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## Understanding Your Middos - 06 Limits & Beyond Our Limits

### ***The Concept of Tzimtzum\Exactness***

Another of the natures which branch out from our element of earth is called *tzimtzum*, to be “exacting.” This is because another meaning for “*atzvus*”, the Hebrew term that is generally known as “sadness”, can also mean to be “exact”, as we find in the Sages’ term *amah atzuvah*, “exact measurement.”<sup>[1]</sup> The concept of *atzvus*\sadness is thus related to the concept of *atzuvah* and *tzimtzum*, which is when a person acts too exacting.

The simple understanding of this is that when a person is overly exacting in his nature, he becomes stiff, and this breeds on a cause for sadness, because he will end up contracting into himself too much. There is much to say about this point. We will try to understand more here about the nature of *tzimtzum* – when a person is too “exacting”, and then he becomes sad because of this.

There is an argument in the words of our Sages if it is even possible for us to ever be exact about anything.<sup>[2]</sup> The classic example of this is the argument in the Gemara if it’s possible to have twin first-borns. One of the Sages’ opinions is that two first-borns can emerge at the same time from their mother’s womb, and thus they are both considered to be first-born. The other opinion in the Sages is that one of them had to come first, since it’s not possible that they were both born at the same exact moment.

Our own soul contains the nature of *tzimtzum*\exactness. Let us try to understand this nature.

### ***Two Kinds of Exactness: Dryness and Coldness***

Every concept can only be completely understood when we understand its opposite. Therefore, in order to understand *amah atzuvah*\exact measurement, we need to also understand its opposite – *amah sochakas*, a “round measurement.”

The *Sefer HaAruch* explains that *amah sochakas* like a person with a laughing expression on his face, while *amah atzuvah* is like a person with a closed mouth. When there is a laughing expression on one’s face, there is an open space between his lips. The word for “open space” in Hebrew means *revach*, which can also be read “*ruach*” – wind. This hints to us that someone with an “*amah atzuvah*” – someone who has a closed expression on his face, because he is sad – is missing a “*ruach*” in his expression. In other words, a sad person is missing some wind in his soul.

We explained before that wind is the opposite of the element of earth. Earth is dry and cold, while wind is moist and warm. Thus, sadness, which causes a *tzimtzum*\contraction in the soul, is the antithesis of the element of wind.

Which of the aspects of earth is responsible for creating a *tzimtzum*? We find that both coldness and dryness can be a cause for a contraction. We can see this in our physical world, from the sand of a beach, which prevents the ocean water from flooding the earth. Chazal say that each wave of the ocean wishes to flood the entire world, but Hashem placed the sand on the beaches to withhold the ocean from overflowing. When the sand of the beach holds back the ocean from flooding the earth, it accomplishes two things. Firstly, it protects the earth from the ocean's waves. Secondly, it sends the ocean waves to recede.

This shows us how something about the concept of *tzimtzum*\contraction. When there is a *tzimtzum*, not only enable will this make that something shouldn't spread past its limits; it also causes a rebound effect.

Both of these abilities of *tzimtzum* are present in the two natures of earth - dryness and coldness. The dryness of the earth doesn't let something spread (as opposed to wetness, which allows for spreading). The coldness in earth not only prevents spreading, but it also causes something to recede from it.

The sands of a beach, which hold back the ocean from overflowing its boundaries, represents our power to use dryness of earth - **to set limits for ourselves**. It is the ability in a person to erect fences and boundaries; to set limits. The fact that the beach causes the ocean waves to recede is what represents our power to use coldness of earth; it the ability we have to **"recede"** [later, we will explain what this is].

These are the two abilities of *tzimtzum*\contraction which stem from our element of earth - our ability to set limits, and our ability to recede.

### **Overstepping A Boundary**

Here is an example from the Torah that illustrates these two ideas of *tzimtzum*. There is a prohibition in the Torah for one to trespass onto another's property (*hasagas gevul*). This is besides for the prohibition to steal. The *Sifri*<sup>[3]</sup> asks: If the Torah already prohibited stealing, why does the Torah also have to prohibit trespassing another's property? The *Sifri* answers that when one bypasses another's property, he transgresses two sins: stealing, and in addition, bypassing another's property.

