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Water-of-Earth-of-Fire: The Pleasurable Feeling When Receiving Honor

Let us continue, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to learn about the trait of *kavod* (honor), which stems from the element of fire in the soul. Now we will discuss *kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, *kavod* stemming from **earth-of-fire** is when *kavod* causes a person to have *k'veidus*, "heaviness", meaning that the person receiving honor will have a hard time leaving the place where is found in, so long as he's receiving honor in that place. It is the depth behind the desire in a person to stay in a place where he's receiving *kavod*.

There is the trait of *kavod* in general, and on a more specific level, there is a kind of *kavod* where a person pursues *kavod* through remaining in a certain place/situation, so that he can continue to receive *kavod* there. That is the idea of *k'veidus*\heaviness, where a person can't pull away from the place or situation where he's receiving *kavod*, like a person who has climbed to a high place and now he doesn't want to come back down.

Kavod stemming from **water-of-earth-of-fire** is when a person is having *taanug* (pleasure) in the honor when he's remaining in his place. Later we will discuss *kavod* that stems from **water-of-fire** in general, which is the general *taanug* that one has in *kavod*. But here we are discussing a different and more specific kind of *kavod*, where a person is having pleasure in the honor he's receiving when he remains in his place. This is the *kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**, and that is what we will discuss here in this chapter.

The Depth Behind Kavod\Honor: A Spiritual Pleasure Found On This World

Rav Chaim of Volozhin said that although the Sages say although the general rule is that "There is no reward for *mitzvos* on This World", it is possible for a person to get his reward for *mitzvos* on This World when he receives *kavod*. Receiving honor is Heaven's way of repaying a person on This World for *mitzvos*. What is the depth behind this? Why is *kavod* a way of receiving one's spiritual reward for the *mitzvos*, on This World?

It is because the higher realms are spiritual, whereas the world we live on here is material. The *mitzvos* that we do contain a spiritual light (as in the term "*Ner Mitzvah*", the "flame of a *mitzvah*" - its spiritual light). The physical "garment" of a *mitzvah* is a physical act that we do on This World. We can't receive the spiritual reward for a *mitzvah* on This World, because This World is a material dimension. But there is one thing that serves a bridging point between This World and the upper

realms, which the Sages mention in many places: the idea of *kavod*, honor.

Each of the realms that Hashem has created is bound to its dimensions, where they are each contained in their own space, and none of them interfere with the other. But there is a point where the upper realms can extend into the lower realms, where the lower realms can have some grasp of the upper realms. That point is *kavod*.

A good example of this concept is the *mitzvah* of honoring one's father and mother. The child, who is at a point below his parents, must honor his father and mother, who are above him. A child has a *mitzvah* to be in awe of his parents, for a higher realm is generally viewed in awe by the lower realm. The *mitzvah* to honor one's parents is the idea of revealing a higher, spiritual dimension upon the lower realm; this revelation takes place through the act of honoring them, *kavod*.

(We mentioned in the previous chapter that this idea also exists on a deeper level, that when the *neshamah* is revealed and it overcomes the bounds of the body, this in turn reveals the *kavod* of the *neshamah*.)

This is a very clear principle: *Kavod* reveals a higher realm amidst this lower realm. When the lower realm "honors" the higher realm, based on its own understanding of the higher realm even though it isn't actually grasping the higher realm, this is *kavod*; the lower realm is giving *kavod* to the higher realm. The truth is that we do not comprehend anything of the higher realms. Any honor we attribute to it is based on the feeble and limited understanding that is available to us on this lower realm we are on. Just as we don't understand Hashem, and all honor that we accord to Him is on our own level, we don't either understand any of the spiritual realms that are above this lower realm we are on.

The *mitzvah* of honoring parents is "*Honor your father, and your mother*" – the emphasis is on the "*your*", for the honor that a child must give to his parents must come from the recognition that they are above him and that he is below them. The Gemara says that the father and mother each provide five different aspects to the physical makeup of the child. The child needs to honor them because they gave to him, and since they gave to him, they are higher than him, and he must recognize that it is upon him to honor their higher status.

