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MOVING OUT OF
NON-MOVEMENT

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Moving Out of Non-Movement

Two Opposing Elements: Wind/Movement and Earth/Permanence

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will learn here about the element of earth, the root of the trait of laziness.

As a general description, there are two “pairs” within the four elements – the elements of fire and water, and the elements of wind and earth.

The Vilna *Gaon* said that the elements of fire and water are Heavenly elements and more associated with the Next World, while the elements of wind and earth are baser elements which are more associated with This World.

Man’s body was taken from the earth, and when man received a soul, he became a “talking spirit” (*ruach memalelah*). Therefore, the soul is rooted in the element of “wind”.

Laziness - Stifled Movement Caused By “Heaviness” In The Soul

Wind is the root of movement. Wind is the motivating force in everything. Earth, by contrast, is a serene, unmoving element which gives permanence and solidity. Therefore, the element of earth is the very antithesis to the element of wind/movement.

When earth’s nature of “serenity” is in repaired, this is the genuine serenity which is referred to as “*menuchah*”. When serenity is impaired, this is what we call “*atzlus*”, laziness. Therefore, earth is the opposite of wind in two ways: either because it is serene [the rectified use of earth], or because it breeds laziness [the impaired use of earth].

Laziness is essentially whenever a person stifles his power of movement. When a person’s movements become completely stifled and still, this is death. At death, the soul (or the “wind”) of a person returns to Hashem, and the body (or his “earth”) returns to the earth. When a person’s movements are only partially stifled, this is what we experience as laziness. The trait of laziness should therefore be more precisely defined as a partial stifling of wind/movement in the soul.

When one needs to move more (based on his personal needs for movement, which vary according to each soul) but his movements have become restricted, due to the nature of “heaviness” which comes from the element of earth, this produces laziness. Laziness comes from the aspect of “heaviness” in the element of earth, and this is what lays behind the definition of laziness we explained above: laziness is a partial stifling of movement. So it is really the “heaviness” of earth which, when it dominates, causes a partial stifling of movement in the soul. This heaviness of “earth” in the soul, when it meets the “wind” in the soul, can slow it down – and this is what we know as laziness.

The Five General Functions of the Soul

The soul generally consists of five functions (in order of lowest level to highest level): (1) **Action**, (2) **Emotion**, (3) **Speech**, (4) **Thought**, (5) **Will**.

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Let us explain these levels, from the lowest to the highest.

How Laziness Affects Action

When the element of earth is impaired, it will generally manifest in the “actions” of a person. Action is the lowest use of the soul, and earth is the lowest of the four elements. Our Sages also equate the element of earth with the power of action. Earth activates the potential of the elements of fire, water and wind, bringing them into the realm of action. The “world of action” which we live in is generally associated with the element of earth.

Although the element of earth is generally manifest in the world of action, the aspect of “heaviness” in earth also exists in the subtler areas of the soul: the faculties of will, thought, emotion, and the speech. Actions, though, are the basest function of the soul, and therefore the earth’s “heaviness” is mainly manifest in one’s actions, the “heaviest” force in the soul [which weighs a person down and which is closest to physicality]. Thus, the element of earth mainly corresponds to the level of action.

The heaviness of earth mainly settles on the area of action, but it can also show up in the subtler areas of the soul. Therefore, we can detect laziness in the will, thoughts, speech and emotions – where the element of earth can produce stifled movement, resulting in laziness, within the above areas of the soul.

The Effect of Laziness On The Character Traits

Laziness is also a character trait. While laziness is mainly manifest in the area of action, it is also one of the character traits, and therefore, besides for laziness in the active sense (*poel*), when a person “acts” lazy, there is also laziness that can be manifest on a potential level (*koach*) in the soul. While the **results** of laziness can be seen in the area of action, laziness still exists on a **potential** level in the other areas of the soul as well, which include speech, emotion, thought, and will.

Therefore, although we have explained that laziness is manifestly manifest in the area of action, it also exists on a subtler level, as a character trait, in all areas of the soul. So while laziness can mainly be seen in the area of action, it also exists on a subtler level, when it comes to the areas of speech, emotion, thought and will. When laziness is in its “potential” form, it can be detected as **slowed movement** in the soul, which then results in laziness.

