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SELF AWARENESS & EMPOWERMENT

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01 [Necessity for Understanding Yourself]

The Internal Obligations of A Jew

Firstly, let us thank *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* for giving us the merit to learn and recognize the human soul, so that we can thereby recognize our own personal souls with clarity, and be able to serve Hashem in a more genuine, inner way.

Hashem has placed us on this world so that we can serve Him according to His will. Part of our task on this world is to keep the *mitzvos*, which includes keeping all of *halachah*. They are written clearly in the works of *halachah*, so that men and women can learn them and know what to do. That is one part of man's task. Another part of one's task is to serve Hashem through his\her inner, personal world. This goes beyond the external observance of the *mitzvos*. It includes serving Hashem through our mind, heart, emotions, and senses.

Just as one is obligated to do the actions of the *mitzvos*, so is a person obligated to serve Hashem in the internal sense. The root *mitzvos* of the inner world are *ahavas Hashem* (love of Hashem) and *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem), and there are also other such internal *mitzvos*, which involve the inner world of a person. Rabbeinu Bachya, in the introduction to *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*, writes that his sefer is called "*Chovos HaLevovos*" (Duties of the Heart) because he is explaining the *mitzvos* that are the obligations of the heart and mind, as opposed to just the *mitzvos* done with the physical body.

Just as one must learn *halachah* in order to know how to do the *mitzvos* properly in all their details, and if he doesn't learn *halachah* he will surely stumble and err in his observance of the Torah, so does the inner world of a person need to be learned about well. It spans all of a person's life, and therefore a person must learn and study about it very well. A person must know what his external observance is, by learning *halachah*, and

he must also know how to serve Hashem internally – by learning about the details of the inner world.

The *Chovos HaLevovos* was the first to point out that there is difficulty in fulfilling the internal obligations. There are many *sefarim* which explain to us the laws of all the *mitzvos*, but the inner world is not explained clearly. In our times especially, there are many *sefarim* about each of the details of all the *mitzvos*, and they are written clearly. In contrast to this, the information about the inner world is scattered throughout the writings of the Sages, in the Talmud and in the *Midrashim*, and in the works of the *Rishonim*, but it is not concentrated into any one volume. No one has ever written a clear “*Shulchan Aruch*” (Code of Jewish Law) about the inner world and what man’s internal obligations are.

One Mistake Associated With Inner Work

Since there are so few clearly written *sefarim* about the inner world, it is easy for people to make mistakes about it when they learn these *sefarim*. The *Chovos HaLevovos* said that since there is nothing written about the inner world, there are many people who think that there are no internal obligations, and that there is only external observance of *mitzvos*. Therefore, the inner world is forgotten by many, and there are many who erroneously think that there is no *mitzvah* to learn about the internal obligations of man. That is one mistake that people make, when it comes to the internal world.

A Second Mistake Associated With Inner Work

Another mistake people make about the inner world is that they think of it in terms of general knowledge, without knowing that there are details. People may think that there is a *mitzvah* to love Hashem, to fear Hashem, to do kindness, etc., and it seems as if that is all there is to the inner world.

Unlike *Hilchos Shabbos*, where it is clear to everyone that general knowledge about it does not suffice, and in order to know it one must learn its many details, the inner world seems to be “known” to people. People think that they know about the inner world since they know about it in general terms, and that the only difficult part is in keeping it. But the truth is that unless one learns about the inner world and studies these matters well, he will not have any understanding about it at all.

A Third Mistake Associated With Inner Work

Another issue with the inner world is that since these matters are not concentrated into any one place where you can learn about it, people will seek knowledge about it by turning to foreign sources, and using the guidance of gentiles when it comes to these matters.

Imagine if a person wants to learn about the *mitzvos*, so he goes to learn about it from gentiles, by learning about the Seven Noachide Laws which they are commanded to keep. Would this knowledge be sufficient for a Jew to know how to keep the *mitzvos*? Even the *mitzvos* that apply to gentiles do not apply in the same way to a Jew. In the same vein, when a Jew goes to learn from the gentiles about the inner world of man, this knowledge cannot suffice for him. Anyone with a little bit of knowledge knows that the inner world of a Jew vastly differs from the inner world of gentiles.

Those are the three issues associated with the knowledge about the inner world. In order to merit, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to do Hashem's will, these three mistakes needed to be addressed, so that we can be clear that we, the souls of the Jewish people, have a need to learn about our own inner worlds.

The study of the inner world within us is a study that we must work hard at in order to understand. We cannot gain this knowledge from going to any gentile sources. Rather, we need to learn about these matters at their root, from the words of the Torah, from the words of our Sages, and from all the great leaders throughout the generations. That is how we may recognize the inner world of a Jew – and of the Jew specifically.

Now that this has been explained, we can begin what it means for a person to know and understand his inner world.

What Motivates Us To Learn About The Inner World?

The need to understand the inner world may stem from two different reasons. One reason, which is what interests most people in studying their inner world, is that there are various problems, issues, and negative character traits, and in order to be free from such problems and deal with them, it is therefore necessary to recognize one's inner world. The second reason to explore one's inner world, which is more fundamental, is not for the sake of dealing with issues in our personality. It is rather so that we can know how to live life correctly, from the start.

The Goal

Therefore, learning about self-knowledge is not merely for the sake of solving internal issues and problems in the personality. It is mainly about recognizing our soul's inner forces, both the positive and negative forces, and how to guide ourselves from within. This will also include uncovering our own character issues and how we can deal with those issues, but that is not the goal. The goal is rather to gain an encompassing knowledge about our internal world.

This is a very important point to know as we start to complete our task on this world. It is good to know about it even after we have started, but it's even more important to know about it from the start. The need to recognize our souls is not so that we can recognize our problems, our struggles with the evil inclinations, etc. Rather, it is so that we can know how to live an emotionally healthy life, a life that Hashem wants from us, a life in which we can know to use our souls.

