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דע את מדותיך הדרכה מעשית - עפר-עצלות מפורט 004 אש דעפר דעפר

Laziness That Comes From Fire-of-Earth: "Explosions" of Laziness In The Midst of Doing Something

With *siyata d'shmaya*, we continue here to discuss the trait of laziness, which stems from the element of earth in the soul. In this lesson, we will specifically discuss laziness that stems from the "fire" aspect within earth.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, earth is a heavy element which weighs a person down, so it is the root of laziness. Fire is the lightest of the elements, which easily rises to above. Not only is fire the lightest element, but when it encounters a heavy substance, it turns the heavy substance into something light. For example, when fire touches a tree, the tree itself becomes turned into a fire. What used to be a heavy, thick tree has now become turned into a flickering inferno. The tree used to be attached to the ground, and now it can rise upward into the sky, though the flames of the fire which it has now become.

When fire overpowers earth, there is upward movement, as is the nature of fire. In this lesson, we are analyzing the nature of **fire-of-earth**, meaning that the primary element of the person is earth, with some aspect of fire that is revealed amidst his earthy nature, but the earth is still stronger, for this person's main element is earth. As a result, this kind of person has a tendency towards laziness (earth), but with some "fire" in it, which counters his "earth".

Fire-of-Earth: A Contradictory Nature

This particular nature, **fire-of-earth**, is an example of a contradictory nature. When fire-of-earth is a major part of one's personality, he lives with a deep inner contradiction. His earth draws him towards laziness, and to stay where he is; but at the same time, his fire makes him want to rise from where he is.

What will happen, as a result of this contradiction? The person will be in middle of a certain activity, and there will suddenly be an "explosion". Since his main element of earth, which causes him to be lazy, his performance will be somewhat weak, not as productive, slow, or lethargic - in each person it manifests differently. His "fire" is driving him to perform, but his strong amount of "earth" restrains it [so he doesn't act even though he would like to].

To illustrate, if we have a closed pot with a fire inside it, the fire can't get out. But if there are holes in the pot, the fire can burst out through the holes. Similarly, when it comes to the personality of **fire-of-earth**, his earth is dominant, so it will heavily weigh down on the fire and restrain it.

Usually, when one's primary element is earth, it can keep the fire restrained so that it doesn't burst out. But sometimes, the fire succeeds in overpowering the earth, and it explodes outward. This may happen in a scenario where a person's earth is not that strong, or, it may happen when there is a very strong explosion of the fire. When the fire makes its appearance, it comes out in "cracks", just like in the example of a fire that escapes through the holes in a pot.

The repaired, holy use of the element of earth is the power of orderliness (*seder*) and building (*binyan*). The nature of **fire-of-earth**, when it is impaired, will mean that the earth is unutilized, resulting in laziness; in addition, even when the person does perform what he has to do, there will be frequent "explosions" amidst his performance. These explosions occur because the performance of the person is weak, due to his impaired earth.

Forced Work Which Awakens Slothfulness

In such a case, a person will not do any kind of work unless he absolutely has to do it, where he has no other choice. He will do what he has to do, but it will be with "explosions", because the contradiction between his earth and fire will prevent him from working properly (his earth makes him stay where he is, so he gets lazy, but his fire is driving him to perform). His fire explodes outward because it is opposed by his earth, so it will want to overpower the earth.

In the nature of fire-of-earth, a person performs lazily, and his fire causes him to "explode" while performing, driving him to perform further. But since his primary element is earth, the fire cannot totally overpower his earth. What happens? Even when the fire suddenly makes its appearance, it will not dominate totally, because it cannot completely overpower the person's primary element here which is earth.

As a result, the person who is usually lazy will be performing any work [due to the fire which is exploding outward and demanding a performance], for the entire time, will be looking forward to resting from his work. He will do what has to be done, but he will want it to be over.

The Negative Relationship Between Earth and Fire Which Breeds Laziness

To analyze this deeper, his earth will cause him to want even more serenity, now that his fire has forced him to perform. The work doesn't feel pleasant, because it came from a demand for performance which counters his lazy nature. That itself awakens even more laziness in his personality, so he will perform his work lazily and slothfully, because he wants the work to end already. Since he is performing a more extreme kind of work, he keeps awakening his earth.

What caused him to perform extreme kind of work? His earth. When the movements are extreme, this awakens his fire, and he is bothered by the extremity of the work, so he falls back into the laziness in his element of earth.

The person might know that he is not acting logical, but this is the nature of impaired character traits, which operate in the realm of emotion, and emotions can be illogical. The Sages state "There is no reason for the will". That is the nature of character traits [emotions].