In other words, besides for committing two sins in this one act, he has done two things wrong. We know that when someone damages another person, he has caused a loss. When a person steals, he doesn't damage the person, but he has taken away the owner's item and brought it into his possession. A damager has caused a loss to another, but he did not bypass the other's limits. A stealer, by contrast, has minimized the other's boundaries by taking away the other's item and bringing it into his boundaries. He has caused a *tzimtzum*\contraction to the other person's space. The one who bypasses another's property, by expanding his own boundary, has in essence caused a recession to the original owner's boundaries.

This brings out the concept of *tzimtzum* which we have begun to explain. When there is *tzimtzum*, besides for causing a contraction, it causes a recession as well in the process [just like the beach causes the ocean to recede backwards, in addition to the fact that it keeps the ocean within its boundaries].

### **Applying This Concept To The Soul**

The first idea contained in the concept of “*tzimtzum*”, which is when something is held back from spreading past its limits, is clearly stemming from the element of earth. It is caused by a lack of wind. If there would be wind present, the wind would enable spreading, as it is the nature of wind is to spread. It is only earth that limits something and doesn’t allow it to spread. When we want to block something, we take earth and cement it, forming a wall which can prevent something from getting past it. So earth is clearly the element responsible for placing limits on something.

The second aspect of *tzimtzum*, which is when something recedes backwards due to the fact that it can’t spread any further, seems to be a direct result of the first part of the *tzimtzum*. When something can’t spread past its limit, it recedes backward, and the *tzimtzum* seems to be total now. However, although it seems that way, the truth is as follows. There is a general rule in the Torah that when we have an “exclusion following an exclusion, it is really coming to include something.” This is a rule that is said with regards to how the Torah’s words are expounded, but it is a concept that can be applied as well to other areas. It applies to our discussion as follows. If there is a *tzimtzum* following another *tzimtzum* – in other words, when something recedes backwards because it cannot spread any further – that, itself, contains the key to how it can be fixed. We will explain what we mean.

If someone hits an obstacle in his path and he can’t get past it, so he turns around, we would simply say that he is hopeless. But the truth is that now that he has turned around, he is getting himself to move. Until now, he couldn’t get past the obstacle, so he couldn’t move. Now he is turning around, so he is giving himself some movement. If he has movement, he is using the element of wind, which can provide him with a sense of vitality to overcome his dominant earth, which made him non-moving.

The *Maharal* provides an amazing parable to understand this. When you throw an arrow into a wall, the arrow can’t get past the wall. But it can rebound off the wall and then it gets sent back to its owner hands.

Herein we can see that when wind\movement works together with earth\non-movement, it can cause something to recede back to the owner. When the arrow rebounds off the wall back to its owner, it is not happening due to the earthen wall alone, nor is it happening only because of the wind’s movement. It is happening as a result of both factors: the wall itself, which will not budge, can actually make the arrow return to its owner. So earth and wind can work together to produce a constructive kind of movement, even when it seemed at first that no movement could be achieved here.

What we are getting at from all of this is that this shows us how we can repair an imbalance in our element of wind, which is when a person is spreading too much past his required limits.

Let us reflect on the concept of the future resurrection of the dead. When a person dies, he has lost his life spirit, which is also called *ruach*\wind. Chazal say that in the future, the “*ruach*” of Moshiach will come and revive the dead. In other words, when one has reached the point in which his “wind” is incapable of spreading (because his body cannot move, since it is dead), it [eventually] returns anew. Our element of *ruach*\wind will then achieve its complete rectification,

Now we will see how this concept applies to working with our soul. When a person is lacking the ability to spread past his limits, he is lacking wind in his soul, and this is because his earth has become dominant. If he would have more fire or water present in his soul, then he wouldn’t be prevented from spreading, because both fire and water can spread. But earth by itself cannot spread; earth by its very essence stops anything from spreading. Thus, the more a person connects to his element of earth, the less he “spreads”, and in this way he can prevent his “wind” from causing him to overstep any limits that the Torah places on him.

Earlier, we explained the aspect of earth's nature to prevent movement, when we discussed laziness. Now we are touching upon another aspect of earth: earth can be used a wall to prevent anything from spreading past its limits, and it can also cause something to recede backwards, as a result. This is a power in the soul that has either positive or negative uses. When a person runs into an obstacle and he turns around in the opposite direction, because he has given up, this is negative. But at the same time, this can be used positively, and that is because if a person recedes backwards, he is awakening some movement in himself, and in this he has the key to solving his problem of being trapped.

