

Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue

Posted by KiviYVY - 15 Mar 2011 16:15

[This is a lengthy dialogue, but Guard encouraged me to post this with the hopes of others contributing and gaining more clarity]

Dear Guard,

First, a tremendous thank you for all I've gained from your site, your forums and your 12 step phone calls. They've absolutely changed my life and I'm greatly indebted to your program.

At the same time I'd like to voice a concern. I've read a little of buzz about this on the forums, but I just wanted to email you directly so the problem is addressed.

This is what happened: I had gained a lot from your site and had some serious conversations with my wife about your site. She was very understanding, Tzadekes that she is, and was sold on the GYE mission. Of course we're normal and we had our share of high emotions and crying, but Baruch Hashem we were able to sort things out favorably.

Being sold on your mission, my wife thought to suggest the site and the women's phone conference to people she knew who were suffering from lust addiction. After some further (painful) research she realized that the phone conference is really only for spouses of real hard core addicts.

For the record, I am technically not a hard core addict, B"H (about Level 3 in the "GYE Program in a nutshell"); I've never hit rock bottom, I suffer from a mild addiction which I suspect is quite common among men in my culture, and my wife and I can testify that our marriage has been absolutely wonderful. Not picture perfect, but a marriage that we can be proud of and that grows with leaps and bounds on a constant basis. Not having a full addiction I B"H do not fully relate to everything on GYE, but I have been successful in drawing out the lessons from the site and the 12 steps that have been helpful for my personal struggles.

Innocently suspecting that she was a codependent, my wife decided to join the Forum for

Spouse addicts and she was absolutely shocked and shaken by what she read; particularly this story - <http://www.guardureyes.com/GUE/Stories/FeatureStory.asp> - which is part of the suggested reading for all newcomers. She was also shocked by the intimate details that women shared with each other about their own marriages. She cried a long time after reading all of that and dwelled on the matter for at least a week before we were able to come up with some healthy perspectives.

After this experience and after my wife's discussion with a prominent Rav and Rebbetzin in our town we came to the following conclusion: Your site is very helpful for real addicts. It's a life saver - no question. However, when it comes to those who are not addicts, in many cases it's better that they do not join your 12-step calls. The Rav told my wife that there are a number of men (and women) that he knows who were encouraged by someone else to avail themselves of your services. These men were not real addicts, just normal men with normal lusts, and the site convinced them that they were addicts, that their disease was for life, and that they needed to do the 12-steps. It's possible that such men might be going down a road which is overkill for them and cause risks to their emotional well-being and their marriages. I, BH, have a good amount of Seichel and have been able to glean from the site what is helpful for my situation. Others may not be as fortunate.

When it comes to women, the risks are far greater. BH my wife was able find closure on this matter by speaking to a Rav and Rebbetzin, but others are not as assertive about the matter, do not consult with the right people, and end up taking risks that there's no need for them to take. Women take these matters very personally and are from the start at risk of not handling this matter with the proper Seichel, with the healthy approach that's necessary. Pushing such women into the 'addiction track' can cause much unnecessary pain.

You will soon be launching an international campaign for your site upgrade and publicity, which is absolutely wonderful. I wish you much success and I completely support your cause. At the same time, it's important that people are directed to the resources that are appropriate for them and not convinced that they need to take more drastic measures than are appropriate. Your "Program in a Nutshell" is a step in the right direction, but at the moment the site does not naturally follow the course outlined in that piece. I read discussion on the forums of setting up the site in a way that is appropriate for non-addicts (Prevention), while real addicts are directed to a special section to login and address their issues (for Treatment & Recovery). This is also a step in the right direction. My wife and I picture the ideal site to be one that fits this model. We picture a site that speaks to people similar to the way a Rav or Rebbetzin would - validating the normal struggles that people go through and providing a Torah Hashkafa for men and women to gain a healthy approach to Male/Female Tayvah, Triggers, Tznius, the Yetzer Hara, and send normal couples on their way with tools for a healthy marriage.

