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Wind-of-Fire: How We Move and Progress

We have merited thus far to discuss the element of fire, which is the root of the trait of *gaavah* conceit. We have so far discussed earth-of-fire and water-of-fire. Now we are up to discussing **wind-of-fire**.

Wind-of-fire is about the movement and direction of the element of fire. Fire naturally moves in an upward direction; the movement itself of the fire is the 'wind' aspect of the fire. There are four branches of it: **earth-of-wind-of-fire**, **water-of-wind-of-fire**, **wind-of-wind-of-fire**, and **fire-of-wind-of-fire**:

The Four Branches of Wind-of-Fire

(1) Earth-of-wind-of-fire is when one can *stay permanently* on the level he ascends to. This is described in the verse, "*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy abode?*"^[1]

The desire in the soul to ascend in spirituality comes from wind-of-fire in the soul, for it is the movement aspect of fire\ascension. Hence, when one can stay permanently (earth) in the place that he moves towards (wind) and ascends to (fire), this ability comes particularly from earth-of-wind-of-fire.

(2) Water-of-wind-of-fire is when one is *enjoying* being involved with movement.

A person who has a lot of wind-of-fire in his soul often does not have any peace of mind, because he is always striving to go higher, and this can make him somewhat anxious. For example, if he is a teacher and there are no children around available to teach, he cannot be calm, because he feels like he always has to be in movement, and he is being deprived of it. But when one accesses his **water-of-wind-of-fire**, he is able to enjoy any movement of growth, even if it's only a minimal amount of growth.

(3) Wind-of-wind-of-fire is the nature of constant movement. Some people experience growth only for a certain amount of time, and then they return to routine; they experience a temporary period of inspiration, where they get up in the morning with excitement to set out on their day. But when someone has a lot of wind-of-wind-of-fire, he has constant movement and growth.

Someone with a lot of wind-of-wind-of-fire is a person who never has rest; he is always moving and

growing. A true Torah scholar reaches this ability; "Torah scholars have no *menuchah* (serenity), not on this world and not on the next."

(4) Fire-of-wind-of-fire is when a person is often moving in an upward direction and he is growing, but with extreme jumps in his level.

To give an example of this, some people have a nature to want to break rules. In whatever they do, they seek how to transcend the limits and rules. It doesn't matter how; the point is, to break the limits. If this kind of person is in a setting where certain rules and limitations are laid down, he will look for ways in which he can somehow not keep to the rules. If he is in a *beis midrash* setting, he is the type to say Torah *chiddushim* which no one else would say, just so that he can veer from the norm.

Earth-of-Wind-of-Fire: Permanent Growth

We have laid out the four branches of wind-of-fire. Now we will go through each of them in detail, in the order of earth, water, wind and fire, beginning from "earth"-of-wind-of-fire.

Earth-of-wind-of-fire, as we said before, is the ability to stay permanently on the level that one ascends to.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the normal process of spiritual growth is called "*ratzu v'shov*" (running and retreating) – there is a cycle of ascending, descending, ascending, descending, etc. The question is: How much time can a person keep his '*ratzu*' (progressing) stage going for? How much time can a person keep his growth going, before he descends back to '*shov*'?

The more a person has grown spiritually, the amount of "*ratzu*" in his life is increased, and in contrast, the amount of "*shov*" in his life is decreased. But there is also another level: where one can get his stage of "*ratzu*" to become more permanent in his life. This is the depth of the verse, "*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy abode?*"[\[2\]](#)

There is a similar teaching, on the verse, "*The heavens are for Hashem, and the earth was given to man*", that the earth is given to people to transform the earth into the heavens, and then new heavens await us after that. This is also describing **earth-of-wind-of-fire**: to turn the Heavenly level he has reached into 'earth' - into permanence.

We will soon explain how a person can accomplish this. But the basic outline of this concept is for a person to expand his point of '*ratzu*' to the point where the gains of his '*ratzu*' stage have become more permanent in his life.

1) Knowing If You Are In Place

Whenever a person grows spiritually, the question is if he is really there or if he's acting above his level. Often a person cannot last permanently in his growth because he is acting above his level; he isn't in his proper place to begin with, thus he is not called one "*who will stand in His holy abode.*"

This is the first thing one needs to ask himself, before he attempts to make his growth more permanent: "The higher levels that I am ascending to - is this my true point of '*ratzu*'? And am I able to live with this level on a more permanent basis?"