As a result of this, when laziness takes effect on various character traits of the soul – such as the traits of joy, enthusiasm, love, etc. – what will happen? The particular trait in question will become somewhat restricted - either totally, or partially. The laziness will “slow down” the soul’s movements, within the particular trait in question. This will be detrimental to the inner makeup of the soul. So, besides for the fact that laziness bears negative results – it causes a person to act lazy – it also has subtler detrimental effects. It will “weigh down” a certain character trait.

For example, if a person is lazy, his joy may also be lessened. Or, he may feel less loving. Joy and love are both emotions that come from inner expansion, and when laziness dominates, these emotions are constricted and the soul cannot expand as much. As a result, a person will experience less joy even when he is experiencing joy, and less love even when he’s experiencing love, etc. The laziness doesn’t let the soul expand, and the character traits will be prevented from expanding as they normally do, remaining in their potential state, unutilized.

Many times, when a person is lazy, this has a detrimental effect on his character traits, and when he attempts to fix his character traits, he doesn’t realize that the problem is causing from the laziness, and instead he thinks

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that there is something wrong with his love, joy, etc. The laziness is preventing his character traits from performing properly.

Since laziness is a character trait, its effect on the character traits is clearly felt, because that is where the laziness mainly settles.

Laziness In Speech

Laziness also affects a person's speech. The *Chovos HaLevovos* says that the lightest part of the body is the tongue, meaning that a person can speak freely. But when laziness takes hold of a person, it weighs down his speech as well.

A classic example of this is the *mitzvah* to speak words of Torah. When one is lazy, he will be lazy when it comes to speaking words of Torah as well. When learning with his *chavrusa*, he may be too lazy to say what he's thinking.

Or, when learning Torah privately, he may be too lazy to verbalize the words. The ideal way of learning Torah is to verbalize the words when learning it, and the *Baal HaTanya* said that it is an actual obligation, for the *Gemara* says that one must verbalize the words of Torah with his mouth, so that it should become "alive" in his mouth. A person may be learning with a *sefer* and he is thinking about Torah, but he is not speaking words of Torah, because he is being prevented by laziness.

Another example is that a person may be too lazy to give a compliment or an encouraging word to someone else, when the other is going through a difficult time. This is also an example of laziness in speech.

Another form of laziness in speech is when a person speaks slowly. There are some who speak slowly because they have a deliberate thinking process, and they think things through very well before they speak, carefully choosing their words. Others, however, will speak slowly because they have a dominant element of earth in their souls, and the trait of laziness produced from earth is manifest in their speech.

(Laziness doesn't always affect the entire spectrum of the soul. In some people, laziness is only present in their actions, and in others, it shows up in their speech, and in others it will show up in their emotions. Others will have laziness only in their thoughts, and others will have laziness only when it comes to their will.)

When laziness manifests in speech, a person's speech is slowed. A person may seem to be a very calm person who always speaks slowly and calmly, while in reality, the reason he speaks slowly may be because he is weighed down by his element of earth. So if a person is always speaking very slowly, it may either be stemming from a calm state of mind, which is a quality, or it may be stemming from the "heaviness" of a dominant element of earth, which is detrimental.

How Laziness Affects Thought

Laziness can also be manifest in a person's thoughts. This is a more expansive topic.

Every person thinks, each on his own level. The three thinking abilities are called *chochmah*, *binah*, and *daas*. Although laziness affects the entire spectrum of the soul, we can possibly say that the main detrimental effects of laziness are on the power of thought: when a person is lazy when it comes to his thinking.

The Sages state that "A person is thought" ("*adam da machshavah*"). Man has the power to think and reflect, and this is a power that is constantly active. However, it is well-known that a person does not use much of his

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brain. Whatever has been discovered about the brain so far is only about a small part of the brain, which the scientists admit to. There are many more parts of the brain which people do not use, and for the most part, these parts of the brain are asleep. One of the main reasons of why so many people are “asleep” in their brains is because they are simply being too lazy to think.

People are trained to do actions, but they are not that trained to think, and that is what they are used to since childhood. Those who merit learn Torah throughout the day, are usually using their minds to think, each on his own level. But if a person isn't learning Torah that much during the day, or even if he's sitting and learning Torah all day in the *beis midrash* but he is not trying to exert his mind that much, he isn't using the potential of his mind, and he won't be aware of his mental capabilities, because he isn't using them. Even if he is aware, he may still be using very little of his ability to think.

