



ON YOUR WAY

Musings about growing up

*Personal guidance for today's Jewish teen girl
growing up in a world of technology and temptation*

GUARD
YOUR EYES

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Introduction

My dear fellow Jewish girl,

In the booklet you are about to read, you will hopefully find answers for questions that you may have asked yourself.

It may also help you organize the thoughts going through your head that you can't always talk about with others or ask advice about.

You will also find a number of tips and techniques that have helped me a lot, and which I think can help you as well.

I believe that many of the ideas you will read here will resonate with you, and you will identify with them pretty well. It's possible that some of the ideas you won't relate to as much, and you will feel that you're "just not there now." Even so, I wanted to present the whole picture to you, so that you can choose for yourself which things are relevant for you and which are not.

So, What Exactly Am I Talking About?

Like me, you probably feel that growing up today is a big challenge, and it's not just "child's play." This is true about every part of growing up, but when it comes to the challenge of dealing with the *yetzer hera*, specifically the sexual drive, it is even more complicated. TV shows, movies, and the internet filled with pictures, video clips, websites, and whatnot. And then there's advertisements, Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp,

not to mention the millions of other hidden messages we absorb from our surroundings every moment.

You're naturally curious about it, and you may even let yourself be pulled in just to "check it out" and just to know what it's all about... It's also exciting and attractive, so... why not??

You may also have a lot of big questions that you think about sometimes, to which you don't always get satisfying answers.

For example:

- How am I supposed to relate to my body— my appearance, beauty, and bodily pleasure?
- How does this relate to everything I see and hear around me?
- What should be our opinion about the sexual undertones that surround us almost everywhere we go, which make us very curious, but also a little embarrassed, and raise questions about our way of life?
- What's the problem with watching immodest TV shows, movies, or pornography, and how could doing so affect our lives right now and in the future?
- Can I ever change if I'm already accustomed to thinking, feeling, and doing things in a certain way?
- Lots of other questions that are not always easy to ask, or you don't have someone you can ask without feeling embarrassed and a little scared...

Between you and me, you probably also feel that not everything you see and hear around you is coming from a good place, and that makes things confusing and very unclear. You might hear a

little voice inside of you telling you that you need to learn about and understand all of these things, but you feel that you should do so by connecting to your inner self, not based on outside influences that are not in tune with your *neshama* and your inner spirit.

Does this sound familiar?

What you're about to read will hopefully help you organize the turmoil you might feel inside yourself right now.

What, Why, and How?

This guidebook will provide you with the information you need as well as the tools necessary to deal with the various challenges that await you in life.

In order to acquire positive habits, in every area of our lives, we need to combine together the following three elements: Knowledge, skills, and motivation.

1. **Information** is the way we look at things-- the what and the why.
2. **Skills** are how we look at things, and what tools we use.
3. **Motivation** is what causes us to use our information and skills that we have acquired in a productive manner. Our motivation to act can come as a result of knowledge, based on previous experience, or through both of them together.

Let's take an example to illustrate the point: The **motivation** to go on a diet or to keep fit can come from reading **information** about how important it is, or by experiencing the discomfort or pain that might have come from not living a healthy lifestyle in the past. Each of these can create a motivation to develop healthier eating habits.

Based on these categories, we have divided this booklet into two sections.

1. **What should we do and why?** In the first section, we will learn about the power of the sexual drive and its importance in our lives. We will also explain how exposing ourselves to negative content about it can be harmful, and why it is worthwhile to try to stop doing so. As we mentioned, knowing this information can also create the motivation to actually stop.
2. **How?** In the second section, we will focus on various techniques and tips that have proven to be effective in changing people's habits in this area. These tips will help us to pave the way for a fresh start.

Section 1: Why?

Before we can properly think about why it might be a good idea to stop our bad habits and take a different approach, it is important to get a broader picture of the power we have inside of us. What is the sexual drive? Why is it important? And why is it so powerful?

Why out of all the drives in the world, does this one specifically succeed in trapping everyone? What is it about it that can tempt and shoot down even the smartest and most serious girls, weaken even important leaders, and split families apart? What exactly makes this drive the most powerful and tempting one in the world?

The answer we are usually given is that it is very low, and it brings out the worst in us. It's so easy to be dragged into doing things that are shallow, and connecting to the lowest common denominator...

That's a very simple and logical reason, right? But we both feel that this answer is missing something big time. First, it ignores the beauty and joy that this drive brings to the world, the special feelings of pleasure it gives us, and most importantly, its value [in babies being born].

Just so you know, the very fact that you can sit and read these words is because of it. Yes, that's how you were born too...

Its power actually comes because of its importance: This is the only force that causes life to continue on earth. There is something eternal about it, because it brings continuity to our temporary lives by allowing us to have children who can continue our legacy even after we die.

Most of our physical capabilities are needed to keep us going in this world—eating, sleeping, making money. But the power of the sexual urge is not just about the here and now, this power allows life to continue even after we are gone!

And that's not all. It can cause two different people to be joined together in such a powerful way. It can unify them in body and spirit with a sense of pleasure that has nothing like it in the entire world.

That's the deeper reason for wanted and needing to experience the amazing pleasure of the sexual drive. It's not just a low physical desire, but a deep desire to connect with another person, and feel that we are one, and we're not alone.

There is no other power that can create such experiences, and that's why it's not at all coincidence that it "makes the world go round."

That's an unlikely twist, no? You thought this drive was really base and low, but instead it's the greatest thing on earth. But now you might wonder: If it's so important, why does it have to create such havoc in our lives? The answer is simple: It's just like nuclear energy, which can help to build the world, or G-d forbid to destroy it. Our sexual drive is the same way: Without giving it proper care, it can cause massive destruction.

And here's another point that you might have thought about: Sometimes we feel that all these ideas of love, our physical bodies, our sexual drive, desire, and being attracted to another shouldn't be part of us at all. They're really only connected to the *yetzer hara*, and not to us, right? But if in the end this really is an important drive, then it does need to be part of us. Well, which is it? What's the truth?

The truth is that each of the forces inside of us has an important role to play at a specific time. Let me explain:

One World

You asked the following: I see lots of advertisements, clips, TV shows, and movies all around me that talk about love, the sexual drive, and the body freely and unencumbered in a way that makes it all sound really fun. When I see all this, I sometimes feel that it stinks that I'm religious. For us, everything is forbidden, closed off, and limited. Any type of pleasure that is related to love, the body, and to the sexual drive is called the "yetzer hara," so how can I feel comfortable with myself about these subjects?

First of all, let me tell you that I know exactly what you're feeling. After all, what's more exciting, interesting, and attractive than love and a special relationship between a man and a woman? It's not coincidental that the world talks about these things nonstop—songs, videos, books, plays, you name it.

But it's important to organize the feelings you described a little: In today's times, we find ourselves in the middle of a really hard struggle. On one hand, the rest of the world talks about all these things freely, as if they're totally natural and normal. They also talk about them very coarsely and without any sensitivity. On the other hand, we who are religious Jews are trying to maintain a different set of values that come from a totally different background, where these things are spoken about using a different language and with a different approach.

