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Desires Stemming From Wind-of-Fire-of-Water

We are currently discussing desires that stem from **fire-of-water**; we have already discussed desires that stem from earth ('dry' desires) and water (relationships) that are rooted in the fire-of-water of the soul. Now we are up to discussing desires that stem from the '**wind**' aspect of fire-of-water in the soul.

As we have mentioned in the past, water is the root of desire, wind is the root of movement, and fire is about renewal (similar to how the flame of a fire keeps flickering and becoming renewed). When desire stems from **wind**-of-fire-of-water, a person has a desire to move (wind) towards something new (fire).

The world is full of various desires that people pursue; what are the main desires of the world? People mainly pursue the desires of money, illicit relationships, food, and vacations. When a person has an overpowering desire for food and he also desires movement, he will have a specific desire to eat in the street, because he enjoys movement as he's having food. These kinds of desires, however, are not taking people over all the time.

There are a few people think about making money all day, but most people, even if they desire money, do not actually think about this all day. The desire for illicit relationships are also an overpowering kind of desire which totally consumes a person who is involved with it, but these desires as well are not taking place every second in the person's life (although it can definitely be said that in the generation we live in, the world is not that far from the total level of this). Desires for food, and desires for excessive movement, are also not that constant.

But the desire which we will discuss here in this chapter – the desire for renewal – is a kind of desire that is constant. There are two aspects to this.

There is a kind of renewal which a person produces from within himself; for example, there are people who are able to always have new Torah thoughts, and if this kind of person works for a living, he is the type to be creative and always come up with novelty ideas. This doesn't always mean that he actualizes his ideas, but he is constantly having new ideas. This kind of person, because he is naturally drawn towards renewal, is always coming up with new ideas.

This is an "inner" kind of renewal. because the renewal is being produced from within the person, and it is not drawn from an outside force.

The other kind of renewal is called “outer” renewal; this is referring to the renewal we get from the “news” we pick up, either hearing or reading. There is a desire to know what’s new. If this desire to know “What’s New?” gets too dominant, a person will constantly seek “What’s New?” due to the wind-of-fire (of water) in his soul which is getting dominant and raging.

By nature of the soul, most people will not seek to hear new things, and they will only seek it ever so often. But in the situation of this generation that we are in today, things have changed. The desire to hear about new things is being awakened in almost all people (except for a few people who don’t care much for the news). The events going on in the world that we hear about awaken the desire in the soul to hear about new things.

The Problem With Hearing\Reading the News

Technology, an advent of our recent times, has recently caused a great increase in the desire to hear new things and to follow the news. It used to be that a person didn’t hear all the news that went on. When a person has gotten used to following the news, even if he doesn’t read the news every day, he still feels a need all day to know what’s new. This is the problem that technology has recently created.

When a person needs to read the newspaper every day – either because he is bored, or simply because he is curious – once a person has a fixed time every day in his schedule when he reads the news, his need to hear what’s new will always be active, even if he’s not actively seeking what’s new.

This is not new to our generation; it existed as well a hundred years ago, that even amongst *frum* Torah Jewry, people were reading secular newspapers, so the *Gedolim* had to start a *frum* newspaper in order to replace the reading material; it was a kind of newspaper that came close to being a “*frum*” newspaper.

The truth is that there really is no such thing as a newspaper that is designed for a *ben Torah* to read, but it was definitely close to being a ‘kosher’ newspaper. However, although the reading material was perhaps ‘kosher’, it still caused people to get used to reading new things, which made them develop a need to always seek what’s new. It became a fixed part of a person’s schedule.

Some people always need to hear and read what’s new simply because they are ‘dried up’ inside, and it’s not because they seek renewal. This kind of person reads the paper every day for the same reason that he has a coffee every day; it merely is a fixed part of his schedule.^[1] But most people have a need to seek what’s new, every day, because they really want to hear about new things.

In the last couple of years, the advances in technology have caused people to always have to know “what’s new”. There are people who have no *yishuv hadaas* (calm mind) at all because they have gotten so used to their gadgets, because they are always wondering what’s going in this place of the world and that place of the world.

However, in our generation, most of the time the desire to hear “what’s new” is not coming from the desire in the soul to seek renewal. There are only a few people like that. In our generation, the desire to hear “what’s new” simply envelops the entire world.

Understandably, this causes anxiety in the soul. Even worse than this, though, is that it also causes in the soul a constant awakening of the desire for renewal. People who have the latest technological forms of communication usually do not have that much self-control over how they use their gadgets, and they have become enslaved to an ongoing desire for to hear the news and find out about what’s new in the world.

