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Three Kinds Of Middos

We will try to explain the material here in a way that is very practical in our life.

We have explained that there are three kinds of *middos* in ourselves: the *middos* that come from our **nefesh habehamis** (the lower, animalistic part of our soul), which are entirely base and evil; we have the *middos* that come from our **nefesh Elokis** (the higher, G-dly part of the soul), which are always pure and holy; and we have the *middos* that stem from a middle layer of the soul, which contain a mixture of good and evil.

To go a bit more into detail, the middle layer in the soul, which resides between the **nefesh habehaimis** and the **nefesh Elokis**, is called the point of **medameh**/imagination. The “**medameh**” part of the soul is where we can purify the **middos** of our **nefesh habehaimis** and get them to become more like our **Nefesh Elokis**.

Everything has within it the four elements of Creation. Both the higher and lower parts of our soul contain the four elements, and from the elements stem our *middos*. There are four elements in the higher part of our soul as well as in the lower parts of our soul. The elements of our higher soul (our **Nefesh Elokis**) are already perfected, whereas the four elements contained in our lower soul (our **nefesh habehaimis**) are in need of rectification.

The Element of Earth: The Source of Sadness

The element of earth in us, as we have mentioned from the words of Rav Chaim Vital, is the main source of sadness. Since Hashem created the rest of the world from the earth, earth also contains aspects of the other three elements within it: water, wind and fire. Therefore, there is sadness which comes from the ‘earth’ itself in us, as well as sadness which comes from the elements of water, wind and fire within our ‘earth’ itself.

1: Feeling Lazy and Heavy (Earth-of-Earth)

The first kind of sadness comes from the actual that is earth within the element of earth (“earth-of-earth”). The earth is a heavy material, and when a person’s element of becomes too dominant, it makes a person feel a sort of inner heaviness. The person’s soul feels ‘heavy’ inside, he becomes sad as a result.

This is one source for sadness: feeling an inner heaviness.

2: Feeling Like A Failure (Water-of-Earth)

A second source of sadness can come from the 'water' within our element of earth. The nature of water is to descend and drop downwards; it comes down from the sky, and it flows downward from the mountains.

This shows us that when a person feels like he has gone 'downward' – in other words, when he feels that he has had some failure or descent - he is feeling his element of **water-of-earth**. This is the deep reason behind why failures make a person feel sad.

3: Unfulfilled Wants (Wind-of-Earth)

A third cause for sadness can come from the 'wind' aspect that is within our element of earth. Wind is a moving force; when a person wants something and he doesn't fulfill it, this causes him pain. The very fact that a person wants something makes him already sad, because he doesn't have it.

This kind of sadness - unfulfilled desires - is a very common cause of sadness.

4: Doubts (Fire-of-Earth)

A fourth source for sadness comes from the 'fire' aspect within our element of earth. Fire causes division and separation; Hashem created fire from the separation of the upper and lower waters on the second day, thus, fire causes separation.

Strife amongst people comes from the element of fire. When people have strife, this causes sadness with it; it comes from the 'fire' aspect within the element of earth.

Even when a person is just having doubts about something, this also makes him sad, because being in doubt is like an inner kind of 'strife' within oneself. That is also why "There is no happiness like the clarification of doubts^[1]." When there is doubt, there is sadness, so when the doubts are cleared, there is happiness.

5: Figure Out What Is Your Source Of Sadness

So far, we have given four possible reasons why a person is sad. All of these possibilities come from the four elements found in the lower part of our soul, the *nefesh habehaimis*. Think about them and then try to discern which of these might be the source of your sadness.

There are people who are sad and aren't even aware that deep down they are sad!

It is advised to write down all the possibilities and then see which of these you experience the most in your life. It will take a lot of *siyata d'shmaya* (help from Above) as well as your own personal holiness.

For example, let's say a person is lazy, which is also a negative trait rooted in the element of earth. Does that mean that his laziness is stemming from earth-of-earth, being that laziness stems from earth? It is not always the case.

Some people who have more earth in their soul, which makes them feel heavier inside themselves, and that is why they act lazy; they feel heavy and thus lethargic. This stems from **earth-of-earth**. Others, though, are lazy for different reasons entirely. For example, a person might be lazy due to a failure he recently experienced, which is causing him to act lethargic. This stems from **water-of-earth**. Or, he might be lazy because he sees that he's not getting what he wants in his life; this stems from **wind-of-earth**. Or it can be that he's acting lazy because he is always having regrets and

doubts, which stems from fire-of-earth.