Therefore, in most people, there is a laziness which prevents the person from using his thinking, because they have never trained themselves to get used to thinking, which further limits their active mental abilities. This issue has many bearings on one's ability to think. There are two issues here – an issue of quantity, and an issue of quality. One issue to consider is how much a person is thinking, and the other issue is the quality of one's thinking – how well he can think. When one hasn't trained his mind to think that much, not only isn't he thinking, but the quality of his thinking will also decline. His comprehension will therefore become very narrowed and limited.

How Laziness Affects The Will

Laziness also has a detrimental effect on the will of the person. When one is lazy, the laziness prevents him from actualizing his willpower.

If a person hasn't yet begun to improve his spiritual state, his connection to materialism and his sins will block his heart, and he won't be able to actualize his spiritual will to improve. The purer he becomes, the better he will be able to actualize his will. However, this problem is not always when it comes to the spiritual. It can affect a person even a more basic level, of simply not having enough willpower for anything. This is a problem that affects even the “animal” level of the soul, and it is not always related to a spiritual will. We can see that some people have a very active willpower, whereas others don't express any aspirations for anything, and they would need something compelling to motivate them.

There are also other reasons why a person wouldn't be motivated. A person may simply be too lazy to even want something. It may feel too burdensome. Just as a person doesn't want to carry a heavy package, so would a person want to avoid having a will for something, if it feels like a load upon him that he's not interested in having. This is not the same issue as a person who wishes to throw off all his responsibilities. Here we are speaking of a different issue, where a person doesn't want to deal with too much, so he avoids it. He doesn't want to bear the weight of wanting something, so he doesn't try to awaken his willpower.

Even more so, sometimes a person doesn't want to activate his will because he's afraid that it will contradict a different will he has, and he doesn't want to face his own conflicting desires. Subconsciously, he will deny what he wants, because he doesn't want to deal with contradictions in his will. Part of the reason for this is due to laziness, because he doesn't want to exert his mind. He is not prepared to deal with his own willpower, and this is a form of laziness.

Laziness: Inactive Potential

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Thus, when a person is having difficulty accessing his own willpower, part of the reason is due to laziness, of not wanting to deal with internal conflict. The result is that a person doesn't try to activate his potential.

There are two forms of laziness: Either when a person doesn't act at all, or, when he performs his actions too slowly. The first kind of laziness (refraining entirely from performing) is referred to as *atzlus*, while the second kind of laziness (performing slowly and slothfully) is referred to as "*atzaltayim*". In either case, the laziness is preventing the person from utilizing his potential, keeping his soul's power in a dormant, inactive state.

Understandably, this can be explained in further detail, but it will suffice for now with the general description of laziness explained until now.

Impaired Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth: The Unwillingness To Act

Laziness comes from the element of earth, and there are aspects of all four elements in each of the elements. Therefore, in earth, we can find earth, water, wind and fire. Let us begin by first seeing what laziness produced by "**earth**"-of-earth is, and how to repair it [and we will begin with the laziness that comes from "earth"-of-earth-of-earth].

As mentioned above, there are two basic manifestations of laziness – when a person does not act at all, and when a person acts slowly. For a person who has a strong amount of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, his laziness will take on both of these forms – he will act very slowly, and also, he will often not want to act at all.

Now we shall understand this deeper. As mentioned earlier, a person on this world is mainly using his elements of earth (serenity, or non-movement) and wind (action, or movement). What is the initial perspective of our soul? Are we naturally inclined towards action, or serenity?

Here is an example that brings out the idea. There is day and night. In middle of the day, the natural perspective of people is action and movement, and by night, the nature of people is to seek serenity, not action and movement. Our question is: What is the natural state of our soul? Does it initially seek serenity, or does it initially seek action and movement?

The way to define it is as follows. In our world, the main perspective [of the soul] is movement and action, for we live in a "world of action", but in the Next World, which will be "entirely Shabbos", our initial perspective will be serenity (*menuchah*).

To give a general description, when it comes to the personal makeup of one's soul, if a person's main element is wind, his nature is drawn towards action and movement, but if his main element is earth, his nature is to seek serenity. Earlier, we explained how earth/laziness affects the five general areas of the soul, which are: action, speech, emotion, thought, and will. The nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, when it is left impaired, causes the initial perspective of the soul to avoid even the tiniest, subtle desire for any movement. When this nature is rectified, it is called *menuchah*, which is true serenity, and when it is impaired, it is laziness.