If you can absorb this point well, both in your mind and then in your heart, it will cause in you a will and yearning to recognize yourself, not as a way to escape various issues that we may be having internally, but because you want to have greater clarity about yourself.

Living A More Internal Life

What is the definition of what it means for person to live more internally? It would seem that this means for a person to recognize the forces of evil that exist in him, his evil inclinations, and to fight this evil. Sometimes he will succeed in these struggles, and sometimes he will lose the battles, but many times, he can indeed succeed. Yet, this is but a superficial perspective towards the inner world. The correct way to view the inner world is of a totally different perspective.

Living internally means that for all of a person's life – all of it – a person is working to understand his soul. Accordingly, a person will also be able to use the good in his soul to fight his own evil. But that is not all there is to it. Life is not only about our struggles with evil. It is a part of life, but it is not everything. The main aspect of our life is our work in studying the soul and understanding it further. According to how well we recognize our souls, that is how we will be able to use the good in ourselves and fight with our internal evil.

The practical result from the words here is that when you begin to learn about your personal soul, the attitude should not be about how to fight the evil characteristics in yourself. Rather, the goal should be to find yourself, more and more, because you want to clearly recognize your soul. This will include finding both your negative and positive traits.

Here is an example to help us understand what we mean. For those of us who have merited children, how do we help our children? Can we only show them how to deal with their struggles and issues? Or do we want to give something besides for this – such as showing them the good and positive parts in them, as well as to give them the foods they like and the things they love, and along with this, to also show them how to deal with their struggles and negative aspects?

It is clear to us that we want to give our children more than just the ability to recognize their issues and to help them deal with their problems and the hard parts of life. We don't just want to hire therapists for them so that they solve all their issue. We want them to see themselves in a generally good light, to show them the good that is in them, to show them what they can be positive about it. Along with this, we can also show them how they can deal with their issues.

When it comes to our children, it is clear to us that it should be this way. But we also need to relate to ourselves in such a way. It is not only the ability to cope with problems which we are trying to gain. Rather, we need to be able to acquire the general view towards ourselves, to not only discover the bad and to see how to deal with it, but to discover everything, both the good and the bad, so that we can gain the bigger picture about who we are.

In summary, when we begin to learn about our souls, the attitude should be that we are trying to live life to its fullest, by knowing ourselves. The attitude should not be that we want to deal with problems and issues. Rather, we should be seeking how to live life from the start, in an inner way, according to Hashem's will.

A Lifelong Task

An additional point is that learning about the soul is not just a temporary stage in life. Rather, for all of one's life, one must keep learning about the soul, so that he can recognize himself better and better. There is no such thing as a person who has learned and studied about the soul for a part of his life, and now he recognizes his soul and he can deal with issues correctly. Rather, self-recognition is a lifetime work. As a result, the better one recognizes his soul, the better he can use his soul and the better he can fight evil and deal with issues and problems, but as we have emphasized, that is not the goal.

In Conclusion

To summarize and conclude, if we merit to continue explaining this path, with *siyata d'shmaya*, we must know that studying the details of the soul is not for the purpose of discovering our internal evil and to deal with issues in ourselves, but for a greater and more encompassing purpose: so that we can come to recognize the general picture of our souls.

These words are a general introduction towards recognizing the soul, and in the coming lessons, we hope to continue into the details of this.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: Why do people need to study about the soul in order to know about it? Don't we see that there are people who have an understanding about themselves and about others, even if they have never actually learned about these matters?

A: There are some people who have been given by Hashem a nature to have a better understanding of themselves and of others, but even those who have such a nature still need to learn about their souls. A person cannot know medicine unless he has learned about it. Surely there are some people who have a natural sense for it and therefore they can know of it better than others, but without studying the matter well, a person cannot have a complete understanding. A person born with natural understanding of his soul might know himself better than others do, but that doesn't mean he understands the depth of the soul. If a person has a natural sense for health, can he heal sick people, if he hasn't spent at least 7 years studying medicine and treatment? Of course not. He may understand these things better than others do, but if he hasn't learned about it for several years, his knowledge about it is insufficient and very superficial.

Q2: The Rav has said that learning about the soul is our life's work. Is this referring to constantly using the powers of the soul in our own personal *avodah*, or does it mean that it takes an entire lifetime to keep learning and understanding these matters?

A: The second option is correct.

Q3: To clarify my question, I meant to ask: Does our lifetime study of our souls mean that we need to learn *sefarim* (about this), or does it mean to learn about ourselves?

A: It includes the integration of both aspects: To learn *sefarim* about our own inner worlds, and to learn about ourselves from within ourselves.

Q4: If we are obligated to learn about our inner world, why is this obligation not written about clearly in any *sefarim*?

A: This is exactly the question asked by the *Chovos HaLevovos* in the introduction to the *sefer*. It was mentioned in this lesson briefly, along with the answer that he gives. If you want to fully understand this matter, refer to the *hakdamah* (introduction) to *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*.

Q5: Why is it that in the previous generations, people were able to understand these matters (about the inner world of the soul), without having to learn about it?

A: In the earlier generations as well, this knowledge was not accessed by anyone unless he learned about it. It is true that our current generation is very troubled and stressed, and this distances people from knowing about their souls, but even in previous generations where they knew themselves better than we do, they could not have self-recognition unless they learned about it. They were closer to self-recognition without working hard to understand it, because their lives were not as stressed as our own and therefore this knowledge came easier to them, but unless they learned about it well, they didn't arrive at it. In every generation, there are always individuals who reached self-recognition through working hard to understand themselves.

Q6: Can taking pills to relieve anxiety help a person reach self-recognition? Or does it do the opposite?

