



BILVAVI

# FOUR ELEMENTS

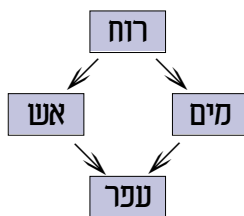
ISSUE 012 ♦ 5784 ♦ CHANNELING OUR MIDDOS PROPERLY

## FRIENDS SCHMOOZE EXTENDED INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUR ELEMENTS

### BACKGROUND

Last week, Yaakov and Tzvi finished discussing how a person can make use of the **יסוד האש** to encourage him to work hard, while at the same time keeping the **אש** under control so that it doesn't make him go too far and get upset about his situation.

we drew before we learnt about the **יסוד המים** to illustrate the interrelationships between the **ארבעה יסודות**:



*each of the other יסודות how they can be used either for the good or the bad?*

**Tzvi:** Well, for the **יסוד המים** and **יסוד האש** we did. **מים** can make either **אהבה** - which is generally good - or **תאוה** - which is generally bad. And **אש** can create either anger - which is generally bad - or **התמודדות** - the power to struggle and work hard - which is generally good.

**Yaakov:** Tzvi, what do you think? Are we ready to finally move on to the **יסוד העפר**?

**Yaakov:** So I'm getting the picture that the **יסוד העפר** is the lowest one of the **יסודות**, meaning the most "earth bound" one...

**Tzvi:** Yaakov, you know how it goes - if you want, we can stay on the **יסוד האש** for as long as you want, and we'll never run out of what to discuss... But if you want to move on, I'll be happy to.

**Yaakov:** I think so... Maybe after we finish all the **יסודות** we can go back around, but for now I'm anxious to get a full picture of what all four of them are.

**Tzvi:** Yes, that's true. You can see how even in our speech, when you want to describe something as "ruchani" you use the word **רוח**, whereas something "chumri" is referred to in the **ספרים** as **חומריות**, from the word **חומר**, which means mud. However, just like all of the other **יסודות**, the **יסוד העפר** can also be used either in a positive way, or in a negative way. There's no **יסוד** which is intrinsically good or bad.

**Yaakov:** And what about the **יסוד הרוח**?

**Tzvi:** You're right - we didn't really explain how the **יסוד הרוח** can be used for good or for bad. Maybe we'll have a chance to get back to it more in depth, but I'll just mention the main point quickly now. The **יסוד הרוח** creates a drive for movement, but this can either create meaningful movement, or meaningless movement.

**Tzvi:** Sure, no problem - that makes sense. Let's maybe start by bringing back the diagram that

**Yaakov:** Did we really explain for

Deep down, the **יסוד הרוח** in a person really creates a drive for the specific course of movement which will bring out that person's

individual and unique **כוחות** to fruition. This is movement which has **תוכן** - inner meaning - and which gives a person a sense of mission and direction in life. However, superficially the **יסוד** **הרוח** just makes a person restless and pushes him to keep moving for no purpose at all and in no given direction. One result of this type of attitude can be that a person spends his whole day schmoozing about things which are totally meaningless. Where does this nature come from? From the **יסוד הרוח**, which pushes him constantly to keep in action, and one type of such action is through talking.

*Yaakov: But why do you specifically pick on talking? What about all other sorts of meaningless actions which people fill their lives with - are they not also coming from the same **יסוד הרוח**?*

**Tzvi:** You're right, but there is a difference between speech and action. Most actions require some level of effort, and a person generally doesn't want to exert himself for no reason. Therefore, even if he's bored and is simply looking for something to do, he will likely only do something which will either give him some level of pleasure (**יסוד המים**) or take care of some issue that he has (**יסוד האש**). Speech, on the other hand, is relatively much more effortless, and therefore people are much quicker to schmooze about something meaningless than to

do something meaningless. And this corresponds to the nature of wind, which is usually a light and calm, constant, movement.