His earth prevents his fire from being active, and when he tries to act against his earth, his work feels difficult, and this awakens a desire for serenity and rest. He becomes lazy. For such a person, every bit of work feels like the suffering of *Gehinnom*. It is difficult for him to work, and even when he does

work, he wants a break. He keeps hoping that his work will be over already.

There are two factors here – he has difficulty doing any work, and he wishes for it to be over as soon as he starts working hard. These two factors together turn all work into a double struggle for him. He finds the work difficult, and while he is working, he will keep waiting for it to be over. He keeps thinking, “When will this be over?”

A Life of Always Feeling Pressured and Never Seeing Success

The result will be, as the Kotzker said, that a person can act quickly, but it is not enthusiasm, it is laziness. He may try to accelerate his work, but he is still being lazy, because he is working fast in order to rest already, and not in order to get things done. His work will feel pressurizing. What will result from this kind of work? He will become chaotic, and because he isn't calm while working, his performance will be off-mark, and this will lead him to make all kinds of mistakes. As a result, he won't succeed with any of his work, and he will be an unsuccessful person in general.

This brings us to the following related issue. Many people today suffer from feelings of low self-esteem, and they don't know the source of it. Often it is because people aren't succeeding at what they do. Their lack of success causes them to feel pressured to perform even more work, so they act under pressure, and this causes them to try harder. But this only causes them to feel more pressured, so they have a great desire for serenity, and then they don't do their work correctly. Then they see that they aren't succeeding, so they pressure themselves even more, creating an ongoing, vicious cycle.

His life becomes a life full of terrible, never-ending pressure, and to exasperate this problem even more, he sees that he isn't successful at anything he does. His inner will to improve is also weak, when he keeps seeing that he isn't successful. He keeps becoming discouraged.

Eventually, when he keeps going this way, he loses his desire to act at all, and then he despairs from succeeding at anything in his life. He stops believing that he can succeed in anything, whether at small things or at bigger things. He doesn't believe he can succeed at his job, and then he despairs about his marriage, and how to raise his children properly, and in his Torah learning, etc.

Understandably, there are also other reasons which may lead him into this state of terrible despair, and laziness is not the only cause. But in this lesson, we are discussing when the cause is laziness, in particular, from the laziness that stems from impaired **fire-of-earth [of earth]**.

Alternating Periods of Depression

In some cases, those who have a dominant nature of impaired **fire-of-earth [of earth]** can get into very troubling situations in life. People with this nature are prone to fall into terrible depressions, sometimes staying in bed for many hours consecutively.

This kind of person lives with many alternating “*tekufos*” (periods) in his life of simply depression. In this state of depression, a person like this may not want to see anyone in society, not even his family, and he just buries his head under the covers, and in some cases, he doesn't even say *Kerias Shema* on time, and he doesn't get up to *daven Shacharis* until 10, 11, or 12 in the morning when his soul feels calmed, and then he finally gets out of bed and moves on. He keeps going until his next dismal period, where the vicious cycle repeats.

This sounds like a very extreme scenario, but those who have a dominant nature of impaired fire-of-earth will often identify with this struggle.

This is all a general description of the issues that come from impaired **fire-of-earth-of-earth**. Understandably, there are more details to it, but we will suffice for now with this.

1. Countering Earth – By Practicing Minimal Activities

How is this nature repaired?

We explained earlier that the root of the problem begins with a demand in the soul for serenity, and when he does any form of work, he feels an opposition to doing any sort of work, which makes him grow lazy and then he stops his performance. Thus, the issue here is that there is an inner contradiction between his elements of earth and fire, which are clashing with each other. This inner contradiction is a result of **fire-of-earth [of earth]**, which, by its very nature, is a contradictory force.

Although we usually refer to wind and earth as the primary contradicting elements, that is a general contradiction in the soul, whereas fire and earth are a more specific level of contradicting elements in the soul. When a person has a lot of impaired **fire-of-earth [of earth]** in his soul, he has a particular struggle with these contradicting elements in his nature. His strong nature of earth causes him to desire serenity, and when this nature is left impaired, it translates into laziness. At the same time, his element of fire causes him to be active. His earth and fire clash, resulting in an inner contradiction between these elements. This inner contradiction is the root of his resulting laziness.

What is the way to fix this nature? In general, whenever a person is drawn towards laziness, he needs **to get used to doing small things he doesn't need to do**, in order to counter his dominance of earth\laziness. Even when he doesn't feel particularly lazy, he should practice some kind of minimal activity, even if it is unnecessary, so that he can train himself to simply do work [which helps him against his nature a bit]. He should certainly try this whenever he feels laziness taking him over – he should do some small kind of activity, to counter his laziness.

