



SHOFTIM AVOIDING INTERNAL BRIBERY

Bribery Sways The Mind and The Senses Parshas Shoftim contains the Torah's commandment of "Do not take a bribe, for a bribe sways the eyes of the wise" - a judge in Beis Din may not take shochad (a bribe) from anyone.

Here the Torah explains clearly the reason why a judge may not take a bribe. A bribe doesn't allow one to see something objectively as it is. It overpowers the rational intellect.

A bribe overpowers even the physical senses. It can even cause him to see the matter in an entirely different light. Now that he has taken the bribe, he has become biased. When a person is bribed, he will hear the facts differently, and even his physical vision will show him something else. He doesn't even see accurately. He has become biased in how he views the situation. A person might even be told what the facts are, yet he continues to see the facts differently and he hears what he wants to hear, because the bribe that he has taken is distorting the reality that he sees.

The Depth of Our Bechirah (Free Will) It is a halachah of the Torah that a dayan may not accept a bribe. We are taught by the Sages that each person must view himself as his own dayan/judge. Thus, just as a judge in Bein Din must avoid a bribe so must we avoid bribery in our soul. How can a person be his own judge? Every person has situations where he must judge and decide what the correct course of action is. Not only must we "judge" others favorably, but we must always see two options in front of us, what truth is and what falsehood is, and then decide between them. That is a judge's purpose: to see both sides, to see which of them is true and which is false, and decide upon the truth.

On a personal level, man must know how to decide between good and evil, when he uses his power of bechirah, free will. Our bechirah is enabled by the fact that we are each our own judge. If a person chooses something simply because he wants it, this is not called making a proper judgment. But if a person has chosen to do something because he has decided between true and false - as the Rambam describes our bechirah - this is what it means to be our own judge.

Sometimes we are faced with total falsehood, and sometimes we must discern subtle untruthfulness that is contained even in truth. There are levels and levels to truth and untruth. Our avodah of bechirah is to see what truth is, where the falsehood is, and then to choose truth.

This is how a person makes himself into his own judge. It means to pit truth against fiction and decide between them. There is a

lot that we have to decide, and this is where a large part of our avodah in This World is. **Bribery In Our Soul** Being that we are each our own judge, we must make sure not to take any "bribery" in our own soul, Bribery sways our sense of rational judgment. A judge must not listen to any offers of money, but how do we refuse a bribe in our soul? Are there any 'bribes' that we offer to ourselves?

The power of bribery (shochad) that can sway our soul is essentially identified as our very own ratzon (will). When one is a judge over oneself, one chooses between truth and falsehood, but when he has certain desires for something, these very desires will sway his way of thinking and it will be like bribery to him. In the soul, bribery is in the form of ratzon. When a person already has a desire for option "A" over option "B" before he has viewed the situation objectively, he has already decided to choose option "A".

The halachah is that when judging a case, the dayan must view all of the litigants as equal.¹ For example, he must not differentiate between the wealthy and the poor. So too, when one is being his own judge as he decides between one of two options, he must see the two sides as equal options. Otherwise, he cannot judge.

If he sees the options as equal, he can decide between them and reach the truth. His heart can show him what the truth is, what is untrue, and then he must decide upon the truth. His true power of bechirah will be accessed, and he will be able to choose truth. But when one is already inclined to choose one of the options, he is already biased before he has even started to judge. He cannot see that the two options are equal. As long as there is a ratzon already for one of the options, he cannot decide properly. His ratzon has bribed him, and it sways his mind.

The Yetzer Hora and How It Affects Our Decisions Most of the time, when a person chooses and decides something, it is stemming from some form of inner bribery. This is because "the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth"². The innermost will in the soul, which is the desire to do Hashem's will, is often concealed by the yetzer hora. Although there is always a deeply rooted desire in each soul to want to do Hashem's will, it initially remains deep in the subconscious. It is mostly the yetzer hora which is at the forefront of one's conscious desire. We are taught that the yetzer hora has two forms³: One kind of yetzer hora is an external kind of yetzer hora, where we are convinced to

1 Sanhedrin 6b

2 Beraishis 8:21

3 as explained in sefer Nefesh HaChaim

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do evil even when we want good. A more inner kind of yetzer hora is the kind that is buried in our own heart. Chazal refer to this kind of yetzer hora as “Tzefuni”, “hidden one”, for it hides in the heart of man.⁴ It convinces a person that he essentially is the evil desire that he wants.

