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## Fixing Your Earth [Laziness] - 013 Getting Past Obstacles

### *Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth: Running Into Obstacles*

With *siyata d'shmaya* we will continue to discuss the trait of laziness, which comes from the element of earth. In the coming lessons, we will learn about laziness that stems from **fire-of-earth**.

As explained earlier, the element of earth is the root of the trait of laziness: when there is a lack or absence of movement. "Fire"-of-earth is when the movement explodes outward after it has been stifled. **Earth-of-fire-of-earth** is when the element of earth blocks these movements after they have been activated, returning the 'fire' to the original state of earth. First there is earth (laziness, or slowed movement, or non-movement), then there is fire (intense movement), and soon after moving, the person returns to his state of earth (laziness). This blocked movement happens due to the nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** in the soul.

This manifests in the form of various obstacles that a person encounters, which prevent him from progressing forward and continuing what he set out to do. There are all kinds of obstacles that can get in a person's way, which prevents him from doing what he wants to.

### *Different Reasons For Encountering Obstacles*

People react differently to these obstacles.

Some people will feel that if they are being opposed by anything which prevents them from doing what they want to do, it must be the *Sitra Achara* (lit. the "Other Side") preventing them from doing the right thing, and that it is a sign that they must be doing the right thing. Therefore, they will try to persevere.

Others, when encountering obstacles in their path, will take a step back from what they are doing, taking it as a sign that they shouldn't continue what they are doing. A similar reaction is when people react to obstacles in their path as a sign of "*ayin hara*", the evil eye (in spite of the fact that *ayin hara* is only said of those whose work can be seen by others, there are still people who fear that even their unseen activities are being affected by *ayin hara*).

While any of the above may be true reasons, sometimes a person encounters "obstacles" in his path simply because he was involving himself in something that isn't really suited to his personal task. It wasn't meant for him to do, because he didn't really have the necessary energy and skills for it. Although it seems to as if he ran into 'obstacles' which are preventing him, these are not actually obstacles, but simply an outcome of getting involved in something that he anyways wouldn't have

been able to do.

### *Example 1 - Risks In Business*

For example, often people who have businesses will encounter various obstacles that prevent them from actualizing their plans or ideas. Today, people make themselves 'open' to all kinds of options, and they will involve themselves with just about anything, even when it isn't for them. They will try some new investment when they have no idea about it, because they want to expand their options. They become involved in things they don't know enough about.

Understandably, they are doing so because they want to earn more money, but the rule is that "When one wants hundred, he will want two hundred", so even when a person does get a little bit of what he wants, he won't be satisfied and he will aim for more, so he will try to take all kinds of risks, in the hope of profiting. Then he encounters all kinds of issues and problems along the way, which he never could have foreseen.

Although taking all kinds of risks in business can be a way to "open up" more, it can also cause a person to be involved in something that isn't really for him. He won't fully understand what he's involved with, and he will fail in his business, because he isn't aware of all the rules involved. He will be prevented from actualizing what he wants to do, and it is because he doesn't recognize what he is involved with. People in business will often run into all kinds of 'obstacles' that get in their way, which they never could have foreseen. Sometimes, encountering these obstacles can be a catalyst that serves to spur them on to success. But in any case, these 'obstacles' are simply an outcome of becoming involved in an endeavor that was not suited for this person's energies.

### *Example 2 - Starting Organizations*

Another example is when people open up various organizations, or they become involved with *chessed*, and they didn't realize what they are entering. They become involved with pursuits that they do not have sufficient energy or knowledge for, and they didn't think beforehand if it was suitable or not for them to be involved with it.

### *Problems To Expect vs. Unexpected Obstacles*

However, when a person encounters an issue that he didn't expect, it may not even be an 'obstacle' in his path. It can simply be a normal part of life which, by its very reality, is complicated. A person may not be aware that a certain 'unexpected issue' which came up in his life is actually a normal issue that he should have expected.

For example, a person gets married, and as the first year of marriage continues, he finds himself running into various problems in his marital harmony. He didn't expect that there would be any issues in his marriage, and he views his marital problems as an unexpected issue, a sudden 'obstacle' in his path, which is preventing him from happiness.