2. Countering Fire - By Getting Used To Thinking About Your Next Activity

Practicing the above can help a person counter his impaired element of earth. However, since we are dealing here with the nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, a person will also need to counter his impaired fire, which “explodes” every so often and which causes him to feel opposition at continuing his activity.

To counter this, one needs to get used to the power of organization, practically speaking, by **trying any activity which involves any planned thinking, which forces himself to think about the next step from where he is at**. One needs to practice this for a long time, until he slowly acquires in his soul the power of inner order\organization, which counters the explosive nature of his fire.

A person with a nature of **fire-of-earth [of earth]** usually has difficulty giving order to his thoughts and actions. He has a nature of suddenly becoming chaotic and unable to perform properly, due to the fire in his nature which explodes outward every so often. This kind of person has difficulty thinking about the past or the future, and he tends to live only in the present moment. It is hard for such a person to think about the next step he needs to take, such as what he will need to take care of tomorrow. He is caught in the present moment and he never thinks about the bigger picture of things.

Where does this nature come from? Some people are like this because they are generally dominated by their element of earth, which constricts them to their current place and time, and therefore they have difficulty expanding their minds a bit and seeing past where they are. Here we are not dealing with this. Here we are speaking of a kind of person who doesn't think about past or future because it feels like moving too much, like water spreading out very far. This kind of person, in order to repair

his nature, should try thinking a little about the near future, as long as he can handle it.

The result will be that if there is something he needs to take care of, he will think about it, and if it is something he doesn't need to take care of, he won't think of it. He should just think a little bit about something he will need to take care of.

The Nature To Push Things Off Until The Last Minute

For example, before Succos, people shop for *arba minim* (the four species, which include an *esrog* and *lulav*), and there are some people who seek to buy their *arba minim* even before Rosh HaShanah. Without getting into the argument if one should buy his *arba minim* before Rosh HaShanah or not, when he is supposed to be preparing for the day of judgment, there are those who like to have their *arba minim* already 30 days before Succos. Another kind of person waits until the last few hours before Yom Tov to buy his *arba minim*.

(Some do this because they want to get their set for a cheaper price, and others do this because they are too busy to get it done before Erev Yom Tov. Others wait until the last minute before Yom Tov simply because they lack *yiras shomayim* [\[1\]](#) ^[1], and they aren't that clear about how much of a *mitzvah* it is, and therefore they push off buying their *arba minim* until the last minute. This kind of person is also the type to perhaps push off his wedding until the last minute, if he could.)

However, there are others who do this simply because they have a nature to push things off as much as they can. He will take care of something only if he absolutely has to, and if not, his rule of thinking is to push it off to later. Everything gets pushed off tomorrow, and usually even what was pushed off for tomorrow also gets pushed off to the day after that. It is simply part of his personality to keep pushing off things for later, because the person only thinks about the current moment and never about later.

When There Is A Gap Between Thought and Action

We will also point out that there are people who have no problem thinking about what has to be done later, and they can even do so in a very organized manner, but this does not always translate into any taking any action. Although they do not have the problem of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** when it comes to their thinking patterns, they do have a problem of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** when it comes to their actions.

In order to understand this, we need to know that the inner makeup of a person [the soul] is composed of several layers:

1. His *nefesh habehaimis* ("animal" level of the soul),
2. His "*Ruach*",
3. His "*Neshamah*", [which contains his thinking abilities] - this includes his ability of *seichel enoshi* (human logic), as well as his ability of *seichel Eloki* (G-dly intellect), which is the root of his *neshamah*.

A person with a dominant nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** doesn't necessarily have this nature [of suddenly feeling uninterested in work, which causes him to be lazy] due to any of the higher parts of the personality (which are beyond the *nefesh habehaimis* part of himself). Rather, his nature of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** stems from the particular makeup of his ***nefesh habehaimis***.

Some people have a *nefesh habehaimis* which is subservient to their intellect, so their **fire-of-earth-of-earth** doesn't make an appearance, because their intellect is in control of their emotions. Others, though, can be considered as two people living in one body - they have a *nefesh habehaimis* which

has a lot of **fire-of-earth-of-earth** in it, which causes them to have many sudden “explosions” from their element of fire, and this will be true even if they possess a strong intellect which normally enables them to be very organized.

This kind of person may be very insightful, and he may even be able to give advice to people on all sorts of issues. Yet, when it comes to issues in his own life, he does not act upon any of his vast knowledge.