A: In most cases where taking pills have helped, it is because these pills calm the soul [the inner state of the emotions] and once the soul is calmed, a person then has an easier time learning about his own soul. But it does not directly lead to self-recognition. In some cases, pills can calm a person down, but even then, it is not actually doing the work of self-recognition.

Q7: If a person has not yet done any work to understand the soul, will this prevent them from having *emunah*?

A: The person will still be able to have *emunah*, but he will not be able to reach the complete level of *emunah*.

Q8: If a man only learns Torah and he never learns about the soul, will he be able reach his inner world?

A: Is a man exempt from *emunah* (faith) and *tikkun hamiddos* (character improvement)? He needs *emunah*, as well as Torah learning, as well as *tikkun hamiddos*, as well as the knowledge about his soul.

Q9: Is learning about the inner world so that we can know how to do the *mitzvos* properly, or is it for a different purpose?

A: It is also to know how to do the *mitzvos* in a more complete way, but it is not entirely for that purpose. The gain of studying about our souls is to help us on two levels – to help us do the *mitzvos* better, and to gain knowledge about our inner world.

Q10: Is this a *mitzvah*, to learn about our souls?

A: There is a difference between men and women [when it comes to learning Torah]. A man's Torah learning is a purpose unto itself, whereas when a woman learns Torah, it is only so that she can know how to do the *mitzvos*. It is the same with studying our souls so that we can get to know our inner world. Do we need to learn it? The answer is an absolute yes. But is it a *mitzvah*? It depends on what we are learning about. If one is studying about an actual internal *mitzvah* such as *yiras Hashem* (fear of Hashem) or *ahavas Hashem* (love of Hashem), a man who learns about this gets a *mitzvah* of learning Torah, whereas a woman who studies these matters is learning this part of Torah in order to know how to act properly, which leads to doing the *mitzvos* properly. So it is not so clear-cut if it is classified as a "*mitzvah*" or not, because it depends.

Q11: What will be the direction of this series of lessons?

A: I will briefly explain. This lesson was an introduction, explaining that this study is so that we can know our souls, and not for the purpose of dealing with issues. In the next few lessons, we will learn that a person is comprised of a *neshamah* (Divine soul) and *guf* body, and in between our *neshamah* and *guf* is our *nefesh habehaimis*, the "animal soul", where our *avodah* starts. Our *avodah* starts from the lower level, which is our

nefesh habehaimis (“animal soul”) and this will include the four elements [earth, water, wind, and fire]. We will not only focus on the negative aspects of our four elements, but of both the good and the bad that are found in them. From there, we will continue our self-work.

May you all have *hatzlachah* (success).

02 [General Overview of the Soul]

Introduction

In the previous lesson, we explained about the need to recognize the human soul. Now we will explain, with the help of Hashem, the fundamentals of how one can know himself – his soul.

The Body, the Lower Soul (Nefesh) and the Higher Soul (Neshamah)

Man contains two parts – a body taken from the earth, and a soul, breathed into him by Hashem. There is the *guf* (body), and there is the soul, which contains the *nefesh* [lower soul] and *neshamah* [higher, Divine soul]. Man's task includes recognizing the body and its needs, and this is explained in the Rambam's *Hilchos De'os*. However, we will not be explaining about this part here. Our study here is about the soul.

The Root of the Soul and Its Parts

The soul, at its root level, is one unit. In its revealed state, however, it manifests as several parts. We will explain these parts of the soul, from lowest to highest parts. But as a general outline, we must know that the soul is really one unit, and it is only that we experience different parts of it.

The Six Levels of the Soul

1. The lowest level of the soul is called the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul).
2. Higher than the “*nefesh habehaimis*” area of the soul is the *nefesh Elokis* (“G-dly” soul).
3. Higher than the *nefesh Elokis* is the level of the soul that is called “*Ruach*”.
4. Higher than *Ruach* is the *Neshamah*.
5. After the *Neshamah* is the *Chayah*.
6. Higher than the *Chayah* is the *Yechidah*.

Altogether, we have six levels of the soul. These parts of the soul were included in the “breath of life” that Hashem has breathed into man, known generally as “the soul”.

Working Our Way Upwards

Man's task in knowing his soul is to recognize all of these parts mentioned – from the lowest level, the *nefesh habehaimis* (“animal” level of the soul) all the way to the highest level, *Yechidah*. However, it is clear that we must study the soul in this order of progression. First we must recognize the lowest level, the “*nefesh habehaimis*”, and then we can proceed to study the level after that, the *nefesh Elohis*, then the *Ruach*, etc. We must know all the soul's parts, but we must study them in the order of lowest level to highest level.

Therefore, in these lessons where we will be studying the soul, we will start by explaining the lowest level, and as we continue, with Hashem's help, we will study the higher levels of the soul.

The Nefesh HaBehaimis (Animal Soul)

Just as an animal has a soul, for it contains in it a “*nefesh chayah*”, a living spirit – so do human beings contain a soul that resembles an animal. This is called the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul) in a person. It is not completely like an animal, though, but it is the part of the soul that is closest to physicality. The Sages refer to this part of the soul as “*nefesh shitufa d'gufa*”, the part of the soul that is ‘partners with the body’. It has desires for the physical and therefore it is referred to as the animalistic part of the soul.

The *nefesh habehaimis* is therefore connected with animalism and with physicality. It is not simply a *nefesh* in and of itself, but a *nefesh* connected with the material world and with the physical body's desires. Part of recognizing the *nefesh habehaimis* is to recognize its natures, its contradictory forces, and the internal battle that it brings upon man.

As a general definition, there is a specific manifestation of the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) in the level of the *nefesh habehaimis*, which is essentially an inner force of contradictions, and this creates an internal battle in man. This is the *yetzer hora* inside the *nefesh habehaimis*: contradictory forces within. There are also higher levels of the *yetzer*

hora, which are in the *nefesh Elokis* and in the *Ruach* (where it is in the category of “angel”). But right now we are only explaining the *yetzer hora* that is in the *nefesh habehaimis*. It is the very reality of inner contradictory forces within man, which creates an internal battlefield for man.

