



Guard**your**eyes.org

Maintaining Moral Purity in Today's World

THE GYE ATTITUDE HANDBOOK

**PRINCIPLES FOR MAINTAINING
THE PROPER ATTITUDE AND
PERSPECTIVE ON PURITY
STRUGGLES**

Table of Contents

Attitude Principles for Lust Struggles

1. Fixing the foundations of ourselves & of the world
2. Fear of Heaven can't always stop us, but it can PUSH us
3. You are not alone
4. Determination is completely up to us
5. No pain no gain
6. Making it a top priority
7. True fulfillment vs. false fulfillment
8. "With cunning make your battle" (Mishlei 24:6)
9. Learning to love Hashem through this struggle
10. Redirecting the power in our souls
11. Dealing with thoughts and fantasies
12. Catching ourselves as we slip
13. Every Little Bit Counts
14. It's never all or nothing
15. Hashem looks at our efforts, not the results
16. Getting back up after a fall
17. Don't dwell on the past
18. Guilt vs. Shame
19. We don't lose past gains after a fall
20. Experience is built out of failures
21. There's always hope

1. Fixing the foundations of ourselves & of the world

The struggle with lust is a struggle with the deepest human emotions. And therefore, **fixing these emotions fixes a person deeper than anything else**. That's why the Zohar calls this *Yesod*. Hashem is not just telling us not to be dirty. Rather, he is telling us to **build ourselves** with the things we **don't do**. The foundation of a building is underground and no one sees it, but it holds up the entire building. *Shemiras Habris* is the hidden part of a Jew, it's the **real you**. And if the foundation of a Jew is weak, his whole spiritual structure is fragile and in grave danger of collapse.

It is brought down from the Baal Shem Tov that if a person succeeds in subjugating this particular desire then he is automatically able to subjugate all other desires, as the *Mekor Mayim Chaim* writes (*Baal Shem Tov, Lech Lecha*), "For it is from the strength of **this desire** that man is created, and a person has 365 sinews--parallel to the 365 negative commandments, and by subjugating this he therefore nullifies [the desires for] all 365 negative commandments". The *B'nei Yissachar* also writes (*Derech Pikudecha*): "We have a tradition from our fathers that the Yetzer Hara desires more than anything to attack the person through these sins, because included in this lust **are all the others**." Perhaps this is why R' Nachman also writes that these temptations are a man's main test in life.

It says in the *Korbonos*: "*Zeh Ha'isheh asher Takrivu LaHashem – This is the fire that you should sacrifice to Hashem.*" **Ishah** means fire, but it also spells **Ishah**, which means "a woman." The biggest sacrifice that a man needs to make in his life for Hashem is **zeh Ha'isheh** – this desire for women and the fire of lust.

By working on these areas, we ultimately learn to give over our entire heart to Hashem, as the Pasuk says "**Bechol Levavcha – with all your heart.**" And Chazal say "**Bishnei Yitzrecha – with both your inclinations.**"

And not only are we fixing ourselves deeply through this struggle, we are also fixing the world. Every generation has its tests, and this is likely the test of our generation. There has never been a time in history where promiscuity and licentiousness filled the world in every corner, to the degree that it does in our time. In the generation before Moshiach's time, we are cleaning out the filth from the very bottom of the barrel. We are doing the final work before the great days that are to come.

Only great souls with immense potential were given this difficult job. So if Hashem gave us this struggle, it means he trusted us with a great mission. This alone should bring us joy and motivation to substantiate His trust. And of course, if we succeed, we will be in the front lines to greet Moshiach!

2. Fear of Heaven can't always stop us, but it can **PUSH** us

Often we are aware of how serious these sins are, yet our "Fear of Heaven" alone isn't always enough to stop us when faced with an attack of lust. It's not that we don't fear Hashem, but will power alone is often not sufficient when dealing with these extremely addictive behaviors. Not only that, but lust is so powerful that even the greatest Tzadikim who feared Hashem with all their hearts, sometimes felt powerless when faced head-on with lust. See what happened with *Masya ben Charash* and *Rav Amram, Rabban Shel Chassidim*. In both these cases, these great Tzadikim had to take extreme measures to ensure they didn't stumble.

The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni (Vayechi) tells this story:

Once the Satan fixed his sight on Masya ben Charash who was a big Tzaddik, and said to himself: "Is it possible that this man does not sin?" Then the Satan went and asked G-d: "How do you view Rabbi Masya Ben Charash?" And G-d replied: "He is a perfect Tzaddik". The Satan said to G-d: "Give me permission to put him to the test". G-d told the Satan: "Go".

The Satan appeared to the Rabbi as a beautiful woman, the likes of which had never been in the world. When the Tzaddik saw her, he immediately turned his face away. Then the woman quickly moved to the side where Rabbi Masya had turned his face to, and again he quickly turned his face away. Then the Tzaddik said: "I am afraid that my Yetzer Hara will overpower me and cause me to sin". What did the Tzaddik do? He called a student that was with him and ordered him to bring him fire with nails. The student brought him nails and the Tzaddik put them into the fire and then to his eyes and became blind. When the Satan saw this, he trembled and fell on his back.

At that time The Holy One Blessed be He called the angel Raphael - for he is in charge of healing - and told him: "Go and heal Rabbi Masya Ben Charash". Then Raphael came in front of the Rabbi and the Rabbi asked him: "Who are you?" and he replied: "I am Raphael the angel, I came for G-d sent me to cure your eyes". Rabbi Masya replied: "Leave me alone, what is already done is done". Raphael returned before the Holy One Blessed be He and said: "Master of the World, thus spoke Masya". G-d said to Raphael: "Go back to him and tell him that I will personally guarantee that the Yetzer Hara will have no power over him". Immediately Raphael went and cured Masya. From here our Sages said: "All those who are careful not to look at women, the Yetzer Hara has no power over them".

