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Earth-of-Water-of-Earth: Contracting After Expanding A Bit

With *siyata d'shmaya* we are continuing to learn about the element of earth, the root of the trait of sadness. In the previous lessons we learned about the sadness which comes from the "earth" within the element of earth. In the next few lessons, we will learn about sadness that comes from "water" within earth. In this lesson, we will begin with sadness that stems from the **"earth" of-water-of-earth**.

As mentioned earlier, the heaviness of earth is the root of laziness, and the dryness in earth is the root of sadness. In the first lesson, we mentioned the concepts of contraction and expansion, and that sadness is associated with contraction, whereas joy is associated with expansion.

Water is an element that can naturally expand. The water can widen beyond where it is. This is the opposite of earth, which is constricted to where it is. Earth is an element that places limitations, and it keeps something in a contracted, constricted state (*tzimtzum*). **Water-of-earth** is when there is expansion applied to contraction – meaning that there is first a constriction, and then an expansion. **Earth-of-water-of-earth** is when there is first contraction, then expansion, and then a return to contraction.

When something stays where it is, this represents death, a still, lifeless state. Sadness is a deathlike state, where there is only constriction, and no expansion. By contrast, movement\expansion represents life and joy. When a person can't move, this is absolute sadness. When a person doesn't feel like he's moving, he is deeply sad in his soul. Non-movement is not just laziness, it is also sadness. Earth causes a person to stay where he is, water causes him to want to expand. This is a contradiction in the soul, when one feels a need to expand past where is, and at the same time, he also wishes to remain in place.

(Movement can either come from water or wind. If the movement manifests as a need to expand, it comes from water, and it comes from a need to change directions, it is coming from wind).

Example 1 - Stuck In A Bad Job

Those with a dominance of impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth** have difficulty when it comes to

“expanding” past where they are. (There is also the opposite kind of problem, where a person is constantly ‘broadening his horizons’, always looking for news to expand past where he is. This is an evil trait which Chazal refer to as the trait of the “widened soul” of Bilaam).

Here we are discussing the kind of person who doesn’t want to expand, even when it is necessary to do so. For example, if a person is working at a job where there isn’t that much growth and he needs to change jobs, or if he really needs to make more money to support his family, or other legitimate reasons, he may be too uncomfortable to make the change. He doesn’t want to ‘expand’ past where he is, even though he needs to.

When a person has more water in himself, he will be able to ‘expand’ past where he is, so he will apply for different jobs, expanding his options. But if he has very little water in his soul, he will not want to leave his old job. Even if he agrees to apply for another job, he will only consider it if he is certain that he can return to his first job in case the new job doesn’t work out. If there is no guarantee that he can keep his first job, he won’t even trying applying for the new job, even though he really needs to leave his first job.

Example 2 - Same Old Household Items

Here’s another example. A person has a table in his dining room since the day he got married, and by now it is old and shaky, and he really needs a new one. He buys a new table and keeps it in the storage room, but he doesn’t use the new table until the first table is absolutely unbearable for use. There are also those who will use even broken plates and utensils their whole life, because they don’t want to try something new. They would rather remain with their broken plates, because that is what they were used to.

If a person has too much earth in his soul, he will not budge even a bit from his old antics. But even if he has some water in his soul and he can expand, he will only expand if he knows that he can return to his original situation. Otherwise, he will not either budge from where he is.

Example 3 - Emotional Dependency On Old Circle of Friends

This can also be a problem on a more emotional level, with regards to friendships. A person may be too tied to his old circle of friends, so he doesn’t want to make new friends. If he is a very social type, he may feel too ‘loyal’ to his previous group of friends, so he may have the problem of never being able to make new friends, because he doesn’t want to disconnect from his previous social circle.

Even if he is willing to form a new circle of friends, he may always want to return to his original circle of friends, and therefore he won’t try that seriously to form new friends, even if he has different circumstances in his life right now where it makes sense for him to part from his old group. He is too afraid of ‘burning his bridges’. He will only make new friends if he knows for certain that he can always return to his old friends, in the case the new circle of friends doesn’t work out for him.

Although he expands a bit, by trying to make new friends, he is only doing so if he knows for certain that he still has his old niche amongst his previous circle of friends. In that sense, he stays somewhat constricted, even as he expands.

This is impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth**. It’s as if “he has one foot outside the door, with one foot inside the door.” He feels that he cannot completely disconnect from his previous situation. This problem has many bearings on different aspects of life, as we have begun to explain and as we will continue to see.

