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## לעילוי נשמות הורי

א"מ

רודף צדקה וחסד

הרה"ח ר' זכריה מנחם בן הרה"ח ר' משה ז"ל

נלב"ע ז"ך שבט תשע"ו

א"מ הצנועה והחסודה

מ' יוטא רייזל בת ר' שלמה זלמן בנימין ע"ה

נלב"ע ו' אלול תשס"ד

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

נרבת יוצ"ח



## לעילוי נשמות

רבי ישראל מאיר דב בן רבי אהרן  
ענבי (ויינטרויב) זצ"ל  
גלב"ע כ"ו סיון

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גלב"ע ב' סיון

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.



לעילוי נשמת

IN LOVING MEMORY OF  
ALTOON SUTTON

אלטון בת אדל ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

## PRAYER BEFORE LEAVING THE HOUSE

Before one leaves the house, or first thing in the morning, a person should pray to be saved from forbidden sights or speech in advance - before facing any difficulties (*Keser Rosh*, 73). Here is a prayer composed by the Vilna Gaon, along with an addition from *sefer Taharas HaKodesh* (modified to singular). The *Keser Rosh* comments that a person may add his own heart-felt prayers, asking for Hashem's protection.

רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, הַנְּנִי הוֹלֵךְ בְּנֵיא צְלָמוֹת  
וּמְקוֹם מְסוּכָן, הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי מֵיֵצֵר הָרַע וּמַחֲטָאִים  
וּמַעֲוֹנוֹת, וּבִפְרֹט מִהֶסְתַּכְּלוֹת בְּעֵרְיוֹת. (ע"ב  
מהגר"א). וְתַזְכְּנִי לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת עֵינַי שְׁלֹא אֶסְתַּכַּל  
וְלֹא אֶרְאֶה בְּמְקוֹמוֹת הָאֲסוּרִים, וּבְשׁוֹם  
מְקוֹם שֶׁהוּא נֶגֶד רְצוֹנִי יִתְבַּרְךְ, וְלֹא יֵאָרַע  
וְלֹא יִזְדַּמֵּן לִי שׁוֹם רְאוּיֹת וְהֶסְתַּכְּלוֹת רַע,  
שְׁלֹא יִגְרַמוּ לִי אִיזָה הַיּוֹק לְנִשְׁמַתִּי הַקְּדוּשָׁה  
הַלֵּילָה.

Master of the Universe, I am about to walk through terribly dangerous domains. Save me from the yeitzer hora and from sin - whether accidental or intentional, and especially from seeing the forbidden. Help me to sanctify my eyes, that I shouldn't glance or gaze anywhere that is forbidden or against Your Will. Let me not encounter any forbidden sight, so that no damage should be done to my holy soul, G-d forbid.

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## HASKAMAH FROM

RABBI **YISROEL ELYA WEINTRAUB** ZT"l

---

Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Goldschmidt came to me with his booklet on the subject of *shmiras einayim*, a subject that needs special emphasis in our times. He has explained lofty ideas simply and clearly. This booklet is well-written and powerfully so, stressing the importance of this subject.

I commend him for his excellent work, and may Hashem give him much success in his desire to help others.

I was most impressed by the recent addition to "*Veha'eir Eineinu*." Reviewing it revealed not merely the conclusions that the author reached as he delved into the subject, but something much deeper. There is a *Midrash* where Hashem says that He Himself fulfilled all the mitzvos of the Torah before He gave them to Bnei Yisroel. Likewise, from reading between the lines it's clear how the words of "*Veha'eir Eineinu*" flow from one who personally tried out and used the ideas which he presents.

I sign as one who *davens* for the success of the author and his valuable achievement.

ג' תמוז ה'תשנ"ב

**HASKAMAH FROM**  
**RABBI MATTISYAHU SALOMON**  
**Mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva**

---

To my long time friend,

Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Goldschmidt,

It gave me great pleasure to receive your *kuntrus*. It is full of *kedusha*. When I read it, a *passuk* sprang to mind, מאור עינים ישמח לב – the light of the eyes gladdens the heart (Mishlei 15:30) because it so neatly captures the connection between *shmiras einayim* and *simcha* in serving Hashem. Viewing unsuitable sights darkens the soul until the light and *simcha* of a mitzva no longer penetrate the gloom.

May you be *zocheh* to present us with more works on similarly useful and inspiring topics.

משה מ'א"ש סלומון

## HASKAMAH FROM

RABBI **ZVI GREENHOUSE**, BNEI BRAK

---

The author has done us an excellent service with this practical down-to-earth handbook on such a vital subject. A somewhat recent and worrying trend in some Litvishe circles is the attitude that all this "fuss" of *shmiras einayim* is only for the Chasidishe crowd.

*Kedusha* is a major pillar of Yiddishkeit and its requirements apply to all of us. The great Lithuanian Roshei Yeshiva as well as the famous Chasidishe Rebbes all took *shmiras einayim* very seriously indeed. Some declined to discuss it openly, but others specifically stressed its importance. No-one can become a *ben-aliya* without it. As usual, everyone agrees when it comes to the basics of being a Yid, writes Rav Dessler ז"ל.

Today the *nisyonos* are more devastatingly prevalent than ever before and we dare not ignore their threat to our *ruchnius*.

"*Veha'eir Eineinu*" makes easy, pleasant yet powerful reading, with material culled from a full spectrum of sources. By reviewing it from time to time, one will find himself strengthened in this esteemed mitzva, and thereby merit to learn and *daven* in holiness and in purity.

May the author, those who helped bring this work to fruition, and those who study it, be abundantly blessed with all spiritual and material blessings.

רבי ז'בי גרויס  
י"ג אדר א' תש"ל

## HASKAMAH FROM

RABBI **ZEV LEFF** Rabbi of Moshav Matityahu,  
Rosh Hayeshiva Matityahu

---

Dear Friends,

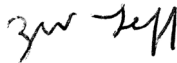
I have read the manuscript of "*Veha'eir Eineinu – Enlighten Our Eyes*", by Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Goldschmidt. The author deals with a sensitive but necessary subject in a most delicate, refined and masterful manner. The author presents the importance of guarding one's eyes and the severity of neglecting to do so. He also presents the rewards and benefits of fulfilling this Torah injunction. Most important, he presents solid practical advice as how to achieve this most important quality.

In our permissive and promiscuous society, compounded by the media technology that presents constant challenge to one's ability to guard one's eyes and thoughts, this book will be an invaluable aid.

I highly recommend this work to everyone who wants to be aided in fulfilling this crucial area of Torah observance. I commend Rabbi Goldschmidt for a truly magnificent contribution to Torah literature and for his meriting the community in such an important and meaningful manner.

Sincerely,

With Torah blessings



**HASKAMAH FROM THE**  
**BADATZ HA'EIDA HACHAREIDIT**  
**YERUSHALAYIM**

---

We give our bracha to Harav Hagaon Yosef Shlomo Goldschmidt, who took upon himself to benefit the public with his *sefer*, *Vaha'eir Einenu*.

The *sefer* presents a valuable compilation of sources from *Chazal*, *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* on the subject of *shmiras einayim*. This subject is increasingly pertinent and demanding in our times. It is well-known that guarding one's eyes is the basis of *Kedushas Klal Yisrael*.

We therefore wish to lend our full support to the distribution of this work, and it is our hope that the public take advantage of this opportunity to grow and fortify themselves in this area. In the *Zechus* of *Shmiras Einaim*, may we all merit to see the *Shechina* in its glory with the coming of *Moshiach* speedily in our days.



## A Letter from the Author

The debt of gratitude that I owe to Hashem is endless. He has given me the good fortune of writing the *sefer* "*Veha'eir Eineinu*".

My admiration of and appreciation to Mr. Sam Sutton, who donated all the expenses from translation to publication of this edition (in addition to his encouragement to overcome the many unforeseen technical difficulties that considerably delayed publication) has no bounds. What was originally an earnest hope became a reality. I am certain that without Mr. Sutton, this *sefer* would never have seen the light of day. May *Hashem* bless him with long years in health, happiness and fulfilment, and may he continue to spread light for *Yidden* everywhere.

Many important works have already been written extensively covering the subject of *shmiras einayim*. Yet, there is a great advantage in a small *sefer* that focuses on one central theme, which enables the reader to grasp a broad understanding of the topic as well as internalize its meaning. Even while on the street, the ideas from the *sefer* will keep ringing in his ears – having been etched

into his subconscious – and protect him when faced with challenges.

The challenges of *shmiras einayim* have become dramatically more difficult in recent years, before the advent of the *Moshiach*. Let us therefore fortify ourselves against thoughts of despair – not to be shaken by setbacks and past failures. A certain individual learnt this *sefer* over and over for an entire year, but at the end of that year he was a different person. Today he feels almost no difficulty with *shmiras einayim* when out on the street! As the Gaon says, (כתר ראש, אות נא), העקשן יצליח.

Many people learn a fixed amount per day or per week from the *sefer*, thus completing it a number of times and extracting the maximum benefit. It is well known that just learning about this subject already weakens the power of the *yeitzer hora* in this area. Internalizing its message might be best achieved by frequent review.

Many *bochurim*, *avreichim* and *baalei-batim* in England have recently joined an organization established by Rav Yehuda Leib Wittler from Gateshead to learn about *shmiras einayim* once a week. They divided the *sefer* into sections, completing it three times a year. (Their chart is included at



the beginning of this *sefer*). Rav Wittler also wrote a letter to a *bochur* striving for *kedusha* which has been included at the end of this *sefer*.

I would like to express my appreciation to all those who were involved and assisted with the translation of the Hebrew edition into English. Firstly, to Rabbi Mordechai Gukovitzki from Gateshead, as well as anonymous partners, about whom it is impossible to describe the thousands of hours of work and devotion that were invested into this *sefer* – days and nights of relentless toil and energy. He put his soul into fine-tuning every word and every nuance until a quality *sefer* was produced. It is no exaggeration to say this is his own creation, for he worked on it no less than if he himself authored it. The *sefer* is a reflection of his warmth and concern for others, coupled with his genuine desire to help others in areas of *kedusha* and *avodas Hashem*. I am pleased to hear that whilst delving into the subject, he has embarked on writing his own work on *shmiras einayim*, no doubt a welcome contribution to *kedushas yisroel*.

I owe special thanks to Rav Shmuel Nussbaum, the Rosh Kollel of Sha'rei Shlomo, who played an

important part in preparation of this *sefer* with his much appreciated advice. I also am grateful to Rav Dov Berkowitz for his great dedication in helping complete this *sefer*.

I am extremely grateful to my brother-in-law, Rabbi Meir Simcha Cohen. He was the one who originally persuaded me to go to print and made the first edition in *loshon hakodesh* really happen. He has helped with marketing, and so much more, ever since. Also thank you for reading and rereading the original documents of this English edition.

I cannot fully express my appreciation to Rabbi Moshe Sonenzon from Lakewood who works tirelessly to distribute our *seforim* across America (in memory of his parents). I am also grateful to Rabbi Sonenzon's in-laws, Family Gross from Brooklyn, for assisting him with this.

A *brocha* is due to all the *avreichim* and *bochurim* who kindly agreed and even offered to take *seforim* to different countries in order to facilitate worldwide dissemination of this holy work.

It is my heartfelt and sincere prayer that the *Ribono Shel Olom* should ensure that this English edition of "*Veha'eir*

*Eineinu*" should be as beneficial to the public as its preceding Hebrew editions, and that my portion should be with those who are *mezakeh rabim*.

**Yosef Shlomo Goldschmidt**

## Foreword

Traveling by car has become so much simpler now that the driver has satellite-linked devices to guide him pleasantly all the way to his destination. In ample time, a patient voice will issue clear directions and will warn him of any upcoming traffic hazards, roadwork, etc. Wonderful!

What equipment is there, however, to protect us as we travel along the highway of life? Modesty and refinement have long lost favour in today's world, which looks askance at those who wish to guard their eyes. How can we protect ourselves from the rampant enticements that surround us? How shall we travel safely when so many electronic devices are poised to lure us off the path and pull us down into the ditch?

The answer is in the words we recite twice daily in the *She'ma*, ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם אשר אתם זונים אחריהם – Do not stray after your hearts and after your eyes. We must guard our eyes and our thoughts from what is impure, because that's what's behind the perilous pull of the streets.

To our credit, rather than calling this mitzvah too

much hassle for today's times, tens of thousands of our brethren are clamouring to uphold it. People from all walks of life want to keep their eyes and minds pure. They are seeking guidance, dodging forbidden sights and sites, and strengthening their holy resolve in fighting the festering sores of this pollution.

Among the various *seforim* addressing this issue, a small *sefer*, "*Veha'eir Eineinu*," was written in תשס"ב by Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Goldschmidt, of Switzerland-Kiryat Sefer. Rabbi Goldschmidt is also the author of a *sefer* on *tefillah* ויחד לבנו, *Shabbos* משובך, *Torah* ויתענגו מטובך, *Torah* וטהר לבנו באהבה, תורתך באהבה, and a *kuntras* on purity of thought וטהר לבנו. His *sefer* on *Shabbos* is currently being translated to English.

Some years ago, this *sefer* was translated into Spanish for Argentinean Jewry and now with much *siyata deshmaya*, with the vision and encouragement of Mr. Sam Sutton, it has been translated into English. Far from giving a literal translation, we have abridged the work in some places and fleshed it out in others, as was necessary for an English edition.

Readers from a wide spectrum of backgrounds have

found themselves inspired and encouraged from the pages of "*Veha'eir Eineinu*."

While politicians proclaim to be saving the planet, the principled behaviour of Jews everywhere quietly promotes the worth of the human being and the stability of society. These self-disciplined people conscientiously protect the glorious golden sunbeam – the soul within them – with untiring *shmiras einayim*. Although they don't necessarily live in a world of their own, they certainly stand in a class of their own.

**The Translators**

## Weekly learning schedule for sefer "Veha'eir Eineinu"

Received from the organization "*Yafe Einaim*," England – endorsed by Rav Yehuda Leib Wittler (Gateshead), this group promotes weekly study sessions on the subject of *shmiras einayim*.

Week	Page	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Week 1	29	<i>Haazinu/Succos</i>	<i>Yisro</i>	<i>Nasso</i>
Week 2	36	<i>Bereishis</i>	<i>Mishpatim</i>	<i>Beha'aloscha</i>
Week 3	41	<i>Noach</i>	<i>Terumah</i>	<i>Shelach</i>
Week 4	50	<i>Lech Lecha</i>	<i>Tetzaveh</i>	<i>Korach</i>
Week 5	61	<i>Vayeira</i>	<i>Ki Sisa</i>	<i>Chukas</i>
Week 6	69	<i>Chayei Sarah</i>	<i>Vayakhel</i>	<i>Balak</i>
Week 7	74	<i>Toldos</i>	<i>Pikudei</i>	<i>Pinchas</i>
Week 8	81	<i>Vayeitzei</i>	<i>Vayikra</i>	<i>Mattos-Masei</i>
Week 9	90	<i>Vayishlach</i>	<i>Tzav</i>	<i>Devarim</i>
Week 10	96	<i>Vayeishev</i>	<i>Pesach</i>	<i>Va'eschanan</i>
Week 11	101	<i>Mikeitz</i>	<i>Shemini</i>	<i>Eikev</i>

<b>Week 12</b>	107	<i>Vayigash</i>	<i>Tazria</i>	<i>Re'eh</i>
<b>Week 13</b>	112	<i>Vayechi</i>	<i>Metzora</i>	<i>Shoftim</i>
<b>Week 14</b>	120	<i>Shemos</i>	<i>Acharei-Kedoshim</i>	<i>Ki Seitzei</i>
<b>Week 15</b>	126	<i>Va'eira</i>	<i>Emor</i>	<i>Ki Savo</i>
<b>Week 16</b>	132	<i>Bo</i>	<i>Behar-Bechukosai</i>	<i>Nitzavim</i>
<b>Week 17</b>	137	<i>Beshalach</i>	<i>Bamidbar</i>	<i>Vayeilech</i>

The study cycle is planned in order to complete "*Veha'eir Eineinu*" three times a year, approximately coinciding with *Yom Kippur*, *T"u B'Shvat*, *Shavuos*.



This three week calendar was inserted on the recommendation of the Veha'eir Eineinu summer program which was founded in Lakewood. This project promotes the daily learning of the sefer Veha'eir Eineinu during the summer bein hazmanim weeks – From the 9th of Av up to Rosh Chodesh Elul.

<b>Date</b>	<b>page</b>	<b>Starting with word</b>
<b>10 Av</b>	29	<i>Introduction</i>
<b>11 Av</b>	36	<i>Streetwise</i>
<b>12 Av</b>	43	<i>Gazing</i>
<b>13 Av</b>	47	<i>A Foot</i>
<b>14 Av</b>	53	<i>Rav Yehuda</i>
<b>15 Av</b>	61	<i>Chapter 1</i>
<b>16 Av</b>	66	<i>In the Dungeon</i>
<b>17 Av</b>	74	<i>part 4</i>
<b>18 Av</b>	78	<i>One More Lap</i>
<b>19 Av</b>	83	<i>Who am I ?</i>
<b>20 Av</b>	87	<i>part 2</i>
<b>21 Av</b>	92	<i>part 4</i>
<b>22 Av</b>	96	<i>Teshuva</i>

<b>23 Av</b>	101	Part 5
<b>24 Av</b>	107	Chapter 3
<b>25 Av</b>	112	Chapter 4
<b>26 Av</b>	118	Play Now
<b>27 Av</b>	124	Part 2
<b>28 Av</b>	130	Point 2
<b>29 Av</b>	135	Idea B
<b>30 Av</b>	142	part 3

***Week 1 - Haazinu/Succos, Yisro, Nasso*****INTRODUCTION – CURTAIN CLOSING**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century confronts the Jew with unique challenges as never before. The long years of exile are drawing to an end, and the Satan is in his death throes, fighting with all his might before he is to be vanquished forever.

As the curtain comes down on the very last act – who will finally win the day? The Satan is desperate to prevail. It is now or never, and this is his last shot. No holds barred. Ripped away are all former standards of modesty or decency. And we, who seek to avoid the impure, feel fragile and vulnerable to provocation and assault.