The Gemara in Kidushin 81/a tells this story:

Some women who had been taken captive were redeemed and brought to Nehardai. They were kept in the attic of Rav Amram the Chasid and the ladder was removed. At night, a beam of light reflected off one of the women, revealing her beauty. Rav Amram was seized with lust and he moved the ladder (which normally needs 10 people to move it) to ascend. As he was halfway up, he screamed "**There is a fire in Rav Amram's house!**" and the Rabanan (Rabbis and students) flocked to his house. After they saw that there was no fire they said to him, "You embarrassed us (with your behavior)!" Answered Rav Amram: "It is better to suffer embarrassment in this world than in the next".

What we can learn from the two stories above is that, although *Yiras Shamayim* is not always enough on its own, it should push us to take **EVERY step we can** to break free of these pitfalls (see Part 1 of this handbook to learn the steps you can take).

With this in mind, let us explore a few aspects about these sins that can help strengthen our Fear of Heaven to make sure that we indeed take every step we can to break free:

Chazal (Niddah 13a) write that HZ"l is as if one has spilled blood or worshiped *Avodah Zorah*, and that those who do it are *chayev misah biday shamayim*. The Zohar even goes so far as to say that it is the worst sin in the Torah. Another terrible result of these sins that is brought down in the holy books, is that they desensitize us to spiritual connection. The more we sin in these areas, the more desensitized we become. This is a commonly experienced phenomenon, where people slowly lose their yearning for spirituality and they start to feel ever more disconnected from Torah, Shabbos and Mitzvos. Unfortunately, this also makes Teshuvah all the more unlikely, as one becomes more and more disconnected.

Also, these behaviors require hiding, lying and living a double life. This cuts us off from the world around us and doesn't let us feel the tremendous kindness of Hashem that fills our lives. It blinds us to the goodness in the world around us, to our souls and to Hashem. We begin to lose

appreciation for our own wives and children. We are unable to find inner peace; we can't stop lust and we remain closed up within a shell that no one can penetrate.

It is also brought down in Kabbalistic texts that every drop emitted in vain causes souls to be created, and these souls are snatched up by the forces of evil and become demonic forces that cause much suffering in a person's life. The souls themselves also suffer in misery with no hope (unless we fix ourselves), and after we die they stand as terrible accusers against us.

But do not let all these dramatic revelations cause you to despair. Teshuvah was created even before the world was created, and Hashem knew that we would stumble in these areas. Hashem has infinite patience and He understands us far better than we understand ourselves. Chazal say that Hashem even brought *David Hamelech* to stumble with *Bas Sheva*, only to show us the incredible power of *Teshuvah*.

Also, it is brought down in the Holy books that, through a sincere Teshuvah, all the souls that we created through our sins actually become uplifted, and they change from being "accusing angels" to "defending angels" instead.

So never despair! Although the standard Teshuvah model may not always work well when dealing with these addictive behaviors (see part B where this is discussed more in depth), by learning the proper perspective on this struggle and by taking the steps we can to break free, we are doing **exactly** what Hashem intended for us to do all along. *That* is our Teshuvah.

3. You are not alone

Almost everyone struggles with lust on some level, and a high percentage have stumbled in these areas as well. Rav Wolbe Zatzal in his Sefer "Psychiatry and Religion" (Pg. 82) writes: "*The difficult phase of adolescence is fertile soil for feelings of guilt, especially for religious youth. Masturbation is a serious prohibition. Yet almost all youth stumble with this and are unable to find the strength to overcome this in any way.*" (See tool 5 in part 1 of this handbook for more of what he suggests). Even Tzadikim of previous generations struggled in this area (as they mention "the sins of their youth"), so you can imagine that those who seek purity in a generation such as ours are truly from Hashem's greatest warriors! In the GYE community, you will find thousands of religious Jews like yourself, struggling in these areas. On our lively and vibrant forum at www.guardyoureyes.org/forum, people like yourself exchange questions and tons of Chizuk, post logs of their progress and share experience and hope. And you can also read the many stories on our website to see what others have gone through and how they have succeeded.

4. Determination is completely up to us

The Vilna Gaon says that what a person says they want, and even what they *feel* they want, has no relation to what they *actually* want. The Yetzer Hara was given permission to make a person feel they want something they really don't. And the same goes for what a person *feels* they can or cannot do. This has no relation to what they can or can't do **in reality**. So believe you will succeed, even if you feel you can't!

The biggest obstacle to succeeding is not believing you can succeed. The first impediment to overcoming this struggle is not in your genes, your childhood or your environment. If you believe you can succeed and are willing to make the effort, you will find the way out. Absolutely NOTHING stands in the way of a true RATZON. You can read the recovery stories on our site to see that many people even worse off than you have successfully broken free of these behaviors.

We must truly want to break free of this *Mitzrayim*. Chazal say that those who didn't want to leave *Mitzrayim* died in the plague of darkness. Already at the outset of our journey, we must be determined that we will **never give up** and always keep trying, no matter what.

R' Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin writes (*Tzidkas Hatzadik 154*): "Just as one must believe in Hashem, so too, one must believe in himself!" Hashem wants us to BELIEVE in our strengths, our capabilities, and in our ability to overcome evil and achieve greatness.

