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## Fixing Your Focus - 012 Staying Goal Centered

### *Fire-of-Wind: Movement Without Direction*

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to discuss the power of focus. In this lesson we will discuss focus-related issues which stem from **fire-of-wind**. Wind is the force of movement, and fire, which we will explain more about in the coming chapters, is an unruly force which skips and jumps. Therefore, **“fire-of-wind”** is when a person moves unpredictably in any of the four directions.

When **fire-of-wind** is repaired through the element of earth\stability, one's movements are given direction. But when **fire-of-wind** is impaired, one's wind is moving him in a certain direction and his fire causes his movements to skip and jump, so he will keep changing directions.

To illustrate the idea, when a fire breaks out and people are trying to contain the fire, the firemen can predict where the fire will go, and slowly learn how to contain the fire. But if the fire is in a windy environment, there is no way to predict where the fire will spread to, because the wind can spread the fire in any directions. That is why outdoor fires can be very difficult to extinguish. The wind sends the fire in any of the directions and it is difficult to contain it anywhere.

When one's wind\movement is guided towards a certain direction, this is the stable movement of **earth-of-wind**, and when one's wind movement is churning in any of the directions with nothing to guide the directions of the movements, these movements are a result of **fire-of-wind**.

Now let us see how this affects one's ability to focus. When one's element of wind\movement is out of control, this will prevent him from being serene, as explained in previous lesson. However, it is still possible for a person to stabilize his movements, if he is guiding and directing his movements. But when one has impaired **fire-of-wind**, not only won't he be serene, but his soul also becomes totally scattered due to the many different directions of his movements.

The wind can move in any of the four directions, but as long as one's wind doesn't combine with his fire, his wind won't scatter him. But when one's fire combines with his wind [generally, fire and wind is a detrimental combination], the jumpy nature of fire causes his wind to 'scatter' him throughout all of the four directions. This destructive combination is the impaired **fire-of-wind**, which causes a person to move from one direction to another and then suddenly switch directions.

### *The Person Who Suddenly Switches His Direction, Goals, or Interests*

Bringing this all down to a practical level, we find that when people make various switches in their life, some people will make only minor switches, whereas others will switch directions more drastically.

Most people, if they are asked what they aspire for in life, will give general, superficial answers that are sparse, such as wanting to be happy, to be financially secure, and to have good children. But these are not defined as having goals in life, because they are very general, and they are things which all people want.

Others are more focused on attaining specific goals. A person may want to get a certain job, another wants to marry a certain kind of spouse, and another wants to own a house. These goals are more specific, and one with this kind of goal is much more focused on getting he wants.

When a person wants to get himself a job, can we say that this is called being focused, or not? Some people will want any job, as long as they can keep it. Similarly, there are those who will say that they want to own any kind of house, no matter what the house is like, as long as they can get a roof over their heads. In any of these scenarios, there is no specific goal, and it is just that the person is looking for something that gives him permanence.

Most people cannot name any specific goals that they want in life. Some people can get a little more specific with their goals, and a fewer amount can more precisely name what their goals are. But the actual amount of people that can truly name any specific goals they have, are very few.

When a person has many general kinds of aspirations, which are not specific goals, he is more likely to suddenly change directions in his life. If he has certain specific goals, the less likely he is to suddenly switch his goals. If he has many different general goals in life, it is more likely that he will suddenly lose focus on attaining his current goal and he will switch it for a different goal. He will start one project and suddenly moves onto a different one. This is impaired movement that comes from **fire-of-wind**.

When most people choose to make certain transitions in their life, the switch is not that major. For example, a person may have intended to go to a wedding, and instead he abandons the wedding and he goes shopping instead. This is not such a major switch of plans. (In some instances, though, this can be a serious issue, if a person leaves his house to take care of a certain errand and he is always changing his mind to do something else. We are not discussing such serious issues here.) Others, though, will make more extreme switches in their life. They change their major life goals, and they will make the transition very suddenly. They suddenly shift their thinking patterns, and as a result, they begin to pursue different interests than what they were doing until now.

When a person suddenly switches directions like this, it impairs his focus. He is not focused for that long on attaining a certain goal or interest, because he suddenly switches to a different goal or interest. He begins one project and suddenly starts another project, abandoning the first project. He begins to learn a certain section of Gemara, and a week later he's off to a completely different page of Gemara. Even if he doesn't actually make these switches, as long as he is prepared to quickly switch his plans like this so often, it damages his sense of stability and thereby impairs his focus, because he never wants to be permanently involved with anything.

That is all a description of impaired **fire-of-wind**.

*Example - The Irresponsible Worker Who Will Take Any Job*

Here is an example.

