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# THE GUARD-YOUR-EYES ATTITUDE

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*The first edition of this handbook came out on:*

*May 8, 2009*

***PESACH SHEINI - A SECOND CHANCE***

*Download the latest version of the Attitude handbook [here](#).*



# Guardyoureyes.org

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## Introduction

Having the proper perspective and attitude on this struggle can make all the difference. Often people write in to us saying that **had they only known** the proper outlook & attitude that we share on the GuardYourEyes network when they were younger, they would never have fallen into an addiction in the first place!

The GYE community presents below a collection of what we felt are perhaps the 30 most important "Attitude" guidelines in this struggle. These are only suggestions of what worked for us. This handbook is a work-in-progress and we would be happy to hear from you what "attitude & perspective" ideas you think are the most important. Please [send](#) your comments and ideas to us.

If you want, it may be helpful to make yourself a 30 day program to read one of the principles of the Attitude Handbook each day, and try to internalize the message.

We tried to set up the guidelines in the most intuitive order, beginning with understanding the nature of the addiction, how to deal with it, what to do when feeling weak, how to think when beginning to slip, and finally, what is the proper perspective to maintain if we fall, and how do we convince ourselves to get back up again quickly **after** a fall.

On our journey to recovery, the proper perspective must accompany us from day one - and throughout all the practical steps we take (as outlined in the [GuardYourEyes Handbook](#)), until we achieve long-term sobriety. With the proper attitude, we can succeed in learning to control the addiction in a much shorter time frame, with far less steps, and in a much easier manner than otherwise.

**Besides the 30 principles below, here are some other important steps we can take to continue learning and refining our perspective on this struggle every day:**

- [Sign up](#) and receive the daily Chizuk e-mails
- Read through the archives of [previous Chizuk e-mails](#) sent out
- Read through the incredible chizuk posted on [the forum](#) every day!
- Read through the "[Mind Tips](#)" and the "[Attitude](#)" section of our new site.
- Read through the tips [of fellow strugglers](#) on our website.
- [Download here](#) a PDF file translated by GuardYourEyes from a Hebrew book called "**The First Day of the Rest of My Life**," written by a religious addict with the purpose of helping people break free of lust addiction.

If we read some of the above every day, even a little bit, we will quickly be swept up by the spirit of the GuardYourEyes community, and we will rapidly internalize many of the guidelines that will help us maintain the proper attitude and perspective on this struggle throughout our journey.

While **this** handbook focuses on the proper attitude to maintain in this struggle, the "[GuardYourEyes Handbook](#)" provides the **practical steps** that we can take to break free of lust addiction. The GuardYourEyes Handbook starts out with the most basic and easiest steps to try, and continues on through the more intense and life-changing steps if they are necessary, depending on the level of the addiction.

Both this handbook and the GuardYourEyes Handbook, can be used by any individual who struggles with lust addiction, as well as Rabbis, *Mechanchim*, *Mashgichim*, therapists and community leaders, to provide them with ideas and direction in helping others who struggle in this area. Unfortunately, this issue has reached epidemic proportions in the religious community today, mainly due to the privacy and accessibility that the Internet provides.

# The 30 Principles

## 1. Understanding what we are up against.

The first step to beginning the journey to recovery is to understand that we are not simply dealing with a “stronger than usual” Yetzer Hara, and we are not just “weak-willed” people who can’t control ourselves. If we find that we keep falling into inappropriate behaviors that go against our conscience and better judgment, and we have tried countless times to stop in the past but always seem to fall back to them in the end, then we are struggling with **an addiction**. As Rabbi Twerski writes in [this article](#):

*The ultimate distinction between man and animals is not that man is more intelligent, but that animals are creatures that have no choice over their behavior. They must do whatever their bodies demand. They cannot choose what they should do. Man has the ability of self-control, to choose one's behavior, even in defiance of physical urges. If a person loses one's ability to choose and is dominated by urges one cannot control, one is indeed an addict.*

An addiction is a type of illness, and will power alone is not effective in dealing with it. It is a spiritual and psychological disease.

How did these behaviors lead to addiction? It's simple neuroscience. Just like with any pleasure, the pleasure sensory is stimulated in the brain. Whether its cocaine, alcohol, or pleasure one might get from inappropriate things seen during a movie, the serotonin levels spike and the dopaminergic pleasure pathways are activated in the standard "addiction" pattern. As a matter of fact, these behaviors have been shown to be MORE powerfully addictive than most drugs, in one study. It's not a big wonder why that would be. It's an intense pleasure stimulation, even more direct than a hard drug. And upon repeated exposure to certain types of stimulation, one tends to seek out even more perverse and intense stimulation, leading to that vicious self-destructive cycle that is typical of addictions. (See more about the addictive nature of these behaviors in this article [over here](#)).

The addiction didn't appear overnight. We developed the disease slowly over time, by accustoming ourselves over the years to use stimulation from what we gazed at to arouse lust in our minds. And we did this many thousands - if not millions - of times. And every time we did this, **yes, every single time**, we were blazing neuron pathways in our brain that kept getting stronger and stronger. And today, these pathways that we created are deeply ingrained in our minds.