It feels like there's some worldwide conspiracy extant that's out to suck everyone down into the mud. The method may be subtle and suggestive, or shrill and aggressive, but it almost always seems to aim its barbs towards our eyes. Living in today's race for instant fun, and with the prevailing attitude that "anything goes", how does a Jew hope to keep his eyes pure and holy?

The commuter packs his briefcase, the hiker his backpack. Similarly, the Jew who has *Inyanei Kedusha* in the forefront of his consciousness needs to be equipped when he's going somewhere. Being well aware of what might lie out there ready for a collision course with his eyes, he'll have a plan, as well as a back-up, for minimizing the danger.



# FUNDAMENTALS OF SHMIRAS EINAYIM

## Part 1

### The Power of Torah

Hashem tells us, His beloved children, "I created the *yeitzer hora*; I created Torah as its antidote," (*Kiddushin*, 30b). The *Mesilas Yesharim* observes that if Torah is the remedy which Hashem prescribed, then that's final. Success will not be possible without it. Torah learning releases profound powers, sheltering the learner from sin. The more involvement in Torah learning, the higher the level of protection.

To strengthen your commitment to Torah study, you could use *mussar* which turns up your inner fire. Why not start some new subject or research a topic that happens to interest you? This will help you even when you are not in front of your *sefer*. And when in the street, mentally reviewing some Torah thoughts or listening to a Torah lecture will become your portable protection.

### **Other Practical Suggestions**

Although thinking Torah thoughts is the ideal, this may not always be practical. The following suggestions are no substitute for being absorbed in Torah thoughts, but they will serve as a mental toolbox. Anyone, anywhere need only draw out the appropriate tool to deal with the present *nisayon*.

Do you have any currently pertinent or absorbing topic to chew on? Perhaps just keep mentally singing some favourite song. And it often proves worthwhile to put aside some interesting reading for long-distance travel.

The point is to stay wrapped up in your own thought-world and detached from the stimuli of your surroundings!

If the fancy strikes you, opt for some make-believe. Pick a particularly stirring song or inspirational statement of *Chazal*. Then, in your mind, sing these words to a huge orchestra of talented players. Over and over, as you advance towards your destination, the majestic words are being vividly etched into your psyche.

You're untouchable, on your own silvery cloud of *chizzuk* and *yiras shamayim*, disconnected from the humdrum streets below.

By focusing his conscious mind on this imaginary scene as he goes his way, the *Yid* is effectively erecting a tamper-proof casing for the priceless *Yiddishe Neshama* that nestles inside him. Whatever is going on outside soon begins to recede in his subconscious, becoming not much above a hum, whilst his own peaceful little space becomes freer of the indiscriminate bombardment from all sides. Obviously, some days and some parts of the journey are going to be better than others.

Serenely, he bears aloft the ultimate "crown jewels" – two holy Jewish eyes that he is determined to keep clean. Of no interest to him are the blaring billboards, the colourful hubbub of comings and goings. His attention will not be deflected; He is an ambassador of his holy, glorious nation. How very different than Mr. Average's style of travel!

### **Having a Positive Attitude**

It would seem that *shmiras einayim* must be fraught with negativity since we need to keep on nudging ourselves:

"Don't look! Keep your eyes down and never mind what you're missing out on!" But constraining unruly urges can be a bitter struggle, because trying to suppress powerful desires is like squashing down a coiled spring that is gathering the strength to jump right back with more force than before.

The answer to this, says Rav Chaim Friedlander, *ztz"l*, is to focus on the benefits of guarding one's eyes. The struggle, then, is no longer between enjoying a certain pleasure and giving it up, but rather between choosing one pleasure in favour of another one.

Sending ourselves positive messages and cultivating a positive attitude might be far more helpful. We could reiterate our basic premise that deep down we really want to stay inside the Torah's safety net and be clean and pure. We're not seeking to be awash in momentary thrills; we choose to rise above that kind of thing. They leave long-term damage and have already caused untold havoc in enough areas. We'll go for the gold – true spiritual wealth and eternal bliss.

This style of thinking is far more effective. We are no longer suppressing our basic desires. Taking pride



in preserving one's purity by saying "no" to forbidden pleasures gives a marvellous boost to the morale.

A spirited and upbeat attitude turns *shmiras einayim* into an informed **preference** as to how we wish to live, rather than a difficult sacrifice which drains our energy.

By choosing a more positive attitude, it is no longer necessary to keep the palm pressed down so hard on that coiled spring of lust. The roaring fires of our unruly passions begin to behave themselves and to lose their edge.

This is me, happy to march under the banner of *shmiras einayim*.

In that vein, the *sefer "Veha'eir Eineinu"* was written to spell out some of the wonderful benefits and rewards granted (in This World and the Next) for *shmiras einayim* – guarding one's eyes in our challenging times. It gives the reader clear guidance and tips, and will help him regain his footing when he feels he is losing ground.

In itself, just learning about matters of purity will help us rein in and control our impulses. The *Midrash (Nasso, 14:4)* promises that whenever we truly toil over a particular Torah teaching, Hashem will remove from us the desire to commit that sin.

We get a kick-start by reminding ourselves that, moment-by-moment, our *shmiras einayim* is bringing immense satisfaction to Hashem. And the good news is that the real uphill struggle is only for the first bit. The *Mesilas Yesharim* assures us that *kedusha* starts off as effort, but then it comes to us as a reward. At first, it's work – following that, it is handed to us as a gift. Only the first struggles are so seriously tough.

The *Chinuch* writes that if you shut your eyes not to see evil once, it will make it easier to do so many more times. If we restrain ourselves now, we will rejoice in our lot forever after. The *yeitzer hora* towers like a mountain. But as soon as we kick some of the old habits, the road ahead is surprisingly smoother, and all it takes is a slight but continuous input to keep us in the driver's seat.

<b><i>Week 2 - Bereishis, Mishpatim, Beha'aloscha</i></b>
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### **Streetwise**

As we step outdoors, most of us feel an urge to look all around and survey what is happening in the vicinity. Our glance darts hither and thither – who's this, and what's

happening there? A **mild** curiosity concerning what's going on might seem harmless enough, but if it awakens a longing to see a **particular** thing, it will then be more difficult to look aside. Indeed, a major hazard for *shmiras einayim* is our well-entrenched habit of giving in to curiosity.

What started off as "I just want to see what's doing" could suddenly turn into an attraction. And this new torment is our own doing because we didn't recognize the thin edge of the wedge. The more we look around, the more our curiosity will be piqued. Why open new battlefields?

It would serve our interest, therefore, to pre-empt the snags and potholes. If, before heading out we could give ourselves a mini mental briefing, it would run something like this: "I wish to go somewhere now, and there is nothing on the way that requires my investigation. I do not want my eyes pulling me in all directions. This urge to never miss what's going on is really quite pointless and unbecoming. How many times has my inquisitive nature led me to stumble? Curiosity comes with an expensive price tag." Straightening out our priorities would then lessen our precarious juggling act: trying to catch half-glimpses while simultaneously hoping, of course, to maintain our purity.

Overcoming inquisitiveness, like anything else, can be accomplished with habit. Those twitches of curiosity that were forever pushing us to look around start to fade away.

Is there any way we could get a head start and prepare ourselves before stepping out into the streets?

There most certainly is. Off-site eye-control training could be done in shul. Someone's likely to walk in sooner or later, and we find ourselves itching to look up for a quarter of a second just to know who it is. But no! We don't need to see! We really don't need to know who has entered.

Begin with just one minute. During that time, no one and nothing will get you to lift your head up from the *siddur* or *sefer*. Right now we are exercising a skill which will keep us in good shape later, out of shul, when we need to slip into "on-guard mode." Overcoming curiosity means we are far less likely to come in contact with trouble – it's the "stitch in time."

### **Davening for Help**

We *Yidden* always have the powerful weapon of *tefillah* available in our arsenal. When feeling overwhelmed by the *yeitzer hora*, we can plead to Hashem in our own heartfelt

words to save us, His beloved children, from this monstrous attacker.

Help may not arrive that very instant, but we need to keep on *davening*. It feels like a compelling force of demonic proportions, but Hashem can save us from undesired pleasure. Let's remember that Hashem wants to help us more than we want to be helped. And when we contemplate the *nisyonos* that bombard our brethren the world over, no doubt we will have them in mind in our *tefillos*, too.

## Part 2

### Avoid Temptation

Every man is obligated to, as much as possible, keep away from temptation's doorway – mishaps are then simply less likely to occur. We need to assess the situation beforehand. What are our options? Sometimes it's just a matter of re-charting a couple of our normal routes and usual haunts. Main streets are to be avoided in general where side streets are available.

If a person unnecessarily exposes himself to circumstances of risk, he is at fault – yes, even if he shuts his eyes. Why? Because where was his fear of sin? Why was he so unconcerned

about what he could encounter? His actions imply a degree of indifference to this serious issue.

When it comes to matters of *arayos*, the natural condition of man finds it all so very fascinating and so sorely tempting. *Chazal* term it (*Makkos* 23b): נפשו של אדם ומחמדתן מתאוה להם ומחמדתן – A man's soul desires and craves these things. That is why we are required to take extra care to pre-empt any brush with alluring temptations or traps.

The *Arizal* tells us how immodest mingling contaminates the very air being breathed to the extent that Avraham Avinu, as he neared the degenerate land of *Mitzrayim*, suddenly became aware of Sarah's exquisite beauty, saying to her, "Behold, now I know that you are a woman of beautiful appearance."

Rav Shalom Schwadron, *ztz"l*, used to tell the following story about Rav Aharon Kotler, *ztz"l*, and his insistence on avoiding streets that were frequented by women: "When Rav Aharon lived in Kletzk, his home was some distance from the yeshiva; using the main streets would entail *shmiras einayim* risks. So he went instead by way of the back yards, though he had to vault over fences and other such inconveniences. "

"It once happened that two *bochurim* were at his home discussing Torah until it was almost time to be back in yeshiva. He offered to escort them along his usual quick route behind the houses. They couldn't refuse. However, when they reached an alleyway with big, fierce, prowling dogs, they were simply too scared to proceed. Rav Aharon instructed them to take hold of the hems of his coat and walk beside him. Trembling, they obeyed, and lo and behold! Those dogs ignored the trio."

Rav Aharon would happily negotiate tall fences and dangerous hounds rather than streets where he would come across women. Didn't *Chazal* say (*Brachos* 61a) that a man should walk behind a lion in preference to walking behind a woman?

Being alert to pitfalls and danger zones, we can come up with alternative routes. We may decide that certain places are off-limits. If necessary, we can have a couple of polite excuses up our sleeve for tricky situations, ideas for avoiding clashes, and some handy escape routes.

**Week 3 – Noach, Terumah, Shelach****Part 3****The Halacha**

What are the *halachos* of *histaklus*? It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss *shmiras einayim*'s many *halachic* ramifications – some of which many of us face daily. We do, however, wish to summarize the *halachic* parameters.

The unfortunate laxity prevalent today is, perhaps, due to widespread ignorance of the relevant *halachos*. The *passuk* that warns about guarding one's eyes is in *Shema*, ולא תתורו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם – Do not stray after your heart and after your eyes. This informs us that it is a full-fledged prohibition from the Torah for a man to either gaze or fantasize about women.

*Shmiras einayim* is not merely a *chumra* undertaken by previous generations, nor are its struggles intended only for the *frum* or *chassidish*. It was presented to each and every member of Hashem's holy nation.

The Torah regulates our actions, speech and thoughts. A *Yid* is not permitted to behave, speak, or even think without



restraint. The *Shulchan Aruch* says (*Even Ha'ezer* 21:1): "A man must keep himself well, well away from women... it is forbidden to jest with her or to survey her beauty." The *Mishnah Berurah* (*siman* 75, *se'if katan* 7) says that all opinions agree that to gaze upon any woman for pleasure, even an unmarried, modestly dressed woman and even if it's just at her little finger, definitely comes under the prohibition of לא תתורו – Do not stray.

The prohibition applies to any female, married or single, and includes everyone other than close blood relatives (i.e. mother, grandmother, daughter, granddaughter, sister and spouse).

### **Gazing Versus Looking**

What about looking without deriving any pleasure? This is called "ראיה בעלמא לפי תומו" – incidental looking – and is permitted. (The *Minchas Shmuel*, however, proves that an *adam chashuv* should be wary of this).

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, *ztz"l*, gives clear definitions. What is the kind of *re'iyah* that is prohibited and would consequently be damaging to a man's *neshama*? When he gazes at her, taking note of her individual form and features. Merely seeing, however, with no pleasure

involved, is permitted. Does it depend on the length of time? No. Sometimes a momentary glance is in fact an intent gaze, whereas other times even a prolonged look barely gets registered.

An example of *re'iya be'alma* would be how, when walking down the street, we notice exactly where we're going without having paid the matter any attention. Similarly regarding the *issur of histaklus* – if the viewing is incidental and gives no pleasure, and if his attention is focused on some other business at hand, then it is acceptable.

Continually monitoring and correcting where one's eyes are travelling is a basic component of the lifestyle of a *Yid*. Anyone who treats *shmiras einayim* as an optional extra which he is at liberty to decline, has deleted a clause in his contract with Hashem and thereby invalidated the document. He is termed *mumar ledavar echad* (an apostate). Torah is no pick 'n mix. Dispensing with even one section of a royal directive could be equivalent to chucking it all overboard.

In Summation:

- Strengthen our connection to Torah
- Keep occupied while on the journey

- Have the right attitude
- Overcome curiosity
- Daven for *siyata d'shmaya*
- Avoid danger
- Know the *halacha*

### **Compatibility**

What our eyes feed on is pivotal. It becomes the essence of our soul and has a cumulative effect on every aspect of our spiritual standing. To help us absorb the lofty concepts of purity, the *Midrash (Tanchuma, Kedoshim)* gives a picturesque parable of a royal wedding day. The groom is a king. He turns to his bride and says, "Now that we are about to be married to one another, I am King and you are Queen. Henceforth, whatever is my honour is also your honour as today you become my wife."

When *B'nei Yisrael* came to *Har Sinai*, Hashem told Moshe to prepare them to receive the Torah. The word He used, וקדשתם, translates as *sanctify them!* This word also carries a connotation of "*kiddushin*" – a marriage. Yes, it was a marriage, no less, which happened at *Har Sinai*. We were elevated to the status of "*mekudeshes*," becoming the intimate partner of Hashem Himself, so to speak.

And what will serve as the foundation to ensure the compatibility of that marriage? A firm commitment on our part to modesty and purity. Hashem declared, **ואתם תהיו לי**, Hashem declared, **ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש** – You will be to Me a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Why is it so necessary for us to be a holy nation? The *Midrash* (ibid.) quotes a second *passuk* to answer: **כי קדוש אני** – For I [Hashem] am holy. Our special relationship with Hashem is contingent upon our purity.

Now, flowers may fade, but at *Har Sinai* an everlasting covenant was forged between Hashem and the Jewish People – a partnership to endure for all time and reaching to the furthest lands of our dispersion. How shall we keep fresh the magic of that glorious day and hold onto the wonder and excitement of His warm embrace? Only by preserving our deep, Jewish, innate feel for modesty and purity, thus cherishing the sweet exclusivity of the relationship between ourselves, a unique and holy nation, and our Holy Creator.

Purity becomes the cornerstone of the Jew's entire spiritual standing and entitles him, in the World to Come, to be called by name to take his place among those distinguished to remain in priceless proximity to Hashem Himself. This person purified his soul, clung fast to Torah and *mitzvos*,

rejected all foreign invasions, and thereby earned for eternity the title "Beloved Partner of the Creator of the Universe."

Speaking of eternity, the *Chafetz Chaim* says succinctly: "A person's level of closeness to Hashem in *Olam Haba* is determined by the amount of *kedusha* that his soul absorbed by doing *mitzvos* in This World" (*Torah Ohr*, ch. 7).

The Vilna Gaon, *ztz"l*, comments that the *passuk* (*Bereishis* 38:21), **אִיהֶּ הַקֹּדֶשׁהּ הִיא בְּעֵינָיִם**, can be interpreted as, "All of a person's holiness depends on his eyes." It follows that if you want to become holy, then start with keeping your eyes pure.

The *Ra'avad* condenses our topic into a few sentences:

- A person's first line of defense against sin is his *shmiras einayim*.
- If his eyes are guarded then his mind is guarded.
- If his eyes and mind are guarded, then he is completely guarded!

### **A Foot in the Door**

*Chazal* tell us that whoever refrains from gazing at what he shouldn't see – and certainly at another man's wife – will not fall under the sway of his *yeitzer hora*. The *Ben*

*Yehoyada* (*Sotah* 8) notes that the *gematria* of ראייה, seeing, is identical to גבורה, might. We must use all our might to control what our eyes see, because this is where the *yeitzer hora* gets his foot in the door.

The *Chafetz Chaim* says the eyes are the key entry point for desire to come in and grip our soul. This is alluded to in *Eicha* (3:51), עיני עוללה לנפשי – it was their eyes that ruined their souls. Everything else was merely a completion of what the eyes had begun by introducing the cancerous cells.

*Rashi* in *Vayeitzei* (*Bereishis* 28:13) points out that Hashem associated His Name with Yitzchak Avinu during his lifetime, which was not the case with either Avraham or Yaakov. This is because Yitzchak was already blind and, consequently, his *yeitzer hora* was locked out.

The *Chafetz Chaim* warns that, although the *bracha* before performing a *mitzvah* reads, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו – Who sanctifies us through His *mitzvos*, i.e. that by performing *mitzvos* we become holy people – this transformation can only happen to those who are cautious about where their eyes and imagination travel.

Absent that vital ingredient, and one who performs a *mitzvah* won't receive the ultimate promise of אשר קדשנו –

being sanctified through it. Vanished is the fragrant bouquet that might have been the **להיותם קדושים לאלוקיכם**, being holy to Hashem. Eyes that snoop in unclean places taint the *mitzvah* and destroy its vitamins. By casting interested gazes where forbidden, one's soul becomes stained and, with time, the strength of his *yeitzer tov* is sapped.

Imagine a house piled high with dirt and rubbish, and someone comes along to decorate it with lovely, artistic ornaments. "What a pity!" you say. First he must clean the place up, and only then is it fit for the crystal chandeliers, the graceful furniture and the elegant tableware. A *mitzvah*, like a polished diamond, calls for a pure setting.