The Nefesh HaChaim explains that before the sin of Adam, the yetzer hora was heard as an outer voice, and after the sin, the yetzer hora entered man himself. Ever since then, the person thinks that he is his yetzer hora; he identifies himself as the evil desires he is tempted with, and he comes to think of himself as evil. This is the power of the yetzer hora that resides in our heart, ever since the first sin of mankind. This is the orlas halev (the foreskin of the heart) that became embedded into our heart.

Because of this, a person's initial self-perception is that he thinks of his yetzer hora as being himself. A child often identifies more with his yetzer hora than with his yetzer tov. After becoming 13 years of age, he can identify with his yetzer tov, but he has still formed his initial self-perception through his yetzer hora. Before he has even entered the age where he has bechirah, he is already used to the yetzer hora's pull, so his ratzon is already swaying his options and he cannot decide accurately between truth and falsehood.

That being the case, his bechirah is not choosing between two equal options he sees in front of him. Rather, he has developed a desire for evil and falsehood, and he is not that interested in what the truth is. He might know intellectually what the will of Hashem is and that he has been given bechirah to choose right over wrong, and sometimes, he does want to choose Hashem's will - but it is very difficult for a person to remove the “bribery” that has already been present in his heart for so long.

That is why most decisions of people are not stemming from true bechirah. They have already been swayed by bribery, so they cannot decide accurately. Most of the choices in this world between good and

evil are therefore not real “choices”, they are all biased. The person has usually been bribed to follow a certain personal desire that he has. This is one of the most fundamental concepts about our soul and about our inner task in this world.

When a person becomes older and more mature and he gains daas, it seems to him that he wants truth, at least intellectually. But the person is usually unaware that deep down, his heart wants the opposite of the truths his mind knows about. The heart is usually concealed from the person's awareness, so a person remains unaware of his subconscious desires that may be swaying him all along and influencing how he sees things.

Even if he is sitting in solitude and he is trying to decide what the right thing is and what the will of Hashem is (and it might feel like a real decision of choosing to following the truth), the person still has no idea that deep down in his subconscious, he is leaning towards choosing an option that is based on a personal desire, which is based entirely on a ‘bribe’. He thinks he is deciding correctly, but he is probably leaning towards his decision because of some desire that is subconsciously affecting and guiding him. His bechirah is all stemming from bribery.

How Do We Know If Our Decisions Are Correct? This creates a great difficulty in our avodah. It is clear that a judge has to make sure he doesn't take a monetary bribe, but how do we avoid taking a bribe in our own soul? How can we know that we are not being mentally bribed somehow to choose a certain way and that our decision is really stemming from yiras shomayim?

In the beginning of our way, it is not possible for us to have total bechirah that is unaffected by any ‘bribes’, because we have already been living so long with our desires. If so, there is no way for us to initially avoid choices that are not affected by inner bribery. So what should we do? Should we never use our bechirah that Hashem gave

us, just because it is already biased?

We have no choice and we must try our best to decide between right and wrong and to act upon what we feel is right. When we do our best, Hashem will not hold us accountable if we are still affected by bribery; at that point, it is not our fault, because we have done all that we can to remove ourselves from the inner bribery, and we have done the avodah that Hashem wants from us.

But even so, we must still try to purify ourselves of improper desires and ulterior motivations, and only after that is it not our fault if there is still bribery in us. If we have never tried purifying ourselves, we are at fault for letting the bribery remain in us.

We are taught by our Sages that we must view ourselves as our own judge, so we must use our judgment as best as we can. The Gemara says that “A judge sees what his eyes see”.⁵ We have no choice but to rely on our judgment. However, that is only true if we have done all that we can to avoid bribery. If one has done all that he can do to distance oneself from bribery, he is not at fault if he remains affected by bribery. But if one can avoid bribery and he didn't, of this the Alter of Kelm said: “A judge can only see what his eyes see – but he is still blamed for seeing it that way.”

Purifying The Heart The avodah of man in this world is to try as best as he can to purify his heart from any self-serving desires and motivations, and along with this, a person must also daven to Hashem regularly for this: to merit a pure heart.

Slowly, a person's heart will become more and more purified, as he gets used to this. If a person is regularly purifying himself like this, he will be less affected by bribery in the soul. Any bribery that has not been uprooted from his heart after that point is not his fault, and Hashem does not expect more from the person.