The **behaviors** are only **symptoms** of the disease. Whether the behaviors are browsing inappropriate websites, self-pleasuring or other inappropriate activities, the common denominator between them all is an addiction to “lust.” Trying only to stop the behaviors, while still holding on to the lust, may be helpful in training ourselves not to act on our compulsions, but that alone will ultimately not be enough. Our goal must be to stop lusting altogether, not just to stop this behavior or another. Lusting for us is like alcohol to an alcoholic, and it doesn't matter whether it's vodka, wine, or beer. (The *Sefer haChinuch* – *Mitzva 387* compares lust to alcohol addiction). If we try to stop inappropriate behaviors only, but we continue lusting all the time, it is like immersing in the *Mikva* while holding the impurity still in our hand (which is ineffective).

The symptoms of this disease are twofold. First, we have accustomed our minds to crave the chemical rush that lust gives us, in the same way that an alcoholic craves alcohol. We have often learned to use lust as a drug for self-soothing purposes. We crave to lose ourselves in lust to “medicate” our subconscious feelings of inadequacy, guilt and depression, or even simply as an escape from the realities of life. The second symptom of the disease is that stimulation triggers a

much stronger arousal for us than it does in normal people. We have become hypersensitive to stimulation, to the point that we feel powerless when faced head-on with lust. This is a medical/psychological condition known as "hypersexuality." In the mind of someone with this condition, the dopaminergic pleasure pathways in the brain are triggered much faster and more intensely than in normal people. There are even scientific devices that can test this.

Now it is important to understand that, as a disease, this is not something we can remove by simply talking ourselves out of it. A therapist may be able to help us discover **why** we became addicted in the first place, but that alone is **not enough**. Now that we have these pathways engrained in our minds, all the understanding in the world won't change the fact that we have this disease, in the same way that understanding diabetes won't take it away. It is also important to understand that, once the addiction has advanced to a certain level, it will likely be there for life, as the saying goes: "*once an addict, always an addict.*" What that means is that once we have trained our minds to use lust as a type of drug, we must learn to keep **far away** from lust. And no matter how much progress we might think that we've made in this struggle, once we let ourselves take that first "drink" again, we will feel powerless. As the [SA Pamphlet](#) says:

*Lusting, for us, is like riding a roller coaster. Once started, it is nearly impossible to stop. Therefore, lust must be stopped where it begins, with the first drink. Getting out from under the influence of lust, therefore, requires us to avoid getting on board in the first place.*

*Our addiction to lust is like the alcoholic's problem with alcohol. Just as the alcoholic cannot tolerate one drink of alcohol, we cannot tolerate even the smallest drink of lust. Lust always leads to more lust, eventually making us drunk with it. Once drunk, the urge to act out is impossible to resist. Just a little lusting simply doesn't work for us.*

But as scary as all this may seem, it is **not really so bad**. Someone who has a chronic iron deficiency can still lead a perfectly normal life, as long as he takes his daily iron pill. And there are many techniques that can be used as "our pills" every day, to keep the disease in check.

Also, there are many levels of this disease. The fewer times we acted out on lust, the less defined the neuron pathways will be in our minds, and hence, the disease will be at a less advanced stage. This is vital to understand, and it should serve as a powerful incentive for us to do everything in our power to stop these behaviors **now**. Because **every single time** we act out on lust, we are making the disease worse, and harder to deal with in the long term.

## 2. Accepting that we need help

The first key to recovery is "acceptance." We need to accept that we have a problem and that we **need help**. Otherwise, we will read through the GuardYourEyes [website](#) and Handbook and say: "*they don't really mean me.*"

One member of our forum wrote to a newcomer:

*I am considered by many people to be a Talmid Chacham. I tried every **EITZA** there is, both with **mussar, sifrei yirah** and **divrei chizuk**. I tried to punish myself and I almost drove myself crazy in driving myself crazy, and in agonizing over how low I was.*

*And the only solace I found, was to sit in front of the computer and feed my addiction.*

*Listen up my good friend, you came to the right place and you will be helped. And it will cost you a lot less than seeing a professional, and you might even be lucky enough to save your good name.*

*But having said all that, YOU WILL ONLY BE SAVED IF YOU ADMIT YOU ARE AN ADDICT!*

*I know it hurts. It hurt and it hurts me too. Yes, I am an addict. Yes me, the father, husband, Talmid Chacham and neighborhood Askan, is an addict.*

*It still hurts me to write you these words. But we must admit it in order to be helped. If you want to keep on riding on the **Teshuvah/Nefilla** roller-coaster, be my guest. But you will just continue making more addictive behavior neuron pathways in your brain, which only get harder to reverse.*

Some people are willing to “say” they have an addiction, but coming to terms with what that **really** means, and acting like they really are ill and need **help**, is another matter.

