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Water-of-Water-of-Fire: Getting Dragged After Spiritual Jumpiness

With the help of Hashem, we continue here to discuss the element of fire, the root of the trait of conceit. We are currently discussing **water-of-fire**, which is the source of the nature in a person to be dragged towards jumpiness in his spiritual growth. Here we will discuss in particular the aspect of **water-of-water-of-fire**, which is when a person is very excited to grow to higher levels, and his excitement 'drags' him into the jumpiness.

This topic, excitement, is a very broad and multi-layered subject when it comes to our *Avodas Hashem*.

Step-By-Step Growth Vs. Acting On Inspiration

There are basically two ways to live a spiritual life of serving the Creator.

One way is to build ourselves, step-after-step, brick after brick. The Sages said that Torah scholars are called "builders" of the world^[1], and on an individual soul level, this refers to the ability to build ourselves. That is one way to grow: through building ourselves step-by-step, stage after stage. Another kind of growth is where a person grows spiritually through excitement and enthusiasm.

The word for enthusiasm in Hebrew is "*hislahatus*", from the word "*lahat*" (churning), alluding to the "*lahat hacherev hamishapeches*", the "churning sword of fire", which guards the path towards the Tree of Life. This hints to us that although *hislahatus* (enthusiasm) can be a springboard for spiritual growth, it can also be as dangerous as the "*lahat hacherev hamishapeches*".

The first way (building) is the ideal path and sensible path to take, in which a person can build himself step-by-step. The second way (excitement) is making use of **water-of-water-of-fire** in the soul - and it will mean that a person is building his life based upon how elated and excited he feels.

What will happen as a result of trying to live life through excitement and elation? There are people who base their entire lives on excitement - they need excitement in their spiritual pursuits, on a set and daily basis. It might be excitement in one's Torah learning, *davening*, *chessed*, or in other aspects of *Avodas Hashem*. This kind of person needs to feel excited towards everything he does; he feels that excitement and enthusiasm is the key to a spiritually complete life.

We must know very clearly that although excitement and enthusiasm certainly have a place in our life, we have to properly define its use and keep to its rules, for we cannot allow it to get out of hand

and take over our life.

The Pros and Cons of Enthusiasm\Inspiration\Excitement

Excitement helps us become open towards something, so it is certainly a point we can use to start serving Hashem with. A person gets inspired, and for some time he keeps his inspiration and he improves, but after some time, the inspiration wanes. Inspiration is good to get you started, but it will not be enough for the rest of the year. After inspiration, we need to know how to build our own program for growth.

Rosh HaShanah is called “*Yom Teruah*” (day of awakening), which is from the word “*hisorerus*” (inspiration), for the *shofar* awakens us from our spiritual slumber. Why can’t we be this way during the rest of the year as well and always have this awakening? It is because inspiration cannot take up every day of the year. It is good for a day or two, but afterwards, we must be able to build himself, and the inspiration won’t be enough for this.

It is a good way to begin the year, for it helps us get ignited. That is why we have *Rosh HaShanah*: it is a day to awaken ourselves, and to start off the year with this awakening. But after we do get awakened, what are we supposed to do – keep awakening ourselves again and again? We need to get up and go serve the Creator!

But many people make the mistake of thinking that life is supposed to be a constant re-awakening of inspiration after inspiration, with no program for built growth. With this attitude, people erroneously think that constantly looking for inspiration is a way to live life.

Learning Torah Requires Calm Intellect, Not Emotional Excitement

When it comes to the area of our *davening* (prayer), there is more of a place for inspiration. A person may have a very inspiring *davening*, which awakens his emotions to serve Hashem better.

But if a person learns Torah in a way that he has to always get inspired from his learning, it will be very hard for him to acquire the subtle intellect that is needed in learning Torah. He will find that his mind cannot break down the subtleties and nuances of the Gemara.

Why does this happen? It is because he is so full of inspiration and emotion (both from his other areas of *Avodas Hashem*, such as his *davening*), which causes his heart to dominate over his intellect, and the intellect weakens from this.[\[2\]](#)

Although a person must get *chiyus* (vitality) from his learning, a person needs the ability of *machshavah* (thought) in order to learn Torah, and it has to a kind of thinking that is settled and capable of subtle mental analysis. If a person is learning Torah and his heart’s emotions are more powerful than his intellect, his power of *machshavah* (thought) will be very limited, and he won’t be able to think properly and correctly as he’s learning.

