When a person gets used to giving intellectual definition to something and he is seeing how his emotional reactions are inaccurate and insubstantial, he will find himself becoming more in touch with reality. In fact, the more truly inward that a person becomes, the more realistic he is.

Our Entire Avodah: Becoming In Touch With Reality, And Distanced From Fantasy

There are those who think that “inward” people are less realistic kinds of people, but the truth is totally the opposite. True inward *avodah* is based upon reality. A person has to be as in touch with reality as can be, in order to connect to Hashem, Who is the true essence of reality.

This is really the deep ability to recognize *havayah* (reality) and to thereby run away from *dimayon* (fantasy). True recognition of the Creator is based upon distancing oneself from fantasy, and to instead recognize reality as it is.

On a deep level, everything in this world is like one big fantasy that obscures a person from recognizing the reality of Hashem. The more that the soul of a person becomes in touch with reality and distanced from fantasy, the sharper level of recognition of Hashem that the soul can come to. This concept, of becoming in touch with reality and distancing oneself from fantasy, is the very depth of all our *avodah*, for Reb Yisrael Salanter said that the power of imagination is the main force which obscures a person from recognizing the Creator.

In Conclusion

Here we did not speak about how to repair the general power of imagination²⁵, but about a heavenly power that manifests on this world (honor), which is the most subtle kind of fantasy that exists. Concerning this particular kind of fantasy (imagined honor), we have explained here that this stems from **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, and we explained how this force can be rectified, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

²⁵ The ways to rectify the power of imagination in general are discussed in the Rav's series *Getting To Know Your Imagination*

12 | *Desperate For More Honor*

Fire-of-Wind-of-Fire: Moving Towards Elation From Honor

With *siyata d'shmaya* we continue here to discuss the trait of honor, and now we will discuss the particular kind of honor that stems from **fire-of-wind-of-fire**. This is when a person moves towards a place [wind] where he thinks he will receive honor, because he wants to feel the elation [fire] from such honor [fire].

A person may feel that he is in a place where he is not valued by others, where others are not giving him enough honor, and therefore he will move towards a certain place or situation where he can get honor. Such a person is not getting any honor in his life, or at least not enough of it.

But here we are talking about a different situation: There are people who think all day of how they can receive more honor, even though they are already receiving honor. They are never satisfied with the honor that they do receive, and they will continue to obsess over honor, no matter how much honor they are already receiving. They are jealous of others who receive more honor than they, and honor occupies their minds throughout the day. As soon as they encounter an opportunity to receive any small amount of honor, they pursue it with almost no self-control at all, out of desperation to receive more honor.

People who observe this can see how degrading his behavior is, and what he the person is willing to do just to get a little more honor, when he already receives plenty of honor to begin with.

The Concept of “Someiach B’Chelko” (Happy With What You Have)

What this person needs is to learn how to be *someiach b’chelko*, “happy with his portion.”

To be brief about this concept, every person has areas that he has already reached, and areas that he hasn't yet reached, which he desires to reach. Nobody is totally lacking, and nobody feels totally fulfilled. Everyone has certain achievements that he has already reached, and everybody has things they want, whether in the material realm, or in the spiritual. Each person, at his own level, is striving for certain things. But the question is where a person feels vitality from. Is he mainly living in what he has, and upon that he has aspirations to reach more things? Or is he mainly ‘living’ in what he doesn't have?

If he is mainly living in what he doesn't have, even if this is a spiritual aspiration that is truthful, the problem is that he is always living in what he's missing, in what he doesn't have, so he will have nothing to draw support from. The right way to approach life is to live off what you have already achieved, and upon that, you can aspire for more, to reach the next step or higher level.

Of course, when a person is first starting out, it is not enough for him to live mainly from his achievements, because then he will never aspire for anything. He would just remain complacent with whatever he has reached and he won't grow any further. But if a person is sensible about this concept and he is truly connected to what he has already achieved, he will feel a demand to reach more growth, and it will be a deeper kind of aspiration. It won't be a longing that stems from absence of achievement, from an emptiness in the "I", but from an aspiration that stems from the previous achievements.

That is a brief but fundamental definition of the concept of "*someiach b'chelko*", happy with one's lot.

The Inevitable Vitality We Receive From Our Unrefined Character Traits

Now let's return to our current topic, honor. Here this concept takes on a more subtle meaning. Before continuing, we will need another brief introduction, concerning the matter of "bad *middos*" (unrefined character traits) that are found in man.

Before the sin of man, unrefined character traits were not a part of man's soul. They existed as a force outside man, and they were not yet a part of man's character. When Adam sinned, a change took place, and unrefined character traits became an inseparable part of man. Ever since then, every person has been born with good *middos* and bad *middos*. Each person has a different percentage of certain good *middos* and bad *middos* that are part of his makeup, which Hashem has designed as part of the personality in the person, and man's task is to utilize his free will, to improve his character.

