



## THE MECHANICS OF MIDDOS

### WHY DID ELIEZER LOOK ONLY FOR CHESSED?

In this week's *parshah*, we see a very interesting criterion for a *shidduch*. Eliezer is sent by Avraham Avinu as a *shaliach* to bring about one of the biggest *shidduchim* in history. The Torah tells us that Eliezer *davened* to Hashem to send him the right girl for Yitzchak. Now, Yitzchak was known for his tremendous and amazing *yiras Shamayim*. If you were to ask me to tell you what to look for when seeking a *shidduch* for Yitzchak, I would say you should find a girl who also possesses tremendous *yiras shamayim*. That would be a match. Someone who is fit to be the mother of Klal Yisrael. But what is the measuring stick that Eliezer uses to decide who is the right girl for Yitzchak Avinu? He looks for someone who is going to draw water for his camels. He tests her with an act of kindness. He wants to know if this girl has got what it takes when it comes to *chesed*.

Rav Elya Lopian, zt"l, asks the following: Okay, so she's a nice *ba'alas chessed*. But what in the world does that tell you about the girl's *yiras shamayim*? There are a lot of nice people out there who do *chesed* but they're not necessarily *yarei shamayim*. Shouldn't Eliezer investigate whether she has *yiras shamayim*? Especially considering the fact that she's the daughter of Besuel the *rasha*, and the sister of Lavan the Arami - a whole family of *ovdei avodah zarah* - and living in a place full of a bunch of degenerates! So why did Eliezer want only to determine whether she was a *ba'alas chessed*?

Rav Elya Lopian says we see from this *parshah* a *chiddush nifla* and something that not every mind can grasp. But it's the *emes*. *Yirah* is a very fundamental aspect of *avodas Hashem*, he writes, yet we see what did Hashem tell Avraham Avinu after he was tested with all these *nisyonos*? Hashem told him *עתה ידעתי אתה*, now I know, *כי ירא אלקים אתה*, that you're someone who fears Hashem.<sup>1</sup>

We have to know, Rav Elya Lopian says, that a person who has fine *middos*, someone who has good *middos* - even if right now they're in a *matzav* where they have not acquired *yiras shamayim* - if they'll come to the awareness of *yiras shamayim* they will pursue it, and they will acquire it easily because somebody who has *middos tovos* has the foundation upon which to build himself and to reach the highest levels. Now what is the *chiddush* (novelty) in his statement?

### YIRAS SHAMAYIM AND GOOD MIDDOS

The bomb *chiddush* in these words is, that if you see somebody who should have been aware of *yiras shamayim*, someone who was exposed to Torah and *mitzvos* and he lacks *yiras shamayim*, what is it exactly that he's lacking? What's preventing him from acquiring and reaching *yiras shamayim*? You know what the answer is? *Middos raos*. Bad *middos*. Bad *middos* is a sickness. It's the prevention. You could have a person who grew up in a *yeshiva*, in a *frum* environment and he may even look *frum*. Maybe he doesn't concern himself much with his mane. Maybe he doesn't brush his hair a few times a day. You want to know, does he have *yiras shamayim*? He looks like he has *yiras shamayim*. He looks the part. The answer is the thing that determines it, the thing that prevents him from *yiras shamayim* is *middos raos*, and the thing that will bring him to *yiras shamayim* is *middos tovos*.

### MIDDOS COME FROM THE FOUR "ELEMENTS"

Now, there's a famous Rav Chaim Vital, zt"l (1543-1620). (see foot note on last page) Rav Chaim Vital was the *talmid muvhak* of the Arizal (1534-1572). One of the *sefarim* that he wrote was *Sha'arei Kedushah* and in that *sefer* (1:2) he discusses the importance of *middos tovos* and what exactly *middos raos* lead you to and how *middos raos* and *middos tovos* work. He explains that just as your physical *guf* is made up of four elements - *eish* (fire), *ruach* (wind), *mayim* (water) and *afar* (earth) - those four elements also make up and contain all your *midos*. All your *midos tovos* and *midos raos* emanate from them. If you want to know why you have certain bad *midos* - it's not because of where you come from or what you've been exposed to. It's because of what you're made up of. You've got too much of one of these elements, or too little of some of the good elements. The balance is out of whack.

