

Dear Bachur

*A frank discussion of very personal matters.
Written to inform and to encourage.*

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בס"ד

Dear friend, n"y,

The enclosed booklet has not yet been published. It deals with issues that are not often discussed openly and publicly. I feel emphatically that the time has come when we have no choice but to speak openly, Therefore I have undertaken this unconventional project, in the hope that young people will find *chizuk* and encouragement in it. In order to be sure that it is worthy of publication, or to assess what changes or additions need to be made, a limited amount of copies have been made. They are presently being dispersed free of charge to *bachurim* who will be willing to fill out the brief questionnaire, and comment on the pamphlet. Perhaps some readers would be willing to write a two or three line testimonial encouraging others to read the booklet. Thanks for giving this project your time and interest. May *Hashem Yisborach* bless our efforts to inspire our generation to rise above the defilement and temptations of our decadent environment.

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Dear *Bachur*,

If you are a yeshiva bachur, the booklet you now hold in your hands was written especially for you. It addresses one of the great *nisyonos* of our time: the difficulty of living in a society which has abandoned all restraint in matters of morality. Indeed, this is a very delicate issue, which many people hesitate to discuss. However, for someone who sincerely wants to live by the dictates of the *Ribono Shel Olam*, it is imperative to understand the severity of the *issurim*, the difficulty of the *nisayon*, and the unparalleled *z'chus* for those who rise to the challenge.

Road blocks and ferocious lions

Not only the *bachur* who has slipped up or feels a particular weakness in himself should read what is written here. For such a person, it's obvious that this booklet could be a life saver. But even the *bachur* who has kept himself totally pure needs to learn the *chomer* (severity) of these matters.

Rashi tells us that when *Hashem* told *Moshe Rabeinu* to forbid *Aharon* to enter the *Kodesh Hakadashim*, he added, "so that you won't die as your two sons did." This, *Rashi* explains, was a much greater warning than if he had just told him not to enter. You can be sure that *Aharon Hakohen* would have obeyed this command without being warned that he would die if he entered at the wrong time. This was a gift of additional *yiras Shomayim* to him, to distance him ever further from the *issur*.

In *Rabainu Yona's* introduction to the third chapter of his classic work *Sha'arei Teshuva*, he explains why it is important to enumerate *avairos* in the order of their severity. "This can be compared to a person who wants to travel to a certain city. When people tell him that the road is full of stones and other obstacles, he may not refrain from the trip because of his need to go to that city. However, when they tell him that there are ferocious lions on the road, he will cancel his trip." It is vital to know not only that something is forbidden, but also the severity of the transgression. In our generation, the temptation for indecency is one of the chief *nisyonos*. It simply doesn't suffice to know that it is improper, or even just to know that it is forbidden. Road blocks are one thing. Wild animals are another. These *issurim* are comparable to ferocious lions waiting to pounce upon us and tear us apart limb from limb.

Keep your distance

Chazal teach us, "Distance yourself from that which is indecent or from anything (remotely) similar to it". There are two ways of distancing ourselves from

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indecent. The first is simply to avoid situations of temptation or exposure. Don't frequent places where you will see things you should not see. Turn your head the other way whenever possible. However, there is a second, perhaps even more important way, to keep ourselves far away from evil thoughts and temptation. That is by creating a **barrier in our minds**, when we know and understand the severity of the *issurim* involved. The more you understand the catastrophe that *arayos* brings, the more distant you are from it.

For many readers, the information contained in this booklet may have little practical relevance. They are *ehrlicher bachurim*, who keep their minds and their eyes pure. Nevertheless, no one should exempt himself from becoming informed and forewarned, so as to properly distance himself "*min hakiur u'min hadomeh lakiur*" (from what is indecent or similar to it). This subject should be treated as if it were a *sugya* in *Shas*. Many *sugyos* you have learned deal with far-fetched cases that have no immediate practical applications. Since *arayos* is definitely one of the top tests of our time for many, these issues are not nearly as farfetched as "the ox that gored the cow." Becoming more informed is a sign of *yiras Shomayim*, rather than a sign of weakness.

Distill the water!

Perhaps it would be more fitting if a great *posek* or a *manhig Yisroel* would write about these matters. However, people in such positions rarely have the time to undertake a project such as this. I place my trust in *Hashem Yisborach* to help me be successful, less worthy as I may be, in conveying this vital message.

During the hundred years before the *churban* of Europe, there was a tremendous decline in the observance of *Yiddishkeit* throughout Eastern Europe. The *Gedolim* arranged a gathering to discuss tactics to revive observance for the masses. The *Chofetz Chayim zt"l* told all the *Rabonim* that each one must circulate in his district and arouse the people to *teshuva*. After the *Chofetz Chayim* finished speaking, the *Rabonim* discussed the matter among themselves. They felt that only a *tzadik* like the *Chofetz Chayim* had the right to give others *mussar* (rebuke). They, however, had their own shortcomings, and had no right to rebuke others.

The *Chofetz Chayim* got wind of what they were saying and requested to speak again. This is what he told them: I heard that some *Rabonim* were saying that they feel they have no right to rebuke others. Imagine that in a small *shtetel* the *poritz* (nobleman) came to visit and was invited by one of the *Yidden* for a cup of tea. He put the cup to his lips and immediately spat out the tea. "Ugh!", he said. "What do you have here? It's awful!". "I am so sorry", answered the *Yid*. "The only

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water we have in the *shtetel* comes from the well, which is full of sand." "It's no excuse!" said the nobleman. "Distill the water!". The *Yid* promised that from now on he would distill the water, and the nobleman left with no hard feelings.

That night, the nobleman happened to be passing through the *shtetel* again. He saw that the entire *shtetel* was going up in flames, but no one was making an effort to extinguish the blaze. "Put out the fire!", he roared. "We can't", they answered, "because you said we need to distill the water, and we have no distilled water". The *poritz* screamed at them. "Fools! For tea you insist on distilled water, but when it comes to a fire you use whatever water you can get".

Thus the objection of the *Rabonim* was not correct. There was a great fire burning: a fire of desertion from *Yiddishkeit*. A fire must be extinguished with any means available, whether you consider yourselves worthy or not.

Today, too, a fire is burning

No matter how much we would like to pretend it isn't so, there is a fire burning today as well: the fire of *arayos*. Many of our youth (and even adults) are engaged in improper activities, and have little or no sensitivity to the *issurim* involved. These youth may be sitting together in the same *bais midrash* with others from whose mind nothing could be further. For this fire, too, we can not insist on distilled water. We have to use any water available to extinguish it.

It isn't reasonable to even try to estimate the percentage of youth who are caught up in improper behavior against the percentage who are not. We certainly wouldn't want to exaggerate the problem and blow it out of proportion. On the other hand, we can not overemphasize that **there is a real problem**, which is considerably more prevalent than most people are aware of.

We have no choice but to speak openly

Traditionally, the subject of *arayos* was almost never discussed even privately, let alone publicly. Reb Aryeh Leib *z"tl*, the Chofetz Chayim's son, relates how his father approached him when he turned sixteen years of age. "I want to forewarn you about *hirhurim* (evil thoughts), but even discussing this can be harmful. Therefore, I suggest that you immerse yourself in the study of *Torah*, and that will protect you from harmful thoughts". The Chofetz Chaim didn't want to discuss the matter even with his own son. Undoubtedly, it would be ideal if we could conduct ourselves in the same manner. However, you have to know that **in all of Radin, there wasn't one indecent billboard**. There were no magazine racks in the stores, and people didn't walk in the street indecently dressed. There was no TV, nor were they exposed to internet. Since they didn't have our *nisyonos*, we

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can't compare what we have to do today (to address our current situation) to what they did then in their situation. What sufficed for them may very well not suffice for us. Indeed, *Reb Elya Lopian* used to devote an entire *Shabbos* once a year to discussing these matters. He said explicitly that what was proper procedure decades ago will not suffice for us.