How To Use Inspiration

Inspiration is good for the beginning of something, and it can also be used every here and there, but only if it is used in its proper limitations. However, even when we do use inspiration properly, it should still not become the basis of our *Avodas Hashem* (service towards the Creator).

Indeed, we will certainly need to make use of the power of inspiration, especially when we begin something. We all need renewal. There is also a need to awaken ourselves as we’re in the act, so inspiration also has its place for the rest of the year as well. But that is only if it’s being used in its

proper limitations, and not if it is becoming the basis of our *Avodas Hashem*.

Many people think that *Avodas Hashem* must be built entirely on inspiration. Firstly, we need to get rid of this notion - by knowing that it's not true. Life is not built on inspiration or excitement.^[3] Excitement can get us started and it can even be awakened during the rest of the year in how we act, but it must never become the basis of how we act.

This will come as a total change of perspective to anyone who is used to thinking otherwise. Just as in the physical world we cannot build something through inspiration, only through building it step after step, so too when it comes to spirituality, we need to build ourselves, and inspiration and excitement alone won't build us.

As we know good and well, people are inspired on *Rosh HaShanah* when they hear *shofar*, but soon after, the inspiration is gone. Many people are acting entirely upon inspiration during the days of *Yomim Noraim*, and when *Yomim Noraim* is over, the inspiration is over, and all of their improvement disappears with it.^[4]

Water-of-Water-of-Fire: Dragged After Inspiration

The point described until now is what happens when there is a dominance of **water-of-fire** in the soul in general. Now we will explain how the particular aspect of **water-of-water-of-fire** and how it plays a role in this problem, enlarging the issue even further.

When a person bases his life on excitement, he is usually dragged after anything that inspires him. This comes from a use of **water-of-water-of-fire**, which is the nature to get 'dragged' after jumping in spirituality. This is not a mere tendency to simply get dragged after one's emotions, but to get dragged towards areas of spiritual growth.

We will provide a few examples of how we can see this.

Example 1: Inspired By Tzaddikim Or By Righteous Acts

Let's say a person goes to a certain place where he saw as certain Torah scholar or *tzaddik* (righteous and G-d fearing person) whom he was very inspired from. He is totally in awe of this great Torah scholar or *tzaddik* and he wishes he could be like him. If he is very idealistic, he might attempt to copy the exact behavior of the *tzaddik*, because he wants to be on the level of the *tzaddik*...

Or, a person reads a biography of a *tzaddik* and he is in awe of him, and he very much wants to live exactly like that *tzaddik*, so he attempts to copy in his own life all that he has read about this *tzaddik*. A person reads and hears much about high spiritual levels, which are all true words, and his soul is inspired. He is so inspired that he attempts to act upon these levels he hears about and reads about.

If one examines himself deeply, though, he would see that this is totally the opposite of a true and inner kind of life, because he is really acting superficial in his attempts to copy others. He is not acting out of his true self.^[5]

Solution: Analyzing The Inspiration

If one wishes to change from the above patterns, the first thing he must realize (whenever he feels inspired) is to try to discern what exactly is inspiring him. This helps him name exactly what it is that is inspiring him. Now he can proceed to the following thought: "Just because I am inspired right now

by this person or story I read, does that mean it has to become the exact way I should my life, and that I need to do exactly what that person did...?"

As an example of what we mean, just because you see someone do an act of great *chesed* and you were very inspired by him doesn't mean you should try to do what he does. Just because you someone learning Torah and you were inspired by him doesn't mean you should now do exactly like him. You can let yourself feel the inspiration, but that doesn't mean you should immediately attempt to copy exactly what you have just witnessed.

Compare this to an alarm clock. An alarm clock wakes up people in the morning. It wakes up one kind of person at a certain time of the morning, and it awakens another person at a different time of the morning. The common denominator between all alarm clocks is that they all wake people, but that doesn't mean it wakes up all people in the same way.