Once a person begins to move again – even though it appears as if he's turning back, which doesn't seem to be a good thing – he is still revealing in himself new movement, and he resembles how the dead will be revived in the future.

How can a person remove himself from a *tzimtzum* that is trapping him from moving forward? He can do this by using the soul's ability to be "cold", an ability of water, which is the root of coldness. When something is cold, it contains vitality, because water is the source of vitality. When a person uses the coldness of his element of water, he increases his vitality, and causes himself to move again, which will enable him to get past the *tzimtzum* upon him.

### ***The Power of Setting Limits***

We already explained earlier that every force in Creation can be used either for good or for bad. Understanding the power of *tzimtzum* in our soul, which is the ability to place proper limits in ourselves, is actually the root power of how we develop our soul. If a person doesn't make use of the power of *tzimtzum* in his life, he won't be able to keep the laws of the Torah! The first thing we need before anything is the ability to have *tzimtzum* in our life.

We can see this illustrated clearly from the order of the events in Creation. The first thing Hashem did when He made the universe was that He made a *tzimtzum*. He contracted His light, made a space to contain it, and then from there, He formed all the myriad details in the universe. This shows us that the basis which we need, before anything else, is the ability to have *tzimtzum*.

The world needs to have proper limitations placed on it in order to survive. Without boundaries and rules on this world, all of Creation would go awry. Fire, without any limits to it, would spread and destroy the entire world. Water, without any boundaries to it, would flood the entire world. Wind, when totally unleashed without any limits, would also blow apart everything on this world and destroy it. There must be boundaries placed on our elements of fire\water\wind, or else they wreak havoc on everything. For that, we can make use of our element of earth, which can place limits on our other elements and restrain them.

So we need to acquire an ability to place limits on our abilities, or else our various abilities go overboard. Yet, we cannot go in the other extreme either – if we place too much restraint on ourselves, we will end up sapping ourselves from any vitality, and this isn't either good. It would resemble death.

Thus, we need to define when placing limits are holy, and when they are evil. When is it good to place limits, and when it is detrimental? If the limits are helping us keep ourselves stable, then it is good. But if our limitations are taking away our vitality – whether this is total, or even if it's only partially taking it away – then placing limits are destructive.

So if a person has lost vitality – due to a dominance of his element of earth, which has caused him to dry up inside too much – he needs to get back his vitality. The way we can do this is by using the source of vitality in the soul: the element of water. To be specific, we need to use the water's

coldness, which will spring a person back to life, like cold water being poured upon his dry soul. The cold rush of water upon him will make the person jump up and recede, which will stir him to move and take himself out of his inner confines, from his unhealthy *tzimtzum*.

### **Using Water To Fix Earth**

When we want to fix one of our soul's elements, we need to make use of the other three. In this case, we are dealing with how to fix a problem that lies in our element of earth, specifically with regards to the problem of unhealthy *tzimtzum* in the soul. Let us see how we can use either fire, water or wind to solve the problem.

We already explained before how using wind can fix this problem. We also began to explain how water can be used to fix *tzimtzum*, but now we will elaborate. Earth is a cold substance; it gets its coldness from water, because water is the root of coldness. The coldness of water can cause a receding effect in earth. Coldness makes something recede backwards in the opposite direction. Even when wind is causing something to recede backwards, it can only do so in tandem with the coldness contained in earth, as we explained before (with the parable of the arrow rebounds off a wall), and since coldness is ultimately rooted in water, it is always water that will be the root of solving *tzimtzum*.

In addition to this, a limit is called *gevul* in Hebrew, which can also be read *gibbul*, a mixture. In the laws of Shabbos, we find that one is not allowed to mix water with earth and create *gibbul*. This hints to us that earth is softened when it becomes mixed with water. Before it gets mixed, it remains as a piece of earth, with no form to it. Water can come and give it some form.

When we mix water with earth, pouring too much water into the earth will make it soggy, and it won't be able to give proper formation to earth. But if we have a fine balance between the amount of earth and the amount of water being mixed together, the water can work together with the earth and give it a proper form. Hashem created Adam from earth and water together, because when there is a proper amount of water and earth together, there can be a lasting formation that is produced from the mixture.