And what's the result? It's a feeling that we're trapped. You described a feeling of two worlds: A secular world of pleasure and fun, and a religious world where everything is hard and

miserable. This is a sad and frustrating way to describe the situation, and it makes it hard to maintain a religious lifestyle, as well as any rules and limitations at all.

It might help to try to stop thinking about two worlds, and instead to think about one world: A world where everything has its place. In this kind of world, there is a sky and an earth, a body, and a soul. Each one is important, and each has its place, but there are separations and boundaries between them. In this world, sex and sexuality are not coarse words that are considered street talk and inappropriate. In this world, pleasure from the body, both from its beauty and from enjoying relationships and physical contact with others at the right time, is an inseparable, enjoyable, and wonderful part of life.

If the body takes its rightful place among other important things in life, and becomes part of a larger picture, then we won't focus on it alone. In this case, unlike what you described above, the body is not at all the *yetzer hara*; it can be a great thing!

The Ladder of Love

Let me explain a little more about what I mean when I talk about one world. One world doesn't mean that everything is good in the same way, that everything in the world is hunky dory, fun, and you can do whatever you feel like. What it means is that the world has a structure that we'll refer to as a ladder. As it relates to our subject, we can call it the "ladder of love." On this ladder of love, there are different rungs, each of which has a purpose, a time, and a place.

1. The lowest rung is the Physical rung.
2. The next one up is the rung of Feelings and Experience.
3. The third one is the rung of Thoughts.
4. The top rung is the rung of Spirit and the *neshama*, the soul.

What screams out to us from the billboards, video clips, and TV shows that we see focuses mostly on the lowest two levels: The Body, and Feelings and Experience.

For example, take the following expressions: “Enjoy the taste; enjoy the feeling; touch this; smell that; listen to me;” “get excited, experience it.” All of these belong in the categories of the Physical body and Experience. These two rungs are very much in the open, and that’s why they are so attractive. They also don’t require much effort on our part, no hard choices or decisions. All we have to do is taste, feel, see, and enjoy. Even a small child can do all of these things. So these rungs are great and amazing, and there’s nothing wrong with them in principle.

But without the two upper rungs, Thoughts and the Spirit, we lose something important and very precious: The ability to weigh, choose, and take responsibility to do the right thing, not just to do what’s attractive in the here and now.

Because what happens, for example, if I feel like doing something [Body and Experience] that I know is not really good for me [Thought and Spirit]? And what if I know that a certain kind of food might harm me [Thought and Spirit] but I really want to eat it because it tastes good [Body and Experience]?

What you’re reading here you will not hear on the radio, and you won’t usually see it on the internet or on T.V. either. Why is

that? Because nobody talks about *tzeniut* (modesty), self-esteem, refinement, and inner calm today. These ideas are a hard sell, and they are even harder for us to accept. It's hard to get used to a way of life that's not attractive, and to learn how to say "no" to something that we know could be harmful to us.

But it's important to realize also that climbing up the ladder of love does not mean that we need to disconnect ourselves from our body and forget about it. Rather, it means that we connect it to our upper levels so they work in tandem. When you climb up this ladder, it means you are able to decide when and how to use the lower levels, and that you can stop them when you want.

The main idea is that it's not the lower levels that guide you, it's you that guide them. That's not because they're bad or negative, but the opposite: Specifically because of the power within them, it's important to protect them and use them wisely and carefully.

When we look at the body this way, it becomes something divine. Hashem is not only found in the heavens, He's also here on earth within everything we see, taste, and feel. This is even true of our bodies, which are also especially beautiful when viewed this way, because they house the part of Hashem inside each of us: the *neshama*.

But when we disconnect the body from the upper levels, it turns into something empty, dark, and closed up, even if on the outside it looks pretty and attractive.

In order to climb up this ladder to the upper levels, you need to work a little bit, but believe me, it's worthwhile, as you'll see soon.

Who am I?

Even if it's true that there are different levels on the Ladder of Love, could it be that the "real me" is actually the Body and Experience part of me, that can't control itself? Maybe this desire to dress however I feel, to look at whatever I want, to go wherever I have fun, and to do whatever I want, is more the real me, and it's better to just follow it, rather than fighting with it all the time?

That's a good question. Let's do a little exercise. Imagine yourself after a good life of 120 years. All of your family is around you, and they are all crying and saying how great their grandma (you) was, how much of a *tzadeket* she was, and how much she will be missed.

Suddenly, someone else appears out of nowhere, and begins to talk about your lesser-known traits: "This "*tzadeket*" was a mischievous person: Look at the pictures that she uploaded to Facebook and Instagram, look at all the places she surfed on the internet..." And then this person starts telling everyone a few more things that we would prefer that no one knew about... The children and grandchildren look at each other in shock and try not to laugh, or cry...

Do you get the point? Basically, no one would want the following written on her tombstone:
"Here lies our dear grandmother, who spent most of her life sleeping, eating, looking at Facebook, and watching videos..."

The reason for this is not only because it's embarrassing for everyone to know that, but also that we have a deep desire to do the right thing. We want to spend our time doing things that are important and valuable, and that's how we want the world to remember us.

Now think for a moment about how you would want to look at yourself after you die, and not only what others will say about you. You certainly want to feel that you accomplished worthwhile and meaningful things in your life, and didn't just waste all your time with this-world things. This deep desire is connected to the higher levels of the ladder—Thought and Spirit.

If you can do this, and ignore for a moment what you think about yourself right now, or about what you did yesterday, you can see who you really are. This deep-down desire to do the right thing shows that you have an inner power inside of you that will lead you to follow the right path in life. This power inside of you is who you really want to be. The other desires you have or the actions that you do are only by mistake, and it doesn't matter how many times it happens.

The Starvation Game

Let me explain a little bit more. You asked: Who am I really? Is it the “me” that enjoys spending time with friends, that learns, volunteers, and davens, or the me that likes to watch the most disgusting videos in the world?

I agree that it's really confusing and frustrating: We have two sides inside of us that are polar opposites of each other and

struggle for control. One side is refined and the other is broken; one side is light, and the other is dark.

But as we already saw, the distinction and boundary between the two sides really depends on our choices. Deep down inside, we all really want one thing: We want to truly feel good about ourselves. We want to feel love, inner happiness, and to feel connected to ourselves.

Our refined side looks for this feeling in the right places: With family, having good friends, our studies, *Tefilla*, going on trips, dancing, and arts and crafts. But the other side looks for the enjoyment and pleasure in other places. It leads us to look for excitement and fun through very powerful experiences that are not at all related to the upper rungs of the ladder.

It's true that we all sometimes have changes in mood: Ups, downs, feeling depressed or happy for reasons that we can't explain. That's totally normal.

