

עדת אש קודש

Adass Aish Kodesh



Fighting Affluenza

By *Harav Y. R. Rubin Shlita*

Do you remember when things were so much simpler? You had a cold, and it was just that, a cold. People had less complicated lives; you just got on with it. Now we have huge and complex lives, and everything needs labelling.

The newest manifestation of this took place in Texas where a sixteen year old lobs became totally inebriated, commandeered his dad's truck, and killed four innocent souls. In court his defense attorney offered up a unique defense: his client was suffering from "affluenza" and therefore did not know right from wrong.

Now I can sense you are all scratching your head wondering what affluenza is and if there is a vaccine to prevent it. Psychologists describe this malady as "a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more".

Our young miscreant was almost exonerated with ten years' probation, because, as the Judge said: The boy was incapable of taking responsibility for the deaths because of his history with parents who indulged him with "freedoms no young person should have."

A defense witness psychologist testified in court that the teen was a product of affluenza and was unable to link his bad behaviour with consequences due to his parents teaching him that wealth buys privilege. "Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss' book, Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough, poses the question: "If the economy has been doing so well, why are we not becoming happier?" They argue that affluenza causes over-consumption, "luxury fever", consumer debt, overwork, waste, and harm to the environment. These pressures lead to "psychological disorders, alienation and distress", causing people to "self-medicate with mood-altering drugs and excessive alcohol consumption.

So we are witnessing a fine mess, and things aren't getting any better. Obviously, my readership will draw in a deep breath and sigh, "look at the world they have created, everything is about obtaining more stuff, and no one need take any responsibility!"

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Well, I would like you to just eavesdrop on some of our adolescent heimishe youngsters or young marrieds. They, too, talk incisively about materialism, designer labels, trips to exotic places and most importantly, luxury cars, phones and trinkets. It makes little difference if one craves French exclusive labels, or the most up to date style of shtrielmel. Everything is being merchandised, and everyone manipulated. Why do so many more people want what they haven't got and want to be someone they're not, despite being richer and freer than earlier generations? Read kosher adverts in the heimishe media. They subliminally coax us to buy more elaborate things, make more lavish simchas, travel to far off glatt kosher holidays, and attend Chassidishe rock concerts that include all the dance steps that can be seen in the lowest of night spots. Chassanehs now have entertainers who specialise in introducing the holy newlyweds with blood-curdling screams that would be better suited to a sports arena. The songs are from Sodom, and the beat from Harlem. Whole orchestras now play where once a Yied with a keyboard sufficed, but "that is so out of date, Rebbe, get with it."

Our kids are broken because we have lost sight of what our true values are. We work so hard to make ends meet, and the children grow up with no understanding of what a wholesome family unit can be. Ask the young what we as Yidden believe in; don't be afraid, just ask. When you're finished reeling from the shock, sit down and look within your heart.

I am left heartbroken at what we are witnessing. We are being crushed by this rush towards the abyss, and like lemmings, so many are just toppling off the edge of the Torah world.

Kids are lost in school, young families are harassed by expectations that were never part of who were are as an Am Kodesh, and Yidden making chassanehs lay sleepless in beds with pillows wet from tears of fear.

Affluenza is not something concocted by the outside world; it is very much here in our lives and it is time we got to grips with it. We need to revert to the simplicity of what a Torah life is meant to be. Children should be taught that all this running after the golden calf of the wider world is not our way. This has to be done by example, not by preaching. The subject of what a tzenius lifestyle means in terms of our Avodas Hashem should be put high on our communal agenda. The creeping sickness of "more" is crouching at our doors, sitting in our shuls, just waiting for the next customer.

I am old enough to recall with fond nostalgia a Yiddishkeit that seemed clear and pristine. I am no fool. I know we can't turn back the clock. I know all too well that we are here in this time and place because only here can we find our tikun. We need to accept what it is Hashem is asking of us and concentrate on today's challenges. Every sefer you will learn, every word of chizuk you will read, is aimed in terms of where Hashem has placed us.

We can do this; we can create a firewall that will protect our young from the onslaught of the madness that is enveloping the world. How? By reigniting the simple fire of our inner neshomo. We can do so much if we eliminate the clutter that society has rammed into our hearts.

Shemos has parshios filled with wonder, Yidden confined in a tight space, crying out to Hashem, even at the last point before total oblivion. Hashem reaches out and redeems them. This is a scenario which confronts us now. We must start here and cry to Hashem before it is too late.



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