



Fixing Your Fire - 005 Anger | Anger Lovers

Anger Stemming From “Water”-of-Fire: When Anger Is Enjoyable

We are learning about the trait of anger and its subdivisions. We will now begin to learn about anger that stems from the “water” aspect of fire, and its branches. First we will outline the four kinds of anger that stem from “water”-of-fire, and then we will go through each of them in detail.

As mentioned in the first chapter, anger stemming from **water-of-fire** is when a person *enjoys anger*, because he is getting a *sense of vitality* (water), from the anger. There are four branches of this kind of anger:

- (1) **“Earth”**-of-water-of-fire is when anger has gained permanence (earth) in a person’s life, to the point that he derives a sense of vitality from it.
- (2) **“Water”**-of-water-of-fire is when a person is dragged (like water) towards situations that anger him, because he derives vitality from those situations.
- (3) **“Wind”**-of-water-of-fire is when a person has a specific agenda in his anger, moving and directing himself (like the wind) towards a certain goal that he has in mind, of which anger is the vehicle to get him there; and in this way, he derives a sense of vitality from the anger.
- (4) **“Fire”**-of-water-of-fire is when a person derives vitality from situations where he is unexpectedly angered, similar to the nature of fire, which is jumpy; and he ends up enjoying the anger, deriving a sense of vitality now that he realizes that he has overstepped his bounds.

At this point, these concepts will sound vague to us, and as we continue, we will explain each of these in more detail.

Deliberately Choosing A Lifestyle That Breeds Anger (Earth-of-Water-of-Fire)

“Earth”-of-water-of-fire is when a person chooses for himself a certain lifestyle which involves plenty of anger, yet interestingly, he derives vitality from this permanence of anger in his life and in this stressful lifestyle that he has chosen for himself. First we will see how this nature can manifest in our physical world of action, and then we will see how this nature can also manifest in more spiritual kinds of people as well.

Here is one example of this, from the physical world. There are some people who have deliberately chosen (because they have come to believe that this must be their lot in life) to work at a certain job or profession where they experience lots of frustration and anger when they have to deal with other people.

Once I needed a worker to show up in my house to do some repairs, and I asked him to come to me at 9:30. It came 9:30, and he wasn’t there. Finally he showed up. I asked him simply, “What happened to you that you couldn’t get here on time?” He said to me, “There was so much that happened to me

before I got here! I got into all kinds of fights with different people I have to deal with, along the way getting here, which delayed me from getting to you on time.”

He could easily find himself another job where he doesn't have to go through all these daily fights with the people he's involved with. All of this fighting wears him out and delays him from getting to his work on time, and he also cannot keep to his word even when he tells people that he will show up. He simply is so tired out from all of the run-ins he has with people that he simply cannot pull himself together – he can't give his word that he'll show up on time, and even if he gives his word that he will be there on time, you still can't trust his word.

There are certain jobs people have which are entirely based on arguing and disputes with other people, with constant situations that are stressful and which are not a calm place to be in. Yet many people stay in such an environment when they know that they will encounter a lot of anger with other people there.

A very good example of this is the job of being a taxi-driver. Anyone who takes such a job is inviting himself to a life full of nerve-wracking situations, where there is constant anger. How many times will it happen that the person who called the taxi wasn't at the stop on time, and the taxi-driver becomes infuriated? There are so much more opportunities to get angry at people, when you are a taxi-driver. The decision to become a taxi-driver is basically a decision to enter into the den of anger.

Of course, he will still have free will to control how much he gets angry, and how he chooses to express the anger. But he has essentially chosen to enter into a situation that will involve constant anger.

Most people who choose jobs that involve high levels of stress and anger are not looking for the anger involved; they just need a job, and perhaps they are aware that it will involve much anger, but they take the job anyway. But there are some people who will deliberately choose such a job because they *enjoy* the anger that is involved in such jobs.

Here is another example. The Sages teach that one should not take the profession of being a persecutor. This is a profession which is entirely based on hearing others' complaints and disputes with each other, on trying others, on getting involved with disputes – and there is a lot of yelling involved too, whether outside the *Beis Din* or in front of the *Beis Din*. Why do people choose such jobs?

Some people choose it because they need to make money, and they heard that others do this and make money from it. But others choose it because they find it exciting to be involved with disputes. They find it enjoyable to wake up in the morning knowing that there will be another case today to tackle, where there will be plenty of drama and yelling and disputing.