But if a person doesn't regularly work to purify his heart from ulterior motives and

4 Sukkah 52a

5 Sanhedrin 6b

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from self-serving desires (even if he attempts to do Hashem's will and he tries to keep halachah well), his heart will remain with its ulterior motives that continue to influence his choices. Although it seems to him that he is always choosing between truth and falsehood, he really isn't able to choose.

He might be shown in Heaven one day that he never even had one true act of bechirah! Even in the situations where he chose right over wrong, he may be shown that his decision also came from 'bribery' in the soul - perhaps because it was more comfortable or convenient for him at that time to choose that way, and not because he was consciously choosing right over wrong.

Always Suspecting Ourselves Of Ulterior Motivations When one realizes and senses the truth of this concept, he realizes the depth of the yetzer hora, the power of evil that resides in man. It can shake one to the core, which will cause him to want to run away from all the evil.

But where can a person run to? There is nowhere to run away to, because the evil is still with him wherever he turns and it can still sway him! But at least one can know that he can keep purifying his heart more and more. The more the one purifies the heart, the more one becomes cleansed from bribery, until he is totally purified from it.

On a deeper note, it is explained that we are never free from ulterior motives in the heart, and for this reason, our Gedolim always greatly suspected themselves of ulterior motives. Even our holy Avos suspected themselves of ulterior motives, although we cannot comprehend this; our Sages revealed it to us and that is how we know this. Rav Dessler calls it tzeil haguf, "body-shadow", that even the greatest tzaddikim are somewhat affected by the body, and that is why a tzaddik is never perfect.⁶

6 sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu vol. I

We have no comprehension of our tzaddikim, so we cannot try to understand how they saw imperfections in themselves, but what we learn from this is how we deal with ourselves; even the tzaddikim of recent generations are far from our comprehension. The point is that there is this concept of suspecting oneself of ulterior motives.

To give an example that illustrates the idea, this week I met someone who is opening a Kolel. I asked him, "What motivated you to open a Kolel?" He told me, "It is 100% l'sheim shomayim (for the sake of Heaven)." Anyone can know that not one of our Gedolim ever believed that he did something entirely l'sheim shomayim. If only we could even come close. **Basic Self-Awareness** Suspecting yourself of ulterior motives can enable a person to have a true feeling of shiflus (lowliness/humility) towards himself.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would deliver many talks about the subject of emunah, and one day he began to suspect that perhaps all of his talks about emunah were only due to the first impression of his teacher, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l, who once spoke about emunah which he had felt excited about.

Our Gedolim suspected themselves like this, but the average person cannot be on this level; he would become too aggravated with this kind of constant self-probing. But we can at least realize that there is often falsehood in our motivations, and we can at least notice it when it's glaring. Even when we choose good, we should suspect that maybe it is self-serving, for the sake of our own ego, etc.

Feeling Dependent on Hashem The Ramban wrote that after one learns Torah, the mind is more purified. Then one can reach the point of hishtavus (equality), where he sees two equal options in front of him, and then he can decide properly. However, one should not think that he has reached hishtavus when he tries this. Rath-

er, on his own level that he is currently at, he can reach a point of clarity where he can decide accurately. No one totally reaches hishtavus, because there is always a yetzer hora in the heart, and no one is like Dovid HaMelech who succeeded in completely emptying the yetzer hora from his heart ("My heart is empty within me"⁷).

For this reason, one must always feel dependent on Hashem, in order to arrive at any truth. This is how one can come to realize how much one needs Hashem. We are totally dependent on Him - even for the smallest decision. This is because there is no way of knowing on our own if we are choosing correctly.

This can bring a person to feel a great sense of shiflus (feeling humbled), causing a person to feel totally dependent on Hashem. However, if a person does not handle this shiflus correctly, he will become broken and sad, which is a negative use of shiflus. One who can accept it properly will have both healthy shiflus towards himself, as well as a feeling of utter dependence on Hashem.

One must try to get to the truth as much as one can, but one must also realize that one is always far from reaching the truth on one's own. Then he will begin to feel how much he needs Hashem for everything. Instead of feeling weak at realizing how far he is from the truth, he will be inspired even more to daven to Hashem and to feel dependent on Hashem.