Example 4 - Emotional Dependency On Parents After Marriage

In marriage, the Torah commands, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and he shall cleave to his wife”*. After a person marries, he must become more emotionally attached with his wife, and less with his parents. This doesn't mean of course that a person should completely abandon his parents and friends from until now, just because he has a wife now. He can certainly remain close to his parents and his friends, even after he is married. But some people take it too far. Even after they marry, they will never make the emotional shift of becoming closer to their spouse than they were with their parents. In some cases, a person even makes sure that there is still a room waiting in the house for him, in case he gets divorced.

The person cannot make a disconnection in his soul. The fact that he seems to others as a more 'family-oriented' person, who is very close to his parents, with deeper 'family ties', is just a superficial excuse for this kind of behavior. It is really a problematic situation for his soul, because he cannot part from the situation he grew up in. He is always wishing he could go back to his home. In spite of the fact that the Torah says *“Therefore a man shall abandon his father and mother, and cleave to his wife”*, he feels differently than this....

This is impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth**. The earth keeps him in place, the water allows for some expansion, and the “earth” of his water-of-earth causes him to contract back to his original situation. He takes one step out of his first situation, but he keeps one foot behind him, because he feels like he simply cannot completely disconnect from his first situation. Even when he takes some steps away from his previous situation, he will be easily flustered by any difficulty and he will become full of despair, which makes him want to immediately return to his first situation, wherever his comfort zone was.

Example 5 - Can't Move On To A New Yeshiva\Kolel

Here is an example. A person was learning in a certain place [a *yeshiva* or *Kolel*], and then the need arises for him to switch to a new place. When he goes to learn in the new place, he may encounter some new difficulties. So he quickly leaves and goes back to learn in the first place, even though that place wasn't good for him anymore – and even when he left, he made sure not to 'burn his bridges' there, so that he can return there if he needs to.

If he has a lot of water-of-earth, he can leave behind his first place and perhaps he'll make sure to visit it every so often, to keep up with his friends. He is somewhat dependent and attached to his first place, but at least he can make the disconnection from it. But if a person has a lot of **earth-of-water-of-earth**, he makes sure to 'leave one foot behind' in his first place – he never fully disconnects from it. He is too afraid of completely leaving it, so he will quickly return there if the new place doesn't work, and he even makes sure before leaving his first place that he'll be able to easily return.

Attached To His Comfort Zone

This creates a deep contradiction in his soul. He feels the need to move from his place, and indeed, he takes some steps away, but eventually, he finds himself back in his first place. He simply cannot disconnect, on an emotional level, from his previous situation. Either he will develop a low self-esteem, when he realizes that he keeps failing whenever he tries to make a transition to a new place, or, he will become totally full of despair, when he realizes that he is not able to pull away from a situation even when he knows that he needs to. This 'earth' will dry up any water he has, he won't be able to come out of any place where he is, and he is buried there.

Living in this way creates a very difficult situation for a person. Even if it doesn't cause a person to totally despair, he will be a very unsuccessful person. His will is still active, and he does not want to

become full of despair, so he will keep pushing himself, so that he doesn't fall into despair. But the people around him see that he cannot make any changes in his life, and indeed, he feels like he can't.

So, when he gets used to returning to his comfort zone after he has tried to move away from it, either he may end up in total despair, because he feels like he can never make the necessary changes in his life. Even if he doesn't totally despair, he will still feel like an utter failure, because he knows that he isn't able to make necessary changes in his life. It's all because he is too attached to his comfort zone.

The above examples were extreme cases which aren't that common. When one lives with such an attitude, he is always 'leaving one foot behind' in everything. Even when one tries to move forward and make changes, he might make sure to take a few steps behind him, so that he can remain attached to the first situation.

Here is an example which we can see in children. A child in first grade and at the end of the year it says that he will go to second grade. However the child may wish to remain in the first grade. When he enters second grade he may wish to return to first grade, either because he liked the *rebbe* better, or because he misses his old seat and desk, etc.

This childish perspective may remain in an adult. If a person in adulthood has never graduated from this attitude, he may encounter go through a difficulty in life and then he will recede several steps backward, back to wherever his comfort zone was. His **earth-of-water-of-earth** dominates and causes him to return to his previous situation, even if several years have passed already since he has left it.

A Vicious Cycle of Sadness, Helplessness and Despair

Such a person will never have *menuchah* (serenity) in any place. He will always want to move forward from where he is, but whenever he tries to make any changes in his life, he finds himself quickly running back to his comfort zone. Even after he has begun to move forward, he will take several steps back from where he is, as soon as he encounters difficulty in his new place.

