

ראה חיים

See Life

על שם הפסוק קהלת ט:ט "ראה חיים עם- אשה אשר- אהבת"

From the *posuk* in *Koheles* 9:9 "See life with the woman that you love."

Enjoying life fully through *shemiras einayim*.

Introduction:

It has long been debated how to address the issues of *shemiras einayim*. Do we shelter our children and ourselves so that we are not even tempted by the *yetzer hora* or do we discuss and address the issue?¹ It seems that this debate had its place in a time that no longer exists. As Rav Hutner zt"l said many years ago so presciently, "Your children will be exposed on the way to the corner store to more than our parents saw their entire lives in the shtetel." Our children are now the children he was referring to, and this is the generation he was talking about. It is no longer possible to hide and shelter ourselves, and therefore we need to prepare ourselves and our children to understand this *yetzer hora* so that we can properly win this battle.

Many educators and Rabbonim have stated that *shemiras einayim* is the hardest and, indeed, the key challenge of our generation (and certainly for younger males). How can we deal with this difficult challenge in this trying generation? Boruch Hashem there is a wonderful organization called *Guard Your Eyes* (GYE) with a website www.GuardYourEyes.org, headed by Rav Yaakov "Guard" Shlit"l that has helped many people with these issues. They have a proven record of success with this sometimes seemingly impossible struggle, and have Haskamos from Gedolei Yisroel². In this booklet we have compiled ideas gleaned from the many successful experiences of people on the GYE Forum and other sources, to provide guidance and direction on how to deal with this issue. The booklet is divided into two sections. The first, called "Fundamental Concepts," contains guidance on how to address this issue with children (and quite frankly, ourselves) so that we will have the correct attitude towards the problem and are best equipped to succeed. The second section entitled, "What if I have Failed in the Past?" has tips on how to deal with this problem if one has already fallen. Any questions or comments on this booklet should be directed to Rabbi Guard at eyes.guard@gmail.com or the author at kosher.einayim@gmail.com.

¹ The Chofetz Chaim's son reports that his father said that this subject should not be discussed much, because discussing the issue itself could cause problems. Not everyone agrees with this concept (see for example *Keser Rosh* written by R' Chaim Volozhin ZT"l and largely based on the teachings of the GR"l – 135). In any case, at least some basic concepts need to be given over, especially considering the fact that we are living in a very different time than the *Chofetz Chaim*.

² In addition to their Website, they have many books and resources that can be of significant value when dealing with these issues. Some examples are; The GYE Program in a Nutshell and The GYE Handbook (general guides on *shemiras einayim* for the whole range of people's challenges with this issue), GYE's Prevention Tips for Parents, Windows of the Soul (a book and program on *shemiras einayim* to deal with the general challenges we all face in the environment around us), Dear Bochor (a book written for bochorim on this subject by a mechanech with over 40 years of experience), The First Day of the Rest of My Life (a book about breaking free from lust addiction)

Chapter 1

Fundamental Concepts

1. *Interconnected world*

The world we live in was created by Hashem in a beautiful and complex way, with intricate and interlinked energies and powers that function in precise and amazing ways to accomplish their purpose. Scientists talk about how a butterfly flapping its wings in one part of the world could cause a storm in another part of the world, if everything were not in proper balance. On a spiritual level, the same concept applies. Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt”l used to say, “If a yeshiva bochur takes off his jacket in Bnei Brak, who knows what [kind of spiritual destruction] takes place as result in Tel Aviv?”

2. *Our actions affect the world*

Every power (whether spiritual or physical) can be used appropriately or inappropriately. The more power that something has, the more positive effect it will have when used correctly and the more negative effect it will have when used incorrectly. For example, the Chofetz Chaim gave a *moshol* to describe the awesome power of speech for good and for bad by describing the power “modern” electric tools have compared to their older manual counterparts. This concept, obvious in the physical world, is found in *Chazal* in regard to the spiritual world in many places (e.g. Yidden compared to other nations, and Eretz Yisroel compared to other countries).