But think for a moment: When do you actually feel good about yourself? This usually happens when you do something important and valuable, when you feel loved and valued. In these situations, you are filled with a wonderful feeling of satisfaction. This is an example of where we are using all the rungs of the ladder, the top and bottom ones, together. We're connected both to our body, and to our *neshama*.

When you find yourself in this positive state of mind, you're starting from a good place. If you would now be faced with the challenge of seeing something interesting or attractive, you'll have enough strength to stop yourself, take a deep breath, and

tell yourself that it's better to hold back, because this isn't what you really want.

But sometimes the upper rungs of the ladder seem to disappear from our radar, and we feel like doing something really fun and exciting that will give us a good feeling and not have to feel guilty even though it doesn't have any depth or meaning.

It's important that you understand that your inner motivation is positive and good. It's not a bad part of you, but a natural part of you that wants to enjoy life. In these situations, it's really hard to stand strong and block the hunger you have for doing things that will give you the feeling of satisfaction, fun, excitement, and enjoyment that you're missing.

This feeling is also accompanied by a feeling that nothing else matters right now. What you want is just to feel good this instant, to get away from the stress, the boredom, and feeling uncomfortable as fast as you can. You say about everything: "I don't care, let the world burn down, I want to do this, and I don't care what price I will pay for it later..." This is how you get yourself into these low places.

The same kind of thing might happen sometimes when we feel terrible because we did badly on a test, or someone happened to say something not nice to us, or we're just annoyed at the whole world because they don't understand us. Really all that we want is to feel good about ourselves, to feel the warmth, love, and understanding from others, that in those moments we lack so much. But what do we do? We go to what will give us the feeling closest to that—we find a whole bag of chocolate and eat

the entire thing ourselves... and how do we feel about it afterwards? Usually still not satisfied...

Dear friend, always remember that you are not a bad person looking for bad things, the kind you may have read or heard about once somewhere. You are a great and amazing person! You just want to feel good, happy, fun, loved, and to love others. You want to feel the power inside you, which is natural, and searching for love and enjoyment is natural, normal, and healthy too.

So what's the problem?

The problem is that we are looking for these positive feelings in places that we can't ever get them completely. That's also why after we are promised lots of enjoyment and satisfaction, we are usually left afterwards with a greater hunger than before, and a feeling of frustration and disappointment.

Looking Far Ahead

You asked: What's the problem with watching movies that contain sexual content? We don't do anything bad by watching, and sometimes it's really fun and exciting. And anyway, there's nothing we can do about it, because almost every movie has it... And at the end of the day, we're girls, so it's not so bad, right? So why is it not allowed?

Before I try to answer your questions, I want you to remember something: Just like we keep Shabbos, make sure to eat kosher food, and don't touch boys before we are married (no, it's not just a custom or a nice thing to keep), this is also part of

fulfilling the desire of Hashem, which we try to do with everything in life. Keeping the *mitzvot* is part of our serving Hashem, and we do so even when it's hard for us, and even when it requires some sacrifice and effort on our part. And it's not just because we are scared about getting punished; we're supposed to do so out of love. Hashem gave our lives to us as a gift, and we should try to do good things with this gift.

Even the boundaries that Hashem sets for us are first and foremost for our benefit, since He wants only what is truly good for us. It's just like you'd be careful to listen to your doctor when you're sick and he gives you a prescription for medicine. In that case, you'll make sure to get exactly the one he says. After all, the doctor, who is the expert, just wants you to be healthy, and has your best interests in mind.

The source in the Torah from which we learn the importance of controlling our thoughts and our eyes is a *pasuk* we say every morning in *Shema*: “ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם,” “And don't stray after your hearts and after your eyes” (*Bamidbar* 15). This *pasuk* teaches us two things:

1. To guard our **hearts** from thinking thoughts that can ruin our faith in Hashem and distance us from Him.
2. To guard our **eyes** from seeing images that go against the values of *tzeniut*, modesty, of the Jewish people, and that arouse the *yetzer hara* and our desires at the wrong times.

Put simply, these two guidelines ask us to go up one step on our ladder: Don't be tempted by what our eyes see, which can cause us to forget Who is responsible for everything we see in this

world (the words “after your heart” refer to not worshipping idols); and don’t be tempted by the pleasure you get from using your eyes if it is detached from the higher rungs of the ladder--the Spirit and the *neshama* (the words “after your eyes” refer to not staring at immodest things).

Clearing Our Heads

Now that we’ve got that straight, let’s move to the next step: When you guard your thoughts and your eyes, you are clearing your head. When you let them wander freely, you are making your head dirty.

Let me explain. A clear head sees things in a way that is clean, straightforward, and refined. A dirty head looks at things in a confused and crooked way. It causes you to think about your body using the standard you see in the movies. It also causes you to understand the relationship between a man and a woman incorrectly, so that the body and the pleasure you get from the physical connection are the main thing, and all the other parts of the relationship are based on that.

Aside from that, some of the movies that corrupt our minds give us what we think is accurate sexual information. But the truth is that this information is very far removed from reality, and it unfortunately creates a lot of exaggerated expectations, fantasies, and even concerns and panic among some people. All of this filth causes us to look at the whole idea of relationships with boys in a twisted and unhealthy manner.

This might sound somewhat foolish to you right now, but the truth is that if we get so used to this warped picture that we see in the movies, we are likely to forget that there is also a deep

connection, commitment, responsibility, warmth, love, listening, giving, laughter, and joy between a man and a woman, and that it's not all about sex...

I'm sure that logically, it's clear to you that what you see out there is not at all true, and that a true relationship includes a deep love and an inner connection that is built gradually based on listening and giving to each other. But little by little, we get used to the way it's presented all around us, with the fantasy and emotions involved, and things begin to look a little different. This impression then begins to become a part of you without even realizing it.

The most surprising thing is that you probably never thought of yourself as a person who looks at things in this way. It happens gradually, little by little, without even realizing it, but now it might already feel such a part of you that is very difficult to get rid of, like a bad habit. This is how you look at things, and this is what you think, even when that's not really what you want.

The price we pay for getting ourselves into the habit of thinking this way can unfortunately be very painful:

Low self-image - Because we're looking at some model wearing a ton of makeup and silicon, we suddenly feel a bit uncomfortable with our own body. But just remember that to begin with, loving your body without comparing it to anyone else's takes a lot of work. Then trying to compare yourself to the beautiful model you see on TV only makes the struggle harder. So your feelings are not really coming from an objective standpoint, they are mainly because of your desire to always compare yourself to others.

Attention - If we are honest with ourselves, we will probably admit that we often crave attention from other people. Our desire that everyone notice us and relate to us causes us to do things time after time that there's no way we would do if we gave them a bit more thought, and gave ourselves a little more self-respect. This includes the way we dress, the make-up we wear, photos that we post, and things we do with one specific goal in mind. But that's how things are: When the world turns into a brutal contest of who has the best rating, we turn into attention-cravers, and feel the need to be really attractive and to have everyone look at us and give us compliments.

