



BILVAVI

FOUR ELEMENTS

ISSUE 014 ♦ 5785 ♦ THE PATH TO KIRVAS HASHEM

FRIENDS SCHMOOZE EXTENDED INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUR ELEMENTS

BACKGROUND

Last week, Yaakov and Tzvi continued learning about the **יסוד העפר**, and discussed how it can be used in a positive way, to actualize all of one's aspirations

*Yaakov, Yaakov: Tzvi, I think we are about to reach a major milestone! If we finish learning about how to use the **יסוד עפר** properly, that means we'll have finished covering all of the **ארבעה יסודות**!*

Tzvi: Yes, you're right. This is certainly a major milestone, but I hope you realize that this doesn't mean that we're done...

Yaakov: Done? Since when are we trying to be done? After all, isn't this what life is all about - always trying to grow and get better and better?

Tzvi: Excellent, I'm happy you realize! Like my grandfather

always says, there's plenty of time to rest in the grave!

Either way, let's not get too far ahead of ourselves - we first need to try to finish up with the **יסוד העפר**. Was there something specific which you didn't get clear last week about how to use it properly?

*Yaakov: Yes, actually I did have a question: Last week we explained that the **יסוד העפר** is what helps you actualize your **רצון** and bring it from theory to practice. The example we discussed was someone who wants to get rich, and how the **יסוד העפר** can help him go step-by-step and build up his business in a solid way. What I wanted to know is whether this is only true when your goal is a physical, worldly goal, or does this apply even towards a **רוחניות'דיק** goal? For example, what if my goal is to come close to Hashem - which of course is the overall goal of all of us. How would the **יסוד העפר** help me actualize this goal?*

Tzvi: Excellent question. The answer is that the **יסוד העפר** is certainly what a person uses to actualize any and every goal, whether it is physical or **רוחניות'דיק**. So let's take the overall goal of coming close to Hashem - how does the **יסוד העפר** come in over here?

The answer is that from the perspective of the **יסוד העפר**, every process of development is a process of "construction", exactly like the process of building a building. Just like when you build a building you build it brick by brick, level by level, the same is with any growth using the **יסוד העפר**. And just like when you pour cement, you need to wait until the first level is dry and solid before you can build the second level on top of it, that is how a person needs to grow in any area, in order for his growth to be real and permanent.

What this concept means in terms of **רוחניות'דיק** growth, is that in order to progress further in **רוחניות**, you need to first have a

solid foundation, some solid level which you are building upon. This solid foundation is the level which you are already on, upon which you can build the next level which you are trying to reach.

Yaakov: But what does this mean למעשה? Let's say in closeness to Hashem - how do you know what level you're on now? I mean... how exactly can I define closeness to Hashem?

Tzvi: Well this is exactly the point! When you build a building, every step of the way is exactly defined. You don't rush to start building right away by randomly laying bricks... You first draw up general plans, then you move on to figuring out all the details as much as possible, and only then do you actually start building. This is exactly how the **יסוד העפר** works in all areas, and this is the only real way to succeed in growing a permanent way! You need to first figure out how to define precisely what your goals are, precisely where you are holding today, and precisely what steps it will take you to get from where you are today to where you want to get to. Turning a vague and abstract dream into a practical and well-defined plan of action is exactly the role of the **יסוד העפר**.

Yaakov: But can every רוחניות'דיק goal actually be broken down into exact steps? Let's say davening well - it's not just a matter of saying every word slowly and thinking about what they each mean... The main thing is really feeling what you're saying, and it's not so much a matter of checking off the specific details on the list...

Tzvi: You're definitely right, and I'll try to explain. What you're saying, in other words, is that the **יסוד העפר** alone is not the key to success. If a person davens while fully focusing on the specific words and their meanings, but without feeling like he is talking to and with Hashem from his heart, then he's using only the **יסוד העפר**, but not the other **יסודות** of **מים** - feeling a connection to Hashem, **אש** - feeling awe and **התבטלות** to Hashem, and **רוח** - the general feeling of turning towards Hashem and talking to Him. And you're certainly right - using just the **יסוד העפר** will not bring a person to true success.

However, the opposite is also true - if a person focuses only on the general feelings involved in **תפילה**, but not on the details of exactly how to stand, exactly what the words he's saying mean, and so on, then despite all the inspiration he may get from his davening, it will not bring him to a true, real connection to Hashem.

Yaakov: Why not?

