

ROSH HASHANA 5769 GETTING TO KNOW OURSELVES

This dvar Torah is an introduction to the Torah we will learn together over Rosh Hashana. This year I have chosen to focus the four drashot on the four elements of the world, **Fire, Wind, Water and Earth**.

The Rambam (hilchot yesodei hatorah chapter 4) in the footsteps of the Greek philosophers understands the concepts of creation to be based upon these four elements. Many commentators on the Torah explain the verses in light of this. Thus when the Torah says, "These are the derivatives of heaven and earth" (Breishit chap. 2), The Tzafnat Paneach explains that of the four elements two can be attributed to heaven and two to earth. The elements of fire and air rise up while the elements of water and earth go downwards, referred to as earth. The commentaries further understand man to be made up of these elements and thus the elements of earth with the spirit of life joining to make up a human being. (Breishit chapter 2 verse 7)

The kabbalistic masters and numerous ethical writers, not commenting on the scientific veracity of this understanding of the world and its physical make up take us on a different route of understanding. The physical world is merely a manifestation of spiritual realities. The human nature and personality is made up of tendencies in these four elements. There will be those who exhibit a personality of fire, while others will be drawn to water. Some will find their challenge in the element of air while others battle with the element of earth. We all have all four tendencies yet our strength and therefore our challenge will be found more specifically in one of them.

Rav Chaim Vital (shaarei kedusha) teaches that fire is the source of anger, pride, demanding honour and the like. Air is the challenge of speech. Water is the attraction to life and its pleasures, lust, greed, physical desire and the like. Earth is inert in nature, it is hard to move and tends to be still, the tendencies to laziness, and sadness and despair, things that stop us from moving forward are the challenge of earth.

I look forward to sharing some of these ideas with the community over Rosh Hashana. On the first night we will learn about earth, on the first day, air. On the second night, water and prior to the shofar blowing on the second day we will study fire.

May the entire community be blessed for a Shana Tova, filled with Hashem's richest blessings and may we share a meaningful Yom Tov period as we enter the month of Tishrei, filled with festivities, satiated with Hashem's mitzvot.

Rabbi Craig Kacev