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Quick Flashes of Rage (Fire-of-Water-of-Fire)

With the help of Heaven, we continue here to discuss the element of fire and the trait of anger. Now we will discuss the kind of the anger that stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire**. Our Sages described this as “One who is easily angered and easily appeased.”^[1]

The inner workings of this kind of anger are as follows. Fire (the root of anger) bursts out of its place when it is opposed by something that gets in its way. Water-of-fire is when a person is *dragged* towards those oppositions that create the explosions, and the “fire”-of-water-of-fire refers to the boiling point of water-of-fire.

To illustrate, we can see that when fire and water meet, if the fire is boiling, the water will sizzle when it hits the fire. This takes place so quickly that it can all happen in the blink of an eye. Water can also be boiled by fire to the point that it is sizzling hot and it cannot be touched without getting scalded. That sizzle is the “fire” of water-of-fire.

It manifests in the soul as a nature to react in an extreme manner when one feels opposed, causing a “boiling of the blood” (*resichas damim*), where there is a momentary flash of anger. It is a flash of anger that comes in the blink of an eye, and it is also gone just as quickly. This is what is meant in the term “easily angered, and easily appeased.” However, although this kind of anger is somewhat easier to deal with, because it is easily put out, it is also easily activated, as soon as one is quickly ‘dragged’ towards it.

Delaying The Anger

Earlier it was explained that all anger results from opposition. Sometimes the opposition feels intense and sometimes less intense, but all anger is a result of feeling opposed. We mentioned that one of the ways to reduce anger is to delay the anger until later. This can also work for all kinds of anger, and not just the particular anger we are discussing, but it is particularly helpful for the quick flashes of anger that come from **fire-of-water-of-fire** which we are discussing.

Since the nature of this kind of anger is that it can be easily removed, pushing off this anger until a later time is very effective when dealing with this kind of anger. It is always recommended to push off anger, but it is especially effective when we want to put a stop to flashes of intense anger. The more intense the anger is, the more a person should push it off, and in turn, the more the intensity of the anger will decrease.

Remembering That The Anger Is Only Temporary

In addition, even when a person is experiencing the flash of anger, he should remind himself that the anger is only temporary. The whole nature of this kind of anger is that it can leave quickly just as it comes quickly. By becoming aware of this, that very awareness already weakens the anger. Although this doesn't totally uproot anger, the more one is aware that the anger is only temporary, the weaker the anger will be.

Additionally, the gain of this will be that he will not do as much damage when he is angered. The Gemara talks about one who breaks things in his anger, which is when one hits the boiling point of his anger, to the point that he is breaking things. Yet a person can attain some self-control and train himself to lessen the degree of his anger, where he won't be damaging things.

While a person is angry, he is going through a temporary insanity, to some degree. That is why he would break things in his anger; he loses control. But it is possible for a person to weaken the intensity of the anger, even as he is angry (by becoming aware that the anger is only temporary), and then there is a lot less insanity during the anger.

In summary, the first thing one should do for this kind of anger (momentary flashes of anger, which come from **fire-of-water-of-fire**) is to push off the anger until later, and an alternative, deeper method that can help is for one to remind himself and be aware that this kind of anger is only temporary.

Avoid Decisions During A Rage

In either case, when a person experiences a flash of rage, he must make sure that he doesn't make any decisions during this time. He should realize that his rational mind is not able to think properly as he is raging, so now is not a good time to make any decisions or agree to them; nor he should resolve anything upon himself at that moment.

To illustrate, Chazal say that when a woman is at the peak of labor, she swears that she doesn't want to have relations with her husband anymore, because she sees the difficulty of bearing a child. That is why she needs to bring a *korbon* after giving birth, for making a false oath. We see from this that while a person is angry, he might say things that are very decisive, which he regrets later. Therefore, when a person is angry, he should make sure not to decide anything then. He should recognize that he is not fully rational at that moment and that he should not say anything then that he'll regret later.

Uncertainty Caused By Excitement

Until now we have spoken about what happens when a person is actually angry, but we mentioned earlier that anger is a result of feeling opposed. Here we are dealing particularly with **fire-of-water-of-fire**, where a person excitedly 'explodes' after he has become 'dragged' into excitement. This is a nature which does not always result in anger.

Almost all people experience **fire-of-water-of-fire** [on a subtle level] where their fire is 'boiling' inside themselves, in the form of excitement or anxiousness by something, and it is not necessarily anger. They feel very uneasy and anxious about something, and they are not able to think clearly during this time.

