

SHMIRAT HABRIT



“Here I want to awaken you to a painful and shocking matter about which many people err. There are many people who refrain from speaking about these things under the pretext of modesty. May Heaven help us! In such a fallen and licentious generation as ours, where everything is exposed without shame in the open - to speak about holiness and modesty – this is considered an affront to modesty?! Can there be a greater deception on the part of the evil inclination than this?! On the contrary, it is an absolute obligation to speak about these matters in public!”

The Torah giant, **Rabbi Aharon Cutler**, of blessed memory.

SHMIRAT HABRIT

by Tzvi Fishman

SHMIRAT HABRIT - FOUNDATION OF AM YISRAEL

For some time now, the elder Sages of the Kabbalah in the Holy Land have warned that, to a large measure, a root cause of the tribulations we are facing is the sexual immorality rampant in our midst. Women's fashions, imported from Europe and America, cause the holy Jewish soul to shudder. In addition, it is becoming impossible to approach a newsstand without being confronted with the photos of sexy models on magazine covers. Our Sages have repeatedly warned that looking at immodestly dressed women and forbidden images stains the soul with a terrible pollution. Not to mention the lewdness on television, in the movies, the pornography of the Internet, and now via cellular phones, may G-d save us.



Parents! Do you know what your children are watching?

To make matters worse, when a man, or teenager, looks at immodest photographs of women, or erotic videos on the Internet, he is often brought to masturbate, or to spill semen in vain, which is

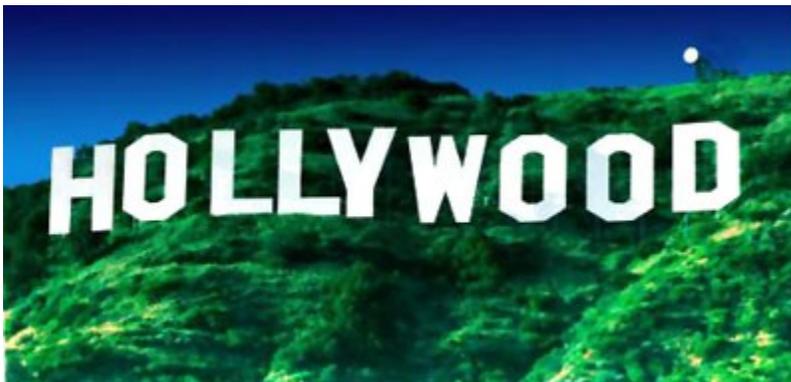
considered the most severe transgression in the Torah (*Shulchan Aruch, Aven HaEzer, 23:1*).



According to the secrets of Torah, this gives strength to the forces of evil in the world (the *Sitra Achra*) and weakens the nation of Israel. As the Torah warns us, sexual transgression leads to exile from our Land (*Vayikra, 18:28*).

Needless to say, if this decline in sexual norms is damaging the material and spiritual state of the Jewish People in the Holy Land, how much greater the damage to the Jewish People in the impure lands of

the Diaspora, where sexual immorality reigns in all of its destructive force!



The alarmingly growing rate of assimilation outside of Israel bears witness to this.

The *Baal HaTanya* explains that while all transgressions blemish the spiritual channel that brings Divine blessing to the world, transgressions incurring excision (*karet*), and death at the hand of Heaven, like the spilling of semen in vain, cause the most damage (*Igeret HaT'shuva, Ch.6*). This is true for single and married people alike.

The holy Kabbalist, Rabbi Yaacov Abuchatzera, of blessed memory, writes that the terrible tribulations that fell upon the Jewish People in exile, as set forth in the Torah portion, "*Bechukotai*," stem from sexual transgressions: "Our Sages have stated that the majority of man's sufferings, whether through disease, pestilence, war, or famine result from transgressions to the *Brit*."

Giving the great importance of *Shmirat HaBrit*, and the fires raging everywhere around us, what can we do to put out the flames?

THE COVENANT OF THE LAND

Shmirat HaBrit means guarding the *Brit* or Covenant. While our connection to G-d, and to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), are eternal, the Torah warns our forefather, Avraham, that *Shmirat HaBrit* (guarding the Covenant) is of paramount importance in insuring that the Covenant between G-d and the Nation of Israel remains constantly active:

“And I will give to thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land in which thou dost sojourn, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their G-d. And G-d said to Avraham, therefore you shall safeguard My Brit, you and your seed after you in their generations. This is My Brit that you shall safeguard, between Me and you, and your seed after you, every male among you shall be circumcised” (Bereshit, 17:8-10).



The meaning of *Shmirat HaBrit*, as the *Zohar* stresses, is not merely the obligation to circumcise our children, but also to guard our sexual purity. This is what differentiates us from the gentile nations, and this is what guarantees our settlement of *Eretz Yisrael*.

With the ingathering of our exiles to Israel, as the time of our final Redemption approaches, first we are tested in the raging waters of sexuality surrounding the holiness of the *Brit*. This is the underlying spiritual cause for the alarming increase of promiscuity and pornography in the world. Just as in the days of Bilaam and Balak, who strove to destroy the Jewish People by luring them into sinning with the daughters of Midian on the eve of our entry into *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel), we are being similarly tested today. To blemish the holiness of our nation and to sever our attachment to G-d, the forces of evil are waging a sexual war against us, just as the nations of Amalek, Midian, Canaan, and Greece tried to do in the past. To look like the Greeks, Hellenistic Jews stretched their foreskins back into place and rushed to compete in the nude sporting games.





Today, what can save us from drowning?

***SHMIRAT HABRIT* NEEDS LEARNING**

As noted, *Shmirat HaBrit* means guarding the Covenant by keeping the laws of proper sexual behavior. Unfortunately, the in-depth study of this subject, the foundation of *Am Yisrael*, has been left largely unlearned. This is due to two factors: the long tradition of modesty surrounding the subject; and the fact that the texts which elaborate on the importance of *Shmirat HaBrit* belong, in large measure, to the world of Kabbalah and to the secrets of Torah.

Today, at a time when sexual immodesty is everywhere, on the streets, in the shopping malls, on TV, in the movies, in the newspapers, and on the Internet, each and every man is inundated with difficult trials each day. To combat this “Tsunami” of temptation, parents, educators, and rabbis must meet the challenge by arming their children, students, and congregations with the necessary defenses – the first and foremost of which is knowledge. People must be taught to recognize the gravity of the problem, and learn how to avoid falling into the traps that surround them. Through education, people who are trapped in darkness can be given the guidance that can lead them to light.

The works of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov are most known for their focus on *Shmirat HaBrit*. However, the vital role of *Shmirat HaBrit* is not only found in Hasidic literature and in the secrets of Torah. As we shall discover, the theme appears again and again in the Torah, the Talmud, and in the precise, down-to-earth details of Jewish Law.

The great Torah scholar, the *Gaon* of Vilna, also known as the *Gra*, throughout his commentaries on the “*Zohar*” and “*Tikunei HaZohar*,” also emphasizes the role of *Shmirat HaBrit* as the foundation of Jewish life. For instance, the *Gaon* of Vilna writes that “*Tikun HaBrit*” (rectifying blemishes to the *Brit*) is the ultimate purpose of man (*Tikunei HaZohar*, *Tikun* 23, Folio 76, Column 3). He states that *Shmirat HaBrit* is the key to understanding the secrets of Torah (*Zohar*, *Parshat Pikude*, 248a). And he notes that the Redemption of the Jewish people from the exile will come speedily – if the Jewish People merit it due to *Shmirat HaBrit* (*Tikunei Zohar*, *Tikun* 21, Folio 56, column 3).

Furthermore, the holy *Zohar* emphasizes repeatedly that the spiritual and material redemption of the Nation of Israel, and of the world, is dependent on *Shmirat HaBrit*. Therefore, the more we sanctify ourselves, the more we will be able to strengthen our connection to *Eretz Yisrael*, not just for ourselves, but for the Jewish nation as a whole.



Shmirat HaBrit Brings Blessing to the Nation

WINDOWS OF THE SOUL

Watching forbidden Internet sites pollutes the soul and disconnects a person from Torah and from the Holy One Blessed Be He. The damage is especially alarming concerning our young people, who are so often innocently lured into the world of Internet pornography, and then don't have the tools to escape.



Pre-teens also find their way to “Adult” content websites.

A study conducted by Haifa University revealed that over 60% of young people watched Internet pornography on a regular basis. A person shouldn't think that he is wiser than the Torah and the great Talmudic rabbis who labored to explain the dangers of straying after one's eyes. If he says, “I can watch pornography on the Internet as much as I like and nothing happens to me,” he is tragically mistaken. Gazing at attractive women, whether on the Internet, the movies, or in provocative magazines, causes more damage to the spiritual world of a Jew than eating forbidden foods such as pork. Eating non-kosher foods pollutes the *nefesh*, the lower physical soul of a man. Gazing at women, however, pollutes the higher, more spiritual level of the soul, which, because of its loftiness, damages the highest spiritual realms, and cuts off the person from the flow of Divine blessing emanating from Above.



Watching porn on the Internet is worse than eating pork!

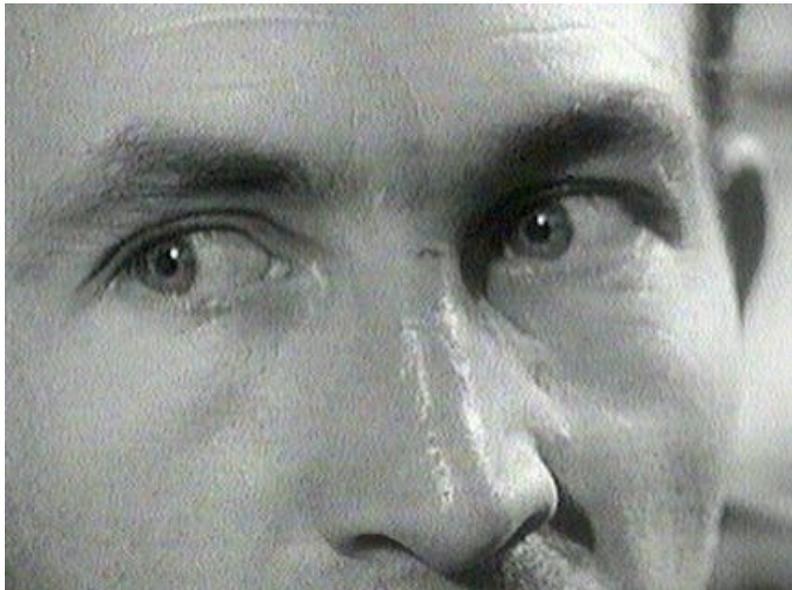
In his book, “*Kuntres HaAvodah*,” *Rebbe Sholom Dov Ber of Lubavitch*, one of the early great

Rebbs of Chabad, wrote the following:

“Everyone who is concerned about his soul, not to pollute it, G-d forbid, should guard over his eyes. And if this is difficult for him, he should endeavor to restrain himself with all of his strength and might. He must take to heart that this matter is instrumental to the well-being of his soul, and if he does not guard himself in this matter, then all of his Divine service is accounted as nothing, and all of his achievements are as naught, and his service of G-d will fall lower and lower....” (Ch 2).

The holiness of a Jew is dependent on the degree to which he guards his eyes from looking at forbidden images.

When a man sees an immodestly dressed woman or an erotic photograph, his desire is aroused. Automatically, his spiritual world is polluted. With every sexual thought and fantasy, he violates the Torah prohibition, “*And you shall guard yourself from everything evil.*” All the more so if this brings him to spill his seed in vain (*Taharat HaKodesh*, Ch. 3).



The Torah describes how Yosef in Egypt withstood the temptation with Potiphar's wife. Day after day, dressed in the most immodest outfits, the wicked woman would approach the young Hebrew slave and beckon him to her quarters. She would whisper seductive things in his ear, but day after day he refused. She kept after him for months on end, doing everything in her powers to cast her spell over him. On that fateful day when she threw herself at him with all of her charms, she made sure that no one else was in the house. The only thing standing between Yosef and the forbidden act was his fear of G-d. His father and family were hundreds of miles away, he was in the prime of his strength, she was the most beautiful and seductive woman in Egypt, and still he resisted.

In praising Yosef's achievement, the *Zohar* emphasizes that guarding the Covenant of sexual holiness is like observing all of the Torah (*Zohar, Bereshit 197a*).

In our time, each of us is tempted every day with the very same test when we sit down at the computer. Thousands of seductive women are just a quick click away. Today, the Internet is Potiphar's wife.



Potiphar's Wife

We who don't have the same exalted fear of G-d that Yosef had, where will we summon the strength to overcome the temptation? For us, Divine assistance comes in the form of an anti-pornography filter. Thank G-d, there are many on the market. Many can be downloaded for free. They afford vital (if only partial) protection from the overpowering temptations of Internet surfing. I say partial because the filters don't encompass all lewd sites, and furthermore, most teenagers today know ways of circumventing the filter, such as USB Wireless attachments, 3rd generation cell phones, I Phones, MP4 players, and the Bluetooth copy program.



So grave is the danger of Internet [watching](#) that Torah authorities have ruled that Internet surfing without an anti-porn filter is a violation of the Torah commandment, **“Thou shall not put a stumbling block in front of a blind man.”** Erotic pictures on the Internet, whether they

be in ads, on the Yahoo home page, or in adult sites, cause a person to violate a long list of Torah commandments, including:

“You shall be holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am holy!”(*Vayikra* 19:2)

“Thou shall not turn astray after your hearts and after your eyes which lead you astray.” (*Bamidbar* 15:39)

“Therefore shall your camp be holy, that He see no unclean thing in you and turn away from you.”(*Devarim* 23:15)

“And you shall guard yourself from every evil thing.”(*Devarim* 23:10)

“Do not turn astray after their gods!”(*Vayikra* 19:4)

“You shall not walk in the customs of the gentile.”(*Vayikra* 20:23)

“Thou shall not bring an abomination into your house.”(*Devarim* 7:26)



Without a reliable filter, it is forbidden to bring this beast into your home!

