

How to Make Your:
**Married Life Better,
You Stronger,
And G-d Happier!**



A 'Hands-Off' Approach

בס"ד

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*“There is a small limb in man,
if he satisfies it, it increases its hunger;
if he starves it, it becomes satisfied”*

(Sanhedrin 107a)

*“Hashem recompensed me according to my righteousness,
He repaid me befitting the Cleanliness of my hands”*

(Tehillim 18:21)

I.

*“He who comes to purify himself is granted Heavenly assistance”
(Yoma 38b)*

When you make an effort to deliberately not look at something (either knowing it's there and avoiding it, or accidentally seeing it, but then immediately looking away), Hashem rewards you by eventually making it easier to not look next time.

[This is like a 401k where Hashem matches your efforts in the form of spiritual contributions so that one day you realize that you are much stronger than the sum of your total efforts should logically have been by your own efforts alone].

We see the same *Siyata de'Shemayim* in other areas as well.

For example, if you make a concerted effort to avoid *Lashon Hara*, then not only will you be less tempted to speak it, but you will also find that people will not speak it to you as well. This can be easily evidenced by the periodic realizations that relatively 'monumental' events may have occurred around you that you were never aware of until later (e.g. divorces, firings, neighborhood scandals (*Chas v'shalom*) and yet you never found out until long after the fact. This can be considered a “receipt” of your efforts being favorably accepted by Hashem.

(What may also be relevant is a statement made by the Chofetz Chaim regarding studying the laws of Lashon Hara. Regarding the importance of studying these laws, he said, “The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 14,4) states that if one studies a subject intensely, Hashem removes the Yetzer Hara from him with regard to that subject.” – Cited in Chofetz Chaim – A Daily Companion, 2008, Mesorah Publications)

By knowing that the road you must travel to accomplish this goal will be shortened for you at the point that you deserve it, the knowledge that you will receive this assistance will strengthen your efforts.

[This is like the “runners’ high” that marathon runners experience and come to expect with long runs (like marathons). Were they not to experience this ‘boost’, then they likely might not be able to complete the lengthy course by way of their own intended physical effort.]

Each opportunity you have to look at something is a choice – a custom-designed test made **just** for you, by Hashem, for exactly that moment. No one else in the history of the universe has ever had, nor will ever have this test that is being laid out for you at this moment!

If you don't look this one time, then you now have a tremendous asset. The next time you are offered this opportunity, think “Why not add to my assets as opposed to spoiling the whole pile by giving in and looking?”

[This is like if you're dieting and you've gone a week without cheating, then it is easier to turn down a piece of cake so that you do not undo all the benefits of restraint which you have shown until that point.]

II.

“Create in me, G-d, a pure heart”
(Tehillim 51:12)

Regarding looking at forbidden things; what you see is a contaminant for your soul, especially in the ideas & thoughts that arise from the glance (“The eyes see and the heart desires”). But even if the desire could somehow be contained, the mere ‘seeing’ of the forbidden blemishes the soul and the efforts you have put forth thus far.

E.g. When I was a young child and I was in the midst of a foul odor (usually created by brother), I remember that I didn’t want to breathe through my nose and smell it. I also remember thinking (with my 5-year old logic) that breathing through my mouth, while not resulting in the experience of the unpleasant odor, had me fearing that I was somehow bringing the ‘dangerous “stink” molecules’ into my lungs where it would poison me from within’.

This is a somewhat valid metaphor for looking at forbidden things. Even if we could look at a forbidden image without immediately running to act on it (*‘wincing from the odor’*), we have still taken in the ‘stink molecules’ by looking, and these will most certainly “poison us from the inside”. Just like the only solution with my brother was to close my mouth and hold my breath, so the only solution here is to close your eyes, look away, and keep the foul imagery out. If my analogy is too far-fetched or abstract (or ridiculous), then use pulmonary disorders like inhalation of asbestos as your example. Had they taken the necessary precautions and closed off their mouth (similar to ‘shutting your eyes’), the intrusion of the aggressors’ influence in the form of tiny asbestos particles (similar to the unholiness of viewed forbidden image) would not have entered them and progressively become aggressive to the point that their physical (in our case, ‘spiritual’) well-being was damaged.

III.