Man has free will to change his inner character, and even if one cannot change his character totally, he certainly can change himself partially. But one cannot transform himself entirely. Every person has good and bad character traits, and every person should have the aspiration to uproot the bad character traits. But every sensible person understands that we cannot immediately change bad character traits. We are not able to break our bad *middos* completely, even though it is commendable to have such an aspiration. Every person has certain bad *middos* which will stay with him for many years, and in fact, they will remain with him until death!

In spite of this, a person should not give up, *chas v'shalom*, from trying to work on his *middos*. He should always know that he can certainly weaken his bad *middos*, even if he will never break them completely. But everyone must know that certain bad *middos* will remain with him his entire life. How much of it will he be able to improve? That will be his task. But there will be some bad character traits which will be with him his entire life.

After a person accepts this fact calmly (someone with a very emotional, sensitive personality will have a hard time accepting this fact, because it will feel very painful, knowing that certain bad *middos* will never go away from a person), there are now two different perspectives he may have towards this. He might look at this as Hashem's design, that Hashem created a person to have certain bad *middos*. Or, he may look at this as a result of Adam's sin. But either way, certain bad character traits

are here to stay with us, and it is Hashem's will that these traits should stay with us for our entire life.

Bad character traits cannot just be ignored. They are very noticeable in a person's life. Here are some clear examples. A person has evil lusts. Can a person reach a point where he has no physical desires at all? There is no such thing. The *Ibn Ezra* said that since the Torah commands a person not to covet that which isn't his, he should understand that the desire isn't in his reach at all, just as a pauper doesn't even have a desire to marry the princess. However, it takes a lot of personal *avodah* to internalize these words of the *Ibn Ezra*, and simply reading these words of the *Ibn Ezra* will not cause a person to stop having desires for things he shouldn't.

So for the time being, a person does have evil lusts for certain things. Now what should he do? To try to wage war with the desire is not either possible, because it is impossible to fight everything all at once. A person has to make peace with the fact that he has certain desires and that he is not able to uproot them right now.

If, for example, a person is trying to break his desire for food, by making sure not to enjoy his food, such as by pouring salt on it until it tastes worse than dog food, this is too high of a level to try to attain. One can certainly minimize how much he desires something, but he cannot uproot his desire entirely, at least for the time being. So a person needs to accept the fact that until he uproots his desire for food, he will be enjoying his food until then, even though the lust for food is a desire that should really be uprooted.

Now that he accepts the fact that he will be enjoying it, there is a deep issue he needs to consider. Desire is not simply an unrefined character trait. A person will also be living off this character trait and getting a certain vitality from it. The depth of the soul's exile on this world is that there are bad character traits embedded into it, and in addition, it gets vitality from these bad character traits.

To a person who is not spiritually refined, this will not feel painful. But to a person who is refined in his soul, this realization will feel painful. Part of the atonement for bad character traits is that a person is pained over them. But, even though we suffer from our bad character traits and we are pained over them, we still feel vitality from them. This is a gnawing contradiction in our soul. A person's body lives off food and drink, a person's higher soul lives off spirituality, and the lower soul lives off evil, unrefined character traits.

It is a painful realization, for anyone who is spiritually refined: A person does feel some vitality from his unrefined character traits. This is the depth of our exile: Inevitably, we are forced to get vitality from the bad *middos* present in our character.

(From all of the bad *middos*, the worst is the trait of cruelty. If a person gets vitality from cruelty, this is an even more painful realization for him, because cruelty is by essence an evil trait; as opposed to the other traits, which are not evil by essence).

So far, we have given the example of desire, which is a very basic example of this idea, because a person enjoys a desire and he gets vitality from it. When a person becomes aware of this, he realizes that he is deriving vitality from an impure source.

When a person receives vitality from desire, he will want more, meaning that he wants to receive even more vitality from this impure source. Instead of being disgusted that this is his source of vitality, he wants even more, and he cannot change this. If he tries to develop disgust for the desire, his tension for it will build up, and then it will burst out of him at a later time, in full force. Therefore, it is not the will of Hashem to try to develop a disgust for any of his material desires. Rather, one must be at peace with their existence [along with his self-work in trying to rid himself of these negative traits, which is a gradual process].

Instead of Disgusting Honor, Derive Vitality From It

Now we will return to discuss the topic of honor, and see how the above concept applies to our subject.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that everyone needs honor. Therefore, it is impossible to live without honor. How, then, should a person react to honor, when he receives it? Should he try to disgust the honor? If he does, he would be denying his human nature which Hashem has designed. We have no choice but to enjoy the honor that we need, and even though it is all false, there is nothing we can do to deny human nature of enjoying honor, and this is the depth of the soul's exile on this world. Since we are going to receive honor anyway, we are inevitably receiving vitality from it.

If a person receives honor but he tries to deny the vitality he is getting from it, he is really focusing on that which he doesn't have. But a person really must be "*someiach b'chelko*" even when it comes to evil character traits, since it is a part of our life that is here to stay. So if a person receives honor, he should enjoy that which Hashem has given him, since that is the reality that Hashem has placed him in.