We can all recognize the following example where we can see it. A person might go to a certain place where he thought he would be able to buy something that he wanted, and when he gets there, he is told that it won't be in stock for another month. He becomes anxious, because he really needs to buy the thing he wants, so he might decide right then that he will buy something else which he didn't plan

on buying.

He is not able to calmly think about it and weigh out the factors of his decision. His mind becomes anxious, thinking: "What should I do?? If I make a decision now, maybe I'll regret it later. If I don't decide, maybe I'll also regret it later." Whichever way he turns, he is in doubt about his decision. (Understandably, the more *emunah* a person has, the calmer he becomes and he won't get so excitable).

Sometimes a person is walking through the streets and someone calls out to him that he is selling a certain item for much cheaper than the normal price. First he calls out, "60 shekel!" and then when he sees that he's not getting a response, he yells out, "40 shekel!" The person walks by and begins to wonder, perhaps it's a good deal. "Maybe this really is a bargain!" he thinks. "But maybe it's not that worth it...?" He is busy hemming and hawing about what he should do, and meanwhile, the other person is pressuring him to buy it, being a very good salesman. Finally he makes the decision and he goes ahead and buys it, paying him the 40 shekel, thinking that he has gotten a really good deal.

When he comes home and shows his family what he bought, they tell him that what he bought isn't worth a cent. He felt so anxious as he was being pressured by the salesman that he made a rash decision, because he couldn't think clearly. And he probably also thought that the salesman is not swindling him, so that influenced him as well in his decision. Without getting into a discussion here if the average salesman on the street is assumed to have integrity or not, the point is that when a person is suddenly asked to decide something and he is not that composed, he is apt to make a very rash decision, because he becomes unclear about what to do, and he is doubting his decision back and forth, finally deciding but without clearly thinking about it.

The more a person is dominated by **fire-of-water-of-fire** - and there are many people like this - he will become excitable, 'dragged' into it and pulled after the excitement, and he won't be able to maintain composure over his mind and be able to think clearly. Many people don't know how to put a halt to themselves when they find themselves in doubt over a certain decision, and at a certain point they go ahead and make a rash decision, to ease their anxiousness. But it would have been much better not to do anything at all. This is where it can be applied the rule, "*shev v'al taaseh adif*" - "Sitting and not doing, is better [than doing]."

Avoid Decision-Making When You Are Anxious

If you are anxiously full of doubts about something, it is much better not to decide anything, rather than make a decision. Even if what you would have bought would have been worth it, I will still tell you that it's still not worth it to decide when you're in doubt. Sometimes you will in fact "lose out" by not making a decision, but the gain that you will have from restraining your anxiousness of making rash decision is an inner kind of gain, which is far worth the monetary loss.

When you find yourself pressured to give in to something that will affect you financially, it is always better not do anything. If you can do this out of having *emunah*, that is of course wonderful, but if you have not yet merited a high level of such clear *emunah*, you should still be prepared to go through some physical\monetary loss and hold onto your composure, rather than make a rash decision.

This is the kind of action you need to take when **fire-of-water-of-fire** (excitement) dominates: you need to calm the 'excitement' of the fire.

Thus, a more inner and truthful way to live is, that whenever you find yourself faced with doubts about making a certain decision, when the doubts are particularly pressing on you, you don't decide anything. This will apply to all areas of life which involve important decisions.

If it's not such a major decision, though - like if you are not sure if it's worth it for you to buy a package of 12 yogurts versus a package of 10 yogurts, and it seems that it's worth it to pay the difference for the package of the 12 - then of course, you can decide whatever you want, even if you're not sure if it's worth it or not. But if it's a more important kind of decision, then you should not decide anything, when you have doubts. Instead, push off the decision for later, like tomorrow.

Sometimes people push off making decisions because they are being lazy, and sometimes it comes from being full of doubts, which hampers their ability to decide. One should deal with himself according to his personal circumstances. If he does not have the problem of being too lazy or being too doubtful, he should do as we said, and not decide anything when he's in doubt. With most people, this is what they should do.

Regaining Composure

How long should one push off a decision for? He should wait until he feels calmer inside himself. This is based on the words of the Ramban, who writes that when one needs to decide when he is in doubt, he needs to come to a point of *hishtavus*, of equilibrium. When he reaches that state of inner equilibrium, he can then have the peace of mind to make a proper decision.

