



BILVAVI FOUR ELEMENTS

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BACKGROUND:

Last week, Yaakov mentioned to Tzvi that ever since their long discussion about how the עבודה of our generation is to live with Hashem, he is struggling to figure out how he can practically live this way on a constant basis. In response, Tzvi suggests to Yaakov that they learn about the ארבעה יסודות of the middos as a means of connecting the details of daily life to the yearning for קרבת אלקים...

FRIENDS SCHMOOZE EXTENDED INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUR ELEMENTS

Tzvi: Yaakov, I'm very excited to begin learning the ארבעה יסודות together. And I'm davening that one day we'll be able to look back at today as the starting point of a whole new time period in our lives, when we started to look at life through the lens of the ארבעה יסודות. Now let me ask you, do you have a preference which one of the ארבעה יסודות we start with?

Yaakov: I don't know all that much about them, but I would think we should start with the most basic one. I would assume that most basic of the יסודות would be עפר. Is that right?

Tzvi: I was also thinking to start with the most basic יסוד, but actually, according to how the ארבעה יסודות are explained in Chazal, the most basic יסוד is considered to be רוח, not עפר.

Yaakov: How is that? I mean, just from looking at the physical ארבעה יסודות in the world, you would certainly think that the most basic יסוד is the physical earth, whereas the water, wind, and fire in the world are all secondary to the earth itself.

Tzvi: Excellent question, and try to remind me to get back to that later. But before we discuss the physical ארבעה יסודות, let me ask you a different question: What do you think the more natural position of a person is, to move around and do things, or to stay in one place?

Yaakov: As far as I understand, a person only moves around if he has a reason to. When a person has no need to do things, he stays in place, so it would seem that a person's more natural position is to stay put. But what does this have to do with anything?

Tzvi: Let me explain where I'm going with this: The question whether a person's natural position is to move about or to stay put is exactly the same question as whether the more fundamental יסוד in a person is יסוד הרוח or יסוד העפר. The יסוד העפר in a person is what makes him stay put, like earth which naturally stays in place, whereas the יסוד הרוח in a person is what makes him move around, like the nature of wind. So when Chazal teach us that the most basic יסוד in a person is רוח, Chazal are teaching us that a person's most natural state is to move about, and not to stay put.

Yaakov: I'm following your train of thought, but I can't say really understand what you're saying. I mean, how can you say a person's most natural position is to move? It seems simply illogical – like I said, every time a person moves, he is going somewhere. It seems obvious that a person's natural position is to be at rest unless there is a need to move!

Tzvi: You are asking a very good question, and on a simple level you are right. But Chazal here are teaching us a deeper perspective, which is fundamental for truly understanding yourself through the ארבעה יסודות. It's just not true that every movement of a person is done for a reason. Chazal are teaching us that there is a natural drive which a person has for movement in of its own, and not as a means to get somewhere or accomplish something.

Yaakov: Can you give me an example of such a type of movement?

Tzvi: Yes – it's very simple. Just try to sit still for a few minutes without moving. After a while you'll start going crazy.

Some people will start going crazy faster than others, but anyone who is forced not to move for too long will find it unbearable. This is because a person has a natural need for movement, due to the **יסוד הרוח** within him.

Yaakov: You're for sure right that people can't sit still for too long, but I would think that that's simply because they find sitting still uncomfortable for them. This doesn't mean that they are moving for no reason. On the contrary, they are moving for a good reason – because it's uncomfortable for them to continue sitting still.

Tzvi: Precisely here is the difference between the deeper perspective of the **ארבעה יסודות** and the superficial, natural perspective. Superficially, a person is only aware of the fact that he becomes uncomfortable when sitting for too long, so he decides to move around. But the deeper perspective of the **ארבעה יסודות** is to realize that this discomfort is not simply a random feeling that all of a sudden popped up from nowhere. There is a system and pattern to our inner feelings! The reason that we feel uncomfortable when sitting still for too long is because we have an inner power of **רוח**, which demands that we move and accomplish. Or, in other words, the discomfort from sitting still is merely a symptom, but the root issue is that inside, we ourselves really want to be moving!

Yaakov: If I understand you correctly, you're saying that a deeper person, instead of feeling uncomfortable sitting still and therefore deciding to move, will instead right away perceive in himself an inner desire for movement?