There are advertisements for people who are seeking jobs, and the advertisement says "Seeking Worker", for all kinds of different jobs. Usually the people that take any job offer that comes their way are not that focused on what they want in life, and they have probably gone through all kinds of difficult circumstances in their life that have prevented them from seeking a job that is really more

suitable for them, and instead they suffice for any kind of job. If a yeshiva student isn't succeeding in yeshivah and he finds himself "burnt out" of his studies, he is vulnerable to take any job that comes his way, whether it involves working for Torah institution or a more secular kind of job. In most of these cases, the person who takes the job cannot name any specific goals that he has in his life.

Often this kind of person is not on time to work, he doesn't have a set schedule throughout his day, he wastes his time at night, and he doesn't wake up on time. When he gets paid, he doesn't know how to budget properly and instead he wastes his money on frivolous things. He doesn't pick up his phone even though he knows that he has important phone calls coming to him and even though he is risking losing his job, perhaps because he thinks that even if he gets fired, he'll find a better job or a job that pays better....

There are all kinds of issues that can result from this irresponsible nature. This kind of person has no permanence or stability in his life. Their entire life lacks stability. Contrast this with a person who is pursuing the medical field, and he is studying for 7 years in order to become a doctor. He is much more focused than the person who takes any job that comes his way. He invests a lot of time and money into it, he works his entire schedule around this goal in order for it to happen, so he is generally more stable.

### *1. Leading A Purposeful Life: Having Goals*

Hashem created this world for a purpose, and on our own level, our actions must be purposeful as well. The secret of success in life, and especially when it comes to becoming more focused, is to be purposeful in our actions. In whatever one is doing, one must always know the purpose of what he is doing, the goal of where he wants to get to.

Hashem has created our life on this world with a purpose to it, and that purpose should be the root of all our goals. We must be aware of it, because it is the greatest purpose of our life. After that, we should become aware of all other major goals in our life, which, although not being our main purpose in life, are still important. And after knowing what our major goals are, we must also become aware of what our smaller goals in life are. Whatever we are in the middle of doing, we must know the purpose of it.

The first thing we must consider, as mentioned, is the greatest purpose of our life. We should all think: What do we want to look like at the end of our life? How do we plan to get there? After that we should contemplate our other goals in life and how we plan on getting to them. And in whatever we are involved with at the moment, we need to think what the goal of it is, where we want to get to, and what the step after that will be.

Understandably, this kind of thinking will not be constructive for a person if he is delusional about his goals in life. With a dominant imagination, a person's aspirations and goals are unrealistic. But if a person is more truthful, he is more aware of his capabilities and his limitations, and he can be more realistic about his goals, so he will be able to think about his goals and how he plans to get there. This is the depth of the power of focus – it is about knowing exactly where you want to get to in life.

Of course, a person cannot be clear about any path he is taking in life, and he cannot know what will happen or how things will turn out. In spite of this, a person can become goal-oriented and he can know exactly where he wants to get to in life. The more a person thinks about "Where do I want to get to?" the less his soul will be scattered.

### *2. The Power of Returning to a "Beginning Point"*

Additionally, there is another kind of thinking one can utilize, which is the true depth contained in the

power of focus. [First we will outline the concept and then see how it applies practically].

Hashem created a point of *raishis* (the beginning), *acharis* (end), and the middle point which is between the beginning and end. In the beginning point and end point of Creation, everything is one unit, but in the middle point, which is between the beginning and end points of Creation, everything is scattered. At first, in the beginning state of Creation, Hashem was one and His Name was one<sup>[1]</sup> [1], and at the end of Creation as well, Hashem will be one and His Name will be one. Currently, we are in the middle point, which is called the *alma d'piruda*, the "world of disparity", where everything is scattered.

Now we shall see how this concept applies to our own souls. In order for one to avoid the state of being "scattered" in his soul, he can either connect to his beginning point, the *raishis*, where everything is one; alternatively, he can connect himself to his end point, the *acharis*, where everything is one. If one is neither connected to his *raishis*\beginning or *acharis*\end, he is left in the middle point, where everything is scattered. In contrast to this, one who is connected to both his *raishis*\beginning and *acharis*\end is in a truly focused state, because he is strongly connected to a state of oneness.

Let us now see this applies to us on a practical level. Whenever we begin something, we begin with a small point, which can later expand into to become one-dimensional (length), two-dimensional (width), or three-dimensional (depth). The small point we begin with may later become "scattered", after it has expanded into any of the dimensions. Therefore, every person needs to identify his "beginning point", the point he began with, as well as his "end point", the goal he is trying to get to. This is how one can navigate his way through the middle point, which is a scattered state.