Although we might feel stuck, **determination** is completely up to us. The trick to ultimate success is only to **want enough**. So let's be honest with ourselves. If we find that we don't want to let go fully of the lust, let's ask ourselves "why not?" Do we really need the lust? What is it doing for us? There are so many **far more important things** in life! When we try to hold on to the poison of lust, we are acting like little babies who kick and scream when their father tries to take the colorful little medicine pills that they thought were candies, away from them. Lust is poison! If we keep feeding it, it will ultimately destroy our lives. **Let's let our loving Father take it away from us.**

5. No pain no gain

By nature, we go to what feels good and try to avoid pain. In that, we are no different than cows. Animals don't understand that a painful experience can be beneficial. Try to explain surgery to a cow! Pleasure and suffering are both part of life. But we get to choose which pleasures we want and which suffering we want. And the choice is either the false pleasure that lust offers us, or the pleasures that Hashem wants us to have – which are infinitely greater. Do we choose the pain of the spiritual "work-out" or the pain of the Yetzer Hara **getting stronger?**

As we brought in tool 1 of the handbook, the Steipler points out that anyone who keeps away from these forbidden pleasures is promised to receive the pleasures of life **from other areas instead**. And it follows that those who accept upon themselves the suffering that breaking-free entails, will save themselves much suffering in other areas of life.

If we decide that no matter how painful it is we won't give in - even if we feel like we are dying, Hashem takes away the pain from us and it becomes much easier.

6. Making it a top priority

Nothing worthwhile comes without hard work. One of the greatest obstacles stopping a person from changing is the notion that it can be done without a lot of investment. We live in a generation of instant results, and we come to expect that whatever needs to happen should happen quickly. We tend to forget that our whole purpose on this world is to grow and improve. We tend to look at any weakness that we have as an "inconvenience" that needs to be gotten out of our way (or ignored), while in reality it's Hashem's personal message telling us exactly what He sent us to this world for. As it is brought down in the Sefarim (such as *Tzidkas Hatzadik #49* and *#181*), that the things we struggle with **the most** in life are the very things that we came down to the world to fix.

The Vilna Gaon (*Sefer Yonah 4:3*) talks about *Gilgulim* (a *Gilgul* means that the soul comes back to this world after a previous life). And he explains that every soul has one major job to fix on its return to this world, in the one major area that it messed up last time. The Vilna Gaon asks, how we can know what the purpose of our soul's *Gilgul* is? He answers that we can figure it out by observing what sins we stumble in the most, and which sins we have the most intense desire for.

So if this is what we indeed came down to the world for, **let us make our growth in this area the most important thing in our life.**

7. True fulfillment vs. false fulfillment

The Yetzer Hara's job and goal is to cause us damage, and to do this he was given permission to use pleasure and "*Sipuk*" (fulfillment) as a bluff to be able to harm us. Otherwise, how could he possibly do his job? We would tell him to get lost! But we must understand that his seductions are like a terrorist offering us a piece of cake to ensnare us. We know he doesn't mean the cake, he means to use the cake to damage us somehow. Only pleasure that is tied with truth has a *Kiyum* (lasts) because it can make a *mitzvah* complete; for example, eating meat on Yom Tov or the enjoyment we experience on Shabbos. But pleasure that is tied to *Sheker* has no *kiyum*, which explains why when the pleasure is over, we don't feel any fulfillment. And we also don't talk about it with those who love us, with those who want the best for us, because we know that it was just there to damage us. And that's also why we want it again not long afterwards, even though we just had it. After all, if it was truth, why isn't it there anymore? Because we feel a void, and so we look again to fill this void with another false *Sipuk* (fulfillment).

8. "With cunning make your battle" (Mishlei 24:6)

We are unlikely to succeed if we try to fight the *Yetzer Hara* head on. As the *Ohr Hachayim* writes (Parshas Acharei Mos), the only way to succeed in this struggle is to diligently guard our eyes and thoughts. Once we are thinking about these things, and especially if we see the temptations before our eyes, it will often be too late and we won't be able to control ourselves.

There are a series of stories recorded in Gemara Kiddushin (80a-81a) where Hashem demonstrated the power of the Yetzer Hara to some of the Tana'im who had belittled it's influence. The Gemara relates that the Satan presented himself to R' Akivah as a seductive woman in a treetop. He became so inflamed that he was unable to resist, and he started to climb the tree to sin. Halfway up the tree, the woman turned back into the Satan and said: "If it wouldn't be that it had been said in the Heavens to respect R' Akivah and his teachings, I'd take your life!". A similar story is recorded with R' Meir swimming across a river to sin with a woman, and upon reaching the halfway point, the woman turned back into the Satan, rebuking him with those same words. We can learn from these stories how it is almost impossible to overcome these tests when a person is faced head-on with powerful lust.

Therefore, to succeed in this struggle, we need to avoid fighting it head on. Just like terrorists are often successful because they don't try to fight a big army head on, we must also learn to apply **guerilla warfare** and pre-empt the *Yetzer Hara*. Fighting him head-on is a sure recipe for failure. Instead, we need to make careful fences to avoid him. To learn what fences we need to make, we have to start asking ourselves how the evil inclination has been so successful until today? How does he get us to fall? How do our minds work in the various situations we find ourselves in? In what habitual ways have we learned to scan our surroundings? How is our mind used to thinking and processing information? Which scenarios most trigger our lust? What moods are we in when it happens, and in what situations do we begin to slip?

When we study ourselves honestly (and sometimes it helps to view our behaviors as if we were a different person watching ourselves from the outside), we can learn how the evil inclination works with us. Then we can pre-empt him and **prevent him from fighting us head-on**. Ultimately, we must learn to try not to even get into discussions with him at all. Instead of fighting him directly, we must learn to walk **around** him.

9. Learning to love Hashem through this struggle

This struggle is the fertile soil that our “true” selves will grow out of. And through it, we learn how to give our hearts over to Hashem. And hopefully we will be able to look back one day and say that it was all worth it. After all, for what did we come down to the world for, if not to learn how to give Hashem our hearts? As the Pasuk says: "**Ten b'ni libcha li – my son, give me your heart.**" Through this struggle, we learn how to “Let go and let G-d” and how to surrender our will and our lives over to Hashem in a very deep way. And this is something most people never merit to learn, even in 120 years on this world. So in a deeper sense, this struggle is truly a gift from Hashem and a sign of His love for us - **if we only use it correctly!**

No matter how much we have fallen, we must never view ourselves as “despised” by Hashem or imagine that Hashem is annoyed and frustrated with us. Instead, as we learn to give over our will to Hashem we will begin to feel that Hashem is truly our closest and most eternal friend.

