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ROOT OF DESIRES

UNEDITED INTERNET VERSION

2019

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The Element of Water: The Root of Desire

With the help of Hashem, we have so far learned about the element of earth in the soul, which included the topics of sadness, imagination, and laziness. Now we will start to discuss the element of water.

Rav Chaim Vital writes that the trait of desire (*taavah*) is rooted in our element of water. As we have said in the past, there are four root elements, each with four branches, adding up for a total of 16 possible scenarios. (And this can also subdivide even further).

Earth-of-Water: Materialistic Desires

Being that each of the elements contains aspects of the other four elements, the element of water also contains aspects of earth, wind, and fire (in addition to its primary ‘water’ aspect). Thus, in the element of water, there is also earth, so there can be desires which stem from the “**earth**” aspect of-water.

Desires stemming from **earth-of-water** are desires that are materialistic in their nature, resembling the earth, the root of all material. There are four kinds of desires that branch out from this type, but that they all have in common is that they are all desires for This World; they are all “materialistic” kinds of desires.

The Four Branches of Earth-of-Water

Within this kind of desire - ‘earth-of-water’ - there are four divisions that come from it, which involve aspects of all four elements: earth, water, wind and fire: (1) ‘Earth’-of-Earth-of-Water, (2) ‘Water’-of-Earth-of-Water, (3) ‘Wind’-of-earth-of-water, and (4) ‘Fire’-of-earth-of-water.

- (1) **‘Earth’-of-Earth-of-Water** is when a person has desires for money and acquisitions (the ‘earth’) of This World.
- (2) **‘Water’-of-Earth-of-Water** is when a person desires to seek pleasure. The deeper understanding of this is that when a person desires something, it is not just because he seeks pleasure, but because he feels a *pull* towards it; he is being dragged towards it. The actual desire is not coming from a need for pleasure. When a person either sees or hears something that he feels a pull towards, these desires stem from the ‘**water**’ aspect that is

¹ <http://www.bilvavi.net/english/fixing-your-water-001-desires-introduction>

within **earth-of-water**. The person gets dragged after the desire, resembling the nature of water, which flows in a certain direction and drags things with its current.

(3) **‘Wind’-of-Earth-of-Water** is when a person wants something and, because he wants it so badly, he moves very quickly towards fulfilling the desire. This resembles the nature of wind, which represents movement. After the person feels like he’s getting ‘dragged’ after his desire, he is also led to move very quickly toward fulfilling it.

(4) **‘Fire’-of-Earth-of-Water** are desires which draw a person due the ‘heated’ nature of the desire, creating a passion towards fulfilling the desire. The person feels a kind of ‘heat’ that is coming from the desire, and because he wants to feel its heat, he pursues the desire. Examples of this include the desire to steal or the desire to engage in forbidden relationships. *Chazal* say that these two desires, from all desires that exist, are the most intense. These are just examples, but the general idea is that when a person feels a fiery kind of passion for something evil, his desires are coming from ‘fire’-of-earth-of-water.

These are the four kinds of desires which come from our element of earth-of-water: the desire for materialism (earth-of-earth-of-water), feeling a pull towards a pleasurable desire (water-of-earth-of-water), moving quickly and rapidly towards the desire (wind-of-earth-of-water), and desires that are heated and passionate in their nature (fire-of-earth-of-water).

We will now begin to explore each of these kinds of desires, which all stem from **earth-of-water** that is within our element of **water** in the soul, the source of desire.

Earth-of-Earth-of-Water: The Lust For Money

Desires stemming from earth-of-water are materialistic desires, and in particular, desires stemming from the “earth” aspect of earth-of-water refers to the classic example of a desire for the materialism of this world: a desire for money.

Some people have a desire for money simply because they need to have their basic needs, such as a house and clothing. They do not have an actual desire for money, only for what results from the money. We are not speaking about this here.

We are talking about people who have a love for making money, simply for the sake of money. It is referring to the type of person whom *Chazal* say about, “One who loves money, will never be satisfied by money.”

It’s not because these people are worried about “What will be...?” if they don’t have money, and it is not because these kinds of people have a desire to gain status through having a lot of money. Rather, we are referring to someone who simply loves money - for the sake of money.

Most people who are still learning in *Kolel* do not know what this desire is. There are some *Kolel* men who like to own various items and objects, but this is more of a curiosity, not a desire

for acquisitions of This World. But people who are working to make a living are familiar with the desire for money for the sake of money itself, and they struggle with this kind of desire.

Water-of-Earth-of-Water: The Desire For Fun In The Water

Now we will discuss desires that stem from **water**-of-earth-of-water, which is the desire to simply immerse oneself in a pleasurable experience. These are the most common kinds of desires that the secular world pursues. It is mainly manifest in the desire of people to spend lots of time in the water and have fun with water; to go swimming. It is essentially a desire to be immersed in water. Hence, it is a desire that stems from the “water” aspect of earth-of-water.

In today’s day and age, if a person is a pleasure-seeker and he has even a little bit of money, it has become the norm that he makes a pool in his house. These are people who simply love to be in the water, so that they can be fully immersed in the pleasure of being in water.

(A desire to drink water is not coming from this. We are talking about someone who likes to be *in* the water, not someone who merely *desires* water). This desire can be further examined and subdivided. If a person has more of a desire to sit in a hot pool [i.e. a Jacuzzi], this is coming specifically from the ‘fire’ aspect of his water-of-earth-of-water, and if he likes to swim in a cold pool, this is coming from ‘water’ of water-of-earth-of-water.