In Conclusion The avodah of a person not to take a bribe is thus a matter that envelopes all of our life, affecting almost all people. The more a person realizes the concept of it, he feels shiflus from it, but even more so, it causes him to feel even more dependent on Hashem and to attach himself to Him.

[from BILVAVI ON THE PARSHAH]

7 Tehillim 109:22

STARTING LAST WEEK WE SHARED THE UNEDITED CHAPTERS IN THEIR ORDER- NEXT WEEK CHAPTER 4- ENTERING THE INTERNAL WORLD

Whole & Parts, Faculties and Elements, Branches and Roots

Thus, we can recognize the soul's faculties either by looking at each faculty as one general unit, or by looking at its complex parts. When we want to see each faculty as its own complete part, we may discover many faculties, and these are different general systems which list a total of either 10, 13, 70, or even 613 faculties. We may recognize each part separately – what its defining character traits are. But if we are looking at the parts that comprise each soul-faculty, we discover that there will always be 4 – we aren't seeing many different soul-faculties, but the same 4 elements which being manifest in many different ways.

In other words, when we examine each soul-faculty as it is, we are studying a branch of our soul, and there are many branches. But when we are examining the parts that comprise each faculty, we are studying our soul's roots, which can only be the 4 elements.

It is the same when it comes to repairing character traits. Chazal explained to us that there are many bad *middos* which every person needs to repair. Some of these are mentioned in Rav Chaim Vital's *Shaarei Kedushah*¹ – the list includes laziness, sadness, desire, envy, jealousy, idle speech, conceit, and anger. Rav Chaim Vital wrote that all of these bad traits are offspring of the 4 elements. Now, if we look at the soul-faculties (our soul's branches) and we want to fix each of our traits, then we will find a **long list of bad *middos* that need to be fixed. Reb Yisrael Salanter zt"l said it is more difficult to fix a bad *middah* than to finish Shas in-depth, and he was referring to the aforementioned approach of trying to fix all our *middos*. But if we instead look at the parts that comprise our *middos*, although we will see that our *middos* need to be fixed, we will mainly be focused on the **elements - the soul's roots - which can only be 4.****

Understandably, fixing our *middos* is vastly different when we take this approach, because instead of trying to fix so many *middos*, we are focusing our work instead of fixing the 4 elements, which are the roots behind all of them.

¹ *Shaarei Kedushah* 1:2

The 4 Elements – Our Main Navigation Tool

This perspective of viewing everything as comprised of the 4 elements is not only a tool for recognizing our souls, it is also a tool for recognizing anything in the world. After a person is getting used to analyzing things in terms of the 4 elements, he can then view everything in the world in these terms.

Compare this to a person who has difficulty hearing, so he gets a hearing aid, and now he can hear well. If his hearing would come easy to him, he would hear most sounds that come to his ears, and the hearing aid would only help him hear subtler sounds. But since he can only hear by way of the hearing aid, most of the sounds he is hearing can only come to him through the hearing aid. Additionally, how well he hears will be affected by the quality of the hearing aid. He will hear better depending on how well the hearing aid can pick up on subtler sounds.

In this example of the hearing aid, the person is using the hearing aid not only to hear certain sounds, but he is using it to hear absolutely everything, and the entire quality of his hearing depends on what kind of hearing aid he has.

Every person was given a certain lens by which he is viewing and perceiving everything. But not necessarily is a person seeing accurately, when he uses his own personal perspective. Every person's worldview is affected by his own personal soul structure, experiences from the past, and environmental and social influence, and other factors. So a person is not necessarily viewing life accurately, when all of these factors are affecting his view.

But there is a certain visor one can use, which has the highest quality and which can see as accurately as possible. Hashem created it² when "He looked into the Torah and created the world".³ Chazal said that the Torah is entirely the names of Hashem, and the root of all these names of Hashem is the name *HaVaYaH*, comprised of four letters –the *yud*, the first *heh*, the *vov*, and the last *heh*, corresponding to the 4 elements. Thus, for everything Hashem willed to create, He looked (so to speak) at the 4 letters of His Name of *HaVaYaH*, which would become the 4 elements of each thing.