To quote this amazing story called [“They Stopped in Time”](#): **“Acceptance is the key. The addiction is a disease and sobriety is not a matter of willpower. When we stop living in the problem, and instead live in the answer, the problem goes away by itself.”**

Truly accepting that we have a problem may sound like a difficult step to take, but it is actually freeing to know exactly what we are up against.

There is a common misconception among unmarried young men that marriage will solve the problem. As Rabbi Twerski always tells people, marriage does not solve the problem of addiction to lust; *if anything it makes it even worse*. Not only that, but once someone is married and they continue not to deal with this addiction, it can ultimately destroy the marriage. When Chazal say that our wives help save us from sin, it doesn’t mean sins we brought with us into the marriage. The problem we have is not a “need” that must be filled, but rather it stems from what has developed (through our addiction) into a skewed attitude towards the act of procreation.

But now that we know we are dealing with a **lust addiction** - which even marriage won’t solve, we are ready to accept our problem and begin to **live in the solution**, by exploring the methods that really work. It will almost never help to simply try “harder” to fight the Yetzer Hara, to learn **more mussar**, or make ever more resolutions. With addictions, there are methods that don’t work, and then there are tried-and-proven methods that **do** work. The steps that **work** are outlined in the [GuardYourEyes Handbook](#). There we will learn that it is possible to break free, no matter how far the addiction has advanced.

### **3. Believing that we CAN be helped**

Some people think that if they are unmarried and have no outlet, they cannot possibly remain clean indefinitely. This is patently false. We have helped many *Bochurim* to achieve complete abstinence and we have many testimonials of *Bochurim* who were addicted and broke free using the right tools, the right attitude and determination. In some ways, it is even easier for *Bochurim* to refrain completely from lust, since they have no need to indulge in it at all. Below is an excerpt from an article on the Internet [over here](#):

*If a male doesn't ejaculate for a long period of time nothing noticeable happens. There is no buildup of pressure or extra sperm. Our bodies are always reabsorbing and disposing of extra material, including excess components of the ejaculate. It is perfectly natural to not ejaculate for a long period of time. There are no risks or health problems associated with not ejaculating.*

Read the many [recovery stories](#) on our website (and on the [new site](#) as well) to see for yourself how people even worse off than you were able to break free.

**Having this condition does not let us off the hook.** We may have an illness, but we are fully responsible for our recovery, and once we know that we CAN recover, acting out will never be the same.

#### **4. Hitting bottom while still on top**

Often a person is not truly ready to admit they have a problem, seek help and be willing to make real changes in their lives unless they have “hit bottom” first. “Hitting bottom” means that one’s life has truly become unmanageable. This can come about through the realization that they are unable to lead a normal marriage, hold a job, or if they stand to lose their entire self respect and honor.

However, one of the goals of the GYE community is to help people “**Hit bottom while still on top.**” What that means, is that we try to get those who find themselves still in the early stages of addiction to understand the nature of the addiction and where it will ultimately lead them. Once a person sees that they have this illness, regardless of the degree to which it may have progressed, they can learn where the addiction will ultimately lead them from those who have already “Hit Bottom.” By doing this, we are essentially “lifting the bottom” for these newcomers to hit, while they are still on top and their lives remain intact. They need not lose their marriages, jobs and respect. They can learn from those who already have, and recognize the direction they are heading and seek help. (See Page 22-24 of the [12 Steps & 12 Traditions](#) for more on this important idea).

#### **5. You are not alone**

Almost everyone struggles with lust on some level, and many have fallen into addictive behaviors as well. Even great Tzadikim of previous generations struggled in this area (as they mention the “sins of their youth”), so you can imagine that those who seek purity in a generation such as ours are truly from Hashem’s greatest warriors! In the GYE community, you will find hundreds of religious Jews like yourself, struggling with this addiction. Join our lively and vibrant [forum](#), where people like yourself exchange questions and tons of Chizuk, post logs of their progress and share experience and hope. And read [the stories](#) on our website (and on our new site [here](#) as well), to see what others have gone through and how they have succeeded.

#### **6. It is not your fault**

Although the spiritual damage we cause by acting out is very great, we must accept that Hashem brought us into this situation and that it’s not our fault. Let us never dwell on how it happened, or on past falls. This will cause us to feel down and lead to future falls. The *Chidushei Harim* (in *Likutei Yehudah*) tells his followers never to look back, claiming that if we look back we remain in the mud.

Everyone has dirty laundry. We don’t have to be ashamed of our laundry unless we let it pile up and never clean it. (Listen to [this wonderful Shiur](#) from R' Yisrael Reisman, Shlit"a, which provides some excellent perspective and *yesodos* on this struggle).