Anyone who gets married understands that marriage does not always flow so smoothly as the engagement period, and that there will certainly be issues, and that it will be complex. But when people think that they're getting prevented by 'obstacles' in their marriage and they begin to seek advice and help for their marriage, they may not understand that their marital issues are simply a normal part of life that can be expected, as opposed to being an 'obstacle' that isn't supposed to be

here. Ever since the sin of Adam, there have been problems in marriage. Yet, when people encounter problems in their marriages, they may view it as an 'obstacle' that is preventing them, rather than as a normal problem that is part of every person's life.

Another example of this idea is, concerning what Chazal say, that "All beginnings are hard".<sup>[1]</sup> [1] The reason for this because there is a rule that the "*kelipah* (husk) comes before the *pri* (fruit)." Beginnings are always hard because all beginnings are a change, and change always causes difficulty. As a hint, Rosh HaShanah is from the word *shinuy*, change, and it is the *Yom HaDin*, the day of judgment, to show that all changes bring difficulty.

That is the way Hashem made the world. When beginnings are hard, this is nothing new, but simply the way that it's supposed to be.

### *Everything Is Completed By An Opposing Force*

In all that Hashem has made, there are opposing forces. Each thing in Creation is opposed by something, in a different way. Each thing is also completed by its opposite force. This is the meaning of *eizer k'negdo*, a "helpmate to oppose him". Without being opposed by an opposite force, a creation or person would expand endlessly, and there would be no limitations or boundaries to stay in. This is detrimental. Therefore, each thing needs to be opposed by some other force, so that it is prevented from expanding too much, and in this way, it becomes balanced and completed, through its opposing force.

That is why whenever someone begins to do something, even if it is done with careful thought, it will always be difficult.

To understand this deeper, it is because all of the Creation is limited. Each thing has an end, its limit, and since each end is contained in its beginning, the beginning is always limited and therefore difficult. The limits of each thing are at its beginning and end. Water needs to be contained or else it will flow out into all of the directions. The six directions of the world which move all over the place are therefore limited, and they cannot move endlessly without being stopped. This is called *tzimtzum*, constriction. Each thing is completed by its *tzimtzum*, its state of constriction, its limitations and bounds. The limitations of each thing in Creation acts as an opposing force which completes that which is being opposed.

When a person is prevented from continuing what he wants to do, he is being prevented by the limits of something which are contained in it. If he is being stopped, it means he has reached the "limit" of this situation. The limit is already in place, and it isn't anything new. Therefore, it should come as no surprise. For example, a person wants to do something and then something prevents him. Other people got in his way, and he may be tempted to think that they wronged him, because he knows that they have *bechirah* (free will) and therefore he thinks that he has been prevented due to others. But instead, he should view this situation with the understanding that the "limit" of this endeavor has been reached.

Each thing has its limits, which are already in place, and therefore one must understand that when he runs into obstacles, this is not a new limitation that has been created, but a limit that is already in place, by the very design of Creation. Therefore, whenever we are prevented from going further with something, we need to become aware that we have encountered its limitation. The limitation in something is its very *havayah* (essence), for everything in Creation has a limit, and when we meet its limit, we have encountered its very essence as a creation.

### *Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth - The Root Cause of Encountering Obstacles*

Now we will explain how the above concept can be used to repair **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which is when a person has a dominant nature of earth\laziness, then he has a burst of movement, and soon after he has back in his state of earth\laziness.

Simply speaking, he becomes lazy after he has a burst of movement. This would imply that there is now a dominance of earth\laziness that wasn't here until now. However, the true way to understand it is that it is not a 'new' appearance of earth - rather, it is that his original nature of earth has been awakened.

Therefore, whenever one encounters any 'obstacles' in his path that prevent him from accomplishing what he would like to do, he is not actually being prevented due to some outside factor, but because he has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which awakens his initial nature of earth\laziness. Although it is certainly true that there is some factor preventing him from doing what he wants to do, he only feels prevented because his dominant nature of earth has been activated. For this reason, the more that his earth dominates, the more he will find himself encountering more 'obstacles'! He is constantly getting 'prevented' from accomplishing, because his earth is easily awakened.

When a person has this nature (**earth-of-fire-of-earth**), he will find that he is always encountering more 'obstacles' in his path, and he may think that he is being prevented by some outside factor other than himself. He might fight and challenge everything that gets in his way, believing that he must overcome these road blocks. But when he doesn't understand that all of these 'obstacles' are a result of his own element of earth that dominates him, he will unknowingly invite many more obstacles into his life!

