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[Home](#) > Getting to Know Your Imagination - 009 Countering The Three Root Causes of Imagination

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Imagined Needs

We first spoke about imagination that stems from our mind. In the more recent chapters, we spoke about imagination that stems from our heart. Now we will speak about a third kind of imagination: imagination which is fueled on by our very desires.

Chazal say that when a person has a hundred dollars, he will want two hundred dollars. In other words, Chazal are telling us that people imagine things that they need certain things. A person has a hundred dollars, and he imagines that he really needs two hundred dollars.

There are endless amount of imagined needs that people have. All of a person's various desires are always stemming from his imagination.

That is the basic concept – let us expand on this.

The Three Roots Behind Both Our Middos and Medameh

In our heart, there are our *middos* (character traits) as well as our *medameh*/imagination.

Our *middos* are called “*de'os*” by the Rambam – which hints to us that all our *middos* really stem from our *daas*, the power of our mind. All our *middos* do not simply come from our *middos*; they come from our *daas*.^[1] The inner core behind all our *middos* is our *daas*.

There is another root to our *middos*, and it is our faculty of *ratzon*/will. Reb Yisrael Salanter writes^[2] that a person's imagination can get him to seek all his various desires. This shows us that there is a deeper root behind our imagination – it is the various *retzonos* we have spurring it on.

If a person merits to purify his *middos*, his imagination as well becomes purified.

Besides for these two roots of the *middos*, there is an additional factor to one's *middos*: the *middos* of the parents, which a person inherits, according to the level of how much the parents have sanctified themselves during their marital union.^[3] Also, the things we eat have an effect on our mood, and this affects our *middos*.^[4]

We are not mainly discussing here about *middos*; we are discussing *medameh*/imagination. Our *medameh* has the same three roots as our *middos*: 1) our *daas*, 2) our *retzonos*, 3) and our nature

that we were born with, which was passed onto us genetically from our parents; as well as the things we eat, which affect our mood.

Why Do I Want Something?

Therefore, let's go back to the classic example of someone who imagines that he needs more, (as Chazal say, that when a person has a hundred dollars, he wants two hundred). It can be coming from any one of these three root motivations.

It might be coming from an impaired *daas*, which means that he has developed an erroneous kind of *daas* - a false belief in his mind that he really needs more. Even though *daas* is a holy power at its root, and it is the core behind our good *middos*, for all good we can always find evil that opposes it, and therefore there is also an evil kind of *daas*, which can cause to want things that we don't need.

That can be one cause for why a person desires something. There can be a different cause why a person would desire something, simply because "I want it." This can be when a person wants something so badly that he feels as if what he wants is "me." This is a more physical kind of desire, unlike the first cause we mentioned, which is a false belief, a problem (with one's *daas*). Here, the problem is that the person's *retzonos* are pulling him after something.

There is a third cause for desiring something, and that is when a person desires something very badly, to the point that a person wants he doesn't even know why he wants it; he just feels a strong pull towards something. Such desires are coming from one's excitement inherent in his nature (which, as we said, is from a combination of what he inherited from his parents, as well as from the things he ate that affect his mood).

If all of these three reasons are present, it causes a person to be totally controlled by his imagination.

There are people who are very disconnected from reality, due to their heavy amount of imagination that's going on in their heads. Although many people appear to be functioning normally and living life like everyone else, there can still be a major disconnect between one's mind with his actual daily living. We are not talking about a small percentage of people who have such a problem - this is the reality of many people's lives: a tremendous amount of disconnection.

As we mentioned, there are three causes for imagined needs: an impaired *daas*, desires, and our inherited natures together with what we eat. All of these roots will have to be dealt with if a person wants to uproot his tendency to imagine.

Part One of the Solution: Sharpening Your Intellect

By increasing our actual intellect, we can control our imagination. We can do this by learning about things that aren't always practical, simply for the sake of sharpening our thinking mind. People who tend to imagine a lot will usually only learn and think about something if it will lead to practical applications, but this isn't real thinking; it's more about action. The way to counter an imaginations-based life is by increasing our intellect, through thinking about matters that are more intellectual and less about action.

