

**BILVAVI**

**MY  
HEART  
ASKS**

**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

**PARSHAS CHUKAS 5782**

**ISSUE 248**

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## COMING OUT OF THE VOID

There is a section in ‘*Getting To Know Your Soul*’, on page 132 called ‘*The Danger of the Void*’, where it talks about the danger of emptying one’s mind. That if one is not careful, outside influences can enter one’s mind, and these can be very improper. Now for my question. I used to do a lot of meditation (at a time in my life when I wasn’t as interested in *avodas Hashem*). It was unstructured and I had very little guidance. As a result of his meditation, some sort of ‘outside influence’ entered me. This has had a major effect on my life and *avodas Hashem*. Improper thoughts often arise in my mind. My vision can be strange at times. Sometimes I feel strangely disconnected from myself. Sometimes it feels like I have no feelings at all. I think this ‘influence’ entered around 5 months ago. I know the improper thoughts are from an outside source because I am very careful with guarding my eyes and my personal sanctity; and I have little desire in this area. These thoughts occur unexpectedly and at times when I don’t want them to; *Shemoneh Esrei* for example. Another effect I noticed is that visualizing the *Shem Havayah* has a significant effect; it makes my head feel weird and my vision distort, amongst other effects (one is something that I’m embarrassed to put in writing). I’ve also been getting headaches for a long time, but this could be from another cause.

After reading in ‘*Getting To Know Your Soul*’ about these impure influences, I’m hoping the author can advise me on how to rid myself of this ‘impure influence’ which is having such a devastating effect on my life. Thank you.

**ANSWER** Discover any thoughts that you find pleasant to think about, and write them down. Every so often, review those pleasant thoughts and enjoy the pleasantness of the thoughts, with as little effort as possible to do so. In that way, the “empty void” that has entered your thoughts will become transformed and filled with proper substance. You need to do this gradually and sensibly, amidst pleasantness, joy, with little effort to do so. Gradually, with *siyata d’shmaya*, your thoughts will become filled with the proper content, and along with this, the unrefined “empty void” in your thoughts will become uprooted. As a result, the improper thoughts which are coming from that “empty void” will dissipate as well. Afterwards, with *siyata d’shmaya*, you should develop the appropriate [holy] “empty void” in your mind, and fill it with proper thoughts, in the holy way, with guidance and precision.

## QUIETING THE MIND

When should a person do when he’s trying to quiet the mind but he keeps having troubling thoughts? How can a person quiet those thoughts?

**ANSWER** First a person needs to identify that all thoughts which enter the mind are essentially a “garment” of his soul, and that the thoughts are not the very essence of the soul. After that is clear, a person should allow the thoughts to wander. Then a person should imagine, palpably, as if the thought is entering his forehead and leaving through the back of the head. Slowly a person can create for himself a mental “pattern” of how thoughts enter and exit his mind. Then a person will gradually see that his mind has been quieted.

## REACHING THE ALONE

In “*Da Es Atzmecha*” the Rav explains about developing the space of “alone” in the soul, in the areas of thought, speech and action. In the series “*Da Es Hisbodedusecha*” (Inner Silence) though, the Rav explains alternative approaches to reach this place of “alone”. How can all of these approaches be integrated together? What I really want to know is, besides for doing regular *hisbodedus* when I am away from people, how can I get used to living in the space of “alone” even as am I around people?

**ANSWER** Those are two different ways to reach the “alone”. The purpose is one and the same: to reach the “alone”. The ways to get there differ. Therefore, it is not recommended to try all of the different approaches at once, but to use one path which works for you, according to your nature. You can also try using different approaches at different times.

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH THROUGH THE 4 ELEMENTS

I have heard the Rav discuss in the *shiurim* many different “soul levels” which a Jew can ascend to, which go beyond the “animal” level of the soul (the *nefesh habehaimis*). Briefly, these are the five levels of the soul: *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah* and *Yechidah*.

I understand that the Rav will not be able to explain to me all of the details of this, but what I want to know is: In whatever soul level a person is at - whether he’s at the level of the *nefesh habehaimis*, or the *nefesh Elohis*, or the *Ruach*, or the *Neshamah*, or *Chayah* – how can a person leave his current soul level and rise to a higher soul level?

**ANSWER** All spiritual ascension is a movement of the soul, rooted in the element of wind. This is in contrast to the element of earth, which stays below. One can have a spiritual ascension through any of the active elements [water, fire, or wind]. One can ascend through the element of “water” by being drawn towards closeness with Hashem, as in the verse, “Pull me after You, with desire”, and like the words of the Mesillas Yescharim, “To be pulled after Him like an iron after a magnetic stone”, and like the verse, “My soul thirsts for You.” One can have spiritual ascension through the element of fire, by destroying his current level, which reflects the verse, “All of this is not worth anything to me.” One also have spiritual ascension through the element of wind, when one is constantly moving in spiritual terms, by progressing from one area of the next. Finally, one can have spiritual ascension by way of *mesirus nefesh*.