If the answer to this is "yes", then the next step is to try to figure out how to actualize it. The next step will be to attempt to make the growth more permanent, but first, one has to make sure that he has given thought to this, to be sure that he's in the proper desired area to begin with.

This is necessary to think about, because we see that when a person loses focus of the area of his newly achieved growth, it is very easy to fall from that level, which in turn causes a person to have a *hesech hadaas* (removal of focus) from the areas that he is striving to grow in. The reason why this happens is because there are many barriers in Creation that prevent our spiritual growth and throw us off course from there.

Besides for the various physical and material issues of life which prevent us from getting further, there can even be certain acts of *mitzvos* which make us lose focus of what we are mainly working on to acquire. When it comes to Torah learning, jumping around between different parts of Torah can take away the focus on the current area of Torah we are learning, which prevents us from being in our rightful place.

The point is that there are many things which cause us to have a *hesech hadaas* (removal of focus) from the place we are supposed to be standing in. For example, in middle of learning a *sugya* of Gemara, sometimes another *sugya* will come up, and people will get very involved in it and discuss it, leaving the current *sugya* entirely, in favor of this new interesting topic. Often it is a topic completely unrelated to the current *sugya*, and it causes people to lose their focus on the actual *sugya* that they are trying to learn.

Although it's still called exertion in Torah if one learns in this way, the person is losing focus of the place he is supposed to be standing in. On an external level, it also causes a person to lose his focus and it hampers his ability to concentrate. But the real problem is that a person will never be able to stand in his rightful place with the more that he is impulsive like this.

One needs to be inwardly aware of where his *proper place* is right now. If one is not aware of what his true place is right now, he will easily get caught up in other areas and veer off track, and he won't even realize this until much time later; and then it will suddenly hit him and occur to him that he has gone off track.

We can see that when a person is capable of very strong concentration, he finds it disturbing to get involved with other topics. The idea we can learn from this is that one needs to be able to *stay in place* and not lose sight of his current goal. If he finds that he can indeed *stay in one place* at a time, this is the first step in being able to hold onto the spiritual achievements and growth that one has gotten to.

2) Awareness To Your Growth

Another point needed (in being able to keep to your level of growth) is: one has to really know if he is involving himself something that is really meant for him to work on or not.

Often a person is not clear if he is succeeding at a certain spiritual endeavor or not. We might ask someone involved in a certain spiritual task if he is feeling the growth of it, and the response is, "I have no idea."

A person should therefore check himself from time to time (at least once a day) and see if he is concentrated on the spiritual task that he is involved with. Others are more self-aware and they don't need to do this. But if one does not have that much heightened awareness throughout the day to his spiritual level, he should at least check himself once a day and see if he's connected to what he is doing. The more a person checks himself like this, the closer he is to staying at his levels of growth.

3) Expanding Upon Our Growth

Another point to consider is that after a person has had a period of spiritual growth, he should make sure that he is still retaining his gains. Life gets stormy and all kinds of 'winds' can come and take

away what we have gained, and for this reason, we have to keep expanding upon our previous gains, in order to hold onto them. One needs to keep deepening his perception of his spiritual gains, and it is not enough that a person already 'knows' about it.

For example, if a person was doing *chessed* every day for a half hour, he should not remain satisfied with the external acts of *chessed* that he has done. He should know what the depth of *chessed* is and keep uncovering more depth to it. Our main growth takes place in our *pnimiyus* (inner world). If one is drawn to doing *chessed*, he should learn each day about what *chessed* is and deepen his understanding about.

This is a very inner and fundamental approach towards living life, but it is a kind of life which is very hidden from most people, even from people who are involved in inner *avodah*.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l once said that he spent half a year preparing a *mussar* discourse. This doesn't mean that it took him six months to come up with the right words. It was because he lived his teachings for at least half a year before he taught about it.

The point is, to keep expanding upon our inner world. This was the way of life which our *baalei avodah* [those Gedolim who explained to us about *pnimiyus* (the inner dimension) and how to serve Hashem] lived with.

However, know that this is a very subtle matter. There were two very different paths of our previous *Gedolim*. Some of our *Gedolim* mainly spent their life immersed in Gemara in-depth, and therefore they had less time to delve into matters that deal with *pnimiyus*. Other *Gedolim*, such as Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, mainly spent their time immersed in *Agaddah* (homiletics) and in matters of Jewish thought, and thus they had more time to learn about *pnimiyus*. However, this is not the main path which most of our *Gedolim* took; it is not our main *mesorah* (chain of tradition) which our *Gedolim* taught. The main path taken by our *Gedolim* was to be more immersed in Gemara in-depth than in matters of *pnimiyus*.)