What we see from this is that earth by itself has no form; it contains no vitality of its own. When water is mixed with earth, the earth can then get a formation, and in this way, it receives vitality from the water. By giving some formation to the earth, the earth begins to receive some vitality.

Earth cannot produce anything on its own. The only way it can grow is through water, and then its potential is utilized. When water nourishes the earth and makes it grow, not only does it make the earth grow, but it shows us that even something as limited as the earth can expand beyond its limits. This is how water fixes earth – it serves to expand the limits of earth, which cannot expand beyond its limits unless it gets water.

When a person dies, his body goes back to the earth. Yet, he can continue to live on, even though his body is in the earth. How? Chazal say that children are a continuation of their father's life. "Just as his children are alive, so is he considered to be alive."<sup>[4]</sup> As long as a person has children alive, he is not considered to be dead, because it is as if his "earth" is continuing to grow and produce. A father of his children, as well as the teacher of his students (for Chazal say that students are called one's children), continues to expand even after his death, through those whom he has produced.

### **Using Fire To Fix Earth**

How do we use fire to fix *tzimtzum* of earth? Simply, this is because fire can break through barriers, due to its destructive nature. So fire can be used to get by the earth. But the deeper understanding is

because fire can keep spreading, which opposes the earth's inability to spread. Fire spreads in a different way than wind does. Wind is always moving everywhere, and thus it can be considered to always be spreading. Fire, though, simply spreads, by actually expanding in all its directions.

Fire is thus the main force of expansion, so it is the best at producing results. Fire can give birth to things; it can make more fires from itself. Earth is also known as the root force of giving birth to things, but the earth is only a tool that allows for birth; it cannot birth to more earth. Wind cannot produce more wind from itself, and neither can water make more water from itself. The root element which brings about birth is fire, and thus fire can be used to break the barriers erected by the element of earth.

We also find that the "wall of Jerusalem" is made from earth, but in the future, Jerusalem will be a wall made from fire.<sup>[5]</sup> What is this 'wall of fire' of the future? The simple understanding is that just as there can be a wall made from earth, so can Hashem make a wall from fire. But the deeper meaning of it is as follows. The original wall of Jerusalem, which was made from earth, got destroyed by fire. This hints to us that a barrier erected from earth is not the ideal kind of barrier; fire can overcome it. The real wall, the wall of fire that will be the wall of Jerusalem in the future, is the true kind of barrier, and it is preferred over a wall made from earth.

When Hashem used fire to destroy the *Beis HaMikdash*, which was made from earth, this hints to the misuse of the element of earth. The earth will receive its rectification in the future, when instead a wall of fire replaces the original wall of earth.

What's the difference between an earthen wall and a fiery wall? An earthen wall represents a total *tzimtzum*. People can't get into it, nor can they get out (unless, of course, there is some opening in the wall). But if you're in a wall of fire, you can be inside of it without being limited, because the fire spreads outward from where you are, allowing the people inside to be protected, while at the same time blocking those outside it from getting in. A wall of fire is thus not a total *tzimtzum*.

This shows us how we can use fire to fix earth: to place a limit which will not be a total limitation. It is when a limit is only placed on our outside, while on our inside we are allowed to expand further and not be limited.

### ***Balancing Our Need For Expansion and Contraction***

Now we will apply this to our soul. We have in ourselves an ability of *tzimtzum* - to place limitations on ourselves. Simultaneously, we also have the power to expand beyond our limits. These are both abilities that need to be balanced.

If a person only uses his power to place limits, and he does not ever seek to expand beyond limits, he is missing vitality. As long as a person has the ability to continue and grow, he is considered to be alive. If not, it is as if he's dead. On the other hand, if a person is always expanding beyond his limits and he does not live by the rules in life, he is breaking the necessary rules that we need to have in Creation. He resembles the Snake, who is called "the one who breaks the fences of the world", a negative implication.

We need to be able to balance our abilities of limits and non-limits. We must live with rules, which make use of our element of earth. Yet, we must also seek to expand ourselves, which uses our element of fire.

