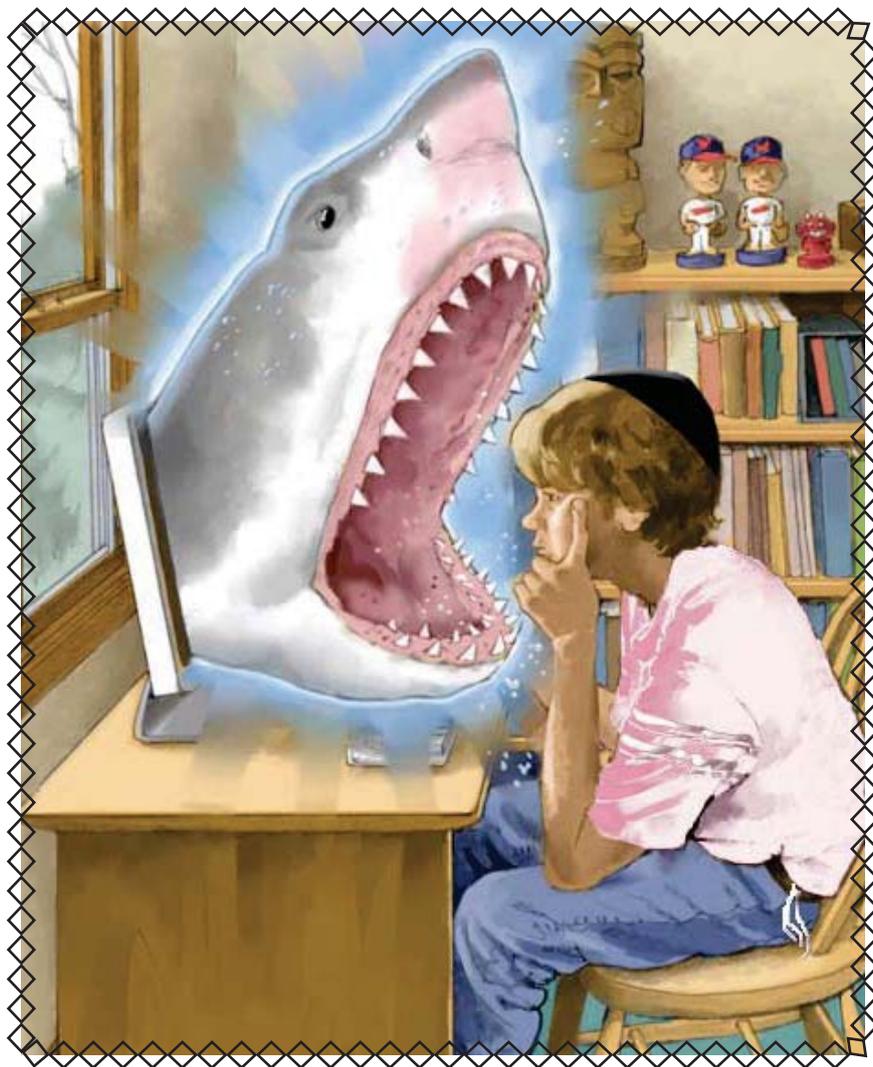




Protecting Our Youth *Experts Speak*



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Introduction

The letter below was sent to some prominent educators and therapists in the frum world and this booklet is the result of their replies.

Dear _____

Guard Your Eyes is working on a new booklet to help parents and mechanchim deal with the dangers of children's exposure to inappropriate materials on the internet.

We believe that the Jewish people would greatly benefit if you would be willing to write an essay for the booklet on some of the following topics:

- *How do we protect our children?*
- *How do we educate our children to deal with these challenges, temptations and nisyonos which they will inevitably encounter at some point?*
- *How do we strengthen our children so they are not pulled by these nisyonos and temptations?*
- *How do we inspire shmiras eynaim in children?*
- *What areas of parenting are important for us to improve in order to help our children in these areas?*
- *How do we identify children at risk for falling into viewing inappropriate materials?*
- *How do we identify warning signs that a child has fallen into viewing inappropriate materials?*
- *What do we do if we discover a child was looking at inappropriate materials?*
- *How can we help a child who may be hooked on viewing inappropriate materials?*

These topics can be addressed from many angles and directions, practical or hashkafic.

Gratefully yours,

The GuardYourEyes Staff

Introductory Remarks by Mrs. Dina Friedman

I would like to thank GYE for giving me the opportunity to share my ideas on such a sensitive topic. I value their contribution to Klal Yisroel and feel truly privileged to have been invited to make my own contribution.

The following information is purposely explicit. I understand that the sensitive nature of this topic may not be suitable for mass publication.

I have included it in this way for the following reasons:

1. Ambiguous information is an opening to the יצה"ר. Clear guidance of what is right, wrong, normal or caused, is what gives a person strength in the face of a decision - נסיון.
2. Many parents have asked me in the past for explicit information as they are pretty clueless about what to say to their children and how to say it. I thought this was an appropriate forum (being frum and discussing עניני קדושה) through which we could reach parents.
3. In response to the questions you presented me with, "How do we inspire שמירת עינים in children," I have found that when children understand the logic behind a certain איסור and appreciate how איסורים protect us, they care to comply.

Many of the points above have been shared with hundreds of participants of my parenting course (the advanced classes) and Boruch Hashem I am pleased to convey their appreciation of the material.

Wishing you continued success,

Sincerely,

Dina Friedman

Eight Powerful Ways to Protect Your Child

By: Dina Friedman

There is a lot you can do as a parent to prevent your child from becoming the next victim of Internet addiction.

Know that no child intends to become an Internet addict when they naively log onto the Internet. And even once a child is addicted to the Internet, they wish someone could help free them from the grip of their addiction, as they watch themselves helplessly being sucked away from all that is near and dear to them.

Kids are only as vulnerable as they are ignorant and lacking in self-awareness.

The following are eight powerful ways to protect your child:

1.A. Educate your child or the street will

Until recently, protecting a child's Kedusha and Temimus meant sheltering them from topics related to marriage. Today, with information available to kids from the comfort and privacy of their own bedrooms, this has changed. Protecting your child's Kedusha and Temimus means educating your children appropriately so that others don't do the job for you and ruin them in the process.

The first serious encounter your child will have with the power of his or her body is usually during the years of puberty. Puberty is the time when the body changes from its child form to its adult shape and form. These changes include:

Physical – changes to the body, outside and inside;

Emotional – the way the child feels and relates to friends and family; and

Intellectual – the teen's ability to think about the future.

At the end of puberty, the child will have their adult body with the ability to reproduce. The way you guide your child through this period sets the stage for the way your child will:

- understand and relate to their body,
- trust you to help them when they encounter challenges, and

- be able to make a calculated decision when faced with Nisyonos in private.

It goes without saying that children who get correct guidance during these impressionable years will enter marriage emotionally and mentally healthy. They do not bring toxic guilt and shame to their intimate life. Healthy intimacy is the cornerstone to a balanced and satisfying marriage.

Before talking to your kids, it's imperative that you are centered about this topic and have no emotional charges or mistaken beliefs or judgments about normal physical experiences **all** teenagers go through.

Take the time to answer the following questions so that you will be able to guide your teen in the most effective way.

1. What were some of the things the adults in your life said or did that made this period in your life easier?
2. What are the things you think adults should not say or do? Why?
3. What parts of growing up were positive and exciting for you?
4. What parts were challenging? What do you think you would have needed at the time to help you?
5. How do you think the adults in your life shaped or influenced your understanding of your body and your sexuality?
6. What associations do you wish your child to have with their body and sexuality?
7. What commitments are you willing to take on in order to help your teenagers achieve the above associations?

1.B. How to Talk to Your Child About Puberty

Before talking to your child you need to have a clear idea of the changes your child will experience. The information in this chapter is for the parent only and is followed by a sample conversation you should have with your child.

For girls:

- Onset of Puberty – 8-13 years
- First Pubertal Change – Breast Development
- Pubic Hair Development – Shortly after breast development
- Hair under the arms – 12 years old

- Menstrual periods – 10-16.5 years old

For boys:

- Onset of puberty – 9.5 to 14 years old
- First Pubertal Change – Enlargement of the testicles
- Penis Enlargement – Approximately one year after the testicles begin enlarging
- Appearance of pubic hair – 13.5 years old
- Hair underarms, on face, voice change and acne – 15 years old
- Nocturnal emissions – 14 years old

During puberty, both girls and boys will experience the above physical changes due to the secretion of a hormone called Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH). This hormone activates the reproductive system and also affects the child emotionally, resulting in teenage mood swings.

It is the influence of this hormone in the child's body that begins to awaken the sexual drives, especially in a boy, thus leaving him vulnerable to seeking an outlet—which might just be the computer in his bedroom.

At this point, you should understand the difference in the physical needs of boys and girls that result in boys being more vulnerable to addiction. A boy's sexual drives are active and seek an outlet in an active way, as a boy experiences physical gratification through giving. On the other hand, a girl's sexual drives are passive and are stimulated by receiving. This means that a sheltered girl who is protected is less likely to seek sexual gratification, resulting in a smaller chance of getting addicted. (This idea is clearly enacted in the physical act of marriage where the man is the giver/ active and the woman is the receiver/ passive.)

Make sure you give your child age-appropriate information before the expected development. A sample conversation a father should have with his son might be as follows: (I'm including a possible father-to-son conversation, as most mothers do seek guidance on how to educate their daughters.)

“You are now going through some changes that all boys go through. This is the way your body matures from its child form to its final adult form. All of these changes are controlled by a hormone in your body and actually take place all on their own in precisely the right time for your body and in your own unique way. You will notice that your private parts will change and that your body will produce hair and that your voice will change. All these physical changes are healthy, normal and happen to all boys.

“Another experience that all boys go through is something that happens at night. (Briefly describe a nocturnal emission in two to three sentences.) This is the result of a build-up of hormones in your body and its way of discharging this build-up.”