Tzvi: Because all of his רוחניות feelings and inspiration will remain "floating in the air", but he will not feel them as a real **מציאות**!

When we want to connect to Hashem, we don't just want to get inspired and feel "lofty feelings". We aren't just trying to get a taste of "something special" and satisfy our thirst for רוחניות. What we're really trying to do is develop a sense for the reality of Hashem, to live with His presence constantly, as a true fact of life. This is the ultimate goal of all **עבודת השם** - not to be inspired, not to achieve lofty level and climb to the highest heights, but to live with the reality of Hashem as a simple fact of life. And the key to acquiring this sense of reality is through the **יסוד העפר**.

*Yaakov: So if I'm understanding correctly, you're saying that the **יסוד העפר** not only gives us a sense of reality of the **מציאות** in this world, but also a sense of the reality of Hashem's presence?*

Tzvi: Exactly. The more superficial usage of the **יסוד העפר** is to gain an awareness of the reality of this world, but the deeper level of the **יסוד העפר** gives us a sense of the reality of רוחניות in general, and ultimately, of Hashem's presence. And this is ultimately why the

can be the highest of all the **יסודות** - because the highest of all levels is to be conscious of Hashem's existence.

*Yaakov: I have another question: You said before that one of the aspects of the **יסוד העפר** is to follow your plans carefully and to appreciate details. Does that mean that following **הלכה** exactly down to the last detail also comes from the **יסוד העפר**?*

Tzvi: Yes, definitely. On a superficial level, people who are unaffiliated to **תורה** often ask: "Why does the **תורה** make such a big deal about all sorts of minor details?" "This is what it means to come close to Hashem?"

But according to what we are learning know, this is precisely the way to acquire an awareness of Hashem's presence and His will as a true reality, rather than as some "nice" and "inspirational" idea.

*Yaakov: I think there's also a concept that being **מדקדק** about details which we see no **חשיבות** in is itself the biggest **התבטלות** to Hashem that there is! The biggest way we can be **מתבטל** to Hashem is to live within the exact boundaries of the world which He made, and to follow His will exactly the way He wants us to, even without understanding why.*

Tzvi: 100%. But in terms of our discussion, the way this works is as follows: When a person is **מתבטל** to Hashem's will, it's not mainly that he is actively

מקורות ומקבילות

שכל עלייה בעבודת ה' הוא כבנייה - שבת קיד, ספר הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש פרק ה'.

הצורך לשלב בין הבנייה של יסוד העפר לכוחות האחרים של היסודות האחרים - ספר עלי שור ח"ב, שער ג', "מאמר החינוך".

שהמטרה של עבודת השם הוא לחוש מציאות השם כמציאות פשוטה ולא כהרגשה עילאית - ספר האדם ביקר ח"ב פ"ו, ספר מכתב מאליהו ח"א עמוד 117 ועמוד 285, ספר בלבבי משכן אבנה חלק ב' פ"ב.

שמישיגים את זה דרך הדקדוק בהלכה - ספר האדם ביקר

making himself closer to Hashem through his actions. Rather, what is happening is that by giving himself over to fulfilling Hashem's will down to the last detail, without any pleasure or understanding of the necessity of these details, a person turns himself into an "empty כלי" - he feels empty in relation to Hashem.

A person reaches the realization and feeling that he himself does not really understand anything, and he must turn towards Hashem for direction, and carry out His will to the last detail. Once he feels these feelings of

emptiness, then the feelings of awareness of Hashem's existence and presence will **מידה כנגד מידה** rain down to him and fill his heart.

This is the ultimate usage of the **יסוד העפר**. As long as a person feels like he knows the reality on his own, then he can't use the **יסוד העפר** to really feel Hashem's presence, because it is already being used for feeling the "reality" of this world. When a person gets to the point that he realizes that **אין לדיין אלא מה שעיניו** "all I know is the limited picture that I see and understand, and that's how I'm supposed to live my life, but I can't ever really know the actual reality for sure - this **התבטלות** clears the way for the **יסוד העפר** to turn towards feeling an awareness of Hashem's presence and true reality.

*Yaakov: Wow! I think that this last conversation sort of turned over my whole picture of what **עבודת השם** is and where we're supposed to be heading in life...*

Tzvi: Well, we're getting to the end of the **ארבעה יסודות**, and this was our goal all along - to see how the **ארבעה יסודות** can give us a perspective which can turn our overall yearning for Hashem into a lifelong, everyday reality.