Our Sages have long told us that sexual transgression causes a terrible rift between the Jewish Nation and G-d, causing exile and national destruction. Our enemies know this and therefore muster all of their cunning, material resources, and technology to bring us to sin. This has been the strategy from the time of Amalek, Midian, Greece, throughout history down to the zillion dollar industry of Internet pornography today. Today, this terrible enemy has not only invaded our territorial borders – rather, like the Trojan Horse, it has been afforded an honored place in our homes. So if you want to join in the fight and help win the battle, save yourselves, your children and the entire Jewish Nation – and expel this cruel and crafty enemy from your homes, if not by throwing away the computer, then at least by installing a reliable filter, and entrusting the code with the mother and daughters of the house only.

Tefilla Zaka

On the eve of Yom Kippur, to enter into a mood of repentance, many congregations recite the prayer called “*Tefilla Zaka*,” which begins:

“Almighty, Father of mercy and forgiveness, Whose right hand is extended to accept those who return in repentance, and Who created man to bestow goodness upon him at the end of his days, and Who created in him two inclinations, the good and the evil inclination....

“And now, my L-rd, I didn’t listen to Your voice, and I followed after the counsel of the evil inclination...and not only did I not sanctify my organs and limbs, but I made them impure.



“You created in me a brain and a heart, and fashioned in them the faculty of thought to think good thoughts and pure contemplations, and a heart to understand your holy words, and to pray and pronounce every blessing with pure intentions. And I made them impure with sordid thoughts and unholy contemplations.

“And worse than this, through my evil fantasies and foreign thoughts, I came to emit semen in vain, both by accident and knowingly, through impure seminal emissions that make the whole body impure. And

through emitting this seed, I created evil spiritual forces and agents which are called the plagues of the sons of man.”

GUARDING THE *BRIT* = GUARDING THE LAND

The Torah warns us that Israel’s success and security is dependent on guarding our holiness, specifically in the area of sexual purity:

“When you go out to encamp against your enemies, then guard yourself from every evil thing. If there be among you any man that is not clean by reason of an impure emission of semen at night, then he shall go abroad outside of the camp, he shall not come within the camp” (Devarim, 23:10-11).

“For the L-rd your G-d walks in the midst of thy camp, to deliver you, and to give up your enemies before you; therefore shall your camp be holy, that He see no unclean thing in you and turn away from you” (Devarim, 23:15).

This demand for sexual purity applies not only to the soldiers of Israel, but also to community life in general. The Torah commands us, *“You shall be holy, for I the L-rd your G-d am holy” (Vayikra, 19:2).*

On a national level, our ability to conquer and settle all of the Biblical borders of the Land of Israel, depends on the holiness with which we lead our lives, both for soldiers in the Israeli army, and civilians in their private lives. This is the key to victory. By guarding our holiness, the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) stays with us, fighting our battles alongside our soldiers and tanks.



“For the L-rd your G-d walks in the midst of thy camp, to deliver you, and to give up your enemies before you; therefore shall your camp be holy....”

To ensure the day-to-day holiness of the Jewish People, the Torah and its Sages set forth guidelines to prevent a man from succumbing to the temptations that can easily cause him to err. In addition to the prohibition of gazing at erotic images, Jewish Law demands that a man exert special care to distance himself from interaction with women (*Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer*, 21:1). This warning is not because women are evil, G-d forbid. Rather, it comes to guard a man from falling into transgression.

Regarding the prohibition against being alone with a woman, Jewish Law states:

“One must not be alone with any woman, whether she is young or old, a Jew or non-Jew, a relative or not, except in the case of a father with his daughter, a mother with her son, and a husband with his wife” (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, 152:1).

THE IMPURITY OF NIDDAH

It is important to note that all unmarried women are considered to be in a state of menstrual impurity. The impurity of “*niddah*” (menstrual impurity) is one of the severest forms of spiritual

uncleanness. The punishment for having relations with a woman considered *niddah* is “*karet*,” dying before one’s time. Because of the great strength of *niddah* impurity, a man does not only become impure through having sexual relations with her, but also through intimacies like hugging and kissing.

When a man pollutes himself through the accidental emission of semen in vain, or through masturbation, by contact with a woman considered *niddah*, or even through a sexual fantasy alone, the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) departs from him. Holiness and impurity cannot exist in the same place.

The Midrash teaches that the Holy One Blessed Be He is slow to anger in regard to every sin, except immorality (*Bereshit Rabbah* 26). “Rabbi Simlai taught, ‘Wherever there is immorality, indiscriminate destruction comes to the world and kills the good with the wicked’” (Ibid).



GAZING AT WOMEN

Not only is physical contact with women prohibited, gazing at them to enjoy their beauty is also a serious Torah transgression (*Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer*, Ch. 300, Section 100:2).

Regarding the Torah commandment, “*You shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes*” (*Bamidbar* 15:39), the Talmud explains: “After your hearts – this refers to idol worship. After your eyes – this refers to sexual immorality” (*Berachot* 12B). The eye and the heart are the two instruments of sin. The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body completes the action (Rashi on *Bamidbar* 25:39).



Today, because of the promiscuity and immodesty that pervade modern life and Western culture, we have become accustomed to this state of affairs, as if this is the natural way to be. However, Jewish Law demands a higher level of moral behavior.

“Whoever gazes at a woman forbidden to him, and says to himself that there is nothing wrong with this, for he hasn’t had sexual relations with her, or even touched her, he is mistaken. Gazing at women is a serious wrongdoing, for it brings a man to sexual transgression, as it says, “*You shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes*” (*Hilchot T’shuva* of the Rambam, 4:4). The Gemara teaches: “You should guard yourself from every evil thing – this means a man should not gaze upon an attractive woman, even a single one, nor upon a married woman, even if she is ugly” (*Avodah Zara* 20A).

This is because, “A man shouldn’t have sexual thoughts in the day and come to seminal impurity at night” (*Avodah Zara* 20B).

SPILLING SEMEN IN VAIN

Wasting semen is a Torah prohibition according to all authorities. Punishment is death at the Hand of Heaven (*Niddah* 13A). In other words, a person is not sentenced or even tried by Jewish courts for this transgression. Rather, it is left to G-d to pass judgment and execute punishment. While in several places, the *Zohar* indicates that there is no repentance for this transgression, the meaning is that ordinary repentance, stemming from the fear of punishment, does not suffice, but that a course of higher repentance, stemming from a great love of G-d, is needed (*Baal HaTanya*, Letter of *T’shuva*, Ch. 4).

The Talmud compares all sexual offenses, including masturbation, with adultery (See *Niddah* 13A and B).

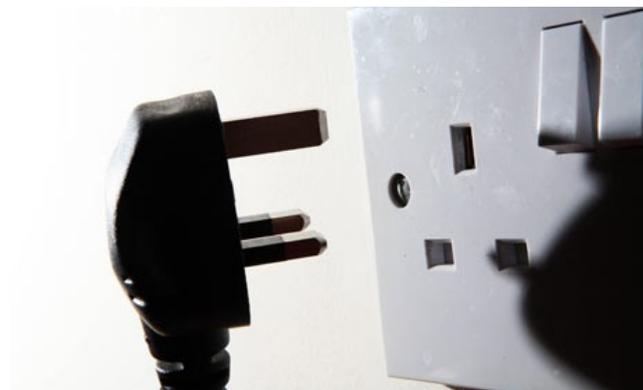
The halachic treatise “*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*,” states:

“It is forbidden to discharge semen in vain. This is a graver sin than any other mentioned in the Torah (*Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer*, 23:1). Those who practice masturbation and cause the issue of semen in vain, not only do they commit a grave sin, but they are under a ban, concerning which it is said, “Your hands are full of blood” (*Yishayahu*, 1:15), and it is equivalent to killing a person. See what Rashi wrote concerning Er and Onan in the Portion of *Vayeshev* (*Bereshit*, Ch. 37) that both Er and Onan died for the commission of this sin. Occasionally, as a punishment for this sin, children die young, G-d forbid, or grow up to be delinquent, while the sinner himself is reduced to poverty. One is forbidden to willfully cause an erection, or to think about women. If a lascivious thought comes to one spontaneously, he should divert his attention to a subject of Torah. Lewd thoughts prevail only in a mind devoid of wisdom.”

In summary, we can see from the warnings of the Torah, from the admonishments of the Talmud, from the exacting prohibitions of Jewish Law, and from the inner understandings of the *Zohar* and the Kabbalah, that *Shmirat HaBrit* is indeed the foundation upon which all of life is based.

THE SOURCE OF LIFE

In order to grasp the full significance of the laws surrounding *Shmirat HaBrit*, it is necessary to understand the tragedy of spilling semen in vain, both for an unmarried person, and for a husband and wife.



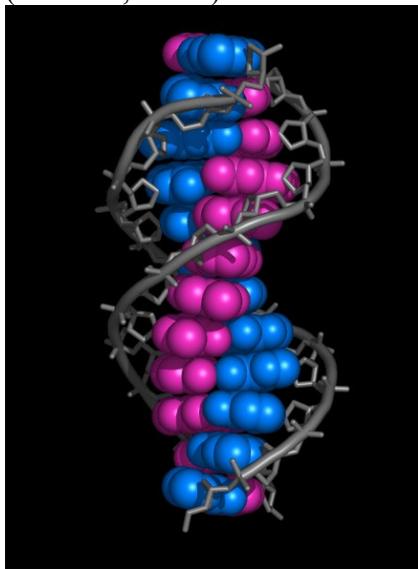
In the Kaballah, the marital union is associated with the lofty spiritual concept of “*Hashmal*,” that the Prophet Ezekiel saw in a vision, and which is translated in modern Hebrew as “electricity.” In effect, sexual transgression metaphorically short-circuits the “*Hashmal*” or life force, and disconnects a person from G-d.



“Hashmal” - The life force connecting Heaven and Earth

Semen contains this *“Hashmal”* – the Divine spark of life that sustains the whole world. The *Zohar* explains that the ladder that Yaacov saw in his dream represents the *Brit*, also called the *Yesod*, the spiritual channel that connects man with heaven, another name for the concept of *“Hashmal”* (*Zohar, Bereshit* 149). According to its inner meaning, Yaacov was not only speaking about the place of the Temple Mount, but also about the place of the *Brit* on the body:

“He laid down in the place to sleep; and he dreamed, and beheld a ladder set up on earth, and the top of it reached up to heaven, and behold the angels of the L-rd ascended and descended on it” (*Bereshit*, 28:12).



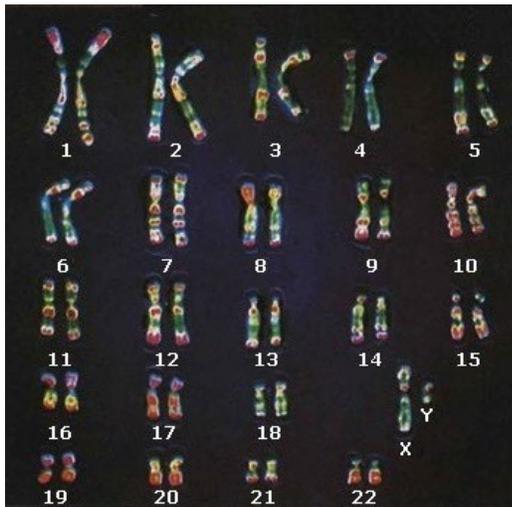
DNA – Ladder to Heaven

“And he was afraid, and he said, How awesome is this place; this is none other than the House

of G-d, and this is the gate of heaven” (*Bereshit*, 28:17).

Regarding the verse, “And he laid down *וישכב* in that place” (*Bereshit*, 28:11), Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, teaches that *וישכב* can be read, *ויש כ"ב* (and there are 22 letters) in that place – the place of the *Brit*.

The Midrash teaches that with these 22 letters of the Torah, the world was created. These Hebrew letters are the building blocks of Creation. Thus, every drop of semen contains not only the genetic blueprint of the father, but also the spiritual blueprint of life. Notice, there are also 22 pairs of genetic information carrying chromosomes, and how #3 resembles the Hebrew letter, “alef.”



This is the reason that Avraham commanded his servant, Eliezer, to swear an oath by placing his hand under the place of the *Brit* – because of its exalted holiness (*Bereshit*, 24:9). In this sense, blemishing the sanctity of the *Brit* through sexual wrongdoing is like desecrating a holy Torah scroll, may G-d have mercy.

The Hebrew word for semen is *zera*, which means seed. This seed contains not only the physical and spiritual blueprints of life, but also the life force itself. Each discharge of semen contains hundreds of thousands, even millions, of souls.



Each microscopic drop is more than a potential life. It is already a living soul. For this reason, the sin of spilling semen in vain is considered like the spilling of blood – like taking the life of a person. Not just the life of any person, but the life of the child of the man who commits the sin (*Niddah* 13A; *Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer*, 23:2).



Every drop is a potential child.

Kabbalistic sources explain that with each drop of semen, a soul is brought into the world. When this occurs in a manner forbidden by Jewish Law, the soul is taken captive by the forces of impurity – the *kelipot*, or husks, of the *Sitra Achra*, the “Other Side.” Thus the holy life force contained in these souls is captured by the realm of evil, strengthening the power of evil in the world. In their anguish at being taken captive amongst the husks, these kidnapped souls return to haunt the man who gave birth to them, inevitably causing him a gamut of troubles, sometimes sickness, sometimes depression, sometimes poverty, marital strife, problems with children, and a long list of other tragedies. The Arizal explains that the Hebrew word for pleasure, **ענג** “*oneg*” that a man experiences during a forbidden sexual climax, turns into **נגע** “*nega*,” or plague, by a

rearrangement of the letters. This is because the captive children that he created return to cause him great suffering (*Shaar HaKavanot*, Part Two, *Sukkot*).

