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Wind-of-Fire-of-Fire: Seeking Perfection

With the help of Heaven, let us continue to explain the element of fire. We will now discuss **wind-of-fire-of-fire** [growth based upon movement].

Wind-of-fire-of-fire is essentially what the *Mesillas Yescharim* describes in the term, “*mevakshei hasheleimus*” – those who seek self-perfection. There are different levels of the nature to seek perfection; we will start to explain the lower uses of this nature and then explain its higher uses.

Materialistic Perfection

In the physical and material world, there are people who seek to have perfection in their life, because they want their situation to be as best as can be, as perfect as can be. This is actually stemming from the “**earth**” aspect (of wind-of-fire-of-fire).

An example of this is the kind of person buying a piece of furniture and he wants it to be as perfect as possible. Or, there is a person who will draw a picture and he wants it to come out perfect. Or, when he is building his *sukkah*, he wants it to look perfect. There is a nature in some people to seek perfection when it comes to physical areas.

In contrast, **wind-of-fire-of-fire** (and especially the “wind” aspect contained in wind-of-fire-of-fire), is a nature to complete and perfect something, covering all its aspects, which uses up all of the possible “movements” of what he is involved with.

Later we will discuss **fire-of-fire-of-fire**, which is when a person seeks to ascend to the highest possible point in something. But with **wind-of-fire-of-fire**, although there is a motivation in the person to ascend, it is more focused on drawing forth all possible “movements” from what the person is involved with.

The “earth” aspect of this is when a person seeks to complete something because he wants to see a finished product from what he is doing. The “wind” aspect of it is that a person wants to use up all possible energy and movement from what he is involved with. Since he is very driven, he will usually complete his work and see the complete results, because utilizing a potential will usually lead to actualizing the potential.

In the “earth” aspect (of wind-of-wind-of-fire), he is not so interested in using all up possible energy from what he is involved with; he just wants to see the completed results. But the “wind” aspect (of

wind-of-wind-of-fire) wants to experience all the possible movements that are to be gleaned from what he is doing.

These are general outlines. Now we will go through this more in detail, beginning from the lower uses of this nature and continuing into the higher uses of this nature. Understandably, it is a nature that manifests both in physical areas as well as in spiritual areas.

Overly Focused On Completion Vs. Not Being Able To Complete

The “**earth**” aspect (of wind-of-wind-of-fire) is where a person seeks to do a perfect job in something because he wants to see the complete results.

When people aim for perfection, they might be acting beyond their actual capabilities, and they become unstable. A person becomes so involved in what he is doing that he completely abandons everything else in his life, in order to complete the project. He can't pull out of what he is heavily involved with and go do something else, until someone else comes and pulls him out of it, because he was so absorbed in what he was doing that he didn't even realize it.

The other possibility that will happen is that the person will give up from ever beginning anything until they finish what they are doing right now. There are people who will not begin to do anything else unless they completely finish what they are doing right now.

Of course, he will do what he has to in life and he will realize that he can't always do a complete job in everything he does, but as soon as he realizes that it is now to begin something else that is important, he is angry at himself for not finishing his previous task, so he disassociates himself from beginning another task. This is a kind of person who seeks *shleimus* (perfection) so much to the point that he is working way beyond his actual energies.

Others have the opposite problem: they like to always begin new projects, but they almost never complete anything. Most workers in a company are able to begin what they do, but they have a hard time finishing the job. Most people have a hard time completing something, and even when there is completion, it is usually a half-baked job which does not look that professional, and it looks instead like an amateur did it.

So there are two different problems in human nature that are movement-related. One kind of problem is where a person has a hard time completing what he does, and another kind of person will be overly focused on completing the task that he cannot begin anything else [which is not as common as the first type of problem].

The Solution for a Person Overly Focused on Completion

If a person is the type to be overly focused on completing what he does, the solution to his problem is that he needs to think about how much time it is going to take up, and he should decide that if it will go over the time limit that he sets for himself, he will stop doing it, even if it remains incomplete.

After all, we really cannot complete anything on this world; it is simply impossible to always be able to do something perfect and complete. We say in the blessing of *Borei Nefashos* that Hashem created “*many souls, and their deficiencies.*” The entire Creation, in essence, contains deficiencies, so we must realize that we are dealing with an imperfect existence. The only perfect one is Hashem.