Not long ago, as I was working on preparing some talks for a lecture tour in Baltimore, my old computer died right in the middle of my preparations. Since I use an Apple computer, I had no choice but to go to the Apple store located in a certain very large mall that I usually try to avoid. This was in the middle of August, and the indecency of dress seemed to have reached new levels of decadence. The advertising in the mall was much too unusually improper for me to describe here. The following thought went through my mind. "I am already a *zeide*, and have been married *b'li ayin hora* for over four decades. I have the sensitivity not to come here unless I absolutely have no choice. Nevertheless, going through such a place is disturbing even to me. For the most part, the younger generation does not have that sensitivity. This is one of the largest and most popular malls in all of Toronto. So they come here out of innocence to make their purchases. How does a normal, healthy teenager deal with the experience of passing through a place such as this? How does he process the temptation? If he is a *bachur* with a conscience, how does he deal with the feelings of guilt after having had his mind polluted? Who can he discuss his feelings with? Since this subject is generally viewed as somewhat of a taboo, he probably won't be comfortable to bare his soul to his *mechanchim*. Any *yeshiva bachur* knows that his parents and his *rebeyim* frown on any interaction between boys and girls. He knows he is expected to turn his head the other way and not look at the indecent billboards and signs. Does he know, however, that besides the disapproval of his elders he is actually committing a serious *issur*? Does he have any idea to what extent he is defiling his precious *neshoma*? How could he, if no one ever taught it to him? From where will he derive the encouragement he needs to rise above this *nisayon*, avoid it wherever possible, and take it in stride whenever he can't avoid it?" These were my thoughts on that August day in Yorkdale mall. Hence this pamphlet which you now hold in your hands.

How great the *nisayon*

The *Gemora* (*Chagiga* 11b) tells us how great the *nisayon* of *arayos* is. In the *mishneh* there we learn that one should not teach about *arayos* to three talmidim at once. The *Gemora* explains the reason: When two *talmidim* study with their *rebbe*, if one engages the *rebbe* in a discussion, the other will automatically listen in, since

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he has no one else to talk to. However, if there are three *talmidim*, when one engages the *rebbe* in a discussion, the other two may converse among themselves. They will overhear the conversation, but not thoroughly. Should a question ever arise about the subject presently being discussed, they may mistakenly think that the *rebbe* said *mutar* (permissible). The *Gemora* asks: If this is the reason, the same logic should apply to the teaching of any other *halacha*, not just *arayos*. Why, then, is it only *arayos* which is forbidden to teach to three? The *Gemora* answers: *Arayos* is different, because we learned in a *Mishneh* in *Makos* that a person naturally longs for and desires *gezel* (stolen money) and *arayos*. The *Gemora* continues to ask: If this is the case, the ruling of not teaching to three students should at least apply to *gezel* as well. The *Gemora* answers: The longing for *arayos* is so great that it is present whether the temptation is right in front of him or not. The main temptation for *gezel*, however, is only when the money is in front of him.

The *Gemora's* answer needs clarification. What difference does it make if the main longing for stolen money is only when the money is in front of him? Isn't that exactly what we are afraid of: that someday when confronted by the temptation, the *talmid* will think that the *rebbe* said it is *mutar*?

What the *Gemora* obviously means is the following: When the *talmidim* are conversing in front of their *rebbe*, they aren't yet blinded by the temptation for *gezel* since the money is not in front of them. They will objectively process what they heard and realize that they didn't hear the *halacha* clearly. By *arayos*, even while sitting in front of their *rebbe*, their temptation is already blinding them to assume that the *rebbe* said *mutar*!

From this *Gemora* we learn that the strongest, most powerful temptation on earth is the desire for *arayos*. The *Gemora* wasn't referring only to times and places such as ours. Even in places where there is a semblance of modesty, the temptation is very great, for such is the nature of mankind. How much more so in an atmosphere such as ours, where the exposure is almost constant, and the prevailing attitude of society is that there is nothing at all wrong with any form of immorality.

These and those

Some young people don't seem to be overly disturbed by this problem. They go about their business, stay away from things they shouldn't see or be involved in, and that is the end of it. However, many others are indeed very plagued by this *nisayon*. You might never guess who, because obviously they won't talk about it. They just keep it bottled up inside themselves, and sometimes they feel very guilty about it. They look around at all their friends who don't seem to be so affected, and

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they start to think that there must be something wrong with them if they are struggling so hard to deal with this temptation.

There are a number of encouraging thoughts we should share with them. The degree of temptation a person has is really dependent on his individual makeup. Some of our greatest gedolim in history, including *Dovid Hamelech*, struggled with this particular *yetzer hora* all their lives. Just because someone is attracted to something forbidden does not reflect negatively on the person at all. Every individual is subject to his own unique set of *yetzer horas*. Only the person **who does not attempt to overcome** his inclinations needs to feel regret, and get working at making improvements.

Furthermore, young people need to know that they are not alone. **This is a problem of universal proportions.** Many *bachurim* all over the world are plagued by these issues. Just as you might not confide in your friends, so, too, those friends who share your situation might not confide in you. *Bachurim* all over the world are experiencing the same thing that you are.

For all the above mentioned reasons, I have undertaken the writing of this short booklet, so that every *ben-Torah* can attain the maximum degree of *z'hirus* and caution in something which is one the greatest *nisyonos* of our generation. In this booklet we will try to address relationships, physical contact, and everything else which is pertinent to living up to the *Torah's* standard of moral purity, while at the same time offering words of comfort and encouragement to those who are struggling.

The *parsha* of *arayos*

Surely *Yeshiva bachurim* don't need to be forewarned about actual *giluy arayos*. However, as we will see, in order to understand the lighter, more prevalent *issurim*, we need to start from the top and work our way down.

In the end of both *parshas Acharei Mos* and *parshas Kedoshim*, the *Torah* gives us extensive instructions concerning forbidden sexual relationships. This *issur* is called *giluy arayos*. There are three main categories of *issurim*. First is what is known as incest, meaning relations with blood relatives. Here the *Torah* forbids relations with one's sister, mother, daughter, granddaughter, mother's sister, and father's sister, etc. A second category is relations with relatives through marriage. A father's wife (other than one's mother), a brother's wife, a daughter in-law, a father's brother's wife, and a wife's sister, etc. The third category does not deal with relatives, but rather other objectionable relations. They are: relations with a *nidah*, a

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married woman, between two men (homosexuality), and between a person and an animal.

In all the above, both participants, the man and the woman, are equally liable. The minimum punishment for any of the acts of *arayos* is *koreis*, some of them bearing also capital punishment in *bais din*.

The severity of *arayos*

In certain ways, this *issur* is one of the most severe in the entire *Torah*. Here, unlike most *issurim*, the *halacha* requires *yaiharag v'al ya'avor* (be killed rather than transgress). When it comes to other *issurim*, the *halacha* is *ya'avor v'al yaiharag* (better to transgress than to die). For example, if confronted **in a private place** by someone who wants to force you to renounce Judaism and says, "Break *Shabbos* or I will kill you," you are permitted to break the *Shabbos*. If, however, he tells you "Commit *giluy arayos* or I will kill you," you are obligated to give up your life rather than to transgress (even if his intention is not to make you renounce Judaism). Obviously, the defilement of *arayos* is so great that it is better to die than transgress.

National consequences

At the end of the *parsha* of *arayos*, the *Torah* warns us of the consequences this *aveirah* can have for the *Am Yisroel*.

*"Do not become defiled with all these (things), for the nations which I send away from before you became defiled with them. The land became defiled, I brought punishment for its sins upon it, and the land spat out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my laws and not do any of these abominations, both the born Jew and the convert who converts among you. For all these abominations the people of the land before you did, and the land became defiled. Let not the land spit you out when you defile it as it spat out the nations before you. For whoever will do any of these abominations shall be cut off from amongst their people (the punishment of *kareis*). You shall guard my charge, that you not do any of the disgusting practices that were done before you and not become defiled through them. I am Hashem, your G-d.*

Rashi comments on the above passages:

*"The land shall not spit you out: 'Eretz Yisroel can be compared to a prince who was fed a disgusting food which (due to his delicate upbringing) can not stay in his stomach. Rather he vomits it up. So, too, Eretz Yisroel can not contain those that transgress the sin (of *arayos*)."*

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"Do not become defiled through them. I am Hashem your G-d: 'But if you do become defiled I am not your G-d. You become disqualified from being behind Me. What pleasure do I have from you? You will be deserving of annihilation. That's why it says, I am Hashem your G-d."

The Jewish people in the land of Israel today are besieged to give up more and more property from their tiny state. We tend to interpret these events in terms of political and military considerations. Perhaps we should attribute these *tzaros* to the sins which the *Torah* forewarned us would bring these consequences.

The *issur* of *nidah*

I beg the forgiveness of the *chashuva* reader for discussing such a delicate issue. However, without the information to follow, the main benefit of this booklet could not be achieved. We must understand the most serious "root" *issurim*, in order to come to understand other lesser *issurim* that stem from those roots. So I have no choice but to speak openly.

An unmarried girl who has never in her life had a period, or who has cleansed herself in the *mikveh*, is called in the *Gemora* by the title *p'nuya*. It is an *issur d'oraysa* to have relations with her, but this *issur*, although serious, is not included in the category of *giluy arayos*. The special stringencies of *giluy arayos* do not apply in this case.