The *nefesh habehaimis* has a root, as well as many branches with their details. Its root is called the “*nefesh habehaimis*” itself. It has four main branches: the elements of earth, water, wind, and fire. The details of these branches are many, and the Vilna Gaon¹ describes 70 of these forces in the animal soul, which are a general description of these branching details. These are the root powers of the *nefesh habehaimis*.

The System of the Four Elements

In the books written by the gentile nations of the world, of which some have entered into the Jewish people, there are many more details that have been uncovered about the soul. However, the works of our Sages have revealed to us the root forces, as we have explained. There are differing opinions in the Sages as to how many main forces are; there are opinions who list 10 main forces, while others list 13.² However, the approach which we will explain here is based upon the opinion in the Sages that there are 4 main forces in the animal soul: the elements of earth, water, wind and fire.

The “4 elements” system of the soul, which describes the animal part of the soul as four main forces, is first mentioned in the Zohar many times. Rav Chaim Vital, the student of the Arizal, based his entire *avodah* (inner work) on this system, as explained in his *sefer Shaarei Kedushah*. Therefore, since our earlier sources have based their entire *avodah* on the 4 elements, we will go in their footsteps and we will also explain *avodah* (inner work) based on this system of the 4 elements.

All of what we will learn here is based on the words of the sages of earlier generations, and not from any other foreign and secular wisdom, which has mixed the mundane into

¹ *Gra Yeshayahu 11*

² *Editor's Note: The system of 13 powers of the soul is explained by Rav Hai Gaon, and are explained in detail by the Rav in “Getting To Know Your Soul”.*

the holy, and which has caused much confusion to come upon the holy souls of the Jewish people.

A Change In Our Perspective

This order of the 4 elements is not only in the “animal” level of the soul; it is the very design of all of Creation. Hashem used the four elements to create the higher parts of the soul as well, even the *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and even the *Yechidah*, for Hashem used the four letters of His name of *havayah* to create the soul, and these four letters are parallel to the four elements. Therefore, these four elements are not just material in the soul. They are a way to view the entire Creation, for they come from the very name of *havayah* that Hashem created the universe with.

Here are some examples to help us understand this concept. If a person has a hard time hearing, he buys a hearing device so that he can hear things. Everything that he will hear will pass through that hearing aid, in order for him to hear. Similarly, if a person cannot see properly, and he buys special glasses that enable him to see better, everything he will see will be through those glasses.

So too, we have all been placed on this world and we can sense and see so much, and there are many perspectives we may have, but there is one root perspective which Hashem has created the world in, which is the perspective that all the sages throughout the generations saw through, in order to view the world in front of them. This view is essentially the system of the four elements.

Therefore, the four elements are not just another “definition” to know about or another “path” to take. It is the very design of Creation which Hashem has made, and the Sages used this wisdom in order to view the world. Therefore, the four elements are not only the structure of our *avodah* – they are the way to view the entire universe and all that goes on in it.

Here is another example that illustrates what we mean. In recent years, there is much talk about health. Two people can be eating the same food. One person is eating it because it tastes good, and the other person is eating it for its nutritional value. They are each looking at the food through a different perspective. They are each seeing the food through entirely different perspectives.

In the same vein, living internally is essentially to view the entire world and all that happens through the view of the four elements. It means to gain this perspective, to view all of creation, with this view that focuses on the four elements in everything.

Inner *avodah* is therefore not about hearing details and guidance and then trying to act upon them. It is rather about changing our perspective - to change our very grasp on things. Surely this will lead to practical action as well, but it is not mainly about “what to do”. It is mainly about how to understand things. When we understand the structure of things, we can then know how to act upon these matters and to be able to behave properly.

At first, it may be difficult to understand how the four elements change our entire perspective on things. But as we continue in these lessons, we will see how to use the four elements not only on a personal level, but as a way to view all that we see in the creation, and then we will see how much these four elements change our entire perspective.

In Summary and In Conclusion

In summary, this lesson was an additional introduction to our *avodah* (inner work) which we will explain in the coming lessons. We will be learning about the four elements in the “animal” level of the soul – earth, water, wind and fire – but we will also slowly learn, understand and see how we can view the entire Creation through these four elements. Therefore, the goal of these lessons will be to change our perspective on how we view everything that we sense and see, and through changing our *understanding*, we will eventually be able to change how we *behave* as well.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: Why is it so important to understand the four elements?

A: As mentioned, at first when you hear about this, it may be difficult to understand why it is so important. Rav Chaim Vital explains that all the good *middos* and the bad *middos* stem from the four elements. When a person is sad, it is not simply that “I am sad” – rather, it is that his element of earth is overtaking him. Therefore, it is so necessary to understand that the four elements are the root of all our behaviors. This system has not been devised by any one smart person; rather, Hashem has designed it our internal makeup with these four elements. Therefore, our entire inner work is to know these four elements.

Q2: Are the four elements also present in the higher parts of the soul, such as in the *nefesh Elokis, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah* and *Yechidah*?

A: Very good question. The four elements are found in all levels of the soul. But in the higher levels of the soul, the elements are of a more spiritual nature. In the *nefesh Elokis*, the four elements are of a more spiritual nature than in the *nefesh habehaimis*, and in the *Ruach*, the four elements are of an even more spiritual nature, and so forth.

Q3: How do we see everything in terms of the four elements, just as a person with a hearing aid hears everything through a hearing aid?

