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[Home](#) > Fixing Your Water - 017 Dry Desires

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Desires That Stem From Fire-of-Water

With the help of Hashem, we are currently up to discussing desires that stem from **fire-of-water**. There will be four subdivisions of this: earth (of fire-of-water) water (of fire-of-water), wind (of-fire-of-water), and fire (of-fire-of-water); we will go through each of them, beginning from earth, then water, then wind, and then fire.

Earth-of-fire-of-water, with regards to desires, are desires that stem from the dry nature of fire. There are three sources for desires – thirst, which stems from dryness in the soul^[1]; searching for something that is a “dry” kind of desire; and after fulfilling the desire, a person is still thirsty for the desire, as it is stated by our Rabbis: “This world is like salty water.”^[2] The more a person tries to quench his desires, the thirstier he becomes for that desire. These are specifically desires which “dry” a person out after he gives in to them, leaving him thirsty for more and more of it.

Water-of-fire-of-water is when a person searches for a reciprocal relationship – as it is written, “*just as water reflects one face to another face, so is the heart of man to another*”. This is a power that can be used either for holiness or for evil. It can be used as a power to acquire deep friendships, “beloved friends” (*rayim ahuvim*) - or it can be *chas v’shalom* used for evil when a person seeks relationships which are forbidden according to the Torah.

Wind-of-fire-of-water stems from the renewal aspect in fire; these are desires in which people seek new things all the time. These kinds of desires fill the world today, and in an astounding manner.

Fire-of-fire-of-water stems from the strife aspect in fire. There are wars in the world, and the Torah requires certain wars as well; the fire in the soul can cause a person to have a desire for war. When it is used for holiness, it is like the wars which Dovid HaMelech fought, but when it is used for evil, it is a desire for war. It is also the root of the trait of *nekama* \revenge; as is well-known, the *Mesillas Yesharim* says that “nothing feels sweeter than revenge”.

We have mentioned the four kinds of desires stemming from fire-of-water. We will now begin to go through explaining these desires, one by one, with their specific solutions. We will begin with explaining desires that stem from **earth**-of-water-of-fire: desires that are “dry” in their nature, which cause a person to “dry” himself out when he pursues them.

Earth-of-Fire-of-Water: Dried Up Inside

Desires stemming from **earth**-of-water-of-fire are when a person has a dominance of **internal**

dryness in the soul. Therefore, he seeks “dry” kinds of desires, which dry him out and leave him even thirstier than before.

When a person feels empty inside and he goes looking through the fridge for something to nosh on, really he is looking for **movement**, just it is manifest as a desire for food; it is all stemming from a desire for some movement.

For example, when a person eats a lot on Shabbos, it seems like he just wants good food, but it’s really a desire for movement. The person is bored inside because he isn’t moving, so his desire for movement will appear in the form of desire for food. We addressed this earlier [in Chapters 5 and 6].

Others search for desires, however, because they are **dry** inside. This problem stems from the **nefesh habehaimis**. It can show up as a desire for a drink, but it’s really more than that: the person feels dry inside, and that is why he is “thirsty”.

Step One: Try To Discern Where The Desire Is Coming From

Whenever a person feels a desire, he should try to discern where it is coming from. Is it coming from being **dragged** [after **movement**], which we addressed earlier? Or is it coming from inner emptiness and boredom?

When a person is sitting in his house and he suddenly feels a desire for a certain snack, sometimes this can also be that he is being dragged after things, and his imagination is responsible for this; he is not aware that it is his imagination which has awakened him to want something. He hears or sees something, and his imagination is awakened, which can cause him to desire it.

(Some people search for food because they feel pressure and to ease their tension, but we are not dealing with this. This is not desire. If this is done sensibly there is nothing wrong with this, and sometimes we can use food to calm the body, like when you are nervous before a test. It just needs to be done with awareness: one must know if he is eating to calm himself, and how much he needs to eat to calm himself.)

But when the desire stems from **internal dryness** – which really shows that there is a lack of **chiyus (vitality)** inside the person – this is what we are dealing with here.

One must become aware of why he is having the desire. It is a subtle discerning; the more of a *bar daas* (mature thinking) that a person is, when he has a moment of calm, he can reflect and try to discern where his desire is coming from. He might not get it perfectly, but he can still attain a degree of clarity what is causing him right now to have the desire.