Part Two of the Solution: Nullifying Your Will

Another cause for imagination is rooted in our *retzonos*. If this is the cause of the imagined desire, then the solution is to *bittul haratzon* - to get used to nullifying our desires.

There are two methods in how to work on our *middos*.

The general method is the way of most of the *baalei mussar*, which is to work on each of the *middos* separately, is to tackle each bad *middah* and work to uproot each one.

The way of the Chazon Ish, however, which is the method we are using here, is to work to uproot the root of all the bad *middos* : to uproot one's *ratzon*. This is called *bittul haratzon* - nullifying our desires.

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l also would advise the method of *bittul haratzon* as the root solution to uprooting all of the bad *middos*, in a more specific exercise: by getting used to go against your will, for three times a day.

This is not simply for a person to say three times a day, "I am not doing this", but for a person to withhold himself from a certain desire, with the underlying intention of trying to uproot his *ratzon* in doing so. Meaning, it's not just about going against your will for three times a day. It's about having a certain awareness as you resist something you want: I'm going against my will, because I want to nullify my *ratzon*.

By nullifying our *ratzon* for the thing we want, we get rid of the root problem that's causing our imagination to want the thing, and this weakens the imagination more and more.[\[5\]](#)

The Ultimate Goal and Underlying Motivation: Increasing Our Emunah

Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote that when a person wants to improve himself, there is the *klal* (general outline) and the *peratim* (details). Working on all the various details that need improvement will not work, because that will just get him lost in all the details, and he will lose sight of the *klal*. Therefore, one should work with the *klal* - the general outline of everything that he needs to work on. That *klal*, Reb Yisrael Salanter writes, is: *emunah* (faith in Hashem).

We need to increase our *emunah*, and this should be our goal in anything - the underlying root awareness that must accompany just about anything we work on. In our case, working on our *middos*, which is done through *bittul haratzon* - we need to do it all with the goal that we are trying to reveal and radiate more *emunah*. So when we nullify our desires, we must be aware: why are we nullifying our desires? Because we need to have *emunah*, and *emunah* tells us that we should nullify our desires.

How indeed do we reveal our *emunah* more? There are many ways, and Reb Yisrael Salanter writes at length about this. We will not go into this discussion, but let us suffice with the following brief outline: Anything we do - whatever it is that we are working on - should always be with the underlying intention that we are trying to increase our *emunah*.

This is the really the meaning behind nullifying our desires: increasing our *emunah*. The root of working on our *middos* is nullifying our desires (as the Chazon Ish and Reb Yeruchem Levovitz explained), and the root of that is *emunah*. So when we work on *bittul haratzon*, our underlying intention behind it, which is the root, should be because we are trying to increase our *emunah*. The whole reason that we must work to nullify our desires is because we are trying to get to the root, which is *emunah*. What we are really trying to get at with all of this is to increase our *emunah*.

For many years, Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would lecture about many different topics that needed improvement. Once, he heard a lecture from his teacher, Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l, which was about *emunah*. He was very moved by the speech, and it inspired him to focus all of his lectures from them on about *emunah*. Reb Chatzkel realized that *emunah* is not just another detail in our avodah that we must work on; he realized that it is the goal of everything.

Therefore, it has to the underlying intention in anything we work on: that we are working to improve because we need more *emunah*.

Of course, there are many different methods throughout the generations in how exactly we are supposed to serve Hashem, and where we to put our main focus on. But the main focus, between any method, is always to increase our *emunah*. There are many different ways how to do it, but this is the general goal of everything we do: to improve our *emunah* and let it radiate outwards.

Weakening Our Imagination Through Realizing How We Have Matured

In addition to what we have so far said, there is also a general piece of advice we can give that can help a person come out of his tendency to imagine. Instead of working directly to uproot the imagination, a person can realize the following, which will help him become more aware of his imagination.