Once a person is in the pool, he likes to splash around in it and swim around in it with all kinds of movements, which would seem to imply that it comes from a desire for movement, which stems from ‘wind’ in the soul. But those desires are only branching out of the primary desire to be in the water, so the desire to go swimming stems from **water**-of-earth-of-water.

Wind-of-Earth-of-Water: The Desire For Fast-Moving Action

Desires stemming from **wind**-of-earth-of-water are also very common. These are desires in which a person enjoys rapid movement – such as the desire to be in a car or vehicle that’s driving very fast.

Just as there are people whose main desire in life is to have fun in the water, so are there people whose main enjoyment in life is to enjoy fast and rapid situations. The pleasure here is being derived from the fast movements involved in it, not from a mere desire to immerse oneself in pleasure.

Fire-of-Earth-of-Water: Desires Stemming From Sights

Desires stemming from **fire**-of-earth-of-water are when a person sees something that catches his eyes, and then he desires it. Visual desires stem from the ‘fire’ aspect within earth-of-water, just as fire is bright and noticeable to the eye. It is a desire (water), for worldly sights (earth), and the key element of the desire is the visual experience of it (fire); hence, desires of the eyes are coming from **fire-of-earth-of-water**.

We find this in the first time that the topic of desire is mentioned in the Torah. When Chavah saw the *Eitz HaDaas*, the *possuk* says, “*And she saw that the tree was good, and that it was desiring to the eyes.*”

Chazal say that “The eyes see, the heart desires, and the actions complete.” In this statement, *Chazal* are telling us that the eyes are the source of desire, because if our eyes wouldn’t look at something, we wouldn’t desire it. It all starts from the eyes.

It is the eyes of a person, the sense of sight, which mainly drag a person after desires, much more than the other senses of the body. The sense of sight is the most sensual from all the senses, and thus it is considered to be the source of desires.

We have so far laid down the issues that result from earth-of-water in the soul, the source of desires for This World. Now we will begin to go through the solutions to each of these [in this chapter, we will only cover earth-of-earth-of-water, the desire for money. The other topics will be covered in the coming chapters].

The Desire For Money: A Desire For Permanence

The first kind of desires we described are desires that stem from **earth-of-earth-of-water**. This is referring specifically to the desire to own money and acquisitions.

First we will mention that there also exist two other reasons why a person would like to own and possess things. If he enjoys owning money and acquisitions because this makes him feel like he is moving in his life and that he’s getting somewhere in his life, this comes from the element of wind in the soul, the root of movement. We are not discussing this here.

There is also a kind of person who likes to own new things, because he needs a sense of renewal in his life. We are also not discussing this here, because this merits a separate discussion.

Here we are discussing the desire in a person to own many things, simply for the sake of acquiring money, possessions, and financial security.

The desire to own possessions is also present even amongst those who live a frugal and Torah lifestyle, who are less into worldly pursuits. However, they have it on a much lesser degree than those who work to make a living. People who are working feel much more of a need to own things. In any case, all of us have a desire to own things, and therefore, all of us possess a desire for money, some more and some less.

There is a deep reason, though, of why we like to own things. *Chazal* say, “Hashem desired to have a dwelling on this world.” Hashem has a “desire”, so to speak, to dwell on this world. This is the root of Creation – Hashem desired to dwell on our world, and that is why He created this world. He desires to dwell among us, even though we live in the lowliest realm in Creation. This is also the root of all holy desires in man: the desire to permanently dwell in something.

But when the power of desire in a person is used for evil, a person wishes to ‘permanently’ dwell in the materialism of This World.

Our *avodah*, when it comes to fixing this aspect of ourselves, is to steer our desire for permanence in a positive direction. Instead of desiring a sense of permanence of This World, we need to channel this desire towards holiness.

The solution to this desire will be two-fold.

1. Getting Used To Giving Tzedakah

The first and simple part of the solution is to simply get used to using our money for the sake of a *mitzvah*, which can slowly chip away at our desire for money, with the more we get used to this. For example, one should regularly get used to giving *tzedakah* more often. This in turn sanctifies his money, as he is using it for holy purposes.

2. Realizing That This World Is Hashem's Dwelling

But there is a deeper part of the solution as well that must be employed. It is for a person can realize that the desire for money really stems from the root desire in Creation, which is that Hashem “desired” to dwell on this world. He can remove the desire for money from the evil ‘garment’ that is on it, and instead use it for a good reason.

The *Vilna Gaon* on his deathbed held his *tzitzis* and cried, saying, “For a few coins, a person can merit to have such a great *mitzvah*.” The depth of this is that even this lowly world can reveal Hashem, when we sanctify the physicality and steer everything on this world to a positive direction. *Tzitzis* is made from wool – we use animals, which are creatures of this lowly earth, to produce the holy *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* from them; this is an example of how we take the mundane and sanctify it.

Thus, the deeper part of the solution to getting rid of a desire for money is to realize that our money can be used to reveal Hashem on this world, specifically because we are using materialism for holy purposes, such as when we give *tzedakah*. When we give *tzedakah*, it’s not just about a superficial act of giving *tzedakah* – it’s because by giving *tzedakah*, we sanctify our money. As we give the money, we must realize that we are sanctifying this mundane world, and through that, we are revealing Hashem more and more upon this world.

So we can use the desire for money – which was once a desire to have permanence on this material world – and use it to yearn to reveal Hashem on this world (by sanctifying it, through giving *tzedakah* and using it for *mitzvos*). This sanctifies our money and turns it from mundane to holy: at first, the person desired to have a permanent dwelling with this world, and instead, he has revealed how Hashem made this world into His permanent dwelling.

Getting used to this perspective will slowly weaken a person’s desire for money. We have only begun to discuss this solution very briefly; in the next class, we will go more into detail with this concept.