If a person does not seek to expand beyond his limits, if he doesn't seek continuity, he won't be able to connect to the Endlessness of Hashem. Hashem is Endless and is unlimited, while we are limited creatures; how can humans, who are limited, connect to the Creator, Who is unlimited? This is the

secret of our *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) which Hashem created us with. Because we were all created in G-d's image, we have the power to resemble Hashem in some way, by being continuous. When we continue and expand, we can shatter limits, and in this way, we somewhat bear a resemblance to the Creator.

However, the power to shatter limits can be used for evil as well. If a person breaks necessary rules in Creation, he is being like the Snake, who wanted to break the rules. The only way for us to transcend the rules of Creations that is holy and good is through being continuous (reflected by the *mitzvah* to have children).

We are limited creatures; we were created from earth, which is the element that is responsible for all limitations. However, we were also created with some water, and this shows us that we can leave our "earth" from which we were fashioned from. Even more so, Hashem breathed into us a breath of life, which is our "wind" that can take us out totally from our limits. In fact, when Hashem breathed into man His breath of life, there was also some fire in it, because it was a "warm" kind of breath. Fire is therefore the most complete way to fix our earth when we have become too constricted and limited, because fire can keep producing and continuing, which counters the earth's inability to produce on its own.

Thus, the element of earth is the root of our power to place limits, and the other three elements of fire, water and wind combine together and help the earth produce limitlessly, which gives our element of earth its most complete rectification.

So on one hand, we need limits. Hashem has given us certain rules that we must follow. Simultaneously, we must also acquire the ability to go above limits, which is the root of *d'veykus* (to attach ourselves with Hashem).

### ***Above The Four Elements***

In our soul, there is a higher point that is above our four elements of earth, water, wind and fire. This is the point known as *daas*. There is a way to use *daas* for continuity as well. It is brought in *sefarim hakedoshim* that if a person did not merit to have children, he can fulfill the *mitzvah* of having children, by writing Torah *chiddushim* (insights). Writing Torah *chiddushim* can give any person continuity, but it is especially true regarding someone who doesn't have children. It offers a person a way to get the *mitzvah* of having children, by doing something that makes him continuous. It is a way to have children - through our *daas*. This is the meaning of how "the Torah is longer than the earth and wider than the sea" - since we can continuously expand the Torah through our *chiddushim*, the Torah expands endlessly. This is how we can use *daas* to leave the limits of earth from of which we come from.

On a more subtle note, the ability to leave our limits really comes from our holy and G-dly soul, our *neshamah*. From our body's viewpoint, we are limited, but from our soul's viewpoint, we are unlimited. Our soul transcends the limits of earth by producing Torah *chiddushim*, and our body transcends its limits by having children, which gives us continuity. These are the two ways of how we can transcend our limits in a holy and positive way; any other way of trying to break our limits is evil and destructive to us.

The Gemara says that a king can break fences and enter someone else's property in order to get to where he has to go, and no one may protest him.<sup>[6]</sup> The depth behind this is that we have an inner power in a soul called being a "king", which can break limits. (In the physical dimension, there can only be one Jewish king at a time, but in our soul, each of us has an inner "king"). The Sages also state that the Jewish nation is a princely nation, for we are all sons of the King.<sup>[7]</sup> In other words - we

have a certain power of royalty in us, which enables us to break limits.

However, we must mention again that we are only allowed to go past our limits when we are merely being continuous [such as with the *mitzvah* to have children and to have Torah *chiddushim*]. Anything that oversteps our boundaries is misusing our power to break limits.

### ***The Two Kinds of Teshuvah***

Now that we have understood this, we can understand the following deep point. We have explained thus far how earth is dry and cold; the dryness of earth, when it becomes total, removes a person's sense of vitality, but the coldness of earth, which really gets its source from the element of water, can revitalize the dryness. So when coldness of water is used on earth, the earth begins to get fixed. The coldness of the water shakes the person up, making him recede backwards from his obstacles, and this stirs him on to have some movement. It is like the ocean waves, which recede backwards, as we explained earlier.

When a person recedes backwards in the opposite direction, he now has the power to go in an opposite direction. We began to explain earlier that moving in the opposite direction shows that the person now has the power to return to his source and start anew. Of the four elements, there are two elements which can return something to its source: fire and earth. Fire destroys something. Since the four elements are contained in everything, when fire destroys anything, it returns all the four elements back to its source. Earth returns the body back to the earth where it came from, after death.