<sup>1</sup> ונבוא הלאה בכתיבם: "ואשיבעך ב' אלקי השמים ואלקי הארץ אשר לא תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני וגו', כי אל ארצי ומולדתי תלך וגו'". ובשלישית אומר לה: "אולי לא תאבה האשה ללכת אחרי וגו'?" - "ויאמר אליו אברהם השמר לך וגו' ד' אלקי השמים אשר לקחני מבית אבי ומאריך מולדתי וגו' הוא ישלח מלאכו לפניך ולקחת אשה לבני משם". ופירש"י: "ד' אלקי השמים ואלקי הארץ שהרגלתי בפי הבריות, אבל כשלקחני מבית אבי היה אלקי השמים ולא אלקי הארץ, שלא היו באי עולם מכירים בו, ושמו לא היה רגיל בארץ", ע"ב. ויש להתבונן, מה זאת שדייק אברהם אבינו לומר לו כעת בשלחו את אליעזר לשם - כי "כשלקחני מבית אבי היה אלקי השמים ולא אלקי הארץ"? אך הן אונן ושמעו עוז, דהנה כשהלך אליעזר לקיים שליחותו - היה נרעש ונפחד, והפיל תחנה לפניו יתברך שימיון לו הראייה ליצחק, ונתן סימן בזה בענין שאיבת המים וכו', ובשוראה שנתקבלה תפלתו והנה היא רבקה היוצאת לשאוב מים וכו' - ויקד האיש וישתחו לך". ופלא גדול יש להתפלא כאן, כי אף אם ראה בה מדות נפלאות של גמ"ח הדרך ארץ וחריות - אבל מה ידע אם היא יראת שמים או לא? ואכן גם לא ביקש סימן על זה כלל! היתכן? ומה יועיל אם היא בעלת מדות טובות - וה"ו שמה יראת שמים אין לה? והלא היא בת בתואל ואחות לבן הארמי, ושמה היא עובדת גלולים כמו כל משפחתה ואנשי ארץ מולדתה? האם זו היא האשה הראויה ליצחק אבינו לבנות את בית ישראל? אתמהא! מכל זה למדנו יסוד גדול וחדוש נפלא, אשר לא כל מוחא סביל דא - אבל כן הוא האמת, דאף כי היראה היא העיקר בעבודת האדם, וכמו שמצינו באברהם אבינו ע"ה, שלאחרי כל הנסיגות שנתססה ועמד בכולן, ואחרי כל המדרגות והמעלות שעלה בהן - נאמר לו: "עתה ידעתי כי ירא אלקים אתה וגו'", מ"מ יש לנו לידע, כי אדם שיש בו עדינות הנפש ומדות טובות, אף כי עומד במצב שעדיין לא קנה היראה - אבל אם יגיע להכרה בחיוב יראת שמים ירדוף ושיגגה בנקל, כי מי שיש לו מדות טובות - יש בו היסוד לבנות את עצמו ולהגיע לכל המדרגות היותר נעלות. משא"כ המושחת במדות - חולה רעה היא ואיומה, אשר מעטים מאד זכו להחליף ולהרפא ממנה, וכל זמן שהמדות הרעות שלטות באדם - כל יגיעתו בעבודת השי"ת לריק הוא, והולך לשמיון ר"ל \* \* \* גם יש לידע, כי המדות - בין לטב או למוטב - מורשיש האבות לבניהם אחרים, כמ"ש בתורה ומפורש בדברי חז"ל בכמ"ק ואכמ"ל, והכלל הוא משאחז"ל במשנה (עידות פ"ב, מ"ט): "האב זוכה לבנו בניו ובכח ובעושר ובחכמה", ובכלל "כח" - נכלל גם ענין המדות כידוע, עייכל. (לב אליהו, פ' חיי שרה) \* \* \* כדאי לציון כאן בברי הרח"ו ד' ל' בשערי קדושה (שער ב' פ"ב, המדבר בפנים הנמשך ע"י מדות המונות). חז"ל: "והנה ענין המדות - הן מוטבעות באדם וכו', ולפיכך ענין המדות הרעות קשים מן העבירות עצמן מאד, ובהן תבין מ"ש חז"ל: כל הבעוס וכו', עובד ע"ז מושב וכו', וכן אמרו (ילקוט תנ"א): מי שיש בו גסות הרוח הוא כבוער בעיקר, וראוי לגרועו כאשרי', ר'אין עפרו נגער, וכו'." [