You're Not in the Movies!

Once we've brought up the subject of movies, it's important to explain a little more about what's so bad about them, and what damage the things you see in them are likely to cause.

True, there are many types of "movies": There's movies, videos, shows, clips, photos, etc. and everyone is attracted to something different. One person might be attracted to romantic scenes, another might look for more explicit material, and a third may just watch TV shows with shallow content.

I'm purposely not going to refer to a specific category of video or movie, since each one is different. But the common denominator among all of them is that it's probably clear to you that you shouldn't be watching them, because they don't match the values on the ladder we spoke about earlier.

What do we feel like after watching this kind of video? Was it fun? Maybe. But we both know that that's not always the feeling that you get after watching it. And even when it is, only one part of you really feels that way.

There is another side of you that actually feels uncomfortable with all this talk about sex and everything around it. That part of you sends a distress signal and makes you feel a bit distant from yourself. These feelings might also make you feel lonely, angry, and frustrated. You may feel inner pangs of conscience telling you: "How can I look at things like this? No one would believe what I just saw and what I'm doing right under everyone's nose... If they only knew who I really am... because on the outside I look like someone totally different..."

The reason that you feel alone every time you watch these shows is because they disconnect you from Hashem and from yourself as the person that you really want to be. As we said, no one is really happy to view themselves as someone whose hobbies are to watch videos and TV shows with sexual content (and it doesn't matter if it's erotic, pornography, or just not modest). It's low, superficial, and embarrassing.

It's important to explain a little more about what watching these can do to our lives. You probably know that what you see in the movies is not really what happens in real life, but when you are in the middle of it, everything that happens seems very real: What the characters do, how they look, and how they enjoy themselves. Everything seems really attractive, enticing, and inviting.

But what exactly do we see there most of the time? Love? Emotions? Sensitivity? Relationships? No! It's all about sex and desire. That's exactly what we meant when we said earlier that when we detach ourselves from the higher rungs of the ladder of love, the lower rungs sink deep into the ground. Aside from all this, some movies also have an exaggerated amount of violence and other crazy things that normal people don't even think about. Let's hold off on the examples for now...

Now when we watch these movies, we may be thinking: Well, if they're doing this, then what's wrong with it? This can sometimes also arouse questions about our sexual identity: Who am I attracted to for real? Boys? Girls? Both of them? Because if in the movies it's ok and it's natural, and I like watching them, then maybe I'm the same way? The bottom line is that it can drive your mind crazy.

This is not really the right place to discuss this, but it's important for you to know that being attracted to something or someone doesn't necessarily mean anything specific about us. Our body and our spirit can be attracted to things that are not necessarily connected to us in any way. Some things are just attractive, interesting, and peak your curiosity.

So you don't have to feel guilty or ashamed if you are attracted to something that doesn't match your values or what you believe in. The question is just what you do about this attraction, and that is your choice.

This is also the place to stress the following point: Some things we need to struggle with ourselves, while other things we need to turn to a professional therapist for, and you don't need to be

ashamed to ask for help about those. That's why there are good people out there that do this as their job, and they'll be happy to help you.

To detach yourself from all of these feelings and the images that you see is not easy at all, and requires a little effort. But like some people say: Why bother spending so much time and effort to clean out the garbage that you didn't need to bring into the house in the first place?

Getting Rid of the Peel

In addition to what we've already discussed, there are also other long-term consequences to exposing ourselves to more explicit sexual content. There was a recent study showing that the percentage of the population who suffer from depression and loneliness is more than double the average among both girls and guys that regularly visit pornographic websites on the internet. After everything we've discussed, you can probably understand the source of these feelings a little better now.

And here's another point: It's very important to stress that everything we've discussed so far is not meant to be anti-everything: It's not against beauty, it's not against the body, and not even against the internet. The problem is when we don't know how to put all of these things in perspective and use them in the right way.

In fact, the internet is really a great tool, and it's full of interesting information and other fun things to see and use: Good movies, funny videos, music, games, and an endless possibilities of things to learn and connect with that have good

content. We should remember this and make sure to use all of the good things on the internet to their fullest. But the power of the internet is that it also includes a lot of inappropriate and filthy material. Just like many good fruits have peels that need to be removed, the internet also has a peel that needs to be thrown away before using the rest. Together with all of the good things in it, the internet also opens up to some dark and scary places, which can cause both males and females a lot of trouble. It is a little scary to know that, but it's also important to make sure you stay away from them.

There are some girls that describe a feeling of being caught in a vicious circle: They hate going back over and over to the same inappropriate sites and movies, but they feel the craving is too strong for them, and that they can't free themselves from it.

Here's the reason for this common feeling. Studies show that visiting these websites on a regular basis works just like drugs. When people use drugs, the drugs give them a nice, warm feeling, which is hard to free themselves from afterwards. When you get used to watching these videos, the brain sends out hormones that are just like drugs. They give us a good feeling and cause us to want more and more, even if we understand that they're not good for us. It's like someone who is addicted to cigarette smoking: They know it's not healthy and can be harmful, but since the body really wants it, the brain can't think logically anymore.

Addiction is dangerous and very scary, because when a girl is exposed over and over again to something addictive, she will gradually look for even stronger addictives. What gave her plenty of satisfaction yesterday will no longer be good enough

today. It's sort of like when something used to get you really excited before, but now you got used to it, and it doesn't excite you at all, so you start looking for the next, even more thrilling experience.

It's also similar to what you might have felt at times that when you were younger, a story about an emotional relationship between a boy and a girl might have given you a thrill. Today, though, when thinking about it, you realize just how innocent you were about what was really happening... In the past, these scenes were very exciting, but today they are just boring. Basically, what happens is that our senses become dulled to the stimulation around us. In this way, gradually, we become more and more accustomed to problematic material.

When we get used to seeing so much sexuality, our boundaries that we've established for ourselves begin to disappear, and sometimes we are ready to just go with the flow. Now we might post pictures that in the past we wouldn't have dared to publicize, and we might do things that at one time we wouldn't have even dreamed of doing. And it's all just to feel that excitement and pleasure that flow into the body and to receive the attention, love, and warmth that we need. This is how we fill up the hole inside of us and remove the loneliness and distress that we often feel.

It's important to understand how this process occurs before it's too late, and that should make us want to stop now, while we still can. Every time you repeat these actions, you make the struggle harder for yourself over the long term. The more you understand how much more healthy, normal, and better your life

will be if you are able to stop in time, the easier it will be to actually stop.

Four Rules

It's also important to emphasize something else here. Even if you sometimes slip and don't succeed in overcoming the challenge, know that it's not the end of the world. Don't give up and don't feel terrible about what happened!

If you're trying, then you're on the right track, and you will eventually succeed in moving forward. With a little bit today, a little more tomorrow, little by little you will go up the ladder of love and connect with all of the rungs. The main thing is not to give up or lose hope.