[Please note: If your child is very sheltered (today that would be a lesser percentage of the frum population than in the past) it is unnecessary to provide a context for the above experience, i.e. the way it is related to marriage and creating a child. In a conversation I had with an expert who has helped bochorim deal with matters of Kedusha for 30 years, some boys have claimed that being given a context actually triggered their problems in these matters of Kedusha.]

However, if your child will be exposed to more information (or is already confused or challenged), it is important that a context is given to a nocturnal emission as follows: “What happens at night is the way your body is preparing itself to be able to father a child.” Then make sure to tell your child that protecting their Kedusha will insure the wellbeing of their future--spiritually, mentally and emotionally. Clearly convey to your child that without a doubt, the quality and fulfillment in their marriage is dependent on how they care for themselves now.

Make sure that the conversation is followed up with the following two reassurances:

- A. “It is normal that you might find yourself thinking about these experiences to the point of obsessing. Don’t be afraid to share your difficulties with me. I was also once a teenager and I know what it’s about. I’m here to help you or get you the help of an expert who deals with normal teenage conflicts.” (Giving your child the information doesn’t take away the Nisyonos that all bochorim need to deal with as part of growing up under a flood of hormones without an appropriate outlet. It does give them the courage to ask for help before they seriously hurt themselves through the Internet.)
- B. “What is happening to you is a biological experience and is not your fault or an indication that you are lacking in Yiras Shomayim or Kedusha. Protecting your Kedusha means not doing anything to **actively** cause an emission. That’s why it’s important to take care of your Shemiras Einayim and that’s why our Rabbanim care so much about problems with the Internet. Our Rabbanim care about protecting your Kedusha.”

It may be helpful to reassure your child that Nisyonos in this area will get easier once he is married.

From time-to-time during the teenage years, check with your child if they are okay or if they need to speak to someone, which leads us to the next powerful way in which you can protect your child.

2. Get Your Child a Private Mentor

No matter how much you trust your parenting abilities to create trust in your relationship with your child, it is normal and even healthy for a child to choose to keep information to themselves. This means you might not know where your child is challenged in his matters of Kedusha. This should not be taken personally, but seen as a sign of healthy maturation towards adulthood and independence.

A paid mentor who has earned your child's trust and respect can help guide your child through this rocky period in his life. A true mentor is a lifeline and serves as a buffer between your child's world and the outside world.

Do not wait until there is trouble to engage a mentor. Once a child is in trouble they will view the mentor as an extension of yourself, charged to fix him up, which will likely lead to resentment.

Introduce a mentor into your child's life around the age of Bar Mitzva and encourage your child to see his mentor at least once a month. A good mentor can truly mean the difference between a healthy teen experience (spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically) or a failed teen experience and all the accompanying damage. In today's world, I feel this is a necessity.

Think about Yosef Hatzaddik who is held as the prime example of someone who overcame his serious Nisyonos in this area. We are taught that דמות דיוקנו של אביו is what saved him. I believe that a good mentor is someone a child would seriously fear disappointing.

Be prepared to go through some trial and error until you find someone with enough experience and heart to hold your child with love and care.

3. Help Your Child Discover His/Her Personal Mission

When teens know where they are headed in life it will make it easier for them to make choices that support their life's visions and say "no" to the challenges that will ruin the direction they wish to be headed.

The clearer teens are about what they would like to accomplish in this world, the more power they have to battle negative influences. When a child values his power to make a difference in this world, he will care not to ruin his life.

When helping a child create a mission statement, it's important for the parent to realize that this is about the child's goals in life. It's about him tapping into his own soul's calling. It is not about the parent imposing their goals and dreams on the child. The values you have presented in your home will certainly influence your child's vision for himself, but to truly help your child, leave his unique mark in this world, you must encourage and support him to tap into his individuality.

Take my personal mission statement as an example of a mission statement: It reads in part as follows: "To be a source of inspiration and strength for Jewish women, wherever they may be, in the field of parenting, spirituality and self awareness..." (hence, this article).

With a mission statement, it is easy to choose which friends, vocations, past times, activities etc. that will support you in your life's goals.

Teens with a clearly defined life purpose will be much more motivated to control themselves and not access websites that could be damaging, than teens who are just drifting and are unaware of any purpose to their life. After all, to their mind, there isn't that much to their lives that can be damaged.

The following exercise can help you guide your child in accessing their soul's calling in this world (appropriate from age 16).

1. Imagine yourself lying on your deathbed at the end of your life. Write down all the things you would like to say you accomplished during your lifetime. Put your list in order of priorities from your biggest accomplishments to your smallest ones.
2. Go through all seven areas of life and mark down at least one accomplishment per area. The seven areas of life are as follows: Spiritual, mental, vocational, familial, social, physical and financial (Dr. J. Demartini, www.drdemartini.com)

One personal example reads as follows:

Achievement: I helped empower and guide Jewish women in their parenting.

3. Ask what are you doing today that will help you achieve your goals. This question helps keep a child focused on their choices.
4. Read your mission statement every day to remind you of your power to affect the world.

It is interesting to note the findings on addiction by Anne Marie von Forstmeyer who noted that, as evidenced by tests and statistics, 90% of the alcoholics she studied suffered from an abysmal feeling of meaninglessness. Of the drug addicts studied by Stanley Krippens 100% believed that “things seemed meaningless.” I wonder what can be concluded about Internet addicts.

4. Lead a Balanced Life

Many parents are challenged with presenting Yiddishkeit in a way that integrates the spiritual and material world in a healthy way. You might identify with the following confusion: If I were truly spiritual then I wouldn't be so interested in physical pleasures. And if I'm enjoying this physical world, then I'm probably not such a holy or spiritual person. (This, of course, is impossible. If physical pleasures could be removed from this world, we would probably die of hunger, be sleep deprived to the point of exhaustion, and stop populating this world until humanity would be extinct.)

This conflict leads to extreme living (or lifestyles) either desperately trying to be spiritual with little regard to physical needs or sinking into a materialistic lifestyle with little appreciation for spirituality.

King Shlomo has revealed two pieces of wisdom that are important to remember. The first is that the world always maintains a balance, as it says *זה לעומת זה עשה אלוקים*, and there is a time and place for everything-- *לכל זמן ועת*. If you disregard the above rules and live with one extreme, then you will notice that someone else, usually a significant figure in your life, such as a sibling or spouse, will display the opposite extreme to maintain balance and help you learn to be more integrated.

It is clear that the crisis of Internet addiction stems from lack of life balance, from living without understanding the purpose of physical pleasures Hashem has given us in this world. Children who are taught that Yiddishkeit abhors physical pleasures are vulnerable to the sensual pleasures that the Internet affords. I strongly believe that when we have learned (and conveyed to our children) how to use both physical and spiritual pleasures to serve Hashem and to connect to Him, our children will not have to act out and go to the opposite extreme to maintain balance in this world.

On a practical level, an integrated spiritual/ material life elevates the physical world in the following two ways:

- A. 1) Boruch Hashem, we are financially comfortable so that I can provide better chinuch for my children.
 2) Boruch Hashem, we have a beautiful home so that I can have the yishuv hadaas to parent my children.
 3) Boruch Hashem, I have delicious food to eat so that I have the energy to fulfill my life's purpose (all that is included in your mission statement).

Continue to link every physical pleasure to your spiritual mission until you see how one can't exist without the other.

- B. Take the time to think about the many physical pleasures we have as an expression of Hashem's love for us, and watch how your heart will open in gratitude to Hashem for this glorious world we live in.

If you use physical pleasure as a way of connecting to Hashem, you will also be sensitive to which types of physical pleasures cut you off from Hashem, the Internet being a case in point. Think about this: One can't lead a purely spiritual life without the help of this physical world, just as one can't find fulfillment in a physical world that is devoid of some form of spiritual idealism. (For this reason, statistics show that people have little motivation to accumulate wealth when they see no higher purpose for it.)

5. **Make Sure Your Child Knows his Successes**

Your child will be as safe as is his level of successes in the main areas of his life. When a child perceives himself as a failure, he is highly likely to seek compensation for his distressing emotions through instant gratifications that are found on the screen.

The areas of life that most teens regard as important are spiritual accomplishments, peer acceptance, academic achievements, and his relationships with the authority figures in his life.

Go through each area and help your child own his successes and strengths in each area. If he can't come up with a success in one area help him create success by opening up opportunities that appeal to his unique gifts, strengths and interests.

6. **Plan Structured Downtime with Your Child**

Every teen will be faced with free or unstructured time. It is during those free periods (perhaps weekends or Bein Hazemanim) that a child is vulnerable to exploring forbidden things. Teach your child to use his free time in meaningful ways. Chazal teach that boredom leads to sin. List appropriate activities that are pleasurable yet כשר for your child to choose from.

7. **Clearly Record all Instant Drawbacks to Accessing the Internet Inappropriately**

An addiction can only keep a person trapped if he perceives it to provide him with more pleasures than drawbacks. In addition, the drawbacks have to be instant to neutralize an addiction. A future perceived drawback, such as burning in Gehinom isn't powerful enough to fight the desire for instant gratification.

Listing every single drawback, in all 7 areas of life, until the mind comprehends equal drawbacks to pleasure, is a powerful and effective way of neutralizing an addiction.

Sit down with your challenged teen and write out the drawbacks like the example that follows:

If I stay hooked on the Internet, I will have to use enormous amounts of energy to keep it a secret and not get caught. If I am caught, which can happen at any moment, I will lose my friends and my parent's trust. I will have to deal with their very real distress and disappointment. I will ruin my reputation. I will ruin my chances for a good shidduch and will affect the course of my future.

[If you know your child's hope and dreams for themselves, then list every way in which this addiction will shatter them, e.g. If you know he wishes to enter a certain yeshivah or vacation, or belong to a certain community etc.]