Undoubtedly you have put much thought to this exact issue already and that you are consulting Gedolim on how to best approach it. My intention is only to highlight the severe importance of addressing this. What I've heard from Rabbonim regarding your current site is that it's a wonderful site, addresses an very important issue in our community, *but it's not for everybody*. Your hope is to make your site for everybody so please do your best to address the greater public as is most appropriate and helpful.

Much Hatzlacha!

Here is my followup to Guard's response (Guard is in quote boxes).

Thank you for reading my long email and taking my concerns to heart. I've understood from your site and it has been confirmed by your response that you approach your mission thoughtfully and sincerely and always seek out the most appropriate course of action Al Pi Torah. Please see my comments and responses below:

Guard Eyes wrote: Thank you for your well thought out and respectful letter, from the heart. Your concerns are very important, and we are indeed addressing them as best we can in the new website design, which will be based on the "Program in a nutshell" from the start. Your letter has helped us gain even further clarity on this issue, especially in regards to Miriam's CODA call which is indeed only for the wives of real addicts.

Thanks for saying this. It's encouraging to know my voice is being heard and is making a difference. As you said, Miriam's CODA is only for wives of real addicts. My wife did call in once to listen in and her heart goes out to these women. She was struck by what seemed to be a "tough love" approach, the labeling, and the exposure to sordid details.

If I may ask just a few questions. 1) What level of addiction do you see yourself in regard to our

"Program in a nutshell"s 8 levels? (see attached).

Level 3. I reached my 1st 90 days rather easily, without much help from the Forum and without the 12 step calls. After 90 I fell and struggled for 2 months or so, peaking at a month. Entering a mini cycle of falling I felt a more desperate need to do something concrete and I read the INCREDIBLE GYE handbook (printed out a pocket size copy I could pull out to read 5 minutes here and there) and started listening in on the 12-step calls periodically. Duvid Chaim encouraged me to start participating in the calls, which I was very hesitant to do, but now I share my voice on the calls from time to time.

2) Do you think that for your level, the 12-Step calls of Duvid Chaim may have been too much? In other words, do you think it might have been Yatza Secharo Behefsedo for you? If yes, what particular aspects of the approach do you feel might have been the hefsed?

I think I mostly gained from the calls, but as I said - I think I have a good dose of Seichel and self-esteem about these things. I know that others might not approach the matter with as much Seichel, label themselves as addicts, and find themselves treading in the shark infested waters of labeling themselves as hard core addicts and treating their pneumonia with chemotherapy. I don't think I lost much of anything from the calls, except for time out of my hourly-waged work day.

3) What shook up your wife so much in the "Feature Story"? That guy didn't even use the 12-Steps at all.

It was the exposure to the intimate and unsavory details of his life. She feels there was no need for her to even know about these things, and other things she read on the forums, and it only made her more nervous about things like protecting her son from the issues the writer of the article faced. As just one example, it's certainly unproductive for her to be nervous about her son taking a bath! The truth is that what's described there likely comes with a background of abnormal domestic issues, maybe abuse or trauma of some sort, and should not be framed as something that "can happen to anyone."

4) Did you see yesterday's chizuk e-mail #980? Coincidentally (I hadn't even read your letter yet), it deals with how to tell the wife, and what to say and do...

I read it and I completely agree with it. You can see my personal notes on my own discussions about this matter here - www.guardyoureyes.org/forum/index.php?topic=3231.msg86326#msg86326 . I also once wrote you a thank you note, the "we felt newly married" note that you published in the Chizuk email recently.

GYE has no "hidden agenda" at all, and I don't mind you posting this on the forum because it may help others gain clarity as well, but maybe let's wait until you answer the questions above, and then we can include some of your answers in the letter you post as well, to help people have more clarity on where you're coming from...