There might be a little voice inside you that says: "Why try so hard? Even now you're in over your head," or "you've tried to stop so many times and haven't succeeded, so give up already." That's the voice of despair. This is your weaker half, which is waiting for you to give up on the struggle, let go of all your boundaries, and just do whatever you feel like. It waits in the corner for you to put the keys on the table and say that you throw your hands up and surrender.

Here's my advice: Don't listen to that little voice! You're not really so weak, and you shouldn't give up so quickly on all the good you have inside you. You have a lot of strengths: Lots of love, good will, talent, and courage. Show them off! You're not evil and disgusting like it's trying to portray you, and you have far more than you can imagine inside of you that you just need to bring into the open.

Despair has many disguises and all sorts of sophisticated explanations that all have one goal: To convince you to give up. It wants you to give in to yourself and let go of the goal that you have set and are trying to achieve. In the following section, four important rules will be presented that you can remind yourself every time that the feelings of despair overcome you again.

1. Hashem Loves You

Having faith in Hashem and developing a connection with Him can provide hope, strength, and a feeling of calm. One of the painful feelings we often experience after slipping is that we are entirely distant from Hashem and can't achieve the proper faith in Him. It seems to us that Hashem hates us and doesn't associate with us anymore, *chas veshalom*. But this is the most common disguise of despair. It wants to convince you that all is lost, that there is no way to restore your relationship with Hashem after what you did or saw. For example, if you want to *daven*, learn Torah, or do anything else worthwhile, it will give you a bitter feeling that you are just putting on a show, and everything you do is fake and worthless.

Always remember: If you are upset right now about what happened in the past, and want to change, Hashem will be pleased with you. He loves you, and will be happy with your desire to go forward. This is the simple truth, and any other feeling you might have is simply not accurate.

3. Remember Who you Really are

One of the characteristics of these kinds of despairing thoughts is their one-dimensional nature. Here are some examples: “Everyone’s doing it, there’s nothing I can do,” “that’s just how it is,” “that’s me and I’ll always be that way,” “there’s no way I can get out of this,” “I’m stuck,” or “my life is stuck.”

Now let’s be precise here: What you just said is not who you are. Who you really are is who you *want* to be. Anything you do that doesn’t feel right and causes you pain and distress is not representative of who you really are, and is only temporary. Every moment you can choose to return to the right path and start again.

What the feeling of despair tries to do is to present the specific moment you are in as if it is the entire picture. That way, if you mess up, it makes you feel worthless and like a total failure. But the bottom line is that this is not at all who you really are. The best proof of that is feeling that things aren’t good the way they are now, and that you want to get out of your current situation right away.

4. Get up!

“Seven times a *tzaddik* falls and gets up” (*Mishlei* 24:16).

Sometimes despair strikes in a clever way: It presents us with a picture of a *tzadeikes* who is so righteous that she has never fallen and never gotten dirty, and it says that this is what we should be. But when we look at ourselves in the mirror and see our actual condition, we feel full of guilt and despair and even more hopeless than before.

The simple response to this tactic is that there is no such person in the world! The *tzaddik* that Shlomo HaMelech, who wrote the book of *Mishlei*, is talking about actually falls, and oh, how does he fall: He falls seven times, meaning many times, and even so, gets back up on his feet and keeps on walking. Someone who is not a *tzaddik* falls and stays on the ground forever, but a real *tzaddik* doesn't stay there; he gets up, cleans the dirt off his clothes, and keeps going with his head held high. That's how we have to view this situation: There will be falls, but every time we slip, we are just going to get up and keep on going.

However, sometimes our despair stems from the feeling of how big the job of improvement is and how far we have to go to get out of our current condition. Who has the strength to go through this difficult process? So what do we do?

2. This Moment is What Counts

In order to deal with this feeling, we have to focus only on what we see in front of us at this very moment. What happened a second ago doesn't matter, and it doesn't matter where you were beforehand, what you saw, what you did, and for how many years you did it.

So are you ready to turn over a new leaf right now? If you are, then you're already in a totally different place! Not in the future, not tomorrow, and not in another hour. If you are ready to change course right now, then that's where you are. Any thoughts about what will happen in another five minutes or what happened five minutes ago are just not important. The question is just where you are right now, at this very moment.

It doesn't matter how you fell into the dirt; what's important is to always remember: The minute you want to get out of the dirt, you're already out! The real "me" is where your desire is, so the question is not what you did a minute ago, but what you really want right now. This is also the secret of *teshuva*, correcting our sins, and why it's so easy to do if we just put our minds to it. *Teshuva* depends only on your desire at that instant, when you make a decision to change. Once you've decided to do so, then you've already started on the new track.

This approach gets rid of all of your heavy baggage of what happened in the past. Using this method, it's much easier to take one small step forward. If you can keep this idea in mind, you'll see that within a short time, you will be able to make significant progress.

Remember: The Torah says, "You should love your neighbor like yourself," which means that first you have to love yourself. Loving others only begins after first learning how to love yourself. Loving yourself means most importantly being patient with yourself, just like you would be with a friend who was asking for help in dealing with a similar struggle. Would you think about saying to her the negative things that you say to yourself?

Look at all the good feelings you have inside of you, like your desire to move forward and raise yourself up from where you are now. That's certainly what your *neshama* wants, and that's who you really are. You hear what I'm saying? At every moment, you can take the steering wheel of life back into your hands and change the direction in which you're going. It doesn't matter where you were, or where you will be in another few

minutes. Don't let what happened in the past rob you of being happy and enjoying all of the good qualities you have.

So where are you right now? It's important that you repeat to yourself these four rules over and over again:

1. Hashem loves you
2. Remember who you really are
3. Get up, *neshama* (after falling)
4. This moment is what counts

If you agree with the basic ideas here, that it doesn't matter what you've done previously, that you are always loved and accepted by Hashem, and that you can change direction at any time, then fill out the following agreement and sign your name:

I have decided to accept myself and to love myself, even when I go off the right path and do the following: Stumble/ Fall/ Disappoint myself/ Not keep to my own expectations or those of others for me (erase whichever of these is extra)

Your signature: _____

Date: _____

Identifying the Voice

As we already mentioned above, this voice inside of you that says to you: "Stop already, why try so hard? You've already fallen;" or "you've already tried to stop and it hasn't worked, so give it up already," is the voice of despair. It's important that you get to know this voice very well, and that you can identify it with time. This is the voice of your weaker part, which is

waiting for you to give in on the struggle, let go of all your boundaries, and finally do whatever you please. It waits for you in the corner, for you to put the keys on the table and say that you have raised your hands in surrender.

Here's my advice: Don't listen to this little voice! You're not so weak, and you shouldn't give up so quickly on all the good you have in you. You have a lot of strengths: Lots of love, good will, talents, and courage. Show them to it! You're not evil and disgusting like it's trying to portray you. You have inside of you far more than you imagine.

Section 2: How?