We must also realize that we didn’t always have free will in the past. This is clear from various Sefarim and in various places in Chazal. “***Ain Hakadosh Baruch Hu ba beterunya im habriyos***” – “***Hashem doesn’t come with complaints to his creations.***” As the Pasuk says: “***He created together all their hearts and understands all their deeds,***” and he knows that almost all men stumble in this sin at some point in their youth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 7. Determination is completely up to us

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

The biggest obstacle to succeeding is not believing you can succeed. The first impediment to overcoming this addiction is not in your genes, your childhood or your environment. If you believe you can succeed and are willing to make the effort, you will find the way out. Absolutely NOTHING stands in the way of a true RATZON. You can read the [recovery stories](#) on our site to see that many people even worse off than you have successfully broken free of this addiction. And you can also read the many threads on [our forum](#) and watch the amazing strides that so many people are making every day.

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



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

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

## 8. Making recovery our #1 priority.

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

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

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

## 9. Fixing the foundations of ourselves & of the world

The *B'nei Yissachar* writes (*Derech Pikudecha*): "We have a tradition from our fathers that the Yetzer Hara desires more than anything to attack the person through sexual sins, because included in this lust **are all the others.**" And R' Nachman also writes that these temptations are our main test in life.

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

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

This is a struggle with the deepest human emotions. And therefore, **fixing these emotions fixes a person deeper than anything else.** That's why it's called *Yesod*. Hashem is not just telling us not to be dirty. Rather, he is telling us to **build ourselves** with the things we **don't do**. The

foundation of a building is underground and no one sees it, but it holds up the entire building. *Shemiras Habris* is the hidden part of a Jew, it's the **real you**. And if the foundation of a Jew is weak, his whole spiritual structure is fragile and in grave danger of collapse.

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

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

## 10. Fear of Heaven can't stop us, but it can *PUSH* us

Often we were aware how serious these sins were, yet our "Fear of Heaven" alone was never enough to convince us to stop these behaviors for very long. And it's not that we didn't fear Hashem but, like we mentioned above, will power alone is not sufficient in cases of addiction. Not only that, but lust is so powerful that even the greatest Tzadikim who feared Hashem with all their hearts, felt powerless when faced head-on with lust. See what happened with *Masya ben Charash* (#46 on [this page](#)) and *Rav Amram, Rabban Shel Chassidim* (#275 on [this page](#)). In both these cases, these great Tzadikim had to take extreme measures to ensure they didn't stumble.

But, what we CAN learn from these two stories above is that, although *Yiras Shamayim* is not enough on its own, it should push us to take **EVERY step we can** to break free of these sins (see [the GuardYourEyes Handbook](#) to learn the steps you can take).

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

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

Also, maintaining our addiction requires constant hiding, lies, and living a double life. This cuts us off from the world around us and doesn't let us feel the tremendous kindness of Hashem that fills our lives. It blinds us to the goodness in the world around us, to our souls, and to Hashem. We begin to lose appreciation for our own wives and children. We are unable to find inner peace, we can't stop lusting everywhere we go, and we remain closed up within a shell that no one can penetrate.

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

[page and video clip](#) for a dramatic first-hand testimony of someone who claims he had died and experienced the judgment of the world to come. This story and video, especially where he weeps as he recalls the myriads of accusing souls that stood before him, can help inspire our Fear of Heaven and ensure that we do everything in our power to heal from this disease.

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

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

So never despair! By learning the proper perspective on this struggle, and by taking the steps we can to break free, we are doing **exactly** what Hashem intended for us to do all along.

## 11. Breaking the Cycle

We must recognize how insidious the addiction is, how it continues to tell us lies, getting us to act out again and again. Each time we act out, we make it harder to heal from the disease in the long term. Therefore, we must do everything in our power to break free of the vicious cycle **now**, by taking the necessary steps to break free. As long as we are still caught up in the cycle of addiction, we cannot begin to heal. And the nature of the addiction is such that we cannot **think** our way out, we need to **act** our way into a new pattern of thinking.

Often we thought that if we would only feed the lust a little bit more and give it what it really wants, it would leave us alone. But it is exactly the opposite. *Chazal* understood the nature of this addiction, and they said one statement regarding these areas that really sums it up well: ***“There is a small organ in a man, if one feeds it - it is hungry, if one starves it - it is satiated.”*** As the saying goes: ***“The less you feed it, the less you need it.”*** Although it feels hard at first to cut down, and we may likely even experience withdrawal symptoms for a while (see [this PDF](#)), the more we successfully stop acting out in the short term, the easier it will get in the long term. Knowing this *Yesod* can make a **huge** difference. (See also [this page](#) for more on this).

We must realize that the Yetzer Hara/addiction wants our soul, not the pleasure. Otherwise, why is a thousand times never enough? Keep this saying in mind: **“Just once is always too much. A thousand times is never enough.”** We cannot bargain with the addiction. Half measures ultimately amount to nothing. Isolated incidents of control are not important, it’s the overall pattern. **Staying stopped** is the issue. We must realize that we were acting insane. It’s not sane to repeat self-destructive behaviors. This is, in the most literal sense, a **life and death struggle** for our souls.