Tzvi: Exactly. You can see this even in a baby. Everyone knows that when an infant cries, it could be because he is hungry and wants food or because he needs his diaper changed, but it could also be simply because he wants to be rocked. Where does this come from that a baby wants to be rocked? Why does a baby find it

calming to be rocked to sleep?

Yaakov: I once heard that there is a theory that it's because when the baby was in his mother's womb it got used to moving around...

Tzvi: I guess that's all the scientists were able to figure out, since they weren't able to get down to the deeper reason... But according to what Chazal are teaching us, the answer is very simple: This is a perfect example of the simple, inner need for movement of the **יסוד הרוח**, which expresses itself from an infant's very first day.

SUMMARY OF SCHMOOZE

- ◆ **יסוד הרוח** is the most fundamental **יסוד** and not **עפר** like I thought.
- ◆ The natural state of a person is to be moving, not to stay still like I thought.
- ◆ Proofs: You can't sit in place for too long. You feel a need to move just for the sake of moving, and not to accomplish anything. Also babies enjoy being rocked for no purpose.
- ◆ **בחירה הפשית** vs. inborn desires: What came out – our **בחירה** is how to direct these desires, but you can't create new desires or get rid of existing desires - all you can do is purify them.

Yaakov: I hear what you are saying, but I still can't say that I can really relate to it. The bottom line is that whenever I move, at least I think I'm moving for reason. You may be right that deep down, the reason it's more comfortable for me to move may sometimes be coming from some sort of inner desire for movement, but I don't think I ever felt that desire...

Tzvi: Listen Yaakov, we are just starting out now, so don't get discouraged if you can't relate to every point at first glance. The first step is to understand logically what the **ארבעה יסודות** are and how they work. Right now just take Chazal's word for it that the deepest and simplest force within the **ארבעה יסודות** is a desire for movement for the sake

of movement. As we go along, you'll start seeing the bigger picture of how all the **ארבעה יסודות** come together, and it will become more alive and down to earth. The main thing right now is just to understand the concept.

*Yaakov: Okay, so tell me if I got it right – in short, you're saying that the first **יסוד** is the **רוח**, which creates in a person a desire for movement. But I still don't really understand – why does the person want to move? Is there not a rule that every desire aims for a goal?*

Tzvi: Tell me, Yaakov – Why does the wind blow? Where is it trying to go? The wind blows in all directions all the time without any noticeable goal or purpose. And on a deeper level – wind is caused by the spinning and the orbit of the earth. But what makes the earth revolve and orbit the sun?

Yaakov: I don't know...

Tzvi: Very simple – because that's how Hashem created it. The movement of the wind and the orbit of the planets are not like premeditated movements of a person which are done to achieve a specific result. These are natural movements, which were set in motion by Hashem at the time of the creation of the world. And that exactly is what the **רוח** in a person is – it's a natural desire for movement which is inborn in a person, and was set into motion by Hashem at the time of his creation.

Yaakov: I have a question – this whole concept of an inborn desire for movement sounds a little bit strange. Doesn't a person have free will to decide what he wants to do with himself? What exactly does it mean that a person has an inborn desire which he didn't choose to want?

Tzvi: This is a very important principle – a person's free will does not mean that he can decide whatever he wants to do with himself from scratch. All of a

person's desires are inborn in his very nature, and were created by Hashem. These desires take on an exact pattern based on the person's inner makeup and his specific balance between the **ארבעה יסודות** which make up his **נפש**. A person's free will is only to decide how exactly he wants to channel these forces. If a person chooses properly, he will use his mind to become aware of his inborn desires, which are naturally pure and good, and he will thereby use them properly. However, a person is also given the free will to make the wrong choice, which is ultimately to follow the tendencies of his body and imagination, which distort a person's inborn pure desires

and channel these inner forces in an external and perverted way.

But the bottom line is that a person cannot create desires which he doesn't have within him, nor can he get rid of desires that he does have. He can definitely work on himself and purify the way he channels his desires, but all of a person's desires were created exclusively by Hashem.

*Yaakov: Well, then I guess it's no coincidence why the scientists are not aware of this phenomenon. Secular scientists certainly do not want to admit that there are inborn desires which a person was created with! Their whole philosophy, at least of those who even believe in **בחירה** in the first place, is based on the*

premise that a person can decide to do whatever he wants, without there being any absolute right or wrong...

Tzvi: Certainly. In any case, I hope we got some sort of picture of what the **יסוד הרוח** is. Right now things are still quite abstract, but we have only covered the first and most subtle of the **ארבעה יסודות**. Hopefully, as we continue, the picture will get a little bit clearer...

