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We are in the month of Av, the month of mourning and sadness, which will one day be turned into joy, when we merit it from Hashem. Our *avodah* during the month of Av is two-fold. On one hand, we must know what sadness in the soul is, and then our *avodah* is to transform it into joy. Let us try here with the help of Hashem to understand what the source of sadness is, what the source of happiness is, and how we can leave sadness and enter joy.

A Difference Between The Soul of Men and Women

Since this is being delivered to women, we will try here to mainly discuss this subject in terms of the woman's soul.

First we will need the following introduction. Our Sages reveal that when Hashem created the world, He created it with four elements: fire, wind, water, and earth. A man's soul is mainly comprised of the elements of water and wind, whereas the soul of woman was mainly based upon the elements of fire and earth.

Of course, in general, every soul, man and woman alike, contains the four elements^[1]. A man certainly has fire and earth in his soul, and a woman certainly has water and wind in her soul. But it is just that the man's soul is mainly based upon water and wind, and a woman's soul is mainly based upon fire and earth. Therefore, whenever a woman feels sad, this is either coming mainly from the fire in her soul, or it is mainly coming from the earth in her soul.^[2]

When Chavah sinned by eating of the *Eitz HaDaas*, she was cursed with, "*With sadness shall you bear children*". Women have to endure the mood swings that result from childbirth and pregnancy. There are also other times in a woman's life where sadness becomes dominant. The element of earth is where the sadness in women stems from, and it was activated when Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*. Again, to emphasize, it is either the element of earth or the element of fire which is the main source of a woman's sadness. The sin of Chavah, which brought about the effects of sadness upon childbearing, was only a means to activate the sadness that was already part of her inner makeup.

Let us try to understand how we can see sadness coming from either the element of earth or fire.

Sadness Starts With 'Fire' and Awakens Our 'Earth'

To illustrate the concept, we can reflect into the following. The *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed by fire,

and when we mourn it, we sit on the ground – the ‘earth’. Thus, it is ‘fire’ which plunged us into sadness and mourning, connecting us to the element of earth, similar to how the sin brought about the curse upon mankind, “*You are earth, and to earth you shall return*”. We can imply from this that it is ‘fire’ in the soul which causes us to have a reason to be sad, sending us to the level of the ‘earth’, where the sadness is clearly manifest. So the sadness begins with the element of fire, and it is revealed in the element of earth.

Soon we will explain how sadness can come from the element of earth, but first let’s digest the above concept. Now let us explain, with *siyata d’shmaya*, how exactly the element of fire causes sadness in the soul, and how sadness becomes manifest in our element of earth.

Fire: Destruction and Sadness

Fire destroys. Just like fire destroys physical things, so does the element of fire in our soul, our spiritual fire, tend to be destructive to our own soul. When a person misuses his element of fire, he destroys everything in his path, like a person who feels that nothing is important to him.

You can see this clearly from sad people who complain about everything and are never happy about anything in their life. When a person is sad, he feels that nothing is important to him anymore; nothing can make him happy, because nothing has any value to him. This is how a person uses his spiritual fire to unleash devastation and destruction upon his own soul – just like a very real fire.

We can give a few examples of this. Let’s say you have a person who has five children; four of them are doing well, for the most part, and are generally a source of *nachas* to the parents, but one of the five children is a problematic child, causing the parents much heartache and grief. How does the person look at this situation? Either he can focus on the four good children he does have, or, he will become entirely consumed with sadness and frustration over his problematic child.

Some people feel that they have everything good in their family, because they were born with more of an “*ayin tova*” (a good eye); they naturally adapt a positive outlook on everything. Others weren’t born with such a positive nature, and tend to see their lives mostly in a bad light. But if a person is totally negative about his situation in life, then he is never happy. Nothing has any value to him – even if he has a spouse whom he is happy with and he has been blessed with a large family of children and he has other good things in his life. It is all worthless to him, and it’s all because he is consumed in a particular part of his life which is distressing him.

This is a clear example of when one uses his spiritual fire in his soul to be destructive and it negates everything. Such a person, if he wants to change his outlook, should do some positive thinking every day. He should say to himself, “Did I get up in the morning today? Yes. Am I alive? Yes. Am I married? Yes. Do I have a children? Yes.” And just start with that.

Writing Down a List of What’s Good In Your Life

Let’s give another example: when a person is amidst a stormy marriage. Although this is a problem, the question is: Is the person totally consumed by his problem? How does he look at his life? Does he consider his life to be worthless just because he has this one problem, or does he feel thankful to Hashem at least that he got up in the morning, that he’s alive, that he’s healthy, and that he has a family?

Many times people forget about the good that they do have in their life, and instead focus on the one bad part of their life. People have plenty of good in their life – good health, children, a house, and so many other good things – but because they have one problem, they don’t consider their life to be good in general. This was Haman’s problem. He had almost everything to be happy about, but only

one thing didn't go his way. For this, he said, "*All of it is not worth anything to me.*" Many people feel that way too!

We need to balance out our feelings by making sure that our inner 'fire' is not getting out of hand and destroying all the good that is in our life.

If a person were to write down a list of everything good and bad in his life, usually, the list of the bad things will come out bigger. This is because people are too focused on the one bad thing in their life, and thus they don't consider their lives to be good. If only they could just get themselves to focus on the good parts of their life and keep reflecting into it.

Some Positive Reflections To Think About Each Day

There are a few things which we can reflect about that can immediately make us happy, no matter what our situation is.