3. *Our special responsibility*

We Yidden have special roles and positions that make **our actions**, even ones that might not seem so obviously important at first, fundamental in maintaining the world. Just like a general, if he were to make wrong command motions with his hands, it could have disastrous effects, we too, because of our important positions in the world, our actions have very powerful effects. The actions of people for right and wrong have a fundamental effect on the running of the world³ and *Yidden* have an especially powerful and important role.⁴ In this generation, the *Yidden* who have been privileged to be exposed to Torah bear an even greater⁵ responsibility.

³ Mesilas Yeshorim 1.

⁴ Nefesh Hachaim 1:4.

⁵ See Chosen Yehoshua (written by R’ Yehoshua Heler Zt”l of Telz. It is a sefer providing guidance and chizuk in limud hatorah. It was first published in 1867) 1:1:4, regarding the special power of the eyes.

Obviously, one needs to know how to use the world and its energies correctly in order to accomplish what we have to, and in order to have a happy existence in this world. Just like driving a car the wrong way down the street or stepping on the gas instead of the brake is not going to have a very happy or productive result, so too any inappropriate use of the world is not going to have a happy ending. Some *meforshim* explain that the reason that *Chazal* refer to using Torah inappropriately (for personal honor) as a “*kardom lachphor bohem*”, an *axe* to dig with, is because an axe is not made for digging with, and while it might be possible to use it for some digging, it certainly will not be an efficient and happy endeavor. So too, if one uses Torah for personal honor, it might work to a certain extent, but in the end it is going to be fraught with frustration. In every area of life this rule applies.⁶

4. *The Torah, the guide to life*

Fortunately, Hashem gave us a guide book on how to use the world, the Torah. The Chazon Ish writes in his letters that when one commits to follow the Torah, a great happiness comes upon him. This is understandable with the above concept – using tools appropriately and correctly is a much happier experience and more effective than when using them incorrectly.

5. *The difficulty of life*

Despite the fact that following the guidance of the Torah is ultimately what will make us happy, it is still not easy to do so. Hashem, in His infinite wisdom, created the world in a way that we have to work to earn our reward so that the reward should have the pleasure of being earned, rather than being “bread of shame.” (*Daas Tevunos 14 & 18*). Therefore, the world is always enticing us to use it incorrectly, and it is always harder to do the correct thing. If it were obvious and easier to do the right thing, there would be no reason to give a reward for choosing correctly. Only because we have chosen to overcome our inertia and to ignore the enticements to do wrong, can we get reward for choosing correctly.

6. *Marriage and raising a family*

One of the areas of the most powerful spiritual forces in the world, and where a person becomes a partner with Hashem in the creation of the world, is when person marries and raises a family⁷. The joy, happiness, and spiritual accomplishment that one has when raising a family with *kedusha* and *avodas Hashem* is something that words cannot describe. Because of this tremendous power, a person has a tremendous

⁶ Heard from R' Yaakov Stefansky Zt"l.

⁷ Gittin 41 from Yeshaya 45. See also the Gemorah Sanhedrin 64 that *Chazal* wanted to remove the Yetzer Horah of lust, but they found that the world could not exist without it.

drive in this area. At the same time, because of the tremendous ability to accomplish extremely high levels of *kedusha* and spiritual accomplishment, the *yetzer hora* creates an equally strong and slightly more obvious desire to use this power inappropriately. This inappropriate desire is called *lust*. Lust, left unchecked, can easily become an addiction, which is a type of disease. However, attraction to the opposite sex is normal and healthy, which marriage transforms to great heights spiritually and physically.

7. *The danger*

We need to understand that the *yetzer hora* attracts us to run after lust at every opportunity. It is beckoning at every street corner, convenience store, and computer. It may not be easy to turn away from it, but if we follow lust, ultimately we are heading for a life of bitterness and frustration. Did you ever notice how many rich and successful non-Jews are on drugs, commit suicide or have other problems in their lives? We wish we could report all the stories that we are personally familiar with, of people whose lives ended up as “living hell” as a result of not controlling their desire for lust, but we need to protect those people by not printing all the stories. However, the stories are many and it is clear that this is where one is heading if he does not take the proper measures to control himself in this area. On the other hand, if we do prevent ourselves from inappropriately following lust, and only use this energy in the context of a loving and stable marriage, the joy, happiness and fulfillment that it leads to are, as mentioned above, beyond description .