To give a practical example of expanding upon our inner world: if a person takes on various small resolutions on Rosh HaShanah, the point of these resolutions is mainly about the change of perspective that results from keeping the resolutions, and not the resolution itself.

4) Feeling The Exaltedness of The Growth

Another point involved with holding onto a period of growth is that a person needs to feel the exaltedness (*romemus*) of the higher level that he has ascended to. One needs to feel how it has made him more exalted, and realize that he is now on a higher plane than before. We see that this is true from the fact that when one loses that feeling of exaltedness, he usually falls from that higher level, because he has never tasted the exaltedness of it yet (This is a use of the point of "*ratzu*", and not "*shov*").

This is also known as the concept of "*gadlus ha'adam*" (greatness of man): it is for a person to live in a more exalted state. When this concept is misunderstood, it can lead to *gaavah* (conceit), which is not at all *gadlus ha'adam*. On a deeper note, though, "*gadlus ha'adam*" is really a form of *gaavah d'kedushah* (holy conceit). One can use the feeling of exaltedness as a tool to live more in the higher state he has achieved.

5) Disconnecting From The Past

Another point needed for a person to be able to hold onto a period of growth is: a person needs to cut himself off totally from the previous level he was on.

For example, often a person can grow and become more spiritual, but he still yearns to return to his old nostalgic ways. He might miss the place he grew up in, or his old items he used to own. People often have nostalgic memories of the past. With many people, a large part of the present is spent being immersed in various thoughts and memories of the past.

Rav Dessler would say that only the present moment is worth thinking about, and that any thoughts of the future or the past are in the realm of fantasy.

People feel very connected to their past. We see this on a more extreme level from some people when they get older, like when they are nearing their seventies or eighties, and they never want to think of the future at all [living in denial of the fact of death], and they prefer to dwell in their memories of the past. There are old people who will spend all of their final years writing down the memories of their past, and all they will talk about with people are their past.

This problem can exist in our own spirituality as well. For example, if a person has reached an entirely new perception towards his *davening*, he might still yearn for the pleasure he used to have in his previous level of *davening*, where his perspective was not as mature. He is immersed in his past and he's not able to be fully involved in the present.

The way to solve this problem (of being too connected to the past) is, as Avraham Avinu was told by Hashem: "*Go from your land, from your birthplace, from the house of your father, to the land which I will show you.*" There is a deep power in the soul to leave the past behind, *totally* - and to begin again anew.

One should use this power sensibly, of course. If one goes overboard with this ability, he is always forging new beginnings, and he might become rebellious against his fathers and teachers who have taught him properly. But when used sensibly, this is an awesome inner power in which a person can keep disconnecting from the past which holds him down.

When people cannot disconnect from their past, they stay forever in the place where they are, and they feel like they cannot part from it. They are born in a certain place and they feel that they must live there forever, simply because it was the place where they were born in, and they live there their whole life. There are also people who will never think of leaving their own community and their own *shul* which they grew up around, and they feel like they must stay there their whole life. That is where they are born, and that is where they are buried.

Some people will never move from the house they live in. If the family gets bigger, the house will simply be made bigger to accommodate the growing family. If that can't be done, it feels like exile to the person...

All of these are examples of an inability to disconnect from the past. The concept that was described here in this chapter is the opposite idea of this: a person can develop a power to disconnect.

The more a person has truly grown spiritually, he can disconnect from everything in his life in one moment. This is also the quality of a true *Gadol*, and it is a power that we all inherited from Avraham Avinu. A Jew has the power to renew himself and totally pull away from his past, where the past no longer affects him. It reveals an entirely new dimension to a person, and he gains a glimpse of a higher world. The person will discover that it is actually the nature of the soul to disconnect from the past.

In Conclusion

It has been explained here how one can stay at the higher levels he has reached, which is described

in the verse, *“Who will stand in His holy abode?”*

It was explained here how one can reach a higher point in his *avodah* and stay there. When one does reach it, he will find that the higher point has become simple to him, and now there is a new higher point to reach.

[1] Tehillim 24:3

[2] Tehillim 24:3

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