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## Understanding Your Middos - 66 Elevating Our Power of Speech

### ***Wind is the root of a person's speech***

The element of wind in the soul is revealed in two places throughout the body: in one's nose, like when we breathe in and out, and in one's mouth, like when we talk. Also, the very movements of a person come from our element of wind, because wind is the source of movement.

Rav Chaim Vital writes in *sefer Shaarei Kedushah* that the element of wind in the soul is idle conversations (*devarim betailim*), which branch out into five bad *middos*: *chanufah* (flattery), *sheker* (falsehood), *leitzanus* (scoffing), *lashon hora* (gossip) and *mesaper b'shvach atzmo* (bragging). These are not all the same kinds of improper speech; they are four different kinds of evil speech.

A person is called a *ruach memalelah*, a "talking spirit." This shows us that a person is defined by his very power of speech, which comes from the element of wind in the soul - *ruach*. Wind is the driving force behind a person's actions.

### ***Idle conversation: Talking without thinking***

What is idle conversation? It is a kind of speech which serves no purpose. The Vilna Gaon says that all speech is made up of five things: *Ratzon* (will), *Machshavah* (thought), *Hirhur* (reviewing the thought), *Kol* (voice) and *Dibbur* (words). All of our speech goes through this five-step process.

How do we see this? In the ideal way a person talks, first he has a will to talk. Then, he thinks about what he will say (as the Ramban writes in his letter, that a person must think before he talks). Along with this a person thinks in his heart what he will say - as it is written, "I spoke with my heart." After this his voice is heard, and finally, his words come along with his voice.

But when a person just talks mindlessly, his speech is missing one of these factors; therefore, his speech becomes meaningless. This is idle conversation - the root of the bad *middos* which come from the element of wind in the soul.

Moshe has the same numerical value as *Ratzon* (will). Moshe Rabbeinu spoke with the Shechinah; there is a correlation with this. Because Moshe's words came from his true will, he was able to speak with the Shechinah. Only proper speech can be worthy of speaking with the Shechinah.

The proper kind of speech to have is when a person is aware that he needs to have all these five parts

in his speech. All idle conversations come from a lack of awareness to these five parts of our speech: will, thought, reviewing the thought in one's heart, voice and speech.

A person has the ability to be a *ruach memelalah* – to speak with the same *ruach* \wind of Hashem's words, as it is written, "with the wind of His mouth." A person's true kind of speech comes from Hashem's speech; when a person talks, it is a revelation of Hashem's speech. But a person is only a *ruach memelalah* when it resembles the word of Hashem; if it doesn't resemble the word of Hashem, his words are *devarim betailim* – idle speech. Any person's which is not connected to Hashem is *devarim betailim*.

### ***Free will comes from our Wind***

The Vilna Gaon writes that the entire power of *bechira* (free will) that a person has comes from his element of wind. When a person chooses to use his words for either good or evil, he is choosing how he uses his wind. From his words we see that the element of wind is not like the other elements of earth, water and fire. Wind is an entirely different kind of concept from what we are used to; it is the very power of our free will and how we use it.

When a person utilizes his wind in a holy way, it can bring him to have a *d'veykus* to Hashem. When a person misuses his power of speech, it brings him to the opposite of *d'veykus*.

Our speech is rooted in our Ratzon; we speak from our innermost desires. If a person has the right kind of Ratzon – he nullifies his Ratzon to the Ratzon of Hashem, as the Mishnah in Avos states, "Nullify your will to His will", and his speech is holy. But if one's speech doesn't emanate from this kind of Ratzon, then all of his speech is external – it is just lip-service.

Everything in Creation is called a "*dovor*" – a thing. This is because every "thing" comes from the *dvar* (word) of Hashem. If a person's speech doesn't resemble the word of Hashem, his words are like a non-living organism; they don't cause the movement that wind can do.

When a person's words are pointless, he is misusing his element of wind. What is the holy kind of wind?

Talking words of Torah are the kind of words that resemble the word of Hashem. Besides for this, there is a time as well to use speech for holiness – Shabbos, when we cannot talk words that are mundane.

We need to greatly know where our speech emanates from. If we do this, we will come to reach a "*ruach nachon*" – a "proper" *ruach*.

### ***Flattery [דע את מידותיך 067 רוח חנפנים]***

The first kind of improper speech which comes from the element of wind is *chanufah* (flattery).

What is flattery? The Ramban says that when a person flatters someone else with his charming words, he distorts the truth of something. What is the depth of this bad *middah*?