From the first time that a girl or woman has her period, she acquires the status of a *nidah* and she is considered one of the *arayos* listed in the *chumash*. It is to be assumed that a girl has already begun to get her period from the time she is twelve years old. She will remain a *nidah* for the rest of her life, until such time as she is able to go to the *mikveh*. Unmarried girls never purify themselves in the *mikveh*. Therefore, any girl twelve or over is forbidden to any man, not by the lesser *issur* of *p'nuya*, but rather by the very stringent ruling of *giluy arayos*. She is even forbidden to her own husband as long as she has not been properly purified in a *mikveh*. (We call this *Taharas Hamishpachah*). Therefore, when we speak about issues of interaction between a boy and a girl, **we are dealing with issues concerning the *halacha* of *giluy arayos*.**

The Chofetz Chayim's *drosha* in Vilna

In the winter of 1931, just two years before the Chofetz Chayim's *petirah*, he spoke in his house between *Kabolas Shabbos* and *Ma'ariv* (as was his custom). "We must do something about the terrible decline in *Taharas Hamishpacha*," he announced. The more he spoke about it he, the more inspired he became. The very

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first morning after *Shabbos*, talmidim saw a wagon waiting for the *tzadik*, who was about to leave for *Vilna*, in spite of his weakness and his old age.

Upon arrival in *Vilna*, the Chofetz Chayim immediately gathered all the *Rabonim* and charged them with the responsibility to strengthen *taharas hamishpacha*. He also announced that he intended to give a *drosha* for the women of *Vilna* in the *Bais Hakneses Hagadol*. Thousands of women came to hear the *gadol hador*, and the following is an excerpt from his historical words:

"I remember the *Vilna* of fifty years ago. It was a holy city. A city of Torah and fear of Heaven. Now it has become completely different. The generations keep getting smaller and smaller. One generation goes and another generation goes, but the holy Torah stays forever in the same level. The Ribono shel Olam's Torah is always perfect. In all generations we are obligated to maintain its perfection in order that we should remain the same holy people.

Immersion in the Mikveh is a positive command from the Torah. (Neglecting) this mitzvah is not similar to the prohibition of eating pork, *nevailah* or *treife*. Those are just a *lav* (negative command), but here there is a punishment of *Kares* (being cut off with early death). This is one of the sins for which a person is obligated to allow himself to be killed if he is being forced to transgress. Yet here we willingly climb into the fire ourselves and also bring in our husband and children. The *mishneh* says that for three sins women may die (Hashem preserve us) during childbirth. One of these three sins is when we are not careful in observing the laws of *nidah*. Some think that a bathtub is sufficient. All the waters of the world will not help; only a mikveh which is kosher according to the law.

Many are embarrassed, and therefore they put their own lives in danger as well as the lives of their children. Which mother would be ashamed to save her children from fire? When a fire breaks out in a home where everyone is sleeping and one person is awake, he must scream and wake everyone up. I see that the world is sleeping, and the fire encompasses many Jewish homes. So I came here to scream and awaken (people). It was very difficult for me to travel, but since this affects the lives of a large number of Jews, I could not sit at home. Everyone is obligated to arouse the other and to save him from this fire." So spoke the Chofetz Chayim in 1931.

Subcategories

Hopefully, most *bachurim* will never be confronted with a *nisayon* of actual *arayos*. However, there are many much more prevalent *issurim* that are related to the subject of *arayos*. Although those *issurim* themselves do not constitute *giluy*

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arayos, they are subcategories of *giluy arayos*, and in some ways are as severe as *arayos* itself. These are called *aviz'reihu d'giluy arayos* (things connected with *arayos*).

Before we discuss the subcategories of *arayos*, let's cite an example of another *avairah* for which one must give his life. If held at gunpoint and commanded to worship an idol, the *Torah* obligates us to die rather than transgress. *Avodah zarah* means actually performing a service of worship, such as bringing a *korban* to the idol or bowing to it. However, there are other lesser sins connected with idol worship, which are not themselves actually idol worship. The *Torah* forbids us to derive any benefit from an idol, even if we don't worship it at all. Therefore, the fruit and leaves of any tree which has been worshipped (*asheirah*) all become forbidden in *hana'ah*. This *issur* is connected with *avodah zarah*, but is not itself *avodah zarah*.

If the leaves of a certain *asheirah* tree have a medicinal power to cure a particular illness when made into a tea, one may still not have *hana'ah* from them. Even if refraining from healing himself will cost a person his life. This is because *aviz'reihu* also have the halachah of *yaiharag v'al ya'avor*, better to die than to transgress.

Subcategories of *arayos*

It is precisely the same with the lesser *issurim* of *giluy arayos*. The *Torah* commands us, "**Do not come close** to *arayos*." This prohibition forbids other activities which are not actual relations. Although the person does not transgress actual *arayos*, he is still obligated to forfeit his life rather than to transgress any of the lesser *issurim* associated with *arayos*.

The *Mesilas Yesharim* is a *mussar sefer*. Since it is not our intention here to give *mussar*, but rather to convey absolute *halacha*, it would seem out of place to quote the *Mesilas Yesharim*. However, there is one chapter in the *Mesilas Yesharim* which sticks strictly to the *halacha*. Chapter eleven deals with the *midah* called *n'kiyus*. *N'kiyus* means that a person is meticulous in keeping all the details of an *issur* or a *mitzva*, not just the general *issur*. Here the author outlines the intricacies of many *halachos*, and shows how careful we have to be not to transgress even the minutest details. When dealing with the subject of *arayos*, he quotes the following *Midrash*:

The pasuk says, "Do not come close to giluy arayos! HaKadosh Baruch Hu said, 'Do not say that since relations are forbidden with a woman, I will hold her and not have a sin, or I will kiss her and not have a sin. HaKadosh baruch Hu said, 'Just as when a nazir has made a vow not to

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drink wine he is forbidden to eat grapes or raisins and drink grape juice or anything which comes from the vine, so, too, a woman that is not yours is forbidden to touch. Whoever touches a woman that is not his brings death to himself, etc."

This then is the *issur d'oraisa* of *lo sikr'vu* ("Don't come close!"). Not only are relations forbidden, but any physical contact is forbidden as well. This *halachah* is expressed in *Mesechta Sanhedrin* (75a) where the the *Gemora* states the following:

*"Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: There was an incident of a certain man who put his eyes on a particular woman and became obsessed with lovesickness. They came and asked the doctors, who said that there is no hope for him until that woman has relations with him. The Chachomim said, 'Let him die, but let her not have relations with him.' They suggested, 'Let her stand in front of him while undressed (to perhaps appease his passion).' The Chachomim said, 'Let him die, but let her not stand in front of him undressed.' They suggested again, 'Let her converse with him from behind a fence.' The Chachomim said, 'Let him die, but let her not converse with him from behind a fence.' That is the end of the story. Then the Gemora brings a dispute as to the status of this woman. One opinion is that she was a married woman. The second opinion is that she was a single woman. The Gemora asks: If she was married, we understand why he has to die rather than transgress, but if she was unmarried, why does he need to die to avoid this transgression? The Gemora offers two answers. Either to avoid the disgrace of the family we will not let her have illicit relations with him, or else because it could cause a breech in *arayos*, that other people will pretend that they, too, are in danger of dying because of lovesickness.*

It is important for us to understand the implications of this passage in the *Gemora*. There is a vast difference whether this woman was married or not. The prohibition to have relations with a married woman is *giluy arayos*. There the *halacha* of *yaiharag v'al ya'avor* applies. If she was unmarried and not a *nidah*, there would be an *issur Torah* to have relations, but it would not fall under the category of *giluy arayos*. That is why the *Gemora* originally said that it is understandable that he should have to give his life only if she was married, because it is a case of *arayos*. If not, however, then the *halacha* of *yaiharag v'al ya'avor* should not apply.

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From this passage we see that not only actual relations, (*giluy arayos*), require a person to give his life, but even lesser *issurim* such as those suggested by the doctors, (*aviz'reihu d'giluy arayos*), require a person to give his life.

Creating a platonic (friendly) relationship

Based on this *Gemora*, *Hagaon R' Moshe Feinstein, zt"l paskened* that it is forbidden by the *negative commandment* of *lo sikr'vu* to have even a "friendly" relationship between a boy and a girl. Some people are under the mistaken impression that there is nothing actually wrong with having a "friend" of the opposite gender. They think that as long as they are not alone (*yichud*) and don't transgress any *issurim*, such as physical contact, there is nothing halachically improper. Of course they will admit that for people on a higher *madreiga* it would be better to refrain, but, they think, not everyone can be so holy. This issue is discussed in a *teshuva* in *sefer Igros Moshe [Even Ha'ezer part 4 teshuva # 60]*. *Rav Moshe z'tl* was asked about a youngster who had a girlfriend, and claimed that since they were never alone in a secluded place there was nothing halachically wrong. The *bachur* said that he was not interested in hearing any *mussar*, but only strict halacha. *Rav Feinstein* proved from the above passage in the *Gemora* (and from the accompanying *rishonim*) that anything which could bring to affection is *assur* because of *lo sikr'vu*, **including conversations which are for the purpose of creating a relationship**. That is why the *Chachomim* said that he would have to give his life rather than have an intimate conversation from opposite sides of a fence.