If you long for the elated feeling of constantly connecting to Hashem, then you can work on fulfilling the six constant *mitzvos* – the sixth of which is not to stray after your heart and eyes. You are then on the way to reaching the level of **שויתי ד' לנגדי תמיד** – I have set Hashem before me always (*Tehillim* 16:8) – the constant awareness of Hashem's Presence in front of you.

The hallmark of the *eved* Hashem is, and always has been, a constant inner striving to exercise control over his natural tendencies. Relentlessly, he seeks to subdue not

others, but himself – and thereby re-make all the parts of his character into something nobler, an ever increasingly refined person. In his program of dedicating himself to Hashem he will accord *shmiras einayim* urgent priority.

**Week 4 – Lech Lecha, Tetzaveh, Korach**

## **Part 4**

### **In Their Footsteps**

The following anecdotes give some insight into the astonishing steadfastness and inordinate precautions gladly undertaken by our *gedolei Yisrael* in their unceasing vigil to guard their eyes, much as we would guard jewels from lurking thieves.

### **The Steipler Gaon, ztz"l**

The Steipler Gaon, *ztz"l*, would never permit a woman to enter his study; should one enter, he would immediately leave the room. (Ladies' requests were relayed to him by the Rebbetzin.) When he was young his overcoat needed frequent replacing as, in his fear of seeing women, he would walk right at the innermost edge of the sidewalk heedless that his coat was being scratched and ripped against the walls.



**Reb Chatzkel Levinstein, ztz"l**

In the midst of the Nazi terror, the Mir Yeshiva fled en masse and miraculously reached safety in Shanghai. There, the yeshiva's *mashgiach ruchani*, the saintly Reb Chatzkel Levinstein, ztz"l, urged them to unparalleled heights in Torah and *avodah*. Isolated from the rest of their brethren, they applied themselves with legendary fervour, knowing full well that Hitler's hordes were all over Europe and that *Yidden* and *Yiddishkeit* were going up in flames.

At war's end, The Mir Yeshiva set sail for America. After six weeks on the high seas their ship finally docked in at the *Goldene Medina*. Safe haven at last? Not to Reb Chatzkel's way of thinking. Holiness is a highly perishable commodity and a free and easy melting-pot lifestyle would hardly be conducive to its preservation. Not surprisingly, Reb Chatzkel and his family soon left America to settle in Eretz Yisrael where he later became the *mashgiach* in the famed Ponevez Yeshiva in Bnei Brak.

During his stay in America, his fear of the influence of New York's streets was such that before venturing forth, he would learn some *mussar* as a protective measure. Upon reaching his destination, he would learn some more *mussar* to counteract the damaging influence of the streets.

Reb Chatzkel didn't mince his words. He said, "One wedding in America is enough to wreak tremendous damage on the hard-won spiritual attainments of six years' Torah study in Shanghai."

### **Rav Moshe Feinstein, ztz"l**

A young man once enquired of Rav Moshe Feinstein, ztz"l, about using a certain local street; he asked if its despicable store-window displays render one *halachically* obliged to take an alternative route? The inquirer also slipped in a polite mention that Rav Moshe himself walked down that street daily when going to the Yeshiva. Rav Moshe was aghast. "Pardon me? You mean to say that road is plastered with forbidden pictures? I never noticed"

### **Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, ztz"l**

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, ztz"l, famous *mashgiach ruchani* of *Beis Medrash Govoha* in Lakewood, attributed all his tremendous successes in life to his outstanding diligence in *shmiras einayim*. He was convinced that this purity was what prompted Rav Aharon Kotler, ztz"l, to choose him over some other more highly qualified candidates.

"I guarded my eyes non-stop," he once said. "My Rebbetzin would bring in her young seminary students and I had to speak with them and teach them. Even during long conversations, I looked not at them but at a point to the side, quite imperceptibly though, so as not to cause offence. At first, admittedly, it was difficult, but after a while I was able to switch to autopilot.

"Once I became *mashgiach*, my duties included regularly finding fresh and interesting material for my discourses. I'm sure I wasn't equal to the task but somehow Hashem always helped me, and now these discourses have even been published. I can hardly believe it. I feel that it all began with my ultra-sensitivity to what my eyes would behold. And all the other good things then followed as a chain reaction to the holiness this engendered."

### **Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, ztz"l**

The Manchester Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, ztz"l, once missed his plane as he sat in the airport with his eyes glued to a *sefer*, afraid to look up at the timetable screen lest he see some other images displayed alongside there too. Having consecrated his eyes since earliest youth,

he wasn't going to take any chances. Catching planes came secondary.

### **Rav Moshe Aryeh Freund, ztz"l**

Someone once asked Rav Moshe Aryeh Freund, ztz"l, to look up at a second-floor balcony, to give a halachic ruling. "I'll gladly walk up the stairs with you to view the building layout," he replied, "but I couldn't look upwards like you request. It's something I haven't allowed myself to do since a very young age."

### **Dayan Gershon Posen, ztz"l**

The author's father tells in the name of his own father z"l that in the Frankfurt of over 80 years ago, Dayan Gershon Posen, ztz"l, would deliver a *shiur* for ladies whilst remaining screened behind a curtain.

### **Rav Aharon Kotler, ztz"l**

On one occasion, it just so happened that Rav Aharon Kotler, ztz"l, inadvertently saw something unsuitable when turning a corner. His anguished reaction was to lean against a wall and weep. His citadel had been breached. "*Ribono Shel Olam*" he cried, "You took away so, so many of our brothers and sisters in the holocaust. Why did You leave me

alive?" He would have preferred death at the hands of the Nazis rather than life in America if that meant sullied eyes.

### **Rav Baruch Ber Lebovitz, ztz"l**

Rav Baruch Ber, ztz"l, was once about to go from one room to another when he realized that a young woman was standing there. She was perfectly modestly dressed, yet he stood afar and waited, being unwilling to even walk past her. Eventually, family members realized the problem and politely asked the young woman to move to a less conspicuous spot.

He once arrived at a wedding and became aware that the ladies were not dressed modestly enough. He instantly shut his eyes and had to be led like a blind man until he exited that room.

### **Rav Elchanan Wasserman, ztz"l, Rav Reuven Dov Dessler, ztz"l, Rav Elya Lopian, ztz"l, Alter of Kelm, ztz"l**

Rav Elchanan Wasserman, ztz"l, acquired the habit of going with head bent in order not to look beyond his *daled amos*; so did Rav Reuven Dov Dessler, ztz"l, that exemplar of Kelm *mussar* and father of the famed Rav Eliyahu

Eliezer Dessler, *ztz"l*. Rav Elya Lopian, *ztz"l*, would never turn his head to the right or the left when in the street. The Alter of Kelm, *ztz"l*, was known to have complete mastery over all his bodily movements. His eyes never looked to the sides; you could have thought they were nailed in position.

### **Rav Shimon Shkop, *ztz"l***

When Rav Shimon Shkop, *ztz"l*, went for walks with his *talmidim* in the summertime, they noticed that if a person's shadow should fall across his path, he would pause and wait for it to pass, in case it was a woman.

### **Rav Yerucham Levovitz, *ztz"l***

It once happened in the Mir Yeshiva in Europe that a couple of *bachorim* slipped out of a lengthy seder "illegally". No one noticed and they were soon out in the sunshine, where they suddenly noticed the *mashgiach* Rav Yerucham Levovitz, *ztz"l*, walking straight towards them.

They were afraid of questioning and a reprimand, but the eldest of the group allayed their fears. "Just follow me," he whispered. Stepping slightly to the side and with the others close on his heels, he strode straight past the *mashgiach* without incident. "I just knew that in the street he would

never raise his eyes off the ground," he explained to his mightily relieved companions.

### **The Vilna Gaon, *ztz"l***

The Vilna Gaon, *ztz"l*, from the age of *bar mitzvah* never glanced outside his *daled amos*. When he needed to go out into the street, he first reviewed the *Mesilas Yesharim* chapter on *zehirus* (watchfulness) thirteen times over.

The legacy of our holy *tzaddikim* is truly awesome and inspiring.

### **A Nation Born, A Destiny Carved**

Right at the dawn of our history, the opening *passuk* in *sefer Shemos* gives a two-word definitive description of the Jewish Nation's essence: **אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ**, each man and his house. *Chazal* see this as testimony that the *shevatim* kept each to his own tent and none ever looked at even his brother's wife.

Their descendents, a nation two to three million strong, left Egypt 210 years later all stamped with those selfsame characteristics. They saw how the Egyptians were the world's leading society in permissiveness and immorality. Yes, Egypt, the most highly advanced civilization of the

day who in science, architecture and astrology, would astound her twenty-first century counterparts. Yet they, the proud Jewish immigrants, were unimpressed.

The Egyptians' dissolute wallowing in unbridled lusts is detestable to the Jew. Their society is the very antithesis of the Jew's mandate to exercise self-control, curb his natural appetites, and subjugate himself to a Higher Will.

When the lewd Bilaam surveyed the Jewish encampment from his mountaintop viewpoint, a gasp escaped his lips. Every family tent had been so discreetly positioned as to afford its occupants their full privacy. Although they might be breaking camp and journeying onwards the very next morning, *tznius* was never compromised and no deviation ever countenanced.

So it came to be that the Jew-hating Bilaam, in spite of himself, bequeathed us the undying accolade, **מה טובו אהליך**, יעקב – How goodly are your tents, Yaakov, (see *Yalkut Shimoni* on *Bamidbar* 24:5).

Who can possibly fathom what beautiful words Hashem is saying to His Heavenly Court today as He looks down



and watches His ever-faithful People? In spite of the unspeakable, unprecedented, and unrelenting degeneracy all around them, they obstinately hold onto their dignity and purity, and still battle to keep their eyes pure. This nation, sanctity its bedrock, clings to its Maker; it laughs at the predictions that in a short time the ancient concept of purity will simply roll over and die.

In *Parshas Mattos* we read about the warriors sent by Moshe Rabbeinu to inflict vengeance on the Midianites, and the spoils that they took. The *Targum Yerushalmi* lauds their incorruptible integrity. These men refused to look at the princesses they captured – not lapsing for a single moment even while removing their jewelry. The *Or HaChaim* brings from *Chazal* that so great was their fear of compromising their *shmiras einayim* even while carrying out the direct command of Hashem, they conjured up a bright idea. They covered the women's faces before removing their jewelry. They knew very well that after sinning with a non-Jewish woman, a man can walk away easily enough – in This World. But in the Next World, her spirit will cling to him like glue and disgrace him in *gehennom*. The merit of their perfect conduct would serve them well on their final Day of Judgement.

The *Shelah* once promised his *talmid* that if he would guard his eyes and mouth, he would reach the loftiest of *madregos*, and come to fulfil completely the Will of the Creator.



**Week 5 – Vayeira, Ki Sisa, Chukas****CHAPTER 1****THE SPECIAL QUALITIES****Part 1****Then I Will Know You are Mine**

A frequent guest in the home of the Shunamis was none other than Elisha Hanavi. She told her husband that this man was holy. How did she deduce that fact about Elisha Hanavi? Simply because he had never looked at her.

*Chazal* say (*Midrash Vayikra* 24:6) that in matters of *arayos*, restraint equals holiness. Just taking care to refrain from looking at the forbidden and from thinking lustful thoughts already earns one the title "*kadosh*." Rejection of impurity generates holiness. An unfathomable light of holiness envelops the man who conquers his lust – especially when it burns and races inside him.

It is not because Rebbi compiled the *Mishnah* that we refer to him as *Rabbeinu Hakadosh*. It's because he never

in his life looked at the private parts of his body and, therefore, his soul was *kadosh*. In addition, he would never unnecessarily lower his hands below his waist; his body, too, was *kadosh* (*Shabbos* 118b).

What better way to bolster our resolve than to repeat the wonderful words that Hashem Himself has to say to us, "If you will give Me your heart and your eyes, then I will know that you are Mine," (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei* ch. 27). Neither look at nor contemplate what is sinful, and automatically you qualify to be lifted beyond the grasp and the smallness of this temporal existence and to have Hashem Himself fill every corner of your life.

## **Part 2**

### **Guarding Our Spiritual Eyes**

*Sefer Chassidim* assures us that even the *malachim*, those holy celestial beings, cannot approach the place of honour that is reserved for the *Yid* who (among other things) carefully guards his eyes. In the Next World, he won't just be sitting among ordinary folk. His coveted seat is among our very greatest – part of that inner circle of which Hashem Himself is the epicentre.

The *malachim*, having always been pre-programmed to holiness and never having to struggle for it, will be obliged to remain outside the circle of such *tzaddikim* and will come to them, begging to know, "What is Hashem doing?" (see *Sefer Chassidim* 140).

As for remembering one's learning, pure eyes will help here too, because *shmiras einayim* has the propensity to protect our memory, says Rav Shimon Shkop, *ztz"l*. Yes, pure eyes stand guard over the Torah that one has learned. This is hinted at in the last *parsha* of *Shema* by the proximity of the words ולא תתורו – Do not stray after your eyes, to the words למען תזכרו – so that you shall remember.

### **Strengthening One's Memory**

Impure eyes, on the other hand, block our path to understanding it. *Rabbeinu Yonah* (*Avos* 1:5) spells this out in no uncertain terms: "With a man's head full of contemptible visions, how can it possibly simultaneously absorb thoughts of Torah? It's one or the other. Those sunken in the pursuit of the uncouthness of This World become insensitive to spiritual beauty. These two opposites cannot sit side by side in the same heart."

The choice is ours.

The Ben Ish Chai (*Parshas Bo, shana 1*) warns of an evil spirit (*klipa*) who shadows us and tries to wipe our Torah studies clean off our minds. The way to thwart his harmful activities is to preserve the *kedusha* of our eyes.

Rav Yosef and Rav Sheishess were the best at remembering their learning, not in spite of their total blindness, but because of it. Their *rebbe*, the famous Rav, never glanced beyond his *daled amos* (*Teshuvos Hagaonim* 178). When he passed away, they ached to emulate this asceticism but found themselves unable to maintain it. And so they willingly accepted blindness. *L'havdil*, even secular sources maintain that beholding and visualizing sinful things will, in time, damage the memory, (*Machzeh Einayim* pg. 9).

## Part 3

### Yosef Hatzaddik – Paragon of Holiness

One of the most handsome men ever was Yosef Hatzaddik. Breathtakingly beautiful, his name is also synonymous with unblemished holiness in the face of agonizing trials.

The drama of Yosef's story begins to unfold when he is only seventeen years old. Suddenly, he finds himself torn

away from the sheltered environment of his parental home, wrenched from all his illustrious family. Alone and among uncaring masters, miles away from his loving father who is inconsolably mourning him as dead, he is brought down to *Mitzrayim* – a land steeped in immorality.

Here, he was sold as a slave to the wealthy and prominent Potiphar who quickly promoted him to stewardship over all his enterprises and home affairs. Potiphar, not slow in appreciating the blessing of having this gifted manager around, soon put everything into those capable young hands and allowed himself to sit back.

His wife, however, sat up. The unsurpassed beauty of this newly arrived slave piqued her interest. She observed how implicitly her husband trusted him to carry out tasks in her very own home.

Inexorably, her mind became obsessed with the sole goal of somehow getting Yosef to sin. She noted, however, a technical problem. His eyes were always averted, making the ultimate statement, "Not interested". Undeterred, she tried verbal persuasion.

Then she started changing her attire three times a day. Rather pointless, of course. How could she hope to captivate

a boy who never looked at her? But this formidable temptress, relentlessly enticing Yosef to yield to her advances, was implacably determined to somehow get him to look at her, even just once (*Midrash Rabbah*, 7:10).

So she stepped up the pressure, making life successively harder for him, threatening his refusals with the direst reprisals. She positioned a skewer right at his throat to coerce him to look in her direction, just to save himself from danger.

It was all in vain. Yosef remained impervious, steel-like, immovable, aloof, brimming with love for his Creator. From the *Midrash* it's apparent that, of all his trials – trials way beyond the endurance limits of later generations – the hardest *nisayon* that Yosef had was that of guarding his eyes. Yosef calmly and conscientiously continued carrying out his duties, until that cruel woman, her every design thwarted by his unbending "no", had him thrown into prison on charges of attempting to seduce her, his master's "innocent" wife.

### **In the Dungeon**

In prison, Yosef's problems were far from over. This cruel woman still would not leave him alone. She visited



the prison regularly to weaken his resolve and to tempt him to succumb.

She warned him in explicit terms of the consequences of his obstinacy. "So you think this is the last of your woes?" she menaced. "If you don't accede, I will have you bound in iron chains, bent over and unable to stand upright. I will have you blinded," she went on and on. Yosef was as firm, unmoved, and unimpressed as ever, still joyously serving his Maker with love and awe.

Going all out to cajole him to look at her even just that once, even for a split second, she found herself powerless against the iron resolve in the wellsprings of his noble soul. Never did he mar the perfection of his purity. Now, is it a wonder that we speak of him as Yosef Hatzaddik?

### **Turnabout**

Suddenly, there was an astounding turnabout in Yosef's fortune. After twelve long years, his eyes and soul still absolutely clean and untarnished, Yosef was hurried from his incarceration. By order of the king he was hastily groomed, suitably attired, and rushed to the palace to stand before Pharaoh, mighty King of Egypt.

At dizzying speed, he was raised from wretched prisoner to the rank of second-in-command of the whole Egyptian Kingdom. The king's signet ring was placed on his finger; he was arrayed in linen robes and driven through the capital's streets.

Can you picture the scene in ancient Egypt awaiting the gala procession and entourage? Crowds of jubilant citizens fill the streets. The rejoicing is palpable as the throngs begin their chanting. The *Midrash Rabbah* (98:18) describes how the daughters of the noblemen peeped out of their windows and threw their fine jewellery, piece by piece, into his royal chariot in the hope that this mesmerizingly handsome new viceroy might chance to look at them.

Throughout all this exotic pomp and pageantry, Yosef's eyes remained lowered. His self-discipline is timeless. *Targum Yerushalmi* tells us how the daughters of the aristocrats exclaimed to one another in sheer amazement, "Oh, see this pious Yosef who does not follow his eyes or the temptations of his heart."

