

Escapism as Distraction

Posted by musicman - 03 Jun 2011 14:05

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My two biggest forms of distraction are Music and video games. They are both forms of escapism (albeit very different methods), and I was wondering about how healthy this is.

At least for me, the desire for P and M evolved into an escape mechanism. It probably started at first as a simple desire for physical pleasure, but it's very clearly an escapist tool now, as that's when I feel the urge the most - when I need an escape.

So, naturally, when I feel the need to just get out of the real world for a few minutes, I go in a dark room with awesome headphones and listen to Music, or I fire up the Xbox. While these are both infinitely healthier than P/M, they ultimately achieve the same basic goal.

My question is: Is this a positive thing? Or am I just putting bandaids over my grievous wound that's causing me to need an escape all the time (pretty much every day).

My wife always says (somewhat jokingly) that I'm addicted to Video Games. It's true that it's been a hobby of mine since I was literally a toddler. It's a pleasurable activity that's been with me since my earliest memories. I see why people could see it as an addiction, but I see it as a hobby that I'm lucky to have loved since a child. what I'm noticing now is that the compulsive behavior that people are noticing is my constant need for an escape. It's probably normal, but I don't see this as an ideal way of life.

Anyone have any thoughts on this?

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by TheJester - 03 Jun 2011 14:09

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[musicman wrote on 03 Jun 2011 14:05:](#)

Anyone have any thoughts on this?

Yep!

But as Dov wrote on another thread, it's time to pull the cotton wool out of my ears and into my mouth on this one. Because this is an area in which I struggle, too. It's how I know I'm not "cured".

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by musicman - 03 Jun 2011 14:14

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With all due respect to Dov, I'd like to hear your thoughts as well. If you're struggling, I want to hear about it.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by TheJester - 06 Jun 2011 12:10

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Okay... I did not want to write here, because I am outside of my comfort zone. I like to write about areas in which I have some answers, not only questions.

I push things off, in my personal, professional and religious life. It's so *hard* to do the things I know that I must do - fixing a leaky sink, finishing a report, setting a regular *shiuur*. Sometimes I break myself to do something, often when external factors force me (not breaking myself at all there, am I?), and I feel *good*. I know I will feel good. I feel *right*.

But very often, I don't, and I let things pile up, and it gets me stressed. I then *need* other stimuli to distract/occupy myself. False achievements in reading, writing, gaming, whatever. Recently, I have been taking a little more control of my life. I think it might just be maturity - this makes me sad, because it means it is happening without work, so it is less of an achievement. Like giving up pleasures for which one is not strong enough to enjoy - no real work there. Had I one true wish, it would be "the motivation to always do what I need to do". This is, of course, ridiculous since it is my purpose - *to do*. I might as well have been created a *Malach*.

And this is it - I want to be a *Malach*. That is wrong. It is perfectionism. It is unhealthy.

A therapist identified this trait in me (perfectionism) in various ways, and I was quite amused. I am so far from perfect! However, I came to realize that it is quite probably true. More importantly, I want to *appear* perfect to others (I am sure that there are wonderful psychological reasons for this). This comes through in my language - I find it difficult to use slang in many situations, for example. I cultivate a perception of perfection around me. One exercise was to try to care less about spelling, grammar and punctuation. Let me tell you, it was **hard**. It still is - I rejoice each time I am able to leave a mistake in my writing. That I notice and care is another matter.

OK - so what has this to do with procrastination? Procrastination is a fear. Aversion is a better word, but fear will work. It is a fear of doing. But why?

In my case, it is a fear of being less than perfect. So it is better to fail gloriously than do a good job that is less than perfect. That way, I can say "ach, I never tried anyway!".

So for me, the job is to try, regardless. Just do it. Cheesy Nike slogan? Perhaps, but if I could

Sometimes, I need to trick myself into doing things. But the best way is to recognize the weakness and **involve others**. Things like frequent checkpoints, short-term achievable goals, and external pressure - all of these help massively. If I can have the self-discipline for one second to make myself accountable (schedule a status meeting), then this helps get the job done. I might still procrastinate until then.

Another technique I use is to take on responsibility - I then cannot avoid doing things. A strength of mine is wanting to help others. Whilst this can become a distraction, it can also be a motivation - I cannot let others down. Linked to the accountability, it can actually work. It can also cause angst and depression if I feel that I have let someone down.

Escapism is not the problem, in my mind - it is the natural replacement for reality, born of procrastination.

Others might escape because of the horrors of reality, the comfort of a "happy place", but it is mostly, like procrastination, born of a fear. It is the sort of thing that can lead to addictions and compulsions.

If someone has solid advice, I am very happy to receive.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by musicman - 06 Jun 2011 14:13

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Wow.