To further explain the above, the nature of people is that we are constantly searching for happiness (it is in the first line of the American Declaration of Independence). The world beckons us to engage in pleasurable activity to make us happy, but pleasure will not make anyone happy. In fact it will invariably make us less happy. What makes us happy is being in secure committed relationships (with our parents, spouse, children, and Hashem). The more one engages in unwarranted pleasure activities, the more it will take away from the relationships that we are trying to form and make us less and less happy (this can result in a vicious cycle – engaging in more and more pleasure because we get less and less happiness from deteriorating relationships).

8. *You can't have it both ways*

It is important to understand: you cannot have it both ways. You cannot indulge in lust and have a happy and successful marriage. It is only after we have eliminated the lusting and acting in a selfish manner that we can behave in the giving manner that results in the happiness that marriage can bring. The Gemorah⁸ relates that when a person got married, they used to tell him that a wife can be the source of the ultimate happiness or can be more bitter than death. Life experience makes the Gemorah seem almost obvious; there is no bitterness like that of a bad marriage nor happiness and fulfillment like that of a good marriage. The Gemorah does not explain why they told

⁸ Berachos 8a.

this to the *chasan*, but perhaps it was to give over this message. If we deal with marriage as a form of giving, it can be the happiest experience. However, if we treat marriage as a form of taking and try to utilize it for our personal lust it will be more bitter than death. There are three reasons why this is so:

- From a practical perspective, a woman needs to feel safe and stable and to be able to trust her husband for her to be happy in a marriage. (This is why the Torah requires a married woman to have a *kesuba*). Similarly, only if the wife feels exclusive to her husband will she put in the effort that will result in a happy marriage. If she feels like she is being used as an outlet for the husband's lust, the revulsion and resultant bad effect this will have on the marriage is beyond words.
- From a spiritual perspective, our job in this world is to sanctify the physical world (*kedushas hachomer*). It is only possible to enjoy and use the physical world for spiritual purposes after we have stopped using the physical world with purely physical intentions. This is for example is why we fast on *Taanis Esther* before going into Purim⁹. This is also the concept of a *nazir* abstaining from wine for thirty days.
- Even for one who is single, it is important from a practical perspective to remember what we have said. Our habits get strongly ingrained and are hard to change. It is important to establish the correct habits and approach as soon as possible if we are to hope to succeed later in life.

9. *Reward and punishment*

Besides all this, there is reward and punishment. Obviously we will get great reward for following the word of Hashem in the face of great difficulty, and if we do not follow the word of Hashem, we will be punished accordingly.

To summarize:

- This world has forces that can be used for good and for bad
- We have a special role to play in the upkeep of the world that makes our actions especially significant.
- The way to come to ultimate enjoyment and fulfillment in this world is by using the world as the Torah prescribed.
- Hashem made it a challenge to use the world correctly so that we should get reward when we choose to do so.
- The more powerful a force is for good when used correctly, the more powerful it is for bad when used incorrectly
- The more powerful a force is for good, the stronger the yetzer hora will encourage us to use it for bad.

⁹ Mishnas R' Aaron.

- One of the most powerful forces in this world, with tremendous potential to become a partner with Hashem in the maintenance of the world and to accomplish and to bring happiness, is the desire to marry and procreate.
- If we follow our lust inappropriately - not in the context of marriage - it will lead to destruction and unhappiness. Only if we overcome this desire, and limit the use of this energy to within the context of a healthy, loving marriage can we obtain the happiness, joy, reward, and fulfillment that this area of life exists for.
- **By constantly remembering the above concepts we have a fighting chance to succeed.**

Chapter 2

Some Halachos

These halachos obviously do not apply to one's wife. Some restrictions do apply to one's own wife, but these are beyond the scope of this work.

1. It is forbidden to look at a woman if she is dressed immodestly.
2. If you know of an area where immodestly dressed women are present, it is forbidden to enter this area. An alternative route must be taken.
If there is no alternative route, or the alternative route is impractical or costly, you are permitted to pass through the area providing that you make every reasonable effort to avoid seeing the immodest sights.
3. It is forbidden to have thoughts of desire for any woman.
4. It is forbidden to derive pleasure from looking at the beauty of a woman, even if she is modestly dressed.
5. It is forbidden to touch oneself, have immodest thoughts, or waste semen. This is a very serious *issur*¹⁰ (see footnote¹¹).