“I have set Hashem before me always...”
(Tehillim 16:8)

When you are inclined to look at pornographic, or otherwise inappropriate material, you always make sure that “the coast is clear” (i.e. ensure that the curtain is closed, the door is shut, computer monitor facing away from door, etc.), but did it ever occur to you that HASHEM CAN SEE YOU?

How Chutzpah-dik is that? Hashem gives you money, a loyal wife, healthy children, a beautiful place to live, etc. etc. etc., yet you ignore him to make sure an ordinary person doesn’t see you?

[This is like if you are in an elevator with the President of the company and the janitor, and you wait for the janitor to step off of the elevator before feeling comfortable enough to pass gas, completely ignoring the fact the President of the company you work for is still standing right there with you!]

On his deathbed, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai gave a bracha to his talmidim, among them Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, that::

"Your fear for Hashem should be as great as your fear from people".

When asked why he shouldn't bid them to fear Hashem even more, he correctly acknowledged that:

"If only people would have the awareness and fear of Hashem's presence as they do of other people..."

A major turning point that you should strive to experience is when you are truly unable to proceed with this act because of the awareness that, no matter how alone you are with all precautions taken, you know that Hashem is watching you and DOESN'T WANT YOU TO DO THIS. You are fully aware that Hashem is staring at you.

If you truly feel that Hashem is there when you pray for *parnassah*, children, health, *Shalom Bayis*, etc., then why wouldn't he ALSO be there when you do this?

Think of the last wonderful thing that Hashem did for you and imagine saying to him, "Here's how much I appreciate what you did..."

Then imagine that the next time you are called up for *Hagba'ah* (lifting up the Torah after its reading), you will essentially be 'shaking hands' with Hashem with your tainted, impure hands.

According to the *Shulchan Aruch / Mishnah Berurah*, we wash our hands in the morning upon awakening due to '*ruach ha'ra*' (evil spirits) and because, according to the *Rosh*, our hands move about and may touch unclean places on our body.

For this reason, we are not allowed to speak holy words (hence, only '*Moden Ani*', which does not contain Hashem's name, is allowed to be spoken prior to washing hands), nor may we, for reasons of safety, even touch parts of our body (eyes, ears, mouth, nose, anus) prior to washing our hands, due to the POSSIBILITY that we may have touched ourselves inappropriately during sleep.

How much more so if we **deliberately** touch that area while awake??

And all the more so, if we do it to **purposely** draw out that whose '**accidental**' flow would biblically render us '*tamei*' (unclean)??

Imagine having the audacity, when praying, to say:

"Ignore my hands, Hashem, while I ask you to heal my sick child (*Chas v'shalom*). I need *parnassah*, Hashem. *Posayach es yadecha* (Open YOUR hands) and release your blessing into THESE hands...!"

During the period of *Nidah*, when there exists a status of *tumah*, (which Hashem created and acknowledges), a man and his wife may not hand an object to each other directly, but must first place down the object before the other picks it up so as to ensure that we don't come in contact inappropriately.

Compare that with the unholy, unauthorized *tumah* created by this willful act of defiance of Hashem's wishes.

Were Hashem to even fulfill our requests (of money, *refuah*, *Shalom Bayis*, etc.) after rendering ourselves *tamei* with this act, would he not likely follow his own rule and first 'set down' the blessing rather than 'hand' it to us directly?

If so, then the time and effort expended in having to first 'pick up' and ultimately benefit from this blessing may seem terminally and painfully delayed.

If you've ever visited your in-laws and were intimate with your wife, did you not have an uneasy feeling when subsequently speaking with her parents?
If you experienced that feeling of guilt / shame involving a sexual act which was NOT forbidden, then how much more guilt / shame should you experience when confronting Hashem, whom you have certainly disrespected in his home?

[*"for Mine is the entire world..."* (Shemos 19:5)]

To add to the travesty, with knowledge that he witnessed this, you then proceed to ask for benefits from him as if none of this ever occurred!

IV **(Shemiras HaBris)**

"But for circumcision, the Holy One, Blessed-be-He, would not have created the world"
(Nedarim 31b)

When Avraham had Eliezer swear that he would not take a girl from the Canaanites as a wife for Yitzchak, he told Eliezer, (Bereshis 24:2) "Place now your hand under my *thigh*" [euphemism for organ of Bris].

