



## SEEKING SPECIFIC HONOR

### 12. How “Higher Honor” is the Root of Change

Based upon the above, let’s understand the following.

The power to change a negative trait (which we have described here as the power to break a boundary) includes the additional aspects of evil which have accumulated upon the soul (as mentioned earlier, there are three stages of the negative character traits: the raw state of the soul, the evil that came upon the soul after the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, and the evil that has accumulated upon the soul from all of its lifetimes). As explained, these aspects of evil can all be conquered through using the power to break bounds, the honor that stems from fire-of-fire. The power to change\break bounds can either enlarge or lessen the bound.

This is where the depth of life lays in. It is explained in *Igros Ramchal* that the purpose of the entire Creation, and man’s personal task in his lifetime, is to recognize the truth of the Creator’s existence. The power to change one’s *middos* is really through the power of honor. Honor is a force that descends from the upper, Heavenly realms onto the lower realms. That is why honor can change things on the lower realm - because it comes from a higher realm.

As an example, Chazal state that the evil inclination of man gets stronger every day and wants to destroy him, and if not for Hashem’s help, man cannot overcome it.<sup>1</sup> How indeed does Hashem help a person overcome it? Simply speaking, it is *siyata d’shmaya* (assistance from Heaven). True, but how does this *siyata d’shmaya* work? One of the fundamental ways of understanding this is through the revelation of honor in one’s soul. The honor, which comes from a higher realm, can change one’s reality on this lower realm.

This is depth of honoring parents. When the son honors the father, this can change the spiritual level of the son, allowing all of the father’s *chinuch* (education) to have a positive result on the son. If the son does not honor the father, the father’s *chinuch* on his son cannot have a full effect on the son, and the son won’t be able to gain from it. The father needs to sometimes punish the child

because in that way, the child is enabled to honor the father and accept his as authority, and through this honor, the father’s *chinuch* on the child can then have a positive effect on the child.

This is also the depth of honoring one’s *rebbe*, who teaches the student and who brings him to eternal life in the World To Come. Through honoring the *rebbe*, one is brought to the Torah, which is also called *kavod*\honor. Torah scholars are also called *kavod*. Through honoring the level that is above you (parent or teacher), you receive a power from a higher realm that is now exposed within you, and herein lays the depth of changing one’s *middos*.

### 13. The Root Perspective of Approaching Character Improvement

If you understand what we are implying here, it brings a huge overhaul to how you view working on your *middos*.

Usually when people want to work on their *middos*, they will want to work on uprooting their anger, or their lustful desires, or their conceitedness, etc. If you recognize anyone who tries to do this, you know that they almost never succeed at uprooting the negative trait, and they can barely even fight it at all. This is because we cannot transform a negative character trait if we do not receive a power from the higher realm for this.

Perhaps we can fight or conquer the negative trait, because we can all attain some level of self-control (and this, too, requires *siyata d’shmaya*). But we cannot rectify\overturn a negative trait totally unless we receive the power to change a trait. The power to change oneself does not come from persistently trying to improve oneself, like water dripping on a rock. That is not how it works. Real, permanent change only comes from receiving a power from a higher realm.

The Rambam describes all of the *middos* as “*Hilchos De’os*”, because the inner essence behind all of the *middos* is *de’os*, “perspectives.” Each of the *de’os* is a revelation of the “honor” of one’s holy intellect (for the holy intellect is the intellect of the Torah, and Torah is called *kavod*\honor), which descends into the heart (and the numerical value of the Hebrew word for heart, *lev*, is *kavod*).

The power to change the inner essence of *middos* is not simply through trying to use our mind to control our emotions, which is a

# SEEKING SPECIFIC HONOR

war of conquering and fighting the negative character traits. That is needed too, but the final stage of overcoming negative character traits is *tikun*\rectifying, or *hamtakah*\sweetening, which is only possible through receiving a power from the higher realm, which can change the lower realm. The power to change one's inner character, from within, is through the revelation of the "higher honor" – the holy intellect of the Torah.

## 14. Wisdom of the Middos vs. Actively Trying to Uproot Them

Therefore, we can understand that there is an awesome depth contained in our inner work of improving our *middos*.

If you look at most of the statements of our Sages and our holy *sefarim* about *middos*, you will see that most of it does not deal with how to actively overcome the *middos* – rather, their words are mainly dealing with a conceptual definition of each of the *middos*; from that understanding, one is then able to work on improving his *middos*. They first studied the definition of the particular *middah* and from there, they could settle the matter upon their hearts and thereby overturn\rectify the *middah*. (This was not the approach in every single case, but it is the approach in most of their words).