Now that we've got a better idea of our capabilities and the damage that we can cause ourselves with bad habits, let's move on to section 2 of this booklet, where we will present a whole set of tactics and tips that are tried and true ways of effectively changing one's habits and how one acts. They will help us take one step forward.

Let's Go

Here are ten great techniques that have helped many people make progress in this area and turn over a new leaf.

Although actually implementing them will require a little bit of effort, hopefully if we do so, we will be able to see real tangible results. I believe in you with all of my heart, and I am sure that

if you want to take this step, then you have what it takes to do so.

1. Taking a Break

Before presenting the other techniques that can help continue your decision to stop, there is something that you must do first that is really the basis of everything else, without which it will be almost impossible to begin the process. This, of course, is the decision to actually stop. I believe that if you've already gotten up to this point in the booklet, then you do really want to take a step forward and put a stop to your old habits. But experience teaches that many times, the general desire to change is not enough, and you need another step in addition to that.

Before we look at the other techniques, we just have to stop. It sounds strange, and you're for sure saying to yourself, "I have already stopped a lot of times, and the problem was not stopping, but not restarting again afterwards." That's true, but if you want to start from scratch, you need to make a new decision to stop.

That's why the first technique, Taking a Break, is designed to help you understand what it means to stop and how to do it. Notice that the name of this technique is actually not "stopping," but "taking a break." No one can promise you that just because you stop right now, you will never experience a fall ever again. That is not our goal now (at least at this stage); we are just interested in taking a break.

On the other hand, the decision to take a break even temporarily is a very big commitment:

- A. It means you are committed to stop for now (no matter the result and what happens later).
- B. It shows your commitment to keep an open mind to the other ideas and techniques that will be presented shortly.

If you've decided you are ready to take a break and stop at least temporarily, you have taken your first step forward. Now that you've stopped, you need some tips and techniques for how to keep it that way.

3. The Importance of the Environment

To make it easier to succeed in our mission, we need to create a supportive environment for the changes we'd like to make. It's important to keep our distance from anything that makes it harder to reach the goal we've set for ourselves. Otherwise, it's very hard to make progress without slipping each time all over again.

In order to create this supportive environment, we need to take a simple but very important step: Put a filter on your smartphone and computer.

Why is this so important? Very simple: The filter allows us to arrange our environment so that it will tempt us less. This is the most basic thing we can do, since without a filter, the minute that the temptation comes, we will probably be drawn right back to it. It's important to emphasize again: This doesn't mean you shouldn't use the internet at all. There are plenty of movies and videos that are clean, nice music with good messages, and you can use all of these without any problem.

The filter helps us throw away the bad part, or “peel,” of the internet so that we can eat the “fruit” inside. This way, it’s much better and healthier for all of us. It’s like a railing on the roof of a house that is erected to prevent people from falling. When there is a railing, you can walk around the roof freely without worrying about falling off.

True, a filter is never a complete solution, and if someone wants to, then there are always ways to get around it, or just find another device instead. But the railing is the same way: Someone who wants to jump off the roof can just climb on the railing and jump off. What the railing does, though, is makes sure that no one falls off accidentally. Here, too, a filter helps ensure that a person who wants to be protected will not accidentally find themselves in the wrong places.

In order to find and install a filter that works for your device, go onto the website venishmartem.co.il today.

2. Breaking the Cycle

In order to break a habit of any type, one has to successfully break the circle of habit. The way to do that is to make a clear goal for changing your habits that is challenging but not too hard. A challenging goal will motivate us to try to stick to it, but a goal that is too hard will cause us to give up right at the beginning. So let’s try to start with doing 30 days that are clean without any inappropriate material. Why 30 days, you ask?

First of all, because it’s a goal where the end is in sight. It’s not too crazy, like doing so for thirty years would be, but it’s not as easy as refraining for thirty minutes. In addition, studies have

shown that in order to change a habit, you need to do so for at least a month. These studies have shown that the neural pathways in the brain responsible for our habits can be changed if we succeed in shaping a new habit over the course of a month.

So what does this mean practically? It means that if you can stay “clean” consistently over a period of thirty days, your new habit is strong enough to allow you to choose it easily over your old, more familiar tendency.

What this means is that if you can keep this thirty-day period “clean,” something very important can change in your life. The temptations will not totally disappear, but you will have enough techniques at your disposal and seen enough progress to successfully deal with the challenges in a calmer, more confident, and mature way. Even if there are more setbacks afterward, you will know based on your experience how to get back on track with a smile and remain happy and optimistic. This thirty-day goal is highly recommended: It is a challenging task, but also gives you a feeling of satisfaction if you can keep to it, and it can really create a real change in your life.

If you are ready to use this technique of “breaking the cycle,” and begin a thirty-day period of staying clean, then sign the agreement below:

I have decided that beginning right now, I am going to go “clean” for a period of thirty days.

Signature:

Date:

4. Time-Out

The idea behind this technique is exactly what it sounds like—creating a short delay between the impulse you’re faced with and your reaction by engaging in some specific activities.

“Time-out” is basically a pre-planned activity or activities that we decide to do when faced with a test or challenge. This allows us to exercise our free choice properly and make a sound decision without feeling pressured. The minute you are faced with a challenge and are afraid you might do something that you’ll later regret, you need to set aside five minutes for one of the following activities that you have already chosen: Walking, running, riding a bicycle, swimming, diving, soccer, basketball, tennis, climbing a wall, or really any other physical activity you might think of.

These activities used as a “time-out” will give you a chance to breathe, and allow you to think carefully about you really want to do. In short, instead of thinking about what will happen the next time you fail, the “time-out” allows you to focus on the task at hand at the time it confronts you. If you did the “time-out” but still failed, well, it’s too bad, but it’s not the worst thing in the world... next time you’ll do better.

This kind of pause can help you stay strong in times of difficulty that arise from time to time. So decide what you intend to do the

next time you are faced with a challenge. Which time-out are you ready to commit to?

If you are ready to use the “Time-out” technique and choose a set activity to do when faced with a challenge for five minutes, then sign the following agreement:

I have decided to accept upon myself that every time I feel a challenge or test coming, I will do a physical activity for five minutes:

Activity

Signature:

Date:

6. Price-Tag

There is a saying that “whatever one doesn’t understand through one’s head will be understood through one’s feet.” This means that when a certain action carries with it a tangible price tag, we will usually think twice before doing it whether we are truly interested in its benefits if we will also lose something in the process.

This is a good idea to use in our situation as well. The goal is to impose on ourselves a monetary penalty every time we fail. For example, you can say: If I don’t withstand the challenge I have

set for myself, I will need to give \$10 to *tzedaka*. To make this technique more effective, it's best to connect it with the previous technique, Time-out, in the following way. Make the following declaration: "If I fail the test, I will give \$10 to *tzedaka*; but if I did one of the activities as a time-out, and I still failed, I will only give \$2." These numbers, of course, are not absolute; each person can set their price-tag based on their financial status, and based on what they know will work for them.