**Week 6 – Chayei Sarah, Vayakhel, Balak****A People on its Bedrock**

Why did Hashem engineer Yosef's coming down to *Mitzrayim* ahead of the rest of his family? Answers the *Zohar*: "So he would be a *Merkava* for the *Shechina* (a "chariot" for the Divine Presence) deep in the *ervas ha'aretz* (most immoral part of the world) and somewhat neutralize the filth of the land's populace."

His 22-year exile became a veritable textbook when our nation was forged in the iron crucible of Egyptian slavery. Every Jew had the ability to stay pure, strengthened by the *kedusha* of that *tzaddik yesod olam* who triumphed over all that *Mitzrayim* could throw at him.

What noble deeds were necessary to achieve this noble mission of preparing the ground for the Jewish people's 210 year stay? None. Only a refrain from action – Yosef's never beholding the forbidden. And this paved the way for a whole nation to live in *Mitzrayim* for generations and not be totally swept away by the destructive forces of impurity.

Just as their role model Yosef *Hatzaddik* affected all *B'nei Yisrael* later in *Mitzrayim* and in all generations to

follow, so too, our heroes today – those stalwarts from whatever age or background – raise the global *kedusha* level as the echoes of their purity reverberate around the "civilized" world.

To this very day we draw strength from the blessings and rewards that the Torah lavishes on Yosef and his descendants.

Hundreds of people's fortitude in *kedusha*, cutting across continents and spanning generations, can sometimes have its source in a single self-disciplined individual. Who knows how many people will stand firm and strong as a result of our personal self-control? Orienting ourselves towards screening out the inappropriate brings a strong presence of moral purity into the world, fortifying hundreds of other people out there.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The uncompromised holiness of Yosef's eyes was unique and immortal – a solitary, homeless Jewish boy in a country uncontested for, and unashamed of, its deplorable lifestyles. Very few of us, perhaps one or two in a whole generation, will ever have to endure the excruciating trials of Yosef. And yet, everyone can earn himself the

title *tzaddik yesod olam*, writes the *Taharas Hakodesh* (*ma'amar shmiras einayim* ch. 2, 4). How so? When one has for a second seen something enticing and is burning to look for just another millisecond yet he stands firm, refusing to put his purity on the line – there and then he is crowned a *tzaddik yesod olam*.

Maybe he is a teenager with an easily excited nature, suddenly finding himself throbbing with fiery passion, and yet he holds fast onto the reins – then, in those glorious moments, he becomes a Yosef Hatzaddik. In real terms, though in 21st century garb. He suppressed those raging sensations and turned his eyes and mind away; the *Shechina* comes to this great hero and lights up his soul with holiness.

Rav Yitzchok Silberstein heard from the *Taharas Hakodesh* that simply turning one's eyes away from the unsuitable welcomes in the *Shechina*. This person's essence now comes close to Hashem, so to speak. Utilize this golden moment of *eis ratzon* and whisper a *tefillah* for all the things one wants in life. This is hinted at in the words, ישועת השם כהרף עין - The help of Hashem comes swiftly like the **blink of an eye**.

Virtually trapped in a pitiless milieu of a one-track-minded society, those who guard their eyes are our world-class celebrities, unquenchable idealists ever making purity a top priority. How frequently they unquestioningly ignore society's norms and straitjacket themselves, though born into a "been there, done that" era, remaining unfazed even if it seems to be mission impossible.

Besides bringing *siyata d'shmaya* in that individual's whole *avodah*, he draws down onto himself a transcendent light of *kedusha*. An unfathomable holiness envelops the man who conquers his lust when it burns and races inside him. Though imperceptible to us in our physical world, it's there.

The *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (31b) tells of a certain individual who overcame his flaming passion for a certain married woman, and how he walked away from the trickiest situation not just unstained, but with a shining light of *kedusha* now hovering above his head, visible to those around him. Nothing can ever eclipse the ethereal light created by every *Yid* who is striving towards *kedusha*.

Nothing was haphazard when Yosef Hatzaddik rose to the position of *Mishneh L'Melech*. What was now granted

to him was all his own handiwork. No discomfort borne was forgotten when his hour came.

We *Yidden* know that This World is not a playground. We are not here for cheap thrills. The purpose of life is closeness to Hashem achieved through self-mastery. And, like Yosef Hatzaddik, in the end we will never lose out. Whatever pleasure we renounce in pursuit of purity will one day be handed to us on a plate in a permitted way. Hashem ensures that those who do not grab will not lose out; He has plenty of permitted ways to deliver these pleasures. On the other hand, those who pursue forbidden pleasures hardly ever get to really enjoy them and, afterwards, are plagued with remorse.

Hashem's plans will come to be, regardless of all our little strategies. If a person sets out to indulge his [forbidden] animalistic fancies, the sun may shine brightly at first. But as he proceeds along the glittering, wide-open spaces of Ruin Road, he will encounter a lot more difficulties than he had bargained for in the form of obstacles, disruptions, and disappointments.

And what of the fellow who starts out in the opposite direction, without a glance over his shoulder at the "fun" left behind? Keeping to the restrictive path that leads only

to where the Torah takes him, he gradually becomes aware that a goodly measure of the loveliest things in life has chanced to come his way without any effort on his part.

The Vilna Gaon, tz"l, testifies (*Even Shlaima* ch. 2, part 10): "All pleasures which the morally corrupt may obtain with effort and exertion through forbidden avenues are granted to the wholesome, clean-living individuals in a permitted manner without any effort on their part." We lose nothing by choosing to keep our eyes clean and pure.

Yosef Hatzaddik married his *bashert*, Osnas. Together they raised a family of sons whom, till the end of time, countless Jewish fathers and mothers bless their own sons to emulate – Ephraim and Menashe, each to become a tribe in his own right. And Yosef Hatzaddik became the symbol of one who remained unbowed and unconquerable.

<b><i>Week 7 – Toldos, Pekudei, Pinchas</i></b>
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## **Part 4**

### **Elevating the Whole World**

The *Mesilas Yesharim* writes (ch. 1) that every *mitzvah*



elevates the whole world, while every forbidden act brings harm not only to the sinner but to the whole world. Therefore, every time you overcome temptation, you are bringing into existence a spirit of purity and holiness that benefits us all.

The *Chida* writes (*Nachal Kidumim, Bereishis*) that if *Yidden* look at forbidden sights, then the forces of Eisav and Yishmael gather strength. But if we take extra care to protect our sense of sight, then Eisav and Yishmael will be wiped out and *Mashiach* will come.

The call goes out to every Jewish man and woman to rise up and build a wall against that barrage of hollow filth. Though *tznius* may seem a hopeless anachronism, old fashioned and out-dated, by dint of our unflagging drive for modesty and purity in today's world of applauded and sophisticated *hefkeirus*, we will rise to pre-eminence, being princes and princesses. This is the fight at the End of Days. It's the tug-of-war for the holiness of Jewish eyes, after which we will take center stage, crowned with the glory of our King Himself.

The *Midrash (Tanchuma, end of Vayigash)* compares the happenings of *Tzion* to the life of Yosef. Rav Don

Segal notes that just as Yosef earned kingship by dint of his undefiled eyes, so too Yerushalayim's meteoric return as spiritual capital of the world will be preceded by trials centered mainly on guarding the purity of Jewish eyes.

### **The Real Movers and Shakers of This World**

When Hashem breathed life into *Adam Harishon*, He breathed from Himself, so to speak. Something of divinity entered the founder of our race right from his very first breath of life. The soul of man is a spark of the divine; its spiritual source is higher than that of the heavenly angels.

Think of the vast expanses of outer space. Then think how the soul Hashem placed within you is similarly vast, though in a different dimension. Your *neshama* was hewn from Hashem's own throne. Let us not underestimate who we are.

We have a principle that Hashem, in His kindness, has appointed Am Yisrael as Heaven's policy makers – He takes their cues and acts accordingly. "Little" me is a lynchpin in myriads of spiritual worlds.

When we do *mitzvos*, we are in fact pressing all the right buttons on the control panel of the universe. Even a single rejection of the impure will uphold countless spiritual worlds. But please note that it also works the other way around, and even one instance of giving in to temptation destroys accordingly.

It is not surprising then, that some *Amora'im* chose to be blind so as to never see impure sights. However, they were an exception. From the rest of us, Hashem wants the rest of us to keep the amazing gift of eyesight, and use it to carry out His *mitzvos*.

Kabbalistic sources tell us of the cosmic effects of restricting one's eyes from grazing in foreign pastures. The three colours of the eye correspond to the three *avos*. This lofty concept and many more similar ones regarding the eyes are discussed in *Reishis Chochmah* (see *Sha'ar Hakadusha*, ch. 8) and other *sefarim*, and though their true meaning may be beyond our grasp, they at least give an inkling of the colossal effects of our *shmiras einayim*.

*Shmiras einayim* is literally a life-giving elixir, free to all. The *Ibn Ezra* finds a hint to this in *Tehillim* (119:37),

where Dovid Hamelech begs Hashem, העבר עיני מראות שוא, בדרכיך חייני – Avert my eyes from seeing futility, preserve my life through Your ways.

All the inconvenience of looking down, looking away, staying away, curtailing travel and leisure options, and so much more, will be paid for in handsome dividends to us, to our children and to our children's children, writes the *Sefer Chassidim* (*siman* 495).

If the Torah promises generous reward for not tasting animals' blood, something we would in any case find disgusting, then how much greater is the reward for controlling our base drives for viewing things that beckon and captivate.

King Achaz was a sinner, yet he took care never to rest his eyes on women. For this saving grace, the Navi Yeshaya promised him sure victory in all his wars.

### **One More Lap**

Many wonder, why are we, today, faced with such horrific impurity, to a degree unknown before modern technology.

Confusing as it all seems, we know that whatever emanates from our loving Father is only beneficial. There

must be a reason why Hashem allowed this development.

Think for a moment about how a budding young boxer would go about building up his arm muscles. Not overnight, but gradually he would train himself to lift successively heavier sets of weights. As his strength increases, he faces and defeats ever more challenging opponents.

By dint of Hashem's testing us with *tumah*, our "kedusha muscles" grow larger and stronger. In order for us to reach greater levels of *kedusha*, we must successively overcome more difficult challenges.

So has it been since time immemorial. When *B'nei Yisrael* were in *Mitzrayim*, they sank to the 49th level of the impurity of the culture that surrounded them. When they left *Mitzrayim*, they cleansed themselves from these 49 levels of *tumah* in 49 days, thereby attaining the 49th level of *kedusha*. They were neither exposed to the 50th level (an absolute low) of impurity nor were they expected to withstand it. The *Ohr Hachaim* (*Shemos* 3:8) explains that since this was prior to *Matan Torah*, they could not have coped with the 50th level of *tumah*. Therefore, correspondingly,

they could not rise to attain the 50th degree (the zenith) of *kedusha*.

Now at the climax of our history, ushering in the *Mashiach* era, Hashem wants to present us with the full force of 50 levels of *kedusha*. We are therefore witness today to an entirely new ball game. Permission has been granted to the denizens of the netherworld to thrust a final fling of the 50th level of *pritzus* full force into our faces. After *Matan Torah*, with the Torah as our arsenal, we are able to tackle every last bit of the fight – until we vanquish the reign of evil. With our souls fortified with Torah, we are capable of reaching and receiving the zenith of *kedusha*.

Now we're on the last lap of our journey, amidst the ever-quickening pace of *Ikvesa D'Meshicha*. We hear an unprecedented note of urgency – the corollary being that whoever lets themselves be swayed, even if they survived and succeeded in climbing up the previous rungs, will be caught and trapped by the 50th degree of impurity.

But whoever is determined to combat the mighty pull of the dragnet is thereby hacking down the imprisoning

walls of *tumah* and developing great stamina in the process. This continues until the moment when our spiritually powerful arms will pry open the gates for *Mashiach* to arrive amidst the full 50 degrees of our hard-earned *kedusha*.



***Week 8 – Vayeitzei, Vayikra, Mattos-Masei***

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **CONFRONTING CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY**

## **Part 1**

### **Illusion and Confusion**

To help keep our adrenalin levels up when our momentum threatens to run out, it's worthwhile knowing the following points:

Stolen waters taste sweet. Rav Avigdor Miller, *ztz"l*, explains the reason for the sweetness – because it's not yours. When a glass of that glistening, sparkling water is handed to you and is honestly yours, suddenly the magic is gone and it's quite tasteless. Much of the longing to gaze is simply because it is forbidden.

Sin entices with false fantasies, but with the awareness that it's a customized *nisayon* made for one to overcome and thereby earning vast reward for eternity, the infatuation, like a helium-filled balloon,



will soon deflate and drop down to the ground.

The Satan inflates the desires, too. How so? The *Kadmonim* write that lust is from the *yesod hamayim* – the water element of creation. Water has the property to distort the appearance of things. The Satan makes a savvy impostor who offers no apologies for his theatrical deceptions.

More than simply exaggerating, Satan can craft a complete illusion. For the sake of a test, writes the *Maharsha* (*Sanhedrin* 100b), the Satan can give grace and beauty to an otherwise unattractive woman. But if we are wise we subtract all that glitter and, suddenly, he is unmasked. The smokescreen clears and gone is the appeal of the unreal.

### **Who am I? Secrecy and Ambiguity**

"What is your name?" Yaakov Avinu asked Eisav's guardian angel. "Why do you ask?" came the immediate reply. Why couldn't the angel answer such a straightforward question? Because that's part and parcel of his very essence – to elude us.

That slippery, scheming Satan – how shall we pin down his essence? How do we track an assailant who blurs all his outlines so that he doesn't register on our radar? We have

some vague misgivings, and niggling suspicions that he's hatching something dark, but, true to form, he won't be leaving his calling card on our desk.

He prefers when his victims are oblivious to his true colours and not quite sure when they are under attack. He can whip up a whirl of doubts which leave us uncertain of the forces at work, since he thrives on secrecy and ambiguity. Often we're not fully aware that the *Yeitzer Hora* is leading us astray.

In that case, suggests Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, *ztz"l*, of Zurich, as soon as we get an inkling that something's brewing, we should pull away the Satan's mask by articulating, "**Here comes trouble and there is no doubt, it's absolutely forbidden!**"

These few words work wonders and will help us remain the undisputed master of our better judgment. Because he chooses to remain obscure, in all likelihood he'll flee as soon as we announce his arrival.

After that abrupt warning, drop the subject; too much effort to disconnect can have a negative effect. Be alert. The less these issues play on our conscious mind, the better.

And it's best to slam him as soon as we can. Preferring

his assault to go unnoticed, he doesn't usually pounce on us with a full-force temptation. He starts in a small way, but then with every passing moment of our considering the forbidden, the temptation gathers momentum. Forewarned is forearmed; by dismissing the temptation at its onset before it's gained much thrust, we are beating him at his own game.

With *shmiras einayim* as an enterprise, what day-to-day effects are we about to trigger and what kind of benefits will we enjoy? Lots of them, and quite quickly too. Carefully guarded eyes are ready and fit to be enlightened by the Torah. Clues to this are found in the wording of our *tefillos*, *והאר עינינו בתורתך* – Light up our eyes with Your Torah, we ask daily before *Shema* in *Shacharis*. Also in *Tehillim* (119:18), Dovid Hamelech begs, *גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך* – Unveil my eyes that I may perceive wonders from Your Torah. It's so much more meaningful when we implore Hashem to light up our eyes while we ourselves keep them under control.

As we break free from the grip of the *yeitzer hora*, our script changes. We function more independently and it becomes second nature to refrain from viewing the vulgar. Soon we will feel altogether calmer, less distracted and

more focused as the *kedusha* side of our personality is activated in our day, our thinking, and our emotions.

Rav M. Y. Lefkowitz, *ztz"l*, tells how *shmiras einayim* induces calmness and serenity. By shielding one's eyes from the competing outside distractions, ramparts are erected around one's very own space. Within its tranquil confines, there lies the yearned-for peace of mind. It's a win-win situation, bringing inner balance and tranquillity.

Looking at the forbidden prevents enthusiasm for *mitzvos* from warming one's heart, warns Rav Matisyahu Salomon.

After being aroused to improve our purity of sight and thought, we need to be alert – *shmiras einayim* challenges do not take any holidays. It can be all too easy to let our standards slip. But we cannot afford to give our vigilance a break. Being inconsistent makes the struggle so much harder when we take up the fight anew.

*Chazal's* words – "It's as fragile as fine crystal," – could well be applied to the *middah* of *shmiras einayim*.

## Part 2

### A Common Misconception

It seems unfair that the slightest unplanned and unwanted sighting of impurity should deal more merciless blows to someone who guards himself than to someone who doesn't. While others around seem to be unaffected as if anaesthetised and having no issue with it at all, the *shmiras einayim* stalwart can be knocked right off-balance with even one glimpse. Alone, he faces the question, "Am I, perhaps, making my own problems by guarding my eyes so carefully? Is this the way things are supposed to be?"

A famous story of the *Chafetz Chaim* helps us answer this question. Once, the *Chofetz Chaim* was witness to *Yidden* driving cars on Shabbos. He cried bitterly at this brazen *chillul Shabbos*. When he saw the same *chillul Shabbos* a week later, he cried yet again. However, upon realizing that his crying the second week was less passionate than the first, he began to cry intensely, for his own lack of sensitivity which he felt had been dulled so rapidly.

Surprisingly, we see the answer. Acute sensitivity is a very good sign indeed. The violent response speaks of his refinement and high quality. *Kedusha* heightens our

sensitivity to finer feelings. The skilled violinist will have tightened his strings until they resonate to the lightest touch of his bow.

On the contrary, it is the *tumah* of unrestricted viewing that brings on staleness, increases sluggishness and deadens our innate sensitivities. Only a healthy, well-cared-for *neshama* could react so acutely to a minor stimulus. The whiter the shirt, the more pronounced each speck of dirt. The Vilna Gaon, *ztz"l*, related that even hearing the footsteps of a woman was enough to disturb his *kedusha*. Similarly, Reb Chatzkel Levinstein, *ztz"l*, said of himself that traveling through the streets of Tel Aviv – even without looking out of the car window – would have a harmful effect.

