

# Balak

**Cold Water in the Soul**

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## *Cold Water in the Soul*

### *Introduction*

We continue here, with the help of Hashem, to learn about the element of water in the soul. In the previous chapters, we covered the traits which stem from the element of water in the soul, as listed by Rav Chaim Vital: *taavah* (desire), *taanug* (pleasure), *chemdah* (envy) and *kinah* (jealousy).

In addition to the *middos* character traits which each of the four elements produce, there are also unique properties of each of the elements.

The unique property of water is that it is cold. As we mentioned earlier, fire is naturally hot, water is naturally cold, water is naturally moist, and earth is naturally dry. These are the four unique properties of each of the elements.

We are discussing here the element of water, which has the unique nature of being naturally cold. We will try to understand what this is in terms of how it applies to our soul.

### *Good and Evil Kinds of “Coldness”*

For everything that Hashem created, there is a way to use it for good or evil. Where do we find a good kind of coldness, and where do we find evil coldness?

The good kind of coldness is described in the possuk, “*Cold waters on a famished soul.*”<sup>1</sup> Water gives vitality, and when water is cold, it is especially revitalizing.

By contrast, evil coldness is written of Amalek, “*Asher korcha baderech*”, “They met you along the way”, and Rashi compares them to a person who jumps into a scalding bath, who gets burned but cools it off for others. [Amalek fought with the Jewish people and were defeated, but in doing so, they enabled other nations to lose fear of the Jewish people, so they “cooled off” the fear of other nations while they got burned in the process.]

The word *korcha* is related to the word *kerirus*, coldness, which hints to the evil trait of “coldness” that defines Amalek.

“Cold waters” in Hebrew are called *mayim karim*, which has the numerical value in Hebrew as the word *mes*, dead. In other words, the evil kind of coldness is associated with death.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mishlei: 25*

Amalek attacked us when we were exhausted, and they did not fear Hashem. They were the evil kind of “cold waters” which exists in Creation to counter the holy kind of “cold waters”.

Death usually is associated with the element of earth, as we learned about earlier; “*To earth you shall return*” was the curse of death.<sup>2</sup> But there is also death which stems from the element of water. Death stemming from earth is physical death, death of the body, which places the body in the earth; whereas death stemming from water is *spiritual* death, a “death” to the soul.

The episode of the “bitter waters” at Merivah was what brought about the death of Moshe, who was “drawn from the water”; Moshe came from water, and his death was caused by water. The “bitter waters” at Merivah represent the evil kind of “cold waters”, the kind that brings death.

Thus, there is water which brings vitality, and there are waters which bring about death. The waters which brought life were the waters that saved Moshe’s life, while the waters which caused death were the Waters of Merivah.

We will soon bring more examples in which death to the soul is related to water.

The root of *machlokes* (strife) began on the second day of Creation, when Hashem separated the upper waters from the lower waters; on that day, Gehinnom was created. The connection is that the separation of the waters is what allowed for Gehinnom! Earth is death to the body, while water can bring death to the soul.

When a person is contaminated by a corpse, the Torah requires him to be purified through “*mayim chaim*”, pure spring water. Here again we see that water is associated with death.

“*Cold waters on a famished soul*” – what exactly is the person famished from? His soul is famished because he is exhausted, which is a kind of sleep, and sleep is called “a sixtieth of death” according to the Sages. Tiredness can be defined as a pull towards sleepiness; simply speaking, when a person feels sleepy, he is really feeling deathlike. Sometimes the body sleeps, but sometimes the soul sleeps, in the form of exhaustion. What takes the soul out of its tiredness? The “cold waters” that are poured on the soul, the *mayim chaim*, can revitalize a person and take him out of his lethargy.

Thus, the good and holy kind of “cold water” is when “cold water” gives life to the soul, while the evil kind of “cold water” is the root of death to the soul. We see this from the fact that coldness implies a lack of vitality, because heat is what gives vitality; when a person is alive, his body is warm, but when a person is dead, his body is cold. Death stemming from water is coldness of the soul.

Until now, we explained coldness of water – it can either be a source of vitality-giving energy to a famished soul, as the possuk says; or it can be a death to the soul.

### ***The Connection Between Keri\Spilled Seed and Kerirus\Coldness***

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<sup>2</sup> See *Understanding Your Middos #015-Silence*

There are two kinds of water which exit the body: the *bris Kodesh*, the reproductive organ, contains two passageways, one of which brings *zera* (human seed), which brings life to the world (through enabling *holadah* \birth); and the other is the urinary tract. The urine is the *pesoles* (disposable parts) of water.

When *holadah* (the reproductive process) is carried out in its pure form, life is brought to the world. The continuation of life is enabled through the droplet of *zera*. When this droplet doesn't exit through the proper way, though, it is called *keri* (emission), from the word *kerirus*, coldness.