To illustrate this idea, the *Zohar* says that when a person connects himself to any trait of Hashem, that trait will become more attached to him. If one connects himself to the *middas hadin*, the attribute of judgment [i.e. by always judging others], then *din*\judgment will settle upon him, and if one connects himself more to the *middas harachamim* (the trait of mercy), then *rachamim*\mercy will settle upon him. **Whenever one connects himself to any 'outer' spiritual force, he is actually awakening that spiritual force from within him.** That is why when one connects himself to the concept of *din*\judgment, he has awakens his own *middas hadin*.

On a similar note, whenever a person finds that he has encountered some obstacle that is preventing him from getting further, he has really encountered a limitation, and since all limitations are rooted in the element of earth (just as the earth places boundaries and limitations), the limitation is actually a result of his own element of earth that has been awakened.

A person with a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** has a dominant nature of earth, so whenever he begins to do something, he begins from a place of strong "earth" in himself, meaning, he is already somewhat limited as he begins his endeavor. Then his fire takes over and he will get a burst of movement, and he will try to get far in what he's doing, but since he has begun to act from his earth, his "earth" is soon awakened after his fire, and he finds himself encountering obstacles in his path.

He will think that the obstacles are coming from various external factors, and while those reasons may certainly be true, they are only the "branches", not the "root". The "root" reason why he was prevented is because, by his very nature, he is dominated by earth, which brings more 'limitations' upon him.

Therefore - as it was mentioned earlier - he will need to understand that the 'obstacles' he encounters are not coming from outside factors that are deterring him, but that they are coming from within him, from his nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**. Since he is mostly beginning from a place of earth in himself, his earth will stay where it is, keeping him in place, while his fire will also burst out at times

and demand some movement. Subconsciously, his nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth** is causing him to gravitate back towards his dominant nature, earth, which keeps him from moving forward.

### *Despair Can Also Come From Earth-of-Fire-of-Earth*

When some people begin to do something and they don't succeed at finishing, and they find that they can't make any progress forward, they will react with despair, and they give up from finishing. But when a person has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, not only does he despair at achieving his goals, but he regrets ever starting in the first place, because his original nature of "earth" is easily awakened, and it makes him feel, subconsciously, that he shouldn't have started at all. This is because the non-moving nature of earth keeps a person in his place.

Others will encounter obstacles but they don't become full of despair just because they aren't succeeding. They will persevere in spite of their obstacles, and it is either because they seek perfection, or because they seek purpose in their life. But when a person feels full of despair when he encounters something that challenges him, it can be because he has a dominant nature of earth which has been awakened. This is the case when a person has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which causes his earth to be easily awakened. After he has a burst of movement forward (fire), his nature of earth soon takes over, and he feels like giving up and that he should never have started. In other words, he is feeling despair. There can be many other reasons why a person despairs, but this is one of the main sources.

The simple reason for despair is because a person feels unsuccessful, and he develops what people call today as "low self-image", and because he has a negative view of himself, he gives up and he stops what he's doing. But there is also a deeper reason why he gives up. It can be because he has a nature of **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, which easily awakens his dominant nature of earth.

A person like this can easily relate to the statement of the Sages, "It is better for man not to have been born, than to be born." [2] [2] He wishes he could have remained in his fetal state, when he was totally constricted to the same place (a total state of earth). (There is also a higher and deeper use of this power, when a person desires to be in a state of integration with Hashem. But here we are speaking of the detrimental use of this power, which is when a person wishes he return to his fetal state and not do anything at all on this world). By his very *havayah* (the nature of his essence), he is always beginning from a constricted place in himself, his element of earth, and, subconsciously, he is always desiring to return to there, to his initial state of earth.

### *The Solution: When You Begin To Do Something, Do It Quickly*

People can have a hard time with finishing something, as well as beginning something, or even when they are in the middle. This is an issue that we have spoken about previously, and there were several different solutions to that issue. Now we are speaking about a different issue, but related to the above: when a person's nature of earth is easily awakened, and he wishes that he didn't start doing anything to begin with.

The task here, for such a person, is not to fight against his challenges and obstacles as if they are some outside factor in his life getting in his way. He cannot fight the obstacles now that they are here. Instead, he will need to learn how to 'begin' his actions differently.