But a person also has to be aware if it’s coming from inner boredom, which is a problem stemming from “wind” in the soul: a desire for movement. If that is the case, we dealt with this earlier [in Chapters 5-6; and he should use the solutions given there]. If he discovers that it comes from inner dryness, though, it is because he is missing vitality. The solution for this will be to gain some vitality, which we will speak about here how to do.

This is the first part of the solution: try to figure out where the desire is coming from in yourself. Here we are discussing desires that stem from internal dryness.

Step Two: Identify Your Inner Dryness

The second part of the solution, which applies to the actual time of the desire, is as follows. One needs to reflect: “What exactly is it that I am desiring?”

Sometimes a person desires different things all the time – one day he may want something salty, the next day something spicy, the next time something sweet, then moist, then dry, etc. There are all different directions that desire can go in. There are other factors that contribute to these desires which are really causing them.

Here in this chapter, we are addressing a person who knows clearly what he strongly desires. We can see this in people who like to eat or indulge in things that are of a “dry” nature. For example, there are people who like to hear sad songs. Before listening to the song they looked happier, and after the song, they are sad – and they actually enjoy hearing these sad songs! The desire here is for something that dries a person out. These are usually people whose souls have become very dried out – they have no vitality in their life.

It can manifest as well in a desire for certain foods, but it is not limited to food. It is coming from a general lack of vitality in the person’s life. The person is immature, because he doesn’t know how to pull away from these dry kinds of desires that do not satisfy. He gets pleasure in the very dryness of the desire, as opposed to enjoying the object of his desire.

These people do not have any real enjoyment in their life. It is not desire created from dryness – rather, it is dryness in their life which is causing them to have these desires.

If a person has a strong amount of earth in his soul along with this, he will get very depressed and melancholy. But even if he isn’t, a person with inner dryness will seek desires that are dry in their essence.

Here is another example of this: There are people who search for desires that are outdated. For example, there are people who enjoy looking for antiques, or for anything that piques memories of the past, things that provide nostalgia, which do not have any current vitality to them; things that are out of existence.

There are more examples as well of this concept: when a person seeks desires that are entirely dry in their nature, and they get vitality from this dryness – but it’s a dry kind of vitality.

(If a person feels a very strong desire for a particular thing it is usually coming from his ***nefesh habehaimis***).

So the second part of the solution is to realize, as he is amidst the desire, that his desire is really drying him out, and he should become aware that it is really the dry nature of the desire which he is drawn towards. Meaning, the person needs to realize that it is not the actual desire that he is seeking (such as the food or the music or the antiques), but that he is looking for something dry which he gains vitality from. He should become aware that he likes to seek “dry” kinds of desires – because he is dry inside himself, for he lacks vitality.

Step Three: Feel The Dryness After The Desire

The third part of the solution applies after the person has experienced the desire and given in to it. The Vilna Gaon says that a person imagines how salty water will cure his thirst, and after he drinks it, he finds out the truth. When a person is thirsty inside, feeling a powerful desire for a certain thing – usually, it is something that will only be detrimental to him. After he gives in to the desire, he’s thirstier than before.

Holy desire is when a person uses desire as a way to increase his yearning for more. Evil desire is that when the desire goes away, a person feels dry afterwards, and he loses vitality. He feels dead.

When a person gives in to a desire that he really wanted, if he is calm afterwards, he can feel this feeling of inner dryness in himself that we are describing. A person who isn't calm afterwards, though, won't be able to discern this.

Giving Yourself Vitality

Let us examine now what happens before a person feels the desire.

There are people whose entire desires are dry, and there are others who feel dryness after they give in to desire.

To fix these desires, one has to know where he gets vitality from. Every person has things he gets vitality from. When it comes to our physical needs, we get life-giving vitality from the things we eat and drink, and we also get put to 'death' when we go to sleep.

Thus, we have two 'endpoints' in our life – our source of "vitality", which is food and drink, and our source of "death", which is our sleep. (On a more subtle note, after the sin with *Eitz HaDaas*, even food and drink have become deathlike, because eating caused the sin of death).

Every person has a physical source of vitality, or else he can't survive. Just as a person has physical vitality, so does his ***nefesh habehaimis*** ("animalistic" layer) in his soul need vitality. If a person would go for even one moment without giving his soul vitality, he would die!

Of course, this doesn't happen so fast. But if a person would ever come to a point in which he no soul vitality anymore, he would die. The ***nefesh habehaimis*** cannot survive without vitality, just as the body cannot survive without vitality.