² *This does not mean that Hashem needed this tool in order to be able to see well (G-d forbid to entertain such a thing). Rather it means that when Hashem wanted to create His world, He chose to create this way of viewing, and with it, He created all the worlds.*

³ *Zohar Terumah* 161a

Thus, the 4 elements is the ‘visor’ to see everything in Creation. For this reason, whenever the *Avos* or any of the holy, wise sages of the Jewish people throughout the generations wanted to see how Hashem created anything, they used this ‘visor’, the 4 elements, to understand how.⁴

In summary, when a person is viewing life through his own personal perspective, all of his perception is being funneled through all kinds of external factors that affect his view. But when one is using the 4 elements as his visor, he is viewing life and reality through the tool that Hashem created the world with. Without a doubt, man’s own perception does not even compare to the accuracy of the visor that Hashem created.

Seeing Reality As It Is

When a person views everything through his own personal lens, he isn’t absorbing reality as it is with no compromises. His perception of reality will materialize based on the various factors that comprise his own personal vision. In other words, he is not really seeing reality itself, he is rather building his own view of reality – but he is not seeing reality as it really is.

Here is an analogy to help us understand this concept better. Compare the way a child views the world, with the way a mature adult views the world. Simply speaking, the difference between them is that the child can’t absorb so many details, while an adult has a greater capacity to absorb more details. But there is also a deeper difference. An adult’s view of the world is entirely different than a child’s view of the world. A child doesn’t have the tools

4 Here is a partial list of sources in Chazal that discuss the 4 elements: Sefer Yetzirah (attributed to Avraham Avinu), the Zohar in many places, Rambam Hilchos Yesodei Torah 4:1, Kuzari 4-5, Derashos HaRamban, Remak commentary on Sefer Yetzirah, Sefer HaPeliyah, Etz Chaim (Arizal) 50:7, Shaarei Kedushah 1:2, Derech Chaim (Maharal) Avos 1:2, Ohr HaChaim Beraishis 6 and Vayikra 17, Gra in Shnos Eliyahu and Yud Beis Tikkunim Acharonim, Likutei Moharan, Chesed L’Avraham nahar 2 and 5, Aruch HaShulchan Orach Chaim 1, Chofetz Chaim Shemiras HaLashon Shaar HaZechirah 1, Asiris HaEifah (Kamarna), Kli Yakaar Beraishis 28.

These sources (and more) are cited in full in Kuntris Arba Yesodos (4 Elements – The Sources In Chazal) which has been compiled by the 4 Elements Institute that is overseen by Moreinu the Rav shlit”a.

Note: The 4 elements are sometimes called different names, depending on which “world” they are in, where they will also take on different meanings. But the common denominator is that every world will have a division of the 4 elements. It is this foundational structure which all of pnimiyus (the inner dimension of Torah) stands on.

to absorb the reality he is seeing. His worldview won’t match up with reality, and that is why a child is immature, behaving in a way that doesn’t line up with reality. But an adult has the tools to absorb the reality he sees, and therefore his view is realistic and he behaves accordingly. For example, a child sees matches as a game to play with, while an adult sees matches as a tool to light a fire with.

The reality of something is essentially its composition of 4 elements. It is the 4 elements of something which give shape, concept, quality, and personality to each thing. If a person doesn’t get used to seeing things in terms of the 4 elements, he doesn’t have the tool to see reality as it is, and therefore he won’t know how to relate to it properly. The way he perceives reality is entirely based on his own personal way of viewing things, like the child who views the world as a game, who cannot see reality as it is. Even a mature adult, without using the 4 elements as his navigation visor, will not be able to see reality as it is.

With regards to self-recognition, a person who doesn’t view his soul in terms of the 4 elements is like the child who uses everything on this world based on his own understanding – seeing everything as either something to play with, or as something to eat. In contrast, when a person views his soul through the way that Hashem created - through the view of the 4 elements – he can then be able to see reality as it is, and to properly make use of reality.

How Our Yetzer Hora (Evil Inclination) Works

Now we shall discover another ramification of the concept being explained here.

Let us ask: What is the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination)? Many people think that the *yetzer hora* is a spiritual force, an angel, which tries to fight with a person and get him to sin. In turn, it is understood that our task is to fight our *yetzer hora* through various spiritual means. With this perspective, though, if a person feels that he is spiritually weak, he won’t have the strength to fight back.

This perspective of how we view the *yetzer hora* and our struggle with it is only partially true, because it is a superficial definition which comes from an ignorance of recognizing the soul through the 4 elements.