## THE 4 ELEMENTS IN SMOKING & OVEREATING

I would like to ask the Rav about the Torah’s view on how to (1) quit smoking and (2) how to lose weight - so that I can help my clients who are trying to quit these bad habits.

**ANSWER** The approach to any issue is by understanding the four elements of the soul, through which a person can attain a balance in his personality and thereby modify his behavior. The roots of smoking and being overweight are a result of imbalances in the distribution of the soul’s four elements. Therefore, the solution is to balance the soul’s abilities, and their roots, which are the four elements.

1) SMOKING: Addiction to smoking can stem from an imbalance in any of the four elements, or from several elements together. Therefore, the way to treat smoking issues will vary, depending on the situation.

Smoking can come from an imbalance in one’s element of fire: when one feels a surge of anger (fire), he may be pulled towards smoking as a result.

Smoking can also come from an imbalance in one’s element of water: When one feels a pull towards a “desire” for smoking.

Smoking can also come from an imbalance in one's element of wind: When one seeks an outlet that involves various physical movements which are consistent and pleasant. The movements involved in smoking, such as inhaling the smoke and exhaling the smoke, are ways to calm one's desire for movement. When this is one's main motivation in smoking, the person's habit of smoking is coming from an impaired element of "wind" in the soul.

Finally, smoking can also come from an imbalance in one's element of earth: If one got into the bad habit of smoking since his younger years, when he was acting silly and he habitually got used to it, to the point that it became a regular part of his schedule, his element of "earth" is weighing heavily upon him, expressing itself in the form of an attachment to the habit of smoking which has become a regular part of his routine.

2) OVERWEIGHT: Being overweight can also stem from an imbalance in one's elements – either from one of them, or from more than one of them. Accordingly, the way to deal with the overweight issues is to deal with the impaired element(s) causing it.

Being overweight may be stemming from an impaired element of fire in one's soul: When one feels inwardly empty, and he feels as if he is basically 'destroyed' on his inside [a result of too much dominant fire in his soul], he demands a relief to fill his inner void. This can manifest itself in the desire for overeating.

Being overweight may also stem from an impaired element of water in the soul: When one is simply dragged after a lustful desire for food.

Being overweight can also stem from an impaired wind in the soul: When one is chasing food because he desires the movements involved in getting to the food. The act of eating itself can also be a way for him to satisfy his need for movement which he is not getting enough of.

Finally, being overweight can stem from impaired earth in the soul: When one wants to eat because he wants the feeling of a "full stomach", which makes him feel heavy afterwards. In this case, a person eats until he feels heavy, and he doesn't feel satisfied from his eating until he feels heavy – i.e. "to feel full", after eating. He is ignoring the Rambam's rule about eating, which is that a person should only satisfy a third of his appetite when eating.

## THE ELEMENTS OF TRUTH

Which of the 4 elements does the trait of truthfulness (*emes*) come from? On one hand, the element of wind corresponds to the trait of compassion, or *tiferes* (beauty), the trait of Yaakov Avinu, whose main trait was *emes* (truth). Also, truthfulness "moves" a person towards his purpose, reminiscent of the wind, the element which gives movement and direction. However, truth "destroys" falsity, so that would imply that truthfulness comes from the element of fire. Yet we can also say that truthfulness comes from the element of earth, because it is the recognition of reality as it is (which is a trait of earth).

**ANSWER** There is the kav yemin, the “right line”, which corresponds to chessed, kindness. There is also the kav smo’el, the “left line”, which corresponds to yirah (fear) and din (judgment). There is also the kav ha’emtza, the “middle line”. When the middle line is leaning towards the right line, the middle line is called rachamim (compassion). When the middle line is leaning towards the left line, the middle line is called emes (truth). The Gemara says that the trait of Moshe was emes, and the Gemara associates this with din (judgment). But it is also known that the “pillar of truth” guides and moves each thing from its beginning point to its end point, and when this “movement” is revealed as a love for truth, it is coming from the element of water. This “movement” negates all falsity. In that aspect, truth acts like the element of fire, which negates and destroys (as you alluded to in your question). Truth also reveals what the reality is, and that is the element of earth, because earth contains “truth” and through “truth” the earth can clarify what reality is.

## THE ESSENCE OF TESHUVAH

The Rav explains (in Bilvavi Part V – *How To Do Teshuvah*) that yearly resolutions which people make during the days of *teshuvah* are only feasible for a person who sins occasionally. What, then, is the appropriate path for most people who are not included in this category, and what should most people focus on during the days of doing *teshuvah*?

**ANSWER** The main resolution which is needed is for a person to set aside daily time for solitude to bond his soul with the Infinite, Blessed is He, simply and earnestly, and to speak to Him as one talks to a friend, and to beg Hashem to take pity on his soul and merit him to attach his soul with the Infinite, Blessed is He.