## 12. True fulfillment vs. false fulfillment

The Yetzer Hara's job and goal is to cause us damage, and to do this he was given permission to use pleasure and *“Sipuk”* (fulfillment) as a bluff to be able to harm us. Otherwise, how could he possibly do his job? We would tell him to get lost! But we must understand that his seductions are like a terrorist offering us a piece of cake to ensnare us. We know he doesn't mean the cake, he means to use the cake to damage us somehow. Only pleasure that is tied with truth has a *Kiyum* (lasts) because it can make a *mitzvah* complete; for example, eating meat on Yom Tov or the enjoyment we experience on Shabbos. But pleasure that is tied to *Sheker* has no *kiyum*, which

explains why when the pleasure is over, we don't feel any fulfillment. And we also don't talk about it with those who love us, with those who want the best for us, because we know that it was just there to damage us. And that's also why we want it again not long afterwards, even though we just had it. After all, if it was truth, why isn't it there anymore? Because we feel a void, and so we look again to fill this void with another false *Sipuk* (fulfillment).

### 13. "One day at a time"

Take the struggle only "one day at a time." Try never to focus on the future or wonder how we will manage. We must learn to live in the present **only**, focusing on staying sober right NOW. When we focus on the future, we can easily fall. It's like someone walking a tightrope; if he looks down, it becomes so much harder not to fall. Therefore, when feeling weak we can tell ourselves, "just for today, I will stay clean." "Just for **this moment**, I will stay clean." The past and the future are out of our hands and belong **only** to Hashem. When we feel that we are about to fall, we may even tell ourselves that we reserve the right to act out tomorrow. We are not making a decision now for life. However, just for today we will do whatever we can to stay clean.

One guy writes: When I get up in the morning after saying *Modeh Ani*, I always pray to Hashem in my own words and say something along these lines: "*Hashem, I cannot control this without your help. I am willing not to act out on lust today, but I cannot promise about tomorrow. Just for today Hashem, please help me succeed.*"

This is one of the big *Yesodos* in the 12-Step groups as well. On any given day, if we do what we are supposed to on our side to try and stay sober and sane, we trust completely in Hashem that he will give us 24 hours of relief - for that day only.

We see this idea in the Torah too. The *B'nei Yisrael* were starving and needy in the desert. Hashem gave them relief for one day at a time. No matter if they gathered a lot, no matter if they gathered a little, they only got 24 hours of relief.

And remember, **today is the first day of the rest of your life!** So let's do our very best to stay clean just **for today**.

### 14. "No pain no gain"

By nature, we go to what feels good and try to avoid pain. We got that from cows. Animals don't understand that a painful experience can be beneficial. Try to explain surgery to a cow. Pleasure and suffering are both part of life. But we get to choose which pleasures we want and which suffering we want. And the choice is either the false pleasure that the addiction offers us, or the pleasures that Hashem wants us to have – which are infinitely greater. Do we choose the pain of the spiritual "work-out" or the pain of the disease **getting worse?**

The Steipler points out in the first volume of *Krayna D'igrisah* that anyone who keeps away from these forbidden pleasures is promised to receive the pleasures of life **from other areas instead**. And, conversely, it follows that those who accept upon themselves the suffering that breaking free entails, will save themselves much suffering in other areas of life.

If we decide that no matter how painful it is we won't give in - even if we feel like we are dying, Hashem takes away the pain from us and it becomes much easier. **See this amazing revelation in Chizuk Email #420 on [this page](#).**

## 15. “With cunning make your battle” (Mishlei 24:6)

We are unlikely to succeed if we try to fight the *Yetzer Hara*/addiction head on. As the *Ohr Hachayim* writes ([see here](#) for the text of this important piece), the only way to succeed in this struggle is to diligently guard our eyes and thoughts. However, once we are thinking about these things, and especially if we see the temptations before our eyes, it will often be too late and we won't be able to control ourselves. See the Gemara near the end of *Kiddushin* about the *Tanna'im* who thought they could overcome the *Yetzer Hara*, and what power the *Satan* wields if we try to compete with him directly.

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

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

## 16. Dealing with bad thoughts and fantasies

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

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

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

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

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

*There was once a Jew named Moshkeh who owned an inn where he used to sell wine and spirits to the gentile peasants of the area. After a while, he became disgusted in dealing with the drunken gentiles and decided to go into another line of business and he closed down the bar. That evening, there was a banging on the door. "Moshkeh, Moshkeh, open up! We want some*

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

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

See [this page](#) for many more great techniques on dealing with persistent fantasies and bad thoughts.

## 17. Redirecting the power in our souls

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

The Pasuk says "***Bitachbulos Ta'aseh Lecha Milchama***" – "***with cunning, make your battle.***" Says the Midrash, if you did many **chavilos** (bundles) of sins, do **chavilos** of Mitzvos opposite them. The *Beis Aharon of Karlin* explains that **chavilos** is a language of *hiskashrus* - connection, (as it says "***Yaakov Chevel Nachalaso***"), and he explains that in order to fix what we did in the past and break free from the "other side," we need to use the same **hiskashrus** and enthusiasm that filled our mind and limbs during the times we sinned, and instead do the *Mitzvos* in the same all-consuming and enthusiastic manner.

