

LISTEN TO BILVAVI ON KOL HALASHON ISRAEL 073.295.1245 USA 718.521.5231 (2&gt;4&gt;12)

## THE WORLD OF SECULAR PSYCHOLOGY

**QUESTION** The Rav mentions that psychology only deals with the animal soul (*nefesh habehaimis*) and not the G-dly soul (*nefesh Elohis*). But there are people who really need help and they're in difficult situations, so what can they do? Also, can there be more experienced people who know how to apply it properly? Can that avert the problems with it?

**ANSWER** There are people who first got all the material from the outside world and later they look for sources in the Torah for what they've learned. The question is not if the material can 'fit in' to what Rashi is saying, the question is if it can be learned out of Rashi altogether. Why we do we need to go outside into the world and afterwards find sources for it? Even the sources are often weak. People learn Torah and the words of Raboseinu [Chazal and sefarim kedoshim] and whatever can be nursed and produced from their words – that is the way. Certainly a person can find sources for everything he learns from the outside world. But if he would have seen the sources first, he would have a whole deeper and more comprehensive understanding and everything would look different.

According to my understanding, there is not one sensible person in this generation who is able to take all the information from the outside world and sift it out to see if it matches the Torah's view, to know what's kosher and what's not kosher, what's permitted and what's forbidden. In order to do it one would have to be the Rambam. And certainly women and others who aren't knowledgeable in Torah, when they insert whatever they wish and find sources later in the Torah for it – that is the depth of the depth of Galus. If the Steipler in his time said that the generation is exiled to the doctors, today it can be said that we are exiled to the psychologists, the social workers, and the like. It is the depth of a bitter exile we are in. In the previous generation there was Haskalah (*Enlightenment*), and today in the last couple of years there is not only Haskalah but an added dimension in which all of our thinking has become gleaned from the gentile nations.

How did the mistake come to be? If psychology wouldn't help at all, then certainly not even one person would go. But it does help many people – meaning that it's helping people in certain areas

but blocking off other areas. Most people aren't aware of which areas it's helping them in and which parts it's damaging to them in. A person can even come to you and say, "I feel that ever since I started learning psychology, I feel much closer to Hashem." He might be right – but he feels the same exact closeness to Hashem that a non-Jew can also feel. This is where we can find the profound error. Now all of Klal Yisrael has fallen, terribly, into the depth of Galus. Without getting into all the reasons how it came to be, practically speaking we are found in the depth of a profound exile. The soul of a Jew is now found in the depth of the exile of the ways of the gentile nations, and that is where the soul as a whole finds itself in today.

Now, to come and say that there are better ways and less better ways, that's certainly true, but there is not one way gleaned from the outside world which can be called a completely Torah way. It can't be, since it came from the nations of the world. If a person had the knowledge to know which parts he's learning can be added on to what he already knows from the Torah, if he is the Rambam or the Ramban, then that can work. But it doesn't work in the end because a person isn't able to do it properly. There is one particular point that becomes solved, but many other errors come from that one area that became improved.

Practically speaking, to say that people shouldn't go at all, that is also problematic, because there is no one to go to and no one to turn to, there is no other choice of what to do, and the suffering and difficulties which people have if they don't go is bigger, so what should a person do? There is no answer to this. And that is the depth of the exile. The exile essentially means that there is not always an answer to every issue. The Creation is not designed in a way that every problem has a solution. When a person assumes that every problem has a solution to it, this is a child's thinking. He is being like a child who wants his father and mother to come save him from everything. Hashem created the world in a way that there's many problems which don't have a solution.

Certainly, we can cry out to Hashem to be saved. But the salvation doesn't always happen right away. The salvation can come later at the Geulah. The depth of the exile is that not every tefillah gets answered. A tefillah can get answered 20 years later. There are many difficult situations that life may bring – a sudden incurable

illness G-d forbid which the doctors can't treat, general situations in the generation or personal situations in which there is no solution to a problem. If there is no solution, we need to understand the problem, its depth, it needs to bother us, and we need to cry over the depth of the exile and we should not think that this is where the depth of Redemption is.