We are not merely speaking about people who always need to know what’s new in the world, which

can make a person become connected to the worst kinds of evil. We are speaking about the fact that people are enslaved to their gadgets (even if they are 'kosher' gadgets), because they have gotten so used to always receiving the news.

An example of this is the need a person to always view every [text] message that every one of his friends sends. It causes a person to always be in needs of renewal that is superficial in its nature. The desire for news also includes the desire in a person to always know current events, and to know what's going on all over the world (and now they even have news about what's going on in outer space!).

A *ben Torah* who truly spends his day immersed in learning Torah doesn't have this problem. But anyone involved with the outside world has to struggle with this problem, and even those who are learning all day inside a *beis midrash* still might be very connected to the world - if he is a person who has a smartphone in his pocket. Depending on the kind of phone a person has in his pocket, that very factor alone will decide how negatively connected a person is with the world.

Developing A Stability In The Soul

Even a telephone in the home which is always ringing creates this problem: the desire to constantly hear what's new. It destroys the **stability** of the soul.

(Every ability in the soul is good at its essence and needs to be balanced. One has to know if his soul is demanding change or renewal; these are separate concepts. Earlier we addressed the desire for change. Change is a power of the Jew's soul, as the Jewish people are compared to the moon, which is always being renewed.)

The first issue for a person to know is how he is used to always hearing about what's new. When a person is used to always hearing what's new, he will develop a problem of not being able to think properly. Even if he's always reading new words of the Gemara, Rashi, and Tosafos every day, he doesn't necessarily "think" into what he reads. He is always seeking something new - whether it's consciously or subconsciously. Therefore, he doesn't even read what's written there! In his mind, he's seeking something 'new' in the understanding - so he doesn't even see the simple and basic understanding of the words he is reading.

Every person needs renewal, and indeed this is the power of a Jew's soul: renewal. But it must be balanced with **stability** in the soul; earlier, when we discussed the need for change, we discussed this. Stability is described as "*What was, will be.*" The power of stable consistency is a deeper power than renewal.

Of course, it's not good either if a person is the same every day, and he never has anything new in his life. A person has to make sure to have a strong stability in what he does, and that will counter his need for renewal. When the needs for renewal and the stability are balanced, such renewal will be constructive.

If a person always keeps following news, he is constantly leaving himself behind and abandoning his true self! This is the disturbing problem of this generation, in which people are constantly disconnected from themselves, living and experiencing the events of this world that they do not belong to. If we could define the situation of the generation, this is the definition: people that are disconnected from their real selves, constantly involving themselves in a world that is not theirs.

What happened in the past isn't here anymore, and what will happen in the future isn't either here yet; when a person is involving himself with the news, he is essentially disconnected from himself, for he is immersed in either the past or the future. He is neither there nor here.[\[2\]](#) We aren't even

discussing the *kind* of news that a person is listening to; we are simply speaking about *what takes place in the mind* when a person always needs to follow the news.

This concept is true both with regards to one who has developed a constant need for renewal, as well as with one who has a constant need for change.

Step One: Constricting The Desire For Renewal

The daughter of Rav Hutner zt"l once found him learning *Mishna Berurah* for a few consecutive hours. She was not accustomed to seeing her father learn *Halacha* for so many hours straight, so she asked him what's going on. He said to her that he felt his need for emotional renewal was becoming dominant, and he wanted to stabilize it by learning *Halacha*, which would cool off his desire for renewal. He did this to place limits on his desire for renewal.

Understandably, each person needs something else that will place limits on his desire for renewal, according to his specific situation. This is the first step in fixing the desire for renewal: to place limits on the desire for renewal, so that a person won't be impulsive to follow the news that much.

Step Two: Deriving Renewal From Torah Chiddushim and From Avodas Hashem

The second step is for a person to know what kind of renewal he is seeking. Firstly as we mentioned, one has to discover how much he is seeking renewal, and then he needs to see how he is directing this desire: Is he seeking renewal in the area of the outside world, or in his internal world? In other words, does he ever have 'renewal' in his life from his Torah learning and from his inner feelings of serving Hashem - or is he only seeking renewal from the outside of himself?

A healthy soul cannot only get renewal from just intellect or emotion alone; nor is renewal from the outside world alone enough to satisfy the soul's need for renewal.

A person is usually getting renewal from all three areas, and the issue is only in the percentages. Therefore, one has to know: "How much renewal do I get from Torah learning? Secondly, how much renewal do I get from my inner feelings of being involved in serving Hashem? Thirdly, how much renewal do I get from new things in the world?" This is a deep self-introspection to make.

One who learns Torah regularly and he has knowledge in it, and he merits *chiddushim* (novel thoughts), is naturally able to direct his need for renewal to the area of his Torah learning. But if one doesn't merit to have *chiddushim* in his Torah learning (like if he learns *Halachah*, and even if he learns *Gemara* in-depth but he doesn't have *chiddushim*), he might get renewal from hearing the *chiddushim* of others. This is a valid kind of renewal which can satisfy his need for renewal.

