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Wind can move up and down at the same time

This chapter deals with the third negative emotion in the animalistic soul: arrogance. It is described in the Mishna in Avos (5:19): “A bad eye, a haughty spirit and a wide soul are from the students of Bilam.”

What does it mean to have a “haughty spirit”?

The first of the three emotions are the lowest emotions of the soul; each of the Avos personified one of these emotions. Avraham Avinu is the epitome of love, Yitzchok Avinu is the epitome of fear, and Yaakov Avinu is the epitome of compassion. Each of these three positive emotions have three corresponding negative emotions: love is opposed with self-love, fear is opposed with self-hate (like a fear of oneself), and compassion, which is the middah of Yaakov Avinu, comes from the element of ruach, which is wind. There is good wind and bad wind; good wind is compassion, the middah of Yaakov Avinu, and bad wind is arrogance, the middah of the wicked Bilam.

Avraham is the middah of love, which is rooted in the element of water. Yitzchok is the middah of fear, which is rooted in fire. Yaakov is the middah of compassion, which is rooted in wind.

Water descends; it trickles down to a lower place. Fire rises. Wind rises and descends at the same time. Wind is able to uplift and lower things at once – that is its nature.

These three forces can be holy. Avraham Avinu is love, which is rooted in water; water is the holy force of descending. Yitzchok is fear, which is the holy force of ascending. Yaakov combines

ascending and descending and completes them.

Right now we are not speaking of the holy kind of wind which ascends and descends at the same time, but of the evil kind of wind. In order to understand how something holy works, we need to understand how its opposite works. With self-love, a person views himself as the center of everything. Self-hatred is the opposite: a person leaves himself. Arrogance is when a person tries to own everything.

We can see that this is the middah of Bilam. On one hand, Bilam is described as “One who knows the knowledge of above”; he tried to reach the highest level and be on a par with Moshe Rabbeinu.

When a person is arrogant, he moves up and down in order to conquer the whole world!

From a superficial understanding, arrogance is that a person wants to feel elated and high. Upon a deeper understanding, arrogance is not just to seek to go higher. It is to try to reach everything that there is in the world.

***Hispaarus* - The one who has to be perfect**

This emotion of arrogance is also known as *Hispaarus*, which means “glorification.” An arrogant person glorifies himself in everything. In whatever he speaks about, he always “knows” how he fits into that quality or accomplishment he is describing; he is always says that he is very successful in this and in that.

From a superficial understanding, he is a *baal gaavah*, but it is more than that. A person can be a *baal gaavah* because he thinks he is to be praised in a certain quality. But when it comes to other areas, he knows that he is weak in those areas, even though he won't admit it. He only boasts about what he's good at. For example, if someone is makes tables for a living, he might boast about how his tables are the best in the world. He is well aware that he cannot make chairs, but when it comes to tables, he can talk about it all day.

Maybe he is right, and maybe he isn't. Maybe he really does make the best tables in the world. But the point is that his arrogance makes him boast about his successes. That is one type of arrogance.

But then there is another type of *baal gaavah*. He boasts about everything – even what he doesn't do. He always thinks he is successful. He feels that he always knows best, and that everything he does is perfect. This is *hispaarus* – to be haughty and full of false pride.

It is the middah of the wicked Bilam, who glorifies himself in everything possible. Such a person wants to be everything – he wants to both above and below, just like Bilam.

Being involved in many things at once

There is another kind of superficial arrogance, and it is when a person is involved in many things at once.

A person can be heavily involved in what he is successful in, yet he is aware of his limits and weak areas. He will not attempt to be successful in areas where he is weak in. He might be a big *baal gaavah* when it comes to what he does, but at least he has a strong point: he is focused on what he does.

By contrast, another kind of person feels that he is successful in everything. He is ambitious. He gives advice when it comes to everything, as if he knows it all. Such an attitude gives him a lot of *pizur hanefesh* – it makes his soul become scattered. It's like throwing something down from a high place – when it hits the floor, it shatters. When a person feels that he is successful in everything and that he can get everything at once, he will have a tragic end and eventually fall apart.

All of our Gedolim, who gave advice on every possible topic, did not do so with an attitude of “I know everything.” The Gedolim all act for the sake of Heaven in order to help others, from their great love for the Jewish people and for Hashem. They thus received great *Siyata D'Shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) to always say the truth, even though they themselves did not feel that they know it all. They received special abilities to offer advice even in areas that they did not know, in the merit of their great love for Hashem and *Ahavas Yisrael*.

Their mouths and thoughts became a messenger of Hashem to transmit the truth, and this is known as *Ruach Hakodesh*.

Only the Gedolim had such *Siyata D'Shmaya*, but an ordinary Jew who thinks that he is the smartest person in the world when it comes to just about anything is in danger of scattering his soul.

A person has to be one unit

Before we mention the solution to this problem, let us be a bit more clear why it is a problem.

Before we explained at length that all holiness is based on *achdus* (unity). When something has no unity, that is the root of destruction.

Before the world was created, Hashem was one and His Name was one. In the future, Hashem will again become one. This is the way creation is supposed to be.