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

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

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

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

Later on, Rav Tzadok explains (based on the Zohar) that the *Dor Hamabul* and the *Dor Hamidbar*, who received the Torah, shared the same souls. And he explains that the reason is based on the above principle. The *Dor Hamabul's* major sin was spilling seed, as is well known from all the kabalistic oriented *seforim*, and the *Dor Hamidbar* were *Zoche* to receive the Torah. Rav Tzadok explains that the spiritual energy is one and the same. The fake desire for lust is the flip side of the same coin of a true desire for Torah and spirituality. And he explains further, that

this generation will appear once again in the days before Moshiach, where the spiritual *Kochos* will once again succeed in overpowering the *koach* of lust.

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

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

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

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

## **18. Overhauling our character traits**

If we continue to experience falls again and again, even after trying to redirect the energy of our souls to spiritual enthusiasm and passion, then something far more fundamental in our character traits may be absent.

The addiction is often a sign that we are missing some of the most basic principles of what it means to be a human being, created in the image of Hashem. Even animals don't abuse their desires and fall into addictions. We have fallen even lower than animals.

Although it may be hard to admit this, the emotional maturity of an addict can often be at the level of a two year old. When we don't get what we want, we feel like crying, kicking and screaming. We never learned how to deal properly with pain, anxiety, resentment, stress or anger. We have always used the addiction to hide inside ourselves, and we refrained from mature emotional interaction with others. While our peers were growing up and learning about life from the world around them, we were zoning out into our fantasy worlds of self-pleasure and escape. And so we often remained as emotionally immature as a little child.

In order to really begin to heal **at the source**, we must learn the most basic moral principles again from scratch. Fundamentals such as rigorous honesty in all our affairs, an honest personal accounting, complete trust in Hashem, true humility, and a sincere willingness to make amends with those we have harmed and to surrender our disease to Hashem. These principles are so basic, that even the non-Jewish drunks of AA are able to relate to them, and by working through a program of these principles ([The 12-Steps](#)) they often succeed in turning their entire lives around and becoming "Men of G-d." (See Chizuk e-mail #446 on [this page](#) for more on this powerful idea). The 12-Steps don't even mention drinking or acting out. They are all about learning how **to think right** and **to live right**.

Rabbi Twerski once wrote as follows to someone who was convinced he could never give up these behaviors:

*His conviction that he cannot overcome the addiction is the addiction talking to him, saying, "Give up the fight, it's useless. You'll never succeed, so why put yourself through the misery."*

*Other than try to stop and pray etc, what has this young man done to make essential changes in his character? That's where one should begin.*

*I attended an AA meeting where the speaker was celebrating his 20th year of sobriety. He began by saying, "The man I once was, drank. And the man I once was, will drink again" (but the man I am today, will not). Alcoholics who have not had a drink for many years but have not overhauled their character are "dry drunks" and will often drink again. The same is true for this addiction.*

*How does one become a different person? By working diligently on improving one's character traits. Learning how to manage anger, to rid oneself of resentments, to overcome hate, to be humble, to be considerate of others, to be absolutely honest in all one's affairs, to admit being wrong, to overcome envy, to be diligent and overcome procrastination. In short, one should take the Orchos Tzadikim (I'm sure it's available in English), and go down the list of character traits, strengthening the good ones and trying to eliminate the bad ones. This does not happen quickly.*

*When one has transformed one's character and has become a different person, one will find that this "new person" can accomplish things that the old person could not.*

See also [this beautiful article](#) by Rabbi Twerski from the Hamodia.

## **19. Why religion wasn't enough**

Although all truths can be found in the Torah, we had lost our vision. Even though we may have been learning Torah and *Mussar*, we were wearing "broken eye glasses." And so, before we can turn once again to the Torah for guidance, we need to first learn what it means to be a human being, as we discussed above. We need to learn *Alef-Beis* again before we can return to learning *Mussar Sefarim*.

The [12 Steps & 12 Traditions](#) (p.p. 31-32) discusses why even religious people who always believed they had faith in G-d, and had asked G-d for help countless times in the past, were still unable to break free from the grip of the addiction:

*This answer has to do with the quality of faith rather than its quantity. This has been our blind spot. We supposed we had humility when really we hadn't. We supposed we had been serious about religious practices when, upon honest appraisal, we found we had been only superficial. Or, going to the other extreme, we had wallowed in emotionalism and had mistaken it for true religious feeling. In both cases, we had been asking something for nothing. The fact was, we really hadn't cleaned house so that the grace of G-d could enter us and expel the obsession. In no deep or meaningful sense had we ever taken stock of ourselves, made amends to those we had harmed, or freely given to any other human being without any demand for reward. We had not even prayed rightly. We had always said, "Grant me my wishes" instead of "Thy will be done." At no time had we asked what G-d's will was for us; instead we had been telling Him what it ought to be. The love of G-d and man we understood not at all. Therefore we remained self-deceived, and so incapable of receiving enough grace to restore us to sanity. Belief (in G-d) meant reliance. In A.A, we saw the fruits of this belief: men and women spared from alcohol's final catastrophe. We saw them meet and transcend their other pains and trials. We saw them calmly accept impossible situations, seeking neither to run nor to recriminate. This was not only faith; it was **faith that worked under all conditions.***