When *zera* is used for *holadah*, the *zera* is warm, but when it exits as *keri*, the *zera* is cold. This is the ruination of water. Urine is hot, while the misuse of *holadah* is *keri*, from the word *kerirus*.

In other words, the *kerirus* of *keri*, which brings death, has become manifest in this place that could have brought life to the world, because souls could have been created from this droplet, as the Sages reveal; thus, *keri* is like a death to the souls of these unborn children.

So death to the soul comes from water: through *keri*. The droplet of *zera* of *keri* could have been a source of life, had it been used for *holadah*; when it isn't used for *holadah*, when it is not used for holiness, it becomes *keri*. It is like a death – and what kind of death? Not death to the body, but a death to the soul.

So on one hand, water can be *mayim chaim*, “waters of life”, in which the coldness of water brings vitality; or it becomes the *mayim karim* (cold waters) of *keri*, in which the coldness of water brings spiritual death.

### ***Coldness Is Holy When It Is Used To Mitigate Between Two Opposites***

Now that we have defined the good and evil kinds of coldness, we will reflect into what kind of coldness brings life, and what kind of coldness brings death. It is not the same kind of coldness. We will try to understand this and give some examples that illustrate the concept.

Everything in Creation has an opposite. The opposite of coldness is heat. Water is cold, and fire is hot.

There is always a middle point between two opposites. What is the middle point between cold and heat?

The simple understanding is that in between cold and heat, there is a level in between, which is “*poisher*”, lukewarm. We see that there is such a thing as “*mayim poshrim*”, lukewarm water.

However, we do not find this term mentioned explicitly in the words of our Sages. In the words of our Sages, we find a different term for the middle point in between cold and heat: the word “*revayah*”, which is the level in between heat and cold.

These are two ways to describe the middle point that is in between cold and heat. What is the difference?

The element in between water and fire is wind. Wind is moist and hot, which contains properties of both water and fire, because water is moist and fire is hot. We also find that earth is in between fire and water.

*Revayah* is from the word *ruach*\wind, so when wind is used as the middle point in between fire\heat and water\coldness, it is known as *revayah*. The other term for the middle point between fire and water, *poisher*, is a use of the element of earth.

What is the difference? They are two kinds of middle points. One kind of middle point is a point which contains a little of each of the opposite, such as lukewarm water, *poisher*, which contains elements of both heat and coldness. But another kind of middle point is when the opposites are connected to their root. A simple example of is the connection of husband and wife, two opposites, which are connected together, for the sake of *holadah*.

So *revayah* is a middle point that connects two opposite points together, while *poisher*\earth can contain both opposites, but it cannot balance the opposites together.

Thus, there are two ways to mitigate between cold and heat: *revayah* (wind) and *poisher* (earth). The difference is that wind can connect both fire and water to their root, while earth can contain them together, but it cannot connect them to their root.

What kind of “cold water” brings life, and what kind of “cold water” brings death?

When a soul is “famished”, that means that it has become dry inside, from fire in the soul. When “cold water” is poured upon the soul, the soul becomes balanced, and the person receives vitality from this. The “cold water” revitalizes the soul because it balances the soul – it harmonizes the fire with the water in the soul. Such water is life-giving.

Coldness that brings death, however, is when the soul’s abilities are mixed together, but they do not become harmonized and balanced. To illustrate, snow is cold; earlier, we brought from the words of the Sages that earth was created from snow, which is hardened water. Snow is called *kerach*, which stands for *kor* (cold) *revayah* (mitigation) *chom* (heat). However, the coldness of *kerach*\snow does not unify the opposite elements of fire and water. It mixes the three elements together (water, wind and fire), but it does not harmonize them.

When does coldness give life, and when does it give death? If it brings balance to the soul, it gives life. If it brings extremes, it does not bring life.

Snow is the extreme form of water, because snow cannot be drunk; it must be melted. Snow itself cannot give vitality to a person. It represents a mixing of the elements which are unbalanced. By contrast, the good kind of coldness is when coldness brings a person to a middle point, to a balance between two opposites. When coldness brings balance, it is life-giving. But when coldness is just by itself and it does not foster any kind of connection, it brings death.

“Cold water” gives life when a person has dryness in his soul and he is leaning towards a deathlike situation in his soul, and the “cold waters” are poured upon him which revitalize him, by essentially giving balance to his soul’s abilities.

So when coldness is by itself, it brings death; when it brings balance, when it connects the opposite points to their root, it brings life.

We can see this too from our physical world, that coldness by itself cannot provide life: people cannot live in places in the world that are too cold [Such as in the North or South Poles]. But when coldness provides a balance between two opposing points, the cold then becomes life-giving.