In terms of our Sages, this is referred to as "Know from where you come (from a rotten droplet), and to where you are going."<sup>[2]</sup> [2] Generally, to "Know from where you come" means that we come from a rotten droplet, as the Mishnah states, and "Know to where you are going" refers to our purpose in Creation. But this also applies on a more specific level in our own souls: "Know where you come from" is the power to return to a beginning point, while "Know to where you are going" refers to heading towards an endpoint (goal).

When a person begins pursuing a certain goal, and at some point he becomes "scattered" in a different direction, what can he do to re-gain his focus and get himself back to his original goal? Practically speaking, he should try to return to his beginning, by focusing on what he began to do. This idea applies in many different areas.

Here is an example when it comes to learning Torah. A person is in the midst of learning a certain part of the Gemara and suddenly he feels "lost" in the material. Either his mind feels foggy, or he feels like he doesn't understand or that he isn't absorbing it. What can he do? He should begin reviewing the Gemara from the beginning. By returning to the "beginning point" before all the "scattering" began, one regains his focus. When one returns to the beginning point of whatever he was involved with, he finds the depth of the power to focus.

In whatever a person is doing, every so often he should return to the beginning. A person can also take this concept further and give inner order to his soul, by setting aside some time in order to focus and concentrate on his life, from the earliest point he remembers, until the current day. Of course, one cannot remember every detail that transpired in his life. Rather, one can try remembering the general course of his life, from the beginning of his life until today. One can remember: "What was I like when I began my life, and how did I get to where I am today?"

This power of returning to the beginning provides a deep ability to focus\concentrate. This is one side

of the coin, however – soon we will mention the other side of the coin to this. We have been brief in explaining about it, but it is **the root of focusing**: to keep returning to the beginning of what you were doing.

### 3. Connecting To Your End Point (Purpose\Goal)

The other side of the coin is the ability in a person to connect to his *acharis*, his end point. By reminding yourself of where you are headed towards, this also places you in a state of oneness, which thereby improves your focus, just as connecting yourself to a beginning point places you in a state of oneness and thereby improves your focus.

As mentioned earlier, there is the greater goal of our life, and there are also smaller, sub-goals of our life [which aid us in reaching the greater goal of our life]. Firstly, a person needs to clarify the main purpose of his life, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* states, that the purpose of life is for a person to become attached with Hashem. In addition to this, one also needs to be aware of the smaller goals of our life. For example, Shabbos is the purpose of the weekday.

One should therefore always be aware of his goals, in whatever he is doing. One should keep reminding himself what his goal is, and then see if he is heading towards his goal or not. If he sees that he has veered off course, he should re-align himself with his goal. This is what it means to live a life of focus. He is headed towards the main purpose of life, and he is also headed towards the various sub-goals of his life, which will aid him in reaching the main purpose of his life.

On one hand, one needs to keep returning to his beginning point, and on the other hand, a person also needs to keep returning to his end point, by reminding himself of his goals.

This lessens the “scattering” of his movements which is caused by impaired **fire-of-wind** in the soul, and in turn, he lessens the jumpy movements of his soul which had been sending him in different directions. **Fire-of-wind** scatters a person’s movements, and a person unifies his movements by returning to his beginning and end points.

### 4. Avoiding Drastic Changes Along The Way

There is one more point here which one needs, though, in order to repair **fire-of-wind**. The main purpose of life is to become attached to Hashem, and if one succeeds in focusing on this great purpose of our life, he is deeply focused on his root, but, practically speaking, is there a clear-cut way for a person to reach the state of attachment with Hashem?

There are people who have gone through so many different paths of serving Hashem since their youth, and every time you meet them, they have a new path, or they are looking for a new approach, in how to reach closeness with Hashem. They have no guidance, and they keep looking for new ways. If a person takes one certain path for a long amount of time, or even if he takes two or three different paths for a steady amount of time, this is a more stable approach. But the problem is when a person becomes “scattered” throughout so many different paths of serving Hashem. His goal is to reach his greatest purpose, which is to become close and attached with Hashem, but long before he gets there, he can become very scattered [and mixed up] throughout the many different paths he may take.

For this reason, we mentioned earlier that it is important for a person to have sub-goals in life. This lessens all of the “scattering” that takes place in the “middle point” between one’s beginning point and end point. However, this doesn’t totally solve the issue of becoming “scattered”, because it is still possible for a person to become “scattered” throughout the many different sub-goals he has in his life. So we will emphasize here that this is not a complete solution.