A: In order to understand it well, one needs to hear the coming lessons. The concept cannot be understood completely the first time you hear about it. We will explain it step after step, and we are only at the first step. This is the first time you have just heard that we need to see the entire Creation in terms of the four elements, and you cannot yet understand that yet. As we continue with the lessons, with the help of Hashem, we will explain how the entire Creation is designed with the four elements, and accordingly, how we can see it. As of now, this point will seem closed and mysterious to you, and hopefully as we continue, this concept will become clearer to you. The point of today’s lesson was

that we need to see everything in terms of the four elements; as for how exactly to do that, this will be explained in the coming lessons, with Hashem's help.

Q4: Are all events that take place in the world also made up of the four elements?

A: Yes – these four elements are in everything that is found.

Q5: Are these beginning lessons only meant for the purpose of learning, with no practical outcomes for right now?

A: It was explained in this class that part of being able to act practically is through changing one's perspective. These lessons help a person change his perspective and are not meant for practical change as of now. They can eventually lead to practical change, but in the meantime when we are first hearing these lessons, the point is simply to change our perspective.

Q6: How can we practically act upon this concept of the four elements when we don't yet know what it is?

A: You first have to hear about this concept slowly so that you can be able to absorb it. Even before you fully understand it, you have at least heard that there is such a perspective and way of seeing things.

Q7: How does our view change if we view the world through the four elements or not?

A: If a child sees reality a certain way and he asks questions about it, and then we view the same reality through the eyes of an adult, what is the difference? A child doesn't absorb reality properly, whereas an adult can absorb the reality in front of him and therefore he sees reality accordingly. The difference between these two views is like the difference between the sky and the earth. A child looks at matches and may see it as an item to play with, whereas an adult sees matches with a whole different perspective. And if a person heard that a volcano erupted, if he does not see the world in terms of the four elements, all he is aware of is that there was a physical act of the eruption. But a person who sees everything in terms of the four elements will see an act that involved the

element of fire, and that all the events that were caused by the eruption have really been caused by the element of fire.

Q8: Regarding the *yetzer hora* and how it manifests in the four elements of the animal soul, does this mean that anger stems from the 'fire' of the *yetzer hora*, and that desire stems from the 'water' of the *yetzer hora*, and so forth?

A: This will be explained in a future lesson, but here is a brief explanation, since you have asked about it here. Every person contains all the four elements, and there is always one element which is the most dominant, then a second-to-most-dominant element, then a third-to-most-dominant element, and his least dominant element. So, for example, if there is too much fire in one's soul compared to his other elements (relatively speaking), there will be clashes within his elements and this will cause the fire to explode outward. In the level of *nefesh habehaimis*, this is called "the *yetzer hora*".

In the way Hashem created us, our elements were perfectly in balance. Ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas* and the *yetzer hora* entered the soul, it has caused imbalances in the soul where one element is more dominant than another. Since our souls were all contained in his soul, our own souls have become imbalanced by the sin, and therefore it is our inner work to balance out the elements within each of our personal souls.

Q9: Is giving balance to our souls' elements a part of doing *teshuvah*?

A: *Teshuvah* means to return something to the way it was before. When one gives balance to the elements in his soul, this is therefore a big part of doing *teshuvah*.

Q10: Does Hashem give permission to the *yetzer hora* to cause imbalances in our soul?

A: As mentioned in this class, there are different levels of the *yetzer hora* in the soul: in the *nefesh habehaimis*, in the *nefesh Elokis*, and in the *Ruach*. Actual sin is a higher level of *yetzer hora*. Here we are talking about the *yetzer hora* found in the level of the *nefesh habehaimis*, which is not sin itself, but a lack of order in the animal soul's forces, and the

inner contradictions caused by this lack of inner order. This internal imbalance in the elements of the soul is called the *yetzer hora* that is in our *nefesh habehaimis*.

Q11: Does the *yetzer hora* in the higher levels of the soul also cause imbalance in the animal soul?

A: The higher levels of the *yetzer hora* will feed on the imbalances in the animal soul. One who has a more balanced animal soul will have a stronger power of free will and he will have an easier time with his evil impulses to sin, whereas one who has not yet given balance to his soul's elements will have less power of free will and he can be easier prey to his *yetzer hora*. For example, if a person gets angry and this causes him to commit all kinds of sins, i.e. breaking things and damaging other people's possessions, his *yetzer hora* is using the lack of balance in his element of fire and thereby causing him to actually sin.

03 [Tangibly Relating To The Inner World]

Relating To Our Inner World

In the previous chapters, with *siyata d'shmaya*, we explained about the need to understand our souls, which is our inner world. We explained that the entire Creation, as well as our inner world, is comprised of the four elements. In this chapter, we will explain and try to understand what the concept of this “inner world” is.

Everyone has heard of the concept of the “inner world”, but there is less awareness as to what exactly the nature of this inner world is. Since we are learning here about how to try entering it, we need to understand at least a little of what exactly we are trying to enter, before entering it.

There is an outer, external world, as well as an inner world. The external world we all recognize. Our Sages refer to it as the “world of action”, the *“olam hamaaseh”*. In other words, it is essentially about action. The “world of action” is not only called so because it is a world much action takes place. It is because it is the very attitude we have towards This World, which we live on. It is action which we mainly perceive as our existence on this world. The “world of action” is therefore perceived by us as an absolute reality, whereas our “inner world” is not perceived of by most people as an absolute reality.

The “inner world” contains our emotions, thoughts, and deeper aspects of the soul. We can relate tangibly to our actions, but we usually do not relate to our emotions and thoughts as an absolutely existing reality.

The reason for this is because we can clearly see the results of actions. For example, we turn on the lights and then the room is lit up. A person plants a bomb, G-d forbid, and the bomb explodes. With actions, we can clearly see the results. We can therefore perceive of actions as an absolute reality. In contrast to this, our feelings and thoughts are not something we can tangibly relate to, because we do not see any of their results.

