

עדת אש קודש

Adass Aish Kodesh



A SALTY LOOK BACK

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There are things that are so dangerous, that even touching them is toxic. Poison Ivy can trigger severe and itchy inflammations on your skin, Stinging Nettles inject acid and other irritants when coming into contact with the victim, and then there is the Manchineel, or the 'little apple of death' which grows in Florida and if eaten causes all sorts of havoc to the esophagus, whilst its bark causes an infectious skin rash. But the winner of the toxic to the touch sweepstakes is "the Salt of Sodom". Chazal tell us that this salt could blind someone by mere contact, and was extremely corrosive. The halachah of washing our hands following a bread meal is to ensure that we do not come into contact with this salt from Sodom. The gemorah (Chullin 105b) states that this salt is dangerous and can lead to blindness. Abaye adds that the danger is so great that even one grain of Sodom salt in a 'kor' of ordinary salt (a huge amount) can cause irreparable damage.

Now the obvious question springs to mind, we do not find anywhere in the world today such a powerful salt, nor do we hear of cases in which people who didn't wash their hands before benching suffered any special ill effects. What then is the reason we still practice this halachah?

Let us take a step back and remind ourselves what this salt from Sodom represents and why it still possess a danger to our spirituality.

Whilst urging Lot to escape from the wicked city of Sodom before its destruction, the Malach said to him "Escape with your life; do not look behind you" (Vayeira 19:17). A bit further we read, "[Lot's] wife looked behind him, and she turned into a pillar of salt" (19:26). This pillar of salt was still known of in the times of the Gemorah and formed part of a large salt deposit. So, what does all this talk of salt represent to us?

Lot's wife was a born and bred Sodomisha lass, and she came with all the glaring faults of her environment. Sodom was the capital of selfishness and cruelty and although she married Lot, someone who had benefitted from a close relationship with Avrohom Avinu, it is obvious nothing of his kindness rubbed off. The salt of her understanding remained selfish and bitter. At the moment of

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disaster, she looks behind, hunkering for that which she is leaving behind, and so she turns into that which was the essence of her lifestyle. In her world vision, salt would never be served to strangers, why offer them something tasteful? Why allow others to enjoy what they eat? This bitterness of the soul is poison to a Yiddisha Neshoma, it stands against everything we learn from our Holy ancestors. The touch of such a poisonous trait blinds one from the truth of what our goals are in life. Hence we are told to wash our hands of all such selfishness before benching.

There is yet another powerful lesson we can learn from this episode. Lot was told not to look back. We often look back a bit too much and get caught up with yesterday's mistakes to the detriment of our tomorrow. Chassidische Rebbe's often stress that if one focuses too much on past mistakes and yes, even sins, we end up being caught in the same quagmire that led us to those mistakes in the first place. The Divrei Shmuel Zt"l teaches a fundamental concept in Avodas Hashem. One should always look ahead; he shouldn't look back and focus on the sins and errors he committed in the past, as this will draw him into yiush (despair).

Rav Meilech Biederman Shlita points out that it's important to clarify, there are thoughts that come into our mind that we think is the yetzer tov speaking to us, or that Hashem Himself is calling us to teshuva, but really it's the yetzer hara.

How do we know the difference? Thoughts from the yetzer hora lead to feelings of depression and yiush.

Tzaddikim taught us that the yetzer hara desires the yiush that follows sins more than the sins themselves. Sometimes, the yetzer hara lures a person to sin primarily for the depression that will follow.

This lesson is also alluded to by the letter 'beis'. The 'beis' is closed on three sides, and it's opening faces forward. This indicates that a person's focus should be on the future, and not on the past. The first letter of the Torah is a Bais, the beginning of our forward march to spirituality.

True, it is important to have set times for reflection and teshuva; however, this shouldn't be one's constant focus. Most of the time one should forget about the past, and concentrate on the present and on the future.

Each of us has a past that can be distressing. Our lives are complicated and although we try our best, there will be moments that we fail. The salt of Sodom can often linger, even if only on our fingertips. We must wash this off so that we can move in a positive direction.

These weeks of post Yomim Tovim can often set us back. We had made so many promises, hoped for so much advancement. Now, weeks later and we think we are just where we were before it all began. The winter nights draw in and it is all too simple to just fall into a sense of yiush. Listen to the Malach that calls out to every neshoma, don't turn back, don't look at what was, just move forwards to a new today.



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