### **Part 3**

#### **Setbacks are Signs of Progress**

Here is part of a must-read letter addressed to an adolescent who perceived his setbacks as an indication of his having gone wrong somewhere and being now beyond hope. It is from the pen of Rav Yitzchak Hutner, *ztz"l*:

*What a pity that biographies of our Gedolei Yisrael always seem to dwell on the perfection of the 'finished*

*products' and to skip over the tremendous struggles of the early years. What about the unglamorous, uneven journey? What of the wrong turns and the hard bumps? Was it really always a smooth, straight ride? Was the Chafetz Chaim born with a special kind of mouth that automatically refrained from lashon hora? Of course not!*

*The aspiring youngster wistfully pictures himself sitting peacefully learning in the beis medrash, with his yeitzer tov as his constant companion and his yeitzer hora long banished to some distant island. Wasn't that how one became a gadol? Forget it. We have come into This World to be challenged, to wage war with an insatiable yeitzer hora and thereby come close to Hashem. En route lie plenty of defeats and setbacks.*

*The passuk in Mishlei (24:16) says it all: שבע יפול צדיק וקם – The tzaddik falls seven times, yet he rises. Those seven falls are an integral part of his elevation. It's through the nefilos that the shteiging comes – but come it will. And besides, it's exactly those unruly parts of your nature, those sore points, which hold the capacity for excellence. It's when we're straining every nerve to curb our ignoble compulsions that we come nearest to the true-life makings of the essence of a gadol b'Yisrael.*

Was it really a smooth, straight ride to that glowing countenance shown on the biography's front cover? Certainly not.

Rav Shalom Schwadron, *ztz"l*, said of Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *ztz"l*: "How did he ever manage to keep on learning incessantly for stretches of well over fifteen hours? Wasn't his bed calling out to him already, his head absolutely aching for that pillow? It was – but he fought his weariness and his heavy eyelids, and went on to become, as we now know with hindsight, no less than a *gadol hador*."

***Week 9 – Vayishlach, Tzav, Devarim***

### **Dispelling a Myth**

People assume that the particular area that seems to be their weak point is one where they'll never really excel and bring home any medals. Surely the area in which they are always losing points and keep crumbling into defeat is the one of least potential. Though they know they dare not decrease the struggle, they certainly can't imagine how this will ever bring them to excellence.

Incorrect.



In fascination we read from Rav Tzadok Hakohen (*Tzidkas HaTzaddik*, 49): If one particular issue keeps getting in the way, forming an obstinate roadblock, don't go into reverse. Look again at the signpost. It does not read, 'dead end'. It says, 'Here lies your maximum potential for excellence.' So please drive this way. You have just chanced upon your particular field of endeavor. It is the very purpose for which you were created."

Identifying your personal failings, tendencies, and mistakes will tell you the name of your game and highlight the part of your *neshama* that you need to work with most. Realize that grappling with your *yeitzer hora* is your road to greatness. It's exactly those unruly parts of your nature, those sore points, which hold the highest capacity for excellence.

See where the Satan is strategically positioning his heavy blockade? Over there lies a unique life mission and you are the special person who is being called by Hashem to take up those challenges and, with them, make a *kiddush Hashem* as unique as your fingerprint.

The bruises and falls will shake us out of our complacency and prod us to an upgraded performance. Struggles, setbacks

and growing pains are the common companions of anyone striving for purity.

## **Part 4**

### **True Success**

*Chazal* (*Eruvin* 65a) describe us as "employees." It is Hashem, the Boss, Who masterminds the bigger picture of His enterprises. This gives us a deeper understanding why spiritual success depends primarily on effort rather than on results.

Hired employees, furnished with any equipment they might need, have to simply get on with their job. Responsibility for deficits and failure all belong on the director's desk.

Hashem is Director of This World; we, His loyal workforce, are expected solely to be doing our very best. Final results are the affairs of the Conductor on High. Our *avodah* is to be constantly working on this task, and our job description is to keep going full swing as best as we can.

The enthusiast might set himself an optimistic target in *kedusha* – maybe even a realistic goal. And then, if it fails to materialize within the time span allocated, he feels

dismayed, deflated and disinclined to continue. He thinks, "Who locked the gate to my garden of dreams and so callously threw away the key? I had so yearned to serve Hashem with all my *ramach eivarim*."

His disappointment is unfounded, because, we are simply supposed to **succeed in trying our utmost**. There's no need to be so dependent on seeing results, so long as we're moving onwards and upwards to become the very best that we can be. An *ehrlicher Yid*, by definition, is striving ever upwards. Not fanatic, not apathetic, just cheerfully confident that self-improvement really is happening. And any expectation to be like anyone else, which can lead to discouragement, is out of place.

The Malbim comments on the *passuk* (*Tehillim* 105:4), דרשו'ה ועויו בקשו פניו תמיד – Search out Hashem and His might; seek His Presence always. Why is there only searching and seeking with no mention of finding anything? Because the ladder of spiritual striving has no uppermost rung. It's endless. There's no end goal, per se. True, clarifying our aims and setting goals are necessary; they urge us on and help us stay focused and on track. Ultimately, however, it's the upward climb that means the most.

The road stretches ever upwards until your ambition is for nothing more than to fulfill His ambition for you – a lifelong journey along the Royal Highway where your every footstep tells Him of your love.

### **Struggling**

You may walk into a shul and see someone sitting alone in a corner trying – no, slogging – to understand a piece of *gemara*. It looks like he is getting nowhere, but he perseveres. We will call this Stage 1. Then you watch a deep smile spread over his face and you know he has finally got it clear. The success is Stage 2.

Which stage best portrays the conscientious servant of Hashem? Stage 1, of course. It is the clearest indication of subservience to a Higher will.

### **Winning is Not Everything**

"Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." The athlete's days, weeks and months of sweaty practicing are actually no more than training for the real game. That's where he hopes to finally prove himself. His past efforts, toil, and sweat alone are not valued as success.

*Baruch Hashem*, for Torah Jews the reverse is true.

There's no big date in the arena and no contest of one man's performance against another's. Whatever we may find ourselves up against, Hashem will be scrutinizing how hard we're trying. And, at the end of the day, what counts is not, "Did you star?" but rather, "Did you strive?"

### **The Very Frum Satan**

Watch out! That double-faced Satan never gives up. Just in case yesterday's tricks haven't wrought enough havoc, here comes today's menu fooling us yet again. When it suits his purpose, he turns remarkably *frum*.

Choking with emotion, he convinces us that, sadly, we have blackened our soul beyond repair and by now things have just gone too far. He freely belittles any accomplishments to date and magnifies all mistakes. He demolishes his victim's self-esteem like nothing else can, calling all those hard-won achievements a wobbly house of cards.

"Might as well pull off the rose-coloured glasses," he coaxes, "and forget the grand *madreigos* we promised ourselves about guarding our eyes even in today's glamorous and enticing environment. Shame, isn't it?" Of course, a few dramatic sayings of *Chazal* will be thrown in for good measure.

Quick! Someone please come to the rescue of a *neshama* in grave danger! Tell him to ignore any negativity that dares to try and break his confidence during battle. Please sing this *neshama* a song about the eternal reward for every moment that we spend struggling with a raging *yeitzer hora* and his fiercely compelling drives. Point out what it means to chalk up even a single instance of having decisively averted our gaze from what seemed so alluring.

Phew! That was close!

### ***Week 10 – Vayeishev, Pesach, Va’eschanan***

#### **Teshuva, Welcome Home**

"Is there hope for me?" you ask. "What if the vicious waves of *tumah* and *ta'avah* have washed over me again and again, sometimes accidentally yet sometimes less so? What if I myself ignited this firestorm? Oh, how I would love to cleanse myself from all this grime and crime! But gently, because I can't face harsh measures such as pain or fasts."

We cannot let the *yeitzer hora* make us believe we have ruined ourselves beyond repair. Our inner self, our *neshama*, is a shining flame; it cannot ever be soiled in any

way, נשמה שנתת בי טהורה היא – You have given me a pure *neshama*. *Aveiros* only surround it, like blackout curtains hung around a lamp, blocking out its light.

The gates of *teshuva* are always opened. Hashem anxiously anticipates bestowing unbelievable gifts to even the worst sinners. So why do we listen to this deceitful smooth-talker who tries to persuade us to stop in our tracks, even though success is within our reach?

### **Brick by Brick**

"But can't I change overnight?" you might ask. Well, although for some people immediate change is possible, for most of us it is not. We need to take smaller, possibly much smaller, steps towards our goal. Through a series of small changes, we slowly shake ourselves free from the chains of our past and heal the injuries.

Though we hope to improve ourselves forever, it's more effective to set short-term goals. Start with taking on a commitment for a day or two. If no hitches appear on the horizon, perhaps increase the stretch to a week or two. Eventually, set month-long goals but probably not more than that. Start tasting victory, savour the sensation, and *bon appétit!*

These "little" victories are essential – especially in an area which can be addictive. Powerful desires are often hopelessly impervious to reason and common sense. But if we accustom ourselves to overcoming small temptations then, bit-by-bit, these little victories will lead to bigger ones. Habit, rather than logic, will carry the day.

### **Fresh Start**

Is the thing you are trying to run away from perhaps just a little too close to home? You might ask, "How can I unhook myself from something that's long been a part of me?" *Rabbeinu Yonah (Yesod HaTeshuva)* suggests imagining yourself as newborn – with no credits and no debits. Picture a blank piece of crisp, clean paper, or a mystery gift waiting to be unwrapped, or a rose unfurling its velvety petals in the morning dew. You're starting out today as a traveller on a brand new path – without any baggage.

The travel brochure for the destination called *teshuva* tells of how it's a worthwhile trek. It might be a long and arduous journey, but it's a well trodden path that leads us to clean and happy lives. It invites anyone to scrape away the rust of the past and discover anew our true selves.



What about those thoughts which relentlessly reverberate and replay in our minds? Do they indicate an unsuccessful *teshuva*? Definitely not! Such thoughts are the unfortunate after-effects. We are not held responsible for thoughts that flash into our minds; it's when we let them linger that the Torah objects. Likewise, we are not accountable for things we *happen* to see, but rather for taking a second glance. Even if these thoughts persist, with time their strangling clutch will loosen. Furthermore, the more we purify our eyes, the easier it will become to purify our thoughts, and vice versa.

Every drop of *shmiras einayim*, then, is eye therapy – self administered, readily available, and wonderfully restorative. Every time we choose purity over impurity we are thereby rectifying our past.

*Teshuva* should cheer us up. It detaches us from the lethal downward pull of the *Satan*. The word *teshuva*, commonly translated as "repentance," actually means "return" – a return to being close to Hashem. It brings us closer to our Father in Heaven and consequently to happiness.

### **The All-Time Technique**

An all-time, tried and proven method for *teshuva* and successful spiritual growth is *mussar* study. However,

a few words of caution are in order: Are you wondering if you should be firing sharp questions at yourself, with lots of castigating trips down memory lane? Not at all! Assessing where one currently stands in relation to his goal or comparing the present to how he looked a year ago constitutes neither *cheshbon hanefesh* nor a correct way of *mussar* study. In fact, every morning in *Pesukei D'Zimra* we read the *passuk* (*Divrei Hayamim* I 16:27), עון וחרוה במקומו - Might and happiness are in His abode. *Teshuva* should bring about immense satisfaction; if it makes a person sad, it's a sure sign it's not being done correctly.

So then, what questions should I ask myself? Simply this: In my given circumstances, am I doing all I can in striving for purity of eye and mind? If not, then what can I do to change? What caused me to stumble yesterday, and how can I avoid it and improve today?

Ultimately, *mussar* should give us a strong feeling of conviction and of a profound purpose in our lives, a compelling sense of self-worth, and an unwavering intimate relationship with Hashem. If *mussar* causes us to feel down and inclined to quit, we have obviously gone wrong somewhere. 'ישמח לב מבקשיה' – Happy of heart are those who seek Hashem, (*Tehillim* 105:3).

**Week 11 – Mikeitz, Shemini, Eikev****Part 5****Superpowers at War**

World history is replete with instances of smaller battles being lost en route to winning the actual war. Casualties are inevitable, but setbacks don't melt a soldier's steel. He rallies, determined not to forget that, despite the ups and downs, his sworn mission is to be a loyal soldier and give it his all.

When missiles are flying, would the military ever think of stopping in mid-action to mourn fallen comrades? No, boys, we dare not dissolve into weeping now. Spirits up and no drooping chins is the only way we'll win.

Even this war between superpowers is really small-scale in contrast to the real all-out, never-ending marathon battle we wage with our own *yeitzer hora*, notes the *Chovos Halevavos*.

We *Yidden* are permanently stationed on a battlefield. The King of kings wants us to carry on, undaunted. Our high morale is imperative. Confidence in success leads to

success. Inevitably, some points will be lost, but so long as we have not left the battleground, we can still be victorious. Yes, it's a terrible pity that our enemy managed to infiltrate our defense lines. But what folly to allow our losses to make us feel overwhelmed and defeated.

It's just what the Satan is waiting for. The Satan will often accomplish far more when we close shop and give up trying than with the actual sin itself. Sadness over losing a battle makes us flounder, with little enthusiasm left to restart our motor. Therefore, it's far better to keep our morale high, blithely ignoring the echoes of our past mistakes. Furthermore, **a feeling of inner contentment negates any (perceived) need to seek excitement and stimulation in foreign pastures.** If anything dampens our adrenalin, it's the Satan who's playing the tune.

Astronaut trainees find sheer exhilaration in practicing the art of walking and lifting huge objects while in a zone of simulated weightlessness. We, too, need to learn the feeling of spiritual weightlessness, where no baggage of previous wrongdoing will be allowed to weigh us down.

This doesn't mean that Hashem will overlook our sins. There will be justice, but we can't afford to slump

because of it. A positive attitude is the best way forward. Disappointment in ourselves leads us dangerously close to our arch enemy – despair.

So when the Satan tries to persuade us that we've seen so much already a bit more can't make much difference, send him packing, and right away! Instead, we'll lift our chin a notch or two higher, determined for our life to be not a mess but a masterpiece!

### **The Gift of *Nisyonos***

True, we daven every morning not to be tested by temptations but, when they do come our way, let us not underestimate their value.

The *Chovos Halevavos* (*Cheshbon HaNefesh* ch. 3 of *an* 23) writes that the Torah wouldn't celebrate Avraham exercising his freewill to withstand his ten mighty trials if he hadn't accepted them willingly. What we are still singing about is not merely that he scored 10 out of 10, but the flying colours of his joyful acceptance.

The story of the *akeida* – the hardest of all ten trials – tells of the burning love that Avraham had for Hashem, a love that broke all bounds and flew in the face of all reason.

It tells of how Avraham was ready and willing without a moment's wavering to slaughter his precious Yitzchak – and with that, decimating the future nation that would declare Hashem's greatness to the world, until the end of time.

Meanwhile, the Satan, for all his bag of tricks, could conjure up nothing to dampen that fire. And, ever since that day, we keep dipping into the inexhaustible pot of golden *zechuyos* that the *akeida* bequeathed us.

But why is Avraham Avinu praised primarily because of his willing acceptance? That was only an accompaniment to the deed! Were not those tests in themselves a revelation of the most unimaginable, immortal, and unsurpassed greatness of all time?

The answer is that this demonstrated that Avraham Avinu fully understood and appreciated what a wonderful gift the *akeida* afforded. He saw beyond the difficulty of the test to what was really being offered – the most unique opportunity of all time to show that his love for Hashem surpassed everything else. Avraham Avinu, in the most trying of tests, felt only eagerness at the opportunity of serving Hashem.

Although not on his level, we ought to consider and

appreciate the wonderful opportunity that our own *nisyonos* bring. From time to time, it's worth bringing this concept to the forefront of our mind, savouring our good fortune.

**Life's tests are not what we live with, but what we live for.** Man's soul has many levels, layer upon layer. There's nothing quite like a throbbing temptation to bring out the best in him. This helps us dig deep down inside ourselves and activate the many levels of our souls that might otherwise have sat there, undiscovered and untapped. No wonder they say, "Calm seas don't make good sailors."

Come; let us picture a scene unfolding: a threadbare beggar crawls out of his hovel and finds himself standing face to face with the king. His Majesty graciously hands the fellow a million dollars in cash. But, shockingly, no glimmer of thankfulness lights up the haggard face, no words of praise gush from his lips. The ingrate takes the fortune from the monarch's hand without a smile, even begrudging the effort spent carrying it home. "What am I supposed to do with all these mounds of green papers?" he wonders.

Sorry, but do we not recognize ourselves here? Don't we realize that every time we are accosted with impurity, it is actually a golden opportunity for growth? We could be

turning those aching temptations from stumbling blocks into stepping stones. In the Next World, our whole status and reward is dependent on our struggles in This World. *Nisyonos* are a gift and the recipient is none other than ourselves.

The more one incorporates the above thought, the more it helps the harshness fade. Understanding and acceptance of those trying times tremendously lightens the load. These tests are for our ultimate good. If someone were stuck over a difficult piece of *gemara*, he would never in his wildest dreams assume that the *gemara* got it all wrong! Automatically, he attributes the difficulty to his own lack of comprehension.

How much more so, if Hashem leaves us exposed to the horrendous assaults of today's permissive culture, He must have a clear plan and purpose in so doing. When sin beckons, it's actually Hashem calling us to convert our base elements into the purest gold.

Those times when we battle to control a raging *yeitzer hora* are precious moments that we are snatching from the inevitable march of time and transforming them into the most beautiful gifts that life has ever offered us.





**Week 12 - Vayigash, Tazria, Re'eh****CHAPTER 3****PURITY OF THOUGHT****Worlds gained in an instant**

The *Baal Hatanya* is an excellent source on this issue of purity of thought. "It's no disgrace," he writes, "to have such thoughts pushing their way in and trying to steal the limelight. On the contrary, it's an opportunity granted us to firmly eject them, thereby avoiding the Torah prohibition (*Bamidbar* 15:39), "Do not stray after your heart and your eyes."