This is a kind of person who gains a sense of vitality from arguments and dissension. Sometimes, these jobs are enjoyable to the person because he is succeeding at his job, and if that is the case, his main enjoyment is being derived from the fact that he's succeeding at something. That is not what we are dealing with. Here we are dealing with a person who enjoys these kinds of professions because he loves all of the disputing and drama involved, for its own sake.

You can see this in certain children, who enjoy fighting and arguing with other children, for the sake of fighting with them. But this nature also exists in some adults. It is not that common, but it is certainly found in a percentage of adults, whose lives are centered on an enjoyment that comes from the drama of witnessing arguments and dissension with others.

A Torah scholar might actually find it difficult to become a *dayan* (judge) and witness the fighting in

the *Beis Din* between the two litigants, for this very reason. But the person who enjoys the drama of anger and disputing is having a different experience entirely, when he witnesses the dispute. He is excited by what he is seeing, and he's feeling, "This is part of living!" It's enjoyable to him.

Unlike the normal kind of anger which drains people of their sense of vitality [which we spoke about in the previous four chapters], this is a kind of anger which a person gets vitality from, and he bases his enjoyment in life on this.

There are also writers in newspapers and magazines who love to vent all of their anger in the articles that they write, and their entire life is spent on venting, venting, and venting out all of their anger at different things in the world that bother them.

Besides for these examples mentioned, there are other professions as well which are of this nature where there is much 'drama' involved, and the person who chooses that profession is deliberately choosing the job so he can be in all the drama, because he enjoys it.

Children Who Enjoy Fighting

So far, we have seen how this phenomenon manifests in the physical world. Now let's see how this kind of enjoyment from anger becomes manifest in the more spiritual areas of life [which starts from early childhood].

There are many children who regularly scream and fight in the home or at school. Sometimes they come from very pressurized homes, and the only way for them to release their tension they feel is by yelling and fighting, so that someone will notice and give them the attention they need to be heard. But sometimes the child has a more excitable nature, where he enjoys drama and action. These children don't like it when things are calm and simple.

When people aren't satisfied with the simple and calm situations of life, normally they will seek something new to satisfy their need for action. But others react differently: they become filled with a need for drama and action. They let loose their negative character traits, and deliberately get into fights with others. The root of this nature in the soul really comes from a spark of "*Erev Rav*"^[1] and "*Amalek*" [who are instigators of strife]! It is a nature to gain vitality from opposition with others.

We can see this nature to enjoy opposition in some children who enjoy getting into arguments with their parents, and in school, this type of child will enjoy causing stress to the teacher or principal, wishing to drain all of the life out of him; and to do the same to other children in the class. He enjoys noise, arguing, and yelling, and he lives off of this.

When these children grow up and they become adults, they have matured somewhat beyond all of their childish tendencies, so they don't intentionally fight with others. But they still might get dragged easily after arguments with others, a nature that stems from **water-of-water-of-fire** [which we will discuss in the next chapter], or they might intentionally draw themselves towards such arguments, a nature which stems from **wind-of-water-of-fire** [which we will discuss, G-d willing, later].

Usually by the time he has matured into an adult, he has developed some more compassion for others. But in his childhood, he does not yet have as much compassion on others, and he is capable of far more cruelty to others, so he is apt to get into deliberate fights and arguments with others.

Misguided Zealotry

When this nature is manifested in a more spiritual kind of person, he will seek to intentionally engage in arguments with others in a misguided kind of zealotry, thinking that it is all "for the sake of

Hashem". Of course, sometimes people do argue with others for the sake of Heaven, where the motivations are pure. But there are people who are constantly involved with *machlokes* (dissension) with others, always fighting with others, in a hotheaded manner.

As mature adults, people have more *da'as*^[2], and when one is found in the Torah world, he is not as concerned with superficial matters that children are busy with. Instead, he has more spiritual concerns now, and he channels his nature of dissension to fight vehemently with others about more spiritual matters. But his motivations in arguing are not pure, and it is not motivated by a search for truth. His zealousness is not for the sake of Heaven. Rather, it is because he had a nature ever since he was a child to enjoy opposition with others. It has become the way he lives, and he derives a sense of vitality from it.

It has a permanent place in his life (earth), and he enjoys (water) the anger (fire), hence, he is dominated by a kind of anger that stems from **earth-of-water-of-fire**.

Picking A Chavrusa To 'Argue' With

So far, we have not yet described examples that are of relevance to those who are still learning in the *Beis Midrash*. Now we will describe some examples that can apply to those who are in the Torah world who are still learning in *Beis Midrash*.