If someone isn't tasting renewal in his learning because he doesn't have or hear *chiddushim*, he will need to get healthy renewal from his feelings. When one *davens*, each time, he can merit a different level of closeness to Hashem. So our feelings can provide us with inner renewal.

However, this is a matter which requires balance. If it is done correctly, a person will be able to get renewal from his feelings, which will satisfy his need for renewal in a healthy way.

But what should a person do if he is not talented enough to produce Torah *chiddushim*, and he is not a deep kind of person who can get vitality from his feelings in *Avodas Hashem*? He will have to get renewal from somewhere. There is no way for him to suffocate the desire for renewal. What will happen? He naturally will feel a need to get renewal from the outside world, and this presents a problem.

Before a person concludes that he needs this world to provide him with renewal, he should try to see if he is able to get renewal from his Torah learning, by actively seeking to produce Torah *chiddushim*. Of course, one should not learn Torah solely so he can produce *chiddushim*, as the *Nefesh HaChaim* writes; but one should definitely try to have *chiddushim* in his Torah learning.

Secondly, one should try to uncover renewal in his feelings. Most “new feelings” that people have, however, are stemming from their imagination, not from true feelings. That’s a different problem[3]. But if one merits to learn Torah *lishmah*[4], he can get renewal from learning Torah *lishmah*; even if one doesn’t learn Torah *lishmah*, he can still get renewal from *chiddushim* in his Torah learning.

When a person has renewal in both his learning as well in his feelings in *Avodas Hashem*, he has a solid and healthy source of renewal from within himself.

Step Three: Channel Your Creativity

Now we will address the third step that is involved with this.

First of all, it should be noted that some people simply have a very creative nature. An artist, who enjoys to paint or draw pictures, is engaging in a healthy outlet that he feels a need for, and as long as he acts sensibly, there is nothing wrong with such kind of renewal. His *nefesh habehaimis* needs it.

Those are the three steps: figuring out where you get renewal from in your life, then through acquiring stability in the soul via Torah *chiddushim* and feelings in *Avodas Hashem* (i.e. in his davening), and if one has an artistic nature, he can get renewal too for his *nefesh habehaimis* from his creative pastimes.

Arm Yourself With Inner Renewal

The desire to hear the news, though, is not a healthy outlet, so it is not an option for us to get renewal.

If one isn’t getting any renewal from his Torah learning or from his *Avodas Hashem*, he will naturally seek renewal from this world. [He will want to follow the news and the “hock”, in order to satisfy his need for something new].

We must know the following: There is no way to be protected from the outside world. If we have inner renewal, we are able to be protected from the world; but if one does not have inner renewal, he will be harmed by the influences of this world.

This includes even a person who learns *Daf HaYomi* every day, and even if he learns Torah all day: if he doesn’t have *chiddushim* in his Torah learning or if he doesn’t derive vitality from *Avodas Hashem*, he will be harmed through following the news.

Therefore, the very first measure a person needs to take in order to be protected from the influences of this world is to get inner renewal (from Torah *chiddushim*, and from new feelings in his *Avodas Hashem*).

The Detriment of Reading The News

However, even if a person already has inner renewal in his life, such as the above two examples, he should still be aware of the following.

In the later generations, there became a need in the Torah world to have a *frum* newspaper. One of

the Gedolim (I think it was Reb Yisrael Salanter, but I don't remember for sure; but the story is definitely true) started a newspaper so that *frum* people could have a kosher newspaper to read instead of having to read the secular news. There was one Chassidic Rebbe who bought the newspaper and then threw it in the garbage immediately. His *Chassidim* said to him, "Isn't this embarrassing the *Gadol* who said that we should buy the newspaper?" He responded, "The *Gadol* said I must buy it. He didn't say to read it. I bought it so that I could listen to exactly what he said."

The depth behind this story was because although it was true that a kosher newspaper was needed to replace the secular papers, this was only meant for people who need to read. Most people who buy the newspaper would feel that it is *bal tashchis* to throw away the paper as soon as they buy it, rather than care about *bal tashchis* to their souls. Hearing the news that goes in the world always does some damage to the soul.

There is no such thing as clean news! Is there any person here who thinks that he can enter *Gan Eden* with even the cleanest newspaper?! The newspapers, every one of them, are filled with falsity and gossip, and with all kinds of opinions from all over the world that ruin the purity of the mind^[5]. Any of the weekly newspapers are filled with all kinds of material that are harmful to our souls.