It will ruin my marriage as I will carry a secret, shame and guilt into my future. I will ruin my own spirituality.

[Ascertain what your child's spiritual endeavors are. If he doesn't understand the value of his kedusha that might not be perceived as a loss, but if he appreciates tefillah or learning or connecting to Hashem then list that as a drawback and the ways in which he will negatively impact those values.]

At this moment I am creating a mechitza between me and Hashem by engaging in Devarim Assurim.

This addiction consumes mental space, energy and time so that I will affect my scholastic achievements because I'll be distracted and will lose physical energy because of inner conflicts knowing that I'm doing something wrong and harmful.

The time I need to invest in relationships will be lost as well as the ability to create deep relationships because I am harboring a secret.

Keep owning all instant negative effects until the child can say that their mind sees 20-50 negative effects that equilibrate all perceived benefits or pleasures.

Now create a new list recording all instant benefits the child will get by controlling himself. An example might be:

When I practice self control I build my self-esteem and self respect. By protecting my kedusha, I am a vessel that can hold the Shechina and will experience more protection and guidance from Hashem. When I practice self control, my efforts will be matched many times over by heavenly assistance. By controlling myself, I will be able to use 100% of my energy to achieve my life's goals.

[List goals in all 7 areas of life and how 100% presence will have a positive impact.]

By keeping my life pure:

I will be able to pursue the shidduch of my dreams. I will be able to create a home that is pure and holy.

I will have 100% energy available to create deep and meaningful relationships

I will have earned my status in the frum world that values kedusha above all.

I will be able to experience the highest level of Kedusha available through the act of marriage if I keep my mind pure. I will appreciate my wife's gifts and not be distracted by fantasies.

My energies will be free and flowing as I have nothing to hide.

Keep recording benefits until you have between 20-50 items on your list.

By exploring both angles of the challenge, i.e. the losses of instant gratification and the benefits of self control, the child can be released from his addiction.

[The above technique was inspired by the work of Dr. J. Demartini.]

Chazal have instructed us to do the above work before contemplating taking action, as it is written: (אבות ב,א) הוי מחשב הפסד מצוה כנגד שכרה

8. Give Your Child an Emergency Plan

A. Make four flashcards for your child with the following reminders:

1. Self Awareness - I can stand apart from myself and observe my thoughts and actions
2. Conscience – I can listen to my inner voice to know right from wrong
3. Will Power – I have the power to choose
4. Future Oriented-Every positive action today leads to my future successes

B. Give your child a number they can call, e.g. mentor, Chizuk hotline in case they need help.

C. Prepare distractions for your child with which they can distract themselves until the Nisayon passes. E.g. Prepare perakim of Tehillim to say, or a special limud to learn, reading a book, playing a game, or the like.

In summary:

1. Educate your child during the years of puberty so that they can trust you to help them.
2. Connect your child to a mentor who will be a source of inspiration and support and who they will be afraid to disappoint.
3. Make sure your child values their personal purpose and develops a personal life's mission.
4. Present a spiritual-physical integrated life to prevent extremes
5. Help your child to own their successes.
6. Guide your child to structure their downtime/ free time.
7. Equilibrate instant gratifications with instant losses and instant benefits for self-control to neutralize the grip of an addiction.
8. Give your child an emergency plan for when they are faced with a Nisayon.

Do appreciate that every single Tefillah you send up on behalf of your children and the children of Klal Yisroel merits enormous heavenly protection.

Straight Talk for Parents about Internet Prevention

By Rabbi Simcha Feuerman, LCSW-R
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Many children, at some point, will use the Internet for illicit purposes. This is just a normal part of childhood mischief, as was once looking at dirty magazines. Of course, not every child did such things, but many have done so and turned out quite normal. Children are curious and naturally will have difficulty reigning in their desires, especially sexual desires which are intensely felt during adolescence. The problem is that what was once relatively harmless experimentation is now much more dangerous because of the potential dangers and the degree of exposure that the Internet poses. It may not be desirable, but it still is normal for children at some point to experiment with alcohol. Parents do not usually lock up the liquor cabinet in anticipation of this. Yet, at the same time, we wouldn't want our children experimenting with Heroin. That is the hazard of the Internet – normal mischief can quickly lead to abnormal and dangerous over exposure.

Some families are more permissive and some families less so, and it is not the place of this article to dictate values. Rather, this article will focus on what parents can do to protect children from influences and temptations that they deem harmful, although those definitions may vary from family to family. Children today access the Internet at the library, on their phones, on their friends' phones, on portable games and almost every imaginable device. The same is true in regard to movies and music that were once confined to tapes or CD's and now are easily downloaded and uploaded onto stick drives and tiny players. Don't even THINK that it is possible to keep you child from these influences IF he or she desires them. The technical savvy and ingenuity of even small children surpasses most of us adults. We are hopelessly clueless about technology that is as natural as air and water to our children.

Therefore, this article begins with the basic assumption that your child uses or can use the Internet – even if you don't think he or she will. It also takes for granted that your home has appropriate and suitable safeguards and Internet filters if you allow the Internet, and that you have family rules and policies regarding usage (if that's not the case, or if you're not sure if your safeguards are sufficient, we highly recommend "Prevention Tips for Parents" from the Guard Your Eyes organization, available for free at [this link](#)). This article will not rehash the obvious. Assuming these basic protective elements are in place, there still remain many questions, such as:

- How do we educate our children to deal with these challenges, temptations and nisyonos which they will inevitably encounter at some point, despite our best efforts to protect them?
- What areas of parenting are important for us to improve in order to help our children in these areas?
- How do we identify warning signs that a child has fallen into viewing inappropriate materials?
- What do we do if we discover a child was looking at inappropriate materials?
- How do we talk to our children about shemiras einayim and kedushas habris without overexposing them prematurely?

Helping Children Develop Critical Thinking Skills

Many of these questions can be addressed via adopting a particular approach. This approach starts with a recognition that parenting tactics built primarily on control and fear of punishment, which may have worked well in the past, are not as effective today. Many children today have more freedom and access to anything than any other generation ever dreamed of, and as we are in *ikvesa d'meshichah* we know that *chutzpah yasgey* (brazen behavior is ever increasing, see Sotah 49b.) Therefore, an important parenting strategy is to develop in each of our children the capacity for critical thinking, good judgment, self-monitoring, and the ability to resist temptation and peer pressure. Just as a vaccine inoculates a person from an illness by exposing the body to a weakened form of the disease, so too we must inoculate our children to these dangers by building their defenses and decision making skills.

Children develop these character skills when they are given opportunities to make choices and learn from their mistakes at levels that are appropriate for them. This is no different than teaching a child how to ride a bicycle. You can't keep holding the bicycle or use training wheels forever or he will never learn, but you also can't leave him alone and let him feel overwhelmed by letting him fall all the time. Instead, a parent needs to provide just the right amount of holding and just the right amount of letting go. Because, in today's times, our children will end up having many *nisyonos* that we won't even be aware of, we will need to help develop these skills as much as possible.

The process of helping our children develop self-knowledge and good judgment begins very early. Instead of just making rules and demanding compliance, parents should selectively choose areas that a child can articulate and discuss his beliefs and values. Even young children have opinions if they are treated with respect and encouraged to share them. Keep in mind that, asking your child his opinion is not ceding authority to him. As a parent, you can always assert your authority. However, it is helpful to give your child a chance to think and discuss what his beliefs and values are, so you can develop in him those necessary decision making skills that children need now more than ever before. This process of listening is what the famous psychologist Haim Ginott referred to as giving children a voice but not a vote. Parents still can have plenty of control, but the child should feel that his opinion is heard. Let's consider a number of examples:

Imagine your child comes home with a poor grade on a test. Assuming there are no bigger problems such as learning disabilities or difficulties with a teacher or a classmate, you could discipline the child by cutting back a privilege, supervising his studying more etc. Such an approach may work just fine, however there also is an opportunity for the child to develop his own ability to assess and critique his performance and formulate his own plan to correct it. You can ask what he thinks about the particular grade. You can ask him in general what are his goals, and how he would like to budget his time to achieve them. Additionally, not every child wants to get a "A", and it may not even be important for every child to excel in school. Other things in life count that do not have to do with grades, such as *middos*, quality of friendships etc. It is worthwhile to ask your child what is important to him and what his goals are. If they sound reasonable, support them. If your child is happy with getting a lesser grade, but it is an

acceptable grade, find out where he wants to excel and encourage him to pursue that. That builds a child's own abilities instead of just making him compliant.

Many parents have concerns about the kind of friends a child chooses. As children enter adolescence, they attach themselves to various peer groups as way of becoming more independent from family. This is a normal part of development. Instead of dictating your child's choice of friends, ask your child what he thinks makes a good friend or a bad friend. Ask him if he ever had a friend who he thought was a bad influence on him and what he did about it.

Questions and discussions like these are easier to have before you are in a situation where decisions are already being made and you have to step in and intervene. Each of these discussions help a child build in himself the ability to know his own values and assess his own behavior.

Specific Points About Shemiras Einayim

There is a saying that, if you want your child to do something, the best way is to make sure to get upset about it and forbid it. It is important to treat *shemiras einayim* and other aspects of Torah modesty in a calm fashion without becoming overly intense or ashamed. Discussions about how the Torah expects us to handle sexual desires should begin before a child enters adolescence, so that when the desires begin to intensify, it will not overwhelm him. While it is up to every parent to decide how much and when to discuss sexuality in general, it is a Torah obligation to teach our children about what their responsibilities are and what they must watch out for. We can't expect children to know this without being taught. Unfortunately, when children are not taught about these things, they can become prey to those who take advantage of them. It is not unheard of for an innocent adolescent being inducted into various forms of touching by other bochurim without even realizing that he is doing anything wrong.