Rav Chaim Vital says that the Torah doesn't discuss *middos tovos*. *Middos tovos* are not included in the *taryag mitzvos*. You know why? Because they are the force that drives a person to fulfill, and enables a person to want to fulfill the *taryag mitzvos*, or not to fulfill the *taryag mitzvos*. A person needs to first work on his *middos tovos* and his *middos raos* to understand what drives him and what motivates him.

## MIDDOS MEAN MORE!

Rav Chaim Vital says that's why *middos raos* are much worse than the *aveiros* themselves, *meod meod*, he says, very, very much. Now we understand why. The reason is because if you have *middos raos* you are going to sin, you're not going to do the right thing, you're not going to have any control of yourself because the foundation is rotten. The foundation of the building determines the strength of the building. If a person does an *aveirah*, as bad as an *aveirah* is, it's not the end of the building. It's only the end if it reveals that the reason why he did this *aveirah* is because his *middos* in and of themselves are rotten.

He says now we understand what *Chazal* say when they talk about *ka'as*, anger. Anger is a very common emotion that people show. What makes a person show *ka'as*? What makes a person get angry? What do you think? Is it because they are hot-blooded? No. What is it that makes a person get angry?

What makes a person get upset is when his will is frustrated. A person expects his will to be carried out, but as we see in life, it is often frustrated and not carried out. Sometimes it's frustrated *bedavka*. The other person decides to annoy you. He says to you he didn't do it intentionally. That's what the person says. But his behavior is one of, "I don't really care. Your will doesn't mean anything because if it meant something to me, I definitely would be sure to see that it was fulfilled." That makes a person mad.

*Chazal* tells us (Shabbos 105b): כל הכועס כאילו עובד עבודה זרה. Now why does it say "idol worship" *davka*? Because it is equal to all the 613 *mitzvos*. It says (Sotah 4b-5a) that someone who has *gasus haruach*, arrogance, he is *kofer be'ikar* and he's deserving to get cut down like an *asheirah* tree and his dust will not be resurrected for *techiyas hameisim*, and many other similar statements. Rav Chaim Vital says, "Understand this very well because the reason for this - the result of *ka'as* - is because these are the foundations and the building blocks of a person."

So a person has to be much more careful from *middos raos* more than he has to be concerned about fulfillment of *mitzvos aseh* and *lo sa'aseh* because a person who is a *ba'al middos tovos* will not find it difficult to follow the will of Hashem. That means you know why many people can't follow the will of Hashem? Because they can't take direction. They don't like to be told what to do. That's why they can't listen to their parents or to their *rebbe'im*. And that's the same reason they can't listen to the *Ribono Shel Olam*.

It's amazing just to think about it. When you see a *bachur* who struggles with getting up to *daven*, what does it look like? It looks like he's tired. Maybe it looks like he's a little lazy. No! It comes from *middos raos*. You know what it is? "Who are you to tell me what to do?! I don't want to be told what to do!" A person can't give in to doing what they are told to do. You see the same thing in little kids sometimes. Ten year olds. They don't get up in the morning. "So what if you want me to get up? I don't want to get up!" They try to find psychotherapists to analyze the child and then they say, "Well maybe he does this because he doesn't have the right appreciation for *davening*." But the truth is that kids who were raised properly do things that they don't understand. They just do it out of habit. It's called that they received *chinuch*. They don't necessarily grasp the depths and the appreciation for anything when they are too young. But they do it because they're trained, and hopefully, when they get older, they'll look into things and they'll develop an appreciation for it.