Are you sure you aren't me?

I can 100% relate to escapism as procrastination, in most cases.

I can also relate the perfectionism and fear that may be the root cause of all of that. Here's a great example: I have to take out some cash for an unexpected expense that comes up. Before I do that, I need to check by account balances to make sure i have the funds to do so. Instead of simply logging on to the bank website and checking my balance, I find something else to do instead, and push it off until I absolutely have to check. I do this because I'm scared that my balance isn't going to be exactly where I want it to be. Instead of checking it, I just pretend it's not there, and do something else. It sounds silly, but you're obviously been there before.

However, I think there's another type of escapism, and that's the one that causes me the most concern. Let's say I finish everything I need to do, and it's 1130PM. I'm tired, and I really should go to sleep. I want to go to sleep. But it's been a long day, and my mind needs a break before my body does, so I look for something relaxing/enjoyable to do, *to get my mind off of reality, because reality is exhausting*. I don't think this comes from perfectionism, although I see how the two types of escapism may be related. Here's an example from last night: I had to venture over to my parents house last night at 11PM to jumpstart my brother's car (my father is out of town, so I become the resident "Man" of the family). After an hour of fiddling and determining that the problem is not a dead battery, and is probably something more serious, I head home to take a shower and go to bed. As soon as i walk in the door, and I realize that i have an empty house, nothing that needs to, or can be, done at this hour, my mind immediately wanders to something enjoyable I can be doing. Of course, the first thing is P. I did something else instead, but the point is that my mind has this need for an activity that isn't something obligatory, and it's a need that presents itself whenever there's an opening. Even when I'm at the grocery store, I have a list of items to get, and then I ultimately end up wandering to the magazines/books aisle to see if there's a new WIRED out, or I have to buy myself a drink, etc.

It's hard to pin down exactly what it is that these 'urges' are trying to fulfill, but it's something that my wife recognized pretty early on while we were dating, actually. We determined that my default state in a vacuum is stagnation, relaxation, enjoying the lack of things that need to be done. My wife in a vacuum is constantly looking for something that needs to be done. While this seems unmanageable in a marriage, in truth it's complementary. We typically find a good middle ground where things get done, but we find time to relax (usually. Obviously, it causes tension also).

I'm rambling, but I wanted to express that I 100% relate to everything you have going on, but I think that there's maybe something else at play here.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction  
Posted by TheJester - 06 Jun 2011 14:42

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[quote="musicman" link=topic=3966.msg108110#msg108110 date=1307369606]

Wow.

Are you sure you aren't me?

[quote]

but the point is that my mind has this need for an activity that isn't something obligatory, and it's a need that presents itself whenever there's an opening.  
Yes

Right - something that I wanted to mention, but forgot to put into my wall of text was this exact point.

I hate being controlled (except, of course, by my baser nature). I hate *having* to do something. If I come up with it myself, if I *want* to do it, then I'm all engaged. If not... Then I'm toast.

I don't currently enjoy access to the "married" forum (I haven't requested it), but I am sure that this particular point would be addressed in there, in some thread.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction  
Posted by TheJester - 06 Jun 2011 14:43

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by musicman - 06 Jun 2011 15:34

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[TheJester wrote on 06 Jun 2011 14:42:](#)

Right - something that I wanted to mention, but forgot to put into my wall of text was this exact point.

I hate being controlled (except, of course, by my baser nature). I hate *having* to do something. If I come up with it myself, if I *want* to do it, then I'm all engaged. If not... Then I'm toast.

I don't currently enjoy access to the "married" forum (I haven't requested it), but I am sure that this particular point would be addressed in there, in some thread.

it really puts the idea from Chazal in a whole new light. "Greater is the person who does something because he's commanded to than someone who does it willingly." This is used in a variety of questions in the Gemara, but it applies here as well. There is a madrega (that we haven't achieved yet) where doing something obligatory has a higher value than doing something of our own volition. Most people, they assume that if I come up with the idea on my own, it must be better. The opposite is true. When you can really internalize the fact that fulfilling an obligation is more important than fulfilling your own desires, you've achieved a higher level. This is also reflected in a tefillah listed in Pirkei Avos: "Make my will your will". It doesn't say "let me want to do what I'm obligated to do". We're saying "Let my desire to fulfill my G-dly obligations supercede and subsume my need to fulfill me own personal goals. Let my personal goals *become* the obligations put upon me by a higher power." It's a pretty intense tefillah when stated that way, and not something everybody is ready for.

R' Akiva Tatz has some unbelievable Torah on Ratzon and its power and purpose. he touches on this a lot.