## As one addict explains the term “Cleaning House” that is used often in AA:

*It is important to realize that our real problem is the pain in our lives that makes us vulnerable to addiction. Addiction is the self-medication for the problem, and not the problem itself. This pain is caused by a "wall" in our relationship with Hashem and in our relationships with many other people in our lives. To remove that pain, we have to remove the walls. The walls are **not** as we had always thought, i.e. the things Hashem has done to us, or the things that others have done to us, but in reality, the walls are made up of our character defects that we have injected into those relationships. And the only way to stop the pain, is to make a true cheshbon hanefesh (personal accounting) on those character defects, accept that we need Hashem to remove the defects from us, and ask Him to do so. Then, and only then, can we begin to repair our character defects with honesty, so that they no longer act as a wall in those relationships. (Making amends does not mean making do with apologies and payment of debts - it means repairing and fixing the relationships).*

*(And as a side note, the AAs found that addicts are often so much in denial and are such manipulators, that if their cheshbon hanefesh stayed inside their own minds and was not shared with others, they almost never kept to their commitments and eventually lost their sobriety).*

## 20. Giving the fight over to Hashem.

Ultimately, only Hashem can overcome the addiction for us. As Chazal say: *“If Hashem doesn’t help him, he cannot overcome him” (the Yetzer Hara)*. But, in order for Hashem to fight for us, we need to know that we can’t do it alone, and we need to reconnect with Hashem in a very fundamental way and learn a complete dependency on Him; much like the way a one day old baby depends on its mother.

Sometimes “Fear of Failure” can actually lead us to falls. Winston Churchill once said: *“The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself.”* And - *lehavdil* - Rabbi Nachman said, *“The main thing is not to fear at all.”* Trying to control **our own** addiction leads us to fear, because we start to ask ourselves: “Can I really do it?” And when we are attacked by the *Yetzer Hara*, we often fall simply because we fear the addiction and we think it is too strong for us.

Instead, the secret to success is to let Hashem do it for us, as the Pasuk says: **“Hashem yilachem lachem, ve’atem tacharishun” – “Hashem will fight for you, and you shall be silent.”** To accomplish this, however, we need to learn to **completely trust** in Hashem. And those who learn this and give over the struggle to Hashem just sit back and watch as Hashem removes the lust from them and keeps them sober. This technique is nothing short of miraculous, but it has been documented thousands of times by the most hopeless cases of addiction in AA and SA groups around the world, since the 1930s. (Read #438 on [this page](#) for one example).

The *Ohr Hachayim* that we mentioned above in #15 also describes this miraculous phenomenon. He asks, if someone has already fallen into these things and can't help thinking about them, how can they possibly hold themselves back from sinning? He quotes the *Pasuk* in *Acharei Mos*: **“Speak to the Children of Israel and tell them, I am Hashem your G-d. Like the ways of the land of Egypt that you have dwelled in their midst, you shall not do.”** Explains the *Ohr Hachayim*, that the Torah is hinting to us that for someone who **“dwelled in the land of Egypt”** and has already accustomed himself to seeing and thinking about these things, the *Pasuk* starts off with the words: **“Tell them that I am Hashem your G-d.”** This is to teach us that, quote: **“While it is impossible with human strength... with G-dly strength, you shall be able to be victorious over the natural, physical drives.”**

When we learn to **“Let Go and Let G-d,”** Hashem does all the fighting for us and we don’t have to “overcome” anything on our own. Our part is just to **live with Hashem’s help**, and take the steps we can to ensure we do not continue feeding our addiction. When we let Hashem do it for

us, we have Hashem's strength and not our own, as the Pasuk says "**Kovei Hashem – Yachalifu Koach**" – "**those who hope to Hashem exchange strengths,**" one, so to speak, exchanges his strength with that of Hashem.

Learning how to truly give over the fight to Hashem may require joining a [12-Step Group](#), but for starters, we can try to internalize this in our daily struggles through short "foxhole" type prayers every time we are tested, such as "Father, HELP ME!!" or "Hashem, only YOU can do it for me," or "I depend completely on You Father!", etc... The Steipler writes regarding these tests, some people need to daven 50 times a day to be protected.