As we progress and mature, we begin to view our relationship with Hashem on a much more intimate level. We begin to perceive how the lust is trying to get in between “us and Hashem” and interfere with the greatest love that can possibly exist!

To learn how to redirect our love to Hashem through this struggle, here is one helpful approach from the Holy Sefer, Noam Elimelech from Rav Elimelech of Lizensk (Parshas Bishalach):

Yakov Avinu A”H, used to serve Hashem with his midah, which is “Tiferes” (meaning “Awesome Beauty”). And from everything he used to see, hear, do, or eat, he took from it awesomeness of the Creator--Blessed Be He. For example, if he would eat something tasty, he would think in his mind: “This food is but a creation. Who put the good taste into this food? Was it not the Creator--Blessed Bbe He? And if this food is so good in taste, is it not obvious that all the good and pleasantness is to be found in the Creator--may his name be blessed--without any limits or boundaries?! And so he would think with each thing. And with this is understood the Pasuk, “and Yaakov kissed Rachel”.

How uplifting and beautiful it is to try to apply this midah of Yaakov Avinu to ourselves. Whenever we see something that turns our hearts to these desires, we need to tell ourselves, “If this is truly so good and I desire it so much, how much more desirable it must be to connect with Hashem, for in *Him* lies all beauty, comfort, security, love and pleasure. (After all, if He didn't have it all within Him, could He have created it?) All of us have a “G-d hole” that we are trying to fill. Hashem gave us a deep subconscious need to seek Him out, for He is the source of **all that we need**. Our physical minds are simply messing up the signals of our soul's yearning. The beauty we see in this world is but a fleeting shadow of the real thing!

The Baal Shem Tov also speaks a lot about how these desires are “fallen love” that really have their roots in the upper spiritual world of “Ahavah”. As is written in Parshas Lech Lecha:

Everything (in this world) is a projection of Hakadosh Baruch Hu through his attributes of love and fear, as is known. But the love is in exile, clothed in the physical, such as in a woman or in food... One should say in his heart, if I love this, which is only a “fallen and broken love” dressed in a putrid drop (which is where we all come from), how much more should I love the Holy one Blessed Be He!

Those who struggle with these desires can use it as a spring board to Ahavas Hashem. And when we successfully do this, we are uplifting the greatest physical desires and turning them into a great love for Hashem! This is a very high level of Divine service. We can also see this midah at play when Yaakov Avinu met his son Yosef after 22 years and, as Chazal tell us, he turned his love to Hashem by saying *Kriyas Shema*. We can grow in this direction if every time we feel

unhealthy desires we daven to Hashem and say, "Hashem, please help me find in **You** what I am looking for in lust".

The sefarim speak about how the highest desire a Jew can have is to be *dovek* - attached to Hashem and to the *ziv* of the *Sh'chinah*. It is actually *supposed* to be a 'lust' of some sort, as the Rambam (Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, "Laws of Repentance", 10,3) writes:

What is the proper love that we must have for G-d? It is to love G-d with an exceedingly great and intensely powerful love until the individual is constantly enraptured by it; he must be stricken like a lovesick person, whose mind is at no time free from his passion for a particular woman, with the thought of her filling his heart at all times, whether he be sitting down or rising up, whether he be eating or drinking. Even more intense should the love of G-d be in the hearts of those who love Him, and this love should constantly absorb him, as we are commanded to love the Lord "with all your heart and with all your soul." Solomon expressed this allegorically in the verse, "for I am sick with love." (Song of Songs, 2:5) Indeed, the entire Song of Songs is an allegorical description of this love.

10. Redirecting the power in our souls

We have often discovered that we were trying to fight only the Yetzer Hara, rather than building and changing **ourselves**. For true long term success, we must learn to fight the **cause** of the bad behaviors and not just the symptoms.

The Medrash says that if you did many **chavilos** (bundles) of sins, do **chavilos** of Mitzvos instead of them. The *Beis Aharon of Karlin* explains that **chavilos** is a language of *hiskashrus* - connection (as it says "Yaakov **Chevel Nachalaso**"), and he explains that in order to fix what we did in the past and break free from the "other side," we need to use the same **hiskashrus** and enthusiasm that filled our mind and limbs during the times we sinned, and instead do the *Mitzvos* in the same all-consuming and enthusiastic manner.

In general, those who struggle a lot with these issues, have a great deal of emotional and spiritual energy inside them. It is they who actually have the capacity and potential for the most intense spiritual connection with Hashem. We just need to learn how to channel the energy of our souls in the proper ways.

It is also known that people with particular character traits, such as creativity, love for people and spiritual sensitivity, are more prone to seeking alternate expression for their inner strengths through a stronger than usual lust drive. That is why it is so important to learn how to channel the strengths we have in the proper ways. Heightened lust is actually a symptom of a deep subconscious need that, for some reason, has still not reached fulfillment.

Our Sages have said (Sukkah 52a, discussing the desire for lust): "Whoever is greater than his friend, his Yetzer is greater as well". It is important to understand that, in a psychological sense, the Yetzer Tov and the Yetzer Hara are really the same inner force. The greater a person is, the more his soul's strengths require expression, and these strengths will ultimately burst forth and find expression in either a positive or negative way.

As Rav Tzadok (in *Tzidkas Hatzadik #44*) writes, if a person has major temptations, he should not be saddened about blemishes in his soul; on the contrary, he should be glad to realize that he has special strengths that need to be properly channeled. This, he explains, is what Chazal meant by "One who is greater than his friend, his Yetzer is greater as well."