## MAKING A STRONG FOUNDATION (OF MIDDOS)

Rav Chaim Vital says with this you can understand seemingly strange things that *Chazal* say about *middos*. It says that the *middah* of *anavah*, the *middah* of humility, brings a person to *ruach hakodesh* whereby the *Shechinah* resides upon him. And *Eliyahu zachur latov* says: אין התורה מתפרשת אלא במי שאינו קפדן, the Torah is not going to be explained, only by someone who is not a *kapdan*. *Eliyahu Hanavi* says, "I'm not coming to someone who is a *kapdan*." You hear that? Isn't that unbelievable? What's the *pshat* in that?

The *gemara* says in *Sanhedrin* (88b): איזהו בן עולם הבא.<sup>2</sup> It doesn't say somebody who learns Torah all day long. It says it's someone who is humble. Someone who walks with humility and other similar things. There are many sayings of *Chazal* like this. They don't mention *kiyum hamitzvos*. They only mention *middos tovos*. Rav Chaim Vital says, "Pay attention to this, and will be *matzliach* in life, without a doubt."

A few weeks before the great *tzaddik* Rav Chaim Friedlander (1923-1986; *mashgiach* in *Ponevezh*) left the world, Rav Shach (1899-2001) came to visit him. He asked Rav Shach, "What should I be working on right now? You know what Rav Shach said? "*Middos tovos* because that's what they're going to ask you about first. That's the *ikar*. That's preparation. They're going to ask, 'Did you work on your *middos tovos*?'"

When a guy builds a beautiful building, do you know what the first question someone who wants to buy that building should

<sup>2</sup> שלחו מתם איזהו בן העולם הבא ענותו ושפל ברכ שייף עייל שייף ונפיק וגריס באורייתא תדירא ולא מחזיק טיבותא לנפשיה יהבו ביה רבנן עניניהון ברב עולא בר אבא

ask? "Is the foundation strong?" I knew many buildings that were for sale, and they were cheap. I told somebody, "You know why buildings are cheap? Because the foundations are garbage." I'll never forget the first time I told this to someone. He said, "How do you know that? You don't even know this house." I said, "I'm telling you. If it's so cheap, the house must have an issue with the foundation. You don't give houses away cheap. Why would they sell a house for such a low price?" A guy went to one of those houses. The foundation was so bad that he couldn't open the windows. It already shifted a little bit. The windows wouldn't open up. Every other house on the block was five times the price. He said, "Maybe they're desperate." I said, "Of course they're desperate. They want to put the house in your name before it collapses! They want to at least get something from it."

That's what a person has to know. The *middos* are the foundation and they are the first place to look.

Rav Chaim Vital says that if *middos* is the makeup of a man, a person has to make sure that his foundation is in good shape. He says, והבין זה מאד, understand this very well, איך היסוד של קיום המצוות הם על ידי מידות הטובות, the whole driving force for a person to fulfill *mitzvos* are his *middos tovos*, and the driving force that undermines him is his *middos raos*.

## A DEEP, TRUE ANALYSIS OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS:

### #1 EISH - FIRE

Now you have to know what these four parts are - the four elements in a person's life - and which *middah* relates to which element.

The first one is *eish*. Everybody has *eish*. The element of fire is the foundation for which *middah*? Ego. A person's ego, a person's pride, a person's concern with how he's looked at and how he's viewed, how he's respected, is all based on his *middah* of *eish*. You have to know it's the lightest, he says. That means it has the least pull to come down, the least gravity to it. It's very light. *Eish* goes up. And it's higher than all the other elements. The other elements, such as the *mayim* and *afar* all come down. *Eish* has to do with *ga'avah*. He says *eish* also drives a person to *ka'as* because when a person has *ga'avah* he has expectations. If the expectations are not met then the fellow's fire gets kindled. If a person is humble, however, if he recognizes his *chisaron*, he would never get angry. *Ga'avah* and *ka'as* are one *middah*. They go hand in hand. And if you want to work on your *ka'as*, work on becoming a more humble person.

Now, what are the results of *ga'avah* and *ka'as*? What are the things it produces?