Rashi explains that Avraham chose to use his circumcised organ as the basis for this oath since an oath must be made with one's hand on a holy object (such as a sefer Torah or *tefillin*). The pain and effort with which Avraham was circumcised, in his pure desire to perform the will of Hashem, thereby qualified his organ as a viable, holy object.

If Avraham's importance as a human being in general, and as the first Jew in particular, as well as our own inauguration into the covenant of becoming part of B'nai Yisroel are all actualized by way of this organ (*Bris Milah*), how then how can we flagrantly disregard the holiness of this agreement by committing this aveirah, thereby misusing this holy object?

If the terms "I swear on my children" or "I swear on my mother's grave" had any real meaning and we used these oaths seriously, then stop and consider the awesome value with which we are insuring whatever it is that we are swearing about.

If we seriously made this oath, would we dare to disrespect the sanctity of our children's' lives or of our mother's grave while the condition of the oath is as yet unfulfilled? Would we disrespect them anyway even in lieu of an oath?

Imagine that in the refrigerator is a special bottle of formula that is required to keep our child alive. Would we dare to treat it in any way other than that which would insure it remains intact and that not a drop is wasted? Would we not do everything in our power to keep every precious drop of formula in the bottle until the necessary amount is required for its intended purpose in the intended (and ONLY the intended) target?

V.

“Lust breeds Separation” (Mishlei 18:1)

Focus all of your newly built-up sexual energy upon your wife. In becoming successful with avoiding this act, you will likely experience a surge of desire that you had previously been releasing inappropriately. You will now find that your real, undiluted, holy libido (for your wife) will increase, but ironically, your desire to satisfy it by performing this act will diminish (See Section I. *“He who comes to purify himself is granted Heavenly assistance”*)

Eventually, you may find that your libido will become more refined, “holier”, and you will seek your wife, not your hand.

When you DO get excited from inadvertent sights, let your wife know how much you desire her and how you cannot wait to be with her. (If you have an open enough communication with her that she is aware of your struggles and efforts, then let her know how you are working diligently to keep yourself “pure” for her and how much you desire to be with her. She will likely appreciate that you are “saving” yourself for her.)

Realize that performing this act when married “ruins your appetite”.

Just as it’s assur to eat a big meal before Shabbos so as not to steal the ‘Mitzvah’ of the Sabbath appetite, so should you not engage in this act which will naturally reduce the desire you have for relations, specifically (and hopefully only) for your wife.

Bear in mind that even though channeling these urges only toward one’s wife (and certainly at only the appropriate times) is the preferred and acceptable approach to satisfying ones’ physical drives, it is still considered commendable to govern the frequency and means in which one goes about this act.

["He [Hillel] used to say: The more flesh [a person possesses], the more worms [will eventually consume him in the grave]; the more property the more worry; the more wives the more witchcraft; the more maidservants the more lewdness; the more slaves the more thievery. The more Torah the more life; the more study the more wisdom; the more advice the more understanding; the more charity the more peace. One who acquires a good name acquires it for himself; one who acquires words of Torah has acquired himself a share in the World to Come." (Pirkei Avos 2:8)]

The implication is that too much of any good (and even legal thing), such as ‘flesh...property...wives...maidservants’ and regarding our topic, physical intimacy with one’s wife (i.e. all of these being gashmius), can be to our detriment if indulged to excess.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* seems to address this in the chapter ‘Concerning the Trait of Cleanliness’, in which it states:

“You will now note the distinction between the Watchful and the Clean man (although they are closely related). The first is Watchful of his deeds and sees to it that he does not sin in relation to what he knows, and is universally acknowledged to be sinful; however, he is still not so much master of himself as to keep his heart from being pulled along by natural lust and inclining him to rationalize in relation to things whose evil is not thus acknowledged. For even though he exerts himself to conquer his evil inclination and to subdue his desires, he will not remove bodily lust from his heart. All he will be able to do is overcome it and be governed, not by it, but by reason. The darkness of earthiness, however, will still persist in its work or persuasion and deception....Eventually he will attain to perfect Cleanliness, a state in which physical desire is extinguished from his heart through the strengthening within him of the longing for G-d.”