Let us examine the following scenario which may take place amongst those who are learning in the *Beis Midrash*, which is a prime example of the issue we have been describing. When choosing a *chavrusa*^[3], normally a person will choose a *chavrusa* who is suitable for him to learn with, but sometimes, a person will deliberately choose to learn with a *chavrusa* who thinks very differently than he does, whom he is bound to get into a lot of arguments with. He chooses this *chavrusa* anyway, even though he is well aware of their different styles of learning and thinking.

Why? Sometimes it is because he is looking to be enlightened by someone who thinks very differently than he does, so that he can further develop his own mind. That's fine. But sometimes a person chooses this *chavrusa* because he is looking forward to all of the arguments they are going to have - and more specifically, to the anger that he knows he will be experiencing, when learning with this particular *chavrusa*. The Gemara says that a young Torah scholar's anger is caused by the fire of the Torah ("*rischa d'oiraisa*"), and he is looking forward to all of this heated and fiery anger....

But if he is looking forward to the anger, his anger is not coming from a pure place in himself. It's better than taking out his anger in the *beis midrash* when he's learning Torah than to take out his anger in the streets, of course. But it's essentially the same kind of anger, where he's looking for trouble. It is merely taking on the form of his Torah learning. But it is still an evil trait of anger which needs to be fixed.

Sometimes we can hear shouts and screams in the *beis midrash* between people learning with each other, and it is not always stemming from a desire to arrive at the truth. It has nothing at all to do with wanting to get to the truth. In fact, when one is screaming at his *chavrusa* so heatedly, he usually can't even hear what his *chavrusa* is trying to tell him, and many times he doesn't even hear himself! He is so caught up in his own anger, because he is not motivated by a desire to get to the truth or to arrive at greater clarity in Torah. It is usually stemming from a nature of enjoying opposition.

Of course, we know that learning Torah involves constant contradictions that we come across, which invites opposition and questioning. But this is a more refined and softer version of opposition. When a person deliberately seeks opposition and he derives vitality from opposition, it stems from an

unrefined place in the soul, which is seeking to assert itself.

Drawn Towards Opposition and Disagreements

A person doesn't always use a *chavrusa* for this; he might be drawn towards opposition even without a *chavrusa*, by always seeking to question the truth of the words of the Sages that he learns, wondering if their words are "truthful" enough to his standards of truth.

He will not be foolish enough to argue with Moshe Rabbeinu, of course, and he won't either have the foolishness and audacity to argue with the Gemara, or even with the words of the *Rishonim* [4] (for Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes that the *Rishonim* contained such "straight logic" that it is unthinkable to argue with them). But when it comes to the words of the *Acharonim* [5], perhaps he will feel comfortable enough to "disagree" with their words and attack them sharply, arguing with *Acharonim* on a constant basis. It is not because he possesses such "straight logic" that he feels like he has the license to do this; it is rather because he has long ago developed a nature to disagree, and vehemently.

When learning Torah, there is nothing wrong with analyzing all the possible points in a matter, wondering what the opposite arguments may be. That is the way it should be, that is the way of Torah, for the Sages teach: "Turn it over, and turn it over, for all is in it." But some people feel a need to always oppose and disagree with what they learn, and this is the problem we are discussing.

If he is giving a *shiur*, he might also deliberately argue with the way of thinking of others, emphasizing his own approach and insisting that his way is the more truthful one. (Sometimes this stems from conceit, which is a different problem). His entire approach is based on arguing, arguing, and arguing, with others. It is really a kind of anger in him that manifests as a nature to enjoy opposition on a consistent basis. Even if he produces *chiddushei Torah* [6], any arguing that he has done in the process might be stemming from his nature to simply argue and disagree. It is stemming purely from anger, and not from a search for truth.

In The Home

We can give several more examples, but the point is that there are some people who have this nature to enjoy opposition and they live from it. Now we will discuss a scenario which is much more common that all people can relate to.

In some homes, there are husbands who enjoy arguing with their spouse and children, for the sake of arguing and disagreeing. *Baruch Hashem*, this is not the case in every home. But it happens in some homes. The father might think he has inherited the title of a "*Mashgiach*" [7] in his yeshiva, where he thinks that he is the self-appointed spiritual overseer of his home, who must continue the path of his *Mashgiach* and make sure that every aspect in the home should follow this regime. He is always looking for things in the home that aren't in line with his ideals, always pointing out whatever is lacking, and he finds deficiencies everywhere in the home. His wife has to bear all of this criticism the most.