Thanks for your easy-going'ness about this. "GYE has no "hidden agenda" at all" really says it all. Your sincerity with this project is really rare and I believe it has been a driving force behind your success. May Hashem continue to give you this strength of character and grant you much success in reaching all those who are crying internally for the help they so desperately need.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by Meshulam - 15 Mar 2011 16:38

I feel the same.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by pinokio - 15 Mar 2011 16:47

to understand better,

can you succinctly and briefly list for us the negative effects of a non addict joining the forum or site? in what way does it cause "overkill". looking to understand.

also, i thought the main forum board has a specific section called the torah and chizuk approach, directed at this genre of ppl?

please reply

-spaceman spiff

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by Kedusha - 15 Mar 2011 16:51

I think there are two issues here: the extent of the husband's addiction, and whether the wife should be seeking support in an S-Anon type group, call, or forum.

As to the first issue, it is true that not all men are addicts. However, if a person comes to GYE desperate for help, that is certainly a sign of addiction, in that he is, evidently, unable to stop on his own (if he's not addicted, why not just do Teshuva and stop?). Also, as addiction therapist Michelle Rappaport [has said](#), Internet pornography is like crack cocaine, and it's 100 times easier to become addicted to pornography on the Internet than in the pre-web days. So, yes, GYE, as it's currently set up is not suitable for everyone. But, it is suitable for a very very large number of frum Jews. More than we wish to know about.

As to the second issue, I fully agree that not all wives should be involved in S-Anon type groups. It depends on the extent of the husband's problem, and on the wife's personality.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue

Posted by DovInIsrael - 15 Mar 2011 16:56

thanks for your well thought out note.

i agree there is a place for women to turn too...

a place where:

1. they can understand (without getting into the details) of what is going on in their spouses head
2. how to recognize when a spouse is beginning to slip/fall, etc
3. how to respond in a way which can be heard (ie, its not a time for criticisizing, complaining, etc)
4. how they can work on themselves to be more suportive
5. realize its not about them...but that there is something going on in their spouses head.

in short a combination of 12-steps (lite version)

life coaching

couples coaching

and Rabbi Arush

I might know someone (a life coach, a couples coach, who also dealt with sexual additions, etc) who can lead a regular group - might she might want to charge.

For those of you who have spoken to your wife, would like to speak to your wife, or a afriad of what will happen if your wife finds out... would you be willing to pay to a regular shiur?

if so, how much?

Additionally Dr Sarah Ullman is one of the leading neuro-researchers in this field, and has put together a very informative web blog.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by the.guard - 15 Mar 2011 16:57

It's possible that such men might be going down a road which is overkill for them and cause risks to their emotional well-being and their marriages.

I'd also like to better understand how you see the 12-Steps being "risky" for non-addicts. I find this unlikely.

(Just as an aside... As far as boys in a bath... I never allow my boys (9 and up) to take long baths. I generally encourage them to take showers, and if they insist on a bath, I give them a 5-10 minute time-limit. It is indeed not healthy to leave a boy alone in a hot tub to just lay and explore his body for a long time. That is unfortunately how many boys discover masturbation, like in the story.)

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by Me3 - 15 Mar 2011 17:11

I agree that being part of a phone conference or live group with hard core addicts may be detrimental to a non addict. Not from personal experience though as I myself have never joined either (I know, I know, maybe I should).

However, I don't see how applying the 12 steps can be detrimental. I would reccomend

following the 12 steps for somebody who has trouble getting up on time for Shachris, or biting their nails. Following the 12 steps properly can only make you a better person. And I know others feel the same, see below.

[YVY wrote on 01 Mar 2011 04:13:](#)

Steve asked me to say a few words about my 5th step call.

What I found amazing was being introduced to a brand new, life changing way of thinking. I was able to see, with the help of HKB"H and sponsor Steve, a world of resentments and fears transform before my eyes (*poof!*) to a world of beauty and joy, serenity and closeness to HKB"H. With a small, yet powerful, change of perspective interactions with others that formally caused so much pain, become spiritual experiences that bring us up close and personal with our Creator. Why would I want to flee from such a world and drown myself in lust? With enough practice, I can see how it would never occur to me.