Number one, *kapdanus* is in a person's mind. The guy is *makpid*. The emotion of *kepeidah* (pedantry). If a guy did not have *ga'avah* he would not be *makpid belibo*, just like we said about *ka'as*. When you have a guy that's *makpid*, it is because he has certain expectations that are not met. Some people are *makpid* months, or even years, later. Sometimes a year later they wake up and are *makpid* retroactively. All of a sudden a person may ask his friend, "Where is that thing I once gave you?!"

Besides *kapdanus*, *eish* also leads to *bakashas hasrarah*, seeking control. People like to be in control of their lives and their environment. People want control. People want *kavod*, to control others and dictate to them.

The third result he says is when you don't like somebody else because that person is better than you, or has something more than you. That's also a branch of *ga'avah*.

A lot of peoples' "igniters" are out of whack, and their "regulators" that regulate their flame are broken. And that causes people to make their *eish* go up more than is called for. All of these are associated with the *middah* of *eish*, too much *eish* or too little *eish*.

Now, a person has to sit and think about this and figure out how much of a *kapdan* he is. How much of a person is he, who is going to be *makpid* or not be *makpid*. A person doesn't like to be told what to do. "Do this. Don't do this." People don't like it. Where does that come from? Does not liking to be told what to do come from having too much of the element of water? No. It comes from too much *eish*. It's pride. People want to be in charge of their own lives or of others. That's number one.

### #2: RUACH - AIR

Number two, Rav Chaim Vital says, is the *yesod* of *ruach*, how much *ruach* you've got in you. What does *ruach* cause? Your mouth is where the *ruach* is produced. *Ruach* relates to *dibur*. If you have ever seen, there are some people who can talk and talk and talk and talk about things that have no relevance whatsoever. They don't serve any need for the *nefesh* and no need for the *guf*. Just to talk. That means a little too much air was put into your balloon.

Now, this is an amazing thing. People think it's a young person's behavior. It is not. There are people who can *shmooze* for hours, entire nights, day after day! They could talk before *shemoneh esrei*, during *shemoneh esrei*, after *davening*. They go out in the middle of *davening* or *krias haTorah* and *chap a shmooze*. You could think it is a case of, "Wow, I haven't seen you in years!" No, it's not that. It really comes from the power of speech, which means that you have too much helium gas in your balloon.

Now, what are the *aveiros* that come out of having too much *ruach*. Isn't that a nice thing? We're being friendly with others, no? So Rav Chaim Vital says, first of all, it leads to the *ruach nasneker*. Lies can come from too much *ruach*. *Lashon*

*hara* comes from too much *ruach*. For a person to toot his own horn comes from too much *ruach*. A lot of people like to toot their own horn, you know. "Do you like my tie? Do you like my shirt? Hey, that's a Ferragamo belt I have!" You understand? The guy blows his praises, "You see my this or that? You see the way I look? You see my jacket? You see my pants? You see my Louis Vuitton shoes?" And they get all blown up about it. Just to talk about it. It doesn't do anything. It doesn't serve any purpose whatsoever. That's all because of having too much *ruach*, he says. And another thing is the ability to flatter others. I'm not talking about encouraging others, but flattering others in a false manner.

A person may have a *ruach* problem and an *ish* problem. If you get the *ish* together with the *ruach* it's definitely going to be a very combustible situation. That's going to create a great conflagration and a great BOOM!

### #3: MAYIM - WATER

Then you have the *yesod* of *mayim*. What is the *yesod* of *mayim*? The *yesod* of *mayim* involves the desire for physical *ta'anugim*, physical enjoyments. People have a desire for all types of *ta'anugim*. Things that aren't necessary are *ta'anugim*. The drive for *ta'anugim* comes from too much water. (So if I tell you that you're soaking wet, now you know what I mean. Soaking wet means that you are driven to *ta'anugim*.) What *aveiros* does that lead you to? To steal from your fellow man, like coveting someone else's spouse, ולא תחמוד אשת רעך. It also leads to jealousy because if I'm seeking *ta'anugim* and I see somebody else has that *ta'anugim* it causes me to be jealous since I also want to have those *ta'anugim*. I can't live and let live.