*Raboseinu*⁵ explained that our *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) is attached with physicality and is drawn to it, while the *Ruach* part of the soul is drawn to the spiritual. Each of our soul layers has its own corresponding level

5 The Gra and others

of the *yetzer hora*. The *yetzer hora* adapts itself with certain characteristics to challenge the soul-level that one is found at. The *yetzer hora* challenges a person at the level of his *Ruach* by being spiritual, where it is an angel whose role is to try to convince a person to sin, whereas the *yetzer hora* challenges a person at the level of his *nefesh habehaimis* not by being an angel [but through different means, as will be explained].

Thus it is only the ‘spiritual’ *yetzer hora* which tries to get a person to sin, by coaxing a person into using the power of free will (*bechirah*) to choose to do an act of sin. It is a spiritual war, and it is about using one’s power of free will, to choose good over evil. But there is also a baser level of the *yetzer hora*, at the level of one’s *nefesh habehaimis*. Its role is not get a person to sin, but to get a person to follow after his nature, just as animal follows its nature.

Exploring this more, Chazal said that when Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, all 4 elements in the *nefesh habehaimis* of a person’s soul became imbalanced. Since all souls were contained in Adam’s soul, every soul without exception received imbalances in their soul. The impact of this is still going on today. A person faces clashes in his own soul, as a result of the imbalances between his 4 elements. That is the *yetzer hora* that challenges one at the level of his *nefesh habehaimis*. And, because of this, the soul-level that most people find themselves at is the *nefesh habehaimis*, not the *Ruach*. Therefore, their main *yetzer hora* is at the level of *nefesh habehaimis*.⁶

The *yetzer hora* – the most bothersome force for most people, which causes most of one’s challenges and failures – is therefore not a spiritual challenge to most people, rather a result of imbalances in one’s personal 4 elements. Most of the *aveiros* committed by a person are not a product of the spiritual war with the *yetzer hora*, but a result of following one’s nature.

For example, if a person missed the time for saying *Shema*, he might be upset with himself and say, “My *yetzer hora* got me.” But the truth is that his *yetzer hora* (in this case) is nothing but laziness (which comes from the element of earth, and which causes one to contract and not move). Later his *yetzer hora* bursts out again in the form of anger, which comes from the element of fire (destruction).

Another example: A person spoke too much and said derogatory speech about someone (*lashon hora*). He real-

izes he did an *aveirah*, and he says, “The *yetzer hora* got me.” But the truth is that his *yetzer hora* here is nothing but impaired speech, which comes from too much expansion (water) combined with movement (wind). Thus, if we look at most *aveiros*, they are stemming from lack of balance between one’s personal elements.⁷

Based on this, we can understand well what doing *teshuvah* means – for most people, who find themselves at the soul-level of *nefesh habehaimis* – and we can know what to put emphasis on, when we wish to do *teshuvah*. **The mitzvah to do teshuvah is essentially all about returning the balance of our personal 4 elements, to their ideal, repaired state.**⁸

If a person desires to do *teshuvah*, he has to recognize himself well and balance his elements.⁹ When a person doesn’t recognize his soul through the view of the 4 elements, he has a misconception about what his *yetzer hora* is. Only when we view our soul in terms of our 4 elements will we see that most of our challenges and failures are a product of imbalances in our 4 elements, and that the way to avoid those failures and pass those challenges is, through balancing our 4 elements.

This is a very big fundamental to know!¹⁰

7 Certainly there are many cases where there is also a spiritual yetzer hora involved that’s trying to get a person to sin. In fact, the yetzer hora will often use to its advantage the various imbalances in one’s 4 elements, as its tool to convince a person to sin. For example, a person is pulled after his desires due to an imbalance in his element of water, and later he actually sins (chas v’shalom) as a result of his own power of choice. Still, most sins are committed at the level of nefesh habehaimis, as a result of imbalances in one’s 4 elements. Even the sins that result from one’s own choices have their point of origin in a lack of balance in one’s 4 elements. With this, we can now understand the great importance of recognizing our personal nefesh habehaimis [its 4 elements] and how to repair it.

8 The baalei mussar (those who taught the approach of mussar, self-discipline) called this tikkun hamiddos (repairing one’s character traits) while the Rambam calls it “returning from de’os ra’os (incorrect beliefs).”

9 This leads us to a great insight for all those who desire to do teshuvah, but who aren’t seeing desired results from all their efforts. Many times, when one tries to do teshuvah, he will focus on increasing spiritual deeds, but he doesn’t pay attention to the imbalances in his soul. When he falls again into sins, he doesn’t understand how he could fall again into those very same pits. Or, he is simply pained by his failures even after trying so many times to do teshuvah, and he is broken and full of despair. But if a person will work on repairing his personal 4 elements, most of his failures and sins will vanish (with Hashem’s help).