It would appear that the ability to withstand the urge to perform this act, by exerting self-control in the knowledge that it is forbidden, would constitute Watchfulness.

I BELIEVE, therefore, that by not even lusting after one's wife excessively and regulating the frequency and manner in which one acts on these urges, is a quality that surpasses Watchfulness and in fact, is one of Cleanliness.

Here, the physical desire of lust has not simply been channeled toward a 'legal' target (i.e. wife vs. hand), but better yet, the lustful urge itself has been quelled altogether, thereby making the 'struggle' a moot point as it simply does not exist on this level.

That being said, this example of Cleanliness is clearly the ideal espoused by the great sages, past and present. But just as a brand new *Ba'al Teshuvah* is first advised to give up cheeseburgers before worrying about keeping strict *Chalav Yisroel*, so do I think that, at least for myself, focusing these passions on one's wife as a step in abolishing this *aveirah* can be a practical and beneficial stepping stone.

VI.

"You shall guard yourself against every evil thing..."
(Devarim 23:10)

A. Rely upon the miracle of peripheral vision.

When driving, if there is someone jogging on the right side of the road that you know you shouldn't see, then close your right eye and block out that image, continuing to navigate with the field of vision afforded by your left eye. A simple action such as closing an eye has just earned you a tremendous reward in *Olam Habah!*

B. With today's style of clothing, the *Yetzer Hara* has an entire wardrobe at his disposal to lure you into seeing what you should avoid, even in the supermarket – i.e., the supermarket is now a strip club!

If you are going down an aisle and you see this up ahead, avoid it.

Just think, "I don't HAVE to look **this** time..." and then keep repeating that, building strength upon strength.

[This is like when you are driving on the highway and you see that there is an accident ahead that has completely shut down all lanes. If you are determined to reach your destination in a timely manner, than you will abandon this route and select an alternate (e.g. The Turnpike) that will allow you to reach your destination without the penalty of delay. Now imagine that for selecting this alternate route, you have received indescribable reward!]

Imagine you are a movie critic with a newspaper and one day, the editor presents you with a strange offer. He calls you into his office and says to you, "From now on, when the movies are playing, I don't want you to watch them. If you DO watch them, you will have to pay me \$10,000, but if you turn your head and don't watch it, no matter how exciting it seems, then I will pay you \$100,000 for every second that you don't watch."

(I don't propose to know the relative value of reward and punishment for committing vs. avoiding this act, but the point should still remain clear.)

C. Special care should be given to the incidental means in which a forbidden sight might come about. While these seem so banal to mention, they are very real precursors to very revealing sights and for that reason, they bear mentioning (what may be revealed in the following examples should be obvious):

- E.g.
1. Be careful when in a store or at work that a woman shouldn't lean over in front of you.
 2. Be cautious that when sitting opposite even a modestly dressed woman in a skirt, when she sits down or stands up, thereby crossing or uncrossing her legs. Know to look away before this possibility unfolds.
 3. Be especially careful when you are in a store and a female is kneeling down to look at or reach an item on the bottom shelf, as this often opens the back pant line.

CONCLUSION

*"The sum of the matter, when all has been considered: fear G-d
and keep his commandments, for that is man's whole duty."
(Koheles)*

Our texts are full of indications that abstaining from this practice is essential to merit life and that by violating this precept, the opposite holds true. Our Sages speak extensively on how avoiding this act can improve health, finances, *Parnassah*, learning, mood, and our complete spiritual profile.

- "It is forbidden to masturbate, and this sin is more serious than any other sin in the Torah." (*Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha-ezer 23:1*)
- "'You shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes': (*Bamidbar 15:39*) 'After your hearts' – this refers to atheism. 'After your eyes' – this refers to sexual immorality." (*Berachot 12b*)
- R. Yochanan said, 'Anyone who wastes his seed is liable to the death penalty, as it is written, "And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the Lord, and he slew him also." (*Bereshis 38:10*)' (*Niddah 13a*)
[Regarding Onan]
- "R. Eliezer said: 'It is written, "Your hands are full of blood" (*Isaiah 1:15*). This refers to people who arouse themselves with their hands. The words of the commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (*Shemos 20:13*) imply: not with your hand, not with your foot." (*Niddah 13b*)
- "When a person guards the holy Covenant, it is as if he had observed the entire Torah, because the Covenant is equal to the whole Torah." (*Zohar I 197a*)
- "When a person guards the holy Covenant, it is as if he had observed the entire Torah, but if he denies it, it is as if he denies the entire Torah." (*Zohar III 13b*)