We must know that this is an issue, which has nothing to do with proper *chinuch* [8]. It may also be coming from a nature to point out flaws in everything, which is not either good; but that is a separate matter. Many times, people are overly demanding in their homes when it comes to attaining spiritual perfection, but not because of a desire for living truthfully. It can often stem from a nature of enjoying opposition.

This nature exists both in the physical and in the spiritual areas of life. There are people who love to argue about physical matters that are trivial and unimportant, whereas others will only love to argue

when it comes to the spiritual. But that doesn't make it holy. It is not holy for a person to make demands in his home of higher spiritual levels and to explain to the family members exactly what they are doing wrong.

We aren't talking about outright ignorance of matters that are obligations of *Halacha*, which a person must certainly make sure his family is being careful in (but even then, the Sages say that one should speak softly to his family). Those are valid areas to stress in the home, as long as they are conveyed properly to the family. But many times, people are tough on their families to have higher spiritual standards simply because they enjoy opposition.

Here is another example. Sometimes a newly married woman will bring in some things from her old home into their new apartment, and the husband doesn't approve. If he gets angry at her for bringing in these items, the anger is only the byproduct of a deeper issue that he has: he enjoys opposition. The enjoyment of opposition is motivating him to show some anger; sometimes the anger is more intense and sometimes it is only revealed partially, but it is a result of enjoying opposition.

In Summary

Until now we have given examples of the concept, so that we can better relate to it. In many of the above scenarios which we mentioned, most people will say that there were other reasons that motivated them to get angry. But usually, we will be able to find that in at least one of the above scenarios mentioned, the reason for the anger was stemming from a nature to enjoy opposition.

Countering Opposition With Peace and Love

How can this issue be fixed? For the solution, we will need to look inward and make use of two abilities in our soul [*shalom*\peace and *ahavah*\love].

Among the many powers in the soul, there are two opposite powers - "war" (*milchamah*), and "peace" (*shalom*). Hashem's ways are peaceful, for "Great is peace, for Hashem diverges [from truth] for the sake of peace". At the same time, Hashem also fights wars; it is written, "*Hashem is a man of war.*"

These are two deep powers in our soul, war and peace, which need to be balanced. If one is only peaceful and he has no boundaries to how far his peace goes, he will lose his ability to fight for truth. In order to be successful at anything, we need to know how to fight and persevere, so on one hand, we must make sure not to lose our power to fight. But on the other hand, we need to also know how to strive for peace, or else we will fight too much.

When a person is making sure to work hard at giving order to his soul, he will have an easier time with attaining a balance between his abilities of peace and fighting.

The amount of fighting one has to do in his life needs to be preceded by developing the power of peace, and then one can fight properly. Usually when a person gets used to fighting with others, it damages his power of peace, and the person will find himself getting into more and more fights with people. Instead, the correct approach is that whenever one engages in any kind of dispute, opposition, or fight with another person, he must first make sure that he is balanced out by a power to find peace. If he can be peaceful, he can know how to fight properly with others. If not, he will fight too much. So before one gets involved in any kind of opposition with another, he must first make sure that he also knows how to be peaceful.

There is also another point which a person will need, in order to fight properly with others. One needs to be able to feel a love for others (*ahavah*). This is because we usually do not fight with people we

love, and we usually do not love the people we fight with. Therefore, if we want to balance out our ability to “war” with others, we must make sure that we are able to love them. This is based on the words of the Gemara that the ideal way to learn Torah with others is that “at first, they become enemies to each other, and at the end, they become beloved friends with each other.”

One needs to love all creations in the world (except for souls of the *Erev Rav*^[9]); when one has to fight with others, he must first be able to love them. If this is true concerning how we need to view the other nations of the world, surely it applies to how we must relate to other Jews. So the amount that we can fight people must match the degree of love towards the Jewish people.

To summarize, in order to have proper ‘war’ with others, we need to first need to be able to love. When it comes to our interpersonal relationships with others, we need to reveal peace towards others, in order to be able to oppose others properly. This is also true when it comes to one who enjoys opposition in his Torah learning. In order to fight properly within the parameters of Torah learning, one needs to be able to develop the power of *shalom* peace.

One who has the proper balance between the powers of ‘war’ with the powers of love and peace in the soul, will know how to fight properly.^[10]

Practically speaking, before a person enters into some kind of disagreement with another, he should first awaken his love towards the person. That is the condition necessary to fight properly within the parameters of Torah. Upon that condition, he can then argue “for the sake of Heaven”. But that is only if he has strengthened his love for others and a wish for peace.