Later on, Rav Tzadok explains (based on the Zohar) that the *Dor Hamabul* and the *Dor Hamidbar* who received the Torah, shared the same souls. And he explains that the reason is based on the

above principle. The *Dor Hamabul's* major sin was spilling seed, as is well known from all the kabalistic oriented *seforim*, and the *Dor Hamidbar* were *Zoche* to receive the Torah. Rav Tzadok explains that the spiritual energy is one and the same. The fake desire for lust is the flip side of the same coin of a true desire for Torah and spirituality. And he explains further, that this generation will appear once again in the days before Moshiach, where the spiritual *Kochos* will once again succeed in overpowering the *koach* of lust.

So let us direct our spiritual vigor into our prayers. We will be amazed at how uplifting they can become! And let us start doing the *mitzvos* with enthusiasm and learn Torah with passion! We were given a gift by Hashem because the struggles we experience are really just the vibes of our souls, striving for **genuine expression** and a true connection with the Almighty.

Our Divine service can be so much **more than average** if we use the struggle in the way it was intended by Hashem, as a spring-board for growth. Spiritual progress that might take other people many years of intense Divine service to achieve, we can attain through this struggle in a very short time if we use it right!

It can also be very helpful to seek alternative ways of connecting to Hashem to find inner fulfillment. We can seek out Chesed projects, Torah projects or study new areas or techniques in Divine service. For that is what our souls are really yearning for: a meaningful connection with Hashem, and to fulfill that which we came down to the world to accomplish.

It is also important to point out that instead of running frantically away from the Yetzer Hara in fear, we can learn to run instead **towards** Hashem with joy. If we do this, the Yetzer Hara falls away by himself. As the Sefarim say: "**Sur merah.**" **How? Through "Aseh Tov!"**

11. Dealing with thoughts and fantasies

Everyone has these fantasies. Some people more, some people less. We are human beings and not angels. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created the world in such a way that men and women are attracted to one another and, because of this, people get married, have children and populate the Earth. If it bothers you that you struggle with these thoughts, that is already something to be proud of. If we get down on ourselves about fantasies, we become sad, and the sadness brings even more fantasies, and this becomes a vicious cycle that is difficult to break away from. However, the moment we start to look at ourselves in a positive light, we will see that the fantasies will come much less often.

The *Ba'al Hatanya* (Chapter 27, abridged) writes about those who subdue these bad thoughts:

The Zohar (p.128) extols the great satisfaction before Hashem when the sitra achra (the other side) is subdued here below. For then the glory of Hakadosh Baruch Hu rises above all, even more than is possible through any praise, and this ascent is greater than all else.

*Therefore, no person should feel depressed, even should he be engaged **all his days** in this conflict, for perhaps because of this he was created, and this is his service -- to constantly subjugate the sitra achra.*

They tell a story of a *Ba'al Teshuvah* who once came to one of the Chassidic Masters with a question. Having done *Teshuvah* for his past evil ways, he found that he was still plagued by bad thoughts and fantasies. The Rebbe gave him a parable:

There was once a Jew named Moshkeh who owned an inn where he used to sell wine and spirits to the gentile peasants of the area. After a while, he became disgusted in dealing with the drunken gentiles and decided to go into another line of business and he closed down the

bar. That evening, there was a banging on the door. "Moshkeh, Moshkeh, open up! We want some wine and spirits!" "Sorry," Moshkeh replied, "from now on, the inn is closed." The gentiles had no choice but to leave disappointed. For days, and even weeks afterwards, Moshkeh would keep getting knocks on the door, but as the word slowly spread that the bar was closed, the knocking became less and less frequent, until the gentiles stopped coming altogether.

The same goes with these thoughts, explained the Rebbe. After doing *Teshuvah*, the thoughts keep trying to get in. But, if we keep the store closed and refrain from our past behaviors, the thoughts too will stop coming to us after a while.

Practically, we *can* control our own minds to an extent. For some people, the following technique works well: Think of a "clean" pleasurable image of a place you've been or an experience that you enjoyed. Concentrate on this image for a while with your eyes open or closed. Feel the feelings, see the picture and hear the sounds all around you. Now, every time an old image or fantasy comes up in your mind which you want to get rid of, simply replace it with this good image (Google "NLP Swish technique" for more info).

Others suggest focusing on your breathing as you inhale and exhale deeply for a couple of minutes. This exercise has the power to divert our awareness from our thoughts as we focus on the breathing in our body. It is also relaxing and releases the tension and pressure built up by the lust we experience through the fantasies.

One person wrote on our forum:

You can't wrestle with a pig and not get dirty. The thoughts will come - accept that. It doesn't mean anything. Worrying about them or doing something with the express purpose of getting rid of them just won't work - you're wrestling with a pig. It's like trying not to think about a green elephant, that will only make you think of a green elephant more. When the thoughts come, try to just acknowledge that they popped into your head, wish them a friendly 'shalom aleichem!' and then move on to try and do something else.

In the Chassidic literature (see Likutei Moharon 27:8) it is brought down that getting bad thoughts and fantasies is actually a *zechus*. They give a person the opportunity for *teshuva* and proper *tikkun* for past *aveiros*. So many people get down when they get these thoughts and feel bad about themselves. But these thoughts are there in order for a person to chase them away and merit true *teshuva*. The thoughts come to a person so that they should uplift them. Kabalistically, the thoughts have somewhat of a life of their own and actually WANT to be uplifted! So just realize that your current challenges are intended for you to attain *teshuvah shleima*. Knowing this can prevent unnecessary hindrances and should invigorate us for continued growth.