In addition to physical harm, these *kelipot* or husks act as a barrier between the man and G-d, dulling his spiritual sensitivities, and turning his prayer and Torah learning into heavy, half-hearted endeavors which bring no satisfaction or joy.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MODESTY

In the light of these mystical insights, we can understand the great importance of the laws of modesty for women. The women of Israel have the responsibility to dress in a modest fashion, so as not to cause Jewish men to be drawn into sexual fantasies and sin. Their attire should cover the body according to Jewish Law. For example, sleeves should extend lower than the elbow. Skirts should extend below the knees. Clothes should not be so tight-fitting that they expose her figure in a suggestive fashion. When a woman dresses immodestly, she arouses the sexual urge in the men who see her, and this can cause sexual fantasies and the subsequent spilling of semen in vain. Besides violating the laws of modesty, women who dress in an enticing fashion transgress the prohibition of putting a stumbling block in front of a blind man, in that they lead others to sin.

In order to maintain a healthy, wholesome society, it is incumbent upon a woman to carefully guard her beauty from the public eye, and reserve its powerful effects for the enhancement of a romantic, loving relationship with her husband only.

THE POWER OF PENITENCE

The reader can rightfully ask, “After all that I have learned about *Shmirat HaBrit*, what can I do to rectify my past mistakes?”

First of all, one must know, with all the gravity of sexual transgression, penitence (*t’shuva*) is certainly possible, as the *Rambam* states: “There is nothing that stands in the way of repentance” (*Laws of T’shuva*, 3:24).

Furthermore, a person should not think that because of the great number, or because of the seriousness of his sins, he can never start anew. This is not true, as the *Rambam* makes clear: “Let not the penitent suppose that he is prevented from attaining the degree of the righteous because of the iniquities and sins that he has committed. This is not so. He is beloved by the Creator, and desired by Him, as if he had never sinned. Moreover his reward is great, since through having tasted sin, he renounced it and overcame his evil passions. The Sages say, ‘Where penitents stand, the completely righteous cannot stand’ (*Berachot* 34B). This means that the degree attained by penitents is higher than that of those who had never sinned, since the penitent has had to put forth a greater effort to subdue his passion than he who has never sinned” (*Ibid.*, 7:4).



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“Where penitents stand, the completely righteous cannot stand.”

The Talmud teaches that the penitent not only cleanses himself of transgressions, his penitence brings blessing to all of existence. “Great is penitence for it brings healing to the world, and an individual who repents is forgiven, and the whole world is forgiven with him” (*Yoma* 86A).

The spiritual renewal awakened by *t’shuva* is undoubtedly one of the most uplifting experiences in life. Nonetheless, because of the pain involved in facing past errors, and the need to make real changes to set one’s life on a healthier path, the challenges facing the penitent are great. This is especially true when it comes to redressing sexual transgression since the penitent is called upon to redirect life’s most powerful urge from an egotistical quest for personal pleasure to a fervent love and attachment to G-d.

The essentials of repentance are that a person abandon his transgression, remove it from his thoughts, regret his past action and resolve never to do it again. He must make an oral confession, verbalizing the resolutions he made in his heart. Moreover, it is necessary to specify the sin (*Rambam, Laws of T’shuva, 2:3*).

In starting off on the road of *t’shuva*, the penitent has already succeeded. For in reaching out to G-d, he has already attached himself to the true meaning and greatest pleasure of life.

There is a *Tikun!*

Our Sages have set forth guidelines on how to rectify the damages of sexual transgressions. First and foremost is increasing the study of Torah. If a person was accustomed to learning one chapter a day, he should now learn two; or if he learned one page, let him now learn two (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 615; *Mishna Berura*, sub-section 3). Just as immersion in a



natural spring purifies, so too does immersion in the Torah.



The *Baale HaTanya* writes: “Since the violation of the Covenant through wasteful emission, to say nothing of stark immorality and unions prohibited by the Torah and Sages (for the words of the Sages are more grave) causes a blemish in the mind, therefore the rectification is to occupy oneself with Torah which derives from Wisdom” (*Igeret HaT’shuva*, Ch.9).

There are additional things that aid in rectifying blemishes to the *Brit*, like immersion in a *mikvah*, confessional prayers, guarding over one’s eyes, doing extra deeds of kindness, and giving charity as generously as one can.

In order to assist the penitent in his path of rectification, masters of the Kabbalah composed special prayers called “*Tikunim*” which have the power to erase the blemishes caused by sexual transgressions, and to rectify the souls that fell into captivity through the spilling of semen in vain. These prayers, when recited with heartfelt remorse, repair the damage caused to all spiritual worlds by rectifying the *sefirah* of *Yesod*, the all-encompassing channel which brings Divine illumination and blessing to the world.

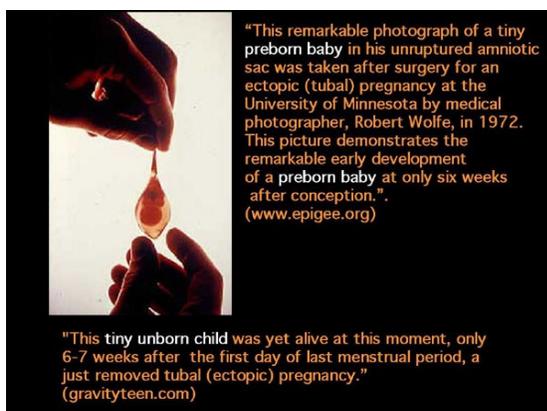
These *Tikunim* include: The “*Tikun HaYesod*” of Rabbi Yosef Chaim, *z’tzal*, also known as the Ben Ish Chai. The “*Tikun HaClalli*” of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *z’tzal*. The “*Tikun Yesod*”

Yeshuat Eliahu” of Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, *shlita*. The Kaballistic version of “*Pitom HaKetoret*,” as formulated by the Ari HaKadosh. As well as “*Tikun Hatzot*,” the midnight lament over the destruction of Jerusalem, and the special *tikunim* during the period of “*Shovavim*.” These unique and profound *tikunim*, when incorporated into a penitent’s daily regimen of prayer and Torah learning, have the ability to purify the deepest recesses of the soul, and to free a person from the mistakes and temptations of the past. The verses of the prayers, the Divine names they contain, and their Kaballistic codes act to obliterate the *kelipot* created through the emission of semen in vain and other sexual transgressions. They help liberate the penitent from the invisible, negative spiritual forces which darken his life. In awakening hitherto dormant powers of holiness, these *tikunim* also strengthen the penitent to overcome the temptations and challenges of the future. In addition, they serve as a lifeline, providing an important sense of security. For, if a person should weaken in the battle against the evil inclination and fall back to erring ways, he knows he has a ladder with which he can climb back up out of the imprisoning clutches of sexual sin.

The prolific author and lecturer, Rabbi Yisrael Hess, *z’tzal*, counseled thousands of young people throughout Israel, most notably at Bar Ilan University where he taught for many years. In an essay on *Shmirat HaBrit*, he emphasizes the importance of relying on the secrets of Kaballah to purify a person from the spiritual pollution of spilling semen in vain:

“The sin of spilling semen in vain is, at the same time, a transgression like all Torah transgressions, and yet much more severe in its devastating influence, in that it causes deep and high reaching damage, far greater than other prohibitions of the Torah. Because of this duality, we cannot understand the magnitude of this transgression and its powerful influences according to standard explanations. Rather, our understanding must come from the inner explanations of the Torah, from the spiritual realm that extends beyond our ordinary physical orientation. This understanding derives from powers that are beyond human intellectual reasoning, which are found in the world of Kaballah.

“Within the physical drop of semen emitted from our material bodies is to be found a Divine creative power hidden from our eyes, beyond our conceptual understanding, beyond our ability to create it ourselves.



“When we recognize this wonder, it clear that the rectification of any blemish to this Divine essence cannot be among the ordinary paths of correction that we are familiar with. We cannot

even understand how or why a particular *tikun* works to rectify the transgression, or how some particular advice can make whole what was blemished and erase the damages incurred.

“With the help of G-d, when we merit to increase our learning and knowledge, when we fill ourselves with Torah and faith, with the fear of G-d, and with greater purity, then we will merit to fathom what is hidden from us now.... Until then, our desire to emerge from our quandary and to improve ourselves, brings us to proceed forward with the willingness to bow our heads and submit to the giants of the inner workings of the soul, the masters of Kaballah. In doing this, may there be a balancing atonement – a sin that we committed wantonly, without thinking about its consequences will be rectified through *tikunim* that are beyond our thinking processes and intellectual grasp” (Essay on *Shmirat HaBrit*, in the book, “*V’Hayitem Kidoshim*,” Pgs. 150-151).

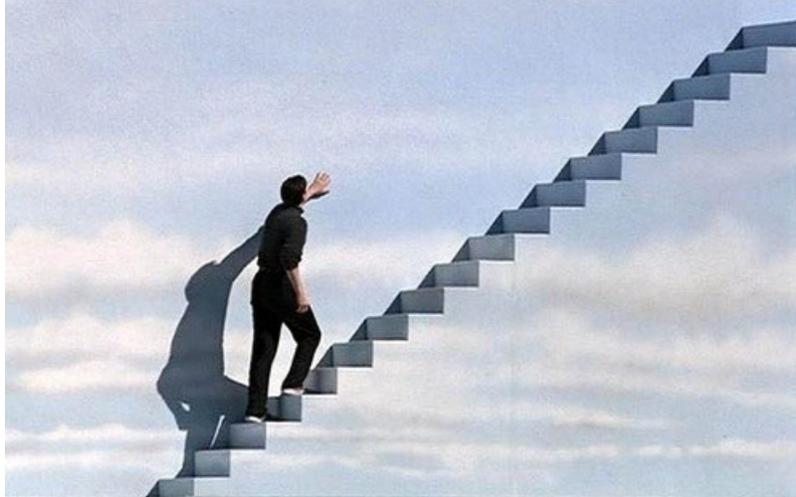
In order to rectify the souls which were exiled to the realm of impurity through blemishes to the *Brit*, the Arizal stresses the importance of reciting the Bedtime *Shema* with great *kavanah* (concentration). A personal connection to a Torah scholar versed in these esoteric matters is also a key. All together, a person should strive to attain a new level of love and reverence for G-d, which finds ardent expression in the constant desire to serve G-d, rather than being a servant to one’s egotistical passions and pleasures.

Addicted to the Internet?

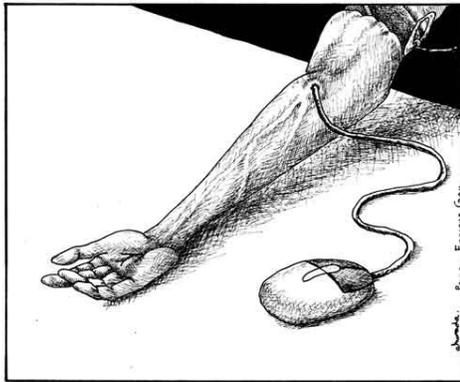
Tragically, many of our brothers have become addicted to pornography on the Internet. I contribute to a website in English dealing with these matters, www.jewishsexuality.com and too many people, single and married, write us describing the horrors they have fallen into because of the easy access to Internet pornography.

Addiction is a disease that can be treated. In the past, I wrote a book about gambling addiction, and over the years I have learned about the addiction to alcohol and drugs as well. To help people overcome Internet addictions to pornography, we took the famous 12 step program initiated by Alcoholics Anonymous and adapted it to a 12 step Torah approach to overcoming pornography addiction. Here are the 12 Torah Steps:





1. We admitted that we were powerless over lust -- that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves, the One and Only Creator, who gave the Torah to His nation Israel, could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of G-d, and to cling fast to the commandments and the teachings of His Torah.
4. We [admitted to G-d](#), to ourselves, and to others, especially to a Torah scholar, the exact nature of our wrongs, and made a commitment not to repeat our mistakes.



5. We were entirely ready to put our trust in G-d and have Him remove all of our transgressions through our heartfelt *t'shuva*, and to trust Him to help us correct unhealthy character traits, and [to rectify our moral shortcomings](#) and the spiritual damages we caused. We humbly begged Him to remove our shortcomings and forgive our sins.
6. We took upon ourselves to [immerse in a purifying mikvah](#) as often as we could.
7. We took it upon ourselves to stop [gazing at women](#), and pictures of women, whether on the Internet, cell phones, TV, the movies, in magazines, or in the street.
8. [We set upon a course of constant t'shuva](#), making a daily personal inventory, and if we erred and sinned as before, we promptly admitted it.
9. We fervently prayed to forge a constant, joyous connection to G-d, and spoke to Him out loud, on a regular basis as a man speaks to a friend, admitting our weaknesses and

fears, and asking for His help in all of our doings, placing special importance on the recital of Tehillim, and [the Bedtime Shema](#) with great intention, and the midnight lamentation "[Tikun Hatzot](#)" over the destruction of Jerusalem, and special prayers called "[Tikunim](#)" designed to rectify the damage we caused to the *Brit*.

10. We took upon ourselves a [loving, joyous, and diligent commitment to Torah](#) study for its own sake, including the study of the secrets of Torah, applying ourselves to the learning with the same fervor and passion we once wasted on vanity, and we sought out holy Jewish sages who could help illuminate our learning, knowing that it was in the power of the holy Hebrew letters of the Torah to heal the damage we caused to our eyes, to our souls, and to the world.
11. We took upon ourselves a new heightened level in the fear and reverence of G-d, including a heightened concentration in our daily prayers, in the recital of blessings, and in the proper performance of the commandments, including (for married men) the [sanctification of the marital union](#), accepting stringencies upon ourselves, rather than pretending that immodest behavior was perfectly all right.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles with all of our strength and with all of our hearts, with the supreme joy of knowing that G-d has forgiven us and created us anew.

