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## Getting to Know Your Imagination - 004 The Limits of Imagination

*(Summary: We have so far explained that not only is imagination evil when a person fantasizes about forbidden things, but even when a person imagines things that are permissible to think about, it can still be evil.*

*We have explained that basically, imagination is constructive only when we use it within its limits. In the previous chapter, we spoke about imagining things we want from the future. In this chapter, we will explain how we can calm ourselves down about future stress.)*

### **Imagination Is An Unhealthy Disconnection From Reality**

Whenever we think about either the past or the future, it's somewhat of a disconnection from the present moment. Imagining the past isn't as much of a disconnection as imagining about the future, because the past already happened, so it's just revisiting reality. But to imagine about the future is a total disconnection from the present moment, because the future has not become a reality yet. When a person's thoughts are very much about the future, he is totally disconnected from the present.

Evil imagination makes a person connect to things that don't exist. When a person imagines his past and adds on some new details that didn't happen, this is the power of evil imagination. He's disconnected from reality. But imagination is mainly a problem when someone imagines about the future, because the future has not happened yet at all. It becomes a total disconnection from reality.

When people can't deal with reality, they often relieve their pain by entering into their imagination, and they become more and more delusional. A delusional person runs away in his mind into an imaginary world where there is no pain, so he can get away from all his stress - in his marriage, in his job, etc.

When people do this, they disconnect totally from reality - through their imagination. It's basically running away from life.

Such a problem causes one to distort his perception of reality, and then he will develop another problem: he cannot take responsibility for the reality in his life, because he cannot deal with reality. He has become much more used to a comfortable, dreamlike world in which everything is "good" - painless - and he will have a very hard time returning to real-life reality, which involves hard stuff.

Unfortunately, many people are using this kind of imagination to relieve their pain, even people who

keep Torah and mitzvos. For example, people look at pictures that are pleasing to the eye, and in this way they imagine themselves in these good places, as a way to escape their stressful reality. They live in the world of imagination and disconnect from the reality of their life.

On a deeper note, when Moshiach comes in the future, it will be revealed that all of us were living in our imagination. That is because the reality we have now is not the true reality, in comparison to the reality which will be revealed when Moshiach comes. On a basic level, though, many people are simply entrenched in their imaginations and fantasies, and a person in his life must learn how to come out of this.

This is why imagination is so evil: it disconnects a person totally from reality.

### **A Torah-Approved Imagination Technique**

However, there is a method involving imagination which is given by Chazal. This is for one to use his imagination for the *present moment*. By imagining more something that's in the present, a person can be saved from delusions about his past or future.

However, even though this can work, it must be used with limitations. One should not ever think that what he is imagining is really happening. For example, one can imagine that he is in a holy place, such as being by the Kosel or by Kever Rachel. Even though he's not there, he can connect to these holy places – through his imagination. This is the holy kind of imagination, because he is imagining something holy which he normally wouldn't be able to connect to.

He shouldn't think that he's actually there in that place, though. He has to know exactly where he's standing, and not delude himself that he has transported himself there.

If a person ignores this rule, he will become delusional even from using holy imagination. Holy imagination has its limits, and the rules must be followed. It can help a person gain from the images of holiness in his mind – only if he doesn't delude himself that he is there in that place in his mind. If he doesn't do this, then his holy imagination becomes evil.

### **Using Imagination to Connect To Spiritual Realities – And The Dangers Involved**

Let us return to discussing how one can imagine about the future.

The *Chovos HaTalmidim* writes how one should imagine that he is Heaven singing with the angels, and he brings other examples as well on how to use the imagination for holiness. A person has the power to connect to what is beyond his current limits – using his imagination.

This is a very subtle matter, and it needs guidance in how to use it, or else it can cause a lot of problems. If a person is imagining that he's singing with the angels, first of all, he might disconnect from reality and delude himself that he's there. Also, he might come to imagine how the angels look, in the physical sense – which is forbidden by the Torah. No one has ever seen the angels, so there is a danger that a person will try to give them some form in his head to the angels. So it's a dangerous thing to imagine.

Also, if someone isn't strong when it comes to his intellectual abilities, he will come to damage himself greatly through imagining even holy concepts, because his mind isn't strong enough to deal with what he's imagining, and then his intellect will get weakened from using imagination.

### **Totally Evil Imagination: Inventing New, Non-Existing Concepts**

There are many ways in which people use imagination. But they are all essentially either one of four possibilities: 1) Imagining the past, 2) Imagining the future, 3) Imagining things that one wants, 4) Coming up with new things that don't exist.

For the first three possibilities, we explained how they can be used. But the fourth kind of imagination – coming up with new realities – should never be used at all. Unfortunately, this is the most common kind of imagination which people are using.

We have to understand that imagination can never be constructive when it is looked at as everything. Imagination can only be constructive when it works together with the other forces of our soul. Each person has different abilities in his soul that are revealed – no two people are the same – and these abilities have to work together with the imagination in order for the imagination to do anything positive. Otherwise, a person is just using imagination alone, and it will never work.

When a person uses his imagination to make up something new that doesn't exist, this won't work. Why? Imagination is based upon a power which essentially **combines** information in the head (called "*markiv*" in Hebrew), so something has to be there before the imagination gets to work. Some power in the mind must precede the imagination in order for the imagination to take it and build upon it. But when a person is making up something new, he's not combining information – he's producing something totally new which did not exist at all in his mind.

This is the problem with the secular imagination therapy techniques. They are using imagination as if it is everything, that it alone can take care of all stress. But this is mistaken. Imagination cannot be everything, because then it has nothing to work together with, and it will come up with totally false images in the mind. In a way, imagining something totally new which doesn't exist resembles the first sin in Creation, and it also resembles idol worship.

### **Rectifying This Evil Power**

Imagination is evil whenever it used to come up with something totally new. On a deep note, we are able to take this very same evil imagination of coming up with new things, and instead return imagination to its true source – the Creator. This is when we use the power of "*adameh l'elyon*" – "I will resemble the Creator", when we come to perfect ourselves and resemble Hashem. This is the ultimate purpose of our power of *medameh*.

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