Perhaps now the *chashuva* reader begins to see why I had no choice but to begin this booklet with the discussion of actual *giluy arayos* in general, and the *issur* of *nidah* in particular. This will enable us to understand that refraining from any "friendly" interactions between boys and girls is not a *chumrah* for *tzadikim*, but rather something forbidden, defiling, and applicable to everyone.

***Chalav Yisroel* and "*shomer n'gia*"**

It is almost inevitable that a *yeshiva bachur* will eventually encounter someone who is not living up to the moral standard of the *Ribono Shel Olam*. Perhaps it will be someone outside the *Yeshiva* society. It may even be someone in the *Yeshiva* world who is leading a dual life. It is important for you to know how to put such behavior in perspective. Let's try to do that now.

In the "modern Orthodox" world there is a term frequently used by the youth. It is "*shomer n'gia*". Some will proudly announce, "I am "*shomer n'gia*." Others

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may say, "I am not *"shomer n'gia."* The connotation of this is that refraining from physical contact with the opposite gender is merely a *chumrah* or a *minhag*. If you do, you are doing something praiseworthy, **but not mandatory**. If you don't, **you're also okay**. It's similar to the practice of drinking only *chalav Yisroel*.

There is a clear cut *halacha* that it is forbidden to drink milk of a non-Jew unless the milking was supervised by a Jew. There is always a possibility that some milk of a non-kosher animal may have been mixed in to the cows' milk. R' Moshe Feinstein gave a *heter*, based on proofs from the *Gemora*, that it is permissible to drink unsupervised milk that was produced by the larger companies. Those companies would stand to suffer very great losses from negative publicity, if it were known that they were mixing in milk other than cows' milk. This gives us a certainty, equivalent to supervision, that indeed they did not do so. However, Rav Feinstein himself recommended being *machmir* and drinking only *chalav Yisroel* wherever possible. Hence, if one person says, "I drink only *cholov Yisroel*," and the other says that he drinks regular, unsupervised milk, we can honestly say that the one is praiseworthy while the other is also okay.

This is what the connotation of *"shomer n'gia."* has come to mean to some people. But there is no comparison between *"shomer n'gia."* and *cholov Yisroel*. If someone drinks the regular milk, he is not keeping a *chumrah*, whereas if someone does not refrain from physical contact with the opposite gender, he commits a sin for which the *Torah* dictated that he should rather lay down his life than transgress.

Other *issurim*

Perhaps the greatest *nisayon* for an *erlicher yeshiva bachur* is in *issurim* that do not fall directly under the category of *arayos* at all. Although they are closely related, since they do not involve the participation of both parties, they are not considered subcategories of *arayos*. Nevertheless, these *issurim* are *d'oraissa*, very serious, and sometimes very tempting. We refer now to the *issurim* of *hirhurim* (unclean thoughts), *histaklus* (looking at women for the sake of *hana'ah*), and the *issur of divrei cheishek* (reading literature or viewing media which can arouse passion). Since these temptations surround us almost whenever we set foot outside the four *amos* of the *bais hamedrash*, we will try to work through these issues methodically, starting from the bottom up.

Unclean thoughts

There is a passage in *parshas Ki Saitzai* which states the following:

*"When you go out in a camp against your enemies, **you shall guard yourself from any evil thing.** When there will be among you a man who*

is not pure because of a mishap in the night, he shall go out of the camp, he shall not come into the camp. And it shall be that towards evening he shall wash in water, and when the sun sets he may come into the camp."

The *Torah* didn't spell out exactly what the "evil thing" is from which you should guard yourself. From the context, our *chachomim* understood that it refers to the thing that can cause a mishap in the night time. Hence, they said (*Avoda Zara 20b*) that here we learn "that a man should not have unclean thoughts during the day, which will bring to *tuma* (defilement) in the night." Evil thoughts are not just improper. The *Ribono shel Olam* has prohibited them to us. We need to train ourselves to have self control.

In the paragraph which we say before putting on *tefilin* we declare, "And (I will put them) on the head, opposite the brain, so that the *neshama* which is in my brain, with all my other senses and energies shall all be devoted to the service of *Hashem Yisborach*." The *neshama* is in the brain. It is the person's intellect and his thoughts. The *neshama* becomes soiled and dirtied from improper thoughts.

In *parshas Matos* we read that, after the war with *Midyan*, the captains brought a donation for the *Mishkan* as an atonement. For what did they need an atonement? They were afraid that perhaps while they were capturing the women of *Midyan* they may have had some improper thoughts. Therefore they felt they needed an atonement.

It is hard for me to imagine that any normal *bachur* could live and circulate in our impure environment without being somewhat affected. A story is told about *Reb Elya Lopian zt"l*. A *bachur* approached him to ask for permission to leave the *yeshiva* to attend a *chasuna*. *Reb Elya* asked him if there would be *pritzus* (indecent dress or behavior) at the wedding. The *bachur* replied that there would indeed be, but that it didn't affect him. *Reb Elya* looked at him very sternly and said, "I am already eighty years old, and blind in one eye. Yet, it affects me. You are a young *bachur* with **two healthy ("fleishige") eyes**, and you say it doesn't affect you!?"

Feelings of guilt

Although we have not yet concluded the section on impure thoughts, I feel that it is necessary to interject this section about guilty feelings right now. **Perhaps this is the most important segment of this booklet.** Every night we say in *ma'ariv*, "Please remove the *Satan* from before us and from behind us." What is the *Satan* before us, what is the *Satan* behind us? There are many explanations, but allow me to share one with you which is very relevant to our discussion. Before a person does a sin, the *Satan* convinces him that it is not really a sin at all. If it is,

it's so minor that it will hardly count. However, after the person has done the sin, the *Satan* sings exactly the opposite tune. He says to the guilty person, "Do you know what a major sin you have just committed? Your *neshama* has been irreparably defiled. *Hakadosh baruch Hu* wants nothing to do with you any more. He doesn't want your *Torah*, and He won't listen to your *tefila*. In His eyes, you are merely a pile of despicable garbage." So we ask *Hashem* nightly to remove both the advance incitement of the *Satan* and his attempts to destroy us with guilt feelings in the event that we do sin.

As important as it is to bear in mind the severity of evil thoughts, etc., we must never forget that *Hashem Yisborach* is not unreasonable, and is always understanding. The *Ribono Shel Olam* knows our weaknesses, and understands the difficulty of the *nisayon*, especially in our decadent times. He is well aware that for some people, this temptation is truly a struggle, sometimes overwhelming. It would be wrong never to feel any guilt, because we would never endeavor to improve ourselves. However, it is nothing more than the *atzas hayetzer* that makes a person become overwhelmed with guilt. "You are children to *Hashem*, your G-d." A father loves a child, no matter what, and never gives up on him. *Hashem* does indeed want the *Torah* and the *tefila* of the person who is struggling, and He still loves him every bit as much as before. Of course, we mustn't take advantage of the Creator's patience with us. He anxiously awaits our making the necessary improvements to rise above the defilement and the guilt. We must do everything in our power not to keep Him waiting.

The heart and the eyes

We recite *parshas tzitzis* as part of the *sh'ma* morning and evening. In it we say:

*"And you shall see it and remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and do them, and you shall not stray **after your heart and your eyes**, which you (tend to) stray after."*

The Gemora explains (Brachos 13b) that "your heart" refers to thoughts of heresy (apikorsus) and "your eyes" refer to thoughts of z'nus. Chazal tell us further:

"The heart and the eyes are the two agents of sin. The eye sees, the heart covets, and the body carries out the sin."

The prohibition against straying after our eyes is one of the six hundred thirteen *mitzvos*. However, it is noteworthy that the *Torah* specified this *mitzva* in the *parsha* of *tzitzis*. After all, the simple meaning of the *pasuk* is that the *tzitzis*

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are a reminder for **all** the *mitzvos*. Why did the *Torah* say to remember all the *mitzvos* and not stray after your eyes? Seemingly it could just as well have said to remember all the *mitzvos* and not break the *Shabbos* or eat *treife*.