So too, inspiration works differently for each person. The things you see in others which inspire you aren't always meant for you to copy into your own life, because your personal soul is not necessarily designed for what you are trying to 'download' into it.

So there are two changes of perspective which are needed. First of all, ask yourself what exactly is it that you are being inspired by; and then ask yourself if it's good for you to work on. The second part mentioned is a bit more subtle. Let yourself get inspired, absorb what's inspiring you, but when it comes to implementing it into your own life, you don't need to act exactly upon this inspiration.

Example 2: Inspired By A Eulogy

To give another example of the problem, let's say you are by a *hesped* (eulogy), and you are very inspired by the mournful and tearful eulogy that the speaker is giving. The speaker is crying and others around you are also crying, and you feel very emotional from this; you then become so inspired that perhaps you start feeling that you must now make a complete overhaul on your life, and live exactly by the ideals that the speaker is saying about the *niftar* (the deceased).

Naturally, most people will get inspired for some time after attending an emotional funeral, and this is fine and it is to be expected. But it is unusual for a person to totally change his lifestyle from a moving *hesped* he has heard, and if one does so, it is resulting from the imbalance in the soul that we are describing (too much **water-of-water-of-fire** in the soul). There are some people who will decide after hearing the eulogy to imitate exactly the words that they heard about the deceased, because they think that it has to affect their entire way of life now.

The reason why this is detrimental is because the way of life of the deceased person is not necessarily the exact life you need to live. When a speaker gives an emotional *hesped* and he cries, and he gets the crowd to cry as well, the tears are surely truthful, but that doesn't obligate the crowd to imitate exactly what he is saying about the deceased person.

When Emotions Dominate The Intellect

Let's bring out the point stronger. When a person lets inspiration take over, it is really because his emotions are dominating his intellect, to the point that it dominates almost totally, and it overcomes the rational mind. Emotions are reactive, and it doesn't break the matter down properly and sensibly.

To be clear about this, we will mention a different point, in order to have a more complete understanding of our current subject: there are really two kinds of emotion. One kind of emotion is a reaction: where one becomes emotional and his emotions take over, and his emotions fail to break the matter down and he doesn't get to properly analyze the situation. Another kind of emotion is deeper: it can discern something. A "discerning" kind of emotion is not a mere reaction, and it can break the matter down into different parts that you can analyze.

Women usually have more emotion than men – in two ways. Women are generally more emotional in the sense that they react emotionally to a situation, women also have more of a discerning kind of emotion, a sense of intuition for something. This is the "extra *binah*" that women are blessed with, which they use to discern the spiritual level of a guest who comes to the house. However, most women are only in touch with the kind of emotion that is reactive and not intuitive. The "extra *binah*" which women are blessed with is usually hidden.)

So there is a kind of emotion which is "emotional" and reactive, and there is another kind of emotion which is discerning and intuitive. Here when we are discussing the disadvantage of getting emotional, we are not speaking of the discerning kind of emotion, but of the reactive kind of emotion.

When a person is always acting upon his inspiration, the problem is that he's letting his emotional reactions take over, and he won't be able to properly take apart the matter in his head. If he sees that a certain great or holy person lives a certain way, he will try to do exactly like him. He will try to download all the inspiration he sees and hears and practically implement it into his life. This is the danger of inspiration.

The Power of Da'as (Analysis)

When someone is always getting powerfully inspired, he needs to have a strong amount of *daas* (mental power) to control his inspiration from taking over too much.

This is not just because he needs to put a leash on his inspiration from getting out of hand. There is more of a reason why a person needs to make use of the power of *daas*. It is because our inspirational feelings are not capable of seeing the greater picture of the facts, while the power of *daas* can break down a matter into subtle nuances, showing the person which areas he can implement into his life and which areas he should leave aside.

When there is a balance between mind and inspiration (or intellect with feeling), the inspiration\feeling can be helpful to a person, as the person is clearly aware of what he can do and what he cannot really do. But in the usual case, the inspiration is a bit too much, and it ends up causing damage.

The inner way to approach life is to have one's *daas* in control, so that his **water-of-water-of-fire** (inspiration) doesn't get out of control. One needs to break down a matter and see the areas he can work on and the areas he should leave aside, and only after he has done that can he allow his inspiration to take him places.