When **earth-of-earth-of-earth** remains impaired, the initial perspective of this person's inner makeup is that he will want to avoid any movement. What will happen from this, as a result? He will not even be aware of the necessity to do any action right now, even when he has to. Any time he will want to do some movement or action, subconsciously he will feel opposition towards it, and as a result, he will not want to do it.

As soon as this kind of person gets even the subtlest will to do anything, the "heaviness" of his **earth-of-earth-of-earth** will make its appearance, awakening the "initial perspective" of his soul, which does not want to do anything. It will overpower any desire that he has to act, and even if he does have a desire to act, he will usually deny it subconsciously.

Repairing Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth At Its Root: Changing The Soul's Initial Nature

To improve impaired **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, we will need to treat the issue at its root, as opposed to merely working with the “branches” of the issues (the laziness per se). In the coming lessons, with the help of Hashem, we will explain how to work with the branches of laziness-related issues, such as by how to improve upon actions and thoughts affected by laziness.

Here in this lesson, where we are discussing how to repair **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, which is the “root” of all laziness, we need to improve it by working with this nature at its root, as opposed to dealing with the results and the “branches” of the laziness.

The way to repair **earth-of-earth-of-earth** is not simply by forcing oneself to do something when one doesn't want to, or to force oneself to think when one doesn't want to, etc. Although it is true that one will need to do that as well, that is only dealing with the “branches” of the issue. What we mainly need to do here, in order to improve **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, is to work with the root: to change the order of the inner workings of one's very nature, by changing the “initial perspective” of the soul [which, in this case, naturally seeks serenity and avoids action and performance]. Otherwise, the heavy nature of his **earth-of-earth-of-earth** will overpower one's wind, meaning that the person's unwillingness to act will overpower any desire for action, and, subconsciously, a person will not even be aware that there is a need for him to move and act. This is the very depth behind the trait of laziness, in particular, when the laziness stems from **earth-of-earth-of-earth**.

Now that we have studied the depth of the issue, we can proceed to the depth of solution. With the help of Hashem, as we continue in the coming lessons to discuss the issues of laziness, we will also examine the “branches” of this issue, in their many details. First, before getting to the branching issues of laziness, we need to understand the **root** of how laziness is repaired – which will involve a change in the inner makeup of one's soul.

Solving Earth-of-Earth-of-Earth At Its Root: Awakening Wind/Movement

How does one change the inner makeup of his soul? There are two ways of *avodah*, to overcome the heaviness in the soul that breeds laziness. Either one can simply try to oppose the laziness and fight it [by forcing himself to act], or, he can begin to **awaken his element of wind**, at its root.

In the first way, a person identifies the laziness as an inner heaviness in his soul, and he then tries to deal with this issue, using any of the various methods which can help him overcome the heaviness/laziness, which we shall explain in the coming lessons, with *siyata d'shmaya*. (These methods are also mentioned in the words of our Sages.)

But when we use the second way, we do not work with branches of the issue. Instead, we work with the root. Here we do not focus on how to deal with the laziness per se. The work here is to awaken movement. This is not because we are trying to deal with the difficulty of laziness. Rather, the approach here will be in the opposite manner: One should simply get used to doing various movements, for the purpose of awakening movement - and not for the purpose of fighting laziness.

These actions of awakening movement (which we will soon give examples of) should be done sensibly, in a way that one can handle, because if a person goes too far with this idea and he is moving too much, he won't be able to concentrate or focus well. Therefore, it is a subtle matter which requires caution. So each person should see which movements he can awaken, as long as he won't be doing anything that disrupts his concentration.

Examples of Awakening Movement

Here are some examples of how a person can awaken more movement and train the soul to avoid staying too long in non-movement.