No matter how much we shelter our children, the body matures and desires will be felt. There is a famous humorous story of chassidic young man that illustrates this point. The man had sheltered his son from seeing girls his whole life. One day in his teens, the boy saw some girls on the other side of the street and asked his father, "Tatty, what are those?" Wanting to keep his son as innocent as possible the father answered, "They aren't really much of anything – just tchatchkes." The boy replied, "I like those tchatchkes. I want one!"

Here is a sample script for what could be told to a boy around age eleven or twelve:

“As you get older, your body will begin to change. You will develop hair in your private areas and eventually begin to shave. That is a normal part of becoming an adult. Also, you may feel all kinds of confusing and strong feelings because, as your body matures, so will your emotions. For example, you could feel angry, depressed, anxious or irritable and not even know why. All this is normal as you adjust to stronger, more adult emotions.

You also may feel strong desires in your private parts. You might become more aware of how they feel or have an urge to touch them. While this is normal, the Torah has an

opinion about this. That part of our body has a special purpose for when a person gets married. As your body matures, that part of your body begins to develop and have feelings that are meant for adults who are married. Some of those feelings are very strong, and that is because this special purpose is very important. However, the Torah wants us to avoid focusing and paying attention to that part of our body until we get married. So, as much as possible, try to avoid touching there, except when you need to. [At this point some of the halachos can be explained.]

You may also become fascinated and interested in looking at girls. This also is part of your body and mind becoming ready for adult married life. But since you are not married yet, the Torah wants you to try to avoid this. Aside from your sister or mother, the Torah requires one to avoid staring at women, especially those who are not dressed modestly. You will see that sometimes this will feel hard to do, but the Torah expects us to try as much as we can.”

For parents who feel their child should not be taught about sexuality at such a young age, the discussion above can be conducted without being sexually explicit. As the reader can see, it is a discussion about Torah requirements and not sexuality. Still, other parents may want to tell their children more about the facts of life, and that can be worked into the conversation as well. These discussions are not one time events. Rather, they should happen every few months as the opportunity arises. Often times, various topics in Torah learning ranging from the parsha to a particular Gemara that the child is learning can be a natural segue into this discussion.

Warning Signs

If a child's behavior changes suddenly, such as he becomes more secretive, irritable, or has a significant decline in grades, this may be a sign that something is wrong. It is important to ask your child if he is having a problem or challenge that is affecting his behavior. You may want to ask if it is about something that he finds difficult or embarrassing to talk about and reassure him that you will be accepting and supportive. This may be a time to be more explicit about sexuality so you can develop a common vocabulary to troubleshoot any suspected problems. Is your child being exposed to something harmful? Is he part of a bad chevrah? Is someone taking advantage of him? He may not feel comfortable talking about these things if he does not feel accepted by you and safe. Part of making him feel safe is to discuss sexuality and discuss some of the common challenges people experience so he feels normal and knows that you are not going to be shocked by what he reveals.

Many of these difficulties remain a normal part of growing up, and parents can be very helpful by offering love, support and guidance without getting overly tense, anxious or punitive. While the Internet definitely poses new challenges in the degree of exposure, human beings have not changed and boys will be boys. Keeping a good relationship with your child is the key to helping him weather the storms of adolescence. A good relationship is built on respect, careful empathic listening, and support. While discipline is sometimes necessary, it works much better when there is a strong relationship. And often when there is a strong relationship, you can help your child develop his own skills to discipline himself which, at times in his life, will be the only protection he has.

A Pound of Prevention – Are We Ready?¹

**Bentzion Sorotzkin, Psy.D.
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The Internet

Much has been written in the Orthodox press regarding Internet addiction, especially in regards to pornography. Many horror stories have been recounted of apparently well adjusted teens who, after a chance encounter with Internet pornography, became swept up in its web and developed serious emotional and/or behavioral problems as a result. It is often stated or implied that the majority of teens who have “gone off the *derech*” have done so primarily as a result of exposure to the Internet.

The perception that is most common among the general population is that there aren’t any individual variables that would make some people more vulnerable to the allure of the Internet than others. The danger is deemed to be so great that the only defense is totally banning the Internet.

This perception is consciously cultivated by activists. Although some prominent *mechamchim* have suggested that, in addition to the efforts to limit exposure to the Internet, we should also consider dangers from within – i.e., factors in children’s home life and developing personality that could make them more susceptible to the temptation of the Internet, their opinions have been withheld from the community. These suggestions were viewed by some in the community as threatening the campaign to totally ban the computer from *frum* life. It was felt that acknowledging the existence of dangers emanating from within would dilute the fear from the dangers lurking without.

The dangers within

A number of years ago, a prominent *frum* publication asked a noted *mechanech* to write an article highlighting the dangers of the Internet. This *mechanech* spent a great deal of time researching the issue. He then wrote an article based on his research. After methodically documenting all the dangers associated with the Internet, he noted under the heading of “*The necessity of identifying risk factors*” that:

Ultimately, restricting Internet access is a **necessary but insufficient** solution.... What is needed is healing the personality weaknesses that virtually guarantee some individuals will fall victim to Internet temptations. **Studies show that those most likely to get into trouble are not deterred by limits on Internet access...** Therefore, a key challenge to parents and educators is identifying the risk factors... Researchers describe **four pre-existing conditions that put an individual at high risk for getting into trouble on the**

¹ I would like to thank my son R’ Eliyohu Meir for his considerable contribution to this article.

Internet. They are lack of family bonds; low self-esteem; inability to express opinions and questions; and inability to socialize. [Emphasis added]

When the article was printed, this section on “*The necessity of identifying risk factors*” was deliberately deleted.

There are two motivations for this type of “selective reporting.” The first is the belief that the danger is truly all from the outside. This leads to the fear of any discussions of other factors as a “distraction” from the real issue. The other is that, because we can all agree that the Internet often decreases the *kedusha* and other positive aspects of a Jewish home, there is no reason not to relate to it with unmitigated condemnation. Horror stories about children going off the *derech* etc. certainly give parents pause. What harm is there in using “scare tactics,” even if this sometimes distorts some of the facts (e.g., minimizing the difficulties someone experienced before exposure to the Internet), for the good cause of increasing *kedusha* in Jewish homes.

Before discussing these two points, I would like to set the parameters for this paper. There are two recognized problems with the Internet. One is the free access it gives to a world that often has values antithetical to our own. This essay is not addressing this problem. My area of expertise lies in the field of mental health. I will only be addressing the belief that the Internet is the **direct cause** of serious emotional and behavioral disorders, rejection of a *frum* lifestyle and the destruction of lives and marriages, and that it is indiscriminate in its choice of victims.

There are many who truly believe that the primary cause of such community ills as “kids at risk” is the deleterious influence of the outside culture. The obvious question is: If exposure to the outside culture is the primary culprit, why are there just as many rebellious teens in the very insular communities as there are in the more “modern” ones with their significantly higher level of exposure to the media? I have addressed this question to many of the proponents of the “danger is all from the outside” approach and have never received a reasonable explanation.

I think that this belief reflects the need of some people to externalize the blame for the difficulties many of our youngsters face onto external factors rather than to honestly face the reality of what some children face in their own homes.

I will now address the “no harm done” argument. Although the rejection of the indisputably corrupting influence of the secular media is an admirable cause, there is, in fact, a tremendous harm that is inflicted on the community by these distortions. The mistaken impression a reader of the printed version of the above mentioned article would be left with, for example, is that the danger is totally external, and that the **only** defense is protection from the outside world. Is it any wonder that parents who are very careful to protect their children from the outside environment, but put substantially less emphasis on developing emotionally healthy relationships with their children are then shocked when their child goes “off the *derech*” *r”l*. Because they did everything that they were told to do in order to avoid such tragedies, to no avail, the only possible conclusion is that “it can happen to anybody.” In their minds, therefore, there is nothing one can do to reduce the risk other than to protect their family from **external** influences.

The importance of attending to “internal” factors is emphasized in a *sefer* on *chimuch* written by a prominent *mechanech* in Bnei Brak where he breaks the pattern of denial and spells out the painful truth clearly [free translation]:

The *mechanchim* who deal with at-risk youngsters report that **all** of the youngsters who dropped out did so **only** because they received insufficient love and respect at home. Not even one of these youngsters claims that that he dropped out because of complaints *ch”v* against *Hashem* or against the Torah... **A child who receives sufficient love and acceptance at home will never go off the derech** [emphasis added].²

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach has been quoted as saying that in the majority of cases mistakes made by the parents are a major factor in causing youngsters to rebel.³

A changing world

This discussion has been going on for a number of years. I wrote this paper not, primarily, as a restatement of opinions, but as a call to recognize the decreasing relevance of the discussion in today’s environment. The Internet has sunk to a level that even the secular community finds alarming, while at the same time pervading most aspects of everyday life. It has become increasingly clear that simply banning the Internet has, for the most part, not been an effective approach.⁴ Rabbi Dr. A. J. Twerski has stated: “The effort to stop this plague by outlawing computers and Internet is unfortunately futile ...every day, more of our daily actions become dependent on the Internet.”

More recently, the use of Internet filters has been promoted. However, filters are mostly effective in blocking accidental pop-ups. As Dr. Twerski notes: “Filters are of limited value for the person who is addicted, one can find ways to circumvent the filters.”

