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“RABBI’S MUSINGS (& AMUSINGS)”

*Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Matos-Masei*

*27 Tamuz 5777/ July 22, 2017 - Avos Perek 2*

*Mevorchim Menachem Av*

Camp Dora Golding is located in East Stroudsburg, Pa. It is a beautiful campus with newly renovated bunkhouses, lush fields, and numerous other attractions, which contribute to making it the wonderful camp that it is.

What is also somewhat unique about CDG, is that it is located in the Pocono Mountains, not in the Catskills ("the country"). While in camps in the Catskills boast that they are "the best camp in the mountains", we say that we are "the best camp in *any* mountains".

Among the advantages of not being in the Catskills, is that it is possible to find an open washing machine at a laundromat the afternoon after Tisha B'av. The disadvantage however, is that our main attraction in "town" is Walmart. We can't run out to town for an hour to grab a slice of pizza or a fleishig supper.

It is therefore an exciting ordeal when there is a Dougies order placed by the staff for delivery to camp. For Dougies to deliver from Woodbourne to East Stroudsburg late at night, there is a five-hundred-dollar minimum on the order.  But that has never an issue. In fact, the orders are easily 3-4 times that amount.

Truthfully, eating Dougies at midnight, hours after it was made and delivered, is quite overrated. Firstly, the food here in camp - thanks to our Chef Yo - is quite good. Secondly, Dougies food is most enjoyable with all its various sauces, when eaten fresh. Still, the excitement of "ordering from Dougies" is strong enough to cause most staff members to want to be part of the order.

The biggest downside to eating Dougies at midnight, is realized the morning after. It is an experience unto itself - one which I shall not elaborate on in this article.

It's fascinating to me that despite the fact that I tell myself that I won't order from Dougies the next time - that it's just not worth it, especially the indigestion- when the next time comes around I find myself ordering anyway. It's such a hype that I feel like I'm missing something by not taking full advantage of having Dougies in the remote hills of East Stroudsburg.

When the new order is being filled, previous experiences are all but forgotten. I assure you that my experience is not unique. Many others tell me that they go through the same internal struggle.

Midnight Dougies may be somewhat unhealthy, but it doesn't have too many ramifications beyond that. The problem is that my Dougies experience is an analogy for various more profound struggles we contend with throughout our lives.

How many times do we tell ourselves that we won't repeat a certain behavior or habit, only to find ourselves doing it again sometime later? The greatness of the human mind is that we are able to convince ourselves of things that may not be grounded in reality. That includes the ability to completely forget the pain or aggravation we felt when engaging in a certain behavior that we promised ourselves we would not repeat.

This is the root of "Addictive Thinking" (the title of one of Rabbi Dr Abraham Twerski's books). This type of thinking is the modus operandi of any addict. He knows his behaviors are damaging himself and others around him, and he sincerely pledges to immediately stop his detrimental habits. Yet, he repeats it again.

In a certain sense, we all suffer from this - whether it's with loshon hora, yelling at your children, arguing with our spouses, religious deficiencies, etc.

Rav Henoch Leibowitz zt'l notes that if only Adam Harishon would’ve been able to clearly recall the acute and indescribable inner pain he felt when he committed the primordial sin, it would ensure that he wouldn't return to sin. But alas, man has a way of forgetting that pain all too quickly, getting swept away by the hype and excitement, even when he innately knows it's futility.

Eating poppers and chicken wings at midnight may be unwise and cause discomfort afterwards, but our other negative habits may be far costlier. Countering that damage begins with cognizance and honesty of the struggle, and then figuring out ways to overcome those engrained habits.

Shabbat Shalom & Good Shabbos,

R’ Dani and Chani Staum