*Yaakov: Okay, very nice. So getting back to the **יסוד העפר**, you were saying that here too there are two ways to use it, one for the good and one for the bad?*

**Tzvi:** Yes. The negative usage is like you already started saying - to connect to the physicality of **עולם הזה**. To explain this a bit more: While every person is made up of all four **יסודות**, the **Gra** teaches that what we see in this world is primarily two of the **יסודות** - the body, which was made out of **מין האדמה**, and the **נשמה**, the life-source of a person, which was made **כביכול** from **רוח** - **ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים**. So here is a question: Why is it that a person was made out of two opposing parts, and wasn't just made from the start as one unit?

*Yaakov: The **ספרים** say that this was to give us **בהירה**, whether we will follow our body or our **נשמה**...*

**Tzvi:** Exactly. So that means that essentially there is a constant inner struggle inside between the **יסוד הרוח** and the **יסוד העפר** over which will dominate. This is our general **בהירה** in life: will we follow the inner **רוח** within us to do the **רצון השם**, or will we follow our body, which is **מין האדמה**, and become tied down to this world.

*Yaakov: But didn't you just finish saying that there is no good **יסוד** or bad **יסוד**? Now all of a sudden, you're saying that the **יסוד הרוח** is good and the **יסוד העפר** is bad?!*

**Tzvi:** Very good question - I was waiting to see if you're actually following! Good job! So the answer is that you're right - the whole perspective I just gave is only one side of the coin. If you look at the good side of the **יסוד הרוח** and the negative side of the **יסוד העפר**, then you can see how the **יסוד הרוח** corresponds to the general desire of the **נשמה**, while the negative side of the **יסוד העפר** corresponds to the general desires of the body. However, we already saw how there are two sides to the **יסוד הרוח**, and **בעזרת ה'** we'll soon learn how the **יסוד העפר** can also be completely **טהור** and **קדוש**. If we focus on the positive side of the **יסוד העפר** and negative side of the **יסוד הרוח**, certainly the whole picture will change.

*Yaakov: Got it. I have another question, though: Apparently when we talk about a person connecting too much to **עולם הזה**, we are usually discussing an issue of **תאוה**. But didn't we already learn that **תאוה** comes from the **יסוד המים**, not the **יסוד העפר**...?*

**Tzvi:** Excellent question! The answer is that like we've already discussed, the **ארבעה יסודות** perspective breaks down every **מידה** to its root sources. This is why sometimes you get surprised,

because when you break things down and see what they're made out of, it doesn't always look the same as when you look at them superficially.

Let's take our example of תאוּוה: Like you said, at first glance we would think that if the יסוד העפר symbolizes connecting to this world, then it would seem that the middah of תאוּוה comes from the יסוד העפר.

However, if we take a deeper look into the middah of תאוּוה, we will see that not every תאוּוה comes from connecting to this world. There are many different types of תאוּוה, and sometimes a person can even connect to רוחניות just out of תאוּוה. For example, you can have a person who is learning תורה, but he is learning just because he enjoys the amazing סברות he comes up with. This pleasure is not physical pleasure, so it clearly wouldn't be coming from the יסוד העפר. What then is the root of this תאוּוה? The root כח here is the יסוד המים, which, creates a middah of pleasure-seeking or תאוּוה when misdirected.

*Yaakov: But one second - if there's a תאוּוה which isn't connected to גשמיות, then what exactly is wrong with it? Let's say a person is learning out of תאוּוה because he enjoys learning - isn't that amazing?*

Tzvi: Well, if he's learning when he's supposed to be learning, then the question is only a question of לשמה or לשמה. But what about if he has such a תאוּוה for learning that he learns

even when he's supposed to be davening, or even on תשעה באב or in unclean places... Certainly we understand that something's wrong here - this is clearly not the type of אהבת התורה that we're supposed to have.