## CHILDREN – DEALING WITH DANGEROUS TEMPER

**QUESTION** My 5-year old has son has a frightening temper. When he gets angry, he physically attacks me, throws things, locks himself into a room for a long time, and hurts his siblings even when they don't do anything to him. He sometimes takes out a knife from the kitchen drawer and tells his little sister that he wants to kill her. He has a big imagination and he acts out his imagination, and I don't know where he gets his ideas of killing people from, since he hasn't read any novels or watched any movies, he's a totally pure kid. Any advice?

### ANSWER

Chazal said, "Push away with the left hand and draw close with the right hand." When the child is angry and he is trying to hit you, grab him strongly and don't let him hit you, and do the same when he wants to hurt his siblings. Wait until his anger subsides a bit and he has stopped raging, and then give him a tight hug that expresses all your love to him. When he feels your love him through that hug, this will enter into him and slowly penetrate into his innermost depths, which will calm and quiet his soul.

## TERRIBLE TEMPER

**QUESTION** I learn both the simple parts of Torah as well as the hidden dimension of Torah (*pnimiyus HaTorah*), I daven and I do hisbodedus every day about how I can fix my middos, but I keep becoming angry. I keep losing my emunah and I take out my anger on others when I feel they deserve it. I have not succeeded in changing even though I daven so much about my issues. I make kaballos on myself to stop my destructive behavior but I have not succeeded yet do carry out any of my kaballos even once.

I should point out that I rationalize my behavior towards others because I don't see it as directly endangering my Olam HaBa and I just think to myself that it's a problem with my interpersonal relationships. So I rationalize how it's okay for me to let out my negativity and my anger in full force on my wife and kids. It bothers me that I am hurting them. Why can't I succeed at changing my behavior? Why isn't my Torah learning helping me?

**ANSWER** Besides for learning the simple and hidden dimension of Torah, and besides for davening and doing hisbodedus on what you need to work on, you also need a practical order of avodah

for yourself to follow. Take upon yourself two small and practical kaballos a day and be consistent about doing them. This will lead to actual progress.

The Mesillas Yesharim says that Torah leads a person to all levels of growth, but usually a person will also need a practical order of avodah for himself to follow on a regular basis, which accompanies his growth. One needs to go step by step, consistently and gradually. This is the secret of success: By doing practical inner work that is gradual and consistent.

Your inner work that needs to accompany you throughout all of your striving for growth is essentially that you need to acquire self-recognition, by learning about the 4 elements in your soul (*fire, wind, water, earth*). In your case, for example, you are struggling with anger, which is a trait that comes from the element of fire. You therefore need to learn about the element of fire, by seeing the 16 primary subdivisions that come from fire, which you can learn about in the series Fixing Your Fire-Anger. Then you see what you will need to work on.

Simply accepting upon yourself not to get angry anymore is not going to work. It's like if a person were to swear that he won't go to sleep for 3 days. Such an oath is automatically deemed a false oath, because it isn't possible for a person to go more than 3 days without sleep.

A lot of people have the mistaken notion that they can fix their issues just by learning Torah and doing personal reflection on their shortcomings. But that is not how growth works. A person needs practical inner work which he needs to do consistently, which is aligned with his personal soul.

Another mistaken notion is when people accept upon themselves very "general" kaballos which are not practical for them to do, and this leads to failure. Their remedy is to learn about the personal inner work they need to do [based on learning about the 4 elements in their soul].

## BALANCING THE 4 ELEMENTS

**QUESTION** 1-A) I have some questions about the four elements of the soul: The Rav has said that one needs to recognize his/her main element, such as by seeing what one's strongest character trait is and what his weakest character trait is. This shows a person what one's "root element" is. For example, if a person sees that he has a lot of displays of conceit or anger, it shows that his primary element is fire. How can a person identify this?

**ANSWER** 1-A) The process of clarifying one's personal soul is long, and deep. It does not begin with recognizing your worst character trait.

One needs to first recognize all of the abilities in the soul, first the positive powers and then the negative powers. One needs to

identify his strongest point, and then organize the rest of the abilities in his soul, in order of how much they dominate.

After that, a person needs to analyze his strongest point and see what powers (*kochos*) and character traits (*middos*) are contained in it. Within this area, a person should see which koach/power is the strongest, which is second-to-strongest, etc. As part of this clarification process, a person also discovers what his worst character trait is.