"Not every *mitzvah* calls for an action. Here is a case of a passive *mitzvah*, and every time we try to switch to a more kosher line of thought it earns us rewards equal to a *mitzvas a'sei*. When we refuse to yield to unwanted images tugging at our mind's eye, we have reason to feel elevated and even joyous, equal to the *simcha shel mitzvah* when performing the *mitzvah* of *succah* and *lulav*. But, you protest, how can I rejoice considering how low I must be if such dishonourable thoughts keep entering my mind?"

Here the *Baal Hatanya* (*Lekutei Amorim* ch. 23 and 28), with one stroke of his masterful pen, swings our mood around one hundred and eighty degrees. He makes us feel not battered but flattered. He tells of how there are two types of *nachas ruach* (delight) before Hashem. The first type is that of the extremely righteous who vanquish the evil elements inside them forever. The second type is the average man who constantly battles against the appealing impurities all around. His task is to keep on shoving away impure thoughts coming from the heart and proceeding towards the mind. This causes tremendous effects in the heavenly realms.

Shall we try to imagine what transpires in *shamayim* when a *Yid* finds unholy thoughts and sensations rising inside him and dutifully quells them at once? The words of the *Zohar* (*Parshas Terumah*) give us a keyhole glimpse which reveals how the *sitra achra* (source of all evil) is firmly settled on his perch like a mighty eagle – a bleak prospect indeed. Who is able to unseat this towering menace?

Suddenly, an act performed on earth is reported: A *malach* announces, "So-and-so has just controlled his thoughts and quietly denied himself a 'minor' indulgence.

In defiance of today's decidedly casual, fun-loving society, he chose to crown Hashem as *Melech* over himself – his body and his soul!"

Immediately, the *sitra achra's* power is weakened, for we have a principle that overcoming our *sitra achra* in This World correspondingly unseats the mighty *sitra achra* in the upper spiritual worlds. He is demoted and a sublime light spreads all across the heavens. The light of this one "small" deed radiates up to the furthestmost celestial spheres.

As for our unsung hero below, *Chazal* (*Yuma* 39a) promised that a person need only sanctify himself a little and *Shamayim* will pour sanctity upon him in abundance.

Some individuals may have a particular immoral fantasy that has been challenging them for years. Again, this is no cause to feel hopeless. This could actually be the purpose of his having being created. It is his personal task that Hashem has entrusted him – to privately keep on championing *kedushas hamachashavah*, and raising its flag ever higher.

The *Baal Hatanya* continues that if the unwanted sight keeps vividly re-appearing and replaying itself in your mind, the way to dismiss those unwanted thoughts is to

completely ignore them and turn your mind to a totally different subject. Strike up a conversation with someone, sing yourself a song, or just distract yourself in some other way. Concentrate on something else completely – anything! That’s far healthier and more practical than trying to push those images out of your mind. If there is a person standing in a cyclist’s path, the cyclist would not confront him with logical arguments. He will but swiftly swerve!

Never try to deal with undesirable thoughts directly. Just as touching mud gets your hands all dirty, so too struggling with evil brings you in close contact with it. Just focus your thoughts on something else. Engross yourself in your chosen topic; with Hashem’s help, you will succeed.

In conclusion, the *Baal Hatanya* sheds light on something that poses a real riddle, an occurrence we meet up with all too often. Why do bothersome thoughts often choose to present themselves right in the middle of our learning or *davening*? What do we really want to do – approach our Creator or, *l’havdil*, follow our base desires? Can we assume that our *avodah* is therefore worthless? Surely, if my *davening* or learning would be of worth, these forbidden thoughts would not be popping up. This phenomenon calls for some clarification.

Two distinct, yet co-existing, forces are at work here. Thoughts of Torah and *yirah* emanate from the Godly soul within us, while desires for materialism have their source in our animalistic *nefesh*. The two opposing forces are permanently engaged in a power struggle, vying for control.

As soon as our Yetzer Tov takes charge, Satan's side feels threatened, and rushes desperately to entrench itself deeper into the mind. This explains those unsolicited, distracting thoughts that arise out of the blue. It doesn't mean something's wrong; it's just the Satan having an allergic reaction to our spiritual sincerity.

The two combatants function simultaneously, yet independently. Hence, despite the *tzad hatumah* reacting so fiercely against one's learning and *davening*, it is a separate entity; one cannot therefore conclude that his service to The King of kings is unworthy. Our *mitzvah*, though under attack, remains of immense value and has in no way gone down the drain.



**Week 13 - Vayechi, Metzora, Shoftim****CHAPTER 4****RECTIFYING DAMAGED EYES****Part 1****The Sin of "Just Looking"**

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuva* 4:4) says that feasting one's eyes on *arayos* could block the road to doing *teshuva*. The person may be comfortably telling himself: "I've never really done anything wrong. I never approached that woman. "But how faulty his reasoning, and oh how willingly is he being led to disaster. Besides for the fact that one thing leads to another, the words ואחרֵי עֵינַיִם – after your eyes (*Bamidbar* 15:39), mean that even just looking is forbidden.

*Arayos* is a broad term. Anything connected with or leading to *arayos*, including *histaklus*, falls under the category of *abizrayhu de'arayos* (an accessory to the transgression) and becomes one of the three prohibitions for which we must be prepared to surrender our lives. And so,

the cunning Satan isn't only out to seduce one to commit a forbidden *action*. To acquire a bulging bag of loot, he only needs our eyes. With plenty of *histaklus* material always available, he could have his victim slapping onto himself an adhesive label, inscribed in indelible ink, with one word – *rasha*. A thorough *teshuva*, though, will immediately rip that ugly label to shreds.

### **Windows of the Soul**

Feasting the eyes on forbidden sights can sometimes be as destructive as committing actual adultery. The *Midrash* (*Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 23:12*) quotes the *passuk* עין נואף – an adulterous eye. *Chazal* say (*Brachos 12b*) אחרי עיניכם - זו זנות - that merely following one's eyes can be considered an act of adultery. Why is this so?

The answer is that the eyes are windows through which the soul absorbs images and scenes from the outside world which then become part of our personality and the building blocks of our imagination. Gazing at something weaves threads which connect the viewer to the viewed and binds them together. Once we have seen something, we are never quite the same again. An indelible imprint remains inside us forever.

Sponge-like, our soul imbibes whatever diet our eyes feed it. Will it be clean, kosher nourishment or will it be unrefined injurious substances? If what our eyes soak up is toxic, then that's the kind of fare our precious *neshama* will ingest. Thus *Chazal* (*Megillah* 28a) warned against looking into the face of a *rasha* because of its impact on our soul.

Unlike our other limbs which perform a given task after which it's over and done, the eyes work like a conveyor belt that keeps on delivering from without to within.

Incidentally, eyes can function in the opposite direction, too, exuding from within to without. When Moshe Rabbeinu climbed up Har Nevo and looked down longingly at Eretz Yisrael, his eyes gazed at it with such heartfelt goodwill that they dispensed a unique quality of wisdom still potent today.

Bilaam, on the other hand, tried to use this power for evil. His intention was to spit forth a stream of venomous curses, but he knew that in order to activate the evil, he would have to gaze upon his victims. So he, too, climbed up a mountain to look down. Such is the power of looking, be it for better or for worse.



When Yosef was finally reunited with Yaakov, he fell on his father's neck amidst tears of long pent-up feelings. At this emotionally charged reunion, an unspoken question from Yaakov Avinu found a wordless response in Yosef Hatzaddik. About what?

Yaakov had obviously deduced that Yosef's appointment, nine years earlier, must have occasioned a grandiose parade through the streets of the capital. The Egyptian women must have been extremely eager to catch a glimpse of Yosef's beauty, as *Chazal* tell us. Doubtless, too, the womenfolk would have been trying desperately to be noticed. Was it possible, Heaven forbid, that in his hour of fame and acclaim, Yosef had forgotten, even for just an instant, his obligations to Hashem?

To find the answer, Yaakov needed merely search in Yosef's eyes; he would have instantly detected the smallest blot even from a decade ago or longer. Spiritual blemishes don't conveniently fade away. And those eyes were as clear as diamonds.

Yosef's holy eyes themselves told it all – 100% innocence, pristine perfection like the clearest, most sparkling diamonds. *Chazal* tell us Yaakov's unstinting

praise: "My son," he said proudly, "you did not glance at a single one of those women."

Spiritual abuse of the eyes can reduce their physical abilities too, often noticeable when reaching middle age. However, one who protects his eyes from forbidden sights, writes Rav Chaim Palagi, *ztz"l*, might be *zocheh* to eyesight that will not dim as the years go on.

### **Blinded by Our Eyes**

Did you know that we have spiritual eyes as well as physical eyes, with the latter mirroring and affecting the former? Whenever a person's eyes of flesh are busy looking at what they shouldn't, the eyes of his soul are becoming clouded over and successively darkened and blurred.

True, right now we might not feel how those sticky layers of spiritual dirt cling to and cover our spiritual eyes. But when *Mashiach* comes and we are all transported at last to where we so longed to be, back to Yerushalayim, to our holy, glowing *Beis HaMikdash*, we will be in need of unblemished eyes – eyes that were conscientiously guarded against defilement – to receive those dazzling rays of supernal light. All that radiance and magnificence will be too powerful for unfit eyes.

After groping in inky blackness, one tightly shuts his eyes against the blinding light of the midday sun.

Perhaps it wasn't such fun after all to have let our eyes run *hefker*. No wonder we *daven* three times a day ותחינה עינינו..., not just for Hashem's return to Tzion but so that our eyes will be able to actually witness it. Eyes sheltered from defilement will one day be welcomed into the shelter of His Holy House.

The *Ben Ish Chai* writes (*Od Yosef Chai, Va'eschanan, shana 1*) that a major source of pleasure in This World is eating and drinking. In the Next World, we first enter the lower Gan Eden where our souls enjoy delightful fragrances, after which we ascend to the higher Gan Eden to partake of the marvels of seeing the Divine Glory. This progression is demonstrated by the structure of the face. Lowest is the mouth, above that the nose, and topmost are the eyes; therein lies a message. At all costs preserve your spiritual eyesight. It's every *Yid's* fondest and deepest hope to one day bask in the ecstasy of the profound luminescence of the *Shechina* 'ה לחזות בנועם (*Tehillim 27:4*). It is a higher dimension of experience.

Though the light of the *Shechina* is infinitely more powerful than any blazing midday sun, this will pose no

problem for eyes that are spiritually healthy and clean. For all eternity, their owner will delight in the wonder of gazing at the phenomenal luminescence of Hashem's Presence.

### **Play Now, Pay Later**

The morbid details of the harm we do ourselves and the punishment awaiting us for sinning with our eyes may be useful to recall when quelling rising passions. Generally however, this kind of reflecting could prove too disheartening.

The Angel of Death has been described as a terrifying apparition with eyes all over, whose appearance delivers such a shock that the person's soul departs (*Avoda Zara* 20b). What are those eyes, eyes and more eyes that affright the wretched victim so? Each one of them corresponds to a different forbidden sight that he allowed himself to view during his life, and it is the realization that he himself is the cause of all those eyes that shocks him to death.

But ill-gotten pleasures eventually have to be paid for. If only he stayed clear of such shameful viewing, the Angel of Death would not now be plastered with all those gruesome eyes to haunt his final moments, and his departure from This World would have been more peaceful.

Our sages call the *yeitzer hora* a first-class con-man. Artfully, he plies his trade around our eyes but woe to us if we buy his wares. When our time on earth is up and we lie helpless, he arrives in his true form, along with his cohorts, claiming the right to exact full punishment from the eyes that were so carelessly sold away into his hands.

Sometimes, those who sinned with their eyes are punished by the painful process of having their soul reincarnated. The *Arizal* says that when the soul of a sinner is reincarnated as a person, it is oblivious to any former existence. However, when it is sentenced to a term inside some member of the animal kingdom, it well remembers its former stature as a human being, the dignity and the pleasure it enjoyed, and its exalted Source – Oh, the agony of this tremendous comedown! (*Sefer Chareidim*, ch. 33).

Let us remember that one who transgresses the prohibition of gazing at what he shouldn't will not be spared from punishment in *gehenom* – no matter how much Torah and good deeds he has to his credit.

The Steipler, *ztz"l*, however, points out the positive aspect of the above warnings. If there is heart-breaking

punishment for our lack of discipline, then how fantastic must be the payoff every single time we exert ourselves to discipline our eyes and mind!

***Week 14 – Shemos, Acharei-Kedoshim, Ki Seitzei***

**No One's Name or Fame Grants Him Immunity**

The Satan once appeared in the form of an exceptionally beautiful woman to seduce the incorruptible *tzaddik* Rav Masya ben Charash, by persistently trying to catch his attention. Sitting there learning, head down, Rav Masya's face was shining like a *malach*. Though he turned his face this way and that, he could not shrug off the unwanted presence.

He was so afraid of the slightest possibility of any blemish to his *neshama* that he requested for two nails to be heated in fire and he blinded himself with them. The *malach* Refael came to him to restore his sight but he refused the offer. Finally, Hashem guaranteed to safeguard him against the Satan, and only then did he agree to be healed, (*Yalkut Shimoni, Vayechi* 161).

Rav Don Segal observes how, between the lines in this story, we pick up the message that absolutely no one's

name or fame grants him immunity from the Satan. Even this flawless *tzaddik* was tested.

Rav Masya, for his part, had done absolutely nothing to spark off this visit from the Satan. Looking deeper into the story behind this unprovoked persecution, we must travel back another one thousand years and meet a towering *kadosh v'tahor* – the legendary Palti ben Layish. Palti became the man whose *kedusha Chazal* would compare to that of Yosef Hatzaddik.

### **Night after Night**

The *passuk* tells us that Shaul Hamelech gave his daughter Michal to Palti in marriage. *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 19b) say that Michal had earlier been pledged to Dovid ben Yishai but, owing to the particular circumstances, Shaul maintained that their betrothal was halachically invalid and that the way was clear for Palti to marry Michal.

Palti, however, held otherwise. He gave recognition to that betrothal and, therefore, he held that she was ineligible to be his bride. But what could he do about it? There was no way that Palti could possibly contradict his king. Royal protocol obliged him, therefore, to play along and go through all the motions of getting married.

When in public, he maintained the full appearance of being the king's privileged son-in-law. But in private, in their own living quarters, the prince and princess were total strangers. As a stark deterrent against sin, Palti kept an unsheathed sword between them.

In the stillness and the dark, night after night, Palti resolutely triumphed over his secret *nisayon*. His heart was aflame with such a passionate love for Hashem and such an unswerving fear of sin, that it fuelled his resistance and his resilience to the very end. His *psak* that Michal was already betrothed was finally vindicated, and the untouched Michal became the wife of Dovid Hamelech.

In one respect, however, Palti's record fell just short of perfection. In the area of *shmiras einayim*, he did not attain total perfection, in relation to his potential. In order to enjoy the full measure of his monumental eternal reward, his soul would need to be born again. Then his eyes could acquire their *tikkun*. This was, in fact, achieved when Rav Masya ben Charash, as mentioned above, unhesitatingly sacrificed his eyesight upon perceiving a possible threat to the spiritual purity of his eyes.



### What About Imagining?

*Chazal* (*Yuma* 29a) say that fantasizing about immoral pleasures is, in some ways, worse than the immoral acts themselves. The body of a *Yid* is like a *Beis HaMikdash*, and his heart (i.e. mind) corresponds to the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*. Dare he defile it by playing around with impure thoughts and sensations? Titus *harasha* demolished the Temple that stood on earth. But forbidden thoughts in a *Yid* do far more harm. They profane the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* of the *Beis HaMikdash* that stands on High (see *Nefesh HaChaim*, part 1 ch. 4).

On a positive note. One who in his lifetime wholeheartedly trusted in Hashem will be able to likewise place his trust in Hashem after he dies. That trust has the power to break through and reach all the way up to the *Kisei Hakavod*. His abiding unshakeable trust in Hashem won't fail him, even in the depths of *gehinnom*. The trust that he held fast to acted to purify his soul. And in his judgement it will come to his defence. This is alluded to in the *passuk* (*Tehillim* 130:7) 'יחל ישראל אל ה' וגו' – *Yidden!* Put your trust in Hashem, for with Hashem is kindness. The more we bind ourselves to Hashem the more kindness is revealed, even where the recipient is unworthy. (*Otzros Ramchal* vol. 4, pg. 246)

## Part 2

### Repairing the Damage

Here are some ideas on how to repair damage done to the eyes, to be used in conjunction with sincere *teshuva*.

Simple eye contact transfers levels of *kedusha* and helps to wipe the old blots off one's slate. Our holy sages come forward with some user-friendly suggestions of ways to tap into spiritual powers via our vision. For starters, when you are given an *aliyah* in shul, says the *Reishis Chochma* (*Sha'ar HaKedusha* ch. 8), be sure to follow along in the Sefer Torah. The *Magen Avraham* (*siman* 114) quotes the *Arizal*, that a great spiritual light comes upon you by simply peering up at the parchment during *hagbah* until you recognize the letters. They exude a powerful radiance which will also help to erase old spiritual scars.

Gaze intently at the face of a *tzaddik*. Then your soul will make contact with the light that is burning in his soul. This suggestion is especially effective on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

When you go to shul, you are bringing your eyes to a *kedusha* power station! By looking at a shul or a *Beis HaMidrash* – even from the outside, your soul is elevated. Once you step inside, the effect is heightened, and even

more so upon approaching the *Aron HaKodesh*. Looking at the name of Hashem spelled *yud-kay-vav-kay* connects your eyes with piercing, penetrating rays of *kedusha*.

The *Ben Yehoyada* (*Shabbos* 118) proposes looking carefully at the two letter *shins* on the tefillin *shel rosh* before donning it. You will thereby draw out and imbibe a special light from within them. This will also help you not to be *mesiach daas* whilst wearing them. You could gaze at your *tzitzis*, says the *Peleh Yo'etz (Ri'ah)*, and keep looking in the *sefer* when you learn and in the *siddur* as you *daven*.

Rabbeinu Yonah writes in *Shaarei Teshuva* that shedding tears of remorse over our *aveiros* is a *tikkun* for sins committed by the eyes. The *Orchos Tzaddikim (shaar teshuva)* adds that when a person cries over his *aveiros*, he should say: "May my tears extinguish Your anger, and may my improved behavior turn Your wrath away from me." Likewise, says the *Peleh Yo'etz*, crying upon hearing of the death of a *tzaddik*, or from longing for *Mashiach*, washes our eyes out wonderfully. (See the *sefer Kedushas Hachaim* for further ideas).