Without doing this, all of one’s *avodah* is delusional, and it is included in the category of one who takes a risky, dangerous path.

This is the fundamental, and the basis, for the entire path of inner, true, spirituality: One needs to set aside time each day and bond his soul with the Creator, whether this is for a little bit of time a longer time. One should not ever miss this daily quota. You should leave civilization for at least once a week and bond your soul with your Creator, for several hours. Then you will merit to know of “*Ain Od Milvado*” (there is nothing besides Him) in the actual sense.

## FIXING OUR 4 ELEMENTS

Rav Chaim Vital in sefer Shaarei Kedushah explains how the bad middos come from the 4 elements, and then he explains the tikkun (repair) for each of them. He writes that conceit and anger comes from the element of fire, and the way to repair these middos is through humility. Lusts come from the element of water, and the way to repair them is through abstinence from This World. Idle chatter comes from the element of wind, and the way to repair it is through silence. Sadness and laziness come from the element of earth, and the way to repair them is by being

constantly happy with one's lot and by acting quickly. Why doesn't the Rav ever mention these words of the sefer Shaarei Kedushah in the series on the 4 elements?

**ANSWER** The words of Rav Chaim Vital were written very generally and briefly. He lays out the opposite of the middah, such as conceit versus humility, lusts vs. abstinence, sadness vs. happiness, and laziness versus acting quickly. In contrast to this brief outline, the series on the 4 Elements divides each middah into 16 parts, the 4 elements that are within each of the 4 elements, and their resulting issues and their corresponding solutions.

## MAIN ELEMENTS OF WOMAN'S SOUL

The Rav explained (based on Chazal) that a woman's soul was mainly created from the element of fire and earth, whereas a man's soul was mainly created from the elements of wind and water. Regarding the topic of sadness, the Rav explained that women tend to become sad either due to the element of fire, or due to the element of earth. Fire-based sadness is when a person acts "destructive" with sadness, feeling that everything is worthless. Earth-based sadness is lethargy. How does this work out with what the Rav teaches in "Getting To Know Your Soul" and in the "4 Elements" series, that every person needs to clarify what their dominant element is? If the Rav has said that fire and earth that dominate a woman's soul, and water and wind dominate a man's soul, then why does every person need to know their main element?

**ANSWER** Our Sages taught us the design of Creation both in a general manner and in an individual manner. On a general scale, men were created from the letters vov and yud in Hashem's four letter name of havayah, and the letter vov corresponds to the element of water, while the letter yud corresponds to the element of wind. Women were created from two heh letters in Hashem's name of havayah, with the first heh corresponding to the element of fire and the second heh corresponding to the element of earth. However, on an individual scale, each soul contains four elements within four elements. Therefore, it is possible for a woman's soul to be mainly wind-of-wind, or water-of-wind, or water-of-wind, or water-of-water. That can all be true with regards to the individual soul of the women. But a woman's general root is either in the elements of fire or earth. The root element of a woman's soul [fire or earth] is sometimes apparent and sometimes it is concealed. But the dominant element of a woman's individual soul is usually more apparent. Therefore, usually a person needs to be involved with the inner work that corresponds to to his or her individual soul, as opposed to being involved with the main elements of one's general soul.

## TECHEILES TODAY

Regarding the issue of *techeiles*-wool, it seems that there are many signs indicating that this [newly discovered *techeiles*] is the true *techeiles*. It doesn't seem to be contradicted from the words of our Sages. Now, whenever there is a doubt in *halachah*, either we can clarify it based on what appears to us logically, or, perhaps we should just remain silent about it, because we are not able to attain

clarity in this generation about something new, unless we have a *mesorah* (tradition) about it. These are the different two options that I recognize, and if there is a third option, can the Rav please enlighten my eyes to it? I don't see any other way about it. I don't understand how it's possible for us not to do a mitzvah of the Torah simply because there are other factors to consider (which exempt us from this mitzvah today), and even if it's all *l'sheim shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven), it's still forbidden to commit a sin for the sake of Heaven, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes...

With deep thanks to the Rav for all the dedication that the Rav has for us.

**ANSWER** The word *techeiles* is from the word *tachlis*, purpose. In the Ends of Days, the time when the *tachlis* (purpose) of the world is being revealed, the spiritual illumination of this *tachlis*/purpose is beginning to shine in the world, and it is shining greatly and strongly. Therefore, this has awakened the revelation of *techeiles*.

However, since the spiritual illumination of the world's *tachlis*/purpose is not yet completely shining, there are doubts about what the perfect *techeiles* is. Therefore, when it comes to this topic, we cannot apply the logic of "Do not add to the words of the earlier Sages" regarding this topic, because this is precisely the spiritual illumination which comes at the end of days, when the *tachlis* (purpose) of the world is being revealed.



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