Clarifying the strongest element needs to be done on two levels: How much it manifests (*kamus*), and the quality of much it manifests (*eichus*).

In order to figure out the first part (*kamus*), one needs to see which element, ability or character trait he encounters the most and struggles with the most, in his daily life.

In order to figure out the second part (*eichus*), there are many different ways to know. At first, one needs to figure out these two factors: How strongly connected you feel to a particular element or ability or trait in the soul, as well as how much stability you feel the particular element or ability or trait provides for you in your life. Understandably, throughout each part of the clarification process, you should try as much as possible to uncover as many specific details as you can, so that you can arrive at a more precise conclusion.

**QUESTION** 2-B) Does a person also need to figure out his second-to-most dominant element in order to know his most dominant element?

**ANSWER** 2-B) Going deeper into the root of this matter, the main character trait of one's most dominant element [i.e. if a person's worst trait is conceitedness, which comes from one's element of fire] is also connected with one's second-to-most dominant element [i.e. if his second-to-most dominant element is water, his trait of conceitedness is also coming from his element of water], and so forth. However, when it comes to how the abilities are actually revealed in the soul, at the root, each element stands on its own, independent of the other elements. At the same time, the primary element also branches out and mixes with the other elements.

**QUESTION** 2-C) And how can a person figure out anything about his element of water, which only contains one character trait (*lustful desire*)?

**ANSWER** 2-C) Regarding your question about the element of water, you should know that lustful desire is not only the trait contained in water. Water contains many other additional aspects (which are explained in the series of "Understanding Your Middos", דע מוהות המידות - את מידותיך [specifically, in classes 31-65 of that series], and in the series of מים - מועשית הדרכה מעשית דע את מידותיך הדרכה מעשית ("Fixing Your Water"). So it is upon a person to clarify which ability contained in his element of water is his strongest.

Another possibility is that one's element of water is producing a negative character trait that is actually coming from his opposite element, fire, which can show up as either conceit or anger or any other fire-related trait.

Besides for this, Rav Chaim Vital in sefer Shaarei Kedushah lists other character traits that result from the element of water [such as jealousy and envy]. It is possible that one's worst character trait is coming from any of the resulting traits of his primary element.

**QUESTION** 2) In order to figure out one's worst character trait, does a person discover it from knowing his strongest character trait, or his weakest character trait? For example, if a person's strongest element is fire and his weakest is wind, on one hand he will have a problem of being highly conceited (*fire*), but on the other hand, he will also be very inactive, because he doesn't have that much wind and therefore he doesn't want to move that much. [So which of the above is his weakest area?]

**ANSWER** Usually if a person hasn't worked hard to repair and balance the abilities in his soul, his worst character trait will become awakened by his strongest element. This is because one's strongest element is the most active and plays the leading role in the various factors that influence one's soul.

However, one needs to know that there are two possibilities. Sometimes a person's strongest element will awaken a negative character trait that stems from that element [i.e. if his strongest element is fire, his fire will awaken the trait of conceitedness, or anger, or honor, etc.]. And sometimes, a negative character trait will be stemming from his opposite element [i.e. his conceitedness or anger may be coming from his opposite element, his weakest element, which in this example would be water]. This is because there is a rule that "two opposites bear one root", and therefore, each element can either awaken its direct byproduct, or a byproduct of its opposite.

For example, if a person's main element is fire, his worst character trait may be conceitedness or anger. Or, his worst trait might be lustful desire, which is a product of his opposite element, water. And the same is true vice versa, as well as with all the other elements.

Therefore, even if a person finds that he has a certain negative character trait, that is not a proof of what his primary element is [i.e. if one's worst character trait is anger, it doesn't necessarily mean that his primary element is fire]. It's very possible that it's exactly the opposite [his worst character trait, anger, might be coming from his weakest element, which is water]. That being the case, a person needs to do thorough soul-searching, in order to discover what [element] is triggering each of his character traits.

After a person has worked hard at truly clarifying what his strongest element is, and he has also worked hard to uproot his worst character trait, he needs to repair and balance the other abilities in



his soul, which so far haven't been balanced. He can be helped by making use of his strongest element, in order to do it.