What is the reason that one should do this? It is because if a person tries to disgust any honor he receives, he never absorbs any of the honor he receives, and then he will be left with no honor, so he will look for more honor! That explains why a person can be receiving honor all the time, yet he continues to look for even more honor, as if he was never satisfied from the previous honor he received. It is because he never absorbed it properly.

A person really wants honor, because that is human nature, and he cannot stifle this desire. If he tries to deny the honor he does receive, he will look for it later, becoming desperate for it. So he must learn how to absorb the honor properly, and derive vitality from it! If he doesn't get it, he is only suppressing his need for honor, and he will look for more of it later, when he gets hungry for it.

This is the soul's exile: It has to endure the vitality that it inevitably gets from false honor. There is no way to avoid honor, because if a person tries to avoid honor, he will only want it more later. Thus, the soul is forced to receive honor, and it is pained over that fact. It is a state of exile for the soul.

Paradoxical Feelings of Vitality and Pain At Once

One therefore has to absorb the honor when it comes his way, and when he feels vitality from it, he should then feel pained that he inevitably enjoys it. That pain is our soul's exile on This World, which is forced to derive vitality from unrefined character traits.

This sound like a complete paradox, because a person must not pursue honor, yet he must also be able to enjoy it, otherwise he will only run after it even more. And, when he does enjoy honor, he should then feel pained that he needs it! Yet, as paradoxical as this is, this is part of our *avodah*.

Here is another example of paradoxical feelings of vitality and pain at once.

Most of the world does not keep Hashem's *mitzvos*. The gentile nations of the world do not keep the seven Noachide laws, and most of the Jews in the world are not observing of the Torah, scattered amongst the nations of the world and living like gentiles. Even amongst the most observant Jews, how many are keeping half of *Shulchan Aruch*, or a third of it, or even a quarter of it? Most of the entire Creation is not doing Hashem's will, which is a very painful reality, to anyone who thinks about it. One should think about this and feel pained at this.

Yet, at the same time, it is also Hashem's will that things be like this, for the time being, when we are in exile, which is currently Hashem's will. Therefore, one should also be at peace with this painful fact.

This is not to say that a person should allow himself to be complacent with evil, *chas v'shalom*. If he does, his heart will become dulled from feeling the spiritual. Rather, one should be aware of the exile and what it means for us, and to be pained at it, yet at the same time, to be aware that it is Hashem's will for us to be in exile now! Hashem can redeem us all in one moment if He wills it, or He will bring us "a king as harsh as Haman" who will cause us to repent. In either scenario, it is His will that things be like, and we must be at peace with His will.

The same is true for our own personal exile of the soul. One needs to become aware of the fact that he does receive vitality from his bad *middos*, and in addition to this awareness, he also he needs to feel pained at this. He needs to feel the paradoxical feelings of vitality and the pain at once!

As an example, when a person is informed that his parents have died and that he has received an inheritance from them, the *Talmud Yerushalmi* says that he makes a blessing of "*Baruch Dayan Emes*" over their death, and a blessing of *Shehechyanu*, for the joy of receiving the inheritance. This is a paradox of mourning and joy at once.

One needs to be able to gain vitality from something, and at the same time, to feel pained from it. This is also known as the concept of "the *oneg* (pleasure) that is *nega* (pain)" – even as one is feeling the *oneg*/pleasure in the mundane, he can feel the *nega* (pain) in it, feeling pained over the very fact that we must inevitably enjoy the mundane, as a part of our soul's exile on this world.

Honor is intangible pleasure, as explained in the previous chapter, and that is why if a person doesn't feel enjoyment in honor when he gets it, he will want even more. He never experienced it to begin with, because it is so subtle, and when he remains without it, he will eventually seek it.

Revealing Higher Honor

There is also a deeper point here to work on.

We explained in a previous lesson that there is “higher honor” and “lower honor”. “Higher honor” is when a person receives honor and he attributes it to the spiritual, and not to himself. “Lower honor” is when a person receives honor and he attributes himself as the source of it. “Higher honor” is tangible, while lower honor is not. When a person receives “lower honor” and he is enjoying it, he is enjoying something that is not really “his”, because it is really a force that belongs solely to the spiritual realm.

Honor is very different from other traits. With the trait of desire, most people will be satisfied from it when they indulge in it. They fill up their stomach with food, for example, and the desire for food is calmed. But when it comes to the trait of honor, many people have the problem of not being satisfied with the honor that they receive, even after receiving plenty of it. This is because they don’t absorb the honor when they get it. It is really because they don’t derive vitality from it in the first place, and that causes them to want more of it.

Therefore, there is a stronger pull to pursue honor that stems from **fire-of-wind-of-fire**, as opposed to honor that stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire**. It is because there is a difficulty to absorb honor in the first place, being that it comes from above [so it not within the human realm of emotions].

So far, we have explained the first step in repairing this type of honor: A person must be able to feel the paradoxical feelings of not wanting the honor as well as gaining vitality from it (which we have explained as “the soul’s exile”). We also explained that the reason for the difficulty in absorbing honor is because honor is really a spiritual force which does not belong to a person, so when a person tries to absorb honor, he is trying to enjoy something that is not really his.