This doesn't mean of course that the ***nefesh habehaimis*** in us needs vitality every second. (In Kelm, they would go for three days without eating or sleeping much). Rather, it means that if there would be a moment in which all of the soul's vitality ceases, the person would have a spiritual death. When a person is completely depressed and melancholy, he is dead inside; but there is almost no one who ever reaches that point.

Everyone must be aware – not just to know this intellectually, but to be actually aware – of the source of vitality that our personal ***nefesh habehaimis*** needs. The only issue is *what* is giving it vitality, and *how much* it needs. But you must be aware that it needs vitality.

There are some people in this world who are very spiritual, and only feed their souls, and not their bodies. They skip from the body to the soul, leaving out the needs of their ***nefesh habehaimis***. What happens? It is tragic. The person only feeds his soul with Torah and mitzvos, and eats the bare necessities to survive – and he neglects his ***nefesh habehaimis*** in the process. His basic emotional needs will be missing, and he will suffer internally.

The ***nefesh habehaimis*** in us is like an animal in us that has been placed into our ownership, which we need to take care of and feed. It's your personal "animal" within you that you need to feed – you must have pity on it and give its basic needs. The *halachah* is that one must feed his animals even before he feeds himself - so too, one has to know *what* his ***nefesh habehaimis*** needs in order to feel 'emotionally' fed, as well as *how much* emotional nourishment it needs. It is like any other poor person who needs your help.

Feeding Your 'Nefesh HaBehaimis'

Being aware of this changes one's entire self-awareness towards his soul. One must not deny his

nefesh habehaimis and its needs.

There are four elements in it (earth, water, wind and fire), and one must know its nature, and where it gets its vitality from – and to give it what it needs. Don't give it more than it needs, but make sure to give it *exactly* what it needs. At times, you can also give it a little less than what it needs, so that you can train it to need less. But you must definitely feed your **nefesh habehaimis** and generally not ignore its needs.

Without knowing about this – and indeed, most people do not know how to feed their **nefesh habehaimis** – a person will “dry up” inside, because his **nefesh habehaimis** is not getting its needs.

Often a person has all kinds of negative emotions and he's not sure where it is coming from. The root is often because he is not self-aware enough towards his **nefesh habehaimis**, so he's not aware of what it needs for vitality and what bothers it. The result is that he doesn't feed his *nefesh habehaimis*.

This often happens to people who do not have much spirituality in their life and they are also not that successful in the world, and in addition, they don't even feel vitality from bad *middos* such as conceit and honor (which other people do feel vitality from). They feel so meek inside, and they sort of “dry up” inside themselves.

Many people are filling up most of the day with eating out and all kinds of foods, and a large part of this (not always, but for the most part) is due to a “dried-up” **nefesh habehaimis**, which is constantly seeking its vitality that it is starving for. The person is often not aware that his pursuit of desires are really stemming from internal dryness in his soul, and he's not aware that he is really dying for vitality. Upon becoming self-aware, he might discover that he eats a lot of extra food in order to satisfy his inner dryness.

So first, one must try to see where he gets vitality from in his life. We already know that we must feed our spirituality, our “G-dly soul” (the **Nefesh Elokis**), through Torah and mitzvos that it needs. In addition, each person needs to find his unique self in Torah learning. And we all know that we must take care of our physical needs, such as to wear the right shirt size and shoe size. So too, one must try to figure out what his “**nefesh habehaimis**” needs, what bothers it, and how to feed it.

This kind of self-awareness enables a person to treat a problem at its root, and the other problems go away on their own. They won't *completely* go away of course, because a person always has some inner dryness left in himself, but a large part of the problems do go away, when he has this self-awareness towards his **nefesh habehaimis**.

This will, in turn, slowly lessen the dominance of ‘internal dryness’ of the soul.

The Key To Overcoming Temptation

Chazal say, “When the *yetzer hora* is present, there is no *yetzer tov*”,^[3] so when there is inner dryness in the soul, it is very hard to overcome a desire when it dominates. But when a person gives inner order to his soul beforehand by feeding it on a regular basis, it is much easier to overcome temptation.

The Great Solution To All Psychological Issues

Therefore, a person must know what his spiritual needs are, and what his “**nefesh habehaimis** needs” are. (A person also needs to know his physical needs, but we are not dealing with this right now). Without this proper self-awareness, a person might be a *ben Torah*, always learning Torah and doing the mitzvos, and always trying to do Hashem's will, but he has no real and inner vitality

sustaining him!

