

Religious Drugs

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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Are you on drugs? Do you want to be? No, you say? Well, just remember this, not all drugs are chemicals. Ask yourself this, wouldn't you rather be happy even if that meant that you were surrounded by lies and liars instead of being unhappy even if that is where the truth and reality is? Think about this for a second! Which do you really value more, happiness or truth? Which do you pursue more, your fantasies or your reality? Maybe you do not want to think about this at all. But it is important that we face the hard facts. Sometimes people are addicted to feeling good. Yes, happiness itself has become an addiction. Sometimes reality is so harsh that some people cannot handle it and they run away from it any way they can.

The Biblical story of Yosef and his brothers reunion drives home this very point. Many of us so emphatically want to pursue our desires and happiness that we become so oblivious to the reality that surrounds us. Yosef's brothers had long ago put out of the minds what they did to him, after all it had been 22 years, and then suddenly they themselves get hit with a terrible situation which unnerves them, even as years before they did to Yosef. Then, out of the back of their minds, comes the haunting memory; this is payback! Yes, what goes around comes around; even after 22 years, and as the old saying goes, "payback is a *itch."

Everyone experiences highs and lows in life. There are days when we are happy and then there are days when we get depressed. Guess what? This is normal! Highs and lows are normal. You can't have one without the other. This is one of those serious life lessons that unfortunately all too many people desperately try to avoid. Modern life in this society is all about happiness and doing what one pleases and what one wants. Disciplines of self control are considered to be a thing of the past.

How many of us are like Yosef's brothers? We have done things in the past that has really screwed up something, somewhere and now years later, we make believe like they never happened. Well, sometimes the past can be buried, but then again, most times the skeletons in the closet come out to haunt us. All our pursuits of happiness and our cloaking ourselves with lies do not make the skeletons go away. The greatest ghosts that haunt us today are the evil spirits of our own making. Like with Yosef's brothers, we can bury them as deep as we like, but in the end the ghouls residing in our unconscious minds will rise from the dead and like zombies seek to eat our flesh (metaphorically speaking).

Yes, we can run, but we cannot hide. While the eye of Big Brother government watches our every move here on Earth; the Heavenly Eye of Big Father watches over our souls and knows our every thought and every feeling. While we can still hide some things from Big Brother, nothing can be hidden from Big Father, nothing! While we can manipulate the laws of Big Brother through bribes and the courts, the Laws of Big Father are beyond our influence. We cannot bribe the Heavenly Court; we cannot manipulate the Angelic Judges; we cannot unduly influence Heavenly decrees. True, we are almost always at the mercy of Big Brother; but we are always at the mercy of Big Father. Even Big Brother is subject to the decrees of Big Father, regardless of how much the New World Order wishes to deny and defy the Old World religion.

Thomas Jefferson spoke wisely when he said, *"I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever."* Yosef's brothers should have remembered G-d's justice before they allowed their hatred to cloud their judgment. Granted, one can say that Yosef's brothers were blinded by Heaven and had no real choice in their actions. I will let the theologians and philosophers debate this point, but for those of us who see clearly and who do not allow mental manipulations to pervert our ways of thinking, such a concept is bizarre and I might say, even unnatural. But philosophers and academicians have a way of escaping into the realm of thought and become more and more detached from reality. We see this happening equally in universities and yeshivot alike. This is the problem when people become so "heavenly minded" that they become no "earthly good."

Like Yosef's brothers, we can create our own messes and like Yosef's brothers our messes do eventually catch up with us. Yet, unlike Yosef's brothers there is no promise for us that we will have a happy ending as they did. I think deep down we all know this and this is why we make so many efforts to repress deep down into the unconscious all memories, fears and feelings about what is really wrong with ourselves and our world.

Rather than allow the ghouls out of the grave so as to heal their pain, we push them further and further down into the unconscious until our own repressions are transformed into terrible monsters, which haunt us in our nightmares. Yes, the majority of nightmares, apocalyptic visions and monsters seen in dreams are not real monsters (there are no such things), but rather they are the archetypal projections of our own inner demons speaking from within the unconscious warning the conscious mind through the only form of communication open to it, i.e. dreams, of the dangers the individual faces if they don't "get their acts together."