You can see this apparent in *sefer Nesivos Olam* of the Maharal, which describes the definition of each of the *middos*, and the purpose of this approach is to first study the intellectual definition of the *middah* and then internalize the knowledge upon the heart. But even in other works of our leaders, such as *sefer Mesillas Yeshtarim*, where this is not as apparent to the untrained eye, this is also the approach. The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* is providing the inner definitions behind the *middos*, and when a person studies them well, he can thereby change his *middos*. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz and others said that *sefer Mesillas Yeshtarim* contains all of the Ramchal's secret wisdom of the Torah. Thus, *sefer Mesillas Yeshtarim* is really a *sefer* about a certain *chochmah*, a deep wisdom, and studying this wisdom leads to change in one's character.

## 15. Concept of Higher Honor – And Its Importance

Here we are explaining that the depth behind all change is contained in the particular kind of honor which stems from "fire-of-fire", the power that breaks bounds. When this power is used for evil, a person will continuously pursue honor and prestige from honorable individuals. But this power is used for holiness when one uses it to rectify his character traits, for the entire power to change one's *middos* is through revealing a power from a higher realm within the reality of this lower realm.

We really cannot change our *middos* based on any of the powers found on this lower realm. All change can only be enabled through a power from above. We cannot change simply from within our own power to do so. Rather, we can only change when we receive a power from above, from a higher realm. The ability to change our *middos* therefore is not possible from within the *middos* themselves. The power that can change the *middos* is through the concept of honor of fire-of-fire which we have explained here. Upon understanding this, we can now realize that in order to change our *middos*, we first need to open our souls to what the concept of honor is.

When a person remains at a superficial level, he may attempt to reach his personal duty on this world through simply studying Gemara and through learning *halachah*. But when one has the deeper perspective, from studying the words of our Sages about these matters, he is aware that recognizing the glory of Hashem on this world is the central aspect of life. (On a deeper level, there is the very essence (*atzmityus*) of Hashem, which is above His *kavod*\glory).

The concept of the *kavod*\glory of Hashem is at the very core of character improvement and inner work. On the highest level, one recognizes the glory of Hashem on the world, and on a personal level, one understands that this higher honor can change his own character.

Thus, the way to go about our inner work is not through simply recognizing our individual *middos* as they are, but through recognizing and studying the definition of the root of *middos* – which is essentially the "higher honor" that descends from the higher realm onto our lower realm. The more a person connects to the concept of recognizing the glory of Hashem on this world, and through connecting to the concept of higher honor as the root power that can change his *middos* on a core level – he receives the deep power which can change his *middos* on a very deep level.

The more a person expands his mind [through the study of Torah] and he becomes more aware of what "higher honor" is and its role in his life, he will be able to have more control over the emotions in his heart, for as mentioned earlier, the numerical value of the Hebrew word for "heart", "*lev*", is "*kavod*", honor.

TO BE CONTINUED IY"H

FROM ORIGINAL HEBREW SHIUR IN BEIT SHEMESH 2017

דע און מיידותיך הדרגה מעשיות אש נבד 013  
עבר דאש דאש פריצת המידות ותיקון

### TWO POSSIBLE METHODS OF LISTING OUR ABILITIES

After we have made a list of all our positive abilities, the next step is to list them in order of their dominance. There are two possible ways of how to do this: (a) List the abilities in the order of strong, in-between, and weak. (b) List them each according to a scale of 1-10 [with number 1 being what you consider your weakest ability, and number 10 for what you consider your strongest ability].

#### 1A) LISTING ABILITIES IN ORDER OF STRONGEST TO WEAKEST

One possible method of how to list your abilities is according to the order of strong, in-between, and weak.

To start, make a chart with three rows: Strong, In-Between, and Weak. Next, think about each of the abilities you wrote down on the list, and start writing which ability belongs in the row you think it belongs in. This chart should be labeled on top, "General List Of My Abilities."

After this, make another chart, in which you will only write down your strong abilities. Divide it into 3 rows: Strong, In-Between, and Weak. This chart should be labeled on top, "My Strongest Abilities."