One good thing we can think about it is the fact that we are Jewish. Every day we make a *beracha* (blessing) of "*shelo asani goy*" (That you did not make me a gentile); we thank Hashem for not making us a non-Jew. This is not just something we say – it can bring us great happiness, if we really think about it.

We possess a *neshamah*, a Divine soul, and we come from our great forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. Imagine if you had been born as a gentile, and you wouldn't be part of the Jewish nation. You would be missing out on everything! If you just think about this and reflect into it, it can cause you to feel sheer joy.

Another thing you can think about is: all of us stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah. Can you imagine what your life would be like if not for this? Think about this one thing, and you will have plenty to be happy about.

Another good thing to think about is that all of the Jewish people have a share in *Olam HaBa* (the World To Come), except for a few wicked sinners who do not have a share. Do we ever think about this? The thought of this alone can make us happy.

When This Doesn't Work

However, some people, when they think about this, don't really care about the fact that we all come from the *Avos*, or that we all have *Olam Haba*, and that we all stood at Har Sinai.

A person might feel, "These are all very nice things to think about, but it doesn't help me. Right now, I have problems. I have *shalom bayis* problems. I have problematic children. I'm not seeing enough *nachas* from my children. My financial situation is very difficult for me. My life is full of problems. It is certainly nice that I come from the *Avos*, and it's nice to hear that I stood at Har Sinai and that I will get *Olam HaBa*, but right now, I am on this world, and it's filled with nothing but hardships for me."

But we have to remember that we are made up of a body (*guf*) and a soul (*neshamah*). We can use our soul's perspective to calm our angry perspective that's coming from our body, by reminding ourselves that we have all these great reasons to be happy: we have *Olam HaBa*, we have the Torah, we were made apart from the nations when we stood at Har Sinai, and we come from the *Avos*.

If we only look at life through the prism of our body, then yes, we will be consumed with our physical problems, and we will become paralyzed by our element of earth, which slows us down and makes us depressed.

But if we look at life through our soul, we are able to think about the fact that we come from the Avos – which is meaningful to our soul, because that means we have spirituality. The more we see our life through our soul and are focused on spirituality, the more of a balance we achieve between our body and soul, and we calm down inside ourselves.

Self-Help Books Don't Help Us

There are many gentile methods to get rid of depression which people turn to, out of desperation. When a Jew is sad and he seeks relief, he is tempted to read self-help books, written by various gentile psychologists or professors. But a gentile cannot help a Jew become happy. This is because a gentile lives only for This World, and therefore, a gentile's perspective is to seek how life on this world can be the most gratifying life on this world. A gentile is interested in how he can get the most out of This World, which is the world of the physical body. The secular methods of the world when it comes to treating depression cannot help us, because we have a Divine soul within us, and the soul in us needs something else which the non-Jewish books can't tell us.

We, the Jewish people, have special souls within us, and we have our own methods to reach happiness. There are actually many different ways we have, and each person needs to find the proper way that is for him. The way a Jew attains happiness is essentially by leaving his body's viewpoint, and entering into his soul's viewpoint. Then he sees life through the prism of the soul, not through the body, and then he can be happy. As a person begins to enter the inner world of spirituality, he will find that his pull towards sadness and depression is lessening.

It takes a lot of inner work to arrive at true happiness. We cannot explain here in this short amount of time all the ways how we can reach happiness; it would take several hours. But we have said here what the key is. The key to happiness, the very first step to take, is to begin living a more internal kind of life, where we are seeing life through the prism of the soul, as opposed to living a life of superficiality and the body. Everyone should try to discover how he can enter this inner world; there are many ways (as explained in the previous months).

May we merit to transform our mourning and sadness in the month of Av, into happiness.

Questions And Answers With The Rav

Q1: Why is fire associated with sadness? Also, isn't fire usually associated with enthusiasm?

ANSWER:Very good question. Each of the elements has positive and negative uses. There is good and evil uses of earth, good and evil uses of water, good and evil uses of wind, and good and evil uses of fire.

Enthusiasm is certainly a nature rooted in the element of fire. When a person doesn't use his fire for enthusiasm, what happens? His fire is not being activated for good uses, so it will be destructive instead, and the person will view everything in his life as negative. Some people even use fire for enthusiasm in a bad way, like when they act very giddy always, and they aren't so focused in their life; they act childish and irresponsible. They are enthusiastic one day and forget about their enthusiasm a few days later. The way to use enthusiasm in a good way is to build upon it, not to use

your fire to destroy your previous successes, but to keep the fire going and building upon your enthusiasm.

Q2: *If women are more prone to sadness, since we come from fire and earth (which are the elements that mainly cause sadness), is there a way for us to have more access to water and wind?*

ANSWER: Certainly. But we need to know how to use the other elements, and it is a very long discussion which we don't have time for now. Generally speaking, the element of earth is the root of the traits of sadness and laziness. If a person is mainly drawn towards laziness, the general solution is to try to stick to doing a certain pastime every day which you never veer from. If a person is mainly drawn towards sadness, the solution is generally to find certain positive aspects about yourself and your life which you can receive pleasure from on a continuous basis.

[1] Refer to *Getting To Know Your Soul*

[2] In *Understanding Your Middos #002 (Laziness)*, the Rav explains the various causes for sadness which each of the four elements in the soul can cause, when they are left imbalanced. (1) Water-based sadness is a sadness due to running after various physical desires, which eventually breeds on sadness. (2) Wind-based sadness is a sadness which is caused by being too haughty, which causes a person to feel disappointed at his failures. (3) Fire-based sadness is the sadness that results from becoming angry. (4) Earth-based sadness is when a person feels lethargic.

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