- 1) When a person is riding the bus, he should try not to stay seated the whole time or fall asleep in his seat. Instead, at a certain point, he should rise from his seat and get used to standing on the bus. (Of course, this is only possible in cases where the *halachah* allows it.)
- 2) If a person is sitting and learning Torah, he shouldn't sit there glued to his seat with a kind of heaviness which he doesn't budge from. He should deliberately awaken some movement every so often, such as by getting up from his seat at times and standing while learning, or by swaying in front of his *sefer* on a *shtender*.
- 3) Additionally, a person should try to avoid lying down in a bed unless he needs to go to sleep. If one wants to take this even further, he can try not getting too comfortable even when he's going to sleep. He can try making it a bit difficult for himself [i.e. by removing one of his pillows].
- 4) One should try walking for a certain distance every day.
- 5) Instead of taking an elevator, he can try walking up the steps.
- 6) Taking this further, one should try taking care of doing something, even if he's not sure he needs to do it. Instead of thinking if he really needs to do this action or not, he should just go do it. Even if he doesn't need to do it, it is good for him to do it, because he will be getting used to practicing movement, so the gain is worth it. It is not a waste of time - as long as a person going overboard with it.

The Goal – “Habit Becomes Second Nature”

Understandably, when trying to practice this idea, one should not try to do anything extreme in order to change his nature. Instead, one should simply get used to practicing movements that are minimal and easy to perform.

When one gets used to this practice, it gradually changes the “initial perspective” of the soul which naturally avoids movement, taking him out of the heavy, dominant nature of his **earth-of-earth-of-earth**. As a person does it more, he gets used to more and more movement, which gradually changes the inner makeup in his soul. At some point, he will feel as if a heavy stone has been lifted from his heart. He will feel lighter, even though he has not dealt directly with the trait of laziness itself. Instead, he has dealt with the root.

There are more examples of the idea, but the point is to gradually enter into a life of movement, in a sensible and balanced way, and slowly, the “initial perspective” of his soul change, both in how he thinks and in how he acts. In this way, the person with a dominant nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth** comes out of his initial nature, and instead, his element of wind (movement) can start overpowering his earth, since there is a rule that “habit becomes second nature.” Eventually, if one keeps going in this direction of change, he can rectify his nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, where it will then become genuine *menuchah*, serenity.

And so, a person with a nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth** starts out with a “heavy” nature of earth, which avoids action and movement, and his inner work (in order to repair his nature) is to get used to practicing small amounts of movement, which awakens his element of wind. After he practices this for a considerable amount of time, he rectifies his nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, where it becomes true *menuchah*/serenity, because his serene nature becomes balanced by the ability of movement.

Rectifying The Soul's Root vs. Trying To Overturn It

As emphasized, this must be a gradual process of getting used to movements, because if a person tries to move too much, he is acting too extreme, and the problem with this is that he may be trying to change his “soul root” - which cannot actually be done. If he has a “soul root” of earth and he is trying to turn it into wind, this will only prove detrimental to him, because he cannot change his soul root. Trying to go against his soul root, by taking on too many extreme changes of action, will only throw him out of balance.

The person who has the initial nature to avoid movement has a “soul root” of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, and since it is his “soul root”, it cannot be changed – instead, it must become rectified and balanced. Therefore, one should not try to overturn his nature of **earth-by-earth** by trying to totally go against his nature, such as by performing extreme amounts of movement and the like. He would by trying to change his soul root, which cannot be done.

Instead, his work is to **balance out his nature**, by bringing some movement into his life, which enables his element of wind to overpower over his nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, thereby rectifying his impaired **earth-of-earth-of-earth** and turning it holy, where his **earth-of-earth-of-earth** can now be the true, ideal serenity that is known as *menuchah*.

However, even when he does rectify his nature, he should still make sure to awaken movement in his life, so that he doesn't fall back into his old, impaired nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**. Since **earth-of-earth-of-earth** is his “soul root”, he may easily fall back it into its impaired state if he allows it dominate again, by avoiding movement. So he should still be wary of his nature to become too serene, and he should make sure that he keeps awakening movement in his life, even after he has succeeded in balancing out his nature.

Conclusion

Through these changes of action, the person with a nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth**, who once had an initial nature to avoid movement, can gain a new nature, in which the element of wind/movement becomes his primary function, overpowering his initial nature of **earth-of-earth-of-earth** that had been confining him. This is because there is a rule that “habit becomes second nature”¹, and it enables a person to reach the ideal, balanced kind of *menuchah*/serenity, where one can perform action and still be able to maintain his original serene nature.

TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW SHIUR:

דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית עפר עצלות מפורט 001 עפר דעפר כח ארשוני בנפש העדר תנועה

¹ *sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh. Also mentioned in the Rambam: Shemoneh Perakim.*