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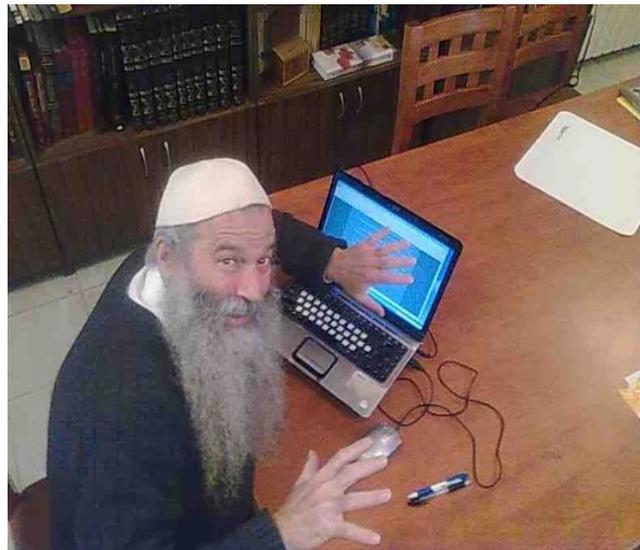
While the sexual urge is one of man's most powerful passions, a person can find strength in the teaching of our Sages that when someone tries to purify himself even a little, he is purified greatly from Above (*oma* 39A). The battle to overcome the *etzer hara*" (evil inclination) is fierce, but, with G-d's help, success is within everyone's grasp.

Yetzer hara down for the count!

Someone is Watching!

Our Sages teach us that everything *Hashem* created, He created for His honor. Today, thanks to satellite photography and "Google Earth," we can better understand how *Hashem* watches over us every second of our lives. Just as satellite photos can zoom down with pinpoint accuracy on every point of the globe, so does G-d! When you sit down in front of the computer, you may think that you are alone, but you are not!

"Google Earth"



Hashem is watching you!

No Room for Despair

Don't be discouraged if you still have fantasies and evil inclinations after working hard to cleanse yourself of them. Only the greatest *Tzaddikim* reach the level where they vanquish their *yetzer hara*. When a man sees an attractive woman and averts his gaze, he adds a great blessing to the world and draws the *Shechinah* upon him.

Rather than being crestfallen by reoccurring temptations and lapses, a man should fortify himself with the knowledge that each time he pushes a lustful thought out of his mind, or turns away

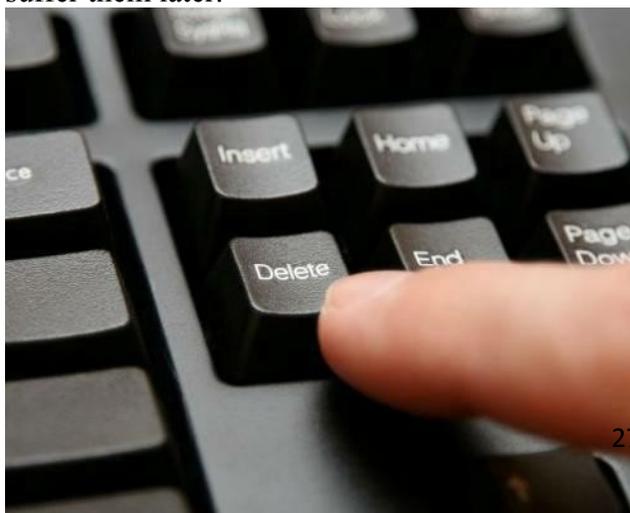
from looking at an erotic image, he makes a great *tikun* in all of the spiritual worlds. Every victory over his *yetzer* weakens the power of the *Sitra Achra* in the world, and exalts the Name of G-d more than any other action (*Zohar, Shemot 128a*).

If all of our strategies fail in our battle to overcome sin, our Sages tell us to remember the day of our death. When we get to the gates of Heaven, before they let us in, we'll have to watch the movie of our lives in front of a panel of judges, including Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, Moshe *Rabbeinu* and King David, the holy Prophets and Sages of Israel, not to mention, the Holy One Blessed Be He.

The shame we experience will be worse than a thousand hells, when, up on the panoramic screen in the sky, we are confronted with all of our most secret doings.



Only serious repentance now can **delete** our mistakes and wrongdoings, so we won't have to suffer them later.



In summary, remember that G-d is always willing to help a person who comes to cleanse himself from mistakes of the past. Therefore, my dear brother, **“Be holy!”** And always remember, “It’s a mitzvah to be happy!” *Chazak v’amatz!* Be strong and of good courage, for our Nation and for our Land!

Part Two – Some Words From Our Sages

Letter of the *Chofetz Chaim*

In the year 1927, at a time of world depression, poverty, and widespread persecution of the Jews, the *Chofetz Chaim* wrote a passionate appeal to the rabbis of world Jewry, urging them to speak out on the dangers of immodesty, in order to stem the sufferings of the Jewish People. If that was the case then, how much more so now when every border has been broken! We quote from his letter:



The Chofetz Chaim

"With the help of the blessed G-d, the beginning of the month of *Tammuz*, the year 5688 from Creation, written in the city of Radin.

To the honored Rabbis and *Admorim*, in every location, perhaps it is in your hands to rectify this matter, may your reward be great from the L-rd.

Behold, I have great anguish over this matter, and great wonder. Even though everyone believes that all that is written below is from the Holy One Blessed Be He, nevertheless, everyone is perplexed, and it is an enigma in his eyes why times have changed so dramatically for the worse.

In addition to the fact that all of the Jewish People, in every place of their dispersion among the nations, have fallen to a state of subservience, the cost of living also rises daily, taxes and rents also greatly increase, terrible decrees hampering the observance of Torah and *mitzvot* have fallen on everyone, causing the Torah study of children in many cities to be abandoned, and earning a living comes at great toil. In summary, each Jew complains, each in his own fashion, over his difficult situation.



Regarding these years, even though they be filled with suffering and decrees, nevertheless, a person with a pure heart could comfort himself and say that even though the externalities of life are not to his liking, nonetheless, regarding his spiritual situation, he is certain that he is not far from the Holy One Blessed Be He, and that certainly, when all is said and done, G-d will stand at his right side and save him.

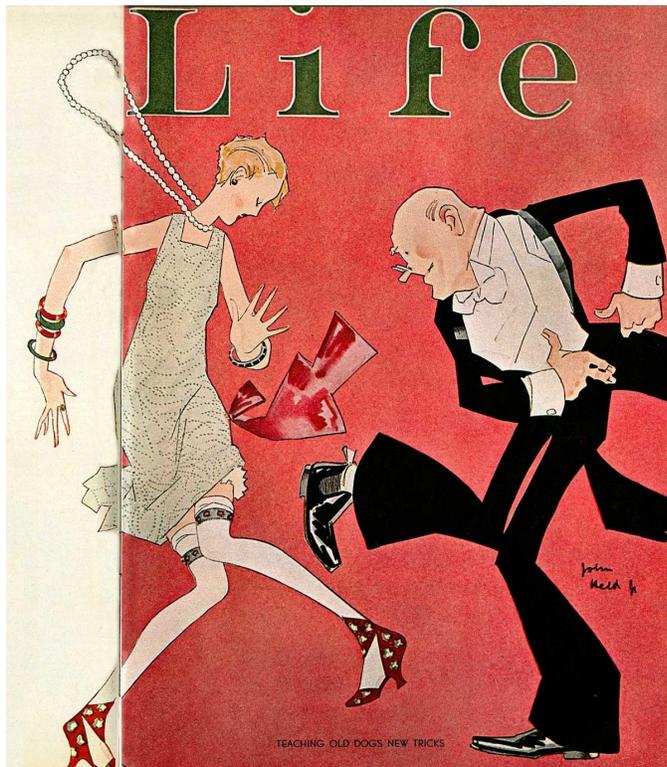
Indeed, so it is written, "*For He stands at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those who would condemn him to death*" (Psalms, 109:31). However, today, because of our great sins, bitterness surrounds us, and when a person looks around him at the state of his life, there is not a day that is not cursed more than yesterday. And when he examines his situation regarding Torah and *mitzvot*, he sees that there also he has absolutely no success. And even though every Jew beseeches the Holy One Blessed Be He to answer his pleadings and to grant him respite, no one hears - this is the true situation.

I have said that the main reason is that we ourselves distance the Holy One Blessed Be He from us. He commanded us, "*Sanctify yourselves and be holy*" (Vayikra, 20:7), and our Sages have taught us that everyone who sanctifies himself on earth will be sanctified from Above. If he sanctifies himself a little, he will be sanctified a great deal from Above (Yoma 39A). When he sanctifies himself in this world, he is sanctified in the world to come. It is also written, "*For the L-rd your G-d walks in the midst of your camp to save you, and to conquer your enemy from before you*" (Devarim, 23:15).

The meaning of "*to save you*" includes many things, to save you from the sword, and from hunger, from imprisonment, and from humiliation. The verse continues, "*Therefore your camp*

shall be holy, that He see no unchaste thing in thee and turn away from thee." The Torah explains the matter explicitly, that when we conduct our lives in a holy manner, then He walks in the midst of us to deliver us from every evil thing. However, if He sees in us some unchaste matter, He turns away from us, and this brings upon us all of the tribulations, G-d forbid.

Behold, our Sages stated, 'A handbreadth exposed in a woman, in a place that is usually covered, constitutes sexual immodesty' (*Berachot 24A*). And today, due to our many sins, this matter has very greatly spread, and the evil inclination seduces women to walk around without covering their hair, and to go out with their arms exposed in sleeveless dresses. And many of their garments expose the chest. Everything is exposed so that in whatever place a man should look, he is confronted with immodesty....



In summary, this terrible fashion of the times brings a man to have evil imaginations, and sometimes also the emission of semen in vain, G-d forbid, (and in doing so, he endangers his small children, as the brilliant Torah scholar, the Yaabetz, wrote in his prayer book). And almost because of this terrible fashion alone, we ourselves negate the admonishment of the Holy One Blessed Be He, as it says, *"Therefore your camp shall be holy, that He not see in you any unchaste thing."*

And behold, it is known to everyone that when a fire bursts out in the vineyard of the king, a proclamation goes forth from the ministers of the king to the inhabitants of the city, saying: 'Everyone be strong to extinguish the fire in any way you can, for

the vineyard of the king is burning, and if you are lazy in this matter, know that you will be held responsible with your lives, and you will be labeled rebels, because you did not take heed for his honor. And if you take courage, as is fitting, and put out the fire, then everyone shall receive his reward and honor according to his efforts.' So too in this matter, for it is known that all of Israel is considered the vineyard of the L-rd, as is written, *'For the house of Israel is the vineyard of the L-rd of Hosts'* (*Yisheyahu, 5:7*).



The Vineyard of the King is Burning!

And due to our many sins, a great blaze has erupted in His vineyard in several places because of this terrible modern fashion. For the power of impurity has considerably strengthened because of this. As our Sages have said on the verse, "*And you shall guard yourselves from every evil thing*" (*Devarim*, 23:10), that a man should not have sexual thoughts during the day and come to pollute himself at night (*Ketubot* 46A). For if this should occur, all of the blessing and Divine flow to this man's deeds will be cut off, and because of this he will be surrounded by evil tribulations, as is written in the holy books of wisdom.

Therefore, every man has the obligation to extinguish this terrible fire, and to rectify the situation in his home so that everything will be according to the law, and not to allow licentiousness, G-d forbid. And in doing so, he will merit to have upright and exalted holy children.



Every man has the obligation to extinguish this terrible fire!



And more than anyone else, this obligation falls on the rabbis and on all those who are zealous to fulfill G-d's words, that in every city and village, the importance of this matter must be publicly explained, in that it directly effects our survival and our success, both physically and spiritually, in this world and the next. Thus will the verse be fulfilled, "*And your camp shall be holy.*"

These words are written in the honor of G-d and His Torah, out of anguish over the tribulations of His nation Israel, with the longing for redemption, speedily in our time, Amen."

Signed:

Yisrael Meir, the son of Areyeh Zev, the Kohen
Author of the book "*Chofetz Chaim*" and the *Mishna Berura*.

A Cry From The Heart

To Our Honored Sisters and Holy Jewish Daughters

By Rabbi Daniel Frish, author of the commentary on the Zohar, "*Matok M'Dvash*"

It is time to seriously examine the terrible breach brought about by clothes that hug the body in a provocative manner. When we contemplate to the depth of the matter, we must know that every time a woman goes out wearing a tight-fitting garment - even without intending to cause damage, but merely to appear "more attractive" - behold, she returns home burdened with thousands of serious transgressions, may the Almighty have mercy!

Each time a woman goes out to the street in immodest attire, she transgresses six prohibitions of the Torah and five positive commandments. With each man that she causes to gaze at her with a lustful glance, she transgresses the prohibition, "*Do not put a stumbling block before a blind man*" (*Vayikra*, 19:14).



Furthermore, she brings upon herself the same punishment that he will face in the future, as the holy *Rashi* explains on the verse, "*He will bear her iniquity,*" that whomever causes his fellow to sin, is punished in his place (*Bamidbar*, 30:19).

In his book, "Letter of *T'shuva*," *Rabbeinu Yona* also makes this point, stating that a man who gazes at a woman lustfully, whether at her face or her hand, brings the punishment of hell upon himself. And she receives the punishment that she caused to each and every man who gazed at her, because she caused them to stumble by her not behaving in a modest fashion.

It is further stated in the book, "*Shomer Emunim*," in the name of the Sages of old, that when a woman goes about on the street dressed in an immodest fashion, she is accompanied by tens of

thousands of evil forces and husks of impurity (*kelipot*,) may the Almighty save us. These impure forces enter into the hearts of the men on the street, and tempt and bewilder these men into gazing at her and succumbing to lustful thoughts.



The Domino Effect

Therefore, a woman must realize that when she goes out in immodest attire, she "sins and brings the multitude to sin." In addition, she also causes other women and young girls who learn from her example to sin, in that they are influenced to dress in the same fashion. Her immodesty causes others to treat the commandment of modesty in a flippant manner, bringing others to trespass. This is especially true if she is a woman of standing, or a mother, or grandmother, who sets an example for daughters and granddaughters - how much greater the responsibility.