The Proper Perspective When It Comes To Fighting Evil

If one attains this balance between the powers of ‘war’ and love\peace in his soul, he can then engage in zealotry “for the sake of Heaven”, because his is truly fighting with pure motivations, for he knows how to love others and be at peace with others.

When it comes to the matter of being zealous in fighting evil, he should have the proper perspective. If one is fighting for Hashem’s Torah and he thinks that he must destroy the evil from the world, this is actually a form of heresy, for he is failing to realize that Hashem also wants there to be evil on this world. It is not up to him to destroy the presence of evil from the world. Hashem has His reasons of why He wants there to be certain evil on this world, and He gave us an *avodah*^[11] to fight this evil as well^[12], but we need to have the proper perspective about this: we must be aware that as soon Hashem wills it, He will erase all the evil from the world in the blink of an eye.

Hashem wants the evil to be here on the world and He also wants us to do our share in getting rid of it, for the purposes of our *avodah*, allowing us to bring rectification to the world. But it is not simply so that the evil shouldn’t be there anymore. If that was the reason, Hashem doesn’t need us for that. He can get rid of all the evil in the blink of an eye. He lets the evil exist so that we can have the *avodah* of destroying it. This is a very subtle point.

When one lacks this understanding towards zealotry, he is consumed with war at others. He thinks it is up to him to destroy all the evil. But if a person realizes that the evil has been placed on this world so that we can fulfill our *avodah* of fighting it – and that fighting evil does not exist as a purpose unto itself, for Hashem doesn’t need us for that – he is then using the power of ‘war’ for its holy and intended use.

In our generation, where we are surrounded by the worst levels of spiritual impurity, we need to know that not only will Hashem be the only One who can take it all away, but He can do so in an instant, and He will, with the coming of Mashiach. It is just that we currently have an *avodah* to fight evil, and

it is an *avodah* and nothing more; there should be no personal agendas involved in it. If we look it at purely as an *avodah* and that it is not up to us do it entirely, only to do our share, we are much closer to attaining a balance between war and peace\love in our soul (*How to fight evil, however, is a separate matter, which merits its own discussion*).

A good example of this is what happened on Chanukah, when the house of the *Chashmonaim* won against the Greeks in the war. This is seen in connection with the fact that the miracle that they found a jug of pure olive oil. The deep implication of this is that because they had pure motivations in their fight against the Greek evil, they were able to fight with the proper and holy perspective, and that was how they could win. Such a war merits assistance from Hashem, Who fights for a holy and pure war, when our motivations in war are correct and in proper perspective^[13] – when our power of ‘war’ is balanced out by a power of love\peace.

“The War of Torah”

This gives a person a totally different perspective towards how we need to “fight” with others in our Torah learning. This is the implication of the term, “*milchamah shel Torah*” – the “war of Torah.” To fight in Torah learning doesn’t mean to simply argue over the words of Abaye and Rava in the Gemara. It means to fight within the parameters of Torah’s perspective. This is also the meaning of “*milchemes mitzvah*”, a war fought on grounds of a *mitzvah*. It is a pure kind of ‘war’ with another, unlike the negative enjoyment derived from opposition with others, which stems from the **earth-of-water-of-fire** element.

In Conclusion

When one has developed the powers of love\ahavah and peace\shalom, he knows how to properly use the soul’s power of war\milchamah, for he has the proper balance. He will then be able to ‘fight’ properly in his Torah learning with others, in a way that does not compromise on his pursuit of love and peace with others, and the ‘wars’ that he fights will be with pure and holy intentions. This, in turn, will surely lessen the kind of anger that stems from **earth-of-water-of-fire**.

^[1] “The Mixed Multitude”

^[2] mature thinking abilities

^[3] study partner for learning Torah

^[4] early commentators, spanning the 10th-15th centuries

^[5] later commentators, spanning the 15th-19th centuries

^[6] novel Torah thoughts

[7] spiritual dean in a yeshiva

[8] child education

[9] Refer to the “*Erev Rav*” pdf, a compilation of some of the Rav’s *derashos* translated into English, concerning the “*Erev Rav*”

[10] See also ***Tefillah #0164 - Truth Before Peace*** and also ***Tefillah #0170 - Peace***

[11] spiritual task

[12] as explained in *sefer Daas Tevunos* of the Ramchal

[13] See also ***Tefillah #067 - Fights***; and ***Reaching Your Essence #010 - Utilizing The Power of Peace***

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