This is like the "exodus from Egypt", in the soul. In the exile of Egypt, we were ruled by Pharaoh (פרעה) who has the same letters as the word *ha'afar* (העפר), which means "the dirt." The implication is, that the exile in Egypt was a state of being dominated by a nature of "earth". It represents a personal enslavement to all that is associated with earthiness. When we left Egypt, we left it

*b'chipazon*, "in haste" – we left it quickly, and this is a hint that in order to come out of the "earth", we need to leave it "quickly", by beginning to do things quickly.

This is the very idea behind the first *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch*: "Be strong like a lion to arise in the morning, to serve the Creator."<sup>[3]</sup> [3] The beginning of our day needs to start with some quick action, because whenever we begin, we need to begin quickly, with alacrity (*zerizus*), as opposed to beginning with an earthy, slothful attitude. The *Poskim* clarify that a person shouldn't get out of bed too quickly, because this is dangerous to the spine, and only after a person has attained a bit of *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind) should he arise quickly. In this way, one begins his day from *zerizus*, quickly and enthusiastically – the very antidote to combat laziness.

The way we begin day, when getting up in the morning, is the way that the rest of the day will look like as well. This is because there is a rule, "The body is dragged after the head."<sup>[4]</sup> [4] The entire day becomes 'dragged' after the "head" of the day. If we begin the day with laziness, by getting out of bed without *zerizus*, then we will find ourselves gravitating back to laziness throughout the rest of the day as well. But if we begin the day with *zerizus*, we will find that we are doing things more energetically throughout the day.

Therefore, the advice for any person who easily falls back into his "earth" is: Whenever you begin to do something, do it quickly.

#### *Practicing Quick Movement In The Beginning, Middle and End of the Day*

Practically speaking, it is advisable to practice doing something quickly upon awakening. One can try jumping out of bed, or, if he finds it feasible, he can try to do a small dance (only if it will not disturb any other sleeping family members) as soon as he gets out of bed.

Of course, it is better if person is able to immediately start elevating his thoughts as soon as he wakes up, when he excites himself from within, by thinking lofty thoughts that enlighten him. This is certainly better to than simply jumping out of bed without any thinking at all. But most people in the morning are not able to have any lofty spiritual thoughts, and they are in a state of "*katnus mochin*" (small-mindedness), unable to enlighten their minds. But even in this state, when one does not feel enlightened, he can still has the ability to simply arise quickly and jump out of bed.

In this way, one begins his day with quick movement. As explained, this needs to be sensibly, and not too rapidly, as the *Poskim* explain that one should be done only after one has calmed his mind a bit, when he has some *yishuv hadaas*. But if one takes this too far and he is spends too much time trying to gain presence of mind, he will stay in bed too long, and this will awaken his element of earth and he will become lazy. The power of *yishuv hadaas* must be used sensibly.)

In addition to this, throughout the day as well, a person should practice doing some quick movement, by doing something quickly, even if it is unnecessary. Even in the middle of the day, a person should try practicing a quick movement similar to how he arose very quickly in the morning. In this way, he trains his soul to constantly return to the power of beginning quickly.

A person should also practice some kind of quick movement even before going to sleep at night. The gain of this is that he is ending his day in the same way he began it – with quick movement – and this returns his soul to a place of quick movement, which combats his previous nature of falling back into his earth\laziness. This should also be done sensibly, because a person should not just fall into his bed quickly from exhaustion, which increases his laziness. Instead, a person should try doing something quick before getting into bed.

#### *In Conclusion*

When a person practices all of the above – beginning the day with quick movement, practicing some quick movement during the day, and ending the day with a quick movement – he creates a flow of fast movement in the soul. This will help many people who have difficulty with getting up in the morning: Practice doing something quickly **(1)** When you begin the day, **(2)** In middle of the day, and **(3)** Right before going to sleep.

This is the very antithesis to **earth-of-fire-of-earth**, and it allows a person to move in a way to awaken more movement that is also more stable and balanced.

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**[1]** <sup>[5]</sup> *Mechilta Shemos 19:5, cited in Rashi (ibid)*

**[2]** <sup>[6]</sup> *Eruvin 13b*

**[3]** <sup>[7]</sup> *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 1:1*

**[4]** <sup>[8]</sup> *Eruvin 41a*

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