A person has to be a “*ben Ish Chai*”, to be “alive”, and if one does not feed the needs of *nefesh habehaimis*, he is not “alive” inside. Both our **Nefesh Elohis** (G-dly and Divine soul), and our **nefesh habehaimis** (animalistic soul – our basic emotional needs) need to be kept alive. Hashem wants our **nefesh habehaimis** to be alive (and to be purified), and therefore, one must know well what his **nefesh habehaimis** needs in order to feel alive.

The words here have been brief, but they are coming to explain the root of many problems in today’s times, in which there are an endless amount of psychological disturbances. People today are full of emotional suffering, going all over the place for therapy and trying to get helped, and sadly, many people aren’t finding anyone who can help them. But many of the emotional problems going on in today’s times are simply because people lack a source of inner vitality in their life; because they don’t know what it is. When there is a lack of vitality in the soul, a person will have an entire “zoo” inside himself, because there is chaos in his soul from all of the desires he has that are not being pacified in any way.

So the first step of the solution is to figure out and clarify where your **nefesh habehaimis** gets vitality from. When this is discovered, a large percentage of a person’s problems will fall away, and not just the area of desires. The concept is being applied here to the topic of desires, but it is really an idea that can be used to solve most of the issues in our soul.

This is one part the solution to solving desires that stem from “inner dryness” of the soul.

Step Three: After You Feel The Inner Dryness From Desires

The other part of the solution is, as we mentioned, that after you give in to a desire and you feel dry inside, to be aware of the following. There are two reasons why there is dryness after desire.

One reason is because desire causes disparity – “*Those who seek desire, are separated.*” When a person has a desire, he has vitality from it, but when the desire goes away, he is left with nothing, so he feels dry. He was connected to something, but it wasn’t a true connection; when that false connection goes away, he feels alone again. That is the simple meaning of the *possuk*.

The deeper meaning, though, is based on the concepts here: dryness is what is causing the desire, so it is really feeding the body, not the soul. It leaves some mark, however, on the **nefesh habehaimis**, and the **nefesh habehaimis** gets something from it.

For this reason, a person seeks a desire and imagines that he needs it, while in reality, it is “salty water”, as the *Vilna Gaon* says. Meaning, it sustains his body, not his soul. So a person will just feel the dryness again, and not only that, but he is thirstier than before, so the desire increases more and more.

Thus, desire stemming from dryness of the soul causes a person to go back to dryness after he gives into such a desire, and then he gets even thirstier, having an even stronger desire than before for the original desire. (As we said, sometimes desires can be stemming from boredom, and this is not necessarily a desire that dries a person out afterwards.)

For Those Who Always Feel Dry Inside

These two parts of the solution can apply to most people, and now we will say a third point, which might not apply to all people.

There are a few people who always feel dry inside, and it is their nature. These people have a very dominant nature of earth-of-fire-of-water in their souls, therefore, they always feel somewhat 'dry' inside themselves. If one is like this, the advice is to look for things that can provide a little bit of vitality, and to keep trying this. It can be something that is a dry kind of desire - as long as it is a little bit.

However, if a person overdoes it and wants to taste a large amount of something dry, then it will backfire, and it will be like pouring too much oil onto a fire, which only puts out the fire.

But if you keep giving yourself a little bit of vitality, it is beneficial. It accustoms your soul to gaining vitality, and the more your soul gets little doses of vitality, the more it is released from its dry confines, and it can conceptualize the idea of giving yourself vitality.

Caution Advised

However, it should be mentioned that there is a danger with this. In spirituality, it is wonderful to increase your vitality, but right now we are dealing with providing for the needs of the **nefesh habehaimis**, which are physical, so it might open a person to the world of desires, which are evil and destructive to the soul.

Therefore, practically speaking, one should mainly try to draw a little more vitality in his life from a spiritual source, and when it comes to the area of your physical needs, gaining vitality must be done sensibly and with prayer to Hashem for assistance.

This last part only applies to a few people, but the first two ideas are applicable to almost all people in the world.

[1] For further research on "dryness" of the soul ("yoivesh"), see **Understanding Your Middos #011-Internal Dryness**.

[2] Statement of the Vilna Gaon

[3] Nedarim 32a

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