Waiting Upon The Inspiration

Now that this was explained, we can get down to the practical outcomes of this concept.

In the beginning of one's way, he is usually very inspired, and his emotions are usually more dominant than his mind. What, then, should he do when he gets inspired? Should he follow his inspiration, or should he instead be suspicious of it and leave it aside?

He should wait a little bit and not act upon it so quickly. Then at a later point he should re-examine his inspiration, and he should think about acting upon it or not. He can now have a more 'unbiased' approach towards the situation, and perhaps he will see the situation now more sensibly. Because he has given himself a break between the inspiration and taking action, he has become less emotional in the interim, so now his mind is working more properly and it can break down the matter better.

Obviously, there is a disadvantage to using this approach, because if you put a hold on your inspiration, there's a good chance that this particular inspiration will fade with time and then it will be gone. However, if we take the other option and we just follow our inspiration as soon as we are inspired, it is almost always going to result in misguided idealism. This is usually what happens with those who are beginning to serve the Creator and they are full of inspiration to do so.

Therefore, it is better to put a hold on something that inspires you, and then re-examine it at a later point, to see if it's for you to work on or not.

As we said, you need to be prepared for the possibility of losing the inspiration altogether. It will be difficult, because in the beginning of one's *Avodas Hashem*, a person is full of inspiration, and it is difficult to put our mind over our emotions and to not act upon the inspiration so fast. But it is still better in the long run when we know how to weaken the hold of inspiration upon us.

Inspirational Speeches: What Do We Do With All of Them?

This concept is very relevant throughout various stages of life. A *yeshiva bochur* starts out in *yeshiva*, continues into *beis midrash*, and eventually into *Kolel*, where he hears many speeches of inspiration, continuously absorbing many words that cover many, many different aspects in matters of *Avodas Hashem*. What should a person do with all that he has absorbed? What do we do with all of this inspiration?

First of all, whenever it comes to inspiring speeches, you should know that it is impossible to speak to a gathering of people about a certain point that will apply to everyone who attends. Being that each person is at a different level, it is not possible to hear a speech that will apply exactly to everyone there. When it's a one-on-one discussion, a person can be told of a point that applies to him in particular, but if it's a lecture being given to the public, it will not apply in the same way to each person.

Sometimes it will apply more to one kind of person there and less to another person there. Even if the point being spoken about in the lecture is applicable to the people there, it is not necessarily the time to work on this particular point.

This is true even if the speaker has intentions for the sake of Heaven. He is speaking about a particular point or a personal feeling he has, either because he was asked to speak about this point or because he has read or heard about it, or because it's his personal project to speak of this particular topic; either way, he is addressing a gathering of people, and each person in the crowd is not holding at the same spiritual level.

So what is the point to be gained from all of the inspiring lectures that people go to? If the speech is about a certain point which they all want to hear about, it is clear what the purpose of the speech is, and there is more of a gain to this kind of speech. But if people come to a series of lectures and each of the speakers is speaking about a different topic, or if one speaker speaks about many different topics in one speech in the span of an hour and a half, it is impossible for a person to absorb these speeches and gain from this.

If a person comes to these speeches and he feels generally inspired by all that he has heard, without

focusing on any one point that was said, in the usual scenario, he will get the up the next morning as if nothing changed in his life.

But when someone seeks truth, he can realize that it's impossible to grow from any of these speeches. Because even if it was a truthful speech and even if the speaker was a prominent and truthful person, that doesn't mean that the points spoken about in the speech are for each person to work on right now. If it's a series of speeches, it's surely impossible to implement so many changes in one's life on so many different topics.

The Two-Step Solution

1) Thus, in the beginning of one's way, he must know how to leave aside inspiration and not act upon it so quickly.

We don't mean that he should push off his inspiration to the point that his feelings have turned cold, but he should definitely push it off for a bit of time that allows him to gain control of his *daas*. This way, he can let his *daas* take over and examine the situation, breaking down the matter and seeing the areas that he can work on and the areas that he cannot work on.