In terms of the soul, the more “one” and unified a person is, the more structure the soul has. The less unified his soul is, the further he is from himself. The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes, “Save me from *pizur hanefesh*” (scattering of the soul).

When a person is clear what he’s successful at, he might be a *baal gaavah*, but at least he is focused and unified when it comes to one area. It should be noted that we are speaking about the animalistic layer of the soul, a simple feeling of arrogance in which a person feels that he is successful and as a result is haughty about it. For example, one person is a *baal gaavah* because he knows how to learn Torah very well; another person is a *baal gaavah* because he is an artist. Although these two people are a *baal gaavah*, they know what they’re good at and what they’re not. They have to work on their *gaavah*, but they don’t have the problem of being scattered, because they know what they’re not capable of.

But if a person feels that he is successful when it comes to everything, he isn’t focused on one area he’s good at like the artist. He is scattered throughout the world.

The soul, in its healthy state, is to be unified into one. When it is scattered, the soul is damaged. There are many ways to become scattered: a person is worried about his health or his livelihood, etc. These are only superficial ways to become scattered. But the main thing that makes a person become scattered is to be arrogant.

When a person is aware what his talents are, he knows that he has to work on his *gaavah*, but he is aware of where he is; he is focused. His only job is to change his ulterior motives. He needs to become more humble, but he should remain focused in what he knows he is good at.

If a person doesn’t focus on his talents, his soul is scattered and he won’t ever be able to be successful in anything.

To be clearer, let’s say a person is successful at ten different things. Ask him if he is aware what he is the most talented in, from all those ten things he does. If he thinks that he is talented equally in all those ten things, his soul is scattered, because it’s like he is split up into ten different parts.

Some people are very talented when it comes to a certain thing, and some people are multi-talented. But even a multi-talented person must be aware what he is best at – and what he isn't. All these people still need to work on their *gaavah*, but at least they are focused. A person who thinks that he is successful when it comes to everything needs to correct this attitude by thinking about what he is best at in comparison to his other areas.

Arrogance can come from fire or wind

There are four elements – fire, wind, water and earth. Which element does arrogance come from?

Rav Chaim Vital (in sefer *Shaarei Kedushah*) says that arrogance comes from fire. On the other hand, it seems that arrogance comes from wind, because arrogance is also known as *gas ruach* – a “haughty spirit”, and *ruach* is wind. So is arrogance rooted in fire or in wind?

It depends. If a person is bragging at his successes, such arrogance comes from fire. We are not addressing such arrogance. We are addressing the arrogance rooted in wind, which is called a “haughty spirit” by our Sages. A “haughty spirit” means someone who widens and broadens his limits.

When a person knows that he is unique in something, he can know with certainty that he excels in that area. When he expands this knowledge, that is to be haughty. He feels that he is unique when it comes to many areas. He resembles wind, which moves from place to place. That is why arrogance is called *gas ruach*. Just like wind does not stay in one place, so is this person not focused on his unique talents and instead seeks to be everywhere. He is scattered.

Some people do not even have one quality about them, yet they think they are loaded with qualities. Such a person needs to talk to someone and find out if he indeed has those qualities, or if he is just imagining things. But what should a person do if he is very talented? How can he fix his arrogance?

The basic solution is to sit with himself and reflect: “It is true that I am very talented when it comes to this and that, but where am I the most talented?” When he discovers what his greatest talent or ability is, he has already begun to stabilize his constantly moving “wind”.

It is possible that he might become more arrogant as a result of focusing on his particular talent, but he will gain from this by not being so scattered anymore. Instead of being so spread out and

scattered, he will become more focused in this way.

More qualities create more contradictions

When a person is arrogant, what is going on inside his soul? Firstly, as we said, it makes the soul become scattered. In addition to this, a person who has so many qualities will get into opposition from other people.

The Sages say that “a craftsman hates his competitor.” Someone who is a carpenter has a natural disliking and competition-like feeling toward other carpenters, and a glass-blower dislikes other glass-blowers. Opticians dislike other opticians. That is a rule.

The more a person expands his talents, the contradictions in him grow more and more. He is at the same time a Talmid Chochom, a generous donor, a good Chazzan and a *baal middos*... and he feels many contradictions going on at once in his soul. This causes an inner turmoil. Why?

Some people don't like a good Chazzan. They are jealous that he davens so nicely. One time I knew someone who wanted to improve on his davening, and he told me truthfully, “I can't stand it when I see someone davening so nicely.”

I asked him, “Why?”

He said, “The fact that someone else other than me can have a relationship with Hashem makes me lose out on my own relationship with Hashem.”

This is a very sensitive point. If a person thinks that he davens beautifully, and then he sees another person who also davens beautifully, he actually has pain from this. It's plain jealousy.

We will give another example. If a person thinks he is an expert when it comes to a certain part in the Torah – and he finds out that someone else wrote a sefer on that part of the Torah – what will he do? He will look at the entire sefer to see if there are any mistakes in it. Why does he do this? He is hoping to find mistakes, because he feels that the one who authored the sefer has stolen his rightful place. He will feel calmed only when he finds a mistake.