¹⁰ *Even Haezer 23.*

¹¹ This is a **very grave aveira** (see *Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:116* regarding exactly how severe, and for guidance and encouragement as to how to do Teshuva for this sin). It is also written in kabalistic texts, that every drop of semen emitted in vain causes souls to be created, and these souls are snatched up by the forces of evil and become demonic forces that cause much suffering in a person's life. The souls themselves also suffer in hopeless misery, (unless we fix ourselves), and after we die they stand as terrible accusers against us. We can not minimize this at all. On the other hand, given our present environment, it is not surprising that this sin is more widespread than it was when the environment was purer. A single person should be aware: The severity of the *aveira* requires you to **make every effort** to improve. However, the *Ribono shel Olam* knows our *yetzer*. If you cannot have a total victory over the *yetzer* immediately, then at least try to win some battles. Minimize. *Daven* for assistance, and celebrate every victory, even the small ones. If you truly make the effort to overcome this, in the end you will be successful. If it is possible to find someone older and wiser to confide in, by all means do so (indeed, Rav Elya Lopian, zt"l used to announce, that if there was a *bochur* who had been *nichshal* in this sin, he should know that he has who to turn to). But do not be riddled with guilt. **Give it all your effort and move on with your life.** *B'ezras Hashem*, the fight should get easier over time, and even more so after marriage.

6. It is a serious sin to read, view, or listen to material that will bring the *yetzer hora* upon oneself.
7. It is ossur to fraternize with a member of the opposite gender outside of the context of marriage or a formal business setting. See *Igros Moshe Even Haezer* 4:60.

Chapter 3

What if I Have Failed in the Past?

As noted above, the challenge in these areas is perhaps the greatest challenge in the world. If it was considered a difficult challenge in the days of *chazal*, how much more so in the corrupt and immoral world that we live in, where we are literally assaulted with inappropriate images and messages on an almost constant basis.

Too many of us have been caught up in lust before we realized why it was wrong or even what we were doing. Now we feel trapped. It can sometimes feel impossible to break free. We have promised ourselves that we would never do it again and took on all sorts of *kabalos* and *gedarim*, we sincerely davened, we asked for advice and *berachos* from *gedolim*, yet we still find ourselves returning to the same place. It is not a pleasant place to be in.¹² We do not want to be here, yet we cannot seem to break free. We ask ourselves, is it possible to break free or should we just resign ourselves to defeat?

Many members of the GYE community can testify that, at one point, they felt this way, but they are now finally having success, *Boruch Hashem*. With the right attitude and techniques, it can be done!

It will not be easy, and the challenges involved are so difficult that it should serve as a warning to those who are fortunate to have not yet been caught in this trap to be very cautious: the pain and constant struggle required to break free from a bad habit is reason enough not to start. But, for those already involved, do not be discouraged: ultimately it can be done.

¹² Also, maintaining what, for many of us, may have become an addiction, requires constant hiding, lies, and living a double life. This cuts us off from the world around us and does not let us feel the tremendous kindness of Hashem that fills our lives. It blinds us to the goodness in the world around us, to our own souls, and to Hashem. We begin to lose appreciation for our own wives and children. We are unable to find inner peace; we cannot stop lusting everywhere we go and we remain closed up within a shell that no one can penetrate.

Chapter 4

How to Break Free

There are a few points that can help us break free:

1. *Why I want to guard my eyes*

If we got into this trap, this means that, at least at one point, we made the decision that following lust is something we wanted to do. Every time we take an action following lust, we are reinforcing this decision. It is extremely difficult to avoid doing something we want to do, simply because we know in the abstract that it is wrong. It is much easier to recognize that something is not in our best interests and therefore not to want to do it.¹³ So the first suggestion is to write down a list of reasons why we want to avoid lust (some of the reasons are outlined in the fundamental concepts above, but ultimately it is up to every individual to determine for *himself* why he wants to stop). We should read this list regularly and make sure we constantly remember why we do not want to be following lust.