This is also called "*Kaf HaKela*" (an intense form of spiritual suffering, of being 'flung' all over the universe) in the soul, for such a person never finds his place. He has no permanence and he is missing a feeling of stability in his life. That is why he keeps returning to his previous situation, to wherever his comfort zone was. (If he is too embarrassed to return to his previous situation, he may take to the streets. Such a person is like Kayin, who was cursed with having to wander the earth.

When a person has no place where he can feel permanence in, this leads him into despair. Simply speaking, he will feel despair because he sees that he is constantly unsuccessful wherever he is. But there is a deeper reason for his despair. It is because he can't find any *menuchah* in his life. He will find comfort only in his despair! His feelings of despair then become like his comfort zone to him, because it is the only the familiar feeling he knows of that he can always return to....

The earth contains dryness, and it also contains heaviness. When one despairs, this can come from an increase of "dryness" in his element of earth, but it can also come from the "heaviness" of his earth. Part of the reason for despair is that a person wishes for permanence and serenity, and he feels too 'heavy' inside himself to make a new move and find his place, and as a result, he despairs.

When one is always 'leaving one foot behind' when trying to move forward, he never finds permanence in any place, and this causes him to feel despair in the depths of his soul. The despair is even comforting to him, because it feels familiar to him. It is very unfortunate that this is where he finds his serenity, but sadly, this is the only "comfort" that he knows of.

We have described the problem of impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth**: when one is always returning to his comfort zone, after he has tried to take a few steps away from it (contraction that comes after a bit of expansion).

The Solution

The way to repair this issue is as follows. The idea will be the same, but it can be described from a few different angles.

1 - Before Transitioning, Think About It Sensibly

Part of the issue here is that a person often moves too much, or that he transitions to a place where he doesn't find permanence in. If a person would make only a small move and not a major move, or if he would find permanence in his new place, there is far less of a chance that he will want to return to his previous comfort zone.

In most cases, though, the new move doesn't work out as he thought it would. He thought the new place would be better, he thought the new school was better for his children, etc., and now he finds out otherwise. The problem was that he lacked clarity about what he was doing. He didn't think it through enough, before making his move.

So before a person makes a new move, he should first try to gain clarity about the new situation he wants to enter. He should think about it carefully, before he makes the change. Most changes that people are done with a lack of awareness, and from being out of touch with reality. People often rely on false kind of trust, a blind faith, and they think that when they encounter a problem, they'll deal with it then. Instead, a person should think about what the new move may entail, and how he will deal with any of the problems that may arise.

2 - Maintaining Some 'Expansion'

Additionally, when a person tries moving forward or embarking on a new endeavor, or moving to a new place, etc. and then he sees that the new plans aren't working out, he should try to keep moving forward just a bit, even if he won't be making the full adjustment to the new plans. Once he has begun to move out of his previous situation, he shouldn't completely disconnect from his new move. In this way, one allows himself to keep expanding, and he doesn't put a stop to his expansion once he has begun to expand. He allows some of the expansion to continue, even though he isn't completely moving forward.

When one makes sure to maintain expansion, by trying to move forward from his previous situation even a little bit, he acquires joy, because joy comes from expansion. If a person trains himself to continue his movement\expansion and he doesn't put a complete stop to it, even though he is mostly falling back into his comfort zone, he is making sure that he doesn't completely destroy his previous place, and in that way, he keeps his power of expansion intact.

Here is an example of how to work on this idea. A person resolves to *daven* for 40 days at the *Kosel*. After a few days, he sees that he can't keep to his resolution. What does he do? He may start looking for other *segulos* to be involved with, or he may just return to his home then. But instead of abandoning his resolution completely, he can try doing it for one or two more days, even though he knows that he won't be doing it for the full 40 days. The gain of this will be that he will be learning how to continue moving forward, even when he has started to fall back to his comfort zone. He allows himself to keep expanding, and he doesn't completely put a stop to the expansion which he has started.

If a person feels like he can't move forward at all, it is not because he isn't able to - it is only because he doesn't want to, and not that he can't. Any person can take one more step forward from where he is, even if he is mostly falling back into his comfort zone.

In Summary and In Conclusion

In summary, the first step is that whenever a person needs to move into a new place or situation, he should try to make a change that will be smooth, one that he can handle, so he should think about it well, before he makes his new move. He should try to find a place where he will find permanence in, rather than making a rash decision and transitioning into a place he has no idea about. And if he meets up with difficulty and he is tempted to quickly return to his comfort zone, he should try to keep moving a bit forward from his comfort zone, even though he won't be making a total change from it, so that he can continue to have some 'expansion'.

Getting used to this will provide a person with joy, and it lessens the sadness that comes from impaired **earth-of-water-of-earth**.

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