Concerning this, our Sages have said: "Yeravam sinned and caused the public to sin; thus the sin of the multitudes is attributed to him" (*Avot*, 5:21). Furthermore, they taught: "Anyone who causes a multitude to sin is not afforded repentance" (*Ibid*).

Therefore, the immodest woman plays a hand in the spiritual decline of every woman she influences, not only in regards to the woman who learned from her, but also from the woman who learns from the second woman, and there on down the chain. As long as this matter is not corrected, and the plague of immodesty not stemmed, the woman who influences others has a part in the whole.

She also causes the standard of modesty to crumble, and causes a weakening of Judaism, for she adds to the spreading of this errant fashion. When one commandment is taken lightly, the entire Torah is weakened, not only in her eyes, but in the eyes of her generation and the generations that follow. All of this comes in the wake of the woman who leaves her home wearing immodest clothes. How staggering are the consequences of this matter!

(From "The Crown of Modesty," Pg. 259)



“First, Rectify the *Brit!*”

This essay by the famed and holy Kabbalist, Rabbi Yaacov Abuchatzera, requires a brief introduction. The Torah portion, “*Bechukotai*,” is known as the portion of rebuke. The portion begins with G-d’s promise that if the Jews observe the commandments of the Torah, prosperity, blessing, and peace will befall them. However, if they turn away from the Torah, G-d warns them that terrible curses and sufferings will be their fate - they will be pursued and ravaged by their enemies and forcibly expelled from the land into exile where they will be relentlessly persecuted and killed:

*“But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all of these commandments, and if you shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that you will not do all of the commandments, but that you break My Brit, I also will do this to you: I will appoint over you terror, consumption, and fever, that shall consume thy eyes, and cause sorrow of heart, and you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.... And if you will not be admonished by Me as a result of these things, but you will walk in contrariness (**keri**) to me, then I will also walk contrary to you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. And I will bring a sword upon you that shall avenge My Brit; and when you are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy...”* (Vayikra, *Behukotai*, 26:14-25).



Rabbi Yaacov Abuchatzera

The saintly *Tzaddik* and holy Kabbalist, Rabbi Yaacov Abuchatzera, grandfather of the holy Baba Sali, explains this entire Torah portion as referring to transgression of the *Brit*:

“It is possible to infer that this is referring to the holy *Brit*, for as is known, someone who blemishes the holy *Brit*, even though he observes all of the Torah, his doings are for naught. As the holy *Zohar* writes, a person who does not have fear of sin in matters of the *Brit*, has no fear of G-d in anything he does. This is because his body which performs the commandments is blemished. Thus, everything which he does is blemished.

According to the holy *Zohar*, the verse: ‘*Be afraid of the sword, for wrath over sins brings the sword*’ (*Iyov*, 19:20) refers to this. Both the *Rishonim* (early rabbinical authorities) and *Achronim* (later rabbinical authorities) have stated that the majority of man’s sufferings, whether through pestilence, the sword, or famine result from transgressions to the *Brit*.



Before the "Tsunami" struck



After the Tsunami struck.

[The beach resorts destroyed by the Tsunami were famous for sexual immorality. Haiti also, recently devastated by an earthquake, was known for its promiscuity, and as a center of Aids disease.]



And whatever *mitzvot* and good deeds that a person does, as long as his *Brit* is blemished, it all goes to the *Sitra Achra* (Other Side, i.e. the forces of evil), may G-d have mercy.

Whoever blemishes the holy *Brit* is considered to have been false to the seal of the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed Be He. This is the meaning of ‘We have not been false to your *Brit*.’

Therefore, a person who comes to serve G-d should first rectify any blemish to the *Brit* in the proper fashion, and afterward begin to serve G-d.

For the matter of transgressing the *Brit*, and all of the sufferings that stem from this, is referred in this rebuke (in *Bechukotai*). So that when the verse says: ‘*But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all of these commandments, and if you shall despise My statutes, or if your soul abhor My judgments, so that you will not do all of the commandments, but that you break My Brit...*,’ it does not mean to say that they do not do any of the precepts, or that they do not occupy themselves with Torah; but rather, they do occupy themselves with Torah, and they do perform the commandments, but the main thing is missing, for the *Brit*, which is the principle matter, is blemished and has not be rectified. Since the *Brit* is blemished and has not been rectified, everything is canceled and considered naught.

This is why the verse concludes: ‘*but that you break My Brit.*’ That is to say: ‘Everything that I said about your despising My statutes, and your abhorring My judgments, and your rejecting My commandments, is not to be taken literally. Rather you broke My *Brit* and you blemished it, and you did not rectify it. For this reason, even if you hearken to My voice in performing all of the other commandments of the Torah, behold I proclaim to you that you have not hearkened to Me. Even if you will do all of the *mitzvot*, I will consider that you have not done them. Even if you will observe My statutes with love, I proclaim that you have despised My statutes. And even if you will perform My judgments with great joy, I proclaim that you have abhorred them. All of this is because ‘you break My *Brit*.’ For you violated My *Brit* and have not rectified it. For this reason, everything you do is considered canceled and as naught. And all of the Torah and *mitzvot* that you do, it all goes to the *Sitra Achra*. And because you betrayed My *Brit*, I will bring upon all the sufferings in the world...’

Therefore, whoever desires to do *t’shuva*, let him first rectify blemishes to the *Brit*, and after that the things he does to please G-d will succeed.”

(From the book, “*Abir Yaacov*,” section, *Pitochei Chotam; Bechukotai*)

Plagued By Sexual Fantasies

By Rabbi Daniel Frish, author of the commentary on the *Zohar*, “*Matok M'Dvash*”

The Prohibition of Sexual Fantasies

*It is stated in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Aven HaEzer*, 23:3) that it is forbidden for a man to purposely cause himself an erection, or to engage in a sexual thoughts. Rather, if sexual thoughts enter his mind, he should distract his heart from vanity and occupy himself with Torah which is filled with exquisite love and charm.

*This prohibition is based on the Talmud which states (*Niddah* 13A) that whoever willfully causes himself an erection is sentenced to excision. Someone who purposely engages in sexual thoughts is not brought into the palace of the Holy One Blessed Be He.

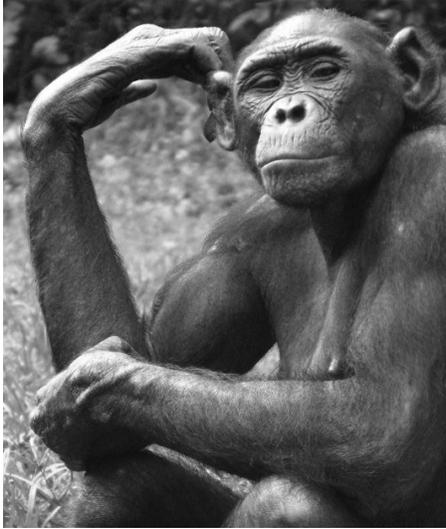
*This prohibition is also found elsewhere in the Talmud (*Ketubot* 46A, and *Avodah Zara* 20B) where Rabbi Pincus Ben Yair teaches that the Torah verse, “You shall guard yourselves from all evil things,” means that a man should not engage in fantasies during the day and bring himself to impurity (via a seminal emission) at night.

*The prohibition against engaging in sexual fantasies is also implied in the Torah prohibition, “You shall not stray after your hearts and your eyes which cause you to go astray,” (*Bamidbar*, 15:39). The Talmud states (*Berachot* 12B) that straying after one’s eyes is looking at something that brings one to a sexual thought.

*According to the *Ramban* and *Rabbanu Yona*, the prohibition against sexual fantasizing, “You shall guard yourselves from all evil things,” is included in the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah, and includes having sexual thoughts about one’s wife during the day. Fantasies are forbidden even if a person does not intend to act on them, even imagining an immodest image in one’s mind is forbidden. Also, the *Rambam* agrees that these are all Torah prohibitions, stating that they stem from the commandment, “You shall not stray after your hearts and your eyes which cause you to go astray.”

*The *Ramban* states in his “*Igeret HaKodesh*,” that to understand how sexual fantasies are worse than the act itself, one has to realize that when a man thinks about evil and impure matters, his thought and soul are connected to the upper worlds, and in polluting the upper worlds with his impure thoughts, he is held guilty by the Celestial Court.

*The holy Hasidic master, the *Baal Shem Tov*, was wont to say that a man is what he thinks. If he thinks about pure matters, he is purified, but if he thinks about impure matters, he is impure. Since the essence of a man, and what distinguishes him from beasts, is his power to think, and the faculty of thought is directly related to the soul, if a man thinks polluted thoughts, he pollutes his soul and very essence.



You are what you think.

*It is noted in the “*Tanya*” that when a person has forbidden fantasies, he makes himself into a chariot for the forces of impurity.

*One can understand the teaching of the Talmud (*Yoma 29A*) that sexual fantasies are worse than the act itself since a person can engage in an infinite number of sins in his mind, whereas, in contrast, engaging in a forbidden sexual act requires many other elements to carry out. Also, a person will often refrain from carrying out forbidden sexual acts because of shame or in fear of getting caught, factors which don’t apply to thoughts.

*It is written in the “*Sefer Haredim*” that sexual thoughts pollute the soul, even if the person does not intend to commit the sin, the thought of the mental image alone causes a blemish and distances the person from G-d. A person’s impure thoughts pollute his whole being, just as when a person enters a dirty place and soils his garments, he will be ashamed to come before a king. Therefore, one must guard oneself from straying after one’s heart and one’s eyes.



You can’t come before the King when you’re covered with mud.

*All of the above applies to a man who willfully thinks unchaste matters or purposely dwells on immodest images in his mind. However, if a sexual thought should chance against his will, and he immediately repels it from his mind, he is not considered to have sinned. On the contrary, he has performed the commandment not to stray after one's heart and eyes by pushing the thought from his mind. It is only when a person knows that a thought is improper, yet he allows his mind to dwell on it, that he is held accountable for his transgression. But should a sexual thought arise without warning, and a man recognizes that the *yetzer* is at work and expels the thought from his mind, then he has done the mitzvah of not straying after his heart, for the Holy One Blessed be He is not overly demanding of his creations (*Avodah Zara* 3A), and it is considered as if the man has been innocently forced against his will.

*In truth, a man should strive to purify himself so that a thought of forbidden sexual matters should revolt him completely, but this is a difficult level to reach. Therefore, if a man is pulled with a feeling of lust toward the forbidden thought or image in his mind, and he repulses it, without dwelling on it, or deriving further enjoyment from it, then no transgression is attributed to him and he is accredited with a *mitzvah*.

*In repenting over evil thoughts, it is proper to increase good thoughts in their place, for good and holy thoughts atone for evil thoughts and imaginations.

*Our Sages stressed the importance of avoiding sinful thoughts, and even though they were holy saints removed from material passions, they personally guarded themselves stringently from tempting situations, as can be seen in the following *Gemara* where a woman was walking in front of two Sages of old: "Rav and Rav Yehuda were walking on the road, and a woman was walking in front of them; said Rav to Rav Yehuda, 'Let us hurry ahead of her lest we be tempted and fall into hell.' Rav Yehuda protested, 'You yourself said that in the case of G-d fearing people it is all right to walk behind a woman.' Rav replied, 'Who says that we are G-d fearing people?'" (*Kiddushin* 81A). How much more so should we guard ourselves from temptation, we who are so lowly, if the early Sages were like angels, we are not even like donkeys – how many strategies must we adopt to save ourselves from sinful thoughts! ("*Taharat HaKodesh*," *Shmirat HaBrit*, Ch.5)

*One should be careful to avoid looking at or reading newspapers, magazines, novels, stories, television, movies, Internet, and similar things that may have provocative material that can stimulate erotic thoughts. One should also avoid people who speak in an unchaste fashion. For seeing an erotic image, or hearing some immodest remark, can pollute a person's mind for a lengthy time. It goes without saying that a person should be especially careful to avoid seeing immodest pictures and the like. Regarding this, it is wise to pray before one begins one's day (or a session on the computer) that one not fall prey to forbidden images, like King David who prayed, "Keep my eyes from seeing vanity." (Excerpted from the book, "*Taharat HaKodesh*," Chapter on *Shmirat HaBrit*, 5).

*Our Sages imposed many warnings so that a man shouldn't fall into sinful thoughts, such as not to gaze on women washing laundry, nor on women's clothes hanging to dry, nor on a small finger of a woman which is compared to gazing on her private place, not to employ a female servant, nor to greet a woman shalom, nor engage her in unnecessary conversation, nor to gaze

upon animals when they are having relations, and many other fences to keep a man from fantasizing. Many men say to themselves that by gazing at and talking to women there is no sin, for this is the way of the world, but they transgress the words of our Sages and bring impurity on themselves in doing so. Therefore, whatever a man can do to safeguard himself in this regard is certainly praiseworthy.

*It is wise practice to distance oneself from all temptations, since a person is easily snared in their net, and this will bring elevation to his soul and to his *mazal* (fortune), and guard him from the dangers and misfortunes of the time, and grant him spiritual and material reward, and blessing in this world and the next.

*The *Rambam* stresses that forbidden thoughts only rise in a heart that is empty of wisdom. Therefore, when forbidden thoughts arise, one should replace them with words of Torah. (*Rambam*, Laws of Forbidden Relations, see the end).

*The main reason for sexual fantasy and sins stems from a mind that is not occupied with thoughts of Torah, and when a person does not strive to renew his Torah learning for its own sake. When the mind ceases to be occupied with Torah, profane matters take its place, and this leads to sinful fantasies.



But when the mind is occupied with new advances in Torah, there is no room for extraneous rumination. Thus a person should strive to always fill his mind with Torah, and this is a great

tikun for blemishes to the *Brit*, because it was the impure reflections in his mind that led to spilling seed in vain, and now he is redressing the wrong by filling his mind with the holiness of the Torah.