Teffilah is a very powerful tool in this struggle as well. When feeling under attack by lust, say: "Please Hashem, save me from lust! I want to love **You**, not flesh and blood". Or say; "Ribono Shel Olam, I know that it is my fault that I have these thoughts. I don't want them. Help me to distract myself to something else and leave them be." Even short "foxhole" type prayers can work wonders like: "Hashem, **Help me**. I can't do this alone."

See our website www.guardyoureya.org and sign up to the *chizuk* e-mail lists, to learn many more great techniques on dealing with persistent fantasies and lustful thoughts.

12. Catching ourselves as we slip

Even if we started to slip, we can achieve the greatest levels of *Kedusha* by stopping ourselves from sliding further. The Sefarim write that the *Nachas Ruach* we give to Hashem by holding back

even when we feel that “we already blew it”, is even greater than when we successfully avoid the tests in the first place.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of this is Yosef Hatzadik. The Gemara (Sotah 36b) says that Yosef actually came to Potifar's house to sin (as Rashi brings). And the Gemara goes on to say that he actually spilled some seed at the time, thereby losing ten *Shevatim* that were supposed to come from him. And when after all that, he still held back from sinning, he became the great *Yosef Hatzadik!*

R' Tzadok explains that this is what really constituted the great test. The *Satan* said to Yosef: “Don't you see that you already messed everything up? Don't you realize what a goner you are? Your brothers hate you and sold you to *Mitzrayim*, nobody cares about you anymore. You're lost and cut off from this world and the next. And now you've failed so badly. Face the facts, **it's over!**”

But *Yosef Hatzadik* said “No! I don't care about anything - not even about being a Tzadik. The only thing that concerns me is: What do I need to do at this very moment? What does my Father in Heaven want from me **right now?**” And it was in that *zechus* that he merited everything. And Chazal say that even the splitting of the *Yam Suf* was in Yosef's merit!

So, if we want to split our own personal *Yam Suf*, this is one of the greatest *Yesodos* to keep in mind!

13. Every Little Bit Counts

We must believe that coin after coin are added to our “spiritual bank” every time we say “no” to the Yetzer Hara, no matter how insignificant it may seem to us at the time. Even if someone is sure that they'll fall in the very near future, they should know that for every second they hold back, they are earning reward that no person or *malach* can fathom! And when a person has enough “coins” in their “spiritual account”, they will succeed beyond their wildest dreams!

The Gemara says: ***"Habah letaher misaayen lo – He who comes to be purified, they help him,"*** and Chazal also say: ***"Biderech she'adom rotzeh leilech molichin osoh – in the way a person wants to go, they lead him."*** Why does the Gemara speak always in plural form: ***"they help him,"*** and ***"they lead him"***? The Maharsha explains that every resolution and every effort that a person makes creates an angel. And when the army of angels gets large enough, it has the power to help one overcome all the obstacles and lead him to where he wants to go!

14. It's never all or nothing

The notion that we must always succeed actually turns us into easy prey for our Yetzer Hara. He uses our good qualities, such as our constant yearning for perfection, and he turns it against us by trying to get us to feel down when we experience a fall! In this struggle, it is never **“all or nothing”**. When an army goes out to battle, do they always win? Are there never casualties? People injured? The Pasuk says: ***"There is no Tzadik on earth who does only good and never sins"*** (Koheles 7:20).

Rav Hutner once wrote a letter to a *Bochur* who was despondent over his personal spiritual failures. In the letter, Rav Hutner explains that what makes life meaningful is not basking in the exclusive company of one's *Yetzer Tov*, but rather the dynamic struggle of one's battle with the *Yetzer Hara*. Shlomo Hamelech's maxim that ***"Seven times does the righteous one fall and get up"*** (*Mishlei*, 24:16), continues Rav Hutner, does not mean that “even after falling seven times, the righteous one manages to get up again.” What it really means, he explains, is that it is only

and precisely *through* repeated falls that a person truly achieves righteousness. The struggles – even the failures – are inherent elements of what can, with determination and perseverance, become an ultimate victory.

If you were watching a fight between a man and a lion, who would you be inclined to reward more, a man with a gun who shoots the lion in one fell blow, or the man who needs to use his bare hands? In the latter case, there is a huge fight and sometimes the man is down and the lion is winning, yet he manages to push off the lion again and again and finally overpowers him and wins the fight! Hashem wants to reward us with infinite Divine delight, and He gave us a beast inside us to slay. He could have made us mighty as the *Malachim*, but it is only through human beings who fight with their bare hands in the darkness of this world that Hashem's Divine presence is uplifted and is able to brighten the darkest places.

The Zohar in Parshas Tetzava writes:

For there is no light besides that which comes out of darkness. And when the "other" side is subjugated, the Master of the World is elevated and his honor is increased. And avodas Hashem can only be through darkness, and there can be no good, only through bad. And when a person goes into a bad path and then leaves it, the Master of the World's honor is elevated. And therefore, the "Shleimus" (completion) of everything, is good and bad together - and then to leave to the (side of) good. And there can be no good but that which comes through bad, and from such good, Hashem is elevated. And this is called an "avodah shleimah" (a complete service of Hashem).

15. Hashem looks at our efforts, not the results

Hashem doesn't seek great successes and big achievements from us. Whether we succeed in a big way or not, is ultimately *His* business. All He asks from us is that we try to get a little stronger every day and do what we can at **this point in time**. Our struggle with the *Yetzer Hara* is even more precious to Hashem than our ultimate success in breaking free. Hashem has enough great and powerful *Malachim* in *Shamayim*, but only humans struggle with the *Yetzer Hara* and can give Hashem *Nachas Ruach* through that.

It is brought down in the *sefer Menucha v'Kedusha*, written by a talmid of R' Chaim Volozhiner, that even a person who sins his whole life can still be considered a Tzadik, as long as he never gives up and always continues to fight. We like to think of success in terms of **results**. But Hashem looks at our efforts, not at the results.