Next, think about all the abilities you wrote down in the column of "Strong", and decide which abilities should be written down in any of the columns of the second chart. After that, repeat the process. Make a chart, divide it into 3 rows (strong, in-between, and weak), and write down in any of these rows where you think each of the abilities on your previous chart belongs in. If you keep doing this, you will keep narrowing down what your strongest abilities are, until

you finally have one last chart which has one ability written in each row. You will be left with one ability under the column labeled "Strong", one ability under the column labeled "In-Between", and one ability written in the column labeled "Weak."

After we have this list of our strongest abilities, if we feel at this point that we have become clear, we can stop here and proceed to Step 2, which will involve a more inner kind of work.

But, if we want to get a more complete picture about our soul-capabilities, and if we have the patience to explore our other abilities we've written in the columns (both the 'in-between' abilities which aren't strong and which aren't weak, as well as our weaker abilities), we can repeat the same exercise with these other 2 columns (In-Between and Weak).<sup>1</sup>

Finally, make another list of all the abilities (Strong, In-Between, and Weak) together, beginning from your strongest ability and ending with your weakest point. For example, if you listed 32 different soul-abilities in alphabetical order, list those 32 abilities now in order of how strong they are and number them, so that #1 is your strongest ability and #32 is your weakest point.

#### 1B) LISTING YOUR ABILITIES ON A SCALE OF 1-10

A second possible method of figuring out what your stronger and weaker capabilities are, is by listing them each on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being weak-

<sup>1</sup> If we want to gain more clarity on our 'in-between' abilities as well as our weakest areas, but we don't have the energy right now to do it, we can skip this part for now and return to it at a later opportunity, when we get the time and capability to do it.

# FINDING YOUR QUALITIES

## SELF-RECOGNITION & SELF-ACTUALIZATION

est and 10 being strongest).

First, make a chart of 10 rows, labeled “General List of My Abilities”. Next, think about each of the abilities you’ve written down, and now list each of them in any of the 10 rows, depending on which row you think each ability belongs in.

After this, make another chart, labeled “My Strong Abilities”, dividing it into 10 rows. Look at your first chart and see which abilities you wrote down in Row 10 (where you wrote your strongest abilities under) and now write each of the abilities in any of the 10 rows on your second chart, depending on which row you think each ability belongs in. Keep repeating this process until you are left with a chart that has only one ability listed under each of the 10 rows. The ability you wrote down in row 10 of your last chart is what you identify as your strongest ability.

If we feel at this point that we have gained enough clarity about what our strong abilities are, we now stop here and go to Stage 2 (which we will soon explain). But if we wish to gain a more complete picture of our soul-capabilities, and if we have the patience to continue learning about our other abilities, then we can should repeat the process with the abilities we wrote down in rows 9, 8, and 7.

Finally, make a list of all the abilities together, in order of strongest ability to weakest ability. For example, if we made a list of 32 positive abilities and listed them in alphabetical order, we should now make another list in order of strongest to weakest ability, listing the strongest ability as #1 and our weakest point as #32.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> If one wants to become even clearer, he can add on an additional step: First, list all of your abilities on the two different types of charts explained - one chart that is arranged in columns of Strong, In-

### INTERNAL YARDSTICKS OF FIGURING OUT OUR STRONGEST ABILITY

Until now we have been explaining the external method of listing our abilities in order of their dominance. Now we will explain a more internal method, which will be about using certain ‘internal yardsticks’ which we can use in order to figure out how strong or weak each of our abilities are.

Altogether, there are six different ‘yardsticks’ we can use, in order to figure out which abilities are stronger, and which abilities are not as strong. The very first yardstick to measure it by is: Which good ability do we make use of the most? The other five yardsticks are all about measuring the quality or intensity of an ability, which is a lead on how strong or weak the ability is.

It is upon us to once again list all of our abilities, using any of the two external methods brought earlier, but this time we will be listing them using the yardsticks which we will explain here. This will mean that after we have made this list (according to what we understand about ourselves), we will now repeat the process of before (either using the method of listing them in order of strongest to weakest, or using the method of listing the abilities in order of 1-10), but this time around we will not be using our own assumptions, we will be using the yardsticks that we are about to explain.

#### NEXT WEEK CONTINUING: FINDING YOUR QUALITIES

*Between, and Weak, and another chart that has 10 rows labeled 1-10, as explained). Then, he should compare the two charts and see if the information matches up or not. Do the two charts bear similar results? If the results of both charts are similar, it is a sign that he has done this clarification process correctly. If there are very big differences between the two charts, one will need to examine what the cause for this discrepancy is. This work alone can give a person many new insights about all of his different abilities.*