### #4: AFAR - DUST

And then there's the fourth element and that's the *yesod* of *afar*. What does *afar* lead to? *Afar* brings a person to depression. If you see a person who is depressed or you yourself are feeling depressed, do you know what that means? You have too much *afar* in you. Your *afar* level has risen. You've got to dredge the *afar*.

You know what depression causes? It causes *atzlus*, laziness. Whenever you see somebody who is acting like a sloth or acting lazy, that person is wearing a sign on his head. "I am suffering from depression. I'm not happy."

But most people think the opposite, that if you're lazy, you get depressed. No. It starts with the *middah* of depression. Too much *afar*. You feel heavy. That means you do not feel light. You become sad. When a person becomes sad, they now become lazy. And then, you can't be *mekayem* Torah and *mitzvos*. But the root of the problem is not laziness. It's the sadness that's the problem.



Let's say you see a *bachur* who has a struggle with getting up. He looks very lazy. You tell him you know what the problem is? "You're depressed. You're not a happy person." But he will tell you, "Oh no, I'm a very happy person. I'm just not happy doing this," and all kinds of *bubbe ma'ases*. It all stems from *middos raos*, rabbosai. The *middah ra'ah* is sadness, *atzvus*.

Now, he says what causes a person to be depressed? Now, sometimes it's a neurological problem. Something's wrong in the mind. The screws are not tight all the way, and that makes a person depressed. But do you know what makes a person depressed in general? Rav Chaim Vital says that any depression is caused by a person's lack of fulfillment. That means he doesn't feel he has the things he needs. And when I don't have what I think I need, I get depressed.

Here is a guy who decides he needs a fancy phone. I've seen many people get really depressed over something as silly as that. It doesn't make a difference what it is. It doesn't have to be a phone, obviously. If you need something and you don't have it, and you, and you can't get it, you're going to get depressed.

If a person feels he has *yesurim* and he can't shake the *yesurim*, he also gets depressed. When a person is lacking something, or he has *yesurim*, he lacks his health or his freedom to do what he wants, what happens is he's not *sameach bechelko* from anything. And he doesn't have the ability to be thankful for what he has.