Yaakov: So do you think you could try to just give me a short synopsis of the overall picture... how everything we learnt until

now can transform our daily life from being a scattered puzzle of a myriad of details into being one cohesive picture of coming closer to Hashem?

Tzvi: It sounds like you want me to be Hillel and teach the whole Torah on one foot...? But let me try!

The most central point of everything we've learnt is a changeover in attitude between the **יסוד הרוח** and the **יסוד העפר**.

The simple attitude people have is that a person's essential existence is his physical body, **עפר מן האדמה**, which as a side aspect also has desires and drives - **אש** and **מים** - which make it move - **רוח**. The result of this overall picture of life is that their starting point is identifying with physicality, which distances them from feeling Hashem's presence, and everything which they're doing is ultimately looked at as being branches of this physicality.

*Yaakov: And how does the **ארבעה יסודות** perspective change this?*

Tzvi: The picture of the **ארבעה יסודות** is the exact opposite: A person is ultimately a **כה** - a being of energy, of potential, of movement! Our whole life we are moving, not because we are motivated by some **תאוה** or some feeling of lack, but ultimately

because our essential makeup is as a **גשמה**, which lives with a sense of movement.

This movement itself gives us a consciousness of Hashem's presence, as He is the Source of our energy and movement, and our true ultimate desire is simply to do His will.

This overall, inner **כה** of movement and energy branches out and expresses itself in two main directions in life - in connecting to what we need to connect to, and in opposing what we need to oppose. The **יסוד הרוח** is constantly moving back and forth between these two forms, trying to choose which is the right path to take at any given time.

And this is our entire goal and job in life - to learn and get to know, as precisely as possible, what exactly Hashem wants from us, and follow that course. Living with this precise plan, which is the role of the **יסוד העפר**, and directing all of the other **יסודות** accordingly, is the ultimate key to feeling Hashem's presence and closeness constantly!

Yaakov: I hear! There's a lot here to think about, but I think I got the main picture.

*So what do you say, perhaps we should make a **לחיים**, now that*

*we finished our first time going around the **ארבעה יסודות**!*

Tzvi: Definitely! I think maybe next week we'll try to do some **חזרה** on everything we've learnt this **זמן**, and I'm already looking forward to continuing **ה' בעזרת** next **זמן**! Now that we have all the basic concepts down straight, we can hopefully get more into the details, which will only help us make the **ארבעה יסודות** more and more practical **השם בעזרת**!

SUMMARY OF SCHMOOZE

יסוד העפר: Any *avodah* that we want should last long-term must be done through the **יסוד העפר** through precise recognition of the reality, an organized plan of action, and working consistently according to the plan. Without this, the whole *avodah* remains "floating in space".

In *avodas* Hashem as well, the goal is to feel **ה' קירבת** as an actual reality like the **יסוד העפר**, and not just as the lofty feelings which stem from the other **יסודות**.

All of the **ארבעה יסודות:** The **ארבעה יסודות** perspective changes the whole picture of life - from a physical life which is run by separate drives, to a spiritual life whose root is one desire to be **ה' מקיים רצון**, and whose branches include all the myriad details of life!

FUNDAMENTALS OF MIDDOS IMPROVEMENT

MAKING A LIST OF QUALITIES AND SHORTCOMINGS

After this stage, a person must then give order to what's going on inside himself - by becoming aware of all his qualities and shortcomings.

This cannot be done in merely 2-3 hours of reflection; that would be like trying to take a shortcut. It takes at least 1-2 months of thinking about one's personal qualities and shortcomings, until a person can become aware of all of them. Each time he realizes he has a quality or a shortcoming, he should write it down.

Sometimes it is hard to determine if a certain part of his nature is a good quality or a negative quality, but generally speaking, one needs to give order to his soul, by writing them down. On one side of a paper write down all your qualities, and on the other side of the paper write down all the shortcomings.

After doing this for about 1-2 months (and you don't have to do be involved with this for an hour each day - just go slowly with this, and go about it calmly), you now have a list of all the qualities and shortcomings you recognize in yourself up until this point. Now you can give even more order: Ask yourself which of these abilities are more dominant in yourself, and which are less dominant.

It is hard to figure out which is your strongest ability, your second-to-strongest ability, your third-to-strongest ability, etc. It requires

deep thinking to be accurate about it. But with the more you attempt to figure it out, you become clearer about yourself.