Yaakov: Don't worry – there were certainly a lot of concepts here which give me plenty of food for thought, and I'm looking forward to continuing next week!

Tzvi: **בסייעתא דשמיא**, so am I!

FIXING YOUR MIDDOS

A little while ago, I got inspired to learn **נ"ך**, and I decided to make myself a seder every day to learn a certain amount. However, as time goes on, I keep finding that I'm not being successful at keeping up my seder. How can I work on this issue using the **ארבעה יסודות** method?

ANSWER: Your inspiration to learn **נ"ך** is certainly very commendable, and you are very fortunate to be working on channeling your energies in such a positive way. That being said, if you see that practically you are not being successful in keeping up your commitment, this probably indicates that you must analyze your plans a little bit more deeply.

While your inspiration and commitment certainly stem from a very good place inside of you, then you may need to further develop and tweak your plans in order to arrive at a learning schedule which truly befits your personality and situation. Most often, when a person takes a commitment based on a sudden inspiration, he is lacking the **יישוב הדעת** to think through the different sides of his personality and develop a fully well-balanced plan of how to reach his goals. This does not take away from the worthiness of the inspiration.

To the contrary, this is the nature of

inspiration, and it's fine for starting out if your seder was not perfectly planned out to the last detail. Nonetheless, as you continue, you often need to tweak and perfect your plans as necessary in

factors which compete for your time. In other words, you need to decide how much of your time and energy you think you should devote to it vs. other areas of learning, your family, your other involvements, etc. This will help you develop a clear and precise goal for you to aspire to. [This parallels the **יסוד**

האש, which is the source of the powers of aspiration and yearning to grow and be elevated].

B. You need to look and see how you can connect to and enjoy this area of learning. As **חז"ל** say, **לעולם** - a person should always learn [the area of Torah] which his heart desires. In order for your commitment to last for the long term, it's not enough merely to aspire to know **נ"ך** and to value it. For a seder in learning to last, you have to connect to it, and to feel like it's yours. [This parallels the **יסוד המים** in a person, which creates a connection.]

C. You need to set yourself the proper pace of learning, so that you'll have the right balance to both be covering enough ground to keep you feeling like your accomplishing, while still having the **יישוב הדעת** to learn and understand the material well. [This is a balance between the **יסודות** of **רוח** – movement and **עפר** – calmness.]

מקורות ומקבילות לשיחת חברים

שהיסוד הכי בסיסי הוא רוח - ספר יצירה [פ"א, טז], ספר דע את נפשך [ריש פ"ג].

הבחנה האם המצב הטבעי פעולה או מנוחה - שיעור א' מ"תיקון כח העצלות".

המחשת כח התנועה שבאדם - ספר דע את נפשך [פרק א' אות ד].

המודעות לתחושות הפנימיות ולא רק לתופעותיהם - תיקון כח הריכוז [סוף פ"ג].

השלב הראשון זה להבין את הסוגיות בשכל - ספר הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש [פ"ה].

כל רצון חותר למטרה - קל"ח פתחי חכמה לרמח"ל [ריש פתח ג], וע"ע מו"נ ח"ג פכ"ה.

תנועת הרוח מיוחסת לה' - מו"נ ח"ב פ"ל [וע"ע שם פ"ד ביחס לסיבוב כדור הארץ], **חובות הלבבות** [שער הבחינה פ"ה],

דע את נפשך [פ"א אות ד].

כח הבחירה לא מתחיל מאפס - מכתב מאליהו [ח"א], **קונטרס הבחירה** [ח"א], **עלי שור** [ח"ב עמ' לת].

order for them to last long term.

In your case, there are several factors to take into consideration to develop a properly balanced program of learning:

A. You need to decide how important this goal is to you in relation to the other

1) LEARNING HOW TO THINK OF "AVODAH"

The first point we need to know before we embark on this series of improving our middos is to realize the fundamental way of thinking that is behind all of these methods we are presenting here.

When we learn Gemara, we are usually used to the way we were learning when we were younger. This is called our "girsas d'yankusa" - the way we learned as children. Those who have been learning Gemara since their youth have slowly learned more and more over the years, until they have arrived at a certain way of thinking. Comprehension in our Torah learning comes to you only after many years of learning. It happens slowly and in steps. This is how anyone grows in Torah learning.