This is the meaning of “cold waters on a famished soul”, how coldness can actually give life.

Where can we find the root of this concept of cold water?

On the second day of Creation, Hashem made a separation between the upper waters and the lower waters. The upper waters remained in Heaven, while the lower waters are on earth. We know that the nature of fire is to rise, and water naturally drops downwards. The word *shomayim*, the heavens, is a combination of the words *aysh*\fire and *mayim*\water, because Heaven can contain both of them properly.

How can water and fire be combined? Through a *revayah*, a mitigating force. When coldness comes from a *revayah*, this represents the upper waters, which can combine with fire, for they are in Heaven, in which water and fire are combined. But the lower waters, which drop to the earth, are essentially waters that are connected with death, to the death in the earth. This is not a coldness that harmonizes fire with water, but a coldness which brings death; this is coldness rooted in earth.

Thus, cold waters can also be a source of death, but if coldness fosters connection, the coldness then acts as a catalyst for life. It is only when coldness is by itself and it doesn't harmonize with anything else that it brings death.

The Gemara mentions that a donkey is always cold, even during even the hot month of Tamuz. A donkey is *chamor* in Hebrew, from the word *choimer*\materialism. The element of earth is known for its *choimer*, (as the Maharal discusses at length). The coldness of the donkey represents the deathlike kind of coldness, for even in Tamuz it is cold, because its coldness is always by itself, and it never gets balanced.

How can we know the difference between evil and good coldness? It is based on the above.

Evil coldness is *keri*, which is also known as *pgam b'ris*, damaging the Holy Covenant.

When *zera* is used for holiness, for *holadah*, it is called *daas*, which causes connection between husband and wife; “*Vayeda Adam es Chavah*”, “And Adam knew his wife”, meaning, he knew her and become connected to her, through their marital relations.

But when the *zera* is used for itself and not to achieve connection with a wife, when it is not used for *holadah* (procreation), it becomes the evil kind of *kerirus*\coldness.

*Keri* is called *mikreh layoh*, a nocturnal emission. It seems to come from bodily heat, not from *kerirus*. If so, why is it called *keri* (from the word *kerirus*), when it is clearly not cold? But the understanding is that it although it comes from heat of the body, it is not a heat which led to any

connection, therefore, even heat can be a kind of coldness. When heat doesn't cause connection like it should, it is really a form of *kerirus*\coldness.

The Hebrew words for cold and heat, *kar* and *cham*, is equal in numerical value to the word *someach*, joy. In other words, there is *simcha*\joy when there is a balance between opposites.

The soul can either be apart from others, or be unified with others. We have the choice to decide if we will use the power of *kerirus* to bring about connection - or disparity.

### ***The Evil Coldness of Amalek***

When coldness is to itself and it does not cause about any connection, it is *keri*. This was the *kerirus* of Amalek. They attacked us at Refidim, which is from the word *pirud*, disparity.

When a person gets burned, what does he do? He sticks his hands into cold water. The nation of Amalek, who "jumped" into the scalding bath (and got burned) cooled it off for others. Why didn't Amalek also get cooled off from its own water that it jumped into? It is because the coldness of Amalek always remains as coldness, and it cannot be mitigated. Its coldness always remains to itself, unable to be balanced. Amalek is a coldness that can never be rectified.

To make this concept simpler, we can understand that when someone doesn't want to connect with people, he is called a "cold person." Evil coldness is *pirud* (disparity), from the word Refidim, where Amalek attacked us; the coldness of Amalek is by itself and it does not become mitigated.

By contrast, the holiness of the Jewish people can connect with each other, as we were all with one heart at Har Sinai.

### ***The Depth of Evil Coldness: Extreme Contraction***

In other language from our Rabbis, heat in the soul causes expansion in the soul, while coldness in the soul causes contraction in the soul. Coldness does not just cause a lack of connection with another; it also causes a person to contract into himself even more. Until now, we explained how coldness causes a lack of connection to another. But in addition, coldness also causes contraction.

Returning to the discussion about Amalek, we have a *mitzvah* to erase Amalek, which is called *mechiyas Amalek*; the word *mechiyah* is from the word *chom*, heat. The depth of this *mitzvah* is that Amalek got burned and cooled it off for others, and the coldness of Amalek causes it to contract into itself. The simpler understanding is that we erase them through "erasing" them, *mechiyah*, from the word *cham*\heat. But the deeper understanding is that we can also erase them through their coldness, for it is their coldness that acts self-destructive to them. Why? Since coldness causes inward contraction, Amalek is so cold that it keeps contracting into itself, until it will eventually destroy itself.

*Kerirus* is also from the word *mikreh*, “happenstance.” *Mikreh* is when something has no connection to the previous event. Amalek is like *mikreh*, and this we explained earlier. But Amalek is also *kerirus*, which is that not only is there no connection to others, but it destroys itself, by contracting into itself too much.

