

עדת אש קודש

Adass Aish Kodesh



DON'T BECOME THE SLAVE

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin

In Shtiebles 'back in the day,' there were always those last few moments before the end of Shabbos. Maariv would have been davened, Havdalah not yet made, and one could sense an atmosphere of edginess. It took an experienced eye to catch what was happening, but I was a smoker, and was probably a part of the problem. In every shtieble there would be one Yied in charge, usually a member of the survivor community, who would open up the first pack of cigarettes and hand them out to nicotine starved Yiedelech who craved their Motzei Shabbos fix. Our minds were starved of an addictive substance called nicotine which amongst other evils, increases the level of dopamine in the brain. This is a neurotransmitter that is responsible for feelings of pleasure and well-being. So it seemed at the time that as the holy Shabbos slipped away, the body needed a chemically induced sense of comfort. We were told then that cigarettes were actually healthy and harmless. Of course in time we became aware of how nasty these white paper cylinders were. Even so, it took years for us to dispense with celebratory "Choson" cigarettes, and tragically untold thousands had to die before we got the message. We now know that the formula used to make those sticks of poison contained specific chemicals that deliberately acted on our brains to cause a flood of addictiveness.

Well, those bad old days are gone, no one smokes in buildings, indulging in tobacco products is frowned upon, and each pack comes with a scary health warning.

So we are ok now right? Well, actually no, there are even more artificially induced mind alterers now in our Shtieblech. No edginess at Havdalah? Sadly things may be getting even worse.

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Today our brains are stimulated by another sort of purveyor of subconscious dopamine, that phone in your pocket was not really created to just make phone calls. In fact recent studies show that most consumers barely use phones for calling anymore. It is easier to send a text than talking to others. You give over the message in few words without having to get involved with the niceties of human contact. We sit at celebrations staring at small screens, foreheads creased with intent, not even talking to the person next to us.

I recently read a study in "Business Insider":

'All day long, we're inundated by interruptions and alerts from our devices. Smartphones buzz to wake us up, emails stream into our inboxes, notifications from coworkers and far away friends bubble up on our screens, and "assistants" chime in with their own soulless voices.

Such interruptions seem logical to our minds: we want technology to help with our busy lives, ensuring we don't miss important appointments and communications. But our bodies have a different view: These constant alerts jolt our stress hormones into action, igniting our fight or flight response; our heartbeats quicken, our breathing tightens, our sweat glands burst open, and our muscles contract. That response is intended to help us outrun danger, not answer a call or text from a colleague. We are simply not built to live like this. These phones take advantage of our inborn need for security and social interaction and researchers are starting to see how terrible this is for us.' Shabbos ends and too many run to turn back on their technology. This nerviness is apparent to anyone who cares to see.

When our Gedolim warned us about these new innovations, it was much more than the dangers of where they can lead us, they're very essence is addictive, and can wear us down spiritually.

In our shtieble all phones are excluded from the Bais Medrash. This doesn't mean no one brings them, it only means that they can't be taken out. As soon as davening is over, holy Yidden who have davened with intent find themselves outside or in the shul kitchen, clicking away feverishly. The dopamine rush won't be denied, and the body and soul of Klall Yisroel slowly turns into mush.

Our avodah in this world is to be connected with the Eibishter, all this distraction is making us broken in spirit.

Parshas Pinchas is unique in that Chazal arranged our calendar in such a way that it would always be read in the 'Three Weeks' and always without any other reading. In it we find featured all the Yomim Tovim and their various sacrifices. The Bnei Yisoscher explains that in

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this sad period of national remembrance, Chazal wanted us to feel the uplifting blessings of our Holy days and receive some chizuk. In fact the Chiddushei Harim relates that the Rebbe Rav Simcha Bunim of Pshischa used to be extremely joyful on Parshas Pinchas because in it was the spiritual energy of all the Yomim Tovim and their Services.

We are in a difficult golus, and despite all the diversions, we are saddened within because of our lack of connection with Hashem. Let us take this unique Shabbos with its wondrous Torah reading and reaffirm what it is we should be seeking in this world. Let the quite of Shabbos, for many the only time where silence reigns supreme, to get back to our truths. Take upon yourself some kabbalah, something that will speak to you, about all the technological input in your lives.

The Alexandra Rebbe Rav Yechiel Ztl tells us that the reason why the Eibishter gave the blessing of Sholom to Pinchas was because in the previous Parsha of Balak we saw Balaam giving blessings to Klall Yisroel with the exception of that of Sholom. All these could never have any real fulfilment because as Chazal tell us, "If there is no Sholom there is nothing". Balaam didn't want the blessing of sholom to be given because he actually didn't want any of the others to have any real worth. He knew without Sholom nothing would come to be. Pinchas, with his heroic devotion, was the perfect one to give inspire these blessings thereby making everything else possible.

We need the brocha off Sholom more than ever, and on this Shabbos we can embrace it. The Shechinah is in golus with us, our goal must be to bring Hashem out of this Hester by focusing on what is real. Let each of us take a constructive step by evaluating our relationship with the technology that abides in our lives. Let us not let our phones be our masters, rather may our neshomahs know of real Sholom.

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