Therefore, when a person experiences honor, he should try to attribute this honor to the spiritual. As for “lower honor” – the superficial honor which a person inevitably enjoys – a person should absorb it, feel the vitality in it, and then feel pained at the fact that he needs it.

This alone, however, will not be enough to completely repair **fire-of-wind-of-fire**. This is because honor does not belong to a human being. It is a spiritual force, and when a person longs for honor, he is really looking for the “higher honor”, for true honor. It is like the parable of the pauper who married the princess, who was not able to make her happy, in spite of everything he brought to her. The soul, which comes from the spiritual realm, is therefore never satisfied from superficial honor.

For this reason, when a person learns how to derive vitality from honor, the soul is never completely calmed by this. Therefore, while it is clearly not easy to leave behind the trait of honor, the way to repair the trait of honor is a two-part process, as follows.

The first part includes all that has been explained until now, and there is also a second part that is needed: One needs to reveal what true, higher honor is. Without revealing true honor, a person will

never be able to absorb any honor. That is why it is not enough to try to uproot evil of honor [which is “lower honor”]; a person must also access “higher” honor.

This is true about all character traits as well. For example, when it comes to the trait of evil desire, a person won’t succeed in uprooting evil desires unless he can uncover holy, spiritual desires. A person won’t be able to rectify evil jealousy, unless he discovers holy, constructive jealousy.

The same is true of honor, especially the particular honor that is **fire-of-wind-of-fire**, which is rectified through: (1) The contradictory forces of enjoying it, and then feeling pained at enjoying it. (2) Through revealing “higher honor”, attributing the feeling of honor to the spiritual source that it comes from.

In Conclusion

When one works on all of the above, and, primarily, by trying to reveal Hashem’s Presence within him, that is where one will find the “true honor”.

From a deeper understanding, there is no way one to rectify honor from within oneself. In order to rectify the trait of *kavod*/honor, one needs to reveal the *Melech HaKavod*, the King of all honor, Who is revealed within the person. The true rectification of the trait of honor is achieved when one nullifies himself to Hashem.

13 | *Higher Honor – The Root of Change*

1. *Fire-of-Fire: Higher Honor*

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we are continuing here to discuss honor, which is rooted in the element of fire. In this chapter, we are up to discussing the particular kind of honor which stems from **earth-of-fire-of-fire**.

Fire rises higher, and “fire”-of-fire refers to a yearning to keep going higher. With regards to honor, it will manifest as a desire to experience more and more honor. However, it is not simply a desire to receive more honor, in quantity. Rather, it is a desire to keep experiencing a higher quality kind of honor. This is a desire in the soul to experience higher kinds of honor, as opposed to a person who simply wants to be honored on all fronts.

[There are four branches of this kind of honor: Earth-of-fire-of-fire, Water-of-fire-of-fire, Wind-of-fire-of-fire, and fire-of-fire-of-fire. In this lesson, we will explain the honor that comes from “earth”-of-fire-of-fire].

2. *Earth-of-Fire-of-Fire: A Desire To Be Honored In A Particular Manner*

“**Earth**”-of-fire-of-fire is when a person has certain boundaries of how he wants to be honored, and at the level that he wants it to be. He will want more of that honor, but only if it is the kind of honor he wants, because there is a certain line that he will not cross.

For example, there are people who wish for others to honor them, but they will only want to receive certain, specific kinds of honor. They don't necessarily want to be honored by prestigious individuals. They just want honor in the way they want it. They have their limits of how much they want to receive honor. They will want to receive more and more of the kind of honor that they want to receive, and they will not just run after any honor, but only after the “higher” kind of honor that they desire. That is the “boundary” (the “earth”) of how far they will go to get honor.

But there is also a deeper understanding of it, as follows.

3. *Breaking Boundaries – The Essence of Honor*

Honor is a force that breaks boundaries [see Chapter 7], for it is a revelation of the upper realms within the lower realms. Therefore, honor by its very essence is a trait that breaks boundaries.

Fire-of-fire is when a person wants to go higher and higher, and in doing so, he breaks boundaries. Fire's nature of constant ascension is the root of the trait of conceit (*gaavah*), whereas

fire’s aspect of breaking boundaries is the root of the trait of honor (*kavod*). The idea of breaking boundaries is therefore not a branch of being conceited, but an aspect of pursuing honor.

Thus, **fire-of-fire**, the nature to break boundaries, is at the very essence of honor. **Earth-of-fire-of-fire** provides a boundary for this fire-of-fire and limits it, but this will not stop the essence of **fire-of-fire** which seeks to break boundaries. In the coming chapters, when we will discuss the “wind” and “fire” aspects within fire-of-fire, we will learn about an unbridled kind of fire-of-fire, which has no “earth” to stabilize it and place limits on it.

