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## Fixing Your Water - 005 Solving The Desire To Take Pleasure | Part 2

### ***Summary of Previous Chapters***

We have explained that there are four factors which contribute to our desires (which stem from our **water**-of-earth-of-water): **(1)** Seeking pleasure, **(2)** Being 'dragged' after the pleasure, **(3)** Becoming a habitual taker of pleasure, **(4)** Becoming unaware that one has become a taker.

Previously, we discussed the tendency in a person to take pleasure, which leads to getting dragged after the pleasure. We described the solutions, and now we will expand upon it more deeply.

When people look at something that captures their senses, they get dragged after it. It then becomes a habit to keep seeking that particular pleasure. Even after a person loses pleasure in the desire, he will keep seeking it once he has gotten very familiar with it; this is the power of habit (*hergel*).

### ***The Power of 'Raishis' - Accessing Your 'Beginning Point' Through Reflecting***

In order to counter getting dragged after pleasure, there are two powers in the soul we can make use of. One power of the soul is called the power of "**raishis**" ('beginning') in the soul, and the idea of it is to use our 'beginning point'; and the other power we need is to use the power of "**acharis**" ('end') in the soul - to think about the 'end' we are heading towards.

The power of **raishis**, to use our "beginning point", is the concept of "*Sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah*" - "The end of action is first with thought." Man is created from a small droplet, which begins in the brain and gets sent to the *Bris Kodesh* (the reproductive organ). This process works in tandem with the faculty of physical desire. Thus, desires begin in the brain (and the brain is the root of the element of water). Therefore, the way to rectify physical desire is through using our brain, which is to make use of our power of thought.

When we use our power to reflect, with our thoughts, into the consequences of running after desires, this can counter the habit of getting dragged after pleasure. [This is the outline of the concept; now we will learn how apply it].

### ***Solution #1 - Setting Boundaries On The Pleasure***

This is done by **creating boundaries** on our desires. When we place limits on the desire, we won't get dragged after the desire beyond the limits we have set for ourselves. This is the first solution to

stopping our habit of getting dragged after a pleasure – by placing a limit.

We cannot lay down exact rules on how to make limits. Each person needs to figure this out on his own, how much boundaries he has to set for himself, so that he doesn't go overboard with seeking a pleasure. This is the general outline of the solution.

We will use eating as an example. As a person is immersed in eating his food, he is immersed in an act of pleasure. How can he gain some self-control? There are several methods that are available to use which can help you gain control of yourself as you're amidst the desire to eat.

For example, Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would decide to eat a certain amount of food on his plate and not eat more than that. He would only put the amount of food on his plate that he needed and not more than what he felt he needed. Not everyone can do this, but the point of this is to acquire an ability to set limitations on your desires.

### ***Solution #2 - Differentiate Between 'Necessity' and 'Extra'***

If you feel that you are not capable of using the above solution, you can instead tell yourself that anything beyond what you actually need is extra to you, and not necessary; this helps you gain awareness that you are pursuing nothing but a physical desire which you do not need, and that in turn will help you gain some self-control.

### ***Solution #3 - Eat, Stop Eating, Eat***

A third option you can use is to try taking small breaks as you are amidst pursuing the pleasure. You can try this as you are eating. As you are eating, try to stop eating for a few moments, then continue eating, then stop again a bit, and repeat the cycle. This gives you a certain degree of control over your desire.

How long should these breaks be? That depends on each person, so again, we can't give exact rules. We are rather giving the general outline of the solution, and it is up to each person to figure out how it applies to his own personal situation.

Another way of how you can work on this is that when you come into the house and you smell a good meal cooking, hold your nose for a few seconds, then go back to taking in the smell, then hold your nose again, repeating the cycle. This helps you gain control over yourself as you are amidst a desire for pleasure. Even if you just do it for a few seconds, it can be very effective to help you gain control of yourself as you're caught up in a desire for something.

### ***Solution #4 - Leave Over A Little Food***

A fourth solution you can use is called the method of *Taanis HaRaavad* (the "fast of Rabbi Avraham ben David"): to leave over a little food on your plate. Get used to leaving over a little of your pleasure.

But when you do this, bear in mind that it is impossible to completely fulfill all our desires on this world, as Chazal say. Therefore, it would be helpful for us if we get used to the concept that even when we have pleasure, we don't need to fulfill 100% of the pleasure – we can leave a little over a little of it.

### ***The Common Denominator Between All Four Solutions***

All of these solutions have one thing in common: "*Sof maaseh b'machshavah techilah*" – by using our thoughts to plan ahead, to think about a situation before it arises, so that we will have a plan to work

with when we are faced with a problem; in particular, with regards to physical desires. This is because physical desires begin in the brain, thus the solution to physical desires lies in how much we use our brain to think and place limits on the desires.

Do not use all of these solutions at once, because they are different forms of *avodah*, and one must never mix different kinds of *avodah* together. Instead, pick one of these and stick with it [the last solution, *Taanis HaRaavad*, is the easiest to implement].

### ***Unrestrained Pursuit of Desires In This Generation: A Dulling of The Mind***

However, there is a more subtle message behind all of this which we need to reflect about, and it is the more inner part of the solution to all of these desires.

We mentioned earlier that our soul contains two opposite powers - *raishis* (the beginning point) and '*acharis*' (the endpoint). What we described until now was essentially how we use our power of '*raishis*' in the soul: the power to use our thoughts to place limitations on ourselves, which guide us from the start so that we won't fall.

But now we will explain how we also need to use the power of '*acharis*' in the soul - the power to think about our 'end'. It is the deeper part of the solution which we need to bear in mind as we use these methods of self-control.