To answer this question, we need to refer to a passage in the *Gemora Menachos* (44a). The *Gemora* wants to show how a *mitzva* can bring reward not only in *Olam Haba*, but even in this world as well. To demonstrate this, it brings a story of a certain person who was very devoted to the *mitzva* of *tzitzis*. Nevertheless, when this young man (who was also wealthy) heard that there was a certain *zona* far away who charged four hundred gold coins for her infamous service, he sent her the money and was given an appointment. When he came, the woman prepared herself, and he was just about to do the *aveirah*. The *Gemora* continues:

"His four tzitziyos came and smacked him on the face. He slipped down (off the bed) and sat down on the floor. She also slipped down and sat on the floor. She said to him, '(I swear) by the ruler of Rome that I will not let you go until you tell me what blemish you found in me.' He said, 'I promise that I never saw a woman as beautiful as you. But we have a command which Hashem our G-d commanded us. It's name is tzitzis. About it is written two times 'I am Hashem your G-d'. I am He Who is destined to punish, and I am He Who is destined to pay reward.' Now (my tzitziyos) seemed to me like four witnesses.' She said, 'I will not leave you until you tell me what is your name, the name of your city, the name of your rebbi, and the name of your study hall in which you learn. He wrote it down and gave it into her hand. She arose, and divided all her properties. One third went to the government (for a tax), one third to the poor, and one third she took in her hands with her, besides the bedspreads (which she had used in her former profession). She came to the bais midrash and said, 'Rebbi, please give orders that I should become a giyores.' He said to her, 'My daughter, perhaps you put your eyes on one of the talmidim? She took out the paper and gave it to him. He told her, 'Go and claim your rightful purchase.' Those same bedspreads that she spread for him to do an issur she now spread for him b'heter. This was his reward in this world. In Olam Haba we can not know how much it is."

This amazing story gives us a new insight into the *pasuk* of "*v'lo sasuru*." These words can bear two distinct meanings. The simple meaning is: you **shall not** stray. It is forbidden. The other meaning is that if you are careful in the *mitzva* of *tzitzis* **you won't stray** after your eyes, because the *mitzva* will prevent you from doing so.

Every *mitzva* has its own special *segula*. The *segula* of the *mitzva* of *tzitzis*, is that it will protect the person who is meticulous in its fulfillment from the sins of *arayos*, just as the man in the story was unable to go through with the *aveirah* because of his four *tzitziyos*.

Perhaps the reason for this *segula* is as follows: Every time we do a *mitzva* we bring additional *kedusha* into ourselves. The part of our body which we use for the *mitzva* is especially sanctified. In order to remember something, you need not only your mind, but your heart as well. If it made no impression on your heart, your mind wouldn't remember it. When you look at the *tzitzis* with intention of subjugating yourself to the will of *Hashem*, and as a result remember to do the *mitzvos*, you are using your eyes, your mind and your heart. Therefore, you **will not stray** after your eyes and your heart to the sins of immorality, because the added *kedusha* will not let you.

Whatever the explanation, we see one thing very clearly. It is forbidden for a person to allow his mind to dwell on thoughts of *z'nus* and indecency. The *Ribono shel Olam* says NO!

Histaklus ba'nashim

Now that we have established that improper thoughts are actually an *issur d'oraisa*, it automatically follows that we are prohibited from looking at women for the sake of pleasure, because this brings to *hirhur*.

The street was not always the same as it is today. When I was young, although the street was not necessarily a place of modesty, it also wasn't the same source of open moral corruption as it is today. Clothing was not so immodest, and the billboards were very different. The media were also considerably more restrained in their presentations. Today we are almost surrounded by improper sights anywhere we go. To a great extent, we consider ourselves *anusim*. We have no choice but to see. This is definitely true in part, but it never justifies or permits looking deliberately.

Perhaps some people still think that the *issurim* we discuss here are only forbidden *mi'tzad hamusar*, and not actual *halacha*. For this we need to quote directly from *Shulchan Aruch Even Ha'ezer* (chapter 21, paragraph 1):

*A person needs to distance himself from women **very very much**. It is forbidden to snap his fingers, make motions with his feet or wink his eyes at one of the *arayos*. It is forbidden to be playful with her, act in a light-headed manner in her presence, or look at her beauty. Even to smell the perfume upon her is forbidden. It is forbidden to look at women who are standing by the washing place (who used to wash*

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clothes in the river and needed to lift up their own garments somewhat so they wouldn't get wet). It is forbidden to look at the colorful garments of a woman whom he knows even when they are not upon her, because perhaps he may come to entertain improper thoughts about her. If he encountered a woman in the street, it is forbidden to walk behind her. He should rather run and remove her to his side or behind him. He should not pass by the doorway of a woman who is a zona within four amos. Whoever looks even at the little finger of a woman and intended to derive pleasure from this is considered as if he looked at her private parts. It is forbidden to hear the (singing) voice of an ervah or to look at her hair. Whoever does one of these things intentionally is liable to receive "maḳas mardus" (lashes prescribed by the Rabbanan). These halachos also apply to a woman (who is not an ervah) but merely forbidden by a negative command (lo sa'aseh).

Could anything be clearer than this passage in the *Shulchan Aruch*? Every *bachur* should be familiar with this passage. Then, if someone tells you that restraint is only for "holy" Jews, *chasidish* or *yeshivish*, show him this piece of the *Shulchan Aruch* and let him try to defend his position.

There is an astounding passage in *Mesechta Bava Basra* (57b). The *Novi Yeshayahu* praises the person who has certain attributes. One of them is that he "closes his eyes from seeing evil." The *Gemora* explains what this refers to:

*"One who closes his eyes from seeing evil." R' Chiya bar Aba said, 'this refers to the person who does not look at women when they stand by the washing place (but rather closes his eyes).' The Gemora asks: What case is this referring to? If there is another road (and he could have avoided the encounter altogether) he is a **roschal** (Rashbam explains: If he has another path he is a *roscha* even if he closes his eyes, because he shouldn't have come so close to the aveirah of possibly seeing. We are commanded (Chulin 44b) '**Distance yourself** from improper things, and from anything similar.')* The *Gemora* answers that the *pasuk* praises him when he had no choice but to pass this place. If he forces himself to look away, he is praiseworthy. If not, he is considered an *onus*.

In a world where the indecency is just about everywhere, and the level of the impurity is considerably worse than "women who stand by the washing place," it is difficult to determine which places are included under the heading "there is another road." One thing, however, is absolutely certain. Whenever we can, we must avoid places of exposure, and when we can not we must never, ever deliberately look.

Divrei cheishek

Now that we see the severity of improper thoughts and looking where we should not, we can readily understand the *issur* of *divrei cheshek* (reading or viewing material which can arouse passion). The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 307, *par. 16*) tells us about things we are not allowed to read on *Shabbos*. One of them is *divrei cheshek*, such as the book of *Amanuel*. *Sefer Amanuel* was obviously some kind of a romance novel, which could arouse a person's passion. The *Shulchan Aruch* continues: Concerning *divrei cheshek* there is also an *issur* of inciting the *yetzer hora* on one's self (and therefore it is not only *assur* on *Shabbos*, but on weekdays as well). Who ever authors such books and certainly whoever prints them are *machati'im es horabim* (causing others to sin). The *Mishneh B'rurah* points out in the name of *Chazal* that a person who causes others to sin is worse than one who murders him. The one who murders him destroys him only in this world. The one who causes him to sin "kills him" in *Olam Haba* as well.

I do not know if a copy of *Sefer Amanuel* is still in existence, but one can be sure that it was relatively mild compared to some of the indecent literature available on the market today. Nevertheless, distributing even such milder literature will affect the reader's *Olam Haba*. Our newspapers and magazines undoubtedly beat *Sefer Amanuel* by a mile. When the *shulchan Aruch* was written, there were no means of arousing passion other than through the written word. What would the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Mishneh B'rurah* say about the TV shows, movies, and internet of our time?

Some people are confident that they will never come to a *michshol* from indulging in media. Even if they could be sure that this is correct (which they can't), they have already done a serious *issur* just by watching. What we see there makes an indelible impression and becomes permanently lodged in our minds. It can be a source of temptation for years to come.

Reb Naftali Amsterdam quoted his *Rebbi*, Reb Yisroel Salanter. "I heard an incorrect saying from a *Chochom*. 'In one ear and out the other.' This is not true, because between one ear and the other it must go through the brain, and something will remain." Besides the *issurim* of *hirhur* and *histaklus*, inciting the *yetzer hora* on ourselves and possible coming to defilement at night (as mentioned earlier), we do ourselves permanent damage. The day will come when we will want to shake our minds clean from all these thoughts, but we may discover that this will be very difficult.