Sometimes the weather is cold and sometimes it is hot. There is winter and summer. In between these two points are the elements of wind and earth. Between winter and summer is spring, and between summer and winter is the fall. This reflects the concept here, that the cold has to be mitigated through the other elements. But when *kerirus* is by itself (unlike what we are used to, when we have both summer and winter in the year), the cold is destructive, for it is unbalanced.

This is the depth behind the concept of Amalek, who will really be destroyed by itself [in the future], from its own coldness.

### ***Holy Coldness: Cooling Off Extreme Enthusiasm***

In clearer language that applies to our soul, there are two kinds of coldness in our soul – when a person doesn’t connect to others, and when a person contracts into himself.

When a person doesn’t connect to others, he is missing a balance. He needs a kind of coldness that will enable him to be balanced. This we have addressed so far.

When a person has too much fire in his soul – when he has too much enthusiasm – he is also off balance. He needs to use coldness in the soul to balance himself out, so that his “fire” will be cooled off a bit. The function of coldness in the soul is so that we can use it to give balance to the soul; it is not meant to remain as itself. [When coldness remains as itself, it is evil. Its purpose is so that we can use it to balance out the soul when there is too much heat].

When a person is too enthused, he needs “cold water” to put out the inner fire that has gotten too dominant. We see this from the following: when a person feels an evil desire, the Rabbis wrote that he should stand in cold water, which cools off the heat of his desire. This is practical advice which our Rabbis gave, but beyond this use as well, a person can also use “cold water” in the soul to cool off his extreme enthusiasm (even when he doesn’t feel an evil desire), by attaining a balance to his soul’s abilities.

In simpler words: we have a heart and intellect. The heart is the root of our element of fire, and our intellect is the root of our element of water. When a person has too much “heart” – when he has too much enthusiasm – he needs to cool off his fire in his heart, by using his cold intellect.

This is the holy kind of *kerirus*, which can balance the heart.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this concept and how to apply it practically, see *Getting To Know Your Feelings-Chapter 17*, and *Tefillah #0107-Balance In Your Avodas Hashem*.



### ***Using Holy Coldness To Cool Off Evil Desires***

That was one practical use of cold water in the soul. Another practical use pertains to the fact that coldness causes contraction in the soul, just as Amalek's coldness will destroy itself.

Chazal<sup>4</sup> say that the male organ, the more it is seemingly "satisfied" through the act of intimacy, the more it causes one to be hungry for even more (intimacy), but when it is starved, it is actually satisfied. How is it starved? When one "satisfies" it, this is using the heat of his soul, and such heat is evil; it needs to be cooled off. When one starves it, by not giving in to its desire, he is essentially using the coldness of the soul, and for a holy purpose. It satisfies the person because the person weakens the desire and comes to not need it. The desire is lessened with the more that the coldness of the soul is applied.

[This is how coldness in the soul can be used for holiness: it can be used to cool off the heat of desire, which gives balance to the soul.]

### ***The Deepest Form of Holy Coldness: The Non-Movement Which Reveals Hashem***

On a deeper note, there is also a holy power of coldness in the soul. The holy kind of coldness is when there is no movement. When there is heat, there is movement, as we see that an alive person is moving. Coldness produces a lack of movement. This is a power that can be used for either good or evil.

So altogether, there are three aspects to coldness: 1) Lack of connection, 2) Contraction, and 3) Lack of movement.

The earth also contains non-movement, and this is related to the coldness of earth which brings death. But coldness of water also contains non-movement. Before it was separated, all water in the world was not moving.

This represents the perfected kind of non-movement in cold water. On the first day, when the water was non-moving, there was nothing besides Hashem; this was the perfected kind of coldness. The perfected kind of coldness is when Hashem fills the entire world, and there is no other movements. "There is no place empty from Him"<sup>5</sup> really refers to this holy kind of coldness. When all desire for movement is silenced, this reveals the holy kind of non-movement.

When Amalek will be destroyed, its coldness will be destroyed and reveal the perfected kind of coldness, which is that Hashem will fill the entire world, and there will be no other movements.

The *kerirus* of water, at its holy root, reveals Hashem in the world. The perfected bond with Hashem is really found in this perfected *kerirus*!

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<sup>4</sup> *Sukkah* 52a

<sup>5</sup> *Zohar*

These words are describing the purpose of Creation. It is the purpose of why Amalek needs to be erased, and in its place, to reveal the holy and perfected kind of coldness.

We have explained the three uses of coldness in the soul. May we merit from the Creator to receive from the Creator the Torah, in perfect acceptance.

Translated from the original Hebrew shiur: דע את מידותיך מהות המדות 035 הקור שבמים