2) After a person gets used to this and he's reached the point where he has grown spiritually, the next step will be to examine what exactly is inspiring him, whenever he experiences inspiration.

He will find himself being inspired instead to *pursue truth*, and that is what mainly motivates him now whenever he finds himself inspired. When he comes across 10 different points of inspiration, he will be able to demand truth from himself, as opposed to the 'garments' of inspiration that it comes in.

In Summary

In summary, there are two steps that must be traversed.

At the beginning of one's way, one must be able to put a hold on any inspiration that comes his way, and give himself the time to examine what exactly he can do and what he can't do. This will allow his power of *daas* to be in control over his emotions.

After he has gotten used to this, he will be able to always examine the root of the inspiration, whenever he finds himself getting inspired. He will be able to strip away the outer layers of the inspiration and see the root behind it, because he is motivated by truth.

This is a description of a kind of life where a person buildshimself. It enables a person to use inspiration in the proper and sensible way.

Using Inspiration Properly

If one tries to cut off his power of inspiration entirely, and instead he attempts to only follow the cold and rational intellect (and indeed, the *seiche*\intellect is called "cold water") and he attempts to guide his life in this way, this will not either be successful. The nature of inspiration cannot be stifled. Being that man is pulled after the element of earth, man tends to be lethargic and sleep-like, so he needs an awakening from time to time.

It is just that we need to be inspired in a way that we really get up from the earth and shake off the dust, and then to build upon that. As we explained here at length, our life cannot be built on inspiration alone; we need the power of *daas* which builds us. We need our *daas* to be in control, so that our inspiration doesn't get out of hand. When our *daas* in control, our inspiration will awaken us

in a more guided and balanced manner.

Based upon the above, whenever a person feels throughout the day that he can use some inspiration, like if he feels himself slackening off from Torah study, he should make use of the two-step plan that was laid out here. First he should awaken his *daas* and remind himself of his obligation of Torah study, and now that his *daas* is in control, he can now attempt to awaken his emotions and to let himself feel the inspiration.

Learning Mussar With Passion and In-Depth Analysis

Now that we have said the outline, we can discuss another practical outcome of this topic.

In the recent generations, there became a need to learn *mussar* (ethics). Reb Yisrael Salanter said that learning *mussar* requires “lips on fire, with a mournful voice to awaken man.”[\[6\]](#) Learning *mussar* with passion and emotion is only one part of *mussar*. The other part of *mussar*, Reb Yisrael Salanter said, is to learn the matters of *mussar* in-depth, as if it’s a *sugya* of Gemara.

To illustrate, if you have ever learned *sefer Chovos HaLevovos*[\[7\]](#), you know that it’s not a kind of *sefer* that makes you get emotional with a mournful voice. It is a *sefer* that contains deep wisdom - a *sefer* of “*daas*”.

One part of *mussar* is to use the analytical power of *daas*, and the second part of *mussar* is to make use of emotion. But most people who learn *mussar* only know of the ‘emotional’ part of learning *mussar*, but the “*daas*” part is usually unheard of.

This had led to a grave mistake about the study of *mussar*: people think that *mussar* is for people who don’t like to think deeply and would rather take a more emotional path. The *Mesillas Yesharim* hints to this misconception in the beginning of the *sefer*, where he wrote that very smart people made the mistake of thinking that *mussar* is for unlearned people who cannot learn deep wisdom, thus they engage in emotion and weeping.

Of course, when Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote the *mussar* requires passion and emotion and a mournful voice, he never implied that it doesn’t require in-depth study; but for some reason, people thought that *mussar* doesn’t require in-depth study and that it only requires emotion, thus many people felt that *mussar* is only for emotional people who can’t study Torah properly.

The proper way to approach life, and when it comes to learning *mussar* especially, is that our *daas* should be in control over our emotions. We also need to inspire ourselves as we learn *mussar*, learning it passionately and with a mournful voice.

As an example, if one is learning a *mussar sefer* such as *Shaarei Teshuvah*[\[8\]](#), where each paragraph discusses a different topic, he needs some wisdom to decide which parts need to be learned in-depth and which parts need to be learned with passion.