Rather than face the harsh realities, most choose to bury them deep and to cover the grave with drug-induced euphoria. Remember, not all drugs are chemical. The religious drug of choice is the illusionary pursuit of happiness. Yes, one believes that they can sing and dance away all of life's problems and with positive aphorisms turn harsh realities into dream-like bliss. Those who do this are no less drug addicted than those who smoke dope, use crack cocaine or are addicted to heroin. All share the common denominator of the inability to deal with real life in a real way.

I see a lot of emotional fervor associated with religious practice. While I do not object to such expressions, at the same time I still reserve some concerns. For in all too many instances I see people turning to emotional religiosity as a coping tool for handling life's problems. In other words, they turn to religion in desperation for answers and help, which very well may not be there in the form that they are sought. Karl Marx was right when he referred to religion as the "opiate of the masses."

Religion is supposed to be a pursuit of truth, a pursuit of revelation, about oneself, the nature of the universe and where one as an individual fits in to it all. Religion is supposed to be about making one a better human being, by transforming the negatives in human character into positive foundations for positive behavior and proper action. Religion is about experiencing G-d and not about philosophical and theological arguments about G-d. When religion fails to accomplish these tasks, then what we have left is the shell of religion and indeed no religion at all.

There is nothing wrong with being emotional, when one is emotional for the right reasons and in the right way. There is everything wrong when being emotional is used as a coping drug to hide the harsh realities of life, the ghosts of the past and the skeletons in the closet. Happiness and joy do

not hide the dead and they cannot kill the zombies residing in our unconscious. The only way to kill the inner monsters is to deal with them. Inner monsters are not killed with sticks, stones, guns or knives; nor are they killed with drug-like happiness, singing, dancing and emotional religiosity. The demons from within are destroyed only once we allow them expression and deal with them in the harshness of the real world. Only this is what we call Teshuva.

Remember the example of Yehuda, he stood up to the “demon” of “Yosef’s blood calling out.” Yehuda believed that Yosef was dead, that he and his brothers were responsible and that now he was going to have to pay the price for the evil that he and his brothers committed so long ago. He was willing to sacrifice himself for what he knew what was right. He was willing to pay the price, because the price demanded was what was necessary at the time.

Yehuda had no idea whatsoever that he was standing in front of Yosef. He had no idea that his willingness of self-sacrifice would be recorded in the Torah for all humanity to learn from. He did what was right because it was right. He willing let the “ghoul” of past sins “come out of the grave” and he stood before it bravely, willing to accept his fate. Only then did Heaven intervene and save him from having to pay back a terrible debt. Mind you, according to Kabbalah, Yehuda and Yosef’s other brothers (except Benjamin) were later, at a future time, reincarnated to pay back this debt. They were the Ten Famous Martyrs, whose deaths were most painful and horrible. Like I said above, you can run, but you can’t hide and “payback is a *itch.”

So what do we learn from all this? The answer, I pray should be simple to ascertain. There is no running away from reality; there is no hiding from the harsh realities of life. Hippie lifestyles and emotional religiosity are not answers to life’s problems. Indeed, such expressions are not what religion is all about, and certainly not what Torah is all about.

The pursuit of happiness is well and good as long as it is balanced by one also embracing one’s responsibilities and obligations. As long as one has one’s feet firmly grounded on Earth, only then can they lift their heads high into Heaven. Ultimately, there is no other right way.

When there is balance, reality can be seen for what it is and addressed the way it needs to be. When we embrace the courage to face the past, we are endowed with the power to destroy the demons, monsters and zombies of our unconscious minds. **When we can heal our minds within, we heal our souls. When our souls are healed, we can then properly approach G-d and live by His Torah. Indeed, its takes a healthy soul to live a healthy life.**

Highs and lows are all parts of real life. We can deal with the damage that we ourselves have caused, but we cannot heal everything. We didn’t start the fire. All we can do is control its burn. If the fire burns within us, we can put it out, if and when we make the effort to do it correctly. As for the rest of the world on fire, that is in the Hands of Big Father. He will deal with Big Brother. As for us, we each have to deal with the Little Brothers inside ourselves. Let us focus on what we must and let Heaven do the rest.

We must do what we can and only then will G-d do what we cannot. Let us put aside the modern day addictions to being happy and emotional religiosity and instead deal with the harsh real world. This is what Torah and Heaven expects from us. When we overcome the monsters within, only then can we address other things. This is way of Torah and the example of our ancestors.