We are all familiar with our feelings of course, and we know we have many of them, but we do not see how our feelings cause anything tangible to happen, unlike our actions, which clearly produce tangible results. We are familiar with our thoughts, and we are aware that many thoughts pass through our head, but we relate to it only a very subtle level, and not as a tangible reality. At best, we can relate to our feelings and our thoughts only with regards to how they affect our actions, but to relate to our feelings as they are, and to relate to our thoughts as they are, is not something we can tangibly relate to. Therefore, we do not see the results of any our feelings and thoughts.

Feelings That Are Not Attached To Any Action

Here is an example from our world, in order to help us understand what we mean.

Every person is prepared to spend money on acquiring something tangible, such as a car, house, furniture, food, and clothing. But how many people are prepared to pay for simply having a good feeling? People will perhaps pay for good feelings if they result in something in the world of action, such as the good feeling from going to a park. Here, the feeling is attached to an action, so we can all understand the value of such a feeling. But if the good feeling would just be by itself – just a feeling, with no action attached to it – would we relate to this and give any value to it?

Another example: Many times, when we see a person who looks happy, we may think that he's happy either because he has money, good children, a good marriage, a comfortable house to live in, etc. We will quickly attribute his happiness to something he must have in the world of action. In truth, though, a person can be happy just from good feelings that come from the inner world, such as a happy inner emotional state, etc. But a person will tend to have the attitude that any happiness must be stemming from something external in the world of action, such as a good career, a major accomplishment in life, etc. This attitude is saying that the inner world of a person, his inner feelings and thoughts, can only be defined by something in the external world, but that there is no inner world for one to actually enter.

The truth is, however, that we have our external world, the “world of action”, by itself; and we also have our inner world, in and of itself; and we also have a point that bridges these two parts together.

We have explained what the inner world is, and why people often have difficulty understanding its concept. It is because people only relate to the inner world if they can attach it to the external world somehow. If they don't see the results of the inner world in their external world, they will not relate to the inner world.

That is often why if you try to tell someone about the inner world, the other person may seek to know how it can apply practically in his life. He will want to know immediately how to act upon it, if it's “*l'maaseh*” (of practical use). Although this argument is understandable, it is only a partial step into the inner world.

When is this argument valid, and when isn't it? It is valid when a person's feelings and thoughts indeed do not bring any changes in one's actions. When is it an invalid? It is invalid because in order for a person to know how to act correctly, he first needs to properly build his inner world, his feelings and thoughts.

Building Our Inner World Before We Know What To “Do”

After one builds his inner world, of course, he must be able to apply it practically to his “world of action”. But he first needs to build the inner world by itself, as it is, without any emphasis on action yet. For as we have explained, the inner world of a person is a world of its own, independent of the external “world of action” that we relate to.

This is the fundamental understanding which we need in order to enter our inner world. It is the understanding that our inner world, our feelings and thoughts, are an absolute reality, just as real as our external world, the world of action.

Our external world is built through learning Torah, observing *mitzvos*, and maintaining basic *derech erez*, and our inner world is built through acknowledging the reality of our feelings and thoughts within us, even when they are not necessarily connected to any

actions. The perfected state of existence is when we fuse the reality of our external observance of Torah and *mitzvos* together with a developed inner world, But even before we reach this integration, we first need to build the inner world by itself, acknowledging our feelings and thoughts as they are, even when they do not involve any effects on our action.

The following example illustrates to us this difference, of whether a person builds his inner world in and of itself, unrelated to any actions - versus building the inner world only one connects it to action.

One day, we will all leave the world, at the time when we are supposed to leave it. We will be leaving behind this “world of action”, so what do we remain with? We will remain with the feelings and thoughts (and any of the deeper parts of the soul than this) we have reached. If someone was only able to relate to his feelings based on their effect on his “world of action”, when he leaves This World, he will not be able to relate to anything! He only learned to relate to feelings when they are connected to actions, but now that there are no more actions, there is nothing for him to feel.

But if a person during his lifetime made sure not only to connect his feelings with his actions but also to build his feelings as a reality that is independent of action, when he leaves This World, he will be divested of actions, but he will remain with his feelings. (He will then be able to reach the “lower Gan Eden” that is on This World.)

On some level, such a person is called by our Sages as a “*ben aliyah*” (one who rises spiritually).³ A *ben aliyah* is one who has several levels of existence within his soul. He has his “world of action” that he can relate to, but he also has more inner levels in his soul he can go to. In different terminology, he has “higher” levels of existence in himself – his inner feelings and thoughts.

It can be compared to a person who has a house with a first floor and attic. There may be several floors between the first floor and the attic, which are connecting together all of the floors of the house, but each floor is seen as its own, independent of the others. A *ben*

³ *Bava Metzia 45a*

aliyah has his first, lowest 'floor' – his world of action – as well as his upper floors, which house his feelings and thoughts; and he has levels in between them which connect together his actions with his feelings and thoughts.

Thus, entering the inner world is really to enter the world of feelings as it is, by itself, acknowledging this reality as it is, even without acting upon these feelings. Then a person can rise to the world of thought, with the same attitude.

Relating To Your Inner World As Inner “Forces” As They Are

Now let us explain the subtlety of this inner world.

The external world is perceived by us through our physical senses – by what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Our inner world, however, is perceived by us as inner “forces” (*kochos*), or “movements” (*tenuos*), as they are. The way to perceive the inner world is through recognizing the inner *kochos* forces, or the inner *tenuos* movements which are constantly moving within the inner world. That is how we should view the inner world.

In the world of action, we can also see potential forces, but only in relation to how they having some bearing on the world of action. For example, if we see a hammer, we will see it as a potential – it can be used to bang in a nail. We can view a car as something that has the potential to move and get to places, etc. **Our inner world, though, is entirely comprised of *kochos* forces as they are – and that is how we must perceive them.**

We can all recognize the inner *kochos* forces in ourselves. These include the powers of love, hatred, joy, and sadness in ourselves. We usually do not relate to these powers as tangible, but as some kind of inner movement that can result in something in the world of action. But the truth is that the forces contained in our inner world are absolutely a tangibly reality. They are no less tangible than anything in the physical world such as the sun, moon, stars, earth, and the seas, which are all a tangible reality. The *kochos* forces contained in our inner world are no less real and tangible.