The fact is, the Internet has become ubiquitous, unfortunately even in the *frum* world. Most modern pocket devices, from phones to games, can access the Internet. Everybody knows at least a few people with Internet access, and, if not, it’s as close as the local library. The only

² חינוך מלכותי: מאמרי חינוך להורים ומחנכים מאת הרב מרדכי הומינר, בני ברק, תשס”ד – עמ’ כט’ – ומדווחים המחנכים שמטפלים בנערים נושרים שכל הנערים מדווחים שסיבת נשירתם היא שנהגו בהם במשטר קשה ובחוסר כבוד ואהבה. עמ’ לו-לז’ - ...כל הנערים שנשרו נשרו אך ורק מפני שלא קבלו אהבה בבית. אף אחד מהנערים הללו לא טוען שהוא עזב בגלל שיש לו טענות ח”ו כלפי הקב”ה או התורה. חוסר אהבה בבית הוא המתכון והסיבה לנשירה מהמסגרת ומהחינוך ולירידה מהדרך. ילד שמקבל אהבה בבית אף פעם לא יפרוש ולא ירד מהדרך. עמ’ לו’ – הורים המשתדלים להראות לילדיהם גמישות ורכות במה שניתן ואפשרי ולא מתעקשים על כל דבר קטן, ילדיהם יישארו קשורים אליהם גם בעתיד... הורים ומחנכים חכמים יודעים שאפשר ואפשר שתהייה משמעת גם בלי ענישה ובלי צעקות וכעסים אלא על ידי יחסי חברות וידידות שעל ידי כך התלמידים יסכימו לקבל את דבריהם.

³ משפחה: משה גרילק, “זוית ראייה” – ג’ בשבט תשס”ח (עמ’ 14-15) – העיר פעם מרן הגרש”ז אויערבך זצ”ל שבניגוד לדעה שהושמעה פה [במאמר בשבועון], ברוב המקרים [של נערים נושרים] ההורים אשמים. אגב, הכתוב מסייעו. שכן נאמר אצל בת כהן שזינתה ששורפים אותה בפתח בית אביה, ואומר על כך רש”י: “ראו גידולים שגידלתם”. משמע – האב אשם. תמה באוזנו צורבא מדרבנן מכובד שזה פשוט לא מובן. אם היה קורה אסון שכזה לאחד מגדולי הדורות האחרונים, למשל, האם נוכל לומר שהוא אשם? נכון, ענינו לו, אנחנו בוודאי שלא. אולם מה לעשות, בתורה כתוב שכן. אז ככל הנראה יש איזו אשמה.

⁴ הגר”ג אדלשטיין: “צריך להאזיב את התורה על הבחורים, ומתוך כך יתרחקו מכל הדברים האחרים”, אמר מרן הגר”ג אדלשטיין... בעת ביקורו של הגאון רבי ברוך מרדכי אורחי בביתו... שאל הגר”ג מ לגבי מכשירים בעיתיים שנאסרו על ידי גדולי ישראל. מרן הגר”ג התבטא בנושא: “צריך לבנות את הבחורים מבפנים, לא מבחוץ”, כשכוונתו לומר במקום לאיים ולהעניש מוטב להאזיב את התורה על לומדיה. “כשבחור יש לו סיפוק מלימוד, הוא לא מחפש את הסיפוק שלו מדברים אחרים...” [משפחה – החדשות כד’ בניסן תשע”א עמ’ 14].

way to ensure that our children have no exposure to the Internet is to hermetically seal them from the rest of the world by totally monitoring and controlling all their activities. Aside from the obvious impracticality of such an approach, there is also a little-appreciated risk in undertaking these efforts even when seemingly successful. This issue has been highlighted in researching the effectiveness of parental monitoring. In recent years there been public service ads (“Parents, the anti-drug”) encouraging parents to “monitor” their teenage children. Parents are instructed to insist on knowing where their children are going and with whom even if they need to ask in a confrontational manner. This advice is based on research that shows that teens whose parents know who their friends are and where they hang out are less likely to be on drugs.

I was always baffled by these public service messages, as clinical experience has shown that being overly controlling of children (and especially teens) and questioning them in a provocative manner is usually what undermines the parent-child relationship and **drives** them to rebellious and dangerous behaviors. I decided to review the research literature myself.

I discovered that the conventional wisdom related to monitoring has long ago been refuted in a series of studies by Kerr and Stattin.⁵ These authors reviewed the many studies cited to support monitoring and were surprised to discover that the studies did no such thing. The teens in those studies were asked **if** their parents knew where they went in the evening and who their friends were, etc. They were not asked **how** their parents knew! It was simply **assumed** that the parents must have found out by questioning their children or by snooping. In their own studies Kerr and Stattin did ask this question. They discovered that a positive correlation with better adolescent adjustment existed only when the teens volunteered the information to their parents (reflecting a positive relationship with their parents). In contrast, when parents had to relentlessly question their reluctant children or “snoop” to get the information, thereby making the children feel controlled, there was an association to poor adjustment! While no one has refuted Kerr and Stattin’s findings, the government continues to run these misleading ads, encouraging parents to take a course of action that is more likely to exacerbate than to solve the problem they are trying to resolve.⁶ (This doesn’t mean that parents shouldn’t monitor their children. It only means that they have to develop the sensitivity to do it in a manner that won’t backfire.)

If the whole problem is from the outside, the only defense is isolation and we have seen that this is practically impossible. As such, this approach leaves us hopeless. In a discussion about how to deal with the problem, this argument no longer plays a role.⁷ The concern that, although speaking about other factors may be important, it is too dangerous because this will compromise the movement to completely expel the Internet from our community is also no longer so tenable, as that battle does not seem to be faring well regardless of its merits.

⁵ E.g., Kerr, M., & Stattin, H. (2000). What parents know, how they know it, and several forms of adolescent adjustment: Further support for a reinterpretation of monitoring. *Developmental Psychology*, 36, 366-380.

⁶ “Monitoring... is accomplished as part of a proactive parenting style that anticipates children’s needs. A far less preferred means employed by parents to supervise teens is the use of control, the manipulation of the child by making the child feel guilty or responsible for how the parent feels. [This] has been associated with a child’s negative emotional growth...” Ungar, M. (2004). The importance of parents and other caregivers to the resilience of high-risk adolescents. *Family Process*, 43, p. 26.

⁷ ראה דברי הגר"ח מוואלוז'ין על "אין לנו להשען אלא על אבינו שבשמים" (מובא בפנינים משלחן גבוה פ"ר ראה טו:יח).

The imperative to attend to internal factors

Perhaps the time has come when we can no longer comfortably blame “the street” as the sole cause of all our ills. It has become imperative that we give serious consideration to understanding what contributes to people’s vulnerability to the allure of the Internet and other *yetzer horahs*. This understanding, as difficult and painful as it might be for individuals and the community, will help us deal with the problem.

Services have been developed in our community to help people overcome Internet addiction. Prominent among these efforts is the website “Guard Your Eyes.” However, it is obvious that prevention is much preferable to cure.

Prevention measures

Dr. Twerski has suggested that: “The only effective antidote... is developing a genuine sense of *kedushah*” providing some suggestions for achieving this important goal. I would only add that the increasing reliance on induced competitiveness in many schools to promote higher achievement almost guarantees that the learning and davening resulting from these efforts will not lead to increased *kedushah*. (I have discussed at length why contemporary contests are not what *chazal* had in mind when they state; “*kinas sofrim tarbeh chochmah*” in an article titled “The unintended consequences of competition and rewards in educational settings”).

In building up resistance to the allure of contemporary “culture” it is imperative - in addition to increasing a sense of *kedushah* - to also attend to the emotional wellbeing of families and children. Many people are unaware of the considerable role emotional distress plays in increasing vulnerability to the wiles of the *yetzer horah*.

Psychological factors in Internet addiction⁸

Some may protest the above title. “Why do we need to look for psychological explanation?” they protest. There is a simple explanation. It’s called *taivah* (lust) and *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). Looking for psychological explanations, they assert, merely serves as an **excuse** to act out.

Perhaps we can address this legitimate concern with the following example. If a *frum* person occasionally transgresses the prohibition against *lashon hara* (slandering speech) we can indeed attribute this to the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination). The appropriate treatment would be learning *mussar*. What about someone who incessantly speaks *lashon hara* without a break? How likely is that to be purely an expression of an over-active *yetzer hara*? It is far more likely to be a result of a deep sense of inferiority which often induces a need to put other people down in a desperate attempt to bolster one’s self-image.⁹ If this person tries to deal with the problem just by learning *mussar*, without the guidance of a *rebbe muvhok* who really knows him well, it will

⁸ A lengthier version of some the following sections was published in “Mental Health in the Religiously Observant Population” – Nefesh Israel, 2011, pp. 82-97.

⁹ Similarly, Rav Dessler asserts that *gaavah* (hubris) is often a reaction to feelings of inferiority (*Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 5, p. 33).

likely just make his problem worse, since it would further depress his self-image thus increasing his impulse to speak *lashon hara*. Psychological help is needed to repair the inferiority complex that is feeding the excessive need to put others down. Only then can he deal with the “normal” *yetzer horah* for speaking *lashon hara* via *mussar*.

The same is true of *kedusha* issues. There are certainly the normal *taivah* impulses that necessitate the learning of *mussar* and minimizing exposure to temptations such as the Internet in order to control these impulses. But there are often psychological factors that cause the problem to reach levels way beyond the bounds of normal *taivah* (see Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichos Musser, Siman 55*). In such a situation, it is often imperative to first use psychological means to deal with these extraordinary impulses to bring them down to normal levels where they can be effectively addressed via *mussar*.

Rav Henoch Lebowitz has highlighted the importance of attending to emotional factors in helping youngsters deal with *kedusha* issues. For example he advises *mechanchim* discussing these issues with *talmidim* to express understanding of all the factors – internal and external – that could make it very difficult not to succumb to temptation.¹⁰ He also emphasizes that inducing fear would most likely make the problem worse.¹¹

In a report on a Nefesh sponsored workshop on “Understanding Internet Addiction” Dr. Rachel Sarna cites similar comments made by leading experts in the field:

While it may appear that addictions are pleasure-seeking behaviors, the roots of any addiction are usually traceable to suppression and avoidance of some kind of emotional pain. Addiction... is a way to escape from [a] reality... too full of sadness... or too devoid of joy. **Emotional trauma in early life may be the source of most addictions.** Everyone is [potentially] at risk... However, people who suffer from low self esteem, distorted body image and... ADHD are even at greater risk than others. [p.14, emphasis added]¹²

The frustrated emotional need of a vulnerable person can hijack his normal sexual drive in a desperate attempt to assuage his pain. The fact that the acting out involves his normal instinctual need can fool people into thinking that it is simply an exaggeration of a normal drive. This is why well meaning advisors will often push marriage as a cure for sexual acting out. The many married men with this problem provide irrefutable evidence that the intimate relationship of a loving couple bears only the most superficial resemblance to the acting out behavior and, therefore, this “cure” is doomed to failure.