In any case, the "discount" that you get by doing the time-out activity will encourage you to do it even at the moment of the test when you are under pressure. They say that "money makes the world go 'round.'" If that's true, then why not use it for good things also? Everyone can set their price-tag based on their own financial status, and based on what they know will work for them.

If you are ready to use the "price-tag" technique and choose a set penalty that you must pay if you watch immodest or other inappropriate content, then sign the following agreement:

I have decided to accept upon myself, bli neder, that if I watch immodest or inappropriate content, I will donate _____ dollars to tzedaka. If I perform one of the physical activities that I decided on as a time-out for five minutes, I will pay the smaller penalty of _____ dollars to tzedaka.

Signature:

Date:

5. Don't Go Alone

It's not good to keep things closed up inside of you. This is true for many things you might be thinking or feeling, but it is especially important when struggling with the challenges we're discussing. When you keep your struggles to yourself, what usually happens is that the problem gets worse, the feelings of guilt and shame get stronger, and you feel very alone and despairing.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Try to think for a moment about a close friend, teacher, parent, or mentor that you can share your struggles with once in a while. It should be someone who can really listen, understand you, and occasionally offer advice too. The fact that someone else knows about our struggles makes it easier to deal with, and allows us to feel that we are not alone on the journey.

Sharing your feelings is also important for another reason: Hiding information from others can encourage negative behavior, while being honest and ready to stand up in front of someone else and tell them what you did will limit that. In the dark, when no one can see us, we are capable of doing things that we would not dare do in broad daylight in front of everyone. Sharing what we've done with someone else brings us into the light, and forces us to face the truth honestly.

This is not just a technique or a tip like the others here, it is really a personal request: Please don't confront your challenges by yourself! Choose a partner for yourself and you'll see how

much easier and more pleasant the road to overcoming your struggles will be.

7. Exercising

We already talked about doing some sort of physical activity as a “time-out” when faced with a challenge.

Aside from that, though, physical activity in general is also helpful in working towards your goal, since it can give both your body and your spirit a nice, pleasant feeling. First of all, that feeling is a result of the success and progress that accompany a set routine of exercise, staying in shape, and accomplishing something. That’s much better than feeling the emptiness and boredom that come with thinking about your next fall.

But there is something else to it as well: Studies have shown that physical activity can directly impact upon the part of the brain that causes us to search for a thrill. After doing physical activity like exercise, the brain releases a hormone that provides us with the same feeling of enjoyment and satisfaction that we may be searching for elsewhere, which means that indulging in the other temptations may not be as necessary as it was before.

In addition to that, physical activity also decreases depression, increases a healthy appetite, and helps you sleep better and more peacefully. In short, it’s not a coincidence that many studies have found that people who spend time exercising regularly are generally happier and healthier.

By the way, you should also know that physical activity and exercise work in the exact opposite way of the temptation by inappropriate stimuli. What happens there is that before the fall, we feel the height of pleasure, but in the end we're just left with a bad taste in our mouths. For exercise, it's just the reverse: Before starting, it seems hard, tiring, and not worth it, but afterwards, you feel a strong sense of pleasure and satisfaction. For all these reasons, it's very worthwhile to set aside at least three times a week for some exercise, such as the activities mentioned in the "time-out" section earlier.

9. HALT!

One of the most helpful methods of dealing with any struggle of this type is to identify what exactly is causing me to want to do whatever it is that I shouldn't be doing. When we can identify how we feel right now, there is a better chance that we can react appropriately, not just based on the pressure of the moment, but in a way that is consistent with our true desires. In addition, identifying the basis for the feeling might help us find a solution from an unexpected source.

Do you remember times when you found yourself arguing heatedly with someone, or got annoyed with something you saw or heard, and just didn't understand why it got you so upset? But when you think about it a little more, you might discover that you were dying of hunger because you hadn't eaten anything since you woke up, or you slept only two hours the night before, and that's why every small little thing got you upset and soured your mood.

HALT are the cases when we are in the most danger of falling:

Hunger

Sometimes you might just be hungry, and the simplest solution to the problem is to eat a good meal. Hunger for food is occasionally mistakenly interpreted by the body as hunger for other things, and sometimes a good meal can do the job.

Anger

Anger causes us to act in an unbalanced and unstable way. When you get angry, you may try to make yourself feel better by giving in to your desires as a type of medicine to “cure” your anger, which will obviously make the situation worse...

Loneliness

Feeling lonely is a sure cause for going back to the temptations you’re trying to get away from, mainly to comfort yourself. The problem is that afterward, you usually feel even more lonely. To solve this problem, you don’t need a million followers on Facebook; it’s enough to find one good friend you can talk to that can help you act with caution.

Tiredness

When you are tired, it is hard to think clearly, and that’s a time that you can easily trip and fall. For this reason, you should realize that evenings are very dangerous when it comes to these challenges.

So when you begin to feel desires or an urge to do something coming to the fore, the first thing you should do is pay attention to them and evaluate the situation you are in: Am I totally exhausted, or dying of hunger? Do I feel lonely? The minute you identify the feeling, you may understand what the source of

the desire is to engage in a harmful activity, and you are already in a much more secure place.

In general, try hard to stay away from these situations, but if you get in them, then make sure you know about HALT and be careful!

8. Taking a Breath of Fresh Air

This technique, like the previous one, is a great way to identify and understand the situation in which we find ourselves, and formulate a thought-out, positive response, without being sucked into the pressure of the moment created by the attraction.

Here's the idea: Every time you fall, it begins gradually, starting from the general urge, up until the actual fall. This technique helps to stop our autopilot response before it's too late. We call these steps T-BAR:

1. **T**ake a step back and think
2. **B**reath deeply a few times
3. **A**sk yourself honestly: What do I really want? And then...
4. **R**espond in an appropriate manner

Let's start with the first one: **T**ake a step back and think. When the urge first arises, it's a good idea to take a step back, think about the situation calmly, and figure out exactly what is happening to you: What do I really feel now? What kind of thoughts are going through my mind? How does my body feel right now? Once you've done that, you still probably won't feel very secure, and the urge will still be very strong. That's why it's

very important to then take the next step: **Breathe deeply a few times.** That will allow you to focus yourself and keep calm. Close your eyes and feel your lungs slowly filling with air, and then exhale.

That brings us to the next step: **Ask yourself honestly: What do I really want?** This will help you connect to what you truly want to do and what you are aiming to achieve in the long run. And then:

Respond in an appropriate manner.

It's your choice, whether to give in or not.

When you take a step backward and think, breathe deeply, and ask: What do I really want, you have avoided the danger of an automatic response. Instead, you have put yourself in a position to make a real choice, based on what you really want. Does that mean that you can choose to fall? In theory, yes you can. But the fact that you are choosing to go through this whole process says a lot about your true desire.

10. Concentration and Aspirations

The world around us is very distracting. We're surrounded by technology, like smartphones and internet, that pulls us in a million different directions, and causes us to waste a lot of time doing things that are meaningless.