Shleimus On Our Own Level - Doing As Much As Our Actual Energies Allow Us To

However, there is a deep desire in our souls to reach *shleimus* (perfection), because there is a spark

of the Creator contained in all creations. (We will speak more about this later). But in actuality, we cannot become perfect, because we are living in a creation that has been designed to be imperfect. If you think about it, nothing on this world is really complete.

For example, any object on this world is only considered to be 'complete' when you compare it with other objects that are broken, which makes the intact object look perfect and complete. Thus, *shleimus* on this world is a matter that is entirely relative. With objects, an object is only perfect and complete when it is compared with other objects, but in its essence, it is not perfect.

When it comes to performing work, what is considered a complete and perfect job, and what is an incomplete and imperfect job? It is defined based on the person's particular energies. Thus, if a person cannot go beyond a certain level of capacity to do something, he has done a complete job when he has reached that limit.

From a deeper perspective, it is not his particular level of capacity which defines the job as complete or not, but the results. If a person sees results from what he did, he knows his job is complete.

Sometimes people have aspirations that are unrealistic and they go beyond their actual capacity to actualize them, because they are demanding from themselves a *shleimus* that they cannot reach. Others demand from themselves because they see that others are succeeding and producing results from their work, and this pushes them to work harder, like when a person has a business and he sees others in the same business who are producing better results than he, so he works harder at the job in order to have the desired results. He is working based upon his motivation to see certain results, and he is not working according to his actual capacity.

What defines *shleimus* on our own level? It is when we have used all our energy on something. That is where we reach the "completion" of something. Thus, *shleimus* on this world is all relative. An object is complete when you compare it to another object that is incomplete, and when it comes to our personal world, *shleimus* is based upon how much we have used our actual potential. This is based on our actual capacity, not based on how we compare to others.

In order to have a healthy sense of desiring perfection and completion in what one does without overdoing it, one has to reach a point where he has used up all of his energies on something, and then it is upon him to accept that he has done all that he can do in this situation, which is the degree of *shleimus* that he can reach.

Therefore, when a person is about to begin a certain task, since he does not know how much he will be able to complete it, he should make up beforehand that there will be a certain amount of time for how much he will spend on the job, and then when the time limit arrives, he should stop. Even if he is 100% sure when he stops that the job is far from complete, he must let go of it and now start something else.

That is the external part of the solution: figuring out how much time it will take for you to do something, and then stopping when your time limit arrives. Even if you realized that you made a mistake about how much time you thought it would take, it should not make a difference to you, and you should stop the task and go on to something else.

In addition to this, there is also a more inner part of the solution: You should be aware of the perspective towards *shleimus* that we described above, which is, that *shleimus* is defined by doing as much as your normal capacities allow you to. *Shleimus* is not about being frustrated that you haven't done a complete job and that you will now try to keep aiming to complete it. You can aim for perfection only when you begin to do something. Realize that only Hashem is perfect, and that

humans cannot be perfect; you can only reach “perfection” on your own level, which is based on your own personal capabilities.

Of course, you might convince yourself that you really do have the power deep down to go beyond your normal capabilities. But this is a mistaken notion. It is very possible that you do have hidden strengths, but in your conscious state, those hidden capabilities are not accessible. You need to act based upon your already revealed strengths, and not based upon your deep hidden abilities that you may have; you need to act based upon your current level which you are conscious of. That is your normal capacity, and when you have done all that you can within your normal capacity, that is the *shleimus* that you can reach.

Summary of the Solution

To review, the first part of the solution is to set a certain amount of time of how much you will work on something. As you are working on your task, you can do as much as you can to get the job done, but as you do so, be aware that *shleimus* is not defined on having perfect results of what you are doing, but by how much you have used your actual potential in something.

As you get used to this kind of attitude when you work, you will find that you are becoming more serene from this. It will be a degree of *someiach b'chelko*, “happy with one’s lot.”

The Solution For Those Who Have Difficulty Completing Tasks

So far, we have addressed the nature of those who are overly focused on *shleimus* when it comes to dealing with physical kinds of work. As we explained, most people do not suffer from this problem. (The ones who do suffer from it, suffer greatly).

Most people are dealing with the exact opposite problem than the above: they have a hard time with finishing what they do. They would rather keep moving on to something else.