¹⁰ Chidushei Halev Noso 5:10.

¹¹ **חידושי הלב (רבי חנוך הענאך לייבאוויטש) נשא ה'יח:** הורו לנו כאן חז"ל את הדרך להנצל מהרהורים, שהרי לא הזהירו לכהן [הפורע את ראש הסוטה] שלא להרהר, וגם לא הדגישו לו את חומר החטא. והיינו משום שלא זו הדרך למנוע הרהורים רעים. שהנה אין בידו של האדם לשלוט על מחשבותיו... ואדרבה, הדאגה שהוא דואג שלא ירהר עלולה להזכיר לו את הדבר שאינו רוצה להרהר אחריו, ותגרום שדוקא הרהורים אלו יפלו במחשבתו. [והוא מביא שכן כתב רבי ישראל סלנטר]. גם היראה שמא יכשל בעבירה מולידה מתח ולחץ, וידוע שמתח ולחץ מגדילים את התאוה להרהר ולהוציא ז"ל....

¹² In the Shadow of the Net: Understanding Internet Addiction and Problematic Online Sexual Behavior. *Nefesh News*, November 2005, pp. 1 & 14.

Developmental factors

What are the early emotional traumas that may make it more likely for someone to develop an addiction to sexual acting out? There are many different possibilities, of course, but the following is a small sampling. A young child in an emotionally supportive home, when dealing with frustration, anxiety, alarm, fear, or dread will feel comfortable turning to his parents for comfort and support. They will protect, reassure, soothe and guide him, thus teaching him by their reactions that; 1) The world is not such a frightening place; 2) Most problems have solutions; 3) Sharing problems with others makes problems easier to deal with. The child will have been **soothed by his parents** and will learn that comfort is achieved in an interpersonal venue.

In a less emotionally supportive home, parents are sometimes the **source** of the pressure the child is experiencing and, even if the pressure is from external sources, the child doesn't feel comfortable sharing the problem with his parents. Since he cannot address the problem interpersonally he seeks **solitary** solutions for **self-soothing** which often involve acting out in a sexual manner. Besides the release experienced via the pleasurable experience itself, there is the additional benefit that he is not dependent on (unreliable) others for relief.

Later in life, even if the person's life becomes more manageable (perhaps as the result of therapy), there is still a feeling that without constant vigilance things will go bad again, so there is often chronic "low voltage" stress which provokes the old "solitary solution." For example, someone who has been hyper-sensitized by chronic emotional abuse early in life may feel pressure to be extra nice to his wife to ensure that she does the same for him since he cannot tolerate even mild criticism. This person may, in fact, have a good marriage with no discernable stress, but the effort to avoid the slightest bit of disharmony (rather than communicating openly and calmly about differences) can exact a tremendous emotional toll. The habituated response to this chronic strain may very well be **solitary self-soothing**.

The emotional functions of sexual acting out

In my clinical experience, I have found another factor that often serves to maintain the overwhelming impulse to act out sexually. Someone who has been emotionally deprived, severely criticized and/or abused throughout his childhood will often feel that he is not deserving of pleasure. When he attempts to partake in a pleasurable experience, feelings of guilt will cancel out the pleasure. Only the intense sensations involved in sexual acting out can override the inhibitions to pleasure. This causes the child to become interested in sexuality prematurely and eventually this can lead to a sexual addiction.

Children who have been sexually molested are saddled with two factors that promote sexual acting out. The emotional trauma they endured creates a strong need to escape into fantasy laden activities while their premature "sexualization" makes it likely that they will escape into sexual fantasy.

Pornography

Pornography, on a superficial level, simply serves the purpose of ensuring a more intense, momentarily self-soothing, physical experience. However, there often seems to be another level of emotional need being addressed.

A lack of affectionate intimacy in childhood often results in a frustrated need for intimacy without the tools to achieve it in a healthy way. (Like someone who did not get sufficient attention as a child, who now needs intense attention that can only be achieved by acting immaturely). This is often the appeal of pornography. In ordinary circumstances a person wouldn't see someone else unclothed unless they had an intimate relationship. Therefore, seeing someone unclothed via pornography creates the **illusion** of intimacy.

Dr. Heinz Kohut, an eminent psychoanalyst, elaborated on some of the emotional issues addressed by pornography and voyeurism:

Behind the enormous attraction of pornography which channels these feelings [of voyeuristic preoccupation]... were children who were contact hungry, were not cuddled or held enough... [and the] enjoyment of the interplay between mother and child – seeing and looking – was missing.... The voyeuristic issues come up in individuals who have felt deeply deprived in this more comprehensive interaction with others.... [The visual contact] becomes the carrier of what should have been... skin contact, voice contact, and all other avenues of pleasure.¹³

After acting out, there is usually a double disappointment: First there is the guilt and shame over the act itself. Then there is the painful disappointment that the hoped-for emotional comfort (i.e., the illusion beyond the pleasure – as described above) was not achieved beyond the momentary illusion. It is like when a failed dieter eats cake to alleviate loneliness. The loneliness is alleviated for only a few moments while the shame and feeling of failure linger on. One wonders why the inevitable disappointment doesn't eventually undermine the illusion. I believe there are a few possible explanations.

Firstly, as Rav Dessler explains,¹⁴ *Hashem* gave the *yetzer horah* the power to create illusions that resist the lessons of experience. Otherwise, it would be virtually powerless. When faced with an acute or chronic frustration of a basic need (such as the need for intimacy, attention, acceptance, etc.) the power of the illusion intensifies in proportion to the frustration. One finds this with a person dying of thirst in a desert who imagines seeing an oasis up ahead.

Secondly, there is a little bit of truth in every illusion. When one is desperate this little bit becomes enormously appealing. For example, a shipwreck survivor on a raft in the ocean who, after days of unbearable thirst, will finally break down and drink the ocean salt water even though he resisted it for days because he knows it will kill him. Nonetheless, since it contains the illusion of water, at some point it feels like it's worth it to get that temporary relief.

¹³ H. Kohut, 1987, *The Kohut Seminars on Self Psychology and Psychotherapy with Adolescents and Young Adults*, ed. M. Elson. NY: Norton, pp. 168-169.

¹⁴ *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, p. 99 (ראה גם חכמה ומוסר ח"א סי' ר"י).

Likewise, someone desperate for intimacy may feel that the illusion of intimacy is all he can hope to get and that may be better than nothing.

Other factors that enhance the illusion

There is often another factor that makes it especially difficult to control these impulses by some people. Those who grew up in homes that were especially harsh and punitive were often led to feel that the Torah's limitations on sexual expression exist for the sole purpose of depriving them of pleasure. No one has attempted to explain to them that it is for the person's own benefit, even in this world.¹⁵ When a person experiences multiple emotional deprivations in his life, this additional perceived deprivation can seem intolerable, thereby enhancing the appeal of the illusion.

The association between acting out and "emunah issues"

Chazal speak about the association between sexual acting out and *emunah* issues (e.g., Sanhedrin 63b). I would like to briefly touch upon a psychological aspect of this association that I have encountered in my clinical work. A *frum* person who is acting out sexually (or in any other serious manner) will experience intense guilt and profound shame. He will see himself as worthless and deserving of severe punishment, especially if his parents responded to his childhood misbehaviors with intense criticism and/or rejection. This will drive him to intensify his efforts at controlling his behavior. Unfortunately, these efforts will most often turn out to be ineffective since the effort involves suppression due to terror as opposed to change resulting from growth.¹⁶ The failure to change intensifies the self-loathing and terror of retribution. At some point the person will develop a strong resentment toward *Hashem/Yiddishkeit* for putting him into this untenable situation and so he becomes alienated from *Yiddishkeit*. Or as one young man put it: "It's not that you don't believe in G-D, it's just that you don't want anything to do with Him. Just like I don't want anything to do with my [abusive] father even though I'm well aware that he exists!"

Family relationships: The primary source of inoculation against outside influences

Rav Shach has emphasized the role of the parents-child relationship in helping children resist the temptation of outside negative influences.

ספר "אורחות הבית", (הרב אשר ברגמן - תשס"ה, עובדות וכו' ממרן הגרא"מ שך) עמ' ריג' – ספר רבינו כי אחד מתפקידיהם היותר נכבדים של האב והאם – הינו להעניק לבניהם בית חם ואוהב, סביבה תומכת, וזאת על מנת שבסיס זה יאפשר להם למצוא בתוכם פנימה את הכוחות הנדרשים לשם ההתעלות וההתגברות על המפריעים השונים. הורים אשר אינם עושים כן - ה' רבינו אומר - הרי הם גורמים בידיים לאבד את נפשם של בניהם ובנותיהם, אם לא בטוהה הקרוב - הרי שבשלב מאוחר יותר.... ובעמ' ריד'-רטו' - כאשר נשאל על ידי אחד ממקורביו מה כדאי ללמד את בנו בן שנתיים, לאחר שלימדוהו כבר את אותיות הא'-ב' – נענה רבינו והשיב: "אין ללמד אותו מאומה!! מספיק מה שמלמדים

¹⁵ See the *sefer, Mishkan Yisroel (Yerushalayim, 5764)* and *Marital Intimacy*, Rabbi A. P. Friedman (Compass Books, 2005) where this point is elaborated upon.