Example 1 – Seeing Love As Connection, and Hatred As Separation

Here is a fundamental example that can help us understand this concept. In the world of action, we find attachments and connections between people, such as the marriage between husband and wife, and there can also be detachment and separation on this world, such as divorce; or death, when the soul separates from the body. In the inner world, however, all of these events represent the various *kochos* forces. In the world, attachment to another person is known as the “force” of love, and separation from another person is the “force” of hatred.

Therefore, we can understand that a person who arranges marriages between people is a person who connects people together, whereas a person who brings strife between couples or between people, or one who causes another person to die, G-d forbid, is a person who causes separation between people.

If we see a person who loves another, we will most certainly view it as a virtue, and if we see someone who is hateful, we view this as negative character. But we usually do not value love in the sense of how we value a couple getting married, and we usually do not view hatred in the sense of someone who has caused a divorce or death.

This is because we live on the world of action, and therefore we can easily relate to marriage as a positive thing, and divorce and death as a negative thing. But how do we relate to the feeling of love, or to the feeling of hate? We certainly will attribute importance to these feelings, but we do not attribute any tangibility to these feelings.

The more a person realizes, though, that feelings are an absolute reality, he will find himself attributing more value to the emotion of love itself, in the same way he values the idea of getting married and building a home. He will also view hatred as a reality no less real and tangible than the reality of a person who causes hate and strife between people, or who has caused divorce between a couple, or who has caused another’s death.

Example 2 – Relating To Happiness as a Force of Expansion

Here is another example from the physical realm. If a family was living in a small house, and they have been blessed with several children, and now they have moved into a bigger house, they have really gone from a situation of “contraction” into a situation of “expansion”. In the same way, when it comes to the world of our feelings, there is also a concept of “expansion” – in the emotion known as happiness. When a person is happy, he is in a state of expansion.

Most of the time, if a person moves his family into a new and bigger house, his siblings will be happy for him in his new move (as long as he is on good terms with them). But if his siblings would meet him when he feels an inward feeling of happiness, would they also be happy for him? Usually, it will be difficult for any of his siblings to feel included in his happiness, because they do not see a physical factor associated with this happiness. They may even wonder why he is happy at all! People identify more with physical reasons to be happy, such as feeling happy for a person who moves into a new house, because this is tangible, and they identify less with internal reasons to be happy, which they can't see and tangibly sense.

A Change of Perspective

We have given several examples of the conceptual difference between our outer world and our inner world. Let us now summarize this.

The inner world, as we have explained here, is all about inner *kochos* forces, namely, the movements (*tenuah*) of these inner forces.

Let's now proceed to understand the following fundamental point. Entering the inner world is not enabled through any guidance and advice to get there. It requires a **change of perspective**. One first needs to accept this change of perspective on an intellectual level, and then he must recognize this matter through a perception of his heart. It is therefore not only about practical change of action, nor is it about understandings which produce changes of action (though this is certainly needed as well).

This change of perspective must take place before you enter any inner work. When you have this change of perspective, you will be able to better enter the inner world, and this change of perspective will then gain greater clarity as you go along.

What is this change of perspective? First let us define it, and in the next lesson with the help of Hashem, we will try to understand it better. It is when one begins to stop and reflect: *“What are the inner forces that are contained in this thing I am encountering? What is this thing made of up of? From which forces?”*

Here is one example to get us started. A person sees fire. If we have a simple perspective, we see physical fire. But if we are examining the inner forces contained in something, what do we see in fire? We can see something that is destructive, or radiant, or warm, or elevating, and other characteristics of fire. Either we can see it as physical fire, or we can “see” the inner forces contained in fire, which are its properties of destruction, light, warmth, elevation, etc.

We have only given one example of the concept, but the point is that when we encounter anything, we can stop to consider what forces are contained in it. This is not for the purpose of intellectualizing the matter alone. That can be a starting point, but the point is to enter into a different perspective, where you are not focused on the surface layer of something, but on the inner forces contained in it. The forces contained in something are its inner layer, its “inner world”.

When we get used to looking at things in this way and when we get used to seeing ourselves in this way as well, this is the gateway to entering the inner world (with assistance from Heaven). This shall be further elaborated upon in the next lesson.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH THE RAV

Q1: Can the Rav further elaborate upon this concept that the inner world are entirely made up of *kochos* forces?

A: We so far gave the example of fire. From a physical viewpoint, fire is physical fire. From the inner viewpoint of our soul, fire can be seen as a force of elevation, light, destruction, dryness, etc. The four elements of fire, wind, water and earth are not just the 'elements' per se, but they contain *kochos*, forces. That is our study here, and that is how we can begin to enter our inner world, which is made up of the four elements.

Q2: Are our feelings always present even when they are not being activated, just like the sun and moon are always there even when we don't see them?

A: They are always present and they are always working. The only issue is how aware a person is to them and in what way he is using them. The more a person lives with awareness, the more he can become aware of what is taking place in his subconscious.

Q3: What is the connection of this lesson with the previous lesson which discussed the four elements?

A: The previous lesson explained that the entire Creation is made up of the four elements. There are different "worlds" within Creation, where the four elements appear differently. In the physical realm, the four elements appear as the physical earth, water, wind and fire as we recognize. In our inner world, the elements are not the simple forms of earth, water, wind and fire. Rather, they appear as forces. They are the forces that are contained in earth, in water, in wind, and fire. That is how this lesson is the continuation of the previous lesson.

Q4: If I focus on the love I have for my children, regardless of how this pertains to the actions of love, is that what it means to understand the power of love simply as an inner "force" unrelated to any action?