16. Getting back up after a fall

If we experience a fall, we must never let it get us down. Getting depressed is exactly what the *Yetzer Hara* wants, and it leads to a vicious cycle of continued falls.

The truest test of an *eved Hashem* is *davka* when Hashem takes everything away from him, such as when he falls and feels no inspiration, no emotion and no *Hislavus*. That's the **moment of truth** where a person can ask himself honestly, "am I an *eved Hashem* because it's my nature and/or because it keeps me emotionally happy, or do I serve the Almighty because that's His will and nothing else?"

The *Lechevitcher Rebbe* (a student of R' Shlomo of Karlin) once went as far as to say that even if a person just killed someone and the knife is still dripping with blood, and he feels unable to stand

up and daven Mincha (the afternoon service) with all his strength and heart, then he has not yet tasted from the waters of Chassidus!

The Be'er Mayim Chayim says that in the army, when they would want to test a great soldier to see if he's fit to be a general, they would put him on a wild horse that was impossible not to be thrown off of. Although no one could stay on that horse, the test was only to see how fast he would get back up after he was brutally thrown down and wounded.

17. Don't dwell on the past

Although the spiritual damage we cause by acting out is very great, we must accept that Hashem brought us into this situation and that it is not all our fault. Let us never dwell on how it happened, or on past falls. This will cause us to feel down and lead to future falls. The *Chidushei Harim* (in *Likutei Yehudah*) tells his followers never to look back, claiming that if we look back, we remain in the mud. Everyone has dirty laundry. We don't have to be ashamed of our laundry, unless we let it pile up and never clean it.

We must also realize that we didn't always have free will in the past. This is clear from various Sefarim and in various places in Chazal. To quote one of the foremost *baalei mussar* of our times, Rav Shlomo Wolbe, [zt"l]:

The great [Jewish] philosophers established bechira as the cornerstone for the whole Torah.... But from this resulted a common misperception among the masses; that all people actively choose their every act and every decision. This is a grievous error. (Alefi Schur, Vol. 1, p. 156)

What, then, is *bechira*? To answer this question, Rav Wolbe refers us to Rav Eliyahu Dessler's "phenomenal essay on *bechira*" (*Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, pp. 111-116). In this essay, Rav Dessler describes how the "*nekudas habechirah* – the point of free choice" is different for different people and in different situations. He explains that *bechira* is not a theoretical concept that can be applied to any circumstance where a person can hypothetically choose between two options. Rather, it only applies to moral conflicts where the two opposing forces are of approximately equal strength, the person is aware of the internal conflict, and he makes a conscious decision in one direction. When a person does something over which he does not experience conscious conflict, or if the compelling force on one side is significantly stronger than the other, the fact that he is theoretically able to decide either way does **not** qualify his act as an expression of *bechira*.

"Ain Hakadosh Baruch Hu ba beterunya im habriyos – Hashem doesn't come with complaints to his creations." As the Pasuk says: *"He created together all their hearts and understands all their deeds,"* and he knows that almost all men stumble in this sin at some point in their youth.

There's a well known adage that if Hashem gave us a test, we must have the ability to overcome it as well. R' Tzadok HaKoehn says though, (in *Tzidkas Hatzadik*) that this is not as simple as it sounds. It is true that we all have free choice to do what Hashem expects of us in this world, over the course of our lifetimes. However, in the process of our journey, there are many times when a person is considered an *onus*.

After the sin of the golden calf, the *Midrash* says that Moshe said to Hashem, if a father gave his son gold and sat him down on the doorstep of a *Beis Zonos* – ***"ma ya'aseh haben velo yecheta? - What can the son do and not sin?"*** In other words, we find in Chazal that there are times when a person may not have full *Bechira*.

See also the *Rambam Hilchos Issurei Biyah 1:8* – “for the Yetzer and human nature forced her to want,” and see *Tosofos in Sanhedrin 26b* where they discuss how someone suspected of illicit relations may still be a Kosher witness, since it could be that his desires simply overpowered him. And see the Gemara in *Brachos, 32b: “Asher Hari’osi”* where *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* acknowledges to *Eliyahu Hanavi* that He was the one who had turned the Yidden’s heart away from him.

The Steipler too, in regards to a specific behavior that someone had difficulty controlling, writes: “He is not a *Ba’al Bechira* now in this area, and the only thing he can (and should) do, are *Tikkunim* that will help him **over time**.”

Once we understand that we didn’t always have free will in the past, we will prevent the guilt from dragging us down into a vicious cycle of despair and continued falls. And guilt can be even more dangerous than the falls. As they say: “It’s not the one cookie you ate that broke the diet. The diet ended when you felt bad about that one cookie, and then went on to finish the entire BOX!”

And even if we may have had some freedom of choice at the time we fell, it could be that we had **very little**. The sins we did are only judged according to the circumstances and the level of free will that we had at the time. Only Hashem knows if we could have done better or not.

But when we talk about the **present moment**, we can never know how much free will we have and we **must always** try our very best.

18. Guilt vs. Shame

It is important to understand the difference between *charata*: healthy guilt & regret, as opposed to *yiush*: shame & despair.

To quote Rabbi Avraham J. Twerski:

We generally use the words “shame” and “guilt” interchangeably. One may say, “I am ashamed of what I did”, meaning “I feel guilty over what I did.” Technically, however, the two terms are different. Guilt is about what a person did, and it can be a constructive feeling in that it can lead one to Teshuvah, to take corrective action. Shame, however, is what one feels he *is*. In other words, guilt is “I **made** a mistake”, whereas shame is “I **am** a mistake”. If one feels that he is inherently flawed, that he is made of “bad stuff”, there is nothing he can do to change that. With guilt there is hope of improvement, but not with shame.