### מקורות ומקבילות שיחת ברים

שאינו יסוד שהיא בעצם טוב או רע - שערי קדושה פ"ב, עלי שור ח"א שע"ג "דעת עצמינו" פרק א'.  
יסוד הרוח מתבטא דווקא בדברים בטלים - שערי קדושה שם. דברי הגר"א שבעוה"ז מתגלה בעיקר רוח ועפר - היכלות פקודי (היכל ו', רנה ע"א ד"ה כהיכלא דא). למה האדם נברא גוף ונשמה - דעת תבונות אות סט והלאה. "אהבת התורה" שאינו אלא תאוּוה - מהר"ל נתיבות עולם נתיב התורה פרק ז', מעשה איש ח"א עמוד רכ. תאוּוה לגשמיות הוא צירוף יסוד המים ויסוד העפר - ספר תיקון כח התאוּוה, פרקים א - ט. שכל אדם נהנה כפי הרמה שלו - עלי שור ח"א שע"ג "דעת קצות דרכיו" פרק ד'.  
דברי ר' חיים ויטאל שיסוד העפר מתבטא בעיקר בעצלות ועצבות - שערי קדושה שם. הצד השווה בין עצלות ועצבות זה שפלות וכבידות - עלי שור ח"א שער ג' "דעת קצות דרכיו" פרק ג'.

*Yaakov: So what's the נקודה - where exactly is the mistake?*

Tzvi: The mistake is that his תאוּוה turned into אהבה instead of אהבה. Instead of channeling his enjoyment from learning towards forging a true connection to the inner truth of the תורה, and realizing how the תורה is what's guiding him on his

true path in life. He just took the pleasure of learning for its own sake and went off on his own path in life. He was never trying to unite with the תורה, just to enjoy it.

*Yaakov: I guess this is exactly what we said when we learnt about the יסוד המים - that אהבה is a true connection, such as when two people are following the same inner path together, whereas תאוּוה is when each one is just interested in his own interests and pleasure...*

Tzvi: Exactly!

*Yaakov: Okay, so I think I understand. You're saying that יסוד המים תאוּוה comes from the יסוד העפר, and not from the יסוד המים, because not every תאוּוה is physical. Or, in other words, the root of the middah of תאוּוה is pleasure-seeking, from the יסוד המים, and not looking to connect with this world, which would be the יסוד העפר. But bottom line, what would you say when you do have a physical תאוּוה? Does this also come only from the יסוד המים?*

Tzvi: No. There are two distinct forces coming together here. The primary force of תאוּוה comes from the יסוד המים, and it yearns for pleasure. However, there is clearly another added ingredient, a secondary force of the יסוד העפר, which is directing this pleasure-seeking specifically towards physical pleasure.

And the truth is that if you look around the world, you can see this clearly. Take a group of

people, and check out what types of things each one of them enjoys. You will see clearly that someone on a higher level of רוחניות gets his enjoyment from things which are less coarse, more refined, whereas someone on a lower level gets his enjoyment from coarser things. The reason is simple because the more a person identifies with his body, the more connected he is to the יסוד העפר in its imperfect form, as gross physicality. Therefore, even his pleasure - from the יסוד המים - is from that level of physicality. And on the other hand, the more a person identifies with his inner self, which is spiritual, the more his enjoyment will also come from things which are more spiritual.

*Yaakov: Wow, very interesting - it's really true! But now I have another question - if the bottom line is that תאוה does not always represent the יסוד העפר, and even when it does, it's some sort of combination between the יסוד המים and the יסוד העפר, then what מידה does represent the יסוד העפר on its own? How do you have someone who is connecting to this world through the יסוד העפר other than תאוה?*

**Tzvi:** Good question. The answer is that Rav Chaim Vital lists two middos עצבות - sadness, and עצלות - laziness. The ספרים explain that both of these come from the lowliness and heaviness

of physicality, which makes a person feel a lack of liveliness and energy to move and be happy.

*Yaakov: So you're saying that a person is sad or lazy because he wants to feel connected to this world?*

## SUMMARY OF SCHMOOZE

The יסודות are not by definition good or bad. Every יסוד can be expressed either in a good way, or in a negative way.

### Regarding יסוד הרוח:

- ◆ the good expression is a motivation to do meaningful things
- ◆ the negative expression is a drive to do meaningless things, such as just schmoozing without any purpose.