We find that two opposing elements are able to unite sometimes; for example, fire and water, which are opposites, can come together and not oppose each other. When can we see this? In a marriage, fire and water are able to unite in harmony. A man is rooted in the element of water, while a woman is rooted in fire. The elements of wind and earth also oppose each other; wind moves, while earth holds back movement. When can we see earth and wind come together? This is when a person stays permanently in his place; when a person is able to stay put in one place, he is using his earth to

balance his wind-like tendency to move. But when a person's earth and wind are separated from each other, this causes him to be sent from place to place; he has nowhere to stay put.

When a person flatters another person, he is essentially separating wind and earth from each other. How do we see this?

Flattery is to say something that is not how one truly feels in his heart. Flattery distorts the truth; it brings a person's words down from the level of wind to the level of earth, which is essentially a separation between one's wind and one's earth.

Flattery is not a problem with one's mouth. It is really a problem with one's heart—to not be truthful and to say things that aren't in line with what one feels in his heart. When a person flatters another person, he isn't saying what's in his heart; in his words, he seems to convey that he likes the person, but in his heart he really doesn't.

The depth of this bad middah is that a person who flatters others is using his lies as a way to connect to others. He really doesn't want to have the connection with the person he is flattering – he merely wants to show the other person that he wants to connect to him.

From here we see that not only does flattery cause lower a person from the level of wind to the lowly earth, but it also damages one's very element of wind. Flattery takes the element of wind, which is able to be used to connect with others, and literally turns it into earth -- because flattery is to take wind and not use it for connection.

### ***Falsehood [דע את מידותיך 068 רוח שקרנים שורש השקר מהקדושה]***

The second bad middah which comes from improper speech is *sheker* (falsehood). When a person lies, he makes up things that aren't true.

When a person exaggerates, it is called *guzma*; this is a misuse of one's wind, because it is like using wind to spread out information beyond what it really is. Lying is called *badai*, which means "alone" – because when a person lies, he is alone in what he claims. Lying is called *kazav*, which comes from the word *zav* (to flow), because a liar convinces other to flow after and be pulled after his lies.

Another kind of lying is called being "*meshaneh*" – distorting information. The Gemara says that in three instances, it is permissible for a Torah scholar to be *meshaneh* and distort the truth a little: when it comes to how much he knows, when it comes to praising another's hospitality, and when it is for the sake of peace. Why is this permissible only for a Torah scholar? It is because only a Torah scholar is able to see the wisdom in everything, and therefore, he is allowed to distort his words to something else, which will also contain wisdom. Only a true Torah scholar – not just someone who learns and knows a lot of Torah, but one who is connected to the wisdom in everything – knows how to distort information properly.

However, the Baal Shem Tov said that if a person lied even once in his life, he does not have the permission to ever distort the truth, even for the sake of peace.

What is the depth of lying?

When a person lies, he is trying to make something which does not exist to exist. In doing so, he causes a separation in Creation, because he is enabling a non-existing thing to exist, through his lies. In doing so, he allows a lack of unity into Creation.

How does a person correct this bad *middah*? Since he caused a separation and lack of unity in Creation though his lies, he must fix this by instead bringing *achdus* among people. This restores Creation back to its unity -- the opposite of the separation that he caused.

### **Gossip [דע את מידותיך 069 רוח מספרי לשון הרה]**

The third improper kind of speech is *lashon hora* (gossip). When a person slanders another person, he misuses his element of wind. Wind is able to bring things together by moving them together, but a person who speaks *lashon hora* seeks to cause strife between people. He defeats the very power of speech by using his "wind" to cause separation among people, when he could have used his wind to bring people together.

### **Scoffing [דע את מידותיך 070 רוח ליצנות]**

The fourth kind of improper speech is *leitzanus* (scoffing). A person makes fun of others when he belittles others. In doing so, he misuses the element of wind, because by lowering others, he takes wind and lowers it down to the level of earth.

The first person to do this was the Snake. The Snake made fun of Hashem to Chavah; it wanted to belittle Hashem to Chavah in order to get her to eat from the tree.

How can a person fix this bad *middah*? When a person has *leitzanus*, he makes fun of something that is supposed to be serious. The opposite of this is learning Torah, which is to give importance to what is serious.

### **Bragging [דע את מידותיך 071 רוח סיפור בשבח עצמו]**

The last bad *middah* which comes from the element of wind is *mesaper b'shavach atzmo* - when a person brags about himself, in order to make others appear lowly. When a person praises himself to others for this reason, instead of using his wind to uplift others, he belittles them.

How can a person fix this bad *middah*? The depth behind this bad *middah* is that a person exalts himself. He has misused his element of wind to exalt himself, when he could have used it to exalt others.

The way is through the *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents.

When a person honors his parents, he gives importance to that which is supposed to be held in importance. This is when a person listens to his parents' words - when he listens to their words, he exalts who should be exalted - his parents.