3 והנה ענין המדות הן מוטבעות באדם בנפש השפלה הנקראת יסודית הכלולה מארבע בחינות, הדומים והצומחת והבהמית והמדברת. כי גם הן מורכבות מטוב ורע, והנה בנפש הזה תלויות המדות הטובות והרעות והן כסא ויסוד ושורש אל הנפש העליונה השכלית אשר בה תלוין תרי"ג מצות התורה כנוצר לעיל בשער ראשון. ולפיכך אין המדות מכלל תרי"ג מצות, ואמנם הן הכנות עקרויות אל תרי"ג המצות בקיומן או בביטולם, יען כי אין כח בנפש השכלית לקיים המצות על ידי תרי"ג איברי הגוף אלא באמצעות נפש היסודית המחברת אל הגוף עצמו בסוד (ויקרא י"ז ו"ד) כי נפש כל בשר דמו בנפשו הוא, ולפיכך ענין המדות הרעות קשים מן העברות עצמן מאד מאד. וזוהו תבין ענין מה שאמר רבותינו ז"ל (שבת דף ק"ה ע"ב), כל הכועס כאלו עובד עבודה זרה ממש שהיא היותר שקולה ככל תרי"ג המצות, וכן אמרו (סוטה דף ד ע"ב - ה ע"א) מי שיש בו גסות הרוח הוא ככופר בעיקר וראוי לגדעו כאשירה ואין עפרו ננער וכו' וכאלה רבות. והבן זה מאד, כי להיותם עקרים ויסודות לא נמנו בכלל תרי"ג המצות התלויות בנפש השכלית, ונמצא כי יותר צריך לזוהר ממצות הרעות יותר מן קיום המצות עשה ולא תעשה כי בהיותו בעל מדות טובות בנקל יקיים כל המצות. וזוהו תבין גם כן דברים מתמיהין שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל בענין המדות, כי הענוה ושפלות מביאין לידי רוח הקדש ושורה עליו שכינה ואמר אליהו זכור לטוב (כלה רבתי פ"ה) אין התורה מתפרשת אלא במי שאינו קפדן, אף אני איני נגלה אלא למי שאינו קפדן, וכמו שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל שלחו מתם (סנהדרין דף פ"ח ע"ב) איזהו הן העולם הבא כל שהוא שפל ברוך וענותן וכו' וכאלה רבות, לא זכרו בהן קיום המצות אלא המדות הטובות. ושים בעיניך דברים אלו ותצלח דרכך בלי ספק. ואמנם כמו שארבעה יסודות גופניים הם שרשים שמהם נוצרו תרי"ג איברי הגוף, כמו כן נפשיות הארבעה יסודות האלו הם יסודות לכל מדות טובות ורעות אשר באמצעותם יקיימו או יתבטלו התורה והמצות שהם תרי"ג מארבע אותיות הוי"ה כנוצר לעיל. והמקיימן הם נפש השכלית הכלולה מארבעה היסודות ורוחנים אשר ממש חוצבו תרי"ג איברי הנפש ההיא. והבן זה מאד, איך היסוד של קיום המצות הם על ידי מדות הטובות וכן בהפכם. וזה ענינם כבר נתבאר כי כל אשר עשה האלהים כלול מטוב ורע זה לעומת זה, והנה כמו שארבעה היסודות הגופניים הנקרא חומר היסודות מורכב מטוב ורע ומשם באים כחות קיום הגוף או תחלואיו שהם ארבע מרות, מרה לבנה מרה ירוקה מרה שחורה מרה אדומה, כמו כן בנפשות הנקראות צורות, הארבעה יסודות הם על דרך זה טוב ורע, ומהם נמשך בריאות הנפש היסודית שבאדם שהם מדות הטובות, או תחלואיה שהם מדות הרעות הנמשכות מארבע קליפות טמאות שבנפש ההיא וכשיסירים מעליו יתלבשו אותיות ארבע של הוי"ה שהם אור המחיה נפש היסודית, וגם היא והגוף שלה יהיו מרכבה אל קדושתו ויתברך שבעולם העשיה, כמו שנתבאר בנפש השכלית ממש בקיימה המצות. וזכור ואל תשכח כי גם על ידי עסק התורה בארבעה פירושים שסימנם פרד"ס, פשט, רמז, דרוש, סוד, יהיה רוחו השכלי כסא אל שם הוי"ה שבעולם היצירה, וכן על ידי המחשבה והכונה תהיה נשמתו השכלית כסא לשם הוי"ה שבעולם הבריאה. ונחזור בביאור ארבעה היסודות שיש אל קנין המדות. דע כי כל המדות הרעות מושרשות בארבע מדורות נפש היסודית מצד הרע והקליפה אשר בה, ולכן כל המדות רעות נחלקות לארבעה מינים, וזה פרטם. יסוד האש יסוד המים יסוד הארבעה יסודות שיש אל קנין המדות. דע כי כל המדות הרעות מושרשות בארבע מדורות נפש היסודית מצד מפני הגאווה מתכעס האדם כשאין עושים רצונו, ואילו היה שפל רוח ומכיר חסרונו לא היה מתכעס כלל, נמצא כי הגאווה והכעס מדה אחת הם. ותולדותיה שלש. הקפדנות בלבד כי לולא הגאווה לא היה מקפיד בלבד, כענין שבארנו בענין הכעס ובקשת השררה והכבוד להתגאות על הבריות. והשנאה לזולתו על היותו גדול ממנו, וזה ענף מהגאווה גם כן. יסוד הרוח יסוד המנוע ממנו נמשך דבור הנקרא שיחה בטלה לדברים שאין בהם צורך כלל או נפשי או גופני. ותולדותיו ארבעה. והן, לדבר