I think the people who are constantly looking for obligation are on a higher plane than us. They aren't quite on the level that the gemara is talking about, but at least they've internalized the idea that obligations are more important than personal goals.

It's interesting, because my wife is baalas tshuvah. She went from basically nothing, to being totally religious, while in college. This is something I've never been able to relate to, or even come close to understanding. It takes me months/years to change small aspects of my life, and she went ahead and uprooted her entire life in a year or two. It's beginning to make more sense in light of all this. Someone who's on a different plane and mindset about obligation operates with different rules.

I'm thinking about this as I'm writing it (it's the first time I've really made these connections). It scares me because that's an ideal I don't think I'll ever be able to live up to. It would involve changing everything about myself, including the way I think, the way I go about my day, the activities I enjoy. It's some really hard mussar, and to me, it rings of truth.

TheJester, I'm happy you opened up on this one, because I think we're on the verge of discovering something important about this whole process.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by musicman - 07 Jun 2011 04:33

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And here we go again.

It's 1130PM, I've made decent progress in my schoolwork, I'm ready to turn in for the night, and the voice is telling me to do something else, something non-obligatory and pleasurable. It's telling me, "Ok, your obligations are done. Now you can really live by doing something you enjoy purely for the sake of enjoying it." Naturally, P and M come first in the list of things to do, as it is a superficial and temporary stress reliever.



I really should just go to bed if I ever plan on staying up tomorrow night. I have chavrusas depending on me. sigh.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by wannabehappy - 07 Jun 2011 04:46

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I don't get it.

If you finished your work and you had a good day why is it stress that you blame.

And what's with the obligatory vs nonobligatory? Maybe your just bored?

Sorry, im just curios.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by TheJester - 07 Jun 2011 14:37

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[musicman wrote on 06 Jun 2011 15:34:](#)

TheJester, I'm happy you opened up on this one, because I think we're on the verge of discovering something important about this whole process.

Perhaps it is all about putting our own will first, above that of others and Hashem. Placing our wants at the forefront of what we do. Even where it ultimately hurts us.

That's certainly a big problem for me.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by musicman - 07 Jun 2011 15:50

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[wannabehappy wrote on 07 Jun 2011 04:46:](#)

I don't get it.

If you finished your work and you had a good day why is it stress that you blame.

And what's with the obligatory vs nonobligatory? Maybe your just bored?

Sorry, im just curios.

The problem is that the moment I finish doing obligatory things, my mind kicks into overdrive and compels me to do something, anything, that isn't an obligation. It's like there's a revulsion deep down to doing things I'm supposed to do. It's kinda hard to explain, but I find that this is more of a problem when I'm stressed out. It seems like I have a subconscious problem with doing something I need to do, even though at some level I really do want to fulfill obligations. There's a deeper part of me that's disgusted by it, and it feels like that's the same part of me that compels and drives my lust issues.

[TheJester wrote on 07 Jun 2011 14:37:](#)

Perhaps it is all about putting our own will first, above that of others and Hashem. Placing our wants at the forefront of what we do. Even where it ultimately hurts us.

That's certainly a big problem for me.

I agree, but that sounds like something you hear in a mussar shmooze and not anything that can be applied realistically to any situation.

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by wannabehappy - 07 Jun 2011 18:34

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Sounds like a fear of being a goody two shoes.

I can relate to that.

I have a fear of living my life with just mitvos and Torah. I want to know what's out there,I want to understand people,I want to be in the know.

Your naughty demands to live too.

I do have another issue with stress,anger.maybe the same.

Im doing good with lust,not white knuckling,day at time.....

and then last night I get a ticket for being in the left lane. I sort of get angry and then something funny happens, maybe out of spite maybe to run from anger, I without any trigger start lust. When I get to supermarket things get worse.

Could it be that you're subconscious is mad at god for being bored?

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Re: Escapism as Distraction

Posted by ontheedgeman - 07 Jun 2011 19:12

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MusicMan/ Jester - are you sure we all three aren't the same person? I totally share your plight. Today has been one HUGE big day of procrastination.

They have a procrastinator's anonymous group online. It seems like it's almost like an addiction. There is a kind of high associated with putting something off. delaying. Jester, your tips are good. Accountability is huge. Having support and someone to answer to helps a lot.

One thing that has worked for me when I stick to it, is setting up my day, 20 minute chunks at a time, and set out in advance what I'm going to do. Then I submit my will to H" and I stick to the calendar, and follow what i said I was going to do. As a rule, **if I don't follow the schedule that I have set out, it will not get done.**

Once we accept we our powerless over procrastination, and that it's a drug of choice in way, then we have to turn our will over to the calendar and let the calendar make decisions for us, because we can't make decisions for ourselves. And turn our will over to H" of course.

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