*Chabakuk Hanavi* said "**Tzadik Be'emunoso Yich'ye**" – "**The Tzadik will live in his faith.**" Rashi explains that, in earlier generations, people had the strength to concentrate on all 613 *mitzvos*; however, in the later generations we simply cannot. So *Chabakuk Hanavi* gave us the key: Concentrate on *Emunah* (Faith) and **Hashem will take care of everything else.**

## 21. Learning to love Hashem through this struggle

This struggle is the fertile soil that our "true" selves will grow out of. And through it, we learn how to give our hearts over to Hashem. **And for this, it was all worth it in the end.** For what did we come down to the world for, if not to learn how to give Hashem our hearts? As the Pasuk says: "**Ten b'ni libcha li**" – "**my son, give me your heart.**" Through this struggle, we learn how to "Let go and let G-d," and how to surrender our will and our lives over to Hashem in a very deep way. And this is something most people never merit to learn, even in 100 years on this world. So, in a deeper sense, this struggle is truly a gift from Hashem and a sign of His love for us - **if we only use it correctly!**

No matter how much we have fallen, we must never view ourselves as "despised" by Hashem, or imagine that Hashem is annoyed and frustrated with us. Instead, as we learn to give over the addiction to Hashem and trust in Him to take it away from us more and more, we will begin to feel that Hashem is truly our closest and most eternal friend.

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

To learn how to redirect our love to Hashem through this struggle, here is one helpful approach: Whenever our hearts are pulled to these desires, we need to tell ourselves, "If this is truly so good and I desire it so much, how much more desirable it must be to connect with Hashem Who is the Infinite Source of all beauty, goodness and pleasure!" When we successfully do this, we uplift the greatest physical desires and turn them into the greatest love for Hashem! This is a very high level of Divine service, analogous to when Yaakov Avinu met his son Yosef after 22 years and, as Chazal tells us, he turned his love to Hashem by saying *Kriyas Shema*.

## 22. Catching ourselves as we begin to slip

Even if we started to slip, we can achieve the greatest levels of *Kedusha* by stopping ourselves from sliding further. (See Chizuk e-mail #355 on [this page](#) for a deeper explanation of this important yesod). And the Sefarim also write that the *Nachas Ruach* we give to Hashem by holding back **even when we feel "we already blew it,"** is even greater than when we successfully avoid the tests in the first place.

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

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

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

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

### 23. Every Little Bit Counts.

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

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

### 24. It's never all or nothing

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

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

Rav Hutner once wrote a letter to a *Bochur* who was despondent over his personal spiritual failures. In the letter, Rav Hutner explains that what makes life meaningful is not basking in the exclusive company of one's *Yetzer Tov*, but rather the dynamic struggle of one's battle with the *Yetzer Hara*. Shlomo Hamelech's maxim that "*Seven times does the righteous one fall and get up*" (*Mishlei, 24:16*), continues Rav Hutner, does not mean that "even after falling seven times, the righteous one manages to get up again." What it really means, he explains, is that it is only and precisely through repeated falls that a person truly achieves righteousness. The struggles – even the failures – are inherent elements of what can, with determination and perseverance, become an ultimate victory.

## 25. Hashem looks at our efforts, not the results

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

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

## 26. Getting back up after a fall

If we experience a fall, we must never let it get us down. Getting depressed is exactly what the *Yetzer Hara* wants, and it leads to a vicious cycle of continued falls. (Listen to [this powerful 5 minute audio clip](#) from a Shiur of Rav Ben Tzion Shafier).

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

The *Lechevitcher Rebbe* (a student of R' Shlomo of Karlin) once went as far as to say that even if a person just killed someone and the knife is still dripping with blood, and he feels unable to stand up and daven Mincha (the afternoon service) with all his strength and heart, then he has not yet tasted from the waters of Chassidus!

*The Be'er Mayim Chayim* says that in the army, when they would want to test a great soldier to see if he's fit to be a general, they would put him on a wild horse that was impossible not to be thrown off of. The whole test was only to see how fast he would get back up after he was brutally thrown down and wounded.

## 27. Charata vs. Yiush

It is important to understand the difference between "healthy" guilt/regret, as opposed to depression/despair. There's a simple test we can do to know which of them are motivating us. If we see that we want to get stronger again, then it's a sign that our "bad" feelings are those of

healthy guilt and positive regret. If, however, we feel that we just want to give up, it's a sign that we are experiencing despair and depression, and we must quickly find a way out of these harmful feelings before they lead us to a vicious cycle of continued falls. (See Chizuk e-mail #341 on [this page](#) for more on this important distinction). How can we remain happy? Let's read on...

## 28. We don't lose past gains after a fall

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

So when we fall, even if it feels like we lost everything and are starting again from scratch, we should know that Hashem does this only so that our "vessels" should be empty once again, to enable us to fill them up yet another time with even more achievements. But the attainments from the first vessels that we filled, were never lost. They were already deposited into our "spiritual bank account." (See Chizuk e-mail #462 on [this page](#) for a **very nice parable** to this effect). So if you were doing great for a while and had yet another fall, don't despair! Trust that Hashem had much *Nachas Ruach* from your spiritual successes, but he wanted you to take it **to the next level** and therefore he gave you these pitfalls, even though he knew you would fall. What makes a person great is his ability to get back up, despite his falls. And *davka* by having to renew your determination from the ground up, you will be rocketed into a much closer *Keshet* with Hashem than you ever had before!

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

## 29. Experience is built out of failures

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

## 30. There's always hope

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