Reb Elchonon Wasserman had a yeshivah in Baranovitch, and he asked the Chofetz Chaim how to motivate the boys to finish the tractate of Gemara. This is a spiritual example of how not being able to finish is an issue that most people grapple with. In the world of action as well, most people have a hard finishing what they are doing. On Erev Shabbos as it’s nearing sundown, people like to cram in as much work as possible that needs to be done, and if not for sundown, they would probably keep working.

When people keep beginning things and they never finish, this stems from an impaired wind in the soul. Obviously, the way to rectify this problem lies in awakening a desire for *shleimus*.

On a practical level, whenever you see that you have no more energy left to continue what you are doing, try doing just a little more. Maybe you can’t finish what you are doing, but you can certainly do a little bit more.

Telling yourself that you will try to finish is not realistic for you, because you feel far from finishing. You might know intellectually that you need to finish, but your soul is not at peace with this. The practical way of getting yourself closer to finishing things is that whenever you feel that you can’t do any more, you can try doing a little bit more. This weakens your despair at finishing, and now you will find it easier to continue what you are doing and eventually finish. If you keep getting used to this exercise, you will feel closer and closer to finishing every time you feel like you can’t do more; you will that you are less further from the end than you used to be.

In addition to this, there is also an inner part of the solution: every once in a while you should awaken

the soul's desire for *shleimus*.

In many people, the demand for *shleimus* is hidden deep away in the soul, where it remains out of use. The truth is that *shleimus* is the desired point of all spiritual growth, as the Ramchal writes in *Mesillas Yesharim*. One needs to awaken it, on his own current level.

Through getting used to this two-part solution – doing a little more when you think you can't go on anymore, and awakening in yourself a desire for *shleimus* every once in a while – a person will then be able to proceed further in what he is doing and he will feel much less further from completing things. Through getting used to this, a person increases his chances of finishing.

In Summary

We have explained here, briefly, of the different solutions for those who have the problem of starting things, and those who have the opposite problem, of not being able to finish.

Difficulty In Completing Spiritual Undertakings

Most people have an easy time beginning a new tractate of Gemara, but have a hard time finishing. Most people have an easy time making new resolutions to improve, but they have a hard time keeping to their resolutions.

People have difficulty with finishing their work, as we from the physical realm. The advice for this, as we said before, is to awaken the desire for *shleimus*, as well as to move a little beyond your current limit. But when it comes to finishing spiritual work, we will need deeper advice, for the spiritual realm is incredibly complex, and surely the main area of spirituality, which is the Torah, is complex and deep to navigate.

Shleimus (Perfection) In Torah Learning

What is perfection in Torah learning? What does it mean to demand *shleimus* from ourselves when it comes to our Torah learning? There is a superficial demand for *shleimus* in Torah, and there is an inner demand for *shleimus* in Torah.

The superficial demand for *shleimus* in Torah is to wish to know the entire tractate, to wish to know all of *Shas*, to wish to know all of Torah. This is a desire to have something perfect and whole. It is a desire to know everything there is to know, in the Torah. After all, a Torah scholar is defined as someone who can answer a question in any area of Torah he is asked about. If a person is learning a *sugya* of Gemara and he sees that he's missing some information he hasn't learned about, and he is pained, it is because he has this desire for perfection.

However, this is all an external, superficial kind of desire for *shleimus*. The inner demand for *shleimus* is what it means to have exertion in Torah learning and to immerse ourselves in its depth. It stems from the “**wind**” aspect that is in the **wind-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul. It is about deriving all possible kinds of “movement” (wind) from any one area of Torah.

Wind-of-Fire-of-Fire: Covering All The Possibilities - The Depth of Learning Torah With Iyun

If one only learns Gemara in a manner of *bekiyus* (a cursory reading of the Gemara), he is very far from this concept. But even if a person learns with *iyun* (in-depth analysis), he still might not know how to make use of the power we are describing here.

Most people are far from making use of this power. With most people, learning the Gemara with *iyun*

does not go past: trying to understand clearly what it is written in the pages in front of them, as well as a desire that there be questions, answers, and also an understanding in the words of the *Rishonim*. Others have a need to say *chiddushim* on the *sugya*, and others want to produce a new *mehalech* (approach) in how to learn the *sugya*. There are many people like this in today's times, especially in many authors of *sefarim* today, who are motivated by any one of the above reasons.

The depth of learning Torah is totally different than this. The Sages state, "*Hafoch ba, v'hafoch ba, d'kulla ba*" - "Turn it over, and turn it over, for all is in it." In other words, we can keep plumbing into the depths of any one point of Torah in particular and keep seeing the many possible angles of it.