**QUESTION** 3) The Rav has said that we balance out the strongest element through its opposite element, even though the opposite element is this person's weakest. From where does a person get the ability to use his weakest element to create a balance in his soul, being that it is his weakest element? Furthermore, even if a person has two elements that are equally strong, one of them has to be the root, and the other one has to be the branch. How can the root element balance out the branching element, being that they are on two different levels?

**ANSWER** 3) Here are some reasons why and how a person can balance out his strongest element, by using his opposite [or weakest] element.

1- One way is by the rule of "Two opposites bear one root". Therefore, a person can discover his strongest element by seeing what his weakest one is. [i.e. If one's weakest element is wind, his strongest element must be earth]. This can be used to repair any ability in the soul.

2- Another way is through making use of the power of free will to choose. Through utilizing the power to choose, one can choose which ability of the soul he will use, and which one he will not.

3- An additional way is, sometimes, a person's strongest ability isn't yet repaired, while his weakest ability is already repaired (*relatively speaking, when compared to the strongest ability which isn't yet repaired*). How do we know if an ability in the soul is repaired or not? Part of the definition is if a person is able to use the ability when the time and place calls for it, in a way that it doesn't backfire on him. In this way, a person is able to use the ability as he wishes [and this shows that the ability is repaired].

4- Another reason is that a person's strongest and weakest elements are not necessarily defined as the "root" of the soul versus the "branches" of the soul. Rather, it is because on one hand, the strongest and weakest elements in one's soul are independent from each other, and on the other hand, they also mix with each other, as stated earlier. Therefore, it is possible for a person to use his weakest element, in order to attain a balance. And even if we do define the weakest element as the 'branch' of its 'root', the primary element – we can still 'move' the 'branch' and thereby repair the root.

5- Additionally, the 'strongest element' of the soul does not mean that this is an element which totally controls all of a person's soul without any means of restraint. The other elements are certainly active and are also affecting the soul. So we can certainly use any of the other elements in order to repair any issue in the soul, according to their abilities.

6 – Each of the 4 elements is comprised of all 4 elements. Even the strongest element is comprised of the other elements, so the other elements will always be manifest to some degree, doing

their respective work. When a person uses his opposite element in order to strengthen his strongest element, he is essentially balancing out the opposite element that is found within his strongest element, using it correctly. For example, if a person's strongest element is fire and his weakest element is water, his element of fire also contains an element of water. The "water" within his "fire" is called his element of "water-of-fire". When this person uses his element of water, he is really balancing out his "water-of-fire". From then onward, his "water-of-fire" will be of good use to him, because it has been balanced. Since his "water" is his opposite element, his element of water will still do its respective work, but now that it has been balanced, it will be beneficial to the person.

**QUESTION** 4-A) Are the four elements all 'wrapped' like a garment around each other, or are they mixed with each other? (*The words of the Hagahos Maharitz on the beginning of sefer Nefesh HaChaim seems to imply the latter*).

**ANSWER** 4-A) There are two different viewpoints. According to one viewpoint, the four elements are offshoots of the other [fire downgrades to wind, wind to water, and water to earth]. According to another viewpoint, the four elements are clothed in each other. According to another viewpoint, they are mixed with each other.

**QUESTION** 4-B) If the elements are all mixed into each other, is it like a physical mixture, i.e. that a person will have 50% fire in his soul, 30% earth, etc.?

**ANSWER** 4-B) Generally speaking, the soul cannot be defined as if it's a 'container' that holds 100% of various soul abilities, i.e. 50% fire, 30% earth, 15% wind and 5% of water. That is not the way to understand it. Rather, each ability in the soul is measured by itself, according to how it manifests and how much it influences the soul, and according to one's nature and temperament, as the Creator has designed the person.

It is only possible to view the soul in terms of "percentages" like this with regards to how much the various abilities of the soul are mixed with each other. The mix of the different abilities in the soul is expressed in the relationship between the different abilities, in their amount and in their quality, as well as in how each ability influences the other.

Even more so, the mix between the different abilities in the soul is able to change, according to the amount of balance that exists currently in one's soul.

Alternatively, when one gives balance to different abilities in his soul, this also changes the mix. Meaning, even if we can measure the percentages of how much each ability in the soul is manifest, the balance between the abilities can change, and then the percentages will change, because the current relationship between the different soul abilities has changes.