Kavod is also from the word *k'veidus*, "heaviness", because when something heavy, it descends. *Kavod* is thus the revelation that something higher has 'descended' to a lower plane, when the lower plane acknowledges the higher plane and reveals its presence within the lower plane. That is the depth behind the concept of *kavod*, and it is a fundamental understanding about *kavod*.

Therefore, *kavod* is not simply another kind of *taanug* (pleasure) of our soul. We have *taanug* when we enjoy any of the physical senses, but *taanug* in *kavod* (honor) is to enjoy who we are, in essence. The enjoyment of feeling honor is a power that bridges the lower realm with the higher realm, allowing a person to experience something of the higher realm amidst this lower realm. *Kavod* is a deeper kind of pleasure; it is a pleasure of the higher realm, which one can experience on this world.

The Ramchal in *Mesillas Yescharim* says that if not for *kavod*, a person would eat and drink only in order to survive, and he would only wear enough clothes to keep himself from harm; the pursuit of food, drink, and extravagant clothing all stem from a person's desire for *kavod*. These words of the Ramchal are hard to understand, at first glance. Why should a person pursue these physical and materialistic things, in order to receive *kavod*? What does *kavod* have to do with it?

But it is because when the *neshamah*'s desire for true spiritual pleasure isn't being met, it will be interpreted by the body as a desire for pleasure in the physical. The body will then seek all kinds of sensual pleasures. But it is all rooted in a desire for spiritual pleasure, which is *kavod*.

We have discussed the general concept of the pleasure of *kavod*. Now we will explain the more specific concept that we will discuss in this chapter, which is *kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**. In summary, the pleasure that one has in *kavod*\honor is the fundamental root of all pleasure that a person can have on this world.

***Kavod*\Honor - A Spiritual Pleasure**

In some people, the desire for *kavod* is very strong, especially if a person has a dominance of fire in his soul, who can strongly identify with the idea of *kavod*. It is usually found in people who overcame their physical desires in their younger years, and when they hit old age, they feel a powerful desire for *kavod*.

Most people in their younger years are excitable, and therefore their physical desires are at their full strength, causing “boiling of the blood” when they desire something. As a person matures and gets older, though, even if he didn’t have a strong pleasure for *kavod* in his younger years, he will feel a stronger desire for *kavod*. When he was younger, he was more materialistic, so his main desires were physical in their nature. Now that he is older and he feels more spiritual (or even if he didn’t age yet, and he has matured spiritually), he is much less interested in physical desires and pleasures, his pleasure will mainly be spiritual in their nature, so he will feel a desire for *kavod*.

If a person has truly risen spiritually, he receives the honor attributed to the wise Torah scholars, and the more he has matured spiritually, the more he merits this honor. But it is the same idea as the above: when a person is no longer that interested in physical, material pleasures, his desire for pleasure will become more spiritual, which translates into a desire to experience more honor.

If a person has a lot of fire in his soul, he will have a strong desire for *kavod* even in his younger years. There are people like this, but they are very few. But even if a person does not have that much fire in his soul, as long as he has matured somewhat in life, he will feel a stronger desire for *kavod*. Therefore, I want to emphasize here that the words we will explain here are only for those who strongly identify with the desire for *kavod*.

There are some people who can strongly identify with the words here, and there are others who feel very far from what we are discussing here, because they don’t feel such a powerful demand for *kavod*, so they can’t understand why a person would make such a big deal about it. But, as we have explained earlier, the pleasure in *kavod* is the deepest pleasure of the soul. If a person doesn’t feel a demand to have this deep desire for *kavod*, it is really because he is not yet connecting to the spiritual dimension within him.

The desire for *kavod* can either be channeled in a holy direction, which is the honor attributed to Torah scholars, or it is used for evil motives. But the actual desire itself for *kavod* is the root of all pleasure in the soul. We will explain more about it, with the help of Hashem when we discuss the general pleasure in *kavod* [when we will discuss *kavod* that stems from **water-of-fire**].