A: That is a good example of the concept we explained here. Either you can love a child by focusing on what you do for the child, or, you can just focus on the love for the child as it is, as in the example you gave.

Another example of the concept would be that when you see that a child is succeeding at something and he is happy, you are happy for him for his achievement, but if you have a small child or baby who has nothing to succeed at, you can't be happy for him for succeeding at anything, because there is nothing for him to succeed at. What, then, can you be happy about for the child? You can just focus on your child's happiness whenever you see that he is happy. You are not happy for anything the child is doing, but simply because he is happy, and this makes you happy when you focus on it. That is a good example of relating to an inner force simply when it is not related to any action.

Q5: Can this apply to negative feelings as well?

A: The concept we are describing should only be used with positive feelings. If you focus on what is contained in the negative feelings – the fact that they are comprised of certain inner forces – this will only be detrimental to you. There is a method that people use to access their inner world by going deeper into their deepest and most painful feelings that they have. We are not taking this path here, and it focuses on working with our positive feelings, not our negative feelings.

Q6: What is a list of some of these inner forces?

A: One who wishes may listen\read the original series we have given about the four elements, which is called *Da Es Middosecha-Mahut HaMiddos (Understanding Your Middos)*, which explains the *kochos*\forces that are contained in the four elements. In this series, several of the forces in each of the four elements have been explained. The first half of the series on the element of earth was published in Hebrew as *sefer Da Es Middosecha*, and the rest of the series is available only in audio format.

Q7: What should a person do if he is filled with negative feelings?

A: Focus on your positive feelings. My hope is that you have at least a few positive feelings and not only negative feelings. A few positive feelings are enough to start [entering the inner world] with. May Hashem help you continue to find more positive feelings.

Q8: Does the Rav mean that focusing on positive feelings causes our inner forces to become activated from their potential state? What was the goal here?

A: Very good question. The first step is to become aware that the inner world is entirely made up of *kochos* - inner forces. The second step is to activate them from their potential state, and the third step is to integrate them into the "world of action". Here in this lesson we have explained the first step, of becoming aware that the inner world is entirely *kochos* forces, because the point here was to help bring a person from the outer world into the inner world.

Q9: What is the connection between thoughts and feelings?

A: We have not touched upon this yet, but since you asked, I will try to answer it briefly. In most people, their thoughts either are for the sake of action, or they are fantasies. However, as one builds his inner world of thought, he can reach a level where he can tangibly relate to his thoughts - either because his thoughts are connected with his feelings, or because thought is a reality unto itself. For example, in the concept of *hekdesh* (consecrating property for the use of the *Beis HaMikdash*) we can see how the thoughts have tangible effects on reality. Just like a person can understand that feelings exist on their own, unattached to action, so can a person learn to understand that there is a world of thought on its own, unattached to action.

Q10: Can a thought generate a feeling?

A: Yes, thoughts can activate feelings, and they can also clarify one's feelings, as it is written, "*And you shall know today and you shall settle it upon your heart.*" When you fix your thoughts strongly upon a matter, it becomes "*daas*", and when this *daas* becomes palpable, your thoughts can then clarify what is in your feelings and thoughts.

Q11: Do fears come from emotions or thoughts?

A: Usually, fears do not begin from thoughts, but from an inner fear the person had, which can come from various reasons, and the fear awakens the thoughts, which in turn increases the fear. The fears do not come from a thought itself, but either from an inner fear itself that awakens a thought, such as from something a person has heard or seen, which awakens his fear (and which then awakens the thoughts).

Q12: But when you love another person, such as your child, your emotion of love is always attached to something in the outer world, such as another person...?

A: There are a few points here to understand. There is the force of love itself which is used with regards to oneself, and there is the outward expression of the love, and there is the point where the love is clothed upon something\someone in the material world. Love can be an inward feeling before it has any outward or material expression, just as one can be inwardly happy and also be happy for others when they are successful with regards to something material. Thus there is the force of the love as it exists in the abstract, within oneself, and there is also an outward expression of love, and there is also the material expression of love.

Q13: When Rabbi Akiva was being tortured and he was still happy, his happiness must have been coming from this inner force of happiness since there was no material factor for this happiness?

A: True, and this is a very fundamental concept. Since you have mentioned it, we shall elaborate upon it. There are feelings that find outward expression, and there are feelings that remain on an inner level, within oneself. Rabbi Akiva's feeling of happiness in spite of being tortured by iron combs is a happiness attached with the material factor, whereas his joy of being ready to die *al kiddush Hashem* was an inner level of happiness. He was so concentrated on this inner joy of being ready to die *al kiddush Hashem*, a feeling that was totally removed from any physicality, and thus he didn't feel the iron combs, because he was totally detached from anything of this material realm.

Q14: The Rav explained that it will be not be an easy task to enter the inner world. Is this in relation to the above point – that it is difficult to separate from feelings attached to the outer world and to make the transition to inner feelings that are not attached to the material?

A: Exactly. Since we are in a material world, a world of action, it is an *avodah* to learn how to acquire abstract kinds of feelings which are removed from this physical world. That is why it contains a challenge.

Q15: What should be our *avodah* for the next few weeks until the next lesson?

A: The current *avodah* for now is not to be worked on in the practical sense, for that is the exact concept we have explained here. The lesson now is to gain **awareness** to these concepts. You can take a few things, or at least one thing, and contemplate: What are the forces contained in this? This is not about what you are seeing or touching. Just analyze what *koach* (force) is contained in something. We so far gave the example of fire, and this can be done with all of the other elements as well, and this will be the backbone of what we will be explaining in the coming lessons. As mentioned before, you can take a look at the *sefer Da Es Middosecha* which lists these forces in the elements. That is a starting point, and we will expand upon those points further, with Hashem's help.

Yasher koach gadol, ad l'meod.