With **earth-of-fire-of-fire**, we can learn much about the nature of all the *middos* (character traits) and how the *middos* cross their proper boundaries [which is what we recognize as “bad *middos*”]. The idea of breaking boundaries is found in the very idea of pursuing honor – in particular, in honor that stems from **fire-of-fire**. In “earth”-of-fire-of-fire, the fire-of-fire is restrained on some level by an aspect of “earth”, but it will still break bounds.

4. The Deep Roots of Bad Middos

Based upon the above, let’s proceed to understand the following.

Every person has his bad *middos*, which stay with him throughout his life. What is the root of bad *middos*? There are several parts to this matter.

4a) The “Kings of Edom” - The earliest root of bad *middos* is depicted in the words of a *Midrash* about the “kings of Edom” who ruled before the creation of this world. These “kings of Edom” are the roots of all evil, as explained in *sefarim hakedoshim*.²⁶

When Hashem had the “first thought” to create the Jewish people before creating the world, the bad *middos* rooted in these “kings of Edom” were already in place, and every Jew’s soul received some of these bad *middos* differently. Part of a person’s self-work is to uproot the bad *middos* that have become part of his soul makeup [which will be referred to here as the negative character traits that have become of one’s “soul root”], which came from the “kings of Edom” that preceded Creation, and for this reason, each person has a unique self-work when it comes to his *middos*.

4b) The Eitz HaDaas - In addition to this factor, every soul was once part of Adam’s soul, and once Adam sinned by eating of the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) which was a mixture of good and evil, the bad *middos* in every soul expanded, becoming an even more complex presence in the soul.

For this reason, every soul that is reincarnated throughout several lifetimes contains these two roots of bad *middos*: The bad *middos* that it inherited since before creation, and the evil which latched onto it ever since the sin of Adam.

²⁶ cited in the Zohar, and elaborated upon in sefer Etz Chaim shaar Derushei HaNikkudim and in shaar Sheviras HaKeilim

4c) Previous Lifetimes – In addition to the above two factors, for every lifetime that the soul goes through on this world, it has accumulated more and more of this evil, until its current lifetime today.

Thus, there are three general parts to the bad *middos* found in every soul. There is the evil it inherited from a point that was before Creation, the evil it inherited from the sin of Adam when he ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, and all of the evil that has piled up from each of the lifetimes that the soul has gone through.

5. Fire-of-Fire: The Power To Change Middos

We can now reflect about the following. Each person’s soul has a certain “boundary” placed on his particular bad *middos*, at their root. However, a person can either enlarge or lessen this “boundary” – he can change it. Although these are two opposite abilities, they are both rooted in the same idea: The fact that a bad *middah* can be changed. What is the root force that can change a *middah*? It is essentially the particular kind of honor which stems from **fire-of-fire**, which breaks bounds.

The word “*middos*” is from the word *medidah*, “measurement”, because the *middos* are each limited and within certain boundaries. What is the idea of breaking those boundaries? One way how the boundaries of the *middos* are broken is through the power of “*medameh*”, the imagination, which is also related to the word “*middah*”. The *medameh*/imagination can expand the bounds of a *middah*, and that is one way of how the bounds of a *middah* are crossed. Another force which can break bounds stems from within the *middos* themselves: The trait of honor, and in particular, honor that stems from fire-of-fire.

The force of *medameh*/imagination does not stem from within the *middos*, whereas honor (fire-of-fire) does, and it is a force that breaks the boundaries of the *middos* from within the *middos* themselves.

In honor, we can see how there is a character trait that can break its own bounds. It can ‘break’ the bounds of a character trait either through **enlarging** the boundary/limitation placed upon one’s *middos*, or it can ‘break’ the boundary of the character trait by **lessening** the boundary/limitation placed upon that particular character trait.

6. Using “Fire-of-Fire” – The Power To Change Limitations – As A Way To Fix Our Middos

Based upon the above, we can now proceed to understand the following. The root of our task to improve our *middos* is not to work with the *middos* directly. This is because *middos* are not just *middos* per se. Rather, Hashem has made it that *middos* can be changed, and it is honor/fire-of-fire which is the root of this change. Thus, the root of working on our *middos* is the power we are describing here: Fire-of-fire, which is the power we can use to change our *middos*.

7. *The Three Areas of Character Improvement*

We can now understand a root, fundamental aspect in all of our inner *avodah*.

The power to enlarge the boundaries/limitations of any of the *middos* began with the sin of Adam. Chazal state that when Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, he said, “I ate, and I will eat again.”²⁷ In other words, he continued to want to go past his limits. Every soul in this lifetime as well has this nature of “I will eat again”. Before Creation, there was the raw state of our *middos*, which contained evil that were inherited from the kings of Edom. After the sin of Adam, an additional aspect of evil entered the soul, of breaking bounds. Every lifetime of the soul since then has seen additional aspects of evil which were added onto it. In any case, however, a *middah* can be changed.

Improving an impaired *middah*, at its very essence, in its raw state, can only be worked upon if a person accesses the **root of the soul**. Most people cannot work on their *middos* on a foundational level even if their current lifetime, but the truth is that there are three stages of *middos*, as we have explained here, and one needs to work on all of them: (1) The bad *middos* found at the soul root of a person, (2) The bad *middos* which entered the soul after the sin of Adam, and (3) The bad *middos* which have been accumulated on his soul throughout all lifetimes.