This idea is the secret behind *teshuvah*! One way a person does *teshuvah* is by destroying his evil, and then he returns to his good source. This uses the element of fire in the soul, which "returns" something to its source by destroying it. But there is another kind of *teshuvah* as well that one can do: when he takes his evil and instead channels it in the right direction.

If we have a tool that is being used for evil, we need to destroy it. But if we have an ability that was until now being used for evil, we do not have to destroy it; instead, we need to learn how to use it for good.

For example, an idol must be destroyed; we cannot repair an idol by using it for holiness. But the person who committed idol worship, who was engrossed in this idol, can now fix his search and instead channel his search in the direction of holiness. An evil object of *avodah zarah* needs to be destroyed, but the ability in a person that was drawn towards *avodah zarah* need not be destroyed; it just needs to be channeled in its proper direction, which is to be attached to holiness.

Another example: if a person loved to eat food, and he ate food which was not kosher, what does he need to do *teshuvah* for? The food that went into his stomach has to be cleansed out; he needs to clean out his system and destroy and trace of the non-kosher food left in him. But as for the fact that he loved the food, he need not get rid of his ability to love things. Instead, he needs to channel his love for food in a direction of holiness, and he should instead love holiness.

Thus, there are two different kinds of *teshuvah*. One kind of *teshuvah* is when a person destroys the evil within him, thus returning to his good source. This is enabled by his element of fire, which destroys and then returns something back to its root. But another kind of *teshuvah* is when a person recedes from the evil direction he was going in, which gets him to begin a new kind of movement. The movement, as we said, is not evil in essence; it merely needs to be channeled in a proper direction.

### ***How Teshuvah Can Remove Our Despair***

The element of earth in us can therefore be used a source to renew ourselves with *teshuvah*. Earth in

the soul, when it becomes too dominant, can bring a person to a deathlike kind of existence – when he gets too confined within himself, and he has no source of vitality going on. Then, just when the person is at the apex of his deathlike existence, it is precisely the heavy amount of earth in the soul that acts as the very catalyst that can get him to return to his source. This facilitates *teshuvah*.

*“Return, o man, until [you are] crushed – until your soul feels utterly crushed.”* [8] When a sinner truly feels crushed inside, it is then that he can be spurred on to *teshuvah*. This is the true level of *teshuvah*. It can be reached precisely when a person feels that he is at the end point of things, when he can’t go on any more like this, that he can be moved to *teshuvah*.

When a person has despair, his abilities are deadened. He feels dead inside, that “it’s all over”, so he despairs. But if he feels like he has come to the end of his capabilities, yet he does not despair from this, he has the ability to return to his source. When he feels how much his earth is limiting him and constricting him, he can get himself to move again, and he “rebounds” off the earthen wall he has run into, like the arrow that bounces off the wall and then gets sent back to its owner.

Thus, the element of earth is rectified through *teshuvah*, when it returns a person back to his source. Earth has the power to return things back to their source; just like the curse of death placed on mankind was that the body would be returned to earth where it came from – a negative use of earth’s power to return things – so can this power of earth be used constructively, to “return” a person back to his Source, when he does *teshuvah*.

The Sages recount that after Kayin killed Hevel, he wandered around the world doing *teshuvah*. Once he ran into his father, Adam, who asked him: “Whatever happened with you?” [How did Hashem judge you for killing Hevel?] Kayin answered, “I did *teshuvah*. I have been acquiesced.” [9] The inner kind of *teshuvah* a person can do is when he realizes that without *teshuvah*, he really has no vitality. *Teshuvah* provides life-giving energy to a person.

When fire is the source of a person’s *teshuvah*, he destroys his evil. But when earth is the source of one’s *teshuvah*, he returns all of his abilities to their Source, and he reveals how there is no such thing as being beyond hope.

From this we see how we can remove despair. When a person runs into an obstacle and he can’t get past it, either he can despair from this, or he can say: “Just like I was able to get here until this point, so can I go back and return to my source again.” This is the power of hope in a person, which is called *tikvah* in Hebrew. The word *tikvah* contains in it the word *kav*, which means “straight line.” In a straight line, you can either move forward to one end of the line, or you can move back to the beginning of the line. In the same way that I was able to move forward and get to the point I am now, so can I use the same path to return to my original Source. [Not on the same exact path, of course, but rather, I have the power to return to my Source].