2. *Stop reinforcing the habit*

Chazal say, “*Aveira goreres aveira, mitzvah goreres mitzvah.*” The Vilna Gaon explains that every time someone has done an *aveira*, it brings a *tumah* on him that makes it more likely for him to do the *aveira* again, and the reverse is true for a *mitzvah*. On a more physical level, there is a very strong comfort in doing what we are familiar with (people even have nostalgia for the “old days,” even when the old days were not so good, because of this comfort). Additionally, something we have done many times becomes like second nature to us, so we can easily slip into doing it again, and it is hard to get out. Thus, even after we are 100% convinced that this is not what we want to do, it can still be a challenge to break free. What works for many people is a system of rewards that they give themselves for remaining clean. See more details on this in the sample program in chapter 5.

3. *Acknowledge every victory*

¹³ See Bereishis 31, 3-16, where, after being commanded by Hashem to leave the house of Lavan, Yaakov Avinu presents various reasons to Rachel and Leah why leaving the home they grew up in would be in their best interests, only then mentioning Hashem’s explicit command. In response, Rachel and Leah list several reasons why leaving would, indeed, be in their best interests, concluding that Yaakov should obey Hashem’s command. The obvious question is: why didn’t Yaakov simply state that Hashem commanded them to leave, and why didn’t Rachel and Leah agree right away on that basis? The answer is that the best way to fight the Yetzer Hora is to minimize the Nisayon, by convincing ourselves (as is truly the case) that following the will of Hashem is in our best interests. And, if that was true for the Imahos, it is certainly true for us (heard from Rav Yisroel Reisman, Shlita).

It is important to remember that the *gemorah*¹⁴ says that for every second that a person sits and does not do an *aveira* (when an opportunity to do the *aveira* presented itself), they get a great reward.¹⁵ This is even if eventually he gives into the *nisayon* and does the *aveira*. This is not an all or nothing endeavor. Every second of success is a success that can never be taken away. If complete success does not come immediately, that does not take away from what was accomplished in the meantime.

4. *The challenge gets easier*

The Yetzer Hora is not going away, especially if we have had problems in this area in the past and can, therefore, easily slip back into our old patterns and habits. However, **it does get easier**. Even if we have not had such problems, there is always the temptation because Hashem put us in the world to overcome challenges and to choose to do what is right, not to just coast along. Hashem put us in this world in order for us to make active decisions in the face of challenges and, therefore, there will always be challenges. It does get a lot easier as we change our habits from a habit to follow lust to a habit to avoid it.

In the *sefer Kreinah Deigrasah*, Letter 1,15a the Steipler Gaon wrote, “Experience shows that the more a person overcomes his nature, it becomes easier and easier for him to continue to do so, until eventually the test will be negligible.” [We see this in the Talmud Sanhedrin 107A “There is a small limb, if a person starves it, it will be satisfied; but if he feeds it, it will be hungry.”] In letter 1,15b he adds, “We have to realize that every time one passes this ordeal, it becomes easier the next time because this is the nature of this test, if you starve it, it is satisfied, like the Sages tell us in Sanhedrin 107. It is a tried and tested fact that, in the end, there will hardly be any challenge at all. One has to know that if he sins one time on purpose, it is not only a sin for that moment but the terrible effects continue for a long time, God should protect us, because one deed leads to another, as we learned in Avos.”

5. *Triggers are not the real problem*

There are many circumstances in life that will cause our desire for lust to be increased and seem to trigger us to engage in lustful behavior. Examples of this are seeing something inappropriate in the street, or stress in life. It is important to differentiate between triggers and the underlying problem. Our goal is to make sure that we internalize and appreciate that lust is not what we want, and to get ourselves out of the habit of lusting. However, even after many years of success, we will still need to avoid triggers, because the Yetzer Hora is never totally going away, as stated previously. Ultimately, triggers are not the problem, just a manifestation of the

¹⁴ Kiddushin 39.

¹⁵ For example, imagine you are sitting in the car and a challenge presents itself. You do not look and suddenly the cash register in Shomayim deposits \$100,000 into your account and double that amount for Klal Yisroel. Think about that. Say, “Thank you, Hashem for being with me to overcome this challenge.” Tell yourself: So much reward for “not doing something” I MUST be super-important to Hashem. Imagine what benefits my correct *actions* bring!

problem. As long as we have not habituated ourselves to avoid lust, there will always be triggers.