I once met a person who gave advice to people, who told me: “Do you think I can really practice in my own life, what I tell people? When people ask my advice about what to do about a certain thing, I tell them “Don’t do it”, but I myself do it.” He doesn’t listen to his own advice which he gives people! He gives advice to others, but his own life is separate from all of the advice that he gives. He is very aware of the contradiction that he lives in, and it pains him very much, but that doesn’t stop him from changing how he acts.

When one is aware that he lives a contradiction, if he is a bit truthful, he feels acute pain at this, because he is intellectually aware of the ideal kind of life that he would like to live. He is aware of the contradiction between his earth and fire in his personality, and it is a painful, destruction contradiction which eats away at his soul. He feels the deep, inner contradiction in his soul.

If a person cannot even organize his thoughts and plan what he needs to do in order to be productive, he will have a difficult time when it comes to his actual performance, because it is hard for him to even think about what needs to be done.

Examples of Thinking About Your Next Activity

Thus, in order for a person to repair the impaired “fire” aspect that is within impaired **fire-of-earth-of-earth**, one needs to get used to thinking for a moment, before he is about to do anything: “What will be the next step, after I do this?”

When some people are told to do this, they feel like it’s too much of a change. “To think before what I am about to do, about what the next step will be? That’s too hard!” Even so, the first step which they need to take is to begin an organized kind of planning in their thoughts, by simply thinking: “What will be the next step, after I do this?”

Of course, trying to change too much at once will not be realistic. A person should not try to think of the next three things he will have to. Rather, he should start by just thinking of the next thing he has to do.

Here is an example. A person is about to go shopping in the store. He should think: “What will I do, after I go shopping?” Whatever you will “find out” later, make sure to “find out” now. Some people never think about they need to do later, because they believe that they have complete *emunah* that Hashem will lead them to wherever they need to go. But in many cases, this stems from an inability to think about what the next step should be.

We are speaking here of thinking about small, simple tasks that you need to take care of, and not major tasks such as setting a goal in your Torah learning of what you will learn for the next six months, and what you will learn after that, etc. We are referring to a more basic kind of thinking: To simply think about what your next step should be.

Here’s another example. If you buy food for Shabbos, and you know that there will be extra food, think: What will I do with all the extra food? It’s not enough to leave it for *Motzei Shabbos* when you’ll worry about it then. Instead, try thinking even now about what you plan on doing with the extra food.

Similarly, we just passed Purim, and everyone has leftover *Mishloach Manos* received from others that is lying around the house. Before Purim, a person knows he will be getting *Mishloach Manos* from others and that he will have plenty of leftover *Mishloach Manos* in his house afterwards. So he should think: How do I plan on getting rid of all it? One should think about it before he gets all of the *Mishloach Manos*, as opposed to pushing off this thinking for later.

There are many examples as well we can give, of this idea. The point is to think about a certain aspect in your life which you need to take care of, and to think about what the step after that will be. **Simply plan out the next two steps that are coming up: The thing which you know you will need to take care of, and the step that will follow after that.**

Countering The Contradiction Between Fire and Earth

The reason we are suggesting this is because (in this lesson, where are discussing what to do about impaired **fire-of-earth-of-earth**), we want to counter the contradiction in the soul that exists between fire and earth.

Since the problem stems from a contradiction between fire and earth, on one hand, we need to repair the earth here by learning how to do things that aren't necessary, in order to counter the nature of laziness which comes from earth. And in order to counter the explosive nature of fire, we need to use the element of earth (the repaired use of earth, that is).

When we work in a step-by-step manner, planning out what we need to take care of, this counters the explosive nature of fire. It awakens the repaired form of earth, the power of orderliness. (On a deeper level, it awakens the spiritual light which is in the element of earth). When this holy use of earth is awakened, what happens? The fire-of-earth will explode less, because the working in a step by step manner will increase the hold of the earth on containing the fire.

There will still be an inner contradiction between the elements, though, because the fire wants to jump outwards and the earth is restraining it. But this would only be a problem for a person who is dominated by the element of fire. Here we are discussing one who is dominated by earth-of-fire, which is much less explosive than fire itself.

A person whose main element is **fire-of-earth-of-earth** is mainly dominated by earth. When such a person awakens the holy use of the element of earth – the power of orderly, organized action – the result will be that he is able to perform more work, and the fire which wants to jump outwards will now find that it has more space to utilize its potential. This will afford some degree of peace to the contradiction that exists between fire and earth.