*Teshuvah* can reveal in a person his point of connecting to the Endlessness of Hashem (the *Ein Sof*). Without *teshuvah*, a person remains with his sins, and the sins destroy the person; “*The soul who sins must die.*” But Hashem said, “One can do *teshuvah* and be forgiven.” [10] When a person does *teshuvah*, he reaches the endless, because now he can see that it is possible to rise above anything, even when he thought he had reached his hopeless end.

*Teshuvah* is what truly rectifies the element of earth in a person. Mankind was cursed with a death as a result of sin, and by death, the body returns to earth. When left un-rectified, our earth symbolizes the end, the ultimate limitation placed on man – death. But Hashem has in front of Him “a book of life and a book of death.” The deep understanding behind this concept is that the “book of death” contains those who give up when they feel like they are at their end, while the “book of life”

symbolizes those who know that even when it seems like they have reached their end, they can transcend the “end” and find continuity.

### **The “Baal Teshuvah” Within You**

Thus, a *baal teshuvah* essentially reveals the deep power of the Jew’s soul to connect to the Endlessness of Hashem. He has reached the point which he really felt as the “point of no return”, in which he feels that his teshuvah won’t even be accepted if he tries to return; but he chooses to return anyway, revealing forth his power of *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). He resembles Rabbi Eliezer ben Dordaya, who had almost completely given up on doing *teshuvah*, and at the apex of his broken-heartedness, he utilized his innate power of *mesirus nefesh* to do *teshuvah* anyway. The *baal teshuvah* reveals how there is no situation in Creation that can really be called “the end”, because there is always hope.

The Gemara says that although *Gehinnom* will cease, the wicked do not cease<sup>[11]</sup>; at some point, they are rectified. If they have some more merits, they merit to become the dust under the feet of *tzaddikim*. What exactly does this mean, that the wicked become the dust under the feet of *tzaddikim*? The depth of this is that the *tzaddikim* reveals the power of “teshuvah” which lays dormant in the “earth” under their feet, and in this way, the “teshuvah” that the wicked can reach can show them to the Endlessness of Hashem. When the wicked become the dust under the feet of *tzaddikim*, this is how they receive their rectification – at first, these wicked thought they were hopeless and at their ultimate end, and now, [through being the dust underneath the *tzaddikim*] they can connect to the Endlessness.

In the beginning of this chapter, it was explained that there are two kinds of measurements – *amah atzuvah*, an “exact” measurement which has no extra space going on, and *amah sochakas*, a “round” measurement which allows for some space. We explained the depth behind this, that *amah atzuvah* needs to be rectified when we turn it into *amah sochakas* – in other words, when we turn *atzuvah*\sadness into *sochakas*\laughter. In the future, we will all laugh – “Then, our mouths will be filled with laughter”<sup>[12]</sup> – and the depth of the future laughter is that whatever seemed to us in the current reality as “the end” was really something that could renew our spiritual growth and movement.

Concerning the future, it is written, “For with happiness, they go out.”<sup>[13]</sup> When we leave exile, we will leave all the *atzvus*\sadness and *amah atzuvah*\limitations behind, and instead we will enter into *sechok*\laughter and *amah sochakas*\above measured limitations. We will leave our limits, and continue to expand more and more, endlessly. Then, we will all become the ideal *baal teshuvah*, for we will be connected to the Endless Creator.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Eruvin 3a

<sup>[2]</sup> Bechoros 17a, and in other places in the Talmud.

<sup>[3]</sup> Sifrei: 188

<sup>[4]</sup> Taanis 5b

[\[5\]](#) *Bava Kamma 60b*

[\[6\]](#) *Pesachim 110a*

[\[7\]](#) *Shabbos 67a*

[\[8\]](#) *Rus Rabbah 6:4*

[\[9\]](#) *Beraishis Rabbah 22:13*

[\[10\]](#) *Yalkut Shimeoni, Yechezkel 358*

[\[11\]](#) *Rosh HaShanah 17a*

[\[12\]](#) *Tehillim 126:2*

[\[13\]](#) *Yeshayahu 55:12*

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