### Regarding יסוד העפר:

- ◆ the good expression which we'll get to next week)
- ◆ the negative expression identifies with the body and - physicality. This expresses itself mainly as laziness, sadness, heaviness, and a low self-esteem.

**The middah of ta'avah** - the root is pleasure-seeking, from the יסוד המים. When it looks specifically for physical pleasures, that comes from it joining with the יסוד העפר.

**Tzvi:** No - it's the other way around. Because a person feels connected to his body and this world, that's why he becomes sad or lazy, because the simple

nature of the body is to be lacking energy - after all, a body without a נשמה is a dead body...

On a more technical level, a person does not usually want to be sad, while he may often feel like he wants to be lazy. The reason for this is because on a subtle level, sadness is a bit connected to the יסוד האש, because a person usually becomes sad when he faces some level of opposition, whereas laziness is a bit connected to the יסוד המים, because a person finds it more comfortable to be lazy than to work. But overall, both of these middos stem mainly from the יסוד העפר, because it is only identifying with physicality which gives a person the nature and tendency to feel comfortable when doing nothing and to give up when facing opposition.

*Yaakov: I hear...*

**Tzvi:** So what if we stop here for now, and אם ירצה ה' we'll continue next week with the positive side of the יסוד העפר...

*Yaakov: Sounds great!*



# FUNDAMENTALS OF MIDDOS IMPROVEMENT

## MAINTAINING A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE AS WE WORK ON SELF-IMPROVEMENT

An additional point to know is as follows. Our avodah requires us to work with our soul, which is the makeup of man. We must know the general structure of the soul which has several layers. There is the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul), which is the external layer of our soul; and there are the spiritual areas of our soul.

When you begin to learn about what is contained in your *nefesh habehaimis*, which describes the negative and evil aspects contained in man, you must be aware that it is not all there is to your existence. If someone identifies 'himself' as being a '*nefesh habehaimis*,' he will develop a terrible negative self-image of himself! If he thinks that his traits of conceit, anger, idle speech, desires, sadness, laziness, etc. are who he really is, he will become terribly broken upon all these discoveries.

Surely we need to learn about our weaknesses so that we can see how to fix them, and we can even derive a sense of vitality from this. But we need to have a deeper approach towards self-improvement that we are comprised of both a *neshamah*, (a Divine soul), as well as a lower layer of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*.

When we work to improve our *nefesh habehaimis*, we must realize that our "I" is not entirely evil, even before it is improved. We have a *neshamah* in us that is pure, it is "a portion of G-d from above", and there are garments that cover our *neshamah* which need to be rectified all the way down to the lowest elements of our "I." We need to become aware of those 'garments' that are in need of being fixed, and we must become clearly aware of them but at the same time, we must realize that our "I" is not defined by these negative attributes that we discover in our personality.

A person is not defined by his conceit, even if he is terribly conceited! He is not defined by his anger, even if he has a big temper. He is not defined as a glutton even if he has little self-control over his desires. First of all, we have aspects of our personality which are tolerable, and even our bad *middos* have already become rectified to a certain extent [as we work on our *middos*]. Even more so, there are parts of our self which are entirely pure and spiritual.

To illustrate what we mean, a person is *davening* and standing before Hashem in prayer, and he is aware that he has a problem of being gluttonous. Must he *daven* to Hashem the entire time thinking about how he needs to uproot his evil desires? Is that all he needs to focus on? When a person *davens*, now is not the time to fix the *nefesh habehaimis*. Prayer is the time to talk to Hashem and pour out one's heart to Him, and as a result he can also speak to Hashem about his problem of desires.

One certainly needs to consciously focus on fixing his *middos* and with awareness of the four elements that are present in our *nefesh habehaimis*, but he must not think that this defines his entire "I." It cannot be the definition of one's self-image, because it focuses too much on the negative aspects of man. Although self-improvement is a major part of our task, it is not everything.