I mention the closeness to HKB"H not out of religious conviction, but out of personal experience. With no exaggeration, together we witnessed HKB"H guide me towards a view on life that faced the pain caused by fear and resentments and transformed the experience into one of serenity, happiness, and spirituality. I now feel that I can call on HKB"H at any time and, in His infinite Power, He will guide me.

These are life tools and they are priceless. With practice, these tools can open up a world that has, for the most part, been hidden. Lest you think I'm a generally unhappy person, consider that before I approached these sheets I could hardly imagine that I even had any resentments. But when I jumped into the exercise the resentments flowed, because I've experienced pain - and who hasn't? Whatever joyful life I had thought I had before beginning the 4th and 5th steps, clearly does not compare to the kind of joy that I've now been introduced to and that I plan on applying to all the bumps ahead.

Thank you Steve for your precious patience and time, your openness and acceptance. Thank you HKB"H for joining us on this call; Your presence was so clear on the call, is so much clearer today and, with Your help, will always be for the rest of my life.

YVY

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by DovInIsrael - 15 Mar 2011 17:26

My wife noticed a link to a dating site, with chats - THIS WAS MUCH MORE OF A THREAT TO HER THAN immodest women.

Chats are designed to bring people together...

many authorities now recognize chatting as a form of adultery

>> you said: only dabbled a tiny bit with chat...wonder how your wife would see having a tiny bit of an openly sexual conversation with another woman.

@Gaurd:

What do you think about a limited open co-ed forum/thread, to allow both spouses to gain from the other.

General format could be:

When my wife/spouse does _____

it makes me FEEL _____

Really, what I need is _____

with a chance to hear co-ed feedback (for tznius reason - could be done completely anon. no names or ids listed.)

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by KiviYVY - 15 Mar 2011 17:39

[tzaddik90 wrote on 15 Mar 2011 16:47:](#)

can you succinctly and briefly list for us the negative effects of a non addict joining the forum or site? in what way does it cause "overkill". looking to understand.

I wrote there are "risks to their emotional well-being and their marriages." They also "label themselves as addicts, and find themselves treading in the shark infested waters of labeling themselves as hard core addicts and treating their pneumonia with chemotherapy."

If someone labels themselves as a hard core addict when in truth they have a mild addiction they would seem to be at risk of giving up hope, which effects their overall well being, their attitude towards themselves, and their approach to other issues in life. Self-esteem and optimism is extremely important in life and it's a shame for a person to be stripped of that unnecessarily. Yes, there are healthy approaches to this, but the risk is that such a person will not be guided towards that approach. I don't have experience in this area, but the Rav we consulted does and seemed to be his take on the matter.

For marriages, there's the risk of the mild addict seeking to come clean with his wife and family, but hurting them/scarring them for life in the process.

[tzaddik90 wrote on 15 Mar 2011 16:47:](#)

also, i thought the main forum board has a specific section called the torah and chizuk approach, directed at this genre of ppl?

It's there, but "inquiring minds want to know" and there's so much interesting reading on the other parts of the forum that unless it's off-limits people will most likely read it.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by KiviYVY - 15 Mar 2011 17:43

[Kedusha wrote on 15 Mar 2011 16:51:](#)

As to the first issue, it is true that not all men are addicts. However, if a person comes to GYE desperate for help, that is certainly a sign of addiction, in that he is, evidently, unable to stop on his own (if he's not addicted, why not just do Teshuva and stop?). Also, as addiction therapist Michelle Rappaport [has said](#), Internet pornography is like crack cocaine, and it's 100 times easier to become addicted to pornography on the Internet than in the pre-web days. So, yes, GYE, as it's currently set up is not suitable for everyone. But, it is suitable for a very very large number of frum Jews. More than we wish to know about.