When we learn sugyas of Gemara, when we learn the words of Abaye and Rava, it's straightforward; the words are built upon one another. But when it comes to learning about matters of "avodah" ("serving G-d", via spiritual self-improvement) all we know about it is certain general terms (*kelalim*). This is our "girsas d'yankusa" when it comes to avodah.

Compare this to a person who's not immersed in Torah, who can certainly know a little Torah, but his knowledge of Torah is very general - because he's not 'there' [*he's not "into it"*].

When it comes to avodah, people usually know only the *kelalim*, the general terms of avodah. This doesn't mean that those *kelalim* \ general terms are not true, but they are not more than a general understanding of the concepts.

In order to absorb anything when it comes to matters of avodah, one has to acquire a way to think. It takes a lot of time to acquire a way of thinking, just as we know from learning Gemara. It takes time to become aware of the sugya and its details. So too, when it comes to matters of avodah, it takes a long time to acquire the way to think about these matters.

Just as we learned Gemara in 5th grade, and then in 6th and 7th grade - and each grade was another step in the process - so, too, when it comes to learning about our avodah, it takes time to learn how to think of these matters. Even if a person didn't remember the Gemara he learned in 5th grade, he retains the way to think and is still in touch with it. When it comes to avodah, we need to train our souls to acquire a certain way of thinking about these matters. It is slowly acquired.

1A) FOCUS ON THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS, NOT ON "DOING"

Therefore, the purpose of these shiurim is not so that you will attempt to "work" on all of these matters and try to carry them out practically as soon as you hear about them.

1B) GET USED TO LISTENING TO HUNDREDS OF THESE SHIURIM

In addition, even the parts you don't understand or the parts that are not of interest to you, are still necessary for you to hear about, because as we said, the point is not for you to try to first practice them; the point of all these shiurim is so that you will learn how to think. In hearing these shiurim, you are slowly hearing about a way to think, when it comes to concepts of inner avodah.

After you start learning how to think from these shiurim, you will need to get used to listening to several hundreds of shiurim, just so that you can get used to learning how to think when it comes to these subjects. We all know that in order to understand Gemara, it takes hundreds of shiurim of listening to get you used to learning how to think. When you get used to hearing hundreds of shiurim, you slowly acquire the ability of how to think when you learn Gemara.

This is the first step you need, and it is a purpose unto itself.

After a person feels that the ability to think has become opened in himself, he can then proceed to the next stages we will describe. But when you are first hearing these shiurim - whether it is about the middah of sadness, laziness, desires, or idle speech - it doesn't matter which topic it is - the initial reaction will be about "what to do", but this is not the goal in the beginning stage. This is because you don't relate to it if you aren't 'there'. The beginning stage is to learn how to think about these matters. (*to be continued in the next issue*)

PART 1: EARTH-OF-FIRE Introduction

Rav Chaim Vital in Shaarei Kedushah writes that hatred comes from the element of fire, and that it is a branch of the trait of *gaavah* (*conceit*). The opposite of hatred (*fire*) is love, which comes from the element of water, and as it is well-known, fire and water are opposites.

The Hebrew word for hatred is *sinah*, שִׁנְיָה, which contains the letters Shin, Nun, and Aleph, which contains the word *Aish*, אֵשׁ, "fire".

Gaavah (*conceit*) is where a person wants to enlarge himself. Hatred, a branch of conceit, is where, in the words of Rav Chaim Vital, "A person views himself as lowly as a result of seeing the other's higher status." Hatred branches out from conceit, and the difference between them is, that conceit is where a person focuses on his own [perceived] elevated status, while hatred is where a person feels inferior to the other as a result of seeing the other's elevated status [and this inferiority causes him to hate the other].

Love is to be one with another, while hatred is when a person is "two" with another - when he views the other person as a separate entity from him, so that there are "two" separate entities here instead of one soul. As a hint, the word hatred, *sinah*, is from the word *shnayim* (*two*) followed by the letter aleph (*which equals the number one*), implying that hatred takes "one" and turns it into "two".

Since each of the four elements contain aspects of all of the four elements, there is a hatred that stems from earth-of-fire, hatred that stems from water-of-fire, hatred that stems from wind-of-fire, and hatred that stems from fire-of-fire. And since each of the subdivisions branch out into an additional subdivision of all 4 elements, earth-of-fire has 4 divisions (*earth, water, wind, fire*), water-of-fire has 4 divisions (*earth, water, wind, and fire*) and so forth. (*to be continued in the next issue*)