8. *The Depth of Character Improvement*

That is why working on *middos* is such a massive task, and this concept is not known to most people. We are describing here the essence of all bad *middos*. When a person is not clear of the difference between the bad *middos* of his soul root and the bad *middos* that became added onto him since the sin of Adam, he won't be clear of what his *avodah* is, with regards to working on his *middos*.

If a person only has a superficial perspective, he will not care what the difference is. But there is a vast difference between these two groups of bad *middos* in the soul. There is the bad *middah* itself, and there is the “expanded” version of the bad *middah*, which became added onto the soul later, after the sin of Adam. If a person only removes the “expanded” version of the bad *middah*, he doesn't succeed in removing the bad *middah* itself, at its essence.

We are dealing here with a concept that pertains to the roots of all our *avodah*, and although these are very deep and subtle words, we should learn about it at least on an intellectual level, so that we can have a better understanding of our task in working on our *middos*, at least once in our life. The difference between the task of working on our root bad *middah*, with working on the “expanded version” of the root bad *middah* which only came later upon our soul, is as follows.

²⁷ *Beraishis Rabbah* 19:12

9. *Three Models of the Stages of Character Improvement*

There are several different terminologies that describe our *avodah* with regards to fixing our *middos*.

According to one model, our *avodah* is divided between two levels: *is-kafya* (“forcing”), and *is-hap-c’ha* (“transforming”).²⁸ In different terminology, these two concepts are divided between three stages: *hachna’ah* (subjugation), *havdalah* (separation), and *hamtakah* (sweetening).²⁹ In a third terminology, these three stages are called “*kevishah*” (conquering) and “*tikun*” (rectification) of the *middos*.³⁰ That terminology is used by Reb Yisrael Salanter³¹, and that is the terminology we will use here.

10. “Conquering” and “Rectifying” a Negative Character Trait

The power to “conquer” a bad *middah* is when the essence of the bad *middah* remains as it is, but a person controls it and tames it, putting restraint on it. The negative character trait is still there in a potential state, but the person has it under control, so that isn’t causing problematic behavior. He has self-control over the bad *middah*, even though the bad *middah* is still there. A deeper level than this is to be able to “rectify” the *middah*, to transform it from an evil trait to a good trait.

Reb Yisrael Salanter says that in a person’s youth, one has these two abilities, to “conquer” and “rectify” a bad trait, but in old age, a person no longer has the task to “conquer” the bad *middah*, but to “rectify” the bad *middah*. He explained that this is because when a person is younger, he is more energetic and therefore he has more self-control over himself, so that is the time to engage in “conquering” the bad character traits.

Understandably, this is only true for someone who works on himself to uncover this power. But, relatively speaking, when a person is more energetic, he has stronger self-control over his character. In old age, a person has less self-control over his character, and the traits which he had control over when he was younger will now come out in full force, in old age.

Why does it suddenly explode outward? The *middah* remained as it was all along. It has only been restrained until now, and now that the person can’t restrain himself as much, the bad *middah* breaks out again in full force. But if someone already reached the stage of “*tikkun*” on his *middos*, he has fixed the *middah* at its root, and he has transformed it from bad to good, so when old age arrives, it remains fixed. That is why *tikun hamiddos* in old age is more difficult, because it involves *hamtakah* (“sweetening”) or *tikkun* (repair) of the *middos* (for one who reaches this stage in old age).

28 *Sefer Tanya*

29 *Baal Shem Tov*

30 Editor’s Note: *The Rav* has explained here the last two stages of character improvement according to Reb Yisrael Salanter, which are *kevishah* (conquering the negative trait), followed by *tikun* (rectification of the character trait). The first level of overcoming negative traits, explained by Reb Yisrael Salanter, is known as “*shvirah*” – “breaking”.

31 *Ohr Yisrael*: 30

11) It Is Easier To Improve “Extended” Negative Character Traits Than To Improve The Negative Character Traits of the Soul’s Root

To understand this deeply – and I will repeat and emphasize that this is one of the deepest points to know about the task of working on *middos* – we mentioned that there are two different kinds of *middos* to improve. There is one kind of inner work in which we can improve a bad *middah* at its root, and there is a separate work to improve the additional aspects of evil that have been added onto the soul.

These are two totally different kinds of inner work. It is much easier to separate from evil that has become attached to the soul which was not part of the original soul makeup of the person, because this evil was not always a part of one’s soul and therefore it is somewhat less difficult to remove. This is not to say that it’s easy, of course, but it is far less difficult than working to improve the bad *middah* that has always been a part of one’s soul root.

The negative *middah* itself, which has always been part of one’s soul root, is part of one’s unique task on this world. It is part of one’s unique soul root, and one has received specific negative traits to fix, and this “package” that he has received has been turned into a part of his very being, as it were.