But if they have signs of addiction should they be given the same treatment as the hard-core addict? If they're "Coachable" as Duvid Chaim puts it, then maybe there's hope for them even if they mistake themselves for full addicts, but if they're not and they don't have a healthy approach to this there would seem to be emotional risks that could be avoided with a more delicate approach.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue

Posted by KiviYVY - 15 Mar 2011 17:51

[guardureyes wrote on 15 Mar 2011 16:57:](#)

It's possible that such men might be going down a road which is overkill for them and cause risks to their emotional well-being and their marriages.

I'd also like to better understand how you see the 12-Steps being "risky" for non-addicts. I find this unlikely.

If they join the 12 steps it's not quite risky - as long as they're coachable, they follow the program to the end, and they can maintain a healthy approach to the "addict" label. That's 3 ifs that, perhaps, a mild addict, and certainly a non-addict, should not be tested with.

[guardureyes wrote on 15 Mar 2011 16:57:](#)

(Just as an aside... As far as boys in a bath... I never allow my boys (9 and up) to take long baths. I generally encourage them to take showers, and if they insist on a bath, I give them a 5-10 minute time-limit. It is indeed not healthy to leave a boy alone in a hot tub to just lay and explore his body for a long time. That is unfortunately how many boys discover masturbation, like in the story.)

Perhaps, but the story can make a person overly nervous about it which I believe is totally unnecessary.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by KiviYVY - 15 Mar 2011 17:56

[Me3 wrote on 15 Mar 2011 17:11:](#)

I agree that being part of a phone conference or live group with hard core addicts may be detrimental to a non addict. Not from personal experience though as I myself have never joined either (I know, I know, maybe I should).

However, I don't see how applying the 12 steps can be detrimental. I would reccomend following the 12 steps for somebody who has trouble getting up on time for Shachris, or biting their nails. Following the 12 steps properly can only make you a better person. And I know others feel the same, see below.

Me3 - I assume you realize that quote was from me!!

Yeah - it's beneficial alright. I love it and am thankful that I tripped into it, but I fear that others would not approach it with a healthy attitude. I'm not always "Mr. Healthy Attitude" myself, but I feel HKB"H has guided me here and has helped me keep an appropriate perspective. For other people though I think Hishtadlus requires us to be more careful about who we direct towards treatment programs.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by KiviYVY - 15 Mar 2011 18:04

[David/Rage wrote on 15 Mar 2011 17:16:](#)

wow, yvy you make some great points...but i am confused about what your rav said here:

[.....]

Thanks - you made some great points yourself! I think I covered the emotional and marital risks in my other responses, but the point you raised that struck me is that GYE as it is does get the attention of the non-hardcore addicts and wouldn't have gotten their attention if it was just a Chizuk site. I believe that is my experience too. The question is, is there a way to get their attention and guide them to the appropriate "treatment" without the overkill factors. The GYE Nutshell might hold the key, but the site is not yet built upon that model.

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by kosher - 15 Mar 2011 18:08

I don't know that my situation is the same as others here, but perhaps it is closer to the target audience of YVY.

I was recommended by none other than DOV to not join a 12 step group and to keep my wife as far as possible away from the spouse's forum.

Having followed the advice, I am not fully competent to comment here. My feeling is that the 12 steps are great, but their value needs to be weighed against the risk that by associating with people that have much bigger problems, it starts to sound normal and reasonable (even if ideally one wants to avoid it) and could in the wrong situation lead in that direction.

(I was once sitting a shabbos meal in Shanghai - listening to all the people that are away from their families for weeks at a time on a regular basis, it sounds like that is almost normal and my doing it only a few times a year is really nothing at all. A similar effect could occur here.)

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Re: Open Correspondence with Guard on an Important Issue
Posted by KiviYVY - 15 Mar 2011 18:14

[kosher wrote on 15 Mar 2011 18:08:](#)

Having followed the advice, I am not fully competent to comment here. My feeling is that the 12 steps are great, but their value needs to be weighed against the risk that by associating with people that have much bigger problems, it starts to sound normal and reasonable (even if ideally one wants to avoid it) and could in the wrong situation lead in that direction.

Excellent point **Kosher**. Thanks for fleshing this out.

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