**Week 15 - Va'eira, Emor, Ki Savo**

## CHAPTER 5

### PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

#### Part 1

This chapter was written primarily, but not exclusively, for those who find that they are particularly challenged.

Some people, especially youngsters, may feel that something is wrong with them when they have to struggle so much. Starting out in life, the post-*bar mitzvah bochur* on his launch-pad, fresh, raring and ready to go, wonders and sometimes even agonizes over why this delicate issue proves to be such a toughie when, in reality, it's the natural desire of any healthy man.

If you feel challenged by *nisyonos* in the area of *kedusha*, you are actually in good company. *Chazal* describe the temptation, מתאווה להם ומחמדתן – man desires and craves these things. (מכות פרק ג' משנה ט"ז) There is a natural craving for immortality implanted in all of us.

Are you nevertheless convinced that you happen to have an extra-hot temperament? Well, scores of our best and finest frontline warriors find themselves pitted against those same odds. Rav Yisrael E. Weintraub, *ztz"l*, told someone who felt overwhelmed by his challenges in the area of *kedusha*, "You have no idea how many of your peers feel the same as you!?"

Though it could be true that you possess stronger than average base desires, still, you aren't alone. You'd be surprised at how many out there share your struggle and whose lot it is to be buffeted by many a gale-force wind. Even great people can never really feel safe – a full-blast *nisayon* is notoriously likely to put to flight all *yiras shamayim* and lofty principles.

It's really no simple matter these days for one's eyes to avoid encountering the inappropriate. So how does one cope when he needs his eyes to survey and scout and he can't realistically walk blindfolded in the street? How can we be the undisputed master over what we expose our precious eyes to?

Maybe you feel that you could not be trying any harder to get a handle on yourself and yet mighty winds

keep spinning you out of control; you could well be right. The answer to your predicament, though, is most likely a different, fresh approach.

Along the quiet lane which each person travels alone in his quest for purity of soul, the following three-point plan provides practical guidance to really make it happen.

## **The Three Points**

### **Point 1: Minimize the *Nisayon***

Each person must determine which areas in his life are his accident-prone zones. A calm frame of mind and being far away from places of temptation, provide a relaxed setting that is ideal for laying careful plans on how to disengage from probable pitfalls. This will initiate a breakthrough in cutting his opponent down to size and forestalling snags.

Let him recall the magnificent garden of beautifully fragrant roses that he has so longed to cultivate inside his *neshama* – all those masses of velvety petals in every vibrant hue. Then let him review what he'll need to do to restore that lovely garden; not just to sweep the paths, but to prune all unnecessary foliage and then to tackle the weeds, one by one. They have quickly grown tall and overarching,

blocking out the sunlight from reaching the precious soil. It will require a strong hand to uproot them all and toss them into the waste heap, ready for the bonfire.

Please appreciate that there is a cost to *shmiras einayim*. It reduces one's choice of entertainment, modifies one's social calendar, and may even mean passing up an opportunity for financial advancement. *Shmiras einayim* is a task that necessitates earnest application and a certain amount of sacrifice, but so is anything else in This World that's really worthwhile.

Here are a few examples of effortlessly availing ourselves of the ever-present opportunities to earn *Olam Haba* by pre-empting trouble:

If a friend stops to speak to you on the street, you may feel it wisest to courteously curtail the conversation, but meanwhile why not maneuver yourself so as not to be facing the pedestrians? And if there is a vacant corner seat at the waiting room, it's there waiting for you.

The trick is to keep far away from nasty potholes; slip-ups are greatly reduced when we avoid engaging in anything that could bring on impure thoughts. It all contributes to a successful *shmiras einayim*!

**Point 2: Be Armed Before You Set Off**

Inside us exists the wise mind that understands all about long-term goals and investments. Together with it resides the bodily instincts that are drawn to instant pleasure, with little vision of the future. The physical instincts, however, can be spoken to as one would explain something to a child. Children have limited grasp of the future, but if we speak to them on their level, they can follow the reasoning and choose to do what's right. Using simple language one can similarly bring base urges to understand enough to be coaxed into conforming. Start off on the right foot by pausing for a moment to get your act together *before* stepping outdoors. This works like magic.

One may tell oneself: "What's in it for me? Nothing. I've unfortunately seen those things enough times before. It catches, confuses, and upsets me, and I walk away empty. I'd feel much better without it and just a couple of moments averting my gaze can help me retain my peace of mind. I'm not here for silly nonsense. Those candyfloss enticements that fool me over and over, overheat my lowly desires whilst simultaneously cooling off my *Yiddishkeit*. I've plenty else to get on with today. I don't need it and don't want it."



Articulation makes an idea real. It enables one to focus on the words and achieve an inner resonance with the concept. For an even more tangible weapon, you could write a little note on an index card and keep it in your pocket. Then, when something really tempting threatens to overpower your better judgement and you're in desperate need for a boost, it'll be ready to come out and buoy you up to safety.

Don't worry; you won't have to do these things forever. It's a short-term venture. Beginnings are never easy. Give it just a few weeks of real determination and the grip of the old cravings usually subside. The difficulties should start to melt away as the new order becomes more automatic. You'll no longer need to keep briefing yourself over and over; all you'll need is secondary but continuous input to keep you in the driver's seat.

### **Point 3: Watch Your Step**

The Rambam says that one's manner of walking distinguishes the wise person from the fool. Sauntering around like a tourist, drinking in the general atmosphere will invite problems; such problems, however, won't arise when portraying a more business-like air and walking briskly as though someone awaits your arrival.

**Week 16 – Bo, Behar-Bechukosai, Nitzavim**

## **Part 2**

### **The Three Ideas**

#### **The ABC's of Getting Back on Track**

This section, though applicable to all, has some especially comforting words to guide the individual who feels stuck in a rut. The dizzying monstrosities of Western society may have brought him to succumb at times to screaming temptation, and this will have left him battered and bruised.

The following three ideas will help put the reins firmly back in his hands and help salvage his self-respect.

#### **Idea A: After a Fiasco**

What do I do after a fiasco, after I've seen something I shouldn't have? Shall I mourn? Shall I groan? No! Ignore it. Even in a case of deliberate *histaklus*, the rule is: don't let the regretting and grieving set in. "*Ignorance* is the best medication." Never fight a sighting. Pay no attention to what you saw, inadvertently or otherwise, and you'll quickly bounce back into shape.

It's only natural for the forbidden to attract a person on first sight. What Hashem asks is to immediately slam the brakes and **right now** resist taking even another half a look or giving it a moment's further thought. Just keep on as if nothing happened and you'll be deserving of seeing the *P'nei HaShechina*. What? Can that be? Yes! This is granted to you because you did not allow yourself to be dragged down by dwelling on what you have seen. *Chazal (Derech Eretz ch. 1)* say, "Anyone who sees something [unworthy] and does not feast his eyes on it will merit seeing the *P'nei HaShechina*." Note that they talk of someone who saw something sinful, yet still, he is promised this reward.

The golden rule is that any harsh, self-berating thoughts that leave us deflated instead of strengthened definitely come from the *yeitzer hora*'s poisonous brews. A few hardy individuals may actually find it serves their purpose, but for many of us it would be a soul-destructive exercise even though it might seem the "*frummet*" thing to do.

While ignoring past mistakes and simply continuing forward, where does remorse and rectification find its place?

An *aveira* distances us away from Hashem, whilst also leading us over to the "Other Side". Once the boundary into this domain has been crossed, we're in the *yeitzer hora's* sphere of influence allowing him a hold on us. Fantastic opportunist that he is, he immediately tries to change his hold into a grip, a clutch, and eventually a strangle, *chas v'shalom*. Therefore, immediately after any misstep, ignore what has just happened. Escape before things become more serious.

Picture the sad scenario of a fine youngster who had a good up-bringing, but has fallen into the wrong company and adopted their bad ways even to the point of stealing. How would we come to his rescue? Prod him to return the dishonest money? Not yet, he's not ready for that. First we must get him to stop meeting up with those unsavoury friends. Only then can we start to help him repair the past damage. The Jewish year is a model for this – we have to experience the inspiration of *Rosh Hashanah* before we can face the day of rectification for our misdeeds – *Yom Kippur*.

Being that *shmiras einayim* is such a delicate subject, before dealing with past sins we need to be at a safe distance. For now, award no space in your mind for any

disappointments in yourself, and certainly never wallow in thoughts that might lower your self-esteem.

### **Idea B: No Success Too Small**

Don't let anyone tell you that your successes, however few and far between, have been buried under an avalanche of your seemingly inexcusable setbacks. This is absolutely not true! Your defending angel goes searching and if he finds the merest trace of *kedusha*, he will caress it, dress it in gorgeous robes, and present it before the One Who is the Source of all holiness.

In the Heavenly accounting, there is no ledger that sets out on the one side a column of all our *mitzvos* and on the other side our *aveiros*, with the latter neatly cancelling out the former as would a calculator.

*Mitzvos* and *aveiros* don't stand on an equal footing at all. A *mitzvah*'s reward is eternal while the punishment process for *aveiros* is for a limited time only. Hashem will never deduct a *mitzvah* from our account to balance out an *aveira*. Though we may stumble, no vengeful red pen draws a cruel line through our beloved, beautiful *mitzvos*. They stand at our right hand and escort us for all eternity.

Even when the likelihood of success seems one in a thousand, it would be absurd to slacken off. From *Shamayim* we keep getting rewarded for resistance and resilience. We are assured that a single instance of standing unbowed in the face of fiery passion will cause a tremendous stir in the Upper Worlds. The forces of evil are dismissed while the forces of purity are upraised, and there is great *nachas ruach* before Hashem.

Even if one maintains that his most wrenching efforts will only slightly dent his lustful ways, no detail is too insignificant for Hashem to notice, and every effort will be unendingly rewarded.

To use an allegory from the world of commerce: After a business trip abroad with the potential for fabulous profits, the weary traveller arrived home beaming. He was away from home for several months and made his fortune. Ironically, a peek at his records revealed that his newfound wealth was, in fact, the result of just one quick transaction. His other dealings were actually costly mistakes. Yes, he could perhaps have made a far greater fortune, but at least he knew he came home a millionaire. Looking back, he definitely pulled off a highly successful venture overall.

How dear it is to Hashem when we conquer our evil inclination. Be it just one instant in a whole day when we slammed down the lid on all the glitter, it is in no way overshadowed by any of our previous blunders.

***Week 17 - Beshalach, Bamidbar, Vayeilech***

**Idea C: Boosting**

In general, *avodas Hashem* requires us to realize our shortcomings and make demands on ourselves in order to improve. However, if we frequently fail in a particular area, the *yeitzer hora* tries to convince us to lose all hope for success and give up the fight.

So what should we do if we are assailed by thoughts of despair? Rather than rush to demand less of ourselves, let's **maintain** and **boost** the feel-good factor; a hurt self-image is just too damaging.

Let us turn up the volume of the applauding and cheering at the smallest effort that we make to magnify *kevod Shamayim*. The successes, however rare, should prompt plenty of self-praise. We earn recognition even when a sharp, "Hold it there!" served only as a slight delay before giving in. Though the slimy Satan may have

commandeered the situation in the end, nevertheless, Hashem still treasures every tiny bit of our efforts.

It isn't only black or white. When one despairing young man confided in Rav Yisrael E. Weintraub, *ztz"l*, about all his *shmiras einayim* failures, the sage would have none of it. "You cannot imagine how fabulous the reward is for every second one **battles** with his *yeitzer hora*, even if he emerges as loser," he replied.

The *Chafetz Chaim* would comment on the familiar phrase: "We toil and they (the nations of the world) toil." When they toil, it's the results – not the sweat – that counts. But when we toil, congratulations! The toil itself is success.

### **The Power of Yearning**

This idea can be carried a step further. An individual who was despairing over his myriad *nisyonos* was told by an *adam gadol*: "Even if you never seem to win and it's all failure after abysmal failure, the very fact that you so desperately wish to be pure should be whispering in your ear, 'Rejoice! Rejoice over your spiritually attuned and refined *ratzon*! It's showing itself in your abhorrence of the ugly and in your yearning to gravitate towards a life of purity.'"



"Upstairs" they clearly heard your unspoken expressions of disgust as your insides were jarred by an immodest sighting. They timed and measured to a fraction of a second how you turned your face away in disdain. They perceived how your heart and soul were yearning to become a more elevated person. And they lovingly considered how you had hoped and strived to bring in today's *shmiras einayim* score at something more respectable.

Intensifying those passionate cravings – over and over again – for wholesome, clean living is, in itself, an achievement. No audible round of applause is heard while we keep struggling, but Hashem hears the yearnings in our soul as the sweetest symphony.

Our comfort lies in the knowledge that if a person is **single-mindedly** focused on being pure, he is certain to succeed. If we really hope for Hashem to save us from what seems to be engulfing us, then that hope alone is enough to bring *malachim* to our rescue. The *gemara* in *Makkos* (10b) makes it clear: "In the way one wishes to go, so is he led." The *Maharsha* informs us that it is *malachim*, no less, that lead a person in the direction of his own leanings.

The *Chafetz Chaim*, *ztz"l*, writes that longing to become the *mechutan* of a millionaire will not get you very far. But if your soul pines to be connected to Hashem, then *Mazal Tov!* He immediately accepts you. The *passuk* (*Tehillim* 105:3) promises 'ישמח לב מבקשי ה' – Those who seek Hashem will be happy of heart; if there is a genuine longing, then some day it must bear fruit.

The Vilna Gaon, *ztz"l*, in his commentary on *Shir HaShirim* (6:12) explains the *passuk* in *Hallel* (*Tehillim* 113:7), מאשפות ירים אביון – this is the person who, stained by filth, longs to get up and run away from it all. He will be upraised from the scrap heap. להושיבי עם נדיבים – he will be seated among the *Avos*. עם נדיבי עמו – he will sit among the prophets. When we ache to rise up and discard our slimy old rags, the impossible begins to happen.

We ascend into another league when we begin to feel in our bones that Hashem really appreciates every time we rule over our eyes, and when we comprehend the value and power of even yearning for purity.

Here is another simple, proven technique to up our motivation all along the route: We could do something concrete to reward and reinforce our achievements. An

action always leaves a powerful impression on its doer, so why not introduce a system of small but meaningful rewards to encourage and to mark our progress? It makes the whole happening become more real.

It may seem, at first, that we're playing a strange little game but, after doing it a few times, we will find that these rewards do, in fact, help us to achieve our goal.

*Nothing of a spiritual nature can ever be a non-event!*

To summarize the points and ideas discussed:

**Points:**

1. Minimizing the *nisayon* by staying clear of accident-prone zones
2. Making a firm resolution *before* stepping outdoors.
3. Maintaining a business-like manner (*casual* = *casualty*).

**Ideas:**

- A. *Ignorance* is the best medication.
- B. *Every* success is tremendous.
- C. Keeping one's spirits high. Simply yearning for purity is effective.

## Part 3

### Fighting Despair

Oversights, mishaps, and the occasional fall are an inevitable fact of life; we learn to take the tumbles without growing disheartened. Make room instead for maximum positivity.

Sometimes a person can succeed in *kedusha* matters for an extended period. Happily he thanks Hashem for his having attained a respectable level. But then one day – oops! A slip-up.

Let him not think for even a moment that all his hard work has gone down the drain, unable to help him in the future. Perhaps the particular time, place, or circumstance of his situation made it extra heavy going. Not every round is going to be as tough as this. So just stay right there on your warpath, don't give up the fight, and your past successes will trail plenty of future successes.

The above holds true even in a case where he knowingly compromised on principles. Perhaps he had hit a low, and on this occasion things were loaded against him. Finding himself assailed by an almost irresistible urge, he felt he couldn't muster the energy to stand

firm. Though the mitigating conditions do not exempt him from the Torah's demands, nor do they exonerate him entirely, nevertheless, there is an element of *oneis* (beyond one's control), and Heaven will reckon it less severely. Certainly a single unhappy outcome can not infer a no-progress report.

Another point to bear in mind is that even where a person may have slacked off to a certain degree, it in no way renders the earlier good work insincere or hypocritical. When things are really not going too well, we need to dig up some consolation from knowing that, even after some wrong turns, we are still persistently heading in the right direction. At times that's the most important task.

Self-blame and a resulting negative self-image can cause us to feel that we can't succeed, but in truth, falls and tumbles are part of the upward climb. Acceptance of ourselves and just being happy for who we are, is a valuable pick-me-up.

Slowly but surely is the way to win the race. Soon after the *Chazon Ish, ztz"l*, had suffered a heart attack, he felt he was ready to venture out on a short walk. Holding Reb Nissim Karelitz, shlita, by the arm, they advanced very

slowly. Upon arrival at his destination he said cheerfully, "I took small steps but kept on going, and as you see I made it!"

## Part 4

### Where to Place our Heavy Artillery

Where is it most strategic spot to array our heavy artillery? When we have made a new start and feel we have gained some ground, right away in the flush of a fresh beginning is the time to invest all our energy in maintaining our gains.

For it is then that the *yeitzer hora* will try to make his entry. But if we can stay strong just a bit longer, the *yeitzer hora* will stay small.

The *gemara* (*Sukkah* 52) describes how when *Moshiach* will come, Hashem will slaughter the *yeitzer hora*, in front of the *tzaddikim* and the *rashaim*. Both will start crying. To the *tzaddikim*, the *yeitzer hora* appears like a huge mountain, while the *rashaim* see only a thin hair. Overcome with emotion, the *tzaddikim* will cry, "How were we able to overcome this huge mountain?" The *rashaim* will tearfully ask, "How come we were duped by this small hair?" The

*yeitzer hora* is only the width of a single hair. But once we force open the door by a tiny crack, he wedges his way in. He then grows and expands until he is the size of a mountain.

As the *Chinuch* writes: היצר בתחילה חלש מאד והולך ומתחזק על האדם הרבה – the *yeitzer hora* is almost powerless at first but becomes increasingly stronger (*Mitzvah* 188).

The secret of the success of the *tzaddikim* is the fact that they stood firm and unwavering right at the beginning, and didn't give the *yeitzer hora* a chance to take root and grow. That's how they emerged triumphant.