¹⁶ See *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, p. 235 where he compares the repression of a strong impulse to pressing on a spring where the harder you press the stronger it presses back. As a means of avoiding this problem, Rav Chaim Friedlander suggests that when working on *shmiras einayim* one should frame the task in the positive rather than in the negative (see *Sifsei Chaim, Moadim 1*, p. 25).

בחיידר!! על ההורים מוטל רק להעניק לילדם הרבה חום ואהבה – עם דוגמא אישית...." – סיכם רבינו, וחזר שוב:
 "היום – מפחדים לתת לילדים אהבה, ואין מבינים כי זהו הדבר החשוב ביותר לחינוך הילדים: להעניק להם הרבה חום
 ואהבה!!!"...

Rav Shach - One of the most important tasks of parents is to provide their children a warm, loving and emotionally supportive home. With this foundation children are able to develop the internal fortitude to resist outside negative influences. Parents who do not do this are destroying, with their own hands, the soul of their children.... Today, parents are afraid of giving children love. They don't understand that this is the most important factor in being *mechanech* children; to provide them with a lot of warmth and love!!

In conclusion

There is a long-standing argument whether it is advisable to discuss all the background factors that create vulnerability to Internet addiction, given that this might lead to a perceived acceptance of the Internet, threatening the ideal – the complete rejection of the Internet by our community. However, that battle seems to have been lost, as Internet access spreads to every electronic device and to a significant percentage of Orthodox homes. The time has come to look beyond the unidimensional ounce of prevention of fighting Internet use, incorporating that into a comprehensive “pound of prevention.” We must recognize that to be successful in overcoming addictions to sexual acting out, it is important to understand the psychological factors that can transform a “normal” *yetzer hara* into an addiction.¹⁷ Even more important is the role such an understanding could play in prevention. When children are raised to be emotionally healthy they are spared from dealing with *yetzer haras* beyond the normal range. It is imperative that in our justified zeal to protect our children from outside influences we should be careful not to ignore what is happening in the “inside.” To illustrate this point I would like to share with the reader the following incident related to me by a patient:

This patient and his wife unfortunately had terrible *sholom bayis*. His children had been witness to countless vicious parental arguments. One day his son's principal called him to a meeting after a DVD of a PG 13 movie was found in his son's briefcase. The principal, who was well aware of the dreadful home situation, tried to impress on the father the serious negative consequences that exposure to this material can have on a child's mind. The father responded: “I am much more concerned with the impact of what he sees at home than with what he sees in a movie!”

¹⁷ See *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, p. 262, and *Matnas Chaim* (Rav Matisyohu Salomon), *Maamorim*, Vol. 1, p. 229, on the importance of understanding the underlying vulnerabilities when fighting the *yetzer hara*.

“You Shall Be Holy”

By Rabbi / Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

Hashem instructs Moshe to tell the Children of Israel, "*Kedoshim tihiyu*, you shall be holy," but does not specify what one must do to be holy. Rashi says that this means one must abstain from immoral behavior. Ramban says that it means one should restrain oneself from indulging in permissible pleasures. His famous statement is that a person might be a *naval bereshus haTorah*, a degenerate person who is technically observant of all 613 mitzvos. Today we can realize that these two interpretations are one and the same.

The *frum* community is being swept by an epidemic - yes, a plague of addiction to internet pornography. As the Talmud says, when a plague occurs, it does not discriminate between *tzaddikim* and *reshaim* (Bava Kama 60a). This is afflicting men and women of all ages, some of whom appear to be stellar in Torah and Yiddishkeit!

Satan is waging a ferocious battle, and it is claiming victims. Some *bachurim* are drifting away from Yiddishkeit, publicly and privately. They know that what they are doing is an abomination to Hashem, but because they cannot control themselves, they feel they have lost their connection with Hashem. Their *davening* and learning suffers, and even Shabbos observance is affected. Wives feel they have been betrayed, and marriages are ruined, with the children being innocent victims.

The effort to stop this plague by outlawing computers and internet is unfortunately futile. Every day, more of our daily actions become dependent on the internet. It is predicted that check writing will become extinct and all transactions will take place on-line.

Filters are the first line of defense, but essentially they are a defense to avoid accidental pop-ups. This is important, because if an indecent picture pops up and one does not *immediately* turn it off, one can be in trouble. Some people can become "hooked" by a single exposure of just several seconds.

Unfortunately, filters are of limited value for the person who is addicted. One can find ways to circumvent the filters.

I may sound naive, but I believe the only truly effective antidote to this terrible plague is developing a genuine sense of *kedushah*. A person would not think of taking a *siddur* or *chumash* into the bathroom. Yet, when one looks at pornography, one is doing much worse. *One is taking one's neshamah, which is part of Hashem Himself, and dragging into the pits of disgusting filth!* I believe that if a person had a true feeling of personal *kedushah*, one would be loath to defile it.

Meticulously observing Shabbos, eating only glatt kosher, pas Yisrael and chalav Yisrael, as important as they may be, is not enough to gain a feeling of *kedushah*. Ramban said it well. One

can observe Shabbos, eat only glatt kosher, pas Yisrael and chalav Yisrael, be an *olam hazehnik* and devoid of *kedushah*.

Rashi and Ramban do not disagree. The only way to avoid immorality is to develop a feeling of *kedushah*, which is not achieved when we are indulgent in permissible gratifications.

Kedoshim tihyu is a Scriptural mitzvah, and its proper fulfillment is literally life-saving.

There are few therapists that deal with pornography addiction. The website guardureyes.com is a most valuable resource for help, providing *chizuk*, education and anonymous support groups. Countless people have been helped by this website.

There must be a dedicated effort at developing *kedushah*, in the home, shuls, yeshivos and girls schools. The study of *mussar* and *Chassidic* writings should be a profound emotional rather than an intellectual experience. Parents and teachers must realize that they must model *kedushah* in their lives, because only this way will our young people adopt it in their lives.

I am not an alarmist, but I must say that we are at a crisis, and we must make heroic efforts to avoid disintegration of our families.

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ONLINE DANGERS AND TORAH RESPONSES

Lawrence Kelemen*

Roshei yeshiva often discourage *talmidim* from “going into town” – to protect them from distractions and corrosive elements – and the same advice applies when it comes to the web. Without doubt, the safest strategy is to avoid the place entirely.

This is the approach our *gadolim* took with television. On erev Rosh Chodesh Nissan, 5735, Rav Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky, Elazar Menachem Man Shach, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky זכרונם לברכה, issued a joint letter against television, and in the years since then television has been effectively banished from the homes of *Bnei Torah*. With television, this was the obvious solution since it was not only noxious but unnecessary.

The internet has a more complex profile since it has become so central to modern business, medicine, research, etc. While our *gadolim* have banned recreational internet use, they have also permitted going online for business purposes, and this leaves the technology in place – in our Palm Pilots and cell-phones, in our office computer systems, and perhaps also in computers used for home-based businesses. We are still vulnerable.

Software filters can add another layer of protection between us and the slums, but to our chagrin we have discovered that they can be disabled by a clever teenager or an adult in the grips of the *yetzer*. Even when they are operating properly, researchers estimate that the best filters still permit through about a fifth of the filth¹, and it takes very little *tumah* to destroy a lot of hard-earned *kedushah*. Hardware patches are more difficult to disable, but they invariably degrade the computer’s ability to access many harmless websites, making them impractical for most businesses.

The Vaccination

Baruch Hashem, unlike our neighbors in the secular world, we are not confused. We recognize the danger; we see the inadequacy of partial protection; and we know what needs to be done. We possess a vaccination. “*Barati yetzer harah, barati lo Torah tavlin* – I [Hashem] created the *yetzer harah*, and I created Torah as the antidote.”² Just as those who clung to the Tree of Life survived the *yetzer*’s attacks over the last 3,300 years, so too will we survive the era of the internet by learning *and living* Torah. The *Messilas Yesharim* warns, “It is obvious that if the Creator only created this cure [Torah] for that disease [*yetzer harah*], one can only recover by taking the prescribed medicine; and one who thinks he can survive without this prescription is mistaken and will ultimately recognize his error when his sin kills

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him.”³ If we can identify those aspects of our lives that have strayed from the Torah ideal, we can medicate appropriately.

Identifying the Risk Factors

Researchers describe four pre-existing conditions that put an individual at risk for getting into trouble on the internet.⁴ Not surprisingly, the Torah long ago commanded us to patch these four vulnerabilities.

1. Lack of Family Bonds

Both for adults and children, the most statistically significant risk factor for internet use is weak familial connections.

The data indicate that adults are at risk when they are unmarried or emotionally distant from their spouse. Anything we do to strengthen our marriages – from spending more time together as husbands and wives, to taking *chizuk* courses in the *halachos* and *hashkofos* of marriage – makes us less vulnerable to the internet.

The data also indicate that children are at risk when they are physically separated or emotionally distant from their parents. Anything we do to strengthen our relationships with our children – from spending more one-on-one time with them, to taking *chizuk* courses in the *halachos* and *hashkofos* of *chinuch* – makes them less vulnerable to the internet.

For many years, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe שליט"א has been telling us that our children need our love, and when we are not present to provide it, they will find dangerous replacements elsewhere.⁵ Having received such guidance, we were not shocked when the director of computer-addiction services at McLean Hospital of Harvard Medical School, Maressa Hecht Orzack, recently revealed her finding that the children most vulnerable to the internet’s magnetic pull are “from families where nobody is at home to relate to after school.” Greeting our children when they arrive home from school, being there to send them off again in the morning, and spending quality time with them in between all constitute inoculations against the internet.