The poster reads: "I place G-d's Name before me always"

[Based on Chapter 20 of the book, "*Kedusha and Tzniut*" by Rabbi Daniel Frish.

Holiness of the *Mikvah*

By Rabbi Aharon Rota, author of "*Taharat HaKodesh*" and "*Shomer Emunim*"



You should know, my brother, that in addition to the purification that comes from immersing in a *mikvah*, an exalted matter in itself, when a person immerses with the intent of sanctifying

himself, he draws over himself a great holiness. Immersing in a *mikvah* is also one of the main paths to rectifying blemishes to the soul (*nefesh*), others being repentance through fasting, self-chastisement, and tears.

Behold, the principle entranceway to holiness is through the purity of the *mikvah*. It is known that the masters of Kabbalah, like the Baal Shem Tov, made *mikvah* an integral part of their Divine service. Also note that in order to convert, a non-Jew must immerse in a *mikvah*. Even though a *Brit milah* be performed on him, if he does not immerse in a *mikvah*, he is not considered a convert to Israel.

The *Baal Shem Tov* revealed to his students that it was due to his *mikvah* immersions that he attained his transcendental levels of holiness.



The *Mikvah* of the Ari in Safed

You should also be aware, my brother, that there is an external and inner process of purification that transpires through immersing. There are myriads of external forces of impurity, called "plagues of the sons of man," and evil spirits that are created through a person's sins, whether it be transgressions in thought, speech, or deed. By far, the main source of these harmful agents of impurity are created through sexual sins, for these are considered his actual children, which he created, and which do not give him rest for a moment, both in his life in this world and in the next. They do not leave him until he has undergone many painful sufferings and scourging fires in the afterlife. And truly, he is fortunate if he is able to shed himself from them all, for their numbers are uncountable.

When a person immerses himself in a purifying *mikvah* with the intention of atonement from his sins and spiritual cleansing, all of the agents of impurity which surround him are cast away for a period of time. This interval of purity is beneficial indeed for it gives great strength to the soul (*nefesh*). And even though the forces of impurity return to cleave to him after the influence of the *mikvah* has worn off, nonetheless, when his intention is to sanctify himself, great numbers are vanquished, and his soul becomes immeasurably strengthened in holiness in the battle against the evil inclination.

There is also an inner purification that occurs during immersion, and this is the main thing. To illustrate, imagine that a person is stricken with a disease over all of his body. Though he cover his body with all kinds of ointments, they will only grant temporary relief. Only when the inner

cause of the disease is treated will the outer symptoms cease. Similarly, to affect inner purity, one must treat the sickness of the soul, which is caused by the evil inclination and its hosts. Every inner aspect of a person's being (*nefesh, ruach, neshama*) must be purged. This is the reason that we are in this world, and it is the essence of man's labor.

If a man immerses himself in a *mikvah* with the proper preparation and with the proper holy intentions, then he brings a great cleansing to his inner soul. This transpires because, concurrently, at the time of his immersion, the root of his upper soul is purified in the celestial river of *Gan Eden*, bringing purity down to the soul in his body. This weakens the power of the evil inclination, and his being is purified through the great holiness drawn down from above to his soul.

“A river went forth from the Garden of Eden....”



This purification is even greater if the water is cold, in that he fulfills the verse, "Cold waters on a weary soul" (*Mishle, 25:25*). For cold water heals the weak and weary soul from the blows of the evil inclination. For you should know, my brother, that just as it would cause you great anguish to see one man smash another man's skull and cruelly beat him to a merciless pulp with blow after murderous blow, so it is each time a man sins, the evil inclination pounds away at his soul with cruel and devastating blows. If our physical eyes could see this, and if our ears could hear the tortuous screams of the soul, we could not bear it for a moment. This is exactly what happens when a person sins against the Almighty, letting his evil inclination gain control within

him and punish him with a plague of murderous blows from his head to his foot.



POW!

Thus, when a soul,

weakened and weary from sin, enters the cold waters of a *mikvah*, this brings renewed life and healing from its sicknesses and wounds. And the more he strives to sanctify himself through the immersion by sanctifying his thoughts, he in turn receives greater sanctification from Above.

The *Baal Shem Tov* revealed to his students that it was due to his *mikvah* immersions that he attained his transcendental levels of holiness. And even though it is also said that he attained his exalted stature due to his fervent praying, both explanations are true, for it is precisely the purification of the *mikvah* that brought an awesome holiness to his prayers.

[Photo: ancient *mikvah* at Masada]



Through the power of *mikvah*, a *Tzaddik* can bring about salvations, heal the sick, and facilitate women in difficult labors to give birth. Just as the *mikvah* can help an individual to sweeten harsh judgments and annul evil decrees adversely affecting his life, immersion in the *mikvah* can enable the true *Tzaddik* to sweeten and annul harsh judgments from over the entire Jewish People, so great is the power of *mikvah*.

Therefore, know, my brother and intimate friend, that when you go to the *mikvah*, you are on your way to banish the evil aspect of your being and to banish myriads of the countless, impure husks that surround you. Know that you are going to do your share in rectifying the world and in purifying and rectifying your soul. Therefore, my brother, don't betray your soul by allowing vain and foolish thoughts to keep you from going to the *mikvah*, causing you to forfeit the awesome

holiness it brings.

)Excerpted from the article "*Taharat HaMikvah*" in the book "*Taharat HaKodesh*")

Some Frequent Questions and Answers



Failed Again!

Question:

I have been struggling with masturbation for some time. 3 months ago I did heartfelt *T'shuva* and did not sin since. However, slowly over the past 3 months I would occasionally gaze at improper websites (again), but still stayed in "check"...Unfortunately, last night I gave in. I now realize that I can't even sneak a peek. I feel so depressed, like all the work I've done till now was a total waste. I feel as if I have lied to *Hashem*...after promising not to do it, how will *Hashem* forgive me yet again? I know the gates for *T'shuva* are always open, but this time, before the act, I knew I was doing something wrong. Isn't this different?? Before, I never gave it a thought. Now, with full of knowledge of the severity of what I was about to do, I still did it. I feel so depressed. I understand forgiving one who does something they don't realize is wrong, but when one has full knowledge, isn't this different?

Answer:

This scenario happens quite often, and while every slip up is a serious matter, it isn't the end of the road. In effect, when a person's original repentance isn't as deep as it should be, *Hashem* brings it about that he fail once again, so that he reach a deeper level of *T'shuva* than before. That seems to be the case with you and the heartfelt sorrow which you expressed in your letter. Certainly *Hashem* forgives again and again when the penitent is sincere. Life is a long process of

falling down and getting up, again and again. *T'shuva* is not a one-time thing, but a constant struggle and ladder to ever new heights of Divine attachment and cleansing. Yes, now that you have more knowledge, the fall is weightier, but your *T'shuva* is deeper too.

Rabbi Aharon Rota, in the book “*Taharat HaKodesh*,” stresses the danger of depression, even if mishaps occur again and again. When the *yetzer hara* sees that a person is falling into a dark and bitter spirit of depression, it works even harder against him, because this is the source of its strength. In fact, depression darkens the soul even more than the sin itself!

Hazak v'amatz! Be strong and of good courage. As long as you are turned toward *Hashem*, He is turned toward you. Trust that your remorse has been accepted. Go to the *mikvah*, recite the *Tikun HaClalli* and its confession/*vidui*, transfer your desire for sensual pleasure to a greater love and passion for Torah, and return to serving G-d with *simcha* and an even stronger resolve!

Everything Seems To Be Going Wrong



Question:

I have been trying to do *T'shuva* for my sexual transgressions by going to the *mikvah*, reciting *Tehillim*, learning more Torah, and doing some of the other things which the Sages recommend, but things in my life seem to be getting worse – problems with my son in school, expensive repairs to my car, blow-ups with my wife, a chronic pain in my lower back, etc. etc. etc. I thought things were supposed to get better?

Answer:

Things are getting better! That's how the *T'shuva* process works. All of the sufferings and pains you are experiencing are part of the atonement a person has to go through to purge himself of the stains left by his sins. The sufferings are like laundry detergent which is needed to clean a soiled garment. Sometimes, with especially difficult stains, a special stain remover is needed too.



This is what King David means when he says: “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (*Tehillim*, 51:9). We experience the sufferings as painful, but they are really for our betterment. When lots of things seem to be going wrong, that's a sign that the cleansing is accelerating, and your *T'shuva* is reaching higher levels. Remember, according to the rules, the Divine punishment for sexual transgression is very severe, for a man and his children, may G-d have mercy on us. However, G-d, in His Kindness, acts with compassion, beyond the letter of the law. Instead of dealing out one devastating, knock-out blow, that would finish the transgressor on the spot, He breaks the punishment up into small doses that the person can bear, while giving him more time to repent. Instead of hitting us with an avalanche, He hurls small snowballs our way. These are the pains and anguish we experience when the school principal calls us for a meeting about an unruly child, or when we have marital strife, or medical problems, G-d forbid. In truth, instead of complaining, we should be happy about them, since they spare us from a far worse fate.

Also, instead of getting angry at our disobedient child, or at our spouse's tantrums, we should realize that we are to blame. It is our transgressions, and the evil spiritual forces which are created by them, that drive our spouse and children to act out the way they do.

The Arizal states that a person should undertake 84 fasts for a single case of spilling semen in vain. Multiple transgressions are atoned by a series of 3 cycles of 84 fasts. In our times of spiritual and physical weakness, we cannot do this, and instead of excessive fasting, there are

Sages who recommend the giving of charity instead (See “*Igeret HaT’shuva*” of the *Baal HaTanya*, Ch.3). Often, if we don’t give enough *tzedaka* in atonement, G-d’s collects His dues via parking tickets, car repairs, and expensive visits to the dentist. This also is a part of the cleansing process.

So be assured that your *T’shuva* process is in high gear, and you are heading toward a new, healthier connection to G-d, stripped of the barriers brought about by your wrongdoings of the past (going all the way back to you youth). Don’t despair. You are on the right track. All your sufferings are coming to make you a holier and happier person. If you can learn to thank G-d for the sufferings, as well as for the “good” things in life, your *T’shuva* will be upgraded immensely to the supreme level of *T’shuva* out of love, and you will be blessed with an illuminating wisdom, realizing that everything that happens to you is truly for your betterment and good.



I Just Look, That’s All

Question:

I fail to understand the great sin in looking at sexy pictures on the Internet. It doesn't make me do anything evil. I don't masturbate when I watch. I just enjoy seeing pictures of beautiful women.

Answer:

In his book, "*Nefesh HaChaim*," Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains that each and every Jew is a miniature *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), connecting us to all of the spiritual worlds of the universe.

This is implied in the Torah verse, "*And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them*" (*Shemot*, 25:8), implying that the Jewish People themselves are to be, "*according to the pattern of the Tabernacle and according to all its vessels.*" The commandment is telling us that we ourselves should be like the Tabernacle, a holy vessel prepared for the actual dwelling of the Divine Presence within us. ("*Nefesh HaChaim*," Gate One, Ch. 4, Addendum).



Because of this Divine connection, a Jew has to live with the moment-by-moment recognition that all of his thoughts, words, and doings have profound cosmic influence, for good, and for evil. As the "*Nefesh HaChaim*" makes clear:

"A man of Israel must understand, know, and establish in his mind and heart that every detail of his deeds, speech, and thoughts, at every second and time, all rise up according to their root source to influence the most exalted worlds. When a wise person recognizes this truth, his heart will greatly tremble in the face of his wrongdoings, realizing the awesome and devastating damage that even a small transgression can cause, even more than the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar and Titus.

"For their deeds had no damaging effect on the upper worlds, for they have no portion or root source in those worlds that would enable them to cause damage there. Rather, it was our sins that polluted the celestial Temple, so to speak, and that gave Nebuchadnezzar and Titus the power to destroy the Sanctuary below.... Therefore, when a man entertains an impure, licentious thought in his heart, G-d forbid, he in effect brings a prostitute into the most exalted, celestial Holy of Holies, giving strength to the forces of impurity and evil in this transcendently holy place, to a much greater extent than the impurity caused by Nebuchadnezzar and Titus when they brought a prostitute into the Holy of Holies in the Temple sanctuary on earth."



The fire that destroyed the Temple started in our hearts and our minds. Every time a person watches pornography on the Internet, he is adding flames to the conflagration that is still burning in the Heavenly *Mikdash*, thus preventing the Temple's rebuilding. When he gazes at erotic images, he causes the exile of the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) from within his own miniature *Mishkan*, thus adding to the prolongation of the *Shechinah's* exile from the world. You may think that your erotic interludes are your own private affair, but the very opposite is true. Every time a Jew watches something immodest on the Internet, his fantasies and lustful thoughts pollute not only himself, but all of the Jewish People, and all of Creation! You have to ask yourself - is this something you want to do? In addition, don't think yourself such a hero, that you can look at whatever you please without falling. If you feel this way, you've already fallen. Samson and King Shlomo were also convinced they could control their *yetzer*, and look what happened to them.



Don't press your luck!

Beating Masturbation

Question:

I've tried so many times to stop, but after a week or two, I'm back at it. Each time I go to the *mikvah* and say the "*Tikun HaClalli*" but it doesn't seem to help. I've gone on *shiduchim*, but I still haven't found "Mrs. Right." What else can I try?

Answer:

Many people maintain that boredom leads them to masturbate. Out of boredom, they switch on the computer and start surfing forbidden sites. If this is the case with you, then keep busy. Find extra work or study. Take up a hobby, join a club, do some volunteer work, and engage in more sports. Keep yourself busy and keep out of the house.

Other people report that feelings of loneliness drive them to masturbate. This is another thing that drives them to the computer. In their imagination, they have romantic relationships with the



women on the screen. But a computer can't give you love.

So try to be with people. Join a men-only kosher gym. Once again, get out of the house so you won't be alone. The best thing you can do is start spending time in the study hall of a yeshiva and learning Torah. There you will meet happy, friendly, and positive people who will surely help bring you out of your darkness.