Any *bachur* who has had the misfortune to view improper media knows how deep an impression it has made on him, and how difficult it is to concentrate on other things, especially *d'varim shebik'dusha* afterwards.

Indecent language

There is an *issur* called *nivul peh* (speaking indecent language). Some people think that this refers only to using unclean expressions, but that is not correct. Any talk about intimacy or romance, anything to do with passion or lust, is considered *nivul peh*, no matter what vocabulary is used. Some youth consider it "cool" to use such language or talk about such matters. Even if there is no indecent intention, even if it is only a joke, and even if no words were spoken but only an indecent gesture was made, a serious *issur* has been transgressed.

The *Gemora in Masechta K'subos* tells us a frightening story. There are two versions of the story there. We will relate only the version which is pertinent to our discussion. *Rav Chiya bar Aba*, who was the *rebbe* of *Raish Lakish's* son, lost a son who was a *bachur*. *Raish Lakish* went to comfort the mourner and told him something startling. He quoted a *pasuk* and this is what he said:

(Yeshayahu 9) "Therefore Hashem will not rejoice over his bachurim, and to his widows he will not show mercy, for all of them are flatterers and evil doers, and every mouth speaks indecently. Even with all this His anger does not go away and His hand is still outstretched (to punish)." What does it mean "His hand is still outstretched"? Rav Chanin bar Rav explained: Everyone knows why a Kallah goes into the chupa, but anyone who defiles his mouth and brings forth a dirty word from his mouth, even if he had a decree on him of seventy years good it will be turned on him for bad." (So the Gemora asks), "He came to comfort him and he causes him anguish (by intimating that his son died because he spoke nivul peh)? This is what he meant to say: You are greatly regarded (in Heaven) that your son was taken (as an atonement) for the sin of the generation (nivul peh)."

The *Gemora in Mesechta Shabbos (31a)* also tells us the severe punishment for *nivul peh*:

"For the sin of nivul peh new tzaros and new harsh decrees come, bachurai Yisroel die, widows and orphans cry out and are not answered, etc. Rabah bar Shila said in the name of Rav Chisda, 'Who ever defiles his mouth will be given a deep place in Gehinom, etc.' Rav Nachman bar Yitzchok said, 'Even the one who hears (nivul peh) and remains silent, etc.'"

The *Mesilas Yesharim* explains in the above mentioned chapter that *nivul peh* was not forbidden just because it may arouse passion in a person. It is *assur* in and of itself, because **it is equivalent to giluy arayos of the speech.** All the above

mentioned quotations speak for themselves, and leave no room for any doubt. The *Ribono shel Olam* wants our talk to be totally free of any hint of indecency.

Non-Jewish music

One of the most prevalent temptations for young people today is to listen to non-Jewish music. Music without words may be detrimental, too, but right now we will discuss the music that has lyrics put to it.

There are some songs whose words are innocuous. There are songs about nature, the birds or the sky. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with listening to those songs. However, those aren't the popular ones that young people are listening to. Today's songs generally have words that discuss romance, *negi'ah*, and much worse. All the vulgarity is open and unmistakably clear. After reading our section on *nivul peh*, it isn't difficult to see that such songs are nothing but *nivul peh* put to music. However, at least in one way, these songs can cause even more harm than just speaking *nivul peh*. Please let me explain.

In the *Sefer Hachinuch* (*mitzva* 384), the author offers a rationale behind the *mitzva* to blow trumpets in the *Bais Hamikdash* over the *korbanos*, and in time of war. This is what he says:

*"At the time of bringing a korban we need to direct our thoughts very well, as is known that certain thoughts can disqualify a korban, and also to have proper kavana before Hashem, Who commanded us to bring the korban. As well, in times of distress a person needs great kavana when he pleads before Hashem to save him from his trouble. Since a person is a physical being, he needs to be greatly awakened, **because with nothing to awaken (his emotions) he is like one who is asleep. Nothing arouses the emotions like the sound of music.**"*

The *Chinuch* teaches us that nothing has the power to arouse a person's emotions as much as music. Which emotions will be awakened within him? It will depend what he thinks about while he is hearing the music. If he thinks that he is standing before *Hashem* and pleading for his life and the life of his people, he will *daven* with his whole heart. But if, *chas v'shalom*, he thinks about the unclean thoughts expressed in the lyrics of most of today's songs, **he will be driving the tumah deeper and deeper into the inner recesses of his heart and his emotions.**

We once had a great *Tana* named Elisha ben Avuyah. He was Rabbe Mayer's first teacher. He went off the *derech*, became a total *rosha*, and was an enemy of the Jewish people. The *Gemora* gives us a number of things that caused him to sour.

One of them was "Greek songs never ceased being in his mouth." Even a *Tana* who knows the entire *Torah* can be severely harmed by *zemer Y'vani* (Greek songs).

Yichud

There is an *issur* called *yichud*, which means being alone. It is forbidden for a man to be alone with a woman who is an *ervah* to him. According to most authorities, this *issur* is *d'oraisa*. When the disgraceful incident occurred that Amnon forced Tamar to lie with him, the *bais din* of *Dovid Hamelech* forbade *yichud* even with an unmarried girl (even if she is not a *nidah*). The *halachos* of *yichud* are found in *Shulchan Aruch Even Ha'ezer* chapter 22.

The *halacha* does not differentiate between a woman who is young or old, or whether she is pretty or not. These *halachos* are complicated, and need to be studied carefully in order to know what is *assur* and what is *mutar*.

It goes without saying that being alone together is like opening the door to the *yetzer hora*. Many *michsholim* that would never have happened were brought about simply by transgressing the *issur* of *yichud*.

Hangouts

There are places where teenagers like to go to socialize, especially with members of the opposite gender. The place might be a restaurant, a pizza shop, or maybe a bowling alley. Once again, some youth think that there is no harm involved. It is important for an *ehrlicher bachur* to know how to view such activities. The *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 529 par.4)*, quotes the words of the *Rambam*:

"Bais din is obligated to appoint officers that will circulate and search in gardens, orchards, and by the rivers (so that) men and women will not gather there to eat, drink, and come to incitement of sin. Similarly, they shall forewarn all the people that men and women shall not mingle in their houses during the simcha celebrations and not be drawn into excessive drinking of wine (because) perhaps they will come to a sin. Rather they shall all be holy." The Mishneh B'rurah adds that this obligation is actually applicable all year long, not just during Yomtov, but that the problem is more prevalent on Yomtov.

There is no nation that compares to the *Am Yisroel* in its desire to remain pure in *Hashem Yisborach's* eyes. There was a *minhag* to fast three fasts, (Monday, Thursday, Monday), following both *Pesach* and *Sukkos*. The *Mishneh B'rurah* explains the reason for these *ta'anisim*. "We are concerned that perhaps as a result of the rejoicing and the drinking (on *Yomtov*) we may have come to some improper moral behavior." Most people do not fast today, because we consider ourselves too

weak to adopt voluntary fast days. In many Yeshivos, however, they still recite the special *s'lichos* for the Monday, Thursday and Monday fast days. (These *s'lichos* are found in any *sidur* which has *s'lichos*). We have a long way to go to restore the awesome sensitivity that previous generations had towards matters of moral purity.

The sin of *hotza'as zera l'vatalah*

Undoubtedly, the most prevalent of all *michsholim* today is the sin of *hotza'as zera l'vatalah*. It wasn't an uncommon thing even when I was young, and today it is much more widespread due to the bombardment of *pritzus* we are exposed to in the street. Few things can be more debilitating to a *bachur* than the guilt feelings brought on by this *michshol*, and sometimes *bachurim* become depressed as a result.

Writing anything about this at all requires one to walk a very fine line. On the one hand, this is a **very grave *aveirah***. We can not minimize that at all. On the other hand, given our present environment, it is not surprising that this sin is more widespread than in eras where the environment was purer. If we dwell on the severity of the sin, we increase the terrible feelings of guilt. If we try to assuage the guilt, we seem to be minimizing the sin, **which we dare not do**. How do we address this difficult issue?

If you know anyone having difficulty with this temptation, this is what you should tell him: The severity of the *aveirah* requires you to **make every effort** to improve. However, the *Ribono shel Olam* knows our *yetzer*. If you can't have a total victory over the *yetzer* immediately, win some battles. Minimize. *Daven* for assistance, and celebrate every victory, even the small ones. If you truly make the effort to overcome this, in the end you will be successful. If it is possible to find someone older and wiser to confide in, by all means do so. (Indeed, Reb Elya Lopian used to announce that if there was a *bachur* who had been *nichshal* in this sin, he should know that he has whom to turn to.) But don't be riddled with guilt. **Give it your total effort, and move on with your life.** *B'ezras Hashem*, the fight should get easier over time, and even more so after marriage.