When a person is pulled after a physical desire, it is as if a "*ruach shtus*" (spirit of folly)<sup>[1]</sup> enters him, as Chazal say. His mind becomes dulled. There are desires which are simply unhealthy for the body, and a person is pulled after them. But besides for the unhealthy desires which people are chasing - and people know that these desires are bad for them - there is also a very large factor of desires that a person is simply being *pulled* after, and his mind is dulled in the process.

It's like a "*ruach shtus*" has entered him, causing him to become mindlessly dragged after a desire, with the more and more he gets used to various physical desires.

We are now in the year 5775. How many physical desires have accumulated in us until now? The world is full of all kinds of crazy desires which did not exist until only recently, such as the many advertisements of various tours and vacations to hotels in other countries.

Some of the desires we pursue in our life we consider to be "normal" for even *Bnei Torah* to live with, while some desires we consider to be more for those who would like to lead a more comfortable and luxurious lifestyle. Some of desires out there that people are pursuing, such as travel and vacation, are considered by us to be meant for those who are going through a rough time in life, who could really use the vacation.

But when these vacations in hotels are being pursued, they are really very destructive to our soul. They make a person get used to a concept of having unlimited desire in his life, in which there is no restraint on desires.

If a person never works to develop his soul, he doesn't care about this problem, and when he desires these trips on a continuous basis, and eventually he gets dragged after them - and his mind becomes dulled in the process. Today there are desires which never existed until recently, such as retreats to hotels in Prague.<sup>[2]</sup>

When a child grows up always being able to have all his desires fulfilled, his very mind is dulled from all this. Our children are growing up in a generation in which desires are unlimited, and people are getting used to getting dragged after all kinds of desires, with no concept of restraint.

## ***Countering The Pursuit of Desire: Using Our Inner Powers of 'Raishis' and 'Acharis'***

We need to build ourselves properly, by developing our soul, so that we won't get dragged after all kinds of pleasures. If a person really wants to change and live a truthful kind of life of inner happiness, he should place restraints on how much he gives in to his desires; if not, he will be sad his whole life.

One must uncover the power of your soul which is called "*raishis*" (accessing your 'beginning point'): to use your power of thought to reflect, about how you can make boundaries on yourself, so that you don't run to fulfill every last desire that you feel yourself getting pulled after. Along with this, you also need to reveal your power of '*acharis*', to think about the end of life, our purpose on this world.

It's a difficult *avodah* indeed, to place boundaries on our physical desires, in a generation like this where desires are so unrestrained. As you work on putting limits on your desires, you will notice contradictions between the truth that you are aspiring for, and with the kind of life you are currently living - and you will see how hard it is.

### ***Developing Restraint***

We are living in a generation with an unprecedented amount of desires! This past week, on Erev Shavuos, I had to go the market, and I came across places that were selling **1,200** different kinds of cheesecake. 1,200 kinds of cheesecake! I am not exaggerating. (But people justify this by saying, "It's a *minhag* in *Klal Yisrael* to eat cheesecake...")

People are growing up in a generation that is full of physical desires; how can a person avoid chasing them??

A person has to uncover a deep, tranquil place in his soul in which he can reflect about this, how problematic it is, and how it prevents us from living a true and spiritual life. This is the most important part of the solution of fixing the problem.

At a later stage, you can begin to work on how you will actually accomplish avoiding desires, but the first stage is the most important: to reflect deeply about the kind of situation we are living in, and to realize how the lifestyle of this generation contradicts the truth we aspire for.

The contradiction you notice, upon making this reflection, has to bother you. If it bothers you, you already have the key to putting a restraint on your pull towards physical desires.

### ***Summary of the Solution To Fixing The Desire For Pleasure***

This is the inner aspect of our *avodah* - to make this deep reflection we have said, to have aspirations for holiness, in spite of a generation which is not aspiring for this. It is very a far concept for most people in this generation to work on, who are chasing all their physical desires.

But as lofty as such an aspiration is (even if one isn't there yet), it is still the most important part of the solution which we need: to reflect about how the current lifestyle we are in contradicts a truthful kind of life, and to indeed aspire for the truthful kind of life.

The second part of the solution is to work on this practically, by implementing *Taanis HaRaavad* which we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter [but this is only with regards to the desire for food; for any other kind of desire, use the first solution].

We have discussed here how we fix our tendency to be dragged after physical desires. Earlier, we discussed the desire in a person to spend time in water, but that was only a part of a general

discussion. In this chapter, we have given the general solution to physical desires – which is, to recognize how we are dragged towards various pleasures, and how we need to solve this by placing limits on how much we give in to our desires. Using this solution will generally improve our problems with desires.[3]

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[1] **Sotah 2a**; “A person does not sin unless a *ruach shtus*” spirit of folly” enters him.

[2] Towards the end of the shiur (At about 42 minutes into the shiur), the Rav also mentioned that these were “women only” retreats to Prague, and the fact that they are geared only to women shows that the purpose is just for people to have extravagance. The Rav said, “Even if it is permissible, is this the *Ratzon Hashem* (the will of Hashem) from us that we should go to such places...?”

[3] After the *shiur* the Rav added on that the problem is that people only begin to think deeply about a problem **after** they have gotten used to living a very extravagant and gluttonous kind of life (always used to eating as much pizza as he wants), and then it is very hard for a person to change his lifestyle that he’s used to. Therefore, we need to think and reflect **before** we develop such a kind of lifestyle, and reflect about what kind of lifestyle we want to lead – “*Sof Maaseh B’Machshavah Techilah*”, “The end of action is first with thought”; the first step is always to think and plan about what the right thing is, so we can know how to act properly.

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