However, it is a very high level in *avodas Hashem* for one to reach *hishtavus*, and it is a lifelong task, as the *Chovos HaLevovos* writes. But even if a person doesn't reach the actual high level that is *hishtavus* (which is the end goal of all our life, of becoming totally and absolutely nullified in our existence to Hashem, which is the deep purpose of our entire existence), on our current level we can still attain touch upon a degree of *hishtavus*: when we make sure to stay composed and calm, where we aren't too anxious or excitable.

From a place of calmness in ourselves we can decide properly; after we have given ourselves enough time to regain composure. This does not mean that the decisions we make then will always be correct. But we can have a truer place in ourselves where we can be deciding from.

The idea of pushing off decisions for later might seem to a person like a way of running away from responsibilities, but the more a person understands about life and he is living a more inner kind of life, the more he realizes the importance of this, and he will get used to pushing off decisions for later, until he feels calmer and more composed, where he can decide more calmly.

Of course, there will be some risk involved with this idea, because if a person gets used to pushing off decisions too much, he will become irresponsible. If a person thinks that this will happen to him, he should make up a time where he will decide, and decide then - even if he hasn't yet calmed himself yet.

In Summary

In summary, a person should first try to calm down from the excitement before making a decision, which will give him the time to decide properly, but if he knows himself well and he realizes that this will make him become irresponsible, he should make up a certain time where he will decide and then decide at that time he sets for himself, whether he feels calmer or whether he doesn't.

Most People Do Not Make Real Decisions

This is a sharp statement, but it is the reality today. We should understand that most people are not able to decide properly, relying on the very first thoughts that come into the mind, and that is what determines their decisions.

Even after weighing out the options before deciding, a person will usually compare it with his first thoughts about it and try to align his thinking with the first thoughts. Whenever a person wants something, and he begins to doubt it and he weighs the options, he has basically “decided” already what he is going to do, because his will has been awakened, and that will probably be his determining factor. The will of a person affects the rational mind like *shochad* (bribery). Once the mind has been “bribed” by a certain *ratzon* will, it will not think truthfully, even if all the rational proofs in the world are brought to argue with it.

When a person is very inclined to decide a certain way, due to the excitement that stems from **fire-of-water-of-fire** in the soul, the pull is very strong, and it will be hard for the person to change his initial, subconscious ‘decision’. For this reason, most people are not able to come reach a truthful decision about anything.

In similar terms, it has been said that most people do not access their true *bechirah* (free will). Instead, many people are deciding based upon their *muskal rishon* (first thoughts), without really weighing out the options.

In a decision that is based on *bechirah*, a person sees two options in front of him, and even though he may be drawn towards one of the options, he is able to pull himself away from where he is drawn towards and choose the opposite. But in most decisions that people make, a person is usually not using his *bechirah* to decide. Instead he is just following his first thoughts, and that is where he will operate. As we have explained here, this stems specifically from **fire-of-water-of-fire** in the soul.

This might sound far-fetched to a person when he first hears this, but this is the situation with most people when it comes to making decisions. There is usually a subconscious decision that is already in place, due to something that the person wants; all of the thinking afterwards will be centered around that initial, subconscious decision. Therefore, the idea of pushing off a decision for later is something that is necessary for most people to do, in order to be able to decide properly.

When You Need To Immediately Decide

There are some exceptions to this rule, of course, as we mentioned. And sometimes a person needs to decide quickly, which cannot be avoided. When a person needs to make quick decision on a matter, he has no choice but to decide, and he must also go to a Rav for some decisions, which require immediate deciding.

In these cases, one should realize that it was the will of Hashem that this should happen. There will definitely be times where we must decide immediately and we don’t have the time to compose ourselves and decide calmly, and this will include even decisions that are not life-endangering but are important nonetheless, and they will require you to quickly decide. But generally speaking, one needs to learn how to push off decisions for later.

Gaining Some Serenity In Our Life

This inner way of living brings a person to attain a great degree of *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind). Most people do not have *yishuv hadaas*, because as soon as there is excitement or pressure about something to decide upon, there is already a subconscious ‘decision’ that a person has decided to follow, with only a few obstacles getting in the way of the decision.

Many people are constantly going through a cycle of excitement, then deciding, then excitement, deciding, etc. The degrees of the anxiousness will vary with each person, some people are more anxious to decide than others, but this nature exists in almost all people to some degree.

But when a person practices pushing off decisions for later and only deciding after he is calm, as we have explained here how to do, he becomes like an *“ish menuchah”*, “a serene person”. He will not make decisions unless he has done some reflection in his thoughts about it, and his decisions will be based on this serenity.