The abomination of *mishkav zachur*

It wasn't an easy decision to include this paragraph in this work. However, after considerable thought, I came to the conclusion that some minimal mention must be made about an abomination which is sweeping across the globe. In my home town of Toronto, these people make a parade every year **to which about half a million spectators go to view and cheer**. There are floats, and various other

forms of celebration. Shouldn't a *ben-Torah* at least have the proper perspective on such a widespread public issue?

In the same aforementioned *parshiyos* about *arayos*, the *Torah* calls this act an abomination, prohibits it, and prescribes the most severe penalty of all, that of *s'kila*. These parades, and the proliferation of this behavior, should be in your eyes as nothing less than an open rebellion against *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. I have often thought to myself that it might be proper for *bnei Torah* to fast on the day when these events occur.

The *Gemora* tells us that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* didn't bring the *mabul* until mankind became so perverted as to write marriage contracts between two men. If that sounds familiar, then you know that we are living in very perverted times, and that *Hashem Yisborach* is really displeased. Even if no one else in the world realizes this, at least *bnei Torah* should be aware and have the correct perspective.

When the media tell us that this behavior is normal and acceptable, and when schools openly promote such "alternative life styles", it shouldn't diminish your conviction one iota. What the *Torah* calls an abomination is nothing less than that.

Imagine, if you will, a person that enters a fabric store to buy a piece of material. He sees a sample that he likes, and asks the proprietor to cut him a yard of the fabric. He pays for it and waits for his purchase. The proprietor goes into the back of the store and brings out a piece of fabric a foot and a half long. He says, "Wait a minute. I asked for a yard. This is not a yard." The storekeeper responds, "Yes it is! I call this a yard." Who is right? After all, it's one person's opinion against another's. Everyone has a right to their opinion, don't they? The answer is that somewhere in the maze of government offices there is a bureau of standards that defines how long a yard is. No one has a right to sell what "they call" a yard, if it doesn't match up to the official measurement.

So it is in life as well. Many people try to "sell" us things that they call "a yard", but they don't measure up to the real yardstick. **The real yardstick is the opinion of the *Ribono Shel Olam*, as expressed in His *Torah*.** We measure truth only by this yardstick. If something is in agreement with the *Torah*, it is correct. If it is not in agreement with *Torah*, **it is by definition *sheker muchlat*** (absolutely false).

The *Ribono shel Olam* calls this an abomination, something unnatural and disgusting. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise.

The *yetzer hora* called *z'vuv* (a fly)

In *Tanach* we find that the *yetzer hora* is compared to a fly. In what way is the *yetzer hora* likened to a fly? The Chofetz Chayim used to say that the fly is unlike other creature. Others can be chased away, but the fly will keep coming back, no matter what. If you shoo him away from your forehead, he'll be back momentarily on your nose, etc. So is the *yetzer hora*. He never gives up, and always returns with some new trick.

I believe that there is another meaning to the similarity of the *yetzer* and the *z'vuv*. The fly is attracted to anything putrid or rotten. Garbage, dung or a carcass is likely to be covered with hundreds of flies. So, too, the *yetzer hora* entices us to have a special attraction to things that are dirty or vulgar. Especially in our time, there seems to be some mystical magnetic pull toward things that are exceptionally vulgar. Media that would have disgusted the youth of two generations ago are avidly viewed on TV, movies, computers, and even cell phones.

It's not so surprising that this is so. The *mabul* destroyed all the animals on earth except for the few that were taken into the ark. Why were the animals destroyed? One explanation in *Rashi* is that the animals were mating with animals from other species, contrary to the plan of *Hashem*. *Reb Elya Lopian* asks: How could the animals disobey their natural instincts, when they have no *bechira*? To illustrate his answer he told the following story. When he was studying in the *Yeshiva* of *Lomza*, there was a hospital so very old that even the elders didn't remember when it had been built. It was discovered that many sick people who were in that hospital contracted diseases from which they had never suffered before. Distinguished doctors from Warsaw were called to study this mystery, and they concluded that the hospital walls were saturated with germs from all the generations of *cholim* who had stayed there. They tore down the hospital, carried its parts to the outskirts of the city, and burnt it completely to ashes. Explained *Reb Elya*: If this is how it is in the physical world, it can certainly be so in the spiritual world. The immorality and *tumah* of the generations leading up to the flood corrupted the world to such a degree, that the defilement even spilled over into the animals. Hence, it isn't so surprising that we sometimes find fine *bachurim* from the best homes and finest *yeshivos* attracted to vulgarity and indecency, and engaging in various sorts of highly improper activities. Our atmosphere has been polluted by the proliferation of immorality and decadence with which we are surrounded. No wonder the fly-like *yetzer hora* is so active and overwhelming today.

We need *Hashem* to walk among us

Earlier in this writing, we quoted part of a short *parsha* in *Ki Saitzai*. Now we will quote the whole *parsha*.

*"When you go out in a camp against your enemies, **you shall guard yourself from any evil thing.** When there will be among you a man who is not pure **because of a mishap in the night**, he shall go out of the camp, he shall not come into the camp. And it shall be that towards evening he shall wash in water, and when the sun sets he may come into the camp." The *parsha* continues: "You shall have a place outside the camp to which you will go out (to the bathroom). You shall have a shovel, besides your other tools, and when you sit outside you shall dig with it and cover what has come out from you. Because Hashem, your G-d goes in the midst of your camp to save you and put your enemies before you. **Your camp must be holy! He must not see in you any matters of immorality, or He will turn around from behind you.**"*

The *Torah* commanded us here on two matters. One is that we must maintain our **moral purity**, and the second is that our environment where we pray and learn must be clean of excretion, etc. so that the place is fitting for the *Sh'chinah* to be with us. If we adhere to these conditions, *Hashem* will be with us to protect us. If we do not, the *Sh'chinah* will depart from us. We will be deprived of His Divine assistance.

It is not without reason that the *Torah* wrote about immoral matters and physically dirty environments together. Immoral thoughts, speech and behavior are in *Hashem's* eyes as abominable as excretion is to us. These two are, in a sense, one.

Three *resha'im* of ancient times understood this very well: Bilam, Nevuchadnetzar and Achashverosh. When Bilam was not allowed to curse *Bnei Yisroel*, he advised the *Moavim* to send out their daughters to entice the Jewish men. "The G-d of the Jews despises immorality." If you can cause them to be *nichshal*, G-d Himself will punish them for you.

Nevuchadnetzar had a very beautiful daughter. Two evil Jewish men (named Achav and Tzidkiyah) put their eyes on her, but needed some kind of trick to convince her to lie with them. Achav said to her, "I am a prophet. So said *Hashem*, 'Listen to Tzidkiyah (when he asks you to lie with him).'" Tzidkiyah said to her, "I am a prophet. So said *Hashem* 'Listen to Achav.'" The poor girl was confused, so she consulted her father. Nevuchadnetzar said, "Impossible! (that *Hashem* would command such a thing). The G-d of the Jews despises immorality." He threw the two of them into a furnace.

Achashverosh didn't want the Jews to be redeemed from his rule. Although he thought that the seventy years of *galus Bavel* were already over, he was afraid that *Hashem* would change his mind and take the *Yidden* back into his favor. What did he do? He arranged the seven day party in Shushan with lots of indecent entertainment. "The G-d of the Jews despises immorality. If I can cause them to be *nichshal* in immoral activity, G-d will never take them back." As wicked as these three were, they understood very well that to the *Ribono Shel Olam* all forms of *arayos* activities are disgusting.

We live in times where there are so many *tzaros*. We cry out to *Hashem* to help us, and sometimes we think He is not listening. We were warned: If *Hashem* sees among you immoral things, He will turn around and forsake you. Our job is to bring the *Sh'chinah* back to us by living up to His standard of purity.