Also high on the list of things that lead people to masturbate is melancholy and depression. Rabbi Kook explains in his book the "*Lights of T'shuva*" that sin is the source of depression. The soul of a person whose life is filled with wrongdoing has a natural feeling of sadness which turns into depression as the person sinks deeper into sin. The solution, Rabbi Kook writes, is a sincere course of repentance. Once a person abandons his mistaken behavior and returns to the pathways of Torah, the light of G-d will enter his life and drive his depression away, gracing him with a feeling of rebirth and great joy.

Another thing is to avoid feelings of guilt. OK, you blew things. Don't dwell on the past. Look to the future instead. Remember, masturbation doesn't make depression go away. The fleeting pleasures soon pass and the depression remains, and is even strengthened because of the guilt and sorrow in the heart.

Often people say they masturbate to experience a high. This is related to feelings of boredom and in not being contented with one's lot. Modern capitalist, consumer society, with its constant bombardment of commercials and new products that "you can't live without out" has created a

need for constant and instant gratification. People waste their lives running from one new “high” to the next.

For many young people, being alone in the house without television or computer games would be a painful incarceration. Similarly, masturbation offers a cheap and readily accessible high. Only it’s really a down. Here again, learning to be happy with one’s lot is the key. Learn to enjoy the simple pleasures in life. Interestingly, since the attachment to G-d is the ultimate high, people who are driven toward illicit pleasures, are really searching (unbeknownst to themselves) for the “high” of connecting with G-d, which is the greatest pleasure there is. The true place for this exquisite connection with G-d is in the World to Come, when the soul isn’t limited by the physicality of the body, but a taste of this great joy can still be had during our life on earth through the attachment to the Torah. The solution is to re-channel misguided lusts into a longing for G-d. Once again, spending time learning Torah with others in a yeshiva, or at Torah classes, or with a regular study partner, and connection with Torah scholars will bring about the happy, “high” feeling of connectedness with the Divine.



There are many yeshiva students who admit that they still masturbate even though they study Torah. This is a sign that they haven’t yet done real repentance for their youthful sins and are learning in a blemished state, still surrounded by “*kelipot*” or impure husks that are dulling their spiritual sensitivities and the joy of their learning. The answer is a concentrated period of *t’shuva*, designed to rectify blemishes to the *Brit* caused by their masturbation.



In addition to Torah learning, going to the *mikvah* on a regular basis, and the recital of special prayers called “*Tikunim*” are highly recommended by the masters of the secrets of the Torah. *Hitbodadut* - pouring out your heart in a personal prayer to *Hashem* in the solitude of nature - is also a powerful way of renewing one’s attachment with G-d, highly praised by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov and his *Hasidim*.

Another thing that causes Torah learning to seem flat and joyless occurs when one is concentrating the brunt of his learning on sections of the Torah that don’t give him the “high” that he could find in other branches of Torah learning. For example, some people prefer learning *Aggadah* more than *Halachah*. Others prefer learning *mussar* and *emunah*. Others enjoy *Tanach*. And there are souls which only find true happiness and rest when engaged in the secrets of Torah. While the goal is to learn everything, our Sages tell us that a person can only properly learn Torah in the place where his heart desires. If a person spends too much time learning matters that cause him inner tension, he should lessen his time in this branch of the Torah and fill up the time with learning that gives him pleasure.

Coupled with everything is developing an added love, along with an increased reverence and fear toward G-d as our Maker and King. This comes through prayer and Torah study. One must pray with all of one’s heart and beg G-d to bring him to this higher level.

The sexual urge is one of the strongest of man’s passions. Often people who indulge in masturbation describe powerful physical sensations and actual physical pangs in the groin that (they believe) can only be quenched through sex or masturbation. To reduce these feelings to normal levels that can be overcome in other ways, it is important to reduce the stimulations that trigger lust. Most important on the list is to avoid gazing at women, or at videos or photographs of women whether on the Internet, television, movies, or in newspapers, magazines and the like. The old adage, “out of sight, out of mind” is very true. If you can’t keep away from your computer, then throw it away!



Out of sight, out of mind.

Exotic literature and other things that arouse sexual fantasies are also to be avoided. Certainly one should avoid being alone in the house with a computer, and any computer one uses should have an anti-porn filter, where you don't hold the password and code. Entrust the code with your wife and daughters. Explain to them that this is the directive of the rabbis. Once again, physical activity, exercise and sports are important elements in reducing tensions that can lead to feelings of lust.



Age-old remedies are excellent too!

Cold showers are another old remedy. On the spiritual side, sin, especially sexual sin, creates harmful spiritual agents called "*Kelipot*" which act as spiritual mosquitoes tormenting a person into more and more sin. This creates a physical tension that drives people to look for sexual release. Going to a *mikvah* as often as possible helps to drown out these negative forces.

As we've mentioned, the study of Torah is also a very powerful tool in driving these "demons" away in the Torah's healing, laser-like light. The more one studies Torah, the more he purifies his being and sheds the layers of spiritual impurity and pollution which encase a transgressor and drive him on, like an addict, to additional sin.



Of course, single men are advised to get married, as the Torah says, “It is not good for man to be alone.” In addition to fulfilling the great commandment of marrying, embodied in the first commandment of the Torah to be fruitful and multiply, the love, happiness, and life-sharing business of marriage keep evil forces away and provide a holy outlet for the sexual urge. It’s great that you are thinking about marriage and building a holy Jewish home. This is a supremely exalted *mitzvah* that the *yetzer hara* tries his hardest to prevent. Regarding your dating, perhaps

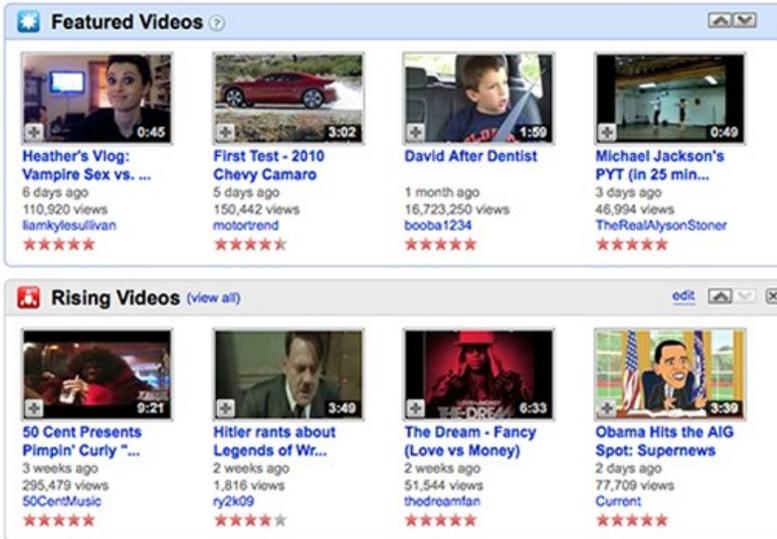
you have too high a standard, or perhaps, you place too much importance on physical appearances. “*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is vain; a woman who fears the L-rd, she shall be praised*” (Mishle, 31:30).

Many married men masturbate as well and need to follow all of the advice above, including not gazing at other women, not viewing forbidden things on their computers and cell phones, and not engaging in immodest sexual relations with their wives which serve to fire their lust rather than to douse it. They also should increase their study of Torah when they have free time, since the study of Torah weakens physical lusts. They also need to work on a greater reverence for G-d, and to work on improving character traits. Especially important is learning to be happy with one’s lot, and not to seek after an abundance of personal pleasures.

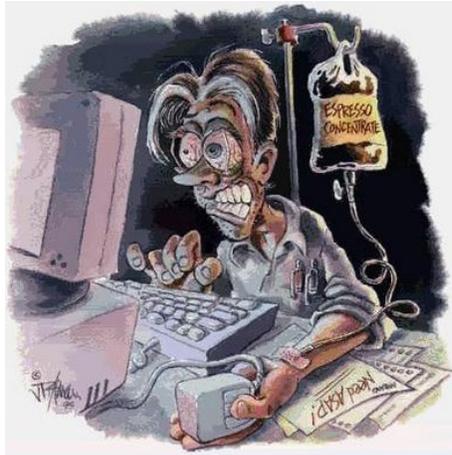


Remember! You’re being filmed!

One must live with the awareness that G-d is always with us, wherever we are, outside on the street and in every room in the house. Just as a person wouldn’t masturbate while someone else was watching, all the more so when he is aware that the King of kings is observing all of his deeds. Imagine that a camera was recording your every move – would you masturbate? Would you masturbate if you knew that a video of your doings, along with your name, was going to be posted on “youtube” for the world to see?



A compulsion to masturbate is an addiction like every other addiction and can be treated accordingly. Earlier, we saw that the famous Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous can be applied to pornography addiction, with the added power of Torah. These same steps, with a little modification, can be applied to a masturbation addiction as well. When adopted over a course of time, they can be used as a guide to freeing oneself from the habit.



I Can't Stop!

Question:

I realize that watching erotic Internet sites leads nowhere and makes me feel spiritually and morally corrupt, but I can't stop. After a few days of going clean, I'm back at the keyboard with a frenzy. I even installed a reliable filter, but I keep punching in the by-pass code. Many times I masturbate to release the tension it arouses. What's a guy to do?

Answer:

One person I know said he beat his habit by imposing a stiff monetary fine on himself every time he clicked on an erotic image. Because the temptation is so powerful, even when a person knows that he will be punished for his transgression, and even if he makes a vow to G-d to stop, these things may be too abstract to counteract the urge. The sexual passion is so great that the person's rational reasoning is short-circuited and he succumbs to his evil inclination, as our Sages teach, "A person doesn't sin unless a spirit of folly enters him." But for some people, money is so important to them, they won't do anything to lose it. Try it. Maybe it will help you to go cold turkey. Another obvious recommendation, at least in your home, is to install a different filter without knowing the code. Ask a friend or your wife to download or order the filter, and to guard the code for safekeeping. You can simply say that you don't want to take the chance of succumbing to the temptation. You needn't be embarrassed. They will surely understand.

We doubt that a person can be free of sexual sin without a strong connection to Torah. The sexual flame is so fierce, it can only be directed and doused by the power of Torah. Nonetheless, it is generally true that a person who is busy doesn't have time to get into trouble. People with lots of free time on their hands fall into all kinds of traps. So try keeping busy, with work, with learning, with sports activity, clubs, volunteer work and the like. If you focus on these projects and succeed in them, you'll have less of a need to seek self-satisfaction in fantasy worlds.

Also keep away from sexually stimulating material and places. What you don't see doesn't fill your mind. And try not to be alone. Get out of the house. Be with a friend.

It should be noted that the Torah prohibition, "Thou shall not follow after your heart and your eyes which cause you to stray after them," applies to looking at immodest images of all types, whether it be girls in bikinis, lingerie ads, "youtube" models on the runway, as well as hard porn. The damages it causes to the Jewish brain and soul is the same for looking at any of them. The infinite harem of *zonot* (prostitutes) in everyone's home computer, cell phone, and laptop, is the number one spiritual danger facing the Jewish People today – and one of the main causes for recent droughts in Israel.

Those who do not guard the Covenant of sexual holiness cause separation between the Jewish People and G-d, as it says in the *Shema*, "*And you turn aside and worship other gods and bow down to them,*" and afterward it says, "*He will shut up the Heaven so that there shall be no rain.*" The *Zohar* explains that bowing down to foreign gods means engaging in sexual relations with non-Jewish women. The Jews never believed in idol worship, but engaged in it to have an excuse for the sexual perversions that went hand-in-hand with it (*Zohar Bereshit*, 189B).

Let's face it. Most of the models on the Internet are gentiles. When someone looks at them, and let's out a long, "Oh, baby," sigh of longing, it is like he is bowing down to a foreign god. If, G-d forbid, he spills semen because of this, he is giving his holy energy to the forces of the Other Side. The *Zohar* explains that the Torah verse, "*You shall not give your seed to Molech,*" means precisely this.



"Thou shall not give your seed to Molech!"

He also violates the commandments, *"Do not turn astray after their gods,"* and *"Thou shall not make for yourself molten gods"* (Zohar, Vayikra 84A).

Furthermore, the Talmud teaches that it is forbidden for a man to gaze upon the beauty of a woman, so that he should not come to evil thoughts and be incited to spill semen in vain (Avodah Zara 20B). Someone who does this is guilty of three Torah prohibitions: gazing at the beauty of a woman, having fantasies about her; and emitting semen in vain.

Furthermore, we learn the gravity of spilling semen in vain from Er and Onan, the sons of Yehuda, and the Divine wrath it prompted.

The *halachah* in the *"Shulchan Aruch"* states: "It is forbidden to discharge semen in vain. This is a graver sin than any other mentioned in the Torah. Those who practice masturbation and cause the spilling of semen in vain, not only commit a grave sin, they are under a ban, concerning which it is said, 'Your hands are full of blood,' and it is equivalent to killing a person.' See what Rashi wrote concerning Er and Onan (*Bereshit*, 37:7-10), that they both were stricken by Heaven for the commission of this sin" (*Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer*, 23:1; and see the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, Ch. 151).



**You can erase your history of websites visited here on Earth,
but it's all recorded in the great Computer in the Sky.**

Thankfully, *Hashem* is an all-forgiving Father, ready to accept our sincere, heartfelt calls for pardon. While atonement over sexual transgression requires a serious course of repentance, and not just a passing clasp on the chest before clicking on to the next forbidden site, anyone who truly wants to renew his connection to G-d that he has damaged through his sexual wrongdoings is certainly able to do so.

HELP!