Here comes the inner kind of test. If one is prepared to totally cut himself from all the news and newspapers, he is to be praised; but there are only a few individuals who can do that. The average person is going to hear the news and read the news; it's too hard for him to hold back. What should he do to improve? Should a person read the paper and try not to accept the *lashon hora*...?

The problem really starts in reading the paper in the first place. From a purely *Halachic* perspective, even before a person wants to work on spiritual improvement, there is no way to justify reading the papers.

But even if a person would somehow gain a "*heter*" in *Halacha* to read and follow the news, he should know that the newspapers are all filled with confusing information. In one section you read the opinions of the *Gedolim*, in another section you read the opinions of various reporters and writers (and you get all the opinions of what each person in the world is thinking, including the opinions of people who are from "*Erev Rav*"). And this is even in the most 'kosher' reading material that's possibly suitable for a *ben Torah*! It's impossible to have a paper that is suitable to be read by a *ben Torah*! It's a huge and disturbing mixture of all kinds of opinions, condensed into one paper.

The problem is that there are people who have a need to hear the news. Where can they get it from? From a conversation overheard by the *mikveh*? How will people satisfy their desire for news in a healthy way?

If you think about it, it's a very difficult battle we are dealing with. It surrounds us from behind and from in front, "*panim v'achor*" as our Rabbis put it. There is nothing clean in the news; so the whole desire to hear news these days is a very, very big threat to one's spirituality.

There is no way to permit such an outlet, because it will definitely harm a person's spirituality. However, there is also no way for a person to avoid hearing the news. What, then, should a person do, when he inevitably does hear news?

Ridding Yourself Of Influences From Following The News

First of all, as we explained, he needs to make sure that he mainly gets renewal from Torah learning and from the feelings has in his *Avodas Hashem* (and if he is creative, he can gain renewal from his various talents).

But in addition to this, when he does hear the news (and inevitably, this will happen to everyone at some point), he needs to deeply examine each piece of news that enters his ears. He should wonder to himself: "What happened before I heard this piece of news? What happens to me afterwards now that I have heard it? What was new to me? What was true, and what was false?"

Besides for the fact that much of the reading material is forbidden because of *lashon hora* or for being inappropriate, there is a more subtle issue involved with reading the news. There is falsity mixed into everything! Even if the news is true, there is falsity mixed into the article one is reading. There is no such thing as a person reading news that is "true". If a person reads news and accepts what he's reading at face value, it greatly harms his soul.

First of all, maybe the article you are reading wasn't even said by the person who is writing it; and even if he did say it, how true is the content in the words of the article?

So the first thing you should know about reading the news is that you have no idea if the material you are reading is true or not. In every event that happens, it is impossible to really know what happened. You are relying totally on the opinion of some writer who is telling you about the event, and the writer himself is probably immersed in worldliness, which is this world of falsity. I don't mean that the writer is not on a high spiritual level; he is simply immersed in falsity, in facts that are not even facts. Most of what is written about is about non-existential things.

Of course, there is a tiny spark of truth to everything, and that is actually what enables the falsity to survive and be accepted. But most of what is being written about simply does not exist in reality! A person reading the news is not only immersed in the news; he is immersed in imagination, because most of the time the "news" isn't even reality. People are living all day in that imaginary space...

If a person reads the news, even if it's a kosher newspaper, he must make sure that he keeps examining the information and wondering how much of it is true and false. Although a person cannot always know what the truth really is, one thing he can know for sure: What he is reading is definitely not totally true, because you do not have to believe everything you read. After you read or hear the news, tell yourself that you are not obligated to believe what you just read.

This will help a person greatly chip away at his desire to be influenced by the news he hears. Every time he hears the news, he will be able to feel turmoil if he should accept it or not. On one hand he will feel that he can't hold back from hearing the news because he feels "tied to it like a dog", but at the same time, his soul can feel inside that it is constantly hearing falsity and licking it up.

For example, a plane crashed this week. Is there anyone here who knows the real reason of what led to its crash? Is there anyone who we can believe about why it happened? The only way to know is through *Ruach HaKodesh*, or else you are hearing lies. There is no news which we can truly believe.

In Conclusion

The topic discussed here describes a problem which envelopes the entire world, and it has become especially stronger in the recent years. Hearing and accepting what you read about in the news is simply destructive to our soul.

In order to avoid the influences which can destroy our soul's spiritual stability, we must know how to guard ourselves from all that we hear about, as it was described here.

[1] Refer to ***Fixing Your Water #017 - Dry Desires***

[2] See ***Tefillah #0125- Past, Present, and Future***

[3] See ***Getting To Know Your Feelings Part 1 Chapter 8***

[4] For the sake of learning Hashem's Torah

[5] See ***Tefillah #093- Media Influence***

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