**Rav Yisroel Elya Weintraub, ztz"l, wrote the following addition as a conclusion to complete this chapter:**

When going to war, it is important to know how to battle and not be beaten by the enemy. Then comes the second stage – knowing how to win and truly oust the enemy.

This chapter has dealt primarily with the first stage of the war. How we can stay strong and not be beaten. It is followed by the second stage: when we don't have to fight constantly with the *yeitzer hora*, we're somewhat detached from this enemy. Now is the time to remind ourselves how

to really win. Hashem tells us that there is only one potent medicine: בראתי יצר הרע בראתי לו תורה תבלין – I created the *yeitzer hora*; I created Torah as its antidote.

The tremendous power of learning תורה לשמה, even if only a little, has been designed to help each and every individual on his personal level and in his own specific struggles with his particular makeup. With this weapon we can vanquish the *yeitzer hora*, the bitterest enemy of every one of us. The *yeitzer hora* has little power over someone who is attached to Torah. There are no words to describe the greatness of this success. By strengthening our commitment, attachment, love and delight in Torah, even to a small extent, we switch on a light. A little ray of the light of *kedusha* dispels lots of darkness.





## EPILOGUE

History is repeating itself as the Satan, in the last days before *Mashiach*, is given extra powers to bombard us. This time he has all the latest technology at his disposal. We are the victims of an unscrupulous assailant with awesome powers. What makes us assume that in Heaven they're belittling our performance? On the contrary, they view the whole picture and are vastly proud of the indestructible purity, the unchanged priorities and the undimmed love of a nation fighting the impossible.

The Jewish People's march through history is the story of the Nation that dwells apart. Turning to the final page, we find ourselves forming the cast of actors. Thrust as we are into the gathering darkness of today's corrupt society, it will be the glorious light of the purity of our eyes that pierces the ominous black cloud to illuminate the golden ink of the book's closing lines. It's the book that started at Creation – The Book of the Generations of Man.





## A Letter from the *Mashgiach*

### Rav Yehuda Leib Wittler

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Rav Yehuda Leib Wittler, a prominent *Mashgiach* in Gateshead, wrote the following letter to a *bochur* who had become secretly caught up in the internet. The *bochur* had anonymously contacted an outreach organization, which advised him to seek professional guidance. That was also the catalyst for the *Mashgiach* to pen him a letter.

The *bochur* wrote a letter about how he was overwhelmed by this new *yeitzer hora* and how he believed that he was now living a lie. He felt that he was lacking the necessary weapons with which to wage his battle, and he wanted to strengthen warm feelings for *mitzvos*. Demoralizing feelings of loneliness and rejection were his constant companions.

The *Mashgiach* addresses each of his concerns and sets out a range of refreshingly practical strategies to help him deal with the various negative assumptions he had made. Certainly an underlying theme in this masterful letter is that aspiring and climbing towards spiritual heights will – at the very least – lift one well clear of the mud.

Dear Friend,

Having carefully read your letter, I felt compelled to write you a couple of points.

**Honesty:** A person going through a rough time, whilst still putting on a cheery face in public, is not living a lie, if at the same time he's making an effort to rise above his challenges. Then on the contrary, this is much to be commended, for it affords him the "space" to sort out his private difficulties, thereby returning to his cheery self.

**Shame (בושה):** Rabbi Miller *zt"l* (Gateshead) would explain that feelings of contradiction stem from the *Yiddishe* virtue of shame and are necessary at times. These nagging feelings **can and should** be a motivation for change and not for disheartenment.

Incidentally, it was apparent from your letter that you are a very sensitive person, a gift you were given alongside some difficult challenges.

**You are normal:** Reb Elya Lopian *zt"l* was once trying to persuade a *talmid* to make a detour to avoid an area notoriously lacking in modesty. The confident *talmid* then proceeded to make it clear that he wasn't affected by such issues. Reb Elya's response was to ask

him for his mother's name, saying that he would daven for him as he would for a sick person.

This *yeitzer hora* was created for a purpose and is present in every healthy person. You are no exception.

**It's not something new:** Your struggles are, in essence, nothing but the age-old challenges in a new outward form. It's the very same *yeitzer hora* that the *Bnei Yisroel* encountered in *Arvos Moav*. Today, like then, most triumphed, and it was only a minority that failed.

**Be strong:** Don't let the *yeitzer hora* succeed, and "don't give up giving up." Even if you have lost many battles, you will win the war. The *Siyata Dishmaya* you were witness to in the time that you did manage to stay strong assures you that you can and *will* succeed (אגרת קהילות יעקב).

Every *neshoma* will eventually have to have its *tikun*. Yet it is up to us to take the "easier route" whilst we still can. כל זמן שהנר דולק אפשר עוד לתקן, *As long as the light burns, there is still time to correct.*

Fighting the present ugly *yeitzer hora* is our chance to show beloved devotion to Hashem. When *Moshiach* comes, there will be plenty of *avodah* for us to do. Nevertheless, this glorious opportunity which is being offered to us now,

will be over (מהר"ל נצח ישראל פרק מ"ו).

**It's everyone's Torah:** Rabbi Chaim Volozhin *zt"l* would wholeheartedly dismiss people's concerns of feeling unworthy to learning Hashem's Torah. On the contrary, Torah benefits everyone tremendously. It can be learnt by every Yid – whatever his level (נפש החיים פ"ח).

Many people have reached great heights of true immersion in Torah (אמת'ר ליגען אין לערנן) through the realization that this is the only way to succeed. Perhaps these challenges are actually messengers ultimately leading to real דביקות בתורה, *attachment to Torah*.

**The power of Torah:** As we all know, the power of Torah is indispensable in battling the *yeitzer hora* (קידושין ל: מסילת ישרים פ"ה).

This, however, refers to quality learning, writes the Steipler (ספר אגרת נדירה מבעל קהילות יעקב). And it is therefore the individual who lives his learning – not merely cruising through it – who can expect to be adequately armed with these protective powers. Even if temporarily it is just one learning *seder* that wins our undivided attention, it will surely bestow amazing results.

**Our speech:** Thinking in learning generates *kedusha* (והגית בו יומם ולילה יהושע א, ח); yet articulating the words increases the effect.

Refinement of speech, in general, not only reflects one's inner purity, but also helps bring it about (פלא יועץ, דיבור, ד"ה ולעולם).

**Structure (סדר):** The Torah with its central underlying theme being *Klal Yisroel's* striving for *קרבת אלוקים*, *intimacy with Hashem*, puts much emphasis on structure. An important part of *Matan Torah* was the organized arrangement for standing around *Har Sinai*. *Korbanos* in the *Mishkon* were all performed with a very organized system. The manner in which *Klal Yisroel* travelled through the desert and set up camp also displayed a definite structure. Imagine for a moment meriting an experience in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Amongst the host of things we would encounter, we would no doubt be astonished at the phenomenal orderliness and organization.

Again and again we see how structure is a foundation in our striving towards intimacy with Hashem.

Structure is not a luxury – it is an essential component

in any plan of growth.

It is a vital weapon in our fight against the *yeitzer hora* and enables us to emerge triumphant even after losing many battles. Those armed with a program to finish a certain *mesechta*, to complete *Chumash-Rashi* every week, or even to learn two *Halachos* of *Chofetz Chaim* daily, etc., will be witness to this great advantage.

A structured growth plan in *tefillah*, be it time, place, or extra *kavana* at certain parts, also has great benefits. Remember that *Yiddishkeit* was not tailored only for people without weaknesses; it is the *program* that will save us despite our weaknesses.

Hold onto structure and eventually you will win.

שבע יפול צדיק וקם, **The Tzadik falls seven times and yet he rises (Mishlei 24:16):** This is the lifeline of a person who stays focused, even in the face of adversity. Regardless of any past mistakes, he persistently carries on. This puts him in a superior category, even when his present *madraiga* is perhaps unsatisfactory.

The original path of life you chose was and remains correct, but the *yeitzer hora*'s ultimate goal is to cause you to detour. Don't let him. View yourself as a budding



*Talmid Chochom* and an up-and-coming *Marbitz Torah*, momentarily going through difficult challenges.

Who knows if feelings of sluggishness and negativity are not the slyest trick of our common enemy to accomplish his skewed goal?

**Warmth and Enthusiasm:** Serving Hashem with joy will empower you to rise after every fall. Reb Moshe Shmuel Shapiro *zt"l* once told a confidant that whilst influencing *bochurim*, he found a need to place more and more emphasis on putting warmth into *Yiddishkeit*. This, he said, was in order to counterbalance the ever-increasing downward pull of the outside world, as the years went by (בספר זהב משבא).

Putting warmth into our *Yiddishkeit* is not about sticking out externally. It's about feeling good to be doing *mitzvos* and adding *inner* effort whilst performing them.

In moments of inspiration of *teshuvah*, do not let your mind stick to this one particular struggle, lest all enthusiasm be drained. Rather, think seriously about other areas such as honouring the Shabbos, *Kibud av v'em*, *Shmiras halashon*, etc. – *mitzvos* you do already, and now add a little more feeling. Allow other areas into the centre. Open

your heart and be aware of the enormous value of each and every *mitzvah*.

Upbeat thoughts before a *mitzvah*, together with added external zest whilst doing the *mitzvah*, have immediate effects on our practicing of *mitzvos*. All this done with the intention of affecting inner feelings can slowly change our very essence. As the Chinuch tells us אהרי המעשים נמשכים הלבבות – people’s natures change in line with their habitual form of behaviour.

With generosity of spirit, we can allow ourselves to feel a part of *Klal Yisroel*, a part of something bigger. A Yid is never alone!

Feel lucky knowing that despite everything, Hashem is there waiting, again and again, to hear the *Shema Yisroel* of every single Yid.

**Krias Shema:** *Krias Shema* said with sincerity every day, affects one’s inner self sooner than expected. *Krias Shema* speaks to those with great challenges, too. It talks of אשר אתם זונים אחריהם and sets the goal that one day we can all attain בכל לבבך, wholehearted service of Hashem.

*Krias Shema* does not just talk about the transformation of one’s inner self; it actually brings about subtle changes

that become increasingly more powerful.

**Take Note:** Observe signs of progress; be happy and relieved as the line on the graph isn't only going down, but starts to look more promising. Notice how the inability to fulfill certain "unnecessary" desires becomes less frustrating, more tolerable and even desirable (מהר"ל נצה). Congratulate yourself!

**Pre-empting Confrontation:** Try creating the inability to sin "להקטין הנסיון ולהגדיל היראה", *to minimize the nisyonos and maximize Yiras Shamayim* (לשון הגאון רבי ישראל מסלאנט) (וצ"ל). We were taught this immediately after leaving Mitzrayim, ולא נחם אלקים, *Hashem didn't relent*. He led them on a way which could not easily be reversed (חיי עולם), and כי ברח העם, *the nation fled*, was in order to increase the distance between ourselves and the attractions of Mitzrayim.

Evading the inappropriate may seem like an external accomplishment; however, it is an immense achievement, and will in time bring one to true fear of Hashem.

**A powerful precedent:** When feelings run low, let us remind ourselves that as a nation we started out very

low. Some were even indifferent to the *mitzvah* of *Bris Mila*. When Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim, it was not merely a horizontal journey but primarily a vertical one, a journey of spiritual elevation.

Leaving Mitzrayim lifted us out of the mud, setting a precedent which created a mechanism that enables us, here and now, to ride above those same old challenges. This is alluded to in the words עזרת אבותינו ... מגן ומושיע לבניהם ... *Helper of our ancestors ... Shield and Savior for their children after them.*

At the end of *Shema* we say twice *Ani Hashem*, the second time alludes to our future salvation. The salvation granted to our forefathers paves the way for our personal and collective redemption.

**Emunah:** Thinking about the ten *makos*, *Krias Yam Suf*, and the ensuing magnificent display of Hashem's total power, enhances *emunah*. In addition creating clear, real-life pictures in the mind (ציור) will make it even more effective, awakening dormant *emunah* that is already inside us.

Think of Hashem's infinite power whilst putting on *tefillin*, when mentioning *yetzias Mitzrayim* in *Shema*,

etc. The more real one's *emunah*, the weaker his *yeitzer Hora*. This is also a *tikkun* for any previous misuse of the mind.

*Hashem* believes in our potential for greatness (והייתם) (לי סגולה שמות יט, ה תחת הנעצוץ יעלה ברוש ותחת הדרפד יעלה הדס, In place of the thorn bush, a cypress will rise, and in place of the stinging nettle, a myrtle will grow (ישעיה נה, יג).

**Interwoven:** The *Neshomos* of all Yidden are deeply connected (תומר דבורה פ"א מדת לשארית נחלתו). By strengthening yourself, who knows how many other Yidden you are helping to stay loyal.

May our eyes merit to witness the coming of Moshiach, והוא ישמיענו ברחמיו שנית לעיני כל חי להיות לכם לאלקים אני ה' אלוקיכם, *And He will answer us, in His mercy, a second time before the eyes of all living to be a G-d to you, "I am Hashem your G-d"*.

With hope, and with love,  
and with respect for your courage in reaching out,  
Your friend,

Reb Yehuda Leib Wittler

P.S. There is so much more that could and should be said. Who knows if Hashem's guiding hand will not grant us to meet, benefiting from each other's company.





## GLOSSARY OF HEBREW TERMS

<i>Abizrayhu d'arayos</i>	Accessory to (the transgression) of immorality
<i>Adam chashuv</i>	Important person
<i>Adam harishon</i>	Adam, the first man
<i>Akeida</i>	The Binding of Yitzchak
<i>Aliyah</i>	Being called up to the Torah reading
<i>Amora'im</i>	The sages of the Talmudic era
<i>Arayos</i>	Immorality
<i>Aveiros</i>	Transgressions
<i>Avodah</i>	Service (i.e. serving Hashem)
<i>Avos</i>	Forefathers
<i>Bochur/bochurim</i>	Young man/young men
<i>Baruch Hashem</i>	Thank G-d (literally, blessed is G-d)
<i>Bashert</i>	Soul mate
<i>Beis hamikdash</i>	Temple
<i>Beis medrash</i>	Study hall



<i>Ben-aliya</i>	Someone who is always striving to improve
<i>Bracha</i>	Blessing
<i>Chas v'shalom</i>	G-d forbid! (figurative)
<i>Chazal</i>	Our Sages, of blessed memory
<i>Chizzuk</i>	Encouragement
<i>Chumra</i>	Stringency
<i>Daled amos</i>	4 cubits
<i>Davening</i>	Praying
<i>Ehrlicher</i>	Sincere
<i>Eis ratzon</i>	Favourable time
<i>Eved</i>	Servant
<i>Eved Hashem</i>	One who serves Hashem
<i>Frum</i>	Religious
<i>Gadol Hador</i>	Leader of the generation
<i>Gedolei yisrael</i>	Leading rabbis of the Jewish people
<i>Gehennom</i>	Purgatory
<i>Hagbah</i>	When the Torah is held aloft after being read

<i>Hamelech</i>	The King
<i>Har sinai</i>	Mount Sinai
<i>Hefkeirus</i>	Free-for-all
<i>Histaklus</i>	Gazing
<i>Ikvesa d'meshicha</i>	The advent of the Messiah
<i>Issur de'oraysa</i>	Torah prohibition
<i>Kadosh</i>	Holy
<i>Kadosh v'tahor</i>	Holy and pure
<i>Kedusha</i>	Holiness
<i>Kedushas hamachashavah</i>	Purity of thought
<i>Kevod Shamayim</i>	Honour of Heaven
<i>Kiddush Hashem</i>	Sanctification of G-d's Name
<i>Kisei Hakavod</i>	Throne of glory
<i>Lashon hora</i>	Harmful (prohibited) speech
<i>Madreiga/s</i>	Level/s
<i>Malachim</i>	Angels
<i>Mashgiach ruchani</i>	Spiritual advisor
<i>Matan torah</i>	The giving of the torah

<i>Mechutan</i>	The relationship that parents have with their child's in-laws
<i>Mesiach daas</i>	Lose concentration
<i>Mezakeh rabim</i>	To bring merit to the public (by encouraging them to do <i>mitzvahs</i> )
<i>Middah</i>	Character trait
<i>Middas hadin</i>	G-d's attribute of justice
<i>Mitzvas a'sei</i>	A commandment which requires action
<i>Mussar</i>	Ethical teachings
<i>Nefilos</i>	Falls
<i>Neshama</i>	Soul
<i>Nisyonos</i>	Challenges
<i>Olam haba</i>	The next world
<i>Oneis</i>	Beyond a person's control
<i>P'nei hashechina</i>	The Divine Countenance
<i>Passuk</i>	Verse
<i>Pritzus</i>	Immorality
<i>Psak</i>	Halachic decision

<i>Ramach eivarim</i>	248 limbs
<i>Rasha</i>	Evil person
<i>Ratzon</i>	Desire
<i>Re'ya be'alma</i>	Incidental glance
<i>Re'iyah</i>	Glance
<i>Ribono shel olam</i>	Master of the universe
<i>Sefer</i>	Book
<i>Shacharis</i>	Morning prayer service
<i>Shamayim</i>	Heaven
<i>Shechina</i>	Divine Presence
<i>Shevatim</i>	Tribes
<i>Shiur</i>	Lesson
<i>Shmiras einayim</i>	Guarding the eyes
<i>Shteiging</i>	Successful spiritual growth
<i>Simcha</i>	Joy
<i>Siyata d'shmaya</i>	Divine assistance
<i>Talmid/talmidim</i>	Student/students
<i>Tefillah</i>	Prayer

<i>Teshuva</i>	Repentance
<i>Tikkun</i>	Spiritual rectification
<i>Tzad hatumah</i>	Side of impurity
<i>Tzaddik yesod olam</i>	A righteous person on whom the world stands
<i>Tznius</i>	Modesty
<i>Yeitzer hora</i>	Evil inclination
<i>Yeitzer tov</i>	Good inclination
<i>Yirah</i>	Fear
<i>Zechuyos</i>	Merits (noun)
<i>Zehirus</i>	Watchfulness
<i>Zocheh</i>	Merit (verb)
<i>Tumah</i>	Impurity
<i>Ta'avah</i>	Lust