Question:

I had a great summer in Israel, learning about Judaism at a yeshiva for *baale t'shuvas*, but ever since coming back to the US for my last year of college, I've been smashed by my *yetzer hara* and I'm on the verge of giving in with a non-Jewish girl who's been making a play for me for some time, letting me know that she's available to fulfill all of my fantasies. The truth is that it's hard to keep close to the Torah here, and I can't stand feeling guilty for all of my passions, and I want to have fun like everyone else. And I've heard that the Torah prohibits marrying gentiles, but not necessarily having relations with them (I'd use a condom to avoid pregnancy.) I know that I'm playing with fire, but what can I do? I've spoken to the campus rabbi about getting married but he says I'm too young.

Answer:

You seem to be weighing between the options: Do I want to spend 1000 years in the World to Come in a furnace of 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit, or in a furnace of 20,000 degrees?



Take your pick! One way or the other, you're gonna get fried!

Also, your sexual transgressions, and the spiritual and physical blemishes they cause, will be passed on to your children, adversely affected their entire lives.

Yes, you may have some fun now, but even though you choose not to think about G-d, He is still there, and according to the system He has established, there is reward and punishment for all of our deeds.

Whatever rationalizations and false Torah ideas you have grabbed on to, the fact remains that sexual relations with a non-Jew is a serious transgression in and of itself, equated with idol worship. Furthermore, the use of a condom is a severe transgression, as with any spilling of seed in vain. As you probably know, pre-marital relations with a Jewish girl is also a weighty transgression, with the added gravity of violating *Niddah* laws, since all unmarried women are considered to be in a state of menstruation.

So what do you do?

Of course, getting married is the correct direction. If your rabbi discourages you from marrying and doesn't have any *shidduchim* for you, perhaps you should widen your circle of matchmakers.

It would also help immeasurably to be in a more religious environment, away from your temptations. Israel is the best place, as you experienced for yourself. People here get married early, there are lots of matchmakers, and beautiful Jewish girls looking to build a holy Jewish family. Since Torah study helps overcome the *yetzer*, you should be back in yeshiva. Being in a holy environment with other people who are trying their best to serve *Hashem* would give you added strength in the battle.

The *Shovavim* period (the weeks that span between the weekly Torah portions of *Shemot* and *Mishpatim* – usually from late December to January) is designed to rectify sexual transgressions, and it would be a good idea to participate in some group *tikunim* if you can find any, or get on a plane and come to Israel where they are common. The more you give in to the *yetzer*, the harder it will be to do *t'shuva*, so why screw up your life for a few fun nights and then be racked with guilt, and all the other unpleasant consequences in this world and the next? You can still get back on the right path and rediscover the good feelings you had when you first got involved in the Torah. Yosef beat the temptation with Potiphar's wife and so can you!

What is *Tikun Hatzot*?

Question:

I've heard a lot about "*Tikun Hatzot*" but I don't really know what it is?

Answer:

One of the most powerful *tikunim* (rectifications) for sexual transgression and the spilling of semen in vain is the heartfelt recital of the "*Tikun Hatzot*" prayer, the midnight lament over the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the Holy Temple, and Jerusalem.



Since one of the main sins which led to the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* and Jerusalem was sexual transgression, the recital of “*Tikun Hatzot*” is a powerful atonement.

One reason for this is that instead of the pursuit of egotistic pleasure which characterizes masturbation and sexual transgression, “*Tikun Hatzot*,” is not recited for ourselves, but for the wellbeing of the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence, which is in mourning and *galut* (exile) over the destruction of Jerusalem. Instead of just thinking about ourselves, and our selfish pleasure, we think about the anguish of G-d’s honor in the world.

Additionally, the Kaballah explains that that with each spilling of semen in vain, hundreds of thousands of souls are lost to the spiritual forces of evil in the world, known as the “*Sitra Achra*,” or “the Other Side.” Since these holy souls are derived from the *Shechinah*, their loss causes the *Shechinah* great pain. Through the heartfelt recital of “*Tikun Hatzot*” we free the captured souls from the realm of evil and enable them to return to the *Shechinah*, the source of souls in Heaven.

According to the Kaballah, this ingathering of the exiled souls parallels the ingathering of the scattered exiled Jews from the four corners of the world back to the Land of Israel. In a sense, every Jew who returns to Israel is returning a piece of the *Shechinah* with him to the Land of the *Shechinah*, the Land of Israel.

The order of prayers in “*Tikun Hatzot*” was formulated by the Arizal some 500 years ago. However, the *Zohar* is filled with references and praises regarding “*Tikun Hatzot*” and those who recite it, calling it the most perfect Divine service. The very first page of the Shulchan Aruch is also filled with praise for the saintly who rise during the night to mourn over the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the *Shechinah*. It is told that the saintly “*Nazir*,” Rabbi David HaCohen, became a devoted student of Rabbi Kook after hearing him recite “*Tikun Hatzot*” with a pained and broken heart.



Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook

The time for reciting “*Tikun Hatzot*” is from *halachic* midnight until dawn. Torah scholars who study during the second half of the night should first say “*Tikun Hatzot*” and then continue on with their studies. The lament is not recited on Shabbat or holidays. If a person finds it difficult to recite it every night, he should endeavor to recite it as often as possible. Thursday nights are

especially favorable for this practice. Even someone who is not learned in the secrets of Torah, and someone who doesn't understand all of the words, and those who find it difficult to actually cry over the destruction, should make an effort to say the prayers and lamentations because of their incomparable value to the Jewish People as a whole, and because of the great pleasure it brings to the *Shechinah*, who is thus comforted in Her anguish and exile.

It is a saintly practice to wear a sackcloth during the recital, and to sit on the floor (on a towel or paper) or on a low stool during the first half of the prayer, known as "*Tikun Rachel*." It is good to recite it by the door of the house, but if this is impossible, it may be recited other places as well. The main thing is that its recitation come from the heart.

Someone who awakens from sleep after midnight should wash his hands in the proper fashion with the blessing, "*Al netilat yadayim*," and say the blessings over the Torah. If he plans to remain awake until the morning, he can say the morning blessings (*berachot hashachar*) as well. The renown Kabalist, the *Rashash*, Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, says that *berachot hashachar* can be recited immediately after *Hatzot*, even if the person hasn't yet slept, and even if he intends to go to sleep after reciting "*Tikun Hatzot*." The Talmud records that at midnight G-d would send a north wind to blow through the strings of the harp above King David's bed, in order to awaken him at *Hatzot* to sing G-d's praises. The exact time of *Hatzot* is recorded in Jewish calendars, since the time differs according to the seasons of the year.

However often a person can recite "*Tikun Hatzot*," and in whatever fashion, he will be rewarded with a great blessing, as our Sages have promised that whoever joins in the mourning over the Temple, and the destruction of Jerusalem, will merit to take part in the joy of their rebuilding – may it be soon!

KOSHER GYM

Question:

I tried taking your advice about exercise and keeping in shape, but all the hot ladies working out on the health club running machines made me horny as hell. So I quit. I'm back to watching sports on TV and from there, my computers is just a hop away.

Answer:

Don't give up on exercise! Find a kosher gym! Believe it not, they exist, where there are hours only for men. If there isn't one in your area, be creative! Good old fashion jogging, tennis, squash, basketball, jump roping, even an hour of vigorous walking will keep you in shape.



In his probing study on the phenomenon of *t'shuva*, Rabbi Kook writes that the first step is getting one's body in shape. Rabbi Kook calls this "*t'shuva* of the body." To return to a state of inner harmony and Divine connection, a person must first have a healthy body. ("*Orot HaT'shuva*," Ch1. See also "The Art of *T'shuva*," Ch.1, by Rabbi David Samson and Tzvi Fishman.)

It is important to note that physical well-being is a basic rule of good living, and that the injunction to be healthy is principle of Torah. We are called upon to "carefully guard your life." (*Devarim*, 4:9. *Rambam*, Laws of *Rotzeach* and *Shmirat HaNefesh* 11:4.)

To hook up with the spiritual channels connecting heaven and earth, a person must first be in a healthy physical state. For instance, one of the basic requirements of prophecy is a strong, healthy body. Physical and spiritual health go together. The *Rambam*, who worked as a physician when he was not studying Torah, has systematically detailed in his writings the rules of healthy living, stressing the importance of exercise, proper diet, [sexual moderation](#), and bodily care as a prerequisite to keeping the Torah (*Laws of Deot*, Ch.4).

The *Rambam* explains, "Having a whole and healthy body is part and parcel in serving G-d, for it is impossible to have an understanding of the Creator if a man is ill. Therefore one must avoid all things which damage the body and habituate oneself with things promoting health" (there, 4:1.)

In our days, when health-food stores and sports club abound, this simple teaching is known to everyone. What is new, however, is that Rabbi Kook sees this as a part of the process of *t'shuva*. Being in good shape is an important factor, not only in attaining personal well-being, and in balancing an over-active libido, but also in forging a holy connection to G-d.

In his classic book, "*Orot*," Rabbi Kook writes: "Our physical demand is great. We need a healthy body. Through our intense preoccupation with spirituality, we forgot the holiness of the

body. We neglected our physical strength. We forgot that we have holy flesh, no less than holy spirits... All of our *t'shuva* will succeed only if it will be, along with its spiritual splendor, also a physical *t'shuva* which produces healthy blood, healthy flesh, firm mighty bodies, and a flaming spirit spreading over powerful muscles." (*Orot*, pg. 80)

For example, a person who is overweight and easily tired may lack the energy to perform the commandments with the proper enthusiasm, or he may feel too weak to resist bodily temptations. His fatigue may interfere with his Torah learning and prayer. In G-d's service, a strong body and a strong mind go hand-in-hand.

Rabbi Kook explains that falling into sin, and a weakening of the will to keep the Torah in all of its fullness, is often due to a lack of physical energy and strength. When a person's willpower is weak, he can fall into many bad habits. As part of his overall mending, he must improve his physical health, as well as his moral and spiritual worlds.

So find ways to keep in shape. You are engaged in a battle with an untiring enemy and you need all the energy and strength your can muster!

Tongue Tied

Question:

I don't know what's wrong with me, but when I try to pour out my heart to *Hashem*, my heart is like stone. Not only can't I cry over all my wrongdoings, but I have trouble expressing myself at all.

Answer:

One of the foundations of Rabbi Nachman's teachings is the importance of "*Hitbodedut*" in serving *Hashem*. The essence of *Hitbodedut* is pouring one's heart out in personal prayer before one's Maker. Rabbi Nachman emphasizes that this practice should be practiced in seclusion, and that it is especially effective when conducted outdoors in a field or a forest. In his books, "*Likutei Tefillot*," and "*Torot and Tefillot*," Rabbi Nachman's devoted student, Rabbi Natan, presents many examples that can help every Jew rise to more fervent outpourings of the heart. Here is one such example which may help release all of the pain and yearning for G-d that is bottled up inside your heart:



“Please, most honored and awe-inspiring G-d, honored King, You who created the entire world for Your blessed honor, as is written, ‘Everything I created and formed and made, for my Name and My honor I created,’ help me in Your great compassion, that I merit to increase and elevate your praise and honor.

“Help me to nullify myself completely before You, and to diminish my own honor, that my own honor be as if void and non-existent. Help me that I do not raise myself up to declare my own honor in any way, but rather that I only endeavor to enhance the honor due You, and that all of my doings and thoughts and desires be directed exclusively to Your great and blessed honor alone.

“Assist me in your great mercy to shatter and remove all feelings of arrogant self-pride from my heart, that there shouldn’t rise in my heart any trace of conceit at all, and that I merit to achieve true humility. Give me the intelligence and wisdom so that I can find the way to true humility, and to flee from false humility, from humility which is really to win honor from others. Please help me in Your great mercy and kindness that I merit to attain true and absolute humility.

“Please, G-d, in Your infinite mercy, have mercy on Your creation, and open my mouth in prayer that I be able to pour forth my speech before You in a manner that awakens Your mercy to extend over me, that You have compassion on me this very moment and that You aid me to sanctify and purify myself in the holiness of the *Brit*, that I may be saved from this moment onward from every transgression against the *Brit* in the world.

“And for all of the blemishes in which I blemished the holy *Brit* until now, please forgive me, please forgive me and cleanse me in Your towering mercy and kindness, in everything that I blemished by my thoughts, and my speech, and my deeds, by looking at forbidden things, and hearing unholy matters, smelling unholy smells, and in all of my feelings, whether intentionally or unintentionally, whether willfully or unwillfully. In every way that I blemished the *Brit*, please forgive me and have compassion on me, and shatter, and weaken, and subdue, and nullify all of the ropes and knots and chains binding me to the *Sitra Achra* (Other Side), which were strengthened because of my numerous sins, which overcome me at every moment and seek to pull me from sin to sin, and not allow me to purify myself as I should, keeping me far from

guarding the *Brit* in true holiness, as a Jew should, a son of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, whom You chose.

“Master of the World, may it be Thy will that all of my transgressions be transformed into merit through my *t’shuva* (repentance), even though I have not even begun to return in true repentance. Even so, grant me the gift of Your forgiveness as a gratuitous gift, and have mercy on me in Your great mercy, and rescue me from the trials and tribulations that pursue me at every moment.

“And even if I myself am my worst enemy, for indeed I have free choice, and no one can force me to stray from the true path, and I confess that I am guilty, and that I myself am responsible for my transgressions, but what can I do for I am weak, and I don’t know how to escape from my pursuers, nor how to overcome all of the lusts and evil fantasies that overwhelm me at every moment. I have no hope if not for Your infinite compassion, that You help me and grant me the strength to overcome all of the lusts and fantasies, to subdue them and cast them into the dust, to shatter them and expel them from my mind, from this moment and forever after, that absolutely no evil fantasy enter my mind or thoughts at all, rather that my mind and thoughts be holy and pure at all times to the utmost measure of sanctity.

“And help me in Your great mercy to purify and sanctify myself, that I be able to sanctify myself in things that are permitted to me, and that I merit to add more and more holiness to my life until I achieve true holiness and separation from all evil things, that through me all the worlds be unified... may it be Thy will, amen.”

(Abridged from, “*Torot and Tefillot*,” *Tefillah L’Torah*, 11)