This is very clear. The more a person believes he has it all and he isn't focused on one particular area, the more contradictions are taking place in his soul, and it is impossible to deal with these contradictions. We will explain this more.

If a person is successful and talented in one area, and he meets another person who is talented in some other area, what happens?

We are not talking about a lack of *Ahavas Yisrael* or not being happy with one's lot in life; then there would be no problems. We are addressing the simple emotions that come from our animalistic soul. If a person sees that another is successful in an area he himself is not successful in, how can he calm himself?

He can say to himself: It is true that he is successful in what he does, but so am I. I have my unique talents that no one else has."

But if a person feels that he's not talented in any one particular area, he suffers when he encounters others who are talented. The same goes for someone who feels that he is the best at everything - he also can't stand other people who are talented. He is constantly dealing with the facts that other people are talented too, and everyone he meets feels like a challenge to him.

The way to success - Utilize your potential

In addition to this, when a person feels that he is very talented in many areas, he also damages his soul. We will explain this.

Every one of us has a unique ability in comparison to our other abilities. What happens if a person feels that he is equally talented in ten of his qualities? It seems that he looks at all his qualities as his number one quality, and it seems that he has gained in doing so. But the truth is the opposite: he has weakened his main quality. By looking at all his qualities equally, his main quality is being neglected.

Every person has to work with their weakest quality as well as their strongest quality. If a person thinks he has ten amazing qualities that are all equally strong by him, he has actually weakened his **main** quality. As a result, he hasn't utilized his potential.

If a person doesn't know who he is, he doesn't use his potential. Instead of going higher with his abilities, he cheapens his worth and loses what is really unique about him.

Each person has unique talents. That is how the world is; in our nation, there are 600,000 souls, and each soul has its unique ability that no one else has. Each person must know what his unique ability is.

When a person believes that he is equally talented when it comes to all his qualities, he has two problems: First of all, he has lowered his main quality to the level of the rest of his lesser talented areas, and secondly, because he believes he is so talented, he will meet a lot of opposition from “competitors”. These competitors are in his own soul, and the competition going on inside himself weakens the soul. What will happen is that his whole life will be spent waging war within himself – with his own talents! He’s not trying to find himself – he’s trying to find his own talents, and he wages war on his own talents. We see this going on all the time.

If a person is fighting to try to find who he really is, this can also be a problem of arrogance, but at least he is dealing with himself. But if a person thinks that he is talented in everything and is attempting to reveal all his “potential” – he is not trying to bring out **himself**; he is trying to be “successful”. This is a person’s downfall.

A person with a healthy soul is aware that he has certain abilities that he needs to utilize and bring out their potential. He knows that his success will be in bringing out his actual abilities, especially in bringing out what he’s best in. When a person leaves his potential unutilized, it is very detrimental.

Ulterior motives can lead to pure motives

The question is: Is the person trying to just be “successful”, or he is trying to utilize his potential? It is a very deep question. When it comes to shelo lishmah – ulterior motives – there are two very different attitudes to have. One person learns Torah in order that others should call him “Rebbi” – while another person learns Torah so that he can utilize his potential and discover who he really is. Both of them are not learning for the loftiest reasons, but there is a huge difference between them.

If a person is trying to advertise something he has that he doesn’t really have, he will always be like a stranger to himself. He will never be himself. But if a person tries to prove who he really is – although this is not the loftiest thing a person can do – at least he is working with himself. Such a person is much closer at arriving at pure motives, even though right now his motives are ulterior.

If a person lives a life of ulterior motives – he does things for honor and wants success – what is his attitude? If he believes he has every talent in the world and can be successful at anything, his soul will be full of contradictions. He will never be himself.

When a person lives with the attitude of “How do I look to others?” and doesn’t think, “Who am I really? How can I utilize my potential?”, then it is very difficult to leave such a superficial outlook and live in a more internal reality.

A person with who does things for recognition and wants others to see his successes should also ask himself if he wants others to see what he really excels at, or if he just wants others to see that he is talented. There is a big difference. Although both people are being arrogant, the one who wants others to see what he really excels at is a more truthful person.

This is a very deep point in understanding the soul. Although both people have to work on their arrogance, we are not addressing arrogance at this point; we are addressing how to change one’s attitude in life.

Each person has qualities, and has a desire to utilize his potential. He has not yet begun to work on his arrogance, but he should first try to begin utilizing his potential.

If a person lives this way, he is very close to improving himself. He will leave his scattered state, leave all the oppositions and come out of his superficial perspective. He will enter a world in which he will utilize his actual potential.

This is the depth of “Ulterior motives lead to pure motives.” If a person is trying to make himself known and take pride in qualities that he doesn’t have, he will not come to have pure motives, because he is not even being himself.

But if he begins to work on utilizing his actual potential, although he still has some arrogance, at least he is having the right kind of ulterior motives, which will eventually lead him to pure motives. Hashem should merit all of us that all our potential be utilized – for ourselves, and not for the sake of fame.

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