חנף, ושקרים, ולשון הרע, ולגלות שבחיו לבריות להתגדל בפניהם. יסוד המים ממנו תאות התענוגים כי כן המים מצמיחים כל מיני תענוג, ותולדותיה שתיים. החמדה, לגזול ממון חברו ואשתו וכל אשר לו להתענג בהן. והקנאה, כי יקנא בחברו, אשר לו ממון רב וכיוצא להתענג בו. יסוד העפר ממנו מדת העצבות בכל פרטיו, ותולדותיה אחת, והוא העצלות לקיים התורה והמצות מפני עצבוננו על השגת קניני הבלי העולם הזה, או על היסורין הבאים עליו ואינו שמח בחלקו בשום דבר, גם עינו לא תשבע עושר. נמצא כי אבות כל המדות הרעות הם ארבעה, הגאווה והכעס הנכלל ומתדבק עמה, והשיחה בטלה, ותאוות התענוגים, והעצבון, וארבעתם נמשכות מארבע קליפות היצר הרע שבנפש היסודית. והפכם הם ארבע מדות טובות נמשכות מארבעה יסודות הטוב שבנפש היסודית. והם, הענוה שהיא תכלית השפלות ומתרחק מכל מיני כעס הבא על ידי גאווה. והשתיקה כאלם לא יפתח פיו לבד בעסק תורה ומצות או בהכרחו לקיום הגוף ולצורך כבוד הבריות, והמיואס בכל תענוגי הגוף ומותריו המוכרחים. והשמחה התדירית בחלקו, כי כל דעבדין מן שמיא לטב, וגם לרזי עצמו בתכלית השמחה בעבודת קונו וכמו שכתוב (תהלים קי"ט קס"ב) שש אנכי על אמרתך כמוצא שלל רב, וכמו שאמרו רז"ל (אבות א' ט"ו) עשה תורתך קבע ומלאכתך עראי. נמצא כי בהיות מדות הרעות קבועות באדם נמנע הוא מלקיים התורה והמצות, וגם אם יקיימם יהיה שלא לשם שמים ובטורח גדול, ועליו נאמר (משלי י"א כ"ב) נזם זהב באף חזיר וגו', כי עוד טומאות בו מלובש תוך הקליפות, וכמו שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל (יומא דף ע"ה ע"ב), זכה נעשית לו תורתו סם חיים לא זכה נעשית לו סם המוות, וכאשר יתגבר על יצרו וילחם בו ויסיר מעליו מדותיו הרעות על ידי טרח ויקיים התורה והמצות יקרא צדיק גמור ירא שמים גבור הכובש את יצרו, וכאשר יתנהג ויורגל יותר בזה עד אשר יוסרו מעליו כל מדות הרעות לנמרי ולא תתאוה להם נפשו כלל ויקנה המדות הטובות בקנין בטבע ולא יצטרך ללחום עם היצר הרע כי גופו ונפשו היסודית מנוקים מכל סיג החומר כמו שנאמר במשה (שמות ג' ה') של נעליך מעל רגליך כנוצר בספר 'התקונים (תיקון ל"א ותיקון מ"ח), אז יתלבשו בו ארבע אותיות ההוי"ה ויהיה כסא קדוש למרכבתו ויתברך וזה האיש נקרא אוהב את המקום מאהבה ונקרא חסיד גמור השלם בכל מיני השלימות, וכו'.


The Bottom Line


It's not a coincidence that when Eliezer searched for Yitzchak's shidduch, he specifically looked for a girl with good *middos*, as opposed to someone with Yitzchak's level of *yiras shamayim*. We learn from this that lacking good *middos* prevents one from building a strong foundation for self-growth to reach one's potential, acquiring *yiras shamayim*, and being able to control oneself and do the right thing. Good *middos* allow us to listen and follow the Torah's dictates and those of our parents and *rabbeim*. All negative *middos*, like *kepeidah*, negative speech, self-aggrandizement, flattery, pursuing pleasures, and even depression, emanate from a disbalance in one of the four basic elements of which a person is formed: fire, wind, water, and dust. Having a clear understanding of what component is the primary driver in a person's negative behaviors and personality flaws is essential to start working on one's *middos*, which has a direct correlation to our Avodah and mitzvah performance. This coming week, I will, *bli neder*, analyze my top negative traits through the prism of the four primary elements that drive those traits (i.e., fire/*gaivah*, air/negative speech, water/desire for pleasures, dust/depression) to determine which corresponding positive *middos* (see footnote #2) will realign these negative traits (i.e., humility, keeping silent, aversion to extra pleasures, being satisfied with my lot).