The Two Approaches In Tikkun HaMiddos (Character Improvement)

Now let’s continue to discussing our topic [*kavod* that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**].

We’ve mentioned this in the past with regards to how we understand fixing our *middos*. We understand simply that fixing our *middos* means that we have good *middos* and bad *middos*, and that our challenge is to try to weaken our bad *middos* and reveal our good *middos*. But the depth of our avodah in fixing our *middos* is of a totally different attitude than this.

There are two deep approaches in fixing the *middos*.

1. The Rambam's Approach: Working On Our Middos and On Our Da'as - One way of *tikkun hamiddos* is the Rambam's approach. The Rambam explains all about *middos* in "*Hilchos De'os*" (the ethical laws), which is from the word "*da'as*". Therefore, the 'external' aspect of fixing our *middos* is to fix the *middos* themselves, but the 'inner' aspect of fixing our *middos* is to work with our "*da'as*".

Our Sages have written explicitly that the core and inner essence of all our *middos* is "*da'as*". This is based on the verse, "*And with knowledge (da'as), chambers will be filled.*" These 'chambers' refer to the "chambers of the heart", meaning that all of these 'chambers' are clothed by our *middos*. Therefore, there is an *avodah* to work on our *middos* both by directly working on the *middos* themselves, as well as working on our *middos* via the means of working with our *da'as*.

But we are not dealing with this approach here. Here we will use a second, alternative approach to how we work on our *middos*.

2) Reb Yisrael Salanter's Approach: Rectifying The Imagination. The other approach to working on our *middos* is that by working with our powers of *seichel* (intellect) and *tziyur* (visualization), in order to overcome the power of *dimayon* (imagination).

Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that the imagination is the root of all evil character traits, for it causes the mind to roam around free in the realm of fantasy, and this leads to all evil^[1]. In these words, Reb Yisrael Salanter was not just giving us the picture about our *middos*; he is teaching us about the root of all our *middos*, which is the imagination.

The depth of one's task of self-improvement is to work on the imagination. If one works on the *middos* alone, he is improving only the "branches", and he is missing the "root". Working with the "branches" would be to work upon one's *de'os* (his various beliefs) alone, and that is not what we will explain here.^[2] Working with the "root" can only be achieved by working upon the imagination.

Working With Our Imagination

To give a brief outline of the imagination, a person has the mental abilities of *chochmah**seichel* (wisdom\intellect) and *tziyur* ("visualization", an improved version of the imagination), which are challenged by the ability of *dimayon*, the "imagination." The ability of *tziyur* (visualization) comes from the *seichel*, but the ability of *dimayon* (imagination) does not.

These forces are pitted against each other. Just as the *seichel*\intellect is challenged by *dimayon*\imagination (and on a more specific level, the *seichel*\intellect contains the power of *machshavah*\thought, *haskalah*\intellectualization, *hisbonenus*\reflection), so is the power of *tziyur*\visualization) challenged by the power of *dimayon*\imagination.

So the core of one's task of self-improvement does not lie in fixing the *middos* alone or in fixing the *de'os*\beliefs, but in fixing the *dimayon*\imagination, which is accomplished through developing the power of *tziyur*\visualization. That is why many of the works of *mussar* focus on building the power of *tziyur*\visualization [an improved version of the imagination].

Most people have a misunderstanding of this, and they think that *tziyur* means the fantastical kind of imagination that they know of since they were children. But that is not what the teachers of *mussar* were referring to. Those *Gedolim* worked many years to develop the power of *tziyur*. They would contemplate something in their minds which could not be seen with the physical eyes, and they would use their *seichel*\intellect in combination with *tziyur*\visualization, to reflect into what they were thinking about and trying to picture the matter.

For example, Reb Yisrael Salanter based on all of man's *avodah* on the concept of fear of punishment,

which involves visualizing the fire of *Gehinnom* (it is a separate discussion for itself as to why he chose fear of punishment as the main aspect of man's *avodah*, but this was his core principle). This is *tziyur*, and not simply imagination, because a person has never seen *Gehinnom*.