The cure to being distracted in this way is obviously concentration and focus on what is really important to us. In order to do so, it's a good idea to sit down, think carefully, and then write what your aspirations are (aspirations refer to the great things you want to do with your life). Your aspirations can

be both long-term goals and short-term goals, and may even include accomplishing a short, simple task.

Having an aspiration also includes defining for yourself who you want to be, what type of person, and what you need to do every day to reach this goal. Writing these things down can help focus us and clarify what we want out of ourselves.

So jot down briefly the answers to the following questions:

What is your aspiration for the short-term?

.....

What do you need to do every day to achieve it?

.....

What are the different factors that distract you and prevent you from reaching your goal?

.....

Every morning, look over these questions and try to answer them from scratch. The answers will help you get back into focus, so that you can eventually fulfill your aspirations.

Brighten your Day

In order to help us focus on positive things each day, Hashem gave us two great “pills” that are important to “take” as part of a healthy lifestyle. The first pill focuses our minds, and that is the

Torah. Learning Torah every day about a subject that interests you will make you a better person, and put the right types of ideas and desires in your head (exactly the opposite of what the *yetzer hara* tries to do in convincing you to let go of your boundaries).

The more you fill your mind with positive thoughts and ideas, the more sincere your thoughts and desires will be. When that happens, there's a good chance that we will be less distracted by all sorts of things that don't fit with our true desires. That's why it's a good idea to take a small *sefer* (whatever you enjoy learning) with you wherever you go so that you can learn during your spare time.

The second pill focuses our heart, and that is *Tefilla*, *davening* to Hashem. *Tefilla* from the heart gives us the feeling that Hashem is nearby, and listens to all of our requests. *Tefilla* cleans out our hearts of all sorts of things that clutter it; including inappropriate images we have seen, and thoughts and actions that we want to fix and improve on.

This type of *Tefilla* does not necessarily have to come from the words of the Siddur. It can and should be personal, using our own words, just as if we were talking to a beloved father. Every time we struggle is a good opportunity to speak with Hashem, share our feelings with Him, and ask Him to help us do the right thing.

It's very simple and really genuine. Hashem is always close by, waiting for us to turn to Him, and happy to help us. We just need to want it and ask for it sincerely.

A Little is Really a lot!

Even after everything we've talked about, you might still be saying to yourself: Maybe all of these techniques and the desire to start all over is just not for me? I have fallen and gotten up so many times already, so how is it going to help to start again from the beginning?

Here is a rule to guide you through life: The biggest enemy of "the good" is "the best." We always want to take a step forward from wherever we are. The little voice that tells you that you are so filthy and disgusting that whatever steps you take won't help is a destructive one that keeps you stuck in place and doesn't let you move forward!

But the truth is exactly the opposite: Any type of change begins with one small step, whether it be maintaining our personal modesty a bit more, trying to be a little more careful about keeping the rules of *negia* (contact with boys), or in how we use the internet. Did you manage to hold yourself back for five minutes from looking at a certain website? Great! Were able to hold off for an hour? Good for you! You've already kept to the program for a week? Amazing!

Give yourself a pat on the back and a little treat every time you succeed. Buy yourself something nice, or go out for a little shopping with your friends. Allow yourself to celebrate each little success you have. You deserve it, because you're doing something that very few people in today's world today are able to do.

Giving yourself a tangible incentive is also important for another reason. The enjoyment you get from whatever reward

you give yourself creates a connection in the brain: For every time I pass a test, I get a reward of something that will make me feel really good. This association strengthens our motivation to keep trying to overcome the challenges.

So you ask what a small step in the right direction is worth? It's worth a lot! Each step of improvement you make will encourage you, make you feel good, and also bring you closer to your goal: Feeling good about yourself, and not having the feeling that you are living in two worlds, that you're putting on a show and covering up something ugly and scary inside. You just need to live with your body, emotions, thoughts, and *neshama*, all the rungs of the ladder of love, working together in harmony to make you the best you can be.

Closing up Shop

You asked earlier how to clean out your mind of everything that you've done in the past. I totally understand you and know what you're feeling. This is something that a lot of people have a really hard time with. The images a person has seen in the past always surface in their mind at the worst possible times, and it's really frustrating. You probably feel that these images and thoughts seem to chase you everywhere you go, and cause you to feel like you are back in the past, after you were sure you had already gotten away from them and started all over.

First of all, you should know that getting rid of everything takes time and patience. But little by little these flashbacks get fainter and less common, and after a while they nearly disappear. Getting rid of them also depends on what you fill your mind with now. The best thing to do is to channel all your energy into

positive activities, such as learning, family, friends, and *davening*. Try hard to stick to the guidelines we've set and to make use of the techniques and other tips we've learned about here.

All of these things together will help you take one step forward. And the main thing is to take this small step forward confidently and decisively.

Here is a cute story that you might like that makes this point:

There once was a Jew named Moishke, who was an innkeeper. As part of his job, he would sell wine and alcohol to the non-Jewish peasants that lived nearby. At some point, Moishke began to get sick of constantly dealing with these drunk non-Jewish peasants, and decided to switch professions and close his inn. That night, he heard a knock on the door: "Moishke, Moishke, open up! We want wine and alcohol!" "Sorry," he answered, "the inn is closed permanently." The non-Jews had no choice but to leave, disappointed that they hadn't gotten what they wanted. For a few days and even weeks, Moishke continued to hear knocks on his door, but the more that news of the closing of the inn spread, the less frequent the knocks on the door became, until eventually they stopped completely...

It's all up to you: If you decide "to close the door," then it's a bit easier to keep it closed afterwards. Little by little, the voices of the drunkards from the past who want to get in will fade. When that happens, you will know that you have truly begun your new path in life.

Your light has come

I have two voices inside of me. One pulling up, and one pulling down. A yetzer tov and a yetzer hara. That's how I was created, with material and spirit, body and soul...

It whispers to me, my soul: You already know. You always knew. That's why you were created. There is a purpose. There is a reason. Get up, get up...

The yetzer hara yells at me: You have no strength! You have no resolve! You have none. Nothing at all. But the soul whispers, you do have. Do something...

That is what the wisdom of the Creator decreed, that is His will. That from within the confusion, we should separate good from evil. That from our miserable end we should get on our fingertips and cling to eternity.

Be like Him: Good, Great, Loving, Pure, and Complete.

He wants me to get up, He rejoices in me like a father who is happy when his child begins to walk, learns how to speak. He rises determinedly, and time after time falls down and gets stuck on the floor.

But then he gets up, without giving up.

The angels sing to me, "wake up, wake up, your light has come." Get up, my light. Get up, get up, speak a song, the glory of Hashem is revealed upon you.

(Taken from Mekimi, by Noa Yaron-Dayan)

To be in touch, ask questions, share your thoughts, or ask for advice, email us at gye.help@gmail.com.

GU  **RD**
YOUR EYES