LEARNING ABOUT THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF THE SOUL

After this, a person has gotten past what we can call the 'first' stage, which was all the beginning to the 'avodah' stage. Now a person can progress to the 'second' stage, to a certain extent: One must learn about the four elements of the soul.¹

One must understand how each element can contain the other three elements. Although there are four root elements - earth, water, wind and fire - those are the general roots. There are more details to those roots.

After one knows which *middos* can stem from each of the four elements, and he is aware of his own good and bad *middos*, and how dominant they are in himself, he should know try to trace the middos to their elements that they come from. This takes time to figure out. It is a process of inner learning.

MOST OF OUR 'AVODAH' IS GRADUAL CLARITY, NOT PRACTICAL CHANGE

There is a statement in our Sages, "The question of the wise, is half the answer." What we explained until now can bring a person to the "question of the wise", but it is 'half the answer' - it is half of our *avodah*, and perhaps even more so. Most of our *avodah* is not practical work; most of our *avodah* is when

¹ see *Understanding Your Middos #01 - Elements and Traits*

we *recognize* our true self (this is called "*hakarah*").

Hakarah, recognition [our soul], is the essence of our *avodah*. Without *hakarah*, a person is impatient and he wants to immediately get to the practical outcomes of what he's learning. This comes from a lack of *hakarah*. If one would know what *hakarah* is, he would know that the very process of recognizing oneself is the root of *avodah* itself. *Hakarah* of our self is already halfway towards the finish line of our *avodah* - and in fact, it's even more than half.

Therefore, as one is working at this process of inner recognition of himself, he becomes clearer about himself, as time goes on. He will discover that many problems that he had before will suddenly disappear on their own.

Anyone who has persevered with this path of inner change can testify that many of their problems went away on their own, even without any actual *avodah*! I don't mean that there was no *avodah* at all, but since they had been unclear about themselves before they started and they became clearer about themselves as they went along, many of their problems went away on their own, from the clarity they gained.

After reaching that stage, there is still *avodah* to be done, of course. The practical changes still need to be implemented, which haven't been implemented until now, being that the beginning stage of *avodah* was a learning process.

I find that very often I'm feeling lazy and not in the mood of doing anything, but then when I get an idea to do something "big", I suddenly get energy. For example, it could be Thursday afternoon and I don't have energy to get up and start making Shabbos. But then if I all of a sudden think of inviting guests, then I'll have energy to prepare food not only for my family, but also for all the guests as well... Perhaps the ארבעה יסודות perspective can help me understand what's going on with my laziness?

Answer: As the שערי קדושה writes, laziness in general stems from the יסוד העפר which sits in place and is immobile. However, on a more detailed level, within the יסוד העפר itself there are two roots of laziness:

There is one type of laziness which stems fully from the יסוד העפר. The כי טבע" describes this as "כי טבע" האדם כבד מאד, כי עפריות החמריות גס, על כן לא יחפוץ האדם בטורח - "ומלאכה" the יסוד העפר of a person's body is heavy, and this makes him lazy and not want to work.

However, there is another aspect to laziness which stems from the attribute of the יסוד העפר which describe as לית ליה מגרמיה כלום - earth has nothing of its own. If you plant something into the earth and you give it water, sunlight, and air, then the earth can make it produce, but earth on its own it has nothing. In regard to a person's middos, what this means is that while the body is what carries out its job, the motivation to do things stems from the יסודות of רוח, אש, and מים, which "rain down" motivation upon body.

The body on its own, however, cannot motivate itself, and when it

doesn't get the motivation it needs, it is naturally lazy.

Accordingly, sometimes a person is lazy not because his body is actively stopping him from doing what he wants to do, but simply because he is lacking in his motivation to do things. He is like a car which ran out of gas - the car isn't being lazy, it is simply lacking the fuel which it needs. In this type of case, the solution to the laziness clearly lies in reawakening the motivation to get up and do things, and then the laziness will disappear on its own.

Thus, based on the ארבעה יסודות, we can offer the following breakdown of how to overcome laziness:

1. If a person is truly feeling heavy, then this is a true issue of laziness of the יסוד העפר. One way to overcome such laziness is by clarifying exactly what is the next small step which you want to take now. Focus on the small detail, instead of on the big picture. By doing this, you can take the יסוד העפר which is causing laziness, and redirect it towards the מידות of orderliness and precision. And once you know precisely what your next small step is, your laziness will already become much weaker, because that one small step itself isn't so hard. Another point which may help is to train yourself that even when you're lazy, you'll always keep moving and progressing somewhat, albeit very slowly. This ensures that there will always remain some aspect of the opposite יסוד - the יסוד הרוח - to counterbalance the laziness of the יסוד העפר, and will save you from needing to start yourself moving from scratch, which is much harder.