How indeed can a person visualize *Gehinnom*, if he has never seen it? He can use various parables that Chazal have given, in order to conceptualize it. One of the examples (explained by Reb Yisrael Salanter) one can use for this is to feel a physical fire, and the like. There are many details involved with this approach, but the point is always to develop the soul's power of *tziyur*.

Honor - A Pleasure Based Upon Imagination

Now let's return to discussing our current topic, the pleasure that one has in *kavod*\honor.

Whenever one has pleasure in honor, he's really enjoying an imaginary kind of pleasure, a *dimayon* (fantasy), which is ultimately rooted in the power of *tziyur* (mental visualization). Honor is not a reality like the sense of taste, which you can experience sensually. Rather, it is experienced through the imagination (The sense of sight comes closest to this, for it enables a person to visualize and experience the pleasure of the vision).

On one hand, *kavod* (honor) is rooted in *tziyur*\visualization, and *dimayon*\fantasy on the other hand. The depth of *kavod* is experienced, on a higher level, through one's power of *tziyur*; when it is experienced on a lower, unrefined level, it is experienced through *dimayon*\imagination, where a person will experience honor on an imaginative level (this is really the *k'veidus*\heaviness that results from *kavod* which we spoke about earlier).

Based upon the above, we can understand the following deep point. *Kavod*\honor is not a feeling based in reality! For example, a *bar mitzvah* boy or a *chosson* [sitting at his *Sheva Berachos*] will be showered with all kinds of compliments that are not reflective at all of the reality (perhaps because they want to "expound and receive reward" for it), and it feels good for him to hear it. If not for the imagination, he wouldn't enjoy these compliments. He is mentally visualizing and also imagining that the compliments about him are true, and that is what allows him to enjoy the honor being accorded to him. He is imagining that the words being said about him are really true, and that is how he enjoys the "honor".

Here is another example. A person is part of a certain place and he is honored there, and he enjoys it. What happens? Just as "a *mitzvah* leads to another *mitzvah*, and a sin leads to another sin", pleasure leads to more pleasure, and the person will want to be honored again. He is consciously (and many times it is subconsciously) trying to return to the previous situation in which he was honored, which he has enjoyed so much. The honor he had in the past is what he is experiencing now.

Recalling the pleasure of honor is not just an imagination of a past memory. It is not like the pleasure of tasting and eating something, which becomes a thing of the past after it has been experienced; there is some imprint left in one's memory of what the pleasure was like, but not more than that. But with the pleasure of honor, it was a pleasure based on imagination to begin with, so every time the person wants to experience the pleasure of the honor again, he is consciously (or subconsciously) returning to the same imaginary pleasure that he has experienced in the past.

This can also be described in the following terms. Physical, material matters are always subject to changes, whereas spirituality remains as it is. Honor, which is a spiritual feeling, doesn't disappear after a person has experienced it. It remains in place, so a person will continue to re-experience it long after he originally experienced the feeling of honor. (This is a more general definition of honor; earlier, we gave a more specific definition of it.)

Identifying The Sense For Honor

In light of the above, one should understand and recognize: "Where is the force of *kavod*\honor found in my soul?"

Most people will not be able to relate to this, however, and there is a simple reason for this. Honor is a very refined and spiritual kind of feeling, so there are a lot less people who can feel it. People identify and relate very well to material matters, but honor is a subtle feeling that is rooted in the spiritual realm, so it is usually concealed from the awareness of people. Some people have a very strong demand for honor, and they can feel strongly what honor is, but this doesn't always mean that they understand what they are feeling. Surely this is the case with anyone who doesn't demand honor that much, who will be much less sensitive to the feeling of honor.

In spite of this, all people can conceptualize honor at least on an intellectual level, then on a more inner level, and after that comes the stage *avodah* of fixing this trait. The first step, then, is for one to identify the force of *kavod*\honor in his soul, by asking oneself how and where and when he experiences it. Only after we absorb where it is manifest in our lives can we then fix it.