Every person should feel he is a child of Hashem with a holy Neshama. Hashem doesn’t make defective goods. There is never room for despair or shame. However, healthy “guilt” is important. As the *Nesivos Shalom* writes in *Parshas Noach*, the guilty feelings we have are a gift from Hashem that come from the inherent good inside every Jew. Indeed, he writes, a Jew who does *not* have these feelings anymore, no longer has much hope.

A person who gives in to the Yetzer Hara only because the Yetzer hara has tempted him strongly and he can’t hold back, is still not “bad” in essence. With sincere Teshuvah, Hashem will forgive him. But if one doesn’t feel guilt anymore, that means that the bad has taken him over totally and there is little hope.

The *Nesivos Shalom* ends by saying that “guilt” is actually a Tikkun for every Jew to be able to break free of the bad. Even when one falls, they should make sure that the fall does not become part of their *essence*. By continuing to hold on to Hashem and feeling guilty when we are far from Him, then even in the case of the worst sins *chas veshalom*, we still have hope and will be forgiven.

There's a simple test we can do to know whether we are being motivated by healthy guilt/regret or by shame/despair. If we see that we want to get right back up and find ways to strengthen ourselves again, then it's a sign that our "bad" feelings are those of healthy guilt and positive regret. If, however, we feel that we just want to give up, then it's a sure sign that we are experiencing despair and shame, and we must quickly find a way out of these harmful feelings before they lead us to a vicious cycle of continued falls.

How indeed can we remain happy after a fall? Let's read on...

19. We don't lose past gains after a fall

If we were trying to stay clean and had a fall, we must realize that we haven't lost anything that we gained until now. We simply have to get up and continue from where we left off. The Steipler once told someone who complained to him about how difficult this struggle was, that the times we fail are erasable, but every time we pass a test is a *Kinyan* that's ours to keep forever. Even if we are successfully *misgaber* (overcome) only once in a while at first, this initial *hisgabrus* will ultimately lead us to break free completely.

The *Ba'al Hasulam* says a beautiful parable:

A king once had a good friend whom he hadn't seen in many years. When this friend finally returned, the king was so happy to see him that he told his treasurer to take his friend - who happened to be a pauper - to the royal treasury, and to give him one hour to take as much money as he wanted! So they brought him into the treasury and gave him a bag, which the poor man proceeded to fill with gold coins until the bag could hold no more. Full of gratitude and happiness, the poor man began to leave, but as soon as he stepped out of the door, the guards gave the bag a big kick and all the coins spilled onto the floor. The man was distraught, but he looked at his watch and saw that he still had plenty of time until his hour was up, so he quickly returned to the treasury and began to refill the bag with coins. But when it was full and he tried to leave, once again the guards gave the bag a big kick and everything went flying. The man was at his wits end, but seeing that he still had more time, he refused to give up and went back again to refill the bag.

The same scenario repeated itself over and over. The guards kept kicking the bag of coins and causing everything to spill, until the poor man was sure that he was simply wasting his time.

Finally the hour was up and the guards dragged the poor man out of the room with his bag barely half full.

*But suddenly the poor man looked up and he saw a wagon overloaded with gold coins standing before him. And as he stood there wondering for whom all that money is intended, he saw the king coming to greet him with a big smile. The king told him that the entire wagon load of gold coins belongs to him, explaining that all the coins he had gathered and thought he had lost were saved for him. The king had commanded the guards to empty the bag again and again only so that he would manage to gather up **so much more** in the one hour that he had!*

The lesson is clear. Even if we fell and it feels like we lost everything and are starting again from scratch, we should know that Hashem does this only so that our "vessels" should be empty once again, to enable us to fill them up yet another time with even more achievements. But the attainments from the first vessels that we filled were never lost. They were already deposited into our "spiritual bank account".

So if you were doing great for a while and had yet another fall, don't despair! Trust that Hashem had much *Nachas Ruach* from your spiritual successes, but he wanted you to take it **to the next level** and therefore he gave you these pitfalls, even though he knew you would fall. What makes a person great is his ability to get back up, despite his falls. And *lavka* by having to renew our determination from the ground up, we are rocketed into a much closer *Kesher* with Hashem than we ever had before!

Instead of getting down on ourselves after a fall, let us reflect back on how many times we *did* manage to say "no" to the *Yetzer Hara* before he won us over now! Let's recall the many tens - if not hundreds - of times during the past clean-streak that we didn't give in to him! We definitely have **the upper hand** in this war. He is determined to make us feel down so that we should continue to slip. But let us focus on the overall picture. Even though we may have lost a battle now, we are still winning the war. Let's rejoice about our successes and get right back up for the next round, where B'Ezras Hashem, we will do even better!

20. Experience is built out of failures

The saying goes: "The man who never did anything wrong, never did **anything**." Experience that makes a man ultimately successful is always earned through his initial failures. The difference between a successful person and a failure is not the number of times they fell, but rather the number of times they got **up** again. The successful person got up just **one time more** than the failure did. Our Sages said: "*The Torah cannot be upheld, only through one who has stumbled in it first.*" The falls are part of the struggle. And through them, we learn how to make better fences, try better strategies, and ultimately become much greater human beings.

21. There's always hope

Rav Yisrael Salanter said: "*As long as the candle is lit, one can still fix.*" And Rabbi Nachman said "*There's absolutely no such thing in the world as giving up.*" There is **always** hope, even from what seems to be the deepest depths of sin and despair. Rabbi Nachman also said: "*If you believe you can destroy, **believe** you can fix.*" There is no such thing as a sin that can't be fixed, or a situation that is completely hopeless.

As we brought above, the *Zohar* says that there can be no light if it doesn't come **first** through the darkest darkness. Even in a state of deep darkness, we must recognize that Hashem is with us, loves us, and is hiding Himself only so that we will ultimately be able to appreciate His light so much more. Hashem is always ready to help us, as soon as we are ready to **let** Him.