This will of course take a lot of deep inner work, which will take time to develop. It might even take hundreds of times of practicing a restraint on deciding anything when you’re anxious, in order to gain this ability of composure.

Eventually, after getting used to this, you will be able to restrain yourself even as you are excited (similar to how the power of despair works, where you are able to give up and let go of something you want). You will also find that even when you do become excitable, the excitement has become much calmer and it doesn’t dominate you when it comes. This will in turn improve your ability to push off decisions for later, and the cycle will strengthen.

This is the depth of how Torah scholars have more *yishuv hadaas*.

Seeing The Reality Of Things

After gaining this ability, you are able to reach a deeper point in the soul, where you won’t be acting from a place of excitement in yourself when you hear or see something. You will become less reactive. Instead, you will see or hear things more objectively, hearing or seeing something from what it actually is.

As we mentioned, when most people hear or see something, they are influenced by a flash of excitement, and they are not seeing it truthfully and objectively. Even more so, we explained that people are usually influenced in their decisions by excitement, and not by truth. But the more a person works on the ideas here and with *siyata d’shmaya*, he will be able to hold back from making any immediate decisions that are rash.

Even more so, he will gain the ability to see things as they truly are, as opposed to acting out of an unrestrained excitement for what he is seeing. A person who reaches this will reach the view of a Torah scholar, who sees things as they are, seeing the reality of each thing for what it is.

Almost all people do not see the clear reality of something that they are seeing. This is not even referring to the lack of being able to see the totality of things; it is referring to a more basic view, which is usually missing, in the view of most people. People are simply not seeing the reality of something they are encountering, and instead, they are experiencing an excitement of what they are seeing.

To illustrate, a person walks by a store and he sees a certain kind of clothing advertised in the window, which appeals to him. He goes into the store, he tries on the item in the window that is being advertised, and he finds that it’s a totally different fit than what he imagined. What he saw in the store window was a completely different reality than the reality of what he is trying on in the store. It seemed like the same thing, but they were two different realities. He might only find out his mistake later when he gets home and he realizes that it’s not what he really wanted.

The more a person gains *yishuv hadaas*, he knows how to compartmentalize things in his mind, maintaining his mental composure, without being too excited and caught up in details. He sees more the reality of things, seeing each thing for what it is.

Increased Clarity In Torah Learning

When this ability becomes stronger in a person, his comprehension in his Torah learning will also increase. When a person begins the *sugya* of the Gemara, he usually will not see the truthful meaning. He is missing some general information, and he also is unaware of certain details he will need to know. But even more so, he hasn't yet absorbed the words as they are, because he is initially understanding it based on his very first thoughts. (In some great people, their first thoughts are *Ruach HaKodesh*, but this is not the case with most people).

In this way, a person is able to think and decide things from a calmer place in himself, without getting confused by all the outer stimuli. Sometimes the clarity will feel greater and sometimes it will be less, some periods of time offer more clarity than other times, and in addition, it will depend on how much holiness and purity is present at that time.

In Conclusion

Thus, **fire-of-water-of-fire** plays a very big role in our life. In a few people, it will manifest as quick flashes of anger, which we discussed in the beginning of this chapter. But in almost all people, **fire-of-water-of-fire** does not result in anger, and it is rather expressed as a flash of excitement and anxiousness [caused by various outside stimuli] that dominates a person, which doesn't allow him to think clearly and make proper decisions.

Here we have come to explain how to calm the **fire-of-water-of-fire**, to reach a place of calmness in oneself, which enables a person to live a life of *menuchah* (serenity) and *shikul hadaas* (being able to weigh out one's thoughts properly).

The full extent of this power is reached by our *Gedolim* who gain the ability of "*Daas Torah*", to rend decisions on questions that come before them. The depth of this is not simply because they know how to decide, (which is certainly necessary as well), but because they can absorb very well the words that are relayed to them. (There is also the level of *Ruach HaKodesh*, where the *Gadol* can answer even without hearing properly what is said to him; but that is an altogether different matter which we are not discussing here).

However, even average people can acquire the ability to think from a calmer place in themselves and to truly absorb the reality and information in front of them, without becoming too excitable, which enables us to weigh out our thoughts properly and to decide from there. Understandably, we will also need *tefillah* and *siyata d'shmaya* along with it, to succeed.

[1] Avos 5:11

Source: <http://bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-fire-008-anger-flashes-anger>