Honor is a pleasurable feeling, but it is not simply a branch of the general force of pleasure (*taanug*) in the soul. It is not like any of the other pleasures we experience, so the way to deal with the trait of honor is not in the same way that we fix the faculty of pleasure in the soul. As we are explaining here, honor belongs in the category of imagination. Therefore, we should identify the force of honor in the soul as a part of the imaginative faculty.

A Prerequisite Before Continuing: The Power of *Tziyur* (Mental Visualization)

That being the case, when we want to fix the honor that stems from **water-of-earth-of-fire**, which is when one is enjoying the honor he is receiving in a place where he is tied down to, the first part of rectifying this trait of honor is by using the power of *tziyur* (visualization), which can counter the *medameh*\imagination that fuels the feeling of honor. Therefore, whatever we will explain in the following lines can only be implemented if one has previously developed the power of *tziyur*, mental visualization.

If one hasn't yet developed the power of *tziyur*, he is skipping an important stage, and there is less of a chance that he will see any results from the *avodah* we will soon explain. In contrast, the more a person has developed his ability of *tziyur*, the more he can succeed with the following *avodah*.

"Fleeing From Honor" - Externally and Internally

Practically speaking, when a person finds himself in a situation where he is receiving honor and enjoying it, there is both external and internal work to do.

The external part of one's *avodah* is to "flee from honor", as Chazal say. This counters the "heaviness" of the honor, because the heaviness ties him down, and running away from it removes him from the heaviness of the situation. However, it isn't always possible for a person to actually run away from the place where he is. Many times Hashem has placed a person into a certain situation and that is where he has to be right now, so he cannot actually run away from it.

If that is the case, there is internal work that he can still do, in order to counter the honor. He can use the power of *tziyur* (mental visualization) to counter the *medameh*\imagination which fuels the honor, as follows.

When he finds himself in a situation where he is receiving honor, he should imagine something else

that will take his mind off the honor. The honor is being fueled by an imaginary feeling that feels pleasurable, but by thinking of something else as he's receiving the honor, he won't experience the pleasure of the honor.

To illustrate, when a person is eating food and he's thinking about something else, he enjoys his food less. Pleasure is experienced only when we are consciously focused on the pleasure. If our mind is elsewhere as we are receiving the pleasure, we don't experience the pleasure, or only on a minimal level. Therefore, when a person is tied down to a certain situation where he's getting honored, and he is not able to escape it right now (if he can get away from it, then by all means he should get away from it, but here we are talking about a situation where he has no choice but to be there), he can "flee from the honor" using his own mind, by imagining something else as he's receiving the honor.

1) Hesech HaDaas (Taking Your Mind Off The Situation)

There are two ways to accomplish this.

One way is to simply take your mind off the honor that is being accorded to you (*hesech hadaas*\removing the thoughts), and to get busy thinking about something else instead. We know that a person can be sitting in a certain place yet his mind is in a different country. If his mind is thinking about Torah thoughts, that is even better, but any person on any level has the ability to mentally disconnect from the physical place he is in, by replacing his thoughts with something else.

Even if he cannot be creative with his imagination and to imagine something else, a person can still take his mind off the place where he is in and be in a different place, in his mind. The Ramban said that a person is where his thoughts are. In this way, a person "moves" away from the place where he had been tied down to, where the "heaviness" of honor had been previously weighing him down.

2) "Tziyur" - Using The Holy Imagination

A second method, which is more developed, is to get busy with the power of *tziyur* (mental visualization) to counter the fantasies that accompany the honor that one is receiving. A person may imagine the Kotel or any holy picture, which is an example of *tziyur*, a holy visualization, and this doesn't allow the power of *medameh*\fantasy to function, because if the mind is busy with *tziyur*, the power of *medameh*\fantasy cannot take hold of the mind.

2b) Imagining Death

Even more so, along the lines of the above method, a person can use an alternative approach, in order to mentally "free from honor": as he is being honored, he can try imagining that the opposite is happening to him.