- "When a person guards the Covenant, which is his seal, death departs from him." (*Tikkuney Zohar* 96, Tikkun 22)
- "When a person guards the Covenant, the Holy One blessed-be-he gives him a child about whom it is written "And the Lord G-d caused every tree of lovely appearance to sprout forth" (Bereshis 2:9) – this refers to the secrets of Torah. (*Tikkuney Zohar* 124a, Tikkun 47)

Don't neglect the powerful gift of tefillah to aid in your struggle to battle this urge.

Almost 20 years ago, while staying by a friend in Brooklyn for the summer, I had the privilege to meet Rabbi Avigdor Miller, zt"l and speak with him privately on multiple occasions. During my last meeting with him, I told him of my struggle with this yetzer and asked for his advice.

He responded simply, "Keep fighting, you'll win".

At the time, I thought the advice to be somewhat disappointing...certainly not the gem of wisdom that I had hoped for from this *Gadol*. As the years went by and the urge continued, I often reflected upon how wrong he was, confirming my feeling at the time that his generic piece of advice lacked any insight to my problem.

Now, almost 20 years after receiving that *Bracha*, B"H I have achieved over four years of successful struggle against this *Yetzer* as a result of a determined, fearful effort to avoid this act. (Whether or not I "win" will be determined when I'm 120).

I am certain that at least some of what I have shared will apply to you as well as it did to me. The important thing to remember is that Hashem not only created us, but he also created the *Yetzer* that tempts us with this urge. That means that he has given us the ability to weaken and eventually evict (please, G-d) the temptation to indulge this urge. Just remember that he's watching us, hoping that we are successful in defeating this temptation, and he has given us a lifeline that is prayer with which to enlist his help in achieving this victory.

Keep fighting, you'll win.

APPENDIX

Additional Resources

Internet

<http://www.guardureyes.com>

<http://www.guardyoureyes.org>

<http://www.jewishsexuality.com>

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7332930594849349840>

[This is a video entitled "The Seal of Truth"]

Books

Tikkun HaKlali – Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

Garden of Peace – Rabbi Shalom Arush



Prayer

by Rabbi Leon Levi

MASTER OF THE WORLD, holy Father, may it be Thy will that You enable me and my family, along with all of the Jewish People, to guard our eyes from seeing unholy matters, and to guard our mouths from evil speech, and from vain and impure utterances, and guard over us from hearing these kinds of things and accepting them as true.

I will be very careful not to suspect any Jew of improper doings, and enable me, my Father, to have the daily merit of speaking in the praise and defense of the Nation of Israel, for their benefit and blessing, happiness and joy.

From this day forth, I will endeavor to guard over my speech from falsehood, flattery, cynicism, bitter arguments, arrogance, anger, misleading communication, and embarrassing others. For these things can, G-d forbid, bring us to a spiritual and moral decline in the ways that You have chartered for us in Your Torah. From this day forth, I will endeavor, my dear Father, to speak holy matters intrinsic to the betterment of my soul, and I will strive, from this time forth, that my deeds be in the honor of the L-rd G-d of Israel, for the sake of Heaven.

Our Father, Father of Mercy, may I merit, from his day forth, to guard my ears and my eyes from hearing, seeing, and reading profane matters, empty of Your honor, things like heresy, atheism, words of division, and forbidden images, whether prohibited by the Torah or the enactments of our Rabbis.

Our Father in Heaven, I beseech You to help me, to erase from my mind everything that I heard or saw that was not in light with Your honor – may all of these things be forgotten and nullified from my psyche like earthenware that has been shattered, which is considered as naught. Likewise, grant me the merit, that from this day forth, I won't hear or see things that are not in Your honor. May my ears and eyes be sanctified, hearing and seeing only holy matters.

May this prayer ascend to the uppermost celestial reaches before our Father in Heaven, and may we be elevated, along with all of our kinsmen, the Nation of Israel, in the fear and love of G-d, and in the love of our fellow Jew, with the coming of our righteous Mashiach, Amen, may it be Your will.