The truth is that this only relative, because if one has reached deeper parts in himself than his “*middos*”, his root negative characters are not a part of his being. But since we exist on the plane of “the world of *middos*”, the root negative character traits in oneself are perceived as part of one’s very being. That is why it is very, very difficult to remove these negative traits.

It is therefore possible that a person is heavily involved in character improvement, but he is unaware of the concepts here and therefore he does not recognize the design of his soul properly. What will happen? He will very likely be working only to improve the “additional” negative character traits which have accumulated on his soul, but he is not working with the root negative character trait, which is the main part of his inner work.

The inner way to live life and to fulfill one’s personal duty on this world is to reach one’s root negative trait, the very core and essence of the negative *middah* itself. This is the main aspect of one’s duty on this world to change his character, which one must work hard at. One who is not dealing with this part in himself is not really working with the core of his negative character traits, but with various other additional aspects in his character, which do not represent his main inner work on this world.

12. How “Higher Honor” is the Root of Change

Based upon the above, let’s understand the following.

The power to change a negative trait (which we have described here as the power to break a boundary/limitation) includes the additional aspects of evil which have accumulated upon the soul (as mentioned earlier, there are three stages of the negative character traits: the raw state of the soul,

the evil that came upon the soul after the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, and the evil that has accumulated upon the soul from all of its lifetimes). As explained, these aspects of evil can all be conquered through using the power to break bounds, the honor that stems from fire-of-fire. The power to change/break bounds can either enlarge or lessen the bound.

This is where the depth of life lays in. It is explained in *Igros Ramchal* that the purpose of the entire Creation, and man's personal task in his lifetime, is to recognize the truth of the Creator's existence. The power to change one's *middos* is really through the power of honor. Honor is a force that descends from the upper, Heavenly realms onto the lower realms. That is why honor can change things on the lower realm: because it comes from a higher realm.

As an example, Chazal state that the evil inclination of man gets stronger every day and wants to destroy him, and if not for Hashem's help, man cannot overcome it.³² How indeed does Hashem help a person overcome it? Simply speaking, it is *siyata d'shmaya* (assistance from Heaven). True, but how does this *siyata d'shmaya* work? One of the fundamental ways of understanding this is through the revelation of honor in one's soul. The honor, which comes from a higher realm, can change one's reality on this lower realm.

This is also the depth of honoring parents. When the son honors the father, this can change the spiritual level of the son, allowing all of the father's *chinuch* (education) to have a positive result on the son. If the son does not honor the father, the father's *chinuch* on his son cannot have a full effect on the son, and the son won't be able to gain from it. The father needs to sometimes punish the child, because that way, the child is enabled to honor the father and accept his as authority, and through this honor, the father's *chinuch* on the child can then have a positive effect on the child.

This is also the depth of honoring one's *rebbe*, who teaches the student and who brings him to eternal life in the World To Come. Through honoring one's *rebbe*, one is brought to the Torah, which is also called *kavod*/honor. Torah scholars are also called *kavod*. Through honoring the level that is above you (parent or teacher), you receive a power from a higher realm that is now exposed within you, and herein lays the depth of changing one's *middos*.

13. The Root Perspective of Approaching Character Improvement

If you understand what we are implying here, it brings a huge overhaul to how you view working on your *middos*.

Usually when people want to work on their *middos*, they will want to work on uprooting their anger, or their lustful desires, or their conceitedness, etc. If you recognize anyone who tries to do this, you know that they almost never succeed at uprooting the negative trait, and they can barely even fight it at all. This is because we cannot transform a negative character trait if we do not receive a power from the higher realm for this.

³² *Succah 52a*

Perhaps we can “fight” or “conquer” the negative trait somewhat, because we can all attain some level of self-control (and this, too, requires *siyata d’shmaya*). But we cannot rectify or overturn a negative trait totally, unless we receive the power to change a trait. The power to change oneself does not come from persistently trying to improve oneself, like water dripping on a rock. That is not how it works. Real, permanent change only comes from receiving a power from a higher realm.

The Rambam describes all of the *middos* as “*Hilchos De’os*”, because the inner essence behind all of the *middos* is *de’os*, “perspectives.” Each of the *de’os* is a revelation of the “honor” of one’s holy intellect (for the holy intellect is the intellect of the Torah, and Torah is called *kavod*/honor), which descends into the heart (and the numerical value of the Hebrew word for heart, *lev*, is *kavod*).

The power to change the inner essence of *middos* is not simply through trying to use our mind to control our emotions, which is a war of conquering and fighting the negative character traits. That is needed too, but the final stage of overcoming negative character traits is *tikkun*/rectifying, or *hamtakah*/sweetening, which is only possible through receiving a power from the higher realm, which can change the lower realm.

The power to change one’s inner character, from within, is through the revelation of the “higher honor” – the holy intellect of the Torah.

14. Studying the Wisdom of the Middos vs. Actively Trying to Uproot Them

Therefore, we can understand that there is an awesome depth contained in our inner work of improving our *middos*.