So one must know very well which element in particular is mainly the cause of his sadness. This is not figured out so fast, and it will take wisdom about life in order to discern.

6: Imagination

A fifth cause for sadness, which is also coming from a negative area of the soul, can be coming from the faculty of imagination. Many times people imagine that they need something, and are anxious because they haven't gotten it yet, and this brings sadness with it.

This is not to be confused with the sadness that stems from the element of wind, which is also a sadness caused by unfulfilled desires. Earlier, we spoke of someone who has a real need, and he isn't fulfilling it, which makes him sad. But now we are speaking of a different kind of desire: when a person imagines that he really needs something, and really, he doesn't need it.

A person's imagination is responsible for exaggerating a person's needs. This is actually the most common kind of sadness found among people: unfulfilled desires, most of them being extraneous and unnecessary for a person to have.

The classical example of this sadness is Adam *HaRishon*, who desired to eat from the *Eitz HaDa'as*. This was something he did not need, yet he desired it anyway. It was all in his imagination; what came about from this? Nothing but sadness came upon Creation.

7: Spiritual Failings (Spiritual Water-of-Earth)

The next four reasons for sadness are higher kinds of sadness which come from the inner, G-dly layer of our soul; these are spiritual kinds of sadness, and if one is sad for any of these reasons, it is actually coming from a holy and pure place in himself.

The **Nefesh Elohis**- the G-dly layer of the soul - also contains the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. But these are completely spiritual kinds of elements, so they are pure and spiritual kinds of sadness, which, in essence, do not need to be fixed. [However, one must know very well if his sadness is really coming from these sources, or if it is perhaps coming from lower elements in his soul that are in the **nefesh habeheimis**].

One source of spiritual sadness is from the element of '**water**' within the element of earth in the G-dly layer of the soul. This is when a person feels a spiritual failure: when he feels that he is failing in his service to Hashem. Unlike the sadness caused by the water of the lower part of the soul that we spoke about before, which was about a feeling of physical failure, this kind of sadness is when a person feels that he has spiritual failings.

8: Spiritual Doubts (Spiritual Fire-of-Earth)

Another spiritual kind of sadness comes from the element of **fire**-of-earth in the G-dly part of the soul. This is when a person is in doubt about what the right thing is; doubt is rooted in the element of fire (as we will explain later).

9: Spiritual Frustration (Spiritual Wind-of-Earth)

A person might also be sad from his element of **wind**-of-earth in the G-dly part of the soul, like if he feels that he is not revealing his potential in spirituality - the true desires of a person. This sadness comes from our "wind" (of earth), since wind moves things and gives direction, a lack of fulfilled

potential is essentially a lack of wind in the soul.

10: Spiritual Restlessness (Spiritual Earth-of-Earth)

Finally, a person might be sad because of the '**earth**' aspect of earth in his G-dly soul. This is when a person is sad about his very situation on this world – the fact that are confined to this physical earth, where our soul does not belong. Our soul is actually very sad that it has to be confined to a materialistic body. When one feels this sadness, he is feeling the holy kind of sadness that comes from **earth-of-earth** of the G-dly soul.

“A pious individual longs for his day of death,”^[2] and the depth behind this is that the soul longs to return to its Creator. When a person truly feels this, he feels the spiritual kind of sadness present in the soul, in the earth of his G-dly layer in the soul. This is a holy kind of sadness; the more a person purifies his soul, the more he feels this sadness.

In Conclusion

Most people, who have not yet revealed their souls, are sad from either one of the first four reasons we have said. To be even more specific, most people are sad because of their element of wind in their lower part of the soul – unfulfilled desires, especially desires that a person **imagine** she really needs.

To summarize, there are altogether nine root causes for sadness in a person. Five of them are materialistic kinds of sadness: the four elements in the lower part of our soul, and the imagination, which is an altogether different cause for sadness. The other four kinds of sadness are spiritual kinds of sadness that are holy.

Recognize these nine causes of sadness in your life, and clarify to yourself which of them are mainly present in your experiences. Then you can know which kind of sadness you mainly need to rectify in your life.

Before you begin to actually work on solving your sadness, you first have to undergo this self-analysis. You cannot begin to work on yourself unless you know what exactly makes you sad.

[**Ed.** In this series, we will focus on the four kinds of negative sadness which come from the *nefesh habehaimis*, which will add up to a total of 16 different kinds of sadness. The imagination-based sadness is discussed in the series *Getting To Know Your Imagination*].

[1] Torah HaOlah

[2] Chovos HaLevovos