If the person is merely lacking

motivation, then here are three types of motivation which can help him overcome his laziness:

2. The יסוד המים can motivate a person to do something that will bring a pleasant outcome. For example, a person can picture how he can do something which will make someone else happy, or how he can prepare something which someone else will enjoy, and the pleasant picture of the feelings of אהבה and שמחה can motivate him to do what he wants to do. Or on a simpler level, he can picture something which he himself will enjoy, or something which he will enjoy together with others, and picturing his personal enjoyment will help him overcome his laziness.

3. The יסוד האש can motivate a person by presenting him with something new [as fire is always renewing itself every second], or with a challenge [as fire always represents opposition]. Sometimes a person can lose his motivation because he gets dried out and bored of his routine [and therefore he will not be inspired by the יסוד המים]. However, when he's faced by something new, or by a challenge, this can awaken his יסוד האש, which wants to stand up to the challenge and emerge successful. [This seems to be the type of situation described in the question.]

4. The יסוד הרוח can motivate a person to do something which he feels is connected to his general purpose and direction in life. If a person can think into why what he wants to do is something meaningful and connected to his overall direction in life, this can awaken his inner יסוד הרוח and help him overcome his laziness.

Hatzlacha Rabba!

THE SYMPTOMS

Water is the element of vitality/pleasure, wind is the element of movement, and fire is the root of hatred. Hatred produces a pleasure and vitality from the soul-movement of “competition”. And sometimes it works the other way around: Competition produces hatred, and as the Shelah HaKadosh says: “A person hates another because of jealousy or competition.” Chazal taught “A craftsman hates his competitor”, and tends to compete against him.

The Korbon Ha'Eidah defines competition is defined as being jealous and fighting with another, where each of them says “I want to be at the lead.”

The Sages taught about the World To Come that there is no jealousy, no hatred, and no competition. Only tzaddikim sitting with their crowns on their heads” – meaning that each person in the World To Come has his “crown” on his head, and does not wish to be leading another.

Competition is therefore when one feels “One of us is at the lead. If he’s leading, then I’m in second place. If I’m leading, then he is in second place.” This is the root of hatred, which is the word sinah, from the word sheini, two.

Hatred demands that I should not be in second place to another. The Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer describes the competition that arose between the sun and the moon, where each of them wanted to be bigger than the other.

Understand that competition can either be that “I have to be the one who is in first place” or “I have to be the one who is greater”. But when hatred comes from competition, it demands that “I should not be in second place. Rather, it’s the other who should be in second place”. And this is because the person in competition sees the other as a “second” person to him. And if he finds himself being in second place to the other, his hatred for the other grows.

THE REMEDY

The World To Come has no jealousy, hatred, or competition in it – only the tzaddikim sitting with their crowns on their heads and enjoying the rays of the Shechinah. This means that the crowns on their heads makes them attached to their root, in the Shechinah – and that is how they are able to enjoy the rays of the Shechinah.

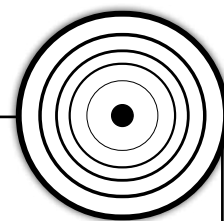
That perspective removes the entire perspective of competition. Competition is all about two people moving in the same path to get to the same place. But the true perspective to have is that each person has their own world, and each of them has their own personal duties. Since each person has his own world to himself, there is really no place for competition. When we remove competition, the hatred is removed with it.

יום שני טו' כסלו תשפ"ה
רה' הרב בלוי 33 ירושלים

20:30

צורת אדם

בנושא גרון



AROUSING INSIGHTS WEEKLY

BILVAVI FOUR ELEMENTS
ISSUE 009 • 5784

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TRANSLATOR NEEDED!
THIS ISSUE ENDS THE CURRENT SERIES OF THE "FRIENDS SCHMOOZE" TO CONTINUE WE NEED A TRANSLATOR FROM HEBREW INTO ENGLISH IF YOU CAN HELP US PLEASE CONTACT US AT BILVAVI231@GMAIL.COM

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BILVAVI FOUR ELEMENTS
EARTH ♦ WATER ♦ WIND ♦ FIRE