2. Low Self-Esteem

Architects of the European *haskalah* attempted (and to a large degree succeeded) persuading the masses that man was nothing more than a sophisticated monkey. When the Alter of Slobodka זצ"ל was preparing to found his yeshiva, he asked Rav Yisroel Salanter זצ"ל what principle should guide the institution, and Rav Yisroel – acutely aware of the heretical campaign being conducted all around him – answered with a verse from Yeshaya, “Revive the spirit of the lowly and resuscitate the heart of those who have been crushed.”⁶ If we think we are apes, we will behave as such; and if we know we are more exalted than the angels, we will live up to that reality.

We are not surprised that study after study reveals that those who are most attracted to the most degraded internet sites also have the lowest self-esteem.⁷ Filth is only repugnant to someone who feels clean.

Today's parents, teachers, *rabbanim* and *mashgichim* who have experimented with the Alter's ancient approach – teaching *gadlus ha-Adam*, the essential greatness of being human – have experienced tremendous success. We can teach this not only through what we say, but through how we say it, and how we daven, learn, walk, eat, and dress. Every fiber of our existence can declare, “I am a *mensch* – and so are you!” We must also be careful not to degrade others even when we need to rebuke them. Perhaps never before have we had so much to lose should we abandon the Torah and mussar of our forebears.

3. Inability to Express Opinions and Questions

Because of its perceived anonymity, the world of the web offers adults and children alike a place to say and ask what they feel they cannot say and ask in the real world. The less people feel they can discuss with their teachers and parents, the more likely they are to turn to the internet for discussion and information.⁸

We especially want our children and our adult students to ask us their questions regarding *kedushas habayis* and *emunah*. We want our children and students to hear about these matters directly and exclusively from us, not only because the internet offers such corrupt presentations of these topics, but also because these areas constitute the “*Kodesh-Kadoshim*” of our *mesorah*. It is a tremendous *zechus* to pass along these special gifts to the next generation.

We must be sober enough to realize that today almost all children and many adults have questions on these topics. If they are not asking us, they are either getting answers elsewhere or looking for an opportunity to do so. If a child doesn't ask, we read in the *Pesach Haggadah*, “You must stimulate his question.” We must encourage our children and our adult students to inquire, and then we must give them suitable answers. If we do not know how to approach these topics or respond to our children's questions, we can approach our own *rebbeim*, master these aspects of our *mesorah*, and then pass the Torah on to the next generation.

4. Inability to Socialize

Data indicate that many who turn to the internet for pornography or social contact do so because they consistently fail to succeed socially in their own world.⁹ These individuals generally fall into one of two categories: the socially inept; and the “not-so-beautiful.”

First, there are the socially inept. These are individuals who never mastered how to get along with others. When they were young, they often studied straight through recess or preferred playing computer games or doing other solitary activities. In some cases, they wanted to play with everyone else but were excluded. In their pre-teens or even earlier, these children were joining the ranks of the “at-risk” for later internet involvement.

Their cases highlight the crucial *chinuch*-potential of recess time. The playground and after-school free play are not only the perfect venues for teaching less popular children how to make friends, share, and lose with a smile; they are also ideal opportunities to teach more popular children how to pick teams using randomizing procedures (instead of choosing just their friends), introduce new members to their clique, and encourage those who are less socially confident. Just as the classroom is

ideal for teaching *Chumash* and *Gemara*, the playground is ideal for teaching *middos*. It would be odd if we left either of these venues unsupervised. Those teachers and parents who invest time in supervising free play are taking a vital step in inoculating the next generation against the dangers of the internet.

The second group who fail socially and are therefore at risk for internet use are those not considered “beautiful” – they lack the physical attractiveness or money that would give them a fighting chance in many social circles. Despite being thoughtful, deep people with nice *middos*, these men and women usually have suffered repeated social rejection.

Men in this category are sometimes attracted to internet pornography because it gives them a brief – albeit depraved - opportunity to leave their painful, lonesome reality. Loneliness can be excruciating, and these men are so desperate to escape their solitary lives that they use the internet like a sort of hallucinogenic drug. After the fantasy, return to reality is even more painful, and then these men often feel terribly guilty too; but until they find real companionship, they are likely to return to the net again and again.

Women who lack physical attractiveness or money are sometimes attracted to the internet because the medium conceals their “appearance.” While *shidduchim* sometimes require that people first reveal their physical profile or wealth, and only then get to know each other, the virtual world of the web seems to offer the opportunity first to get to know someone and only afterward discover these less intrinsic details. In theory, this should tip the scales in favor of nice-but-ordinary-looking, or nice-but-poor women.

The assumption is dangerously naïve, however, since so many internet relationships are built on deception and misrepresentation. Children pretend to be adults, adults pretend to be children, men pretend to be women and vice-versa, and people lie about their religion, background and accomplishments. In one survey, more than a quarter of those who socialized using email or instant messaging admitted to lying about their identity.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, disappointment and heartbreak are commonplace in internet romance. This is not to mention those beastly predators who go online specifically to lure unsuspecting individuals to personal meetings and then victimize them.

We can teach our children about the cyberstreet and about the hucksters and criminals who live there. This offers some protection. We can also make renewed efforts to teach our children and students to value Torah and *middos above all*. This offers even more protection by reinforcing and broadening the truly fair “market” in which potential marriage partners are evaluated based on Torah values – a market in which even someone whose body does not match the Western ideal, or who lacks money, can still be taken seriously and meet good, intelligent, responsible *shidduch* prospects. As we lower the significance of looks and money in *shidduchim*, we simultaneously reduce the need some will feel to turn to the internet to assuage loneliness. Today, because of the threat created by the internet, cultivating this sort of loyalty to Torah values might constitute literal *pikuach nefesh*.

Seeing the Hand of Hashem

The Ramchal writes that everything Hashem does, He does for *Knesses Yisroel*: “And therefore there is a perfect match between what flows into the world

and the state of the Jews.”¹¹ He provides for all of our needs, and every circumstance – pleasant or frightening – is sent to help us grow. When we are weak in a particular area, he sends *nisyonos* – opportunities – that will encourage the growth He seeks. If asked about the internet, Rebbe Akiva would likely remind us, “*Kol d’avid Rachmana l’tav avid* – Everything Hashem does is for our good.”¹²

If we could defend ourselves against the internet as we did against television – just by issuing a universal and unconditional ban – then the current situation would require no particular *avodah* on our part. If software filters or hardware patches could protect us from the dangers of the cyberstreet, we could just purchase the necessary equipment and relax. But Hashem has created a terrifyingly dangerous threat – an enemy that seeks out and destroys the weak and the stragglers in Klal Yisroel’s march towards redemption. The internet leaves us no option but to be *m’chazek* every member of the community – to strengthen family ties and rebbe-talmid relationships; to stress in our *chinuch* and behavior the *gadlus ha-Adam*; to encourage questions and open discussion, especially about issues related to *kedushas habayis* and *emunah*; and to raise a generation who will seek marriage partners who are above all emblems of *ahavas Torah* and *middos tovos*. Hashem has made these agenda items for the leaders of every Jewish community.

This is not to say that we should bravely parade into the cyber-city. It is always best to avoid *nisayon*. We are still safest in the *beis hamidrash*. But given the internet’s pervasive presence, we would be remiss not to pay attention to the *bas kol* and prepare ourselves to pass the test if and when it arrives.

¹ Lenhart et al, p. 32-33.

² *Kiddishun* 30b.

³ *Messilas Yesharim*, chapter 5.

⁴ R. A. Davis, “A Cognitive-Behavioral Model of Pathological Internet Use,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 17 (2001), pp. 187-195; Scott E. Caplan, “Problematic Internet Use and Psychosocial Well-Being: Development of a Theory-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Measurement Instrument,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 18 (2002), pp. 553-575; Leo Sang-Min Whang, Sujin Lee, and Geunyoung Chang, “Internet Over-Users’ Psychological Profiles: A Behavior Sampling Analysis on Internet Addiction,” *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, Volume 6(2), 2003, pp. 143-150.

⁵ Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Zriyah U’Binyan B’Chinuch* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2000).

⁶ *Yeshava* 57:15. See *Alei Shur*, pp. 158.

⁷ R.A. Davis, p. 191; Griffiths, 2001, p. 336; and Wei Wang, “Internet Dependency and Psychosocial Maturity Among College Students,” *International Journal of Human Computer Studies* (2001), 55, pp. 919-938.

⁸ Beard, p. 2; Lindsay H. Shaw and Larry M. Gant, “In Defense of the Internet: The Relationship Between Internet Communication and Depression, Loneliness, Self-Esteem, and Perceived Social Support,” *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, Volume 5(2), 2002, p. 169.

⁹ W. Wang, p. 920.

¹⁰ Lenhart et al, p. 23.

¹¹ Ramchal, *Daas Tvunos*, siman 128.

¹² *Brachos* 60b.

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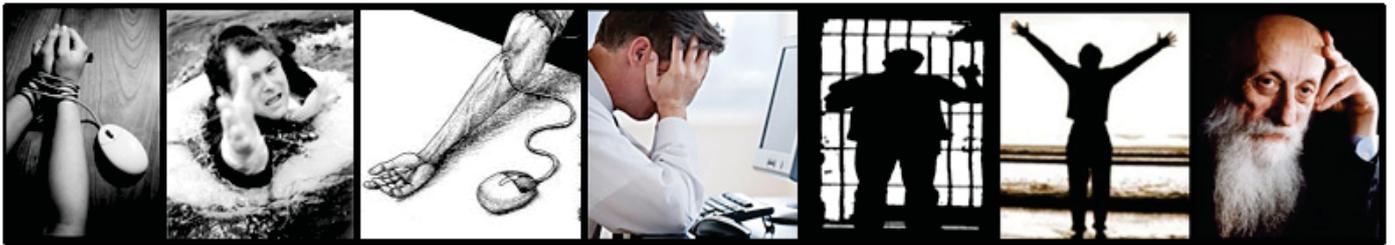
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