6. *Marriage*

There are many places in *Chazal*¹⁶ where it is clear that marriage is the antidote to lust problems. This needs some clarification. It does not mean that we should act out our lust with our spouse, because this will not work, nor make anyone happy. (See fundamental concepts 7-8 above). The *Gemorah*¹⁷ relates that David Hamelech tried having extra relations with his wife in order to avoid the *nisayon* with Bas Sheva, and instead it made things worse. Rather, the stable and healthy relationship of a successful marriage provides us with the happiness and contentedness that will make it easier for us to overcome the temptation of lust.

If we do follow our lust, our marriages are harmed in insidious and pervasive ways. It can seem like something else is harming the marriage, but once this issue is taken care of, time after time we see an improvement in people's marriages. When we avoid lust we will have a happier and better marriage than we ever dreamed possible.

¹⁶ Sanhedrin 64, Kesubos 65a, Kiddushin 29b-30a.

¹⁷ Sanhedrin 107a.

Chapter 5

A Sample of a System ¹⁸

1. Write down a list of reasons why you want to stay clean. (See below for a sample, but it is really up to each person to write his own list.)
2. Every day:
 - a. Read your list of reasons to stay clean.
 - b. Learn mussar (2-3 minute minimum, to make it very practical).
 - c. Stay clean.
 - d. If you have e-mail, subscribe to and read the daily *chizuk* email from GuardYourEyes.
3. For every day that you do all the items in #2, give yourself an immediate small reward (e.g. a small food treat or perhaps relaxation with a short story from a kosher book of short stories. This is ultimately up to each individual).
4. Additionally, make a chart of clean days and have a system to build up to a larger reward (e.g. going out to eat, buying an expensive sefer or Judaica item) for each extended period of staying clean. (Some people find it effective to put cash in an envelope each day to put aside for this reward, so that they can tangibly feel the reward coming closer).

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*Sample explanation list (as mentioned in #1 above):*

#### **Why I want to avoid gazing at women and at images of women:**

It is my strongly held belief and understanding that looking improperly at women and images of women is wrong, and it is against my interest to do so. It is, therefore, my strongest desire to refrain from ever gazing at women or viewing immodest material.

The following are the reasons for that desire:

1. First and foremost: it is *ossur al pi halacha* (i.e. Hashem has forbidden it). This has several aspects:
  - a. It is morally repugnant to go against the word and wishes of the Creator and Supplier of all the good in this world. To repay bad to the One who supplies so much good and does so much to help draw us close to Him etc.
  - b. The punishment for doing what Hashem has forbidden is unspeakable in its severity, as is deserving of one who has done such an action as explained in a. above.
  - c. A specific punishment for this action is that it makes it harder for our children to be good and pushes them away from the ways of the Torah. This can be explained on

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<sup>18</sup> This system was developed by Dr. Meir Wikler (718-438-6529) in his clinical work with one of the contributors to this booklet.

a metaphysical level, but is also because such behavior, invariably, makes us less effective parents.

2. I want to be a partner with Hashem in the building of this world and not one who destroys it.

3. Less objectively significant, but perhaps more significant in a practical sense, are the more physical problems it causes:<sup>19</sup>

a. It greatly worsens the relationship I have or will have with my wife. This is for a number of reasons: It makes it harder for me to appreciate her beauty, it makes her feel very scorned and violated, it makes her lose respect for me, and it makes her unable to trust me.

b. If my transgressions became publicly known, this could be a tremendous source of embarrassment for me, and serious negative ramifications could come as a result of this publicity (loss of job, loss of friends, loss of public prestige, etc.)

c. It negatively affects my functioning (not in the least because of the lack of self-esteem it causes).

**Note:**

This system is certainly helpful for those who have significant problems in this area. It can also be helpful for those who have had difficulty breaking free. However, for some people with a more significant problem or addiction, a 12-step program may be required. It is beyond the scope of this booklet to address 12-step recovery programs; more information about them can be obtained from Guard Your Eyes.

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<sup>19</sup> See the sefer *Divrei Yehoshua* (written by the same author as Chosen Yehoshua, mentioned above) 2:17 that talks about this at length.