10 This current volume, as well as all the entire “4 Elements” series

6 Reb Yisrael Salanter in sefer Ohr Yisrael explains this at length, how the nefesh habehaimis is called the “natural evil inclination”.

The 4 Elements – The Root Path To Navigate Our Life With

The way of viewing everything in terms of the 4 elements is not “another way” that someone discovered based on his own understanding. It is not a product of someone who pondered the world through his own glasses, came to certain conclusion, and then teaching it to others. It is not based on any wisdom of human beings. It is the way which Hashem made, and the wisdom in it is only Hashem’s. He gave this wisdom to His beloved children, Who received His holy Torah from Him. **All the sages of the Jewish people, who toiled in learning His wisdom revealed in the holy Torah, would use this path of the 4 elements.**

So if a person is looking for a way, a path, to recognize his soul or anything else on the world – or if he wants to recognize anything on the world for that matter – there is no better path to use than the one Hashem made, which the sages of the Jewish people all used. In fact, it imprecise to say that isn’t a better path than this, because there is no comparison between the path which Hashem made (and which our sages of the past took) with any of the ways that were devised by people.

Not only that, but even in relation to the other true ways within the Torah that exist, the way of the 4 elements is the fundamental path behind all those ways, to recognize the soul. It is the root of all the paths, and therefore every other path in a branch of the path of the 4 elements. All paths are rooted in Hashem’s names, and the root of all His names is His name of *HaVaYaH*. So too, the 4 elements (which are rooted in the 4 letters of *HaVaYaH*) are the roots of all paths.

In Conclusion

Until now we have explained the way of the 4 elements – their root, concept, and uses. Through this path we can recognize our soul in all its parts: The *Yechidah*, *Chayah*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, *Nefesh Elohis*, and *nefesh habehaimis*. However, we have to know that whatever was explained until now was merely to give general clarity, and to set the goal.

The path of understanding the **4 elements** is the way to see the entire Creation in general and our soul especially, but **we cannot begin practical inner work right away**

(ongoing), is all being written for this purpose.

with it. This is because the 4 elements is the root, and in order to get to the root, we need to find our way through its branches.¹¹ The practical way is to begin with recognizing the *branches* – the various *soul-faculties* that extend from the 4 elements. From there, we can progress to recognizing the roots – the 4 elements themselves.

If a person recognizes many different soul-faculties - which are really the “branches” of his soul – but he has no goal to recognize the “roots” – then he might stay his whole life with only the branches, never getting to the roots. He will only know the various aspects and character traits of the soul, but he won’t know the movements in the soul that comprise them. But when one is learning about the soul’s branches so that he can eventually get to recognizing the root, and he is also acting properly, then gradually he will be drawn after the soul’s movements and revealing them. He will then be able to get used to looking at everything in terms of the 4 elements – viewing his soul, and all of Creation, through the prism of the 4 elements.

To summarize and conclude, in order to reach the main ‘navigation visor’ to our soul – the perspective through the 4 elements – in order to practically work on recognizing our soul, we need to begin with recognizing the soul’s faculties, which are really the branches that come from the soul’s 4 elements. This should all be with the goal of reaching the recognition of the 4 elements, and to progress gradually. **This book is therefore the study of our soul’s faculties – our branching abilities** – laying the groundwork for recognizing our roots: the 4 elements in our soul.¹²

[מהספר הכרה עצמית והעצמת הנפש]

11 as explained at length in the previous chapter

12 We shall note here that recognizing our soul-faculties is not only a tool to recognize our 4 elements, it is a wonderful inner work for itself, and it greatly benefits us in many areas of life. It is the basis for a good life, self-actualizing, and utilizing our potential. Even if, for whatever reason, a person does not reach the stage of recognizing his personal 4 elements, merely recognizing his soul-faculties will serve as a great tool to find great vitality and joy [and it would be commendable for any person to reach even this more basic level].

The way to practically recognize our 4 fundamental elements is explained in the series “4 Elements - Root Movements of the Soul” (ארבעת היסודות - שורשי תנועות הנפש), numbering 48 classes of audio files (not yet transcribed or translated).

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