As mentioned earlier, this will only be true if the person's main element is earth, not fire. If a person's main element is fire, his fire is so strong that it will not be calmed when we try to awaken earth to restrain it. We are discussing here fire-of-earth, which means that the person's main element is earth and not fire. Such fire can become slowly contained through awakening the element of earth (orderly, organized work) in the manner we explained here.

A Deadly Combination - When There Is Strong Earth and Strong Fire

However, there are some people whose main element is earth, but they also have a strong amount of fire in them, because fire is their second-to-most dominant element. Although earth is the main aspect of their personality, they still show lots of fire in their personality.

(In some people, it is possible that their second-to-most dominant element is even stronger than the primary element of others. Besides for their primary element, they have a secondary element which is

almost as strong. As a result of this combination, their inner makeup is more powerful than others, so they have stronger soul abilities).

What happens when a person has a strong element of fire-of-earth, where his earth is the primary element and his fire is weaker? That is the scenario we discussed until now - the earth is mainly dominant, and his fire explodes outward sometimes. But others have a primary element of earth and they have a secondary element of fire, and their fire is almost as strong as their earth. What happens in such a scenario? They have a strong earth as well as a strong fire. This is a much deeper inner contradiction than the normal scenario of earth-of-fire.

Their earth is strong, so they can greatly restrain their actions, but they also have a strong fire, which will clash with their ability to be organized. The strong inner contradiction in their nature causes them to have strong, outward explosions, and they are dangerous to be around when they are in the midst of their work. Their fiery explosions resemble “the war of Gog and Magog”. When combined with a generally negative character, a person with this nature is capable of murder, G-d forbid.

These kinds of people have very strong “explosions”, because they have a strong amount of earth which greatly restrains their fire, but they also have a strong amount of fire which continues to burn even after it is restrained, which eventually explodes from its place. A person with this nature faces an intense battle in his own personality. He becomes simply dangerous when his strong fire explodes outward.

Such a person will not be helped much by the advice of this lesson we explained above. His work instead is to repair his element of fire, and he will need to learn how to weaken his strong element of fire. Such a fire cannot be calmed through the advice of working in a planned, step-by-step manner. His strong fire will demand from himself a strong amount of work and performance, and at the same time, his strong earth wants to keep him lazy.

This person has a primary element of earth, so earth is his strongest element, and he has a secondary element of fire, which is almost as powerful as his earth, so he has a powerful combination of negative fire (a demand for much performance) and negative earth (laziness). For him, it will not be enough to repair his primary element, which is earth, for he has a secondary element which is almost as strong, which also requires repair. In addition to repairing his earth, he will need to repair his fire.

This is a very complex kind of personality, due to his two contradicting elements that are almost equal to each other in their strength. This kind of person will often find himself in deeply troubling situations in life. Whereas other people can eventually attain a balance in their souls, in spite of contradicting elements in their personality - which leads them to much success in life, because they have managed to balance their own conflicting personalities - the person with a strong earth and fire has a much harder time attaining a balance in his personality.

If he merits it, he will do much inner work on himself, and thereby merit great success in life. There have been people who had very imbalanced personalities in their childhood, but 20 years later you meet them and you see that they have been very successful in life. People are in awe of how much they changed: “Wow, this is what he became, after all these years?? It’s simply *siyata d’shmaya* (assistance from Heaven)!” It certainly was *siyata d’shmaya*, but the person had to put in a lot of work in order to balance out his personality.

In other scenarios, though, a person with this imbalance in his personality does not work on improving his nature, and the result will be that he will live a terrible life. This kind of person will have a very difficult time in his marriage, as well as with all of the various parts of life. On a deeper level, he will also have a difficult time with his own self.

When others see such a person, they may say, “He just doesn’t have *mazal*.” But it’s not that he’s missing *mazal*. It is because this kind of person simply has a very complex inner makeup in his soul, and he hasn’t yet merited to work out the contradictions in his personality and to attain a balance, so the result we see before us is a very explosive, chaotic, and dysfunctional kind of personality.

In Summary and In Conclusion

In summary, this lesson addressed two different scenarios (and their solutions).

We first discussed a scenario where a person’s main personality is **fire-of-earth**, in which a person has a strong “earth” and a weak “fire”.

In the end of this lesson, we discussed a scenario where a person has a strong amount of earth as well as a strong amount of fire in his personality. This person would need to improve his nature by repairing his element earth (as described in this lesson) as well as by learning how to weaken his fire. However, we are not discussing the element of fire in this series, so we did not elaborate upon it here. In this lesson, we mainly explained about how a person can fix the inner contradiction between the earth and fire in his soul, on a general level, and how one can attain a balance between these two elements.

[\[1\]](#) ^[2] Fear of Heaven

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