This is essentially the "wind" contained in the soul's **wind-of-wind-of-fire**. It is not simply about wanting perfection. It is to draw forth all possibilities from one point.

When a person is learning more and more *Rishonim*, more and more *Acharonim*, and "more" and "more" thoughts on the *sugya*, although this is certainly commendable and it is necessary for a more complete understanding, a person might still be missing the point of seeing more depth. The purpose of learning with *iyun* is really to see all the possibilities in one point. You can wonder what the possible understandings are, what the differences between them will be, and you can keep doing this endlessly. The Torah is an "endless sea".

This is how exertion in Torah looks like, when it is with the depth of *iyun*. What we are explaining here is that our *iyun* in Torah learning needs to be accompanied with a desire to see all the possibilities in any one point in Torah.

When you reach the point where you feel like you have mentally exhausted the entire *sugya* and you can't see any more possible angles of understanding in what you are learning, only then should you cease thinking about this point in the *sugya* and continue onto the next point.

This power comes from the "wind" of **wind-of-fire-of-fire** in the soul, just as the wind can move in six directions and it covers every possible angle; wind represents the idea of covering all existing possibilities.

In most people, **wind-of-fire-of-fire** remains deep where it is in the soul and largely out of access. Therefore, even when most people learn a *sugya* of Gemara with *iyun*, and they are clear about the *sugya*, and even if they have a *mehalech* towards the *sugya* and even if they have *chiddushim*, there are still much more possibilities that could have been uncovered, had they made use of their **wind-of-fire-of-fire**.

As a result, the person remains satisfied with what he has learned and with the way he has learned it, and he is not interested in hearing other approaches to the *sugya*, even if they are truthful, because he favors his own approach over others'. As the Sages state, "A person prefers his own measurement more than the measurement of others."

Even if his approach towards the *sugya* has left him with many unanswered questions, he is so satisfied and complacent with his own approach towards the *sugya* that it doesn't bother him that there are still unanswered questions. As long as he feels clear about what he has learned, he is satisfied.

But those who seek *shleimus* in Torah will try draw forth all possible angles of understanding in whatever they learn, as much as they can.

Now we can understand the deep challenge that awaits those who seek *shleimus* in Torah and who exert themselves at comprehending their Torah learning. The Torah is "*longer than the earth and*

wider than the sea", and no matter how far a person has gotten in completing the *sugya* that he has learned, all it takes is one thought he hears from another that he never thought about until now, which will make him re-think the entire *sugya* from the beginning. We can never cover an entire *sugya* of Gemara in all its angles. It is simply impossible, and anyone who thinks that it can be done does not understand that the Torah is endless.

When Shleimus In Torah Learning Causes Anxiety

When a person goes overboard, however, with the desire for *shleimus* in Torah (which means to cover all the angles of any *sugya*), he will eat himself up after he finishes the *sugya* and he has tried to cover all its angles, and then he finds a '*shtickel* Torah' he never saw until now, which makes him think that has never learned the *sugya* correctly. He becomes shaken to the core, realizing that he has never really learned the *sugya* as he should have, and that has missed even basic thoughts.

When one doesn't properly understand how to use the power of *shleimus* in Torah and he is too obsessed with covering all the angles, he is misusing this power of the soul, and he will have a lot of grief from this. When he discovers something he was never aware of about the *sugya*, there will be different reactions, depending on what type he is. If he is a *baal gaavah*, he will come up with a way to deny the new thought that he has seen or heard, which threatens his understanding of the *sugya*. Or, he will dismiss the question with a small, half-hearted answer. He can't accept a lack of *shleimus* in his Torah learning.

"*Toras Hashem Temimah*" – "The Torah of Hashem is perfect". The Torah is endless, and no matter how we learn it, it is still "perfect", meaning, there is still more to see in any *sugya* we learn. When one does not know what true *shleimus* is, his perception towards *shleimus* can be detrimental to his entire Torah learning.

True Shleimus In Torah Learning

But when a person merits to access the truth about life, he is aware of *shleimus* as the Ramchal describes it: "One who is *shaleim* (whole) in the holiness of Hashem." What does it mean to become as perfected as the holiness of Hashem? Can a person become as holy as Hashem?? The Sages state that it is impossible to resemble the holiness of Hashem! What does it mean to be an *adam hashaleim* – a perfected human being? It means to reach the *shleimus* that you can possibly reach.