As a person progresses more and more with uprooting his tendency to imagine, his imagination matures and develops, and he ascends spiritually. He will realize that he has matured, and this will be of help to him, because it will help him become more and more aware of his imagination.

To illustrate, we know that a seven year old's imagination is not the same kind of imagination as a teenager's imagination. Our imagination changes with the stage in life we are at. In a way, we go through many worlds. We go through the world of a five year old, the world of a seven year old, the world of a teenager, etc. The fantasies of our life stages change according to where we are at in life. Thinking about this will help a person realize that as he works more and more to weaken his imagination, he has entered a whole new world, and he has left his previous world of imagination, which was more immature.

Part Three of the Solution: Reducing Our Physicality Through A Light Diet

We mentioned in the beginning that part of our imagined needs comes from our excitable nature, and each person has a different nature that he inherited from his parents. A person gets excited for something and imagines that he needs it, and this can be stemming from what the nature he inherited from his parents, from the level they were at during the time of their union, from which he was originally conceived.

How can a person counter these inborn weaknesses he was born with, which he was born with genetically, and he has a certain desires that he feels a pull towards, which are part of the nature he was born with?

The way how one can do this is to purify the body more (which we will say how to do), and that will reduce the various physical urges and desires that he was born with. The body has to undergo some suffering in order to become purified. We are not on the level today to undergo physical suffering as the previous generations could handle, but there is one way how we can purify our body that is feasible: we can deny ourselves a little pleasure.

The suggestion for this is to get used to eating only light foods, and to avoid food that is heavy and thick.^[6] Heavy eating increases our physicality, which contributes to fueling on the desires that each person inherited from his parents' level at the time of their union. By avoiding those heavy foods and instead eating only light foods, our physical body becomes refined in the process, and it becomes more purified. This is some small denial of physical pleasure which we can all handle, even in today's weaker generation.

[1] During the class, the Rov clarified to a questioner that our emotions also work together with our mind to form our middos. Therefore, all our middos are a combination of daas\mind and hergesh\emotion.

[2] Iggeres HaMussar, printed in Ohr Yisrael, Letter 30.

[3] Iggeres HaKedushah of the Ramban. However, the Rov also brought from classic sources that sometimes the parents's spiritual level at the union do not determine the nature of the child, and the classical example of this is Avraham Avinu, who was fathered by the wicked Terach.

[4] Chullin 81a

[5] The Rav also said the following important clarification to one of the questioners in the class: There are three options that people use to work on their middos – one of them is acceptable, but a bit difficult for most people to implement; another is too unfeasible to use, and the third approach is the sensible approach which we can use.

Option 1 is to work starting from the "prat" – each detail. This is that a person works on each of his various bad middos, one by one. In this method, a person focuses on working on one middah at a time. This was the method of the baalei mussar, and we are not taking that route in this path, as it is difficult for us to implement.

Option 2 is the opposite approach of this: to work starting from the klal (general outline). This is when a person focuses on his general mission in working on his middos, hoping to solve all his bad middos just from the general attitude of, "I want to work on all my middos." This will never work at all, as it is way too difficult to attempt to work on all of one's middos at once – it is as difficult as Akeidas Yitzchok!

Option 3, the most sensible approach, which is the path we are taking here, incorporates the views of both klal and prat and synthesizes them: to work on each prat – each of the bad middos at a time - using this general klal of bittul haratzon; that as I work to improve a certain middah (and only work on one bad middah at a time), I am doing so with the awareness that I am trying to uproot my ratzon. (For more specific guidance on this avodah, see Bilvavi Volume VI, Chapters 21-22.)

[6] Refer to the Rav's shiur of [Rosh Chodesh: Shevat \(5754\): Serving Hashem Through Eating](#) [1].

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/getting-know-your-imagination-009-counter-3-root-causes-imagination>

Links

[1] <https://bilvavi.net/english/rosh-chodesh-avodah-011-shevat-serving-hashem-through-eating>