Therefore, besides for returning to one's beginning point and end point, one also needs to avoid making drastic changes in his life, in whatever sub-goal he is involved with. For example, if a person takes upon himself a resolution in order to get closer to his goal (where it is the main goal of life, or even a sub-goal), even if he discovers that he was in error about the specific sub-goal he was seeking, like if he has discovered a more truthful goal, he still shouldn't give up his current resolution. He should try sticking to his resolution for another 2 months, even though he realizes that he made it in error and that he had been making a major mistake in his *avodas Hashem*.

The gain of this is that he avoids making a drastic change in his life that would uproot his stability. In doing so, he maintains his stability. If he makes a major change in his path of *avodas Hashem* as soon as he realizes he was mistaken about something, the problem is that he will lose the idea of permanence and stability.

There is a power in the soul to always begin anew, but this power is only constructive when it is used correctly. There are people who will always start again anew, when it is too soon to do so. The power of starting anew is used constructively by a sinner who wishes to renew himself and do *teshuvah*, but as a general way of living, a person cannot always be starting again anew, because it scatters the soul, when one is always changing directions. It damages his stability, when he is always opened to drastic making changes.

Therefore, practically speaking, as mentioned before, a person should often return to his beginning point (reminding himself of how he began), his end point (reminding himself of his greater goal in life), and in addition, one also needs sub-goals, and one must be careful to avoid becoming "scattered" within his many sub-goals by not making drastic changes in his life too quickly.

How much time should elapse between one change and another? There is no given time for this. It may take 2 months, or 2 weeks, before one can implement a new change. But a definite rule for this is that a person shouldn't let his mood decide this. Even if he believes on an intellectual level that he needs to make a certain change in his life, he should not implement the change so quickly, and he should hold off on it for a bit of time. Otherwise, he will be so quick to make changes in his life and as a result, he will lose his sense of stability. There must be a certain amount of time that elapses between any changes he makes. So one must firmly decide that he will not implement any changes, even when necessary, until a certain amount of time elapses.

Of course, there are some exceptions to this, and sometimes a person may need to make immediate changes in his life. But as a general rule, one needs to resolve that he will not implement any major changes in his life, unless some time has elapsed.

The gain of this, as explained, is that he will save the stability of his soul, by not making changes so quickly. Even when he realizes he was in error about something, he must not make any changes until a bit of time has elapsed. As for the errors he has made - it is impossible not to make errors in life. At least by avoiding making changes too quickly in his life, he will maintain his soul's stability.

### *Maintaining the Soul's Stability Strengthens the Power of Focus*

Obviously, the words here are only for a more internal kind of person. When a person lives without purpose, and he simply takes life as it comes and he lives by the desires of his *nefesh habehaimis*, most of the words here will not be relevant to him, because he lives superficially.

However, even if a person is living a life on the level of *nefesh habehaimis*, it is still possible to become goal-oriented and to become more focused. Stability enables a person to either succeed in his material goals or in his spiritual goals, because it makes him more focused. But if a person has no

goals at all - neither material or spiritual - he 'moves' in any of the directions, and even if he isn't actually 'moving' in different directions, he has no permanence in his life. Since he has no stability, his soul is vulnerable to be pulled in any direction.

### *Know The Reason Of Why You Made Certain Changes*

As mentioned earlier, in order to apply this idea, one must reflect about his beginning as well as his future. He must look back at his past and see where he has gotten to today, what changes he has made, and what the changes have caused in his life.

I met someone recently who had recently gone through a major change in his life. One day he suddenly stopped the major goal he was pursuing, and he changed courses entirely. I asked him how he came to such a change. He said simply, "I don't know." Others, when asked such a question, will either say that they don't remember, or they will say "Life is complex...", or that they found something better, etc. But some people will say that they simply don't know why they changed courses in life - they simply don't know the reason of why they made such changes in their life.

One must know why he had made certain changes in his life, whether it is a big change or a small change. Even if a person was used to drinking a cup of coffee in the morning, and one day he stops, he must know the reason of why he stopped.

One needs to see if the changes he has made were stable, or if they were unstable. If one realizes that he has made a change which has damaged his stability in life, he will act very differently and he will think twice before he makes another change.

### *Returning Fire-of-Wind To Its Root*

This is also called the soul's power of *teshuvah*, to "return", in the inner sense, of "returning" to the soul to a life of stability. It is a "return" of the element of wind\movement to its root. **Fire-of-wind**, by its very nature, needs to be returned to stability, because it is an unruly force which often takes an off-course direction. One needs to return his "wind", his movements, to their proper direction, by having more stability and permanence (earth) in his life.

### *In Summary and In Conclusion*

In summary, one needs to keep returning to his beginning point, to his end point (as explained in detail earlier), and through being connected to these two states together, he stabilizes his movements of the soul, which makes him more focused. This repairs the unruly force of **fire-of-wind** in the soul.

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**Links**

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