Without this perspective, a person will come to look at himself as a lowly being the more he learns about his *nefesh habehaimis*. He will lower the entire spectrum of his soul to the level of *nefesh habehaimis*. Whenever he discovers a small fault in himself (and all the more so if he discovers a big fault in himself), he will lose the basic healthy perspective towards self-awareness.

One must always be cognizant of the fact that his essence is that of a

pure *neshamah*. There are parts in oneself which are totally spiritual and pure, and there is a middle area of the soul which is not as perfected, and there are lower parts of the soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*, which are in need of rectification. But the *nefesh habehaimis* area of the soul is just one part of the soul! It is not your entire self.<sup>1</sup>

We are emphasizing this point specifically, because we have spent much time in this series discussing the negative aspects of the soul and how to fix them. I can mislead a person to erroneously think, at least subconsciously, that he is evil. When learning about our *nefesh habehaimis*, one becomes aware of all the negative aspects of one's personality and all of one's bad *middos* in himself, and he might come to think as a result from this that all of his Torah learning is negatively affected from all his bad *middos*, and other such erroneous beliefs that he might form.

Although it is true that the bad *middos* exist in oneself, it must be viewed as being part of the *nefesh habehaimis*, our lower aspect. It must not be considered to be the general whole of the person. There are higher parts to our existence than our *nefesh habehaimis*! Although we have been focusing the discussion on our *nefesh habehaimis*, this should not imply that you are entirely a *nefesh habehaimis*, even though we are specifically focusing here on the area of the *nefesh habehaimis*. You must realize that your *nefesh habehaimis* is only a part of who you are; it is not all there is to your "I."

This enables you to work on improving yourself with a perspective that is both truthful and healthy at the same time.

<sup>1</sup> See *Fixing Your Earth*, Chapters 1-2.

I am an אברך, and I'm learning in a Kollel where the style of learning is to learn סוגיות which are נוגע להלכה. The Kollel first focuses on learning the sugya in-depth, and then continues to learn the שלחן ערוך and focus on the Halachah. However, I find that I have a very hard time focusing when we're learning the sugya, and I only enjoy learning the Halachah. Is this an issue? How should I look at this situation through the lens of the ארבעה יסודות?

**Answer:** Rav Chaim Vital writes that just as the world was created with the ארבעה יסודות, so too the Torah consists of four parts, [פשט - רמז, פשוט - דרוש - סוד] which also parallel the Four Elements [עפר, רמז - רוח, פשוט - אש, דרוש - מים, סוד - אש].

Additionally, the same way the sefarim teach us that every one of the four יסודות themselves consist of all four יסודות, the same is true with the four parts of תורה - there is פשט, דרוש, רמז, and סוד within each of the levels themselves.

As a general rule, each person has to find his unique area in which he naturally excels within לימוד התורה, and that is where his main עבודה in תורה lies. This is the meaning of what Chazal tell us אין אדם לומד אלא מה שילבו הפץ - that every person is meant to learn mainly the portion of Torah which he finds that he connects to most [aside from the general הלכה that everyone has to learn the תורה as a whole, as discussed by the Poskim]. Nevertheless, you must be very careful before you decide that your portion of Torah is just to learn Halachah and not sugyos.

This is because while every person has his own individual portion in Torah, this doesn't mean that whatever he finds difficult is not for him. Every person's portion in Torah is very broad, and it includes a connection to the entire Torah, just that each person has a unique approach towards learning Torah, a unique style of learning, and a unique setup of where he should start from and how he should structure his learning.

Additionally, very often someone may find a certain area of learning difficult for him because of superficial reasons, which carry no indication that that is not where his main portion in the תורה lies.

Accordingly, let us analyze four reasons why someone may feel a strong connection to learning Halachah over sugyos:

1. יסוד העפר is the most "practical" - "down to earth" - of the ארבעה יסודות. Therefore, someone whose nature is to be very practical and down to earth may enjoy learning Halachah and may have a difficult time with learning sugyos which seem more abstract. Such a person may be able to find more of a connection to learning sugyos if he finds a נפ"מ within every חקירה which he works on.