As an example, one of the Sages, as he was being accorded honor, would bemoan the inevitable reality of death. This was not just a chant to recite, but a power that can remove one's mind from honor: one can think about death, which can immediately diffuse the pleasure of honor he is receiving. (On the other hand, there are some people who, when they think about death, are thinking of how much honor they will receive at their funeral!)

2c) Imagining Times In Your Life Where There Is No Honor

Taking this further, when one is in a situation where he has to receive honor, he can try imagining anything which diffuses the honor. Here are some examples:

He can try imagining times in his life in which he was not very deserving of honor - for example, when

he was a baby in the crib, when nobody attributed any honor to him yet.

Or, he can imagine that he will one day be an elderly, bedridden person, unable to do anything, and that nobody cares then about all of the honors he has received.

He can try thinking that after 120 years when he goes back to Heaven, he might get sent back in another lifetime.

He can also try thinking that if people would really know his own personal weaknesses, they wouldn't honor him, and that even if people don't know about his shortcomings, Hashem knows his shortcomings and what the truth of his situation is.

There are many different thoughts as well that a person can think about which totally diffuses honor. Chazal say that one should contemplate the fact that he came from a rotten droplet and that he is heading towards the grave, where his body will decompose in the earth. There is much one can imagine in order to counter the feeling of honor, and these are all examples of using the power of *tziyur*, focusing on his own shortcomings and limitations, which dissipates the pleasure of the honor that he is receiving.

Who Should Not Be Implementing This Concept

To complete our understanding of this matter, we should point out that if someone doesn't care that much about *kavod* \ honor and he is not that hurt if he doesn't receive enough *kavod*, if he focuses on his shortcomings, he will develop a very low self-image, which is the negative trait of the soul known as *shiflus* (lowliness). This type of person, when he thinks about his shortcomings, will not be rectifying himself, and instead, he will only be harming himself.

This is because the "animal" level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*) is not capable of the lofty trait of humility or of accepting its lowliness (*shiflus*), so if a person focuses magnifies his *shiflus* by thinking of his various shortcomings, he will constantly be lowering his own self-perception, further and further, and this is detrimental to the soul. One needs to reach true humility (*anavah*), and this does not mean the *shiflus* \ lowliness found in the *nefesh habehaimis* (animal soul).

If a person has a very conceited nature, though, he is the kind of person who has an *avodah* to think about his shortcomings and thereby magnify his *shiflus*, in order to counter the trait of honor.

There is another of person, who is drawn towards *shiflus* \ lowliness, and he is also drawn towards conceitedness. Many people are like this, and they have a deep inner contradiction in themselves, of constantly going through cycles of feeling lowly, then conceited, then lowly, etc. - this kind of person has a very subtle, inner kind of work to do. On one hand, this person will need to avoid conceitedness, but on the other hand, they also suffer from feelings of low self-worth.

These kinds of people usually have a very strong imagination which heavily impairs them, causing them to sometimes feel lowly about themselves and at other times to feel haughty about their self-image. It is like the expression, "Sometimes a *malach* (angel), sometimes a *galach* (priest)." These people have extreme inner movements in their souls. A person like this needs to be very careful when he tries to awaken his *shiflus* \ lowliness in order to counter *kavod* \ honor, because as soon as they focus on their *shiflus*, they can get pulled down very easily into the negative *shiflus* of the "animal" level of the soul, which already dominates them as it is.

In Conclusion

To conclude and summarize, *kavod* \ honor is a spiritual feeling, and therefore it requires very subtle

inner work in order to fix, much more than any of the *middos* which we have explained about until now. One needs to understand what the definition of *kavod* is and to identify how it manifests in the soul, how it is used negatively, and accordingly, to fix this *middah*, with the help of Heaven.

[1] *Ohr Yisrael*: 30

[2] Editor's Note: The *avodah* of fixing one's *de'os* (erroneous beliefs) is explained by the Rav in ***Getting To Know Your Imagination_009_Imagined Desires - And The Solution***

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