If you look at most of the statements of our Sages and our holy *sefarim* about *middos*, you will see that most of it does not deal with how to actively overcome the *middos*. Rather, their words are mainly dealing with a conceptual definition of each of the *middos*. From that understanding, one is then able to work on improving his *middos*. They first studied the definition of the particular *middah* and from there, they could settle the matter upon their hearts and thereby overturn/rectify the *middah*. (This was not the approach in every single case, but it is the approach in most of their words).

You can see this apparent in *sefer Nesivos Olam* of the Maharal, which describes the definition of each of the *middos*, and the purpose of this approach is to first study the intellectual definition of the *middah* and then internalize the knowledge upon the heart. But even in other works of our leaders, such as *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*, where this is not as apparent to the untrained eye, this is also the approach. The *Mesillas Yesharim* is providing the inner definitions behind the *middos*, and when a person studies them well, he can thereby change his *middos*. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz and others said that *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* contains all of the Ramchal’s secret wisdom of the Torah. Thus, *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* is really a *sefer* about a certain *chochmah*, a deep wisdom, and studying this wisdom leads to change in one’s character.

15. Becoming Aware To The Concept of Higher Honor – And Its Importance

Here we are explaining that the depth behind all change is contained in the particular kind of honor which stems from “fire-of-fire”, the power that breaks bounds. When this power is used for evil, a person will continuously pursue honor and prestige from honorable individuals. But this power is used for holiness when one uses it to rectify his character traits, for the entire power to change one’s *middos* is through revealing a power from a higher realm within the reality of this lower realm.

We really cannot change our *middos* based on any of the powers found on this lower realm. All change can only be enabled through a power from above. We cannot change simply from within our own power. Rather, we can only change when we receive a power from above, from a higher realm. The ability to change our *middos* therefore is not possible from within the *middos* themselves. The power that can change the *middos* is through the concept of honor of fire-of-fire which we have explained here. Upon understanding this, we can now realize that in order to change our *middos*, we first need to open our souls to what the concept of honor is.

When a person remains at a superficial level, he may attempt to reach his personal duty on this world through simply studying Gemara and through learning *halachah*. But when one has the deeper perspective, from studying the words of our Sages about these matters, he is aware that recognizing the glory of Hashem on this world is the central aspect of life. (On a deeper level, there is the very essence (*atzmityus*) of Hashem, which is above His *kavod* glory).

The concept of the *kavod* glory of Hashem is at the very core of character improvement and inner work. On the highest level, one recognizes the glory of Hashem on the world, and on a personal level, one understands that this higher honor can change his own character.

Thus, the way to go about our inner work is not through simply recognizing our individual *middos* as they are, but through recognizing and studying the definition of the root of *middos*, which is essentially the “higher honor” that descends from the higher realm onto our lower realm. The more a person connects to the concept of recognizing the glory of Hashem on this world, and through connecting to the concept of higher honor as the root power that can change his *middos* on a core level, he receives the deep power which can change his *middos* on a very deep level.

The more a person expands his mind [through the study of Torah] and he becomes more aware of what “higher honor” is and its role in his life, he will be able to have more control over the emotions in his heart, for as mentioned earlier, the numerical value of the Hebrew word for “heart”, “*lev*”, is “*kavod*”, honor.

16. Higher Honor Is The Design of Creation – And Is The Root Power That Enables Change

To most people who read and hear this, these words will seem like a closed riddle. Most people hearing these words will wonder: What is the connection between the *avodah* of recognizing the

concept of higher *kavod*/honor, with our *avodah* of changing our *middos*? What do these two concepts have to do with each other?

However, for this, we can turn to the verse, “*All has been created in My Name, and for My glory, I created it.*”³³ Thus, the very “blood” that runs throughout the design of Creation is the “glory” of Hashem, the “honor”, which results from the Creation. That is why anything in this Creation can only be changed from the “honor” that results from it.

From a superficial perspective, all we see is many different negative *middos* which need to be changed, and we do not see how the concept of *kavod* contains the key to changing all of the *middos*. But when we understand more about the depth of the design of our life, since “*All has been created in My Name, and for My glory*”, all of this Creation must result in “honor”, and this is also the reason why the very *neshamah* (soul) of all of Creation is defined as the *kavod*/honor in Creation.

Therefore, it is only *kavod* (higher honor) which can change anything, for everything in Creation is for the purpose of revealing the higher *kavod* of Hashem’s glory upon the Creation. This higher *kavod* is what moves all of Creation, and that is why the power of *kavod* in our own soul is the power that can change everything.

17. In Conclusion

Thus, in summary, in order to simply fight and overcome negative traits, we can do this by working with our *middos* directly, but if we want to overturn/rectify/sweeten the negative traits, we can only do so through accessing the soul’s power of higher *kavod*/honor.

We explained that this is used on an evil level when one uses the “fire-of-fire” in his soul, which we have begun to explain about in this chapter, and this is somewhat restrained by the “earth” aspect of fire-of-fire. But when we use this power on a holy level, it is the ability to change all of our *middos*, for it is the very inner essence behind all of the *middos*, and it is the core of how they are rectified.

³³ *Yeshayahu 43:7*