2. יסוד המים symbolizes enjoyment & connection, and it makes a person want to be involved with things which he can feel a connection to. Therefore, a person may feel that he can have more of a connection to Halachah, which has a bearing on his daily life, as opposed to sugyos,

which seem to have nothing to do with his daily life. Such a person may likely find that if he gets more deeply involved in the סברות of the sugya, he will find enjoyment and connection to the סברות themselves, instead of the more superficial connection that the Halachah has to his life.

3. יסוד הרוח makes a person want to feel like he is moving forward and progressing in life. A person may feel that when he learns Halachah he walks away with an accomplishment, because he got to the bottom line of knowing what to do, whereas when he learns sugyos, he never feels like he accomplishes anything, because he can always go deeper and deeper. Such a person needs to define for himself clearly what his goal is in learning a sugya, such as to get a pshat in the גמ' רש"י תוס' which makes sense to him, and then he can feel the same accomplishment in his learning.

4. יסוד האש gives a person a perspective of "black-and-white", just like fire which usually either destroys something completely or not at all. This makes a person want to come out from his learning with a black-and-white מותר - מסקנא - yes or no, אסור, etc. Therefore, a person may have difficulty with learning sugyos, which he may feel are much more vague and less clear-cut. Such a person needs to learn how to say svaros in a sugya which are clearly defined and not vague. An example of such svaros are the חידושים of ר' חיים, in which he clearly defines two distinct approaches to a sugya without leaving room for a third "in-between" מהלך.

בלבניפדיה עבודת ה' רה' הרב בלוי 33 ירושלים 20:30

בלבניפדיה מחשבה רה' קדמן 4 חולון 20:30



## THE SYMPTOMS

**Fire's** nature is to ascend. Rav Chaim Vital writes that the traits that come from water are lust, envy, and jealousy in which a person wants what his friend has. In the case of jealousy, a person wishes to rise above (*fire*). Here he is not focused on where he stands, which is down below, but rather he is focused on what's above him, and how he wishes to rise higher to where the other is. This hatred, fire-of-water-of-fire, is a hatred borne of jealousy.

**Rabeinu** Bachyeh (*sefer Kad HaKemach*), the *sefer* Toldos Yaakov Yosef (*parshas Kedoshim*), the Be'er Mayim Chaim (*parshas Toldos*) and *sefer* Ohr Yechezkel (*Middos*) all describe a kind of hatred that comes from jealousy. If a person tries to attain what the other has and is unsuccessful, his jealousy then turns into hatred. He doesn't hate the other as long as he still believes that he can attain what the other has. But once he believes that he cannot attain what his friend has, his jealousy for the other turns to hatred.

## THE REMEDY

**When** hatred comes from jealousy, one needs to understand that even if he cannot have exactly what the other has, he is not that much different than the other in terms of his ability to rise and succeed. One needs to examine himself well and see, "Even if I cannot succeed exactly like my friend, I am still able to succeed on my own level."

That way, he lessens the suffering of feeling how "My friend is doing so good, while I'm only failing." He can instead see that he and his friend are both growing and succeeding, and it is just that some people are able to grow higher and some less.

**This** perspective will recognizably weaken his jealousy and its resulting hatred, though it will not totally uproot it.

**On** a subtler level, taking it further, one needs to be aware that both he and the other (*who are both growing at each of their respective levels*) are in the category of *bnei aliyah*, those who truly grow and rise spiritually, meaning that they have upward movement. He needs to view himself as a "partner" with his friend. The very perspective of viewing another as a partner helps him find a point of similarity with the other, and this weakens his hatred for the other.

**This** remedy helps specifically for the hatred stemming from fire-of-water-of-fire, in which one is simply jealous of another's success but he hasn't despaired on his own, and he continues his own growth in spite of harboring a jealousy and dislike for the other. 1

1 If his resentment towards another has caused him to give up on his own success, this is earth-of-earth-of-fire, and it requires a different remedy, discussed earlier.

יום שני יז' חשוון תשפ"ה  
 רח' הרב בלוי 33 ירושלים  
 20:30

צורת אדם  
 בנושא זקן