The viduy of Yom Hakipurim

When *Yom Kipur* comes, we will confess a long list of *aveiros* in the *viduy* of *al cheit*. It is most noteworthy that so many of the items in this *viduy* have to do with the things we have been discussing. Here are some:

- *For the sins that we sinned before you with the yetzer hora. (We incited the yetzer hora on ourselves by looking at things we shouldn't see and thinking about things we shouldn't dwell upon).*
- *For the sins that we sinned before you with giluy arayos.*
- *For the sins that we sinned before you with the improper thoughts of the heart.*
- *For the sins that we sinned before you with the gathering places of z'nus (hangouts).*
- *For the sins that we sinned before you with the defilement of the lips (nivul peh).*
- *For the sins that we sinned before you for the peering of the eye (staring for hana'ah).*

There is an awesome *tefilah* which we recite at the very beginning of *Yom Kipur*, just before or after *Kol Nidrei*. It is called *Tefilah Zakah*. Anyone who knows what this prayer means, and realizes that he will be saying this *tefilah* on *Yom Kipur*, should surely gain a deeper sense of distance than ever before from *arayos* and all things associated to it. In the beginning of *Tefilah Zaka*, we enumerate all our limbs and confess how we committed sins with them. The following are some excerpts of this *tefila*:

31 Dear *Bachur*

.....And it's not enough that I didn't sanctify my limbs, but rather I defiled them. You created in me a brain and a heart which have the power of thought to think good thoughts and a heart to understand Your holy words and to pray and recite all the blessings with pure thought. I defiled them to think evil dirty thoughts and brought myself (to tumah).....You created in me eyes with the power of sight to see what is written in the Torah and to sanctify them by seeing holy things. You commanded in Your Torah, "Do not stray after your heart and your eyes." Woe to me that I did indeed stray after my eyes and defiled them by staring at women and other unclean things.....You created in me ears to hear words of holiness and words of Torah. Woe to me that I defiled them to hear dirty language.....You created in me a mouth, a tongue, teeth, a pallet and a throat with the power of speech.....Woe to me that I defiled my mouth to speak dirty language.....You created in me hands with the power of touch to engage in mitzvos with them and I defiled them to touch what is forbidden.....You created in me feet to go to every *d'var mitzva*, and I defiled them (by using my) feet to run to evil.....You created in me the limb of procreation and sealed it with sign of the holy "*bris*", but I defiled it.....I have reviewed all my limbs and find them to be full of blemishes. From the sole of my foot to the top of my head there is not one pure one.

So this is the *viduy* that every Jew says at the beginning of *Yom Kipur*. Can any serious minded person do other than to distance himself from all these things to the utmost?

Treife no, but arayos yes?!!

There is an important question that needs to be addressed before we finish off this little booklet. We find many parents, *chashuva ba'alei batim*, who are lax in some of the *halachos* we have written here. They do watch media, or engage in other forbidden activities. If, indeed, these things are so clearly forbidden, how could such fine, *ehrlischer* people transgress them?

Let me fill you in on an important piece of recent history. Up until the second world war, most American Jews had no consciousness of the *issur of sha'atnez*. They would buy clothing indiscriminately, paying no attention to the possibility that there could be a mixture of linen and wool. Those who were aware of the *issur* thought that if the label said "woolen suit" it was permissible. They had no inkling that small amounts of linen could be sewn in without being listed on the label. Along came Mr. Rosenberger, a "h, to the rescue.

Mr. Rosenberger was saved from the Holocaust. He wanted, out of gratitude, to dedicate his life to doing something for *k'vod Shomayim*. He chose to strengthen the observance of the *mitzva* of *sha'atnez*. He started the first *Sha'atnez Laboratory* in Williamsburg, and engaged in a public awareness campaign. He would write advertisements picturing a pair of hands pushing away a plate of meat. The caption was: **Treife no, but shatnez yes?!!** He merited to educate *Torah* Jews all over the world in the *mitzva* of *sha'atnez*.

In today's world, ignorance of the *issurim* of *arayos* is as widespread as the ignorance of *sha'atnez* once was. People may have never studied the *parshiyos in the Chumash*, or the sections of *Shulchan Aruch* concerning these matters. They think that there is no *issur*, only for *machmirim*. We can't blame them, but must rather educate them. We need to spread the word everywhere, loud and clear: **TREIFE NO, BUT ARAYOS YES?!!**

It wasn't so simple to write this for you

As I wrote in the very beginning of this work, this subject is considered by many to be taboo. Although I have tried to deal with the issues in the most delicate manner possible, I have not held back anything that I felt needed to be addressed. I am certain that some people will be critical of this work, because it speaks about these matters so openly. But I could not refrain from writing just in order to avoid criticism. I believe with every fiber of my being that in our decadent times it is crucial to get this message out.

In the laws of *Yom Kipur* we learn the following *halacha*: If doctors, even specialists, say that a *choleh* is not in any danger if he does not eat, but the sick person says he feels the need to eat or he will get worse, we listen to the *choleh*. *Lev yodaya moras nafsho* (the heart knows its own bitterness). Our case, I believe, is quite the same. Many people of the older generation, perhaps even very *chashuva* people ("specialists"), are saying that we don't need to speak so openly. In my experience, however, most *bachurim* would agree that they do, indeed, need to hear this loud and clear. For their benefit, I have undertaken this unconventional (and perhaps unpopular) project in writing this booklet.

Jewish pride

Although we make a *bracho* when we do a positive *mitzva*, we never make a *brocha* when we refrain from doing a negative command. There is no blessing that says thank you for commanding me not to eat treife or to wear *sha'atnez*. There is only one exception to this rule. In the *brocha* that the *mesader kidushin* says at a *chasuna*, he expresses gratitude to *Hashem* for sanctifying us with the prohibitions

of *arayos*. The closing of the *brocha* is, "Who sanctifies His people *Yisroel* through *chupah* and *kidushin*. The *Torah* did not permit us relations any other way but through the process of a Jewish marriage: *chupah* and *kidushin*. This is to us one of the greatest favors *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has done for us. He lifted us above the impurities of all the nations around us, removed us from the filth of the atmosphere in the street, and infused holiness into the union of a man with a woman through marriage. This is the pride and joy of the *Am Yisroel*, to be the *Am Kadosh*. We express it at this holiest of moments, when we come to engage in something which to others is nothing but a fulfillment of lust, and for us is an entry into a higher spiritual existence.

Let me share with you an amazing story. About a hundred years ago, there lived a famous Jewish philanthropist named Moses Montefiore. He was a descendant of Portuguese Jews, lived and prospered in England, and was prominent in the British Government. At one time he was the Lord Mayor of London. In the middle of his life, he gave up all direct involvements in business, and travelled around to give charity to the poor, and help Jews in whatever way he could. He spoke on their behalf to the czar of Russia, and intervened in a blood libel in Damascus.

Queen Victoria once sent him to Warsaw to negotiate something with the Polish government. As we know all too well, the Poles have a terrible history of anti-semitism. They were quite upset that Queen Victoria had sent a Jew to do her bidding. Nevertheless, they knew that they dare not insult the British government, so they had to swallow their feelings and proceed respectfully. They arranged a parade down the main thoroughfare of Warsaw in honor of the British crown's emissary. The populace also understood that they have to be on their best behavior. That is, except for one Polish *shaigetz*, who cared nothing about diplomacy or international relations. When the gilded carriages carrying Moses Montefiore and the local Polish dignitaries passed near him, he screamed out the famous word that we have heard so many times. **Zhid!** (Jew!) Moses Montefiore stuck his head out of the carriage and called out, "Police! Catch him!" The police chased this youngster through the crowd, and finally brought him, panting and frightened, to Sir Moses. Moses Montefiore, who was waiting patiently and calmly, pulled out his purse and held up a gold coin." My friend," he said, "in my lifetime I have been called by many titles: your lord, lord mayor, etc. All those titles mean nothing to me. The only title which I hold dear and precious is the one that you so kindly called me just now. I am proud to be a **Zhid!** Here is this gold coin as a thank you for calling me that name."

34 Dear *Bachur*

That, my friends, is true Jewish pride. We must never feel overburdened by the restrictions written about here. To the contrary, we should be proud to be part of the nation that thanks Hashem Yisborach for forbidding us *arayos*, and sanctifying His people through *chupah v'kidushin*.

One more time

I can not stress sufficiently how important it is to maintain a positive outlook on all the matters we have discussed here. Realize in the deepest recesses of your mind that *Hashem Yisborach* loves you, understands your struggles, and is never unreasonable. Use every bit of your energy to excel in matters of *kedusha*. Ask for His help in maintaining your purity. Never allow yourself to despair. Regret it if you stumble, but don't be overcome with counter-productive remorse. **You will be *matzliach*.** "He who comes to purify himself is given help (*min haShomayim*)."

In conclusion

And so, dear *Bachur*, we've come to the end of our booklet. This is merely an outline of the main subjects in this matter. These *halachos* need to be studied in detail and in depth, just as the laws of *Shabbos* or *tefilin*. But one step at a time. At least we've covered the *roshei p'rakim*. We know the general outline of the *issurim*, and have an appreciation for their severity. It is my hope and my *tefila* that these humble words have provided you with clarity, *chizuk* and encouragement. May *Hashem Yisborach* help you to walk forever in the way of *kedushas Yisroel* and purity.