The main path of our Sages was to put their main focus on immersing themselves in the study of Torah, in the discussions of Abaye and Rava in the Gemara. That was where they mainly focused their *daas* on. There were some of our Sages who mainly immersed themselves in matters of *avodah*, *hilchos de’os*[\[9\]](#), and *Agadta*[\[10\]](#). Rav Wolbe zt”l wrote[\[11\]](#) that his teacher, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l, was mostly immersed in matters of *Agadta*.[\[12\]](#) However, this was not the main path traversed by our Sages.

Either way, with regards to us, one must make sure that his *daas* is mainly focused on Gemara, and he must inspire himself in learning *mussar*, and in addition, he must have *daas* in learning *mussar* as

well. In fact, one should have more *daas* in his learning of *mussar* than the inspiration he has.

Most people do not know how to apply their power of *daas* to learning *mussar*, and they only know about the emotional\passionate part. For this reason, many people have been learning *mussar* for many years, yet they have barely changed. Of course, we cannot say that they didn't change at all. But they didn't change much. and they didn't get to the desired result of learning *mussar*. It is because they are only using the power of inspiration when they learn *mussar*, and they are not using their power of *daas*.

Balancing Our Passionate Prayers

Water-of-water-of-fire, the source of inspiration and emotion in the soul, is also directly related to the power of prayer, which awakens the emotions of our heart.

There are two ways in which we can pray. The higher form of prayer is when a person prays earnestly, from the depths of his heart; and if he is more purified, he feels like he's standing in front of the King, talking to Him as if he is talking to a friend, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* says. This is the deeper and higher source of prayer. Most people, however, are praying from a lower point in themselves: from their emotions and feelings of inspiration.

When prayer is only stemming from emotion and inspiration, one has to be careful not to get pulled in many directions after the inspiration. During the 19 blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*, one has to make sure that he doesn't get pulled emotionally after all the different directions he's *davening* about. There must be a particular direction he is headed towards.

One advice for this is to concentrate on one blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* a day and put all of one's energy into that particular blessing. If one were to put all of his emotional energy into all 19 blessings with equal fervor, he will scatter himself inside. He needs to focus on one blessing, one direction, and put all his energies there, and for the rest of *Shemoneh Esrei*, he should focus on that particular point as well.

This idea can be said of the entire *davening* as well, from the morning blessings until the end of *davening*, which can be an overwhelming emotional journey as we find ourselves praying about all kinds of points, which sends us in all kinds of directions. Therefore, although we must certainly pour out our hearts to Hashem, there should be one point we are directing ourselves towards.

In Conclusion

In this way, we use our **water-of-water-of-fire**, our ability to inspire ourselves and fire ourselves up for Hashem as we serve Him passionately, but in a way that our intense emotions are not causing us to become scattered inside. Instead, our *daas* can be in control of our emotions, and our emotions and mind then become unified together in our service towards Hashem.

This is the ideal way of a person who wishes to truly serve the Creator and desires closeness to Him.

[2] See **Tefillah #0107 - Balance In Your Avodas Hashem**

[3] See **Bilvavi Part 6 Chapter 001**, and **Tefillah #0119 - Building Yourself Vs. Inspiring Yourself**, see also **Rosh HaShanah_025_Changing Our Thoughts**

[4] See previous chapter (**Fixing Your Wind_05_Knowing Your Capabilities**)

[5] See also **Tefillah #0154**

[6] *Ohr Yisrael: Iggeres HaMussar*

[7] “Duties of the Heart”, authored by Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pekuda, 11th century Sage

[8] *Gates of Repentance*, authored by Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerondi, 10th century Sage and Halachic authority

[9] “*Hilchos De’os*” (lit. “laws of knowledge”) refers to the subjects of the inner workings of the soul and serving the Creator. Refer to “*Rambam: Hilchos De’os*”; see **Getting To Know Your Feelings, Part II, Chapter 2**.

[10] Homiletic sections of the Gemara, which focus on areas of Jewish thought and self-improvement

[11] Sefer “*HaAdam B’Yikar*”, authored by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe zt”l

[12] Reb Yeruchem Levovitz’s sefarim are **Daas Chochmah U’Mussar** (2 volumes), and **Daas Torah** (5 volumes).

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