Shleimus does not mean how perfected you are in comparison to others. That is not genuine *shleimus*. *Shleimus* means to be as perfected as *you* can become.

There are two kinds of *shleimus* with relation to yourself. One kind of *shleimus* is where a person reaches his *shoresh haneshamah* (soul root), and another kind of *shleimus* is where you reach as much as you can possibly reach, on the current level that you are on, covering all the possibilities that Hashem has given you, within your current bounds.

When one absorbs this perspective, he is able to seek *shleimus* in his Torah learning. If one is not aware of this point, he will have a hard time seeking *shleimus* in Torah learning, and even if he does awaken a desire for *shleimus* in Torah, it will feel enormously stressful. In order for a person to awaken this point, one must know clearly what the concept of *shleimus* is.

The desire for *shleimus*, which stems from **wind-of-fire-of-fire** of the soul, is the purpose of all our *avodah*. One must be very clear what it is. We can each reach *shleimus* on the current level we are on, and that is called our *shleimus*. That is where we will find our *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind), and that is where we feel *someiach b'chelko*, "happy with our lot".

The Evil of Perfectionism

Only Hashem is perfect and *shaleim*. So what does it mean that we can reach *shleimus*? The desire in our soul for *shleimus* stems from the spark of the Creator that is in our soul, which encourages us to transcend our human limitations.

But this power can be misused: if someone thinks he must be perfect, like Hashem – and he cannot accept it if he's not absolutely perfect – this resembles a subtle form of heresy! He wants to declare himself as a perfect existence, similar to how Pharaoh declared himself to be a god.

There is a demand in our soul to feel perfection, and this stems from the spark of the Creator that is implanted in our soul. But if we are using this power in the soul to wish to be totally perfect, this is *gaavah* (conceit), and it is a subtle root of heresy and idol worship.

Transcendence: Connecting Ourselves To Hashem's Perfection

It would seem that we should uproot the desire to be perfect, since it is the root of heresy. However, Hashem did not implant in us the desire for *shleimus* so that we should uproot it; He wanted us to use it correctly. How do we use it correctly? It is by recognizing that we humans are imperfect, and that only Hashem is perfect, and thus all *shleimus* we know of is relative.

How do fulfill our desire for *shleimus*, though, when we will never be perfect anyway? It is when we integrate our being with Hashem, and then we are connected to His *shleimus*.[\[1\]](#)

This is, essentially, how we transcend. When a person views himself as an "I" that is apart from Hashem, he thinks that "I" have certain qualities and that "I" must be perfect. But when a person penetrates past the "I", he truly demands *shleimus* from himself. The true demand for *shleimus* actually requires a person to leave the ego.

This is a very, very deep point.

In Conclusion: Yearning For Perfection, Even Though We Cannot Be Perfect

At the beginning of one's *Avodas Hashem*, one will not be able to awaken this desire for total *shleimus*, because it will only serve to make him anxious, as we have explained from the beginning of this chapter until now. But at the same time, one must not either deny the soul's demand for *shleimus*. Even though it is not realistic to reach total *shleimus*, it still stems from a truthful place in the soul, so one should not pretend that it doesn't exist, *chas v'shalom*.

Compare it to the Four Species when it is not yet Sukkos, or *matzah* when it is not yet Pesach. Just because you can't use it right now doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

The demand for *shleimus* (even before it can be actualized) is, on a deep level, the power in the soul that can bring a person to the purpose of Creation, where all will become nullified to Hashem and where His perfection will be revealed to all. Therefore, if someone *chas v'shalom* denies his yearning to know of *shleimus*, he is also furthering himself away from reaching the purpose of Creation.

Shleimus is deep inside us, even though we can't yet actualize it [especially at the beginning of our way], and we can definitely picture it to some extent and have a connection to it. It will feel painful to us that we cannot actualize it, but this is a beloved form of suffering to Hashem. It is our task to guard our yearning for *shleimus* until the time comes in the future, where the purpose of Creation will be realized, when we will be able to finally actualize our soul's demand of *shleimus*.

It is this point, which is the **wind-of-fire-of-fire** in our soul, which can bring us to all that we can possibly attain, which will be “*shleimus*” on our own level.

[1] For more on this point, refer to **Tefillah #0122 - Perfection In Torah**

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