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THE IMPORTANCE OF GUARDING YOUR EYES



FROM THE SHIURIM OF

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DANGER: INFLUENCE ALERT!

Every human being's mindset and view of the world is learned from somewhere. This refers to everything that's in your mind. What is the biggest influence on your worldview? The biggest window into your mind is your eyes. You see things, you view things, you perceive things, and you develop ideas. You become inspired. You become influenced for good and for bad.

In this week's *parshah* we encounter the *parshah* of *Nazir*. *Chazal* tell us that the Torah writes the *parshah* of *Nazir* right after the *parshah* of *Sotah* for a reason. The *parshah* of *Nazir* is about a person who abstains from wine. *Chazal* ask: Why did the Torah write the *parshah* of *Nazir* next to the *parshah* of *Sotah*? The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 2a) answers: שכל הרואה סוטה בקלקולה, יזיר עצמו מן היין, to teach us that anyone who sees a *sotah* going through her process of degradation and humiliation should separate himself from wine. The process of a *sotah* who doesn't admit that she did something wrong is that they publicly degrade her and humiliate her. If she says, "I did it, I'm *modeh*," then the process is over. But if she persists in denying, then they give her the water to drink. If she is guilty, she experiences a most horrible, a most awful experience. *Chazal* tell us: Someone who witnesses a *sotah* going through this process of disgrace should abstain from drinking wine.

Now, that sounds like a puzzling statement. If anything, you would think that if you saw somebody getting desecrated, getting humiliated, getting denigrated because of a sin, it would cause you to run away from the sin. You would think that everybody would see this, and they would become aware of its seriousness, and they would say, "I'm not going down that road. I don't want to have that experience." You would think that alone would serve as sufficient protection for them from falling into the trap of that sin. But *Chazal* tell us, no. *Chazal* tell us it's not so, that if somebody sees a *sotah bekilkulah* - not just prancing around the street, but she's going through actual humiliation - don't think: "Well, she's a *zonah*. She's a *prutzah*. She's crazy. What did she get involved in this for?"

A person has to know that this experience did not happen overnight. Don't think that a regular *frum* woman wakes up one day and decides to go off the *derech*. You have to know that such a process starts small. It starts slowly, and it shakes the foundations of her Yiddishkeit, and from there it becomes a slippery slope. A person shouldn't think that the lady had a problem. And if a person witnesses such a sight - an individual being degraded in this horrific way - they have to know that that's not an exception to the rule, that is the rule. You have to know every single person is *shayach* to get exposed and to get ruined. There are so many people you meet who feel indifferent to a lot of *aveiros*, and they take *aveiros* very lightly.

The Torah tells us that when you see something and you become exposed to such a sight, that sight will have an effect on you.

INDELIBLE IDOL WORSHIP WOES

There's a famous *passuk* (Devarim 29:16) where Moshe Rabeinu gives Klal Yisrael a warning before his death. He makes a very special meeting with them, and he makes a special covenant, and he says: וַתִּרְאוּ אֶת שְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גְּלוּלֵיהֶם, "You witnessed *shikutzeihem v'giluleihem*, detestable things." That means you saw the most disgusting idol worship. You saw idol worship that was an abomination.

There was a famous form of idol worship that went like this: A person got in line, they gave him a cup, and in the cup was a very strong diuretic. Then he went into the 'smurch.' He went up front to the *avodah zarah*. There was a little, fat Confucius over there, and he positioned himself over the *avodah zarah*, and he worshiped it by defecating on it. Now, if somebody would offer that to me, I think I would say, "My friend, this is *avodah zarah*, I'm not getting near," especially if I knew you were in line before me, and especially if it was a long line. You can imagine that the odor in that *beis avodah zarah* was not of the best nature, especially after the diuretics. The more *avodah zarah* there was, i.e., the more a person was able to relieve himself on the *avodah zarah*, the greater the worship was. Now, I can understand a fancy worship, a fancy-schmancy thing - maybe a person can get enticed, but to do such a *miuse zach?*!

So the Brisker Rav explained that when the *passuk* says, וַתִּרְאוּ - "you saw this with your eyes" - it means when a person sees something with his eyes, he becomes affected. That thing becomes imprinted upon him. And that human being, when he witnesses the most disgusting service that somebody does, you know what he thinks? *They can't all be that crazy*. Last I checked, no one was enamored by excrement. Most people don't worship an *avodah zarah* through this measure, and I would say, "It ain't happening on my watch." But Moshe Rabeinu tells us, "You're wrong, because you saw it. And a human being is influenced, and if you're influenced, you are never going to forget that. And that's the beginning of the end. And you should never think that it's not relevant."

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Sadly, most of us don't understand that. We don't understand what the power of our eyes is. My grandfather used to say over from his *rosh yeshivah* that if you see an image in your life - a picture is "taken" by your mind - that picture will remain in your mind to become a part of your essence for the rest of your entire life! That's why you notice that the bigger *tzaddikim* are, the more careful they are about looking at things they're not supposed to look at.

HELPING FROM BEHIND A HAT

I've told you the story of my grandfather (Rav Avigdor Miller). I once had a meeting with him. He gave me an appointment. I was a young boy, and I came to his house, and at that same moment somebody knocked on the door, a young *frum* lady with her mother who was wearing, I can tell you today, although almost for sure fifty years have passed, she was wearing a light green pant suit, polyester, *shvartze* attire. That's what she was wearing. She thought she was very *tznius*. She came to talk to the rabbi. She was told to sit down at the table. I was right outside the room, looking in from the keyhole. My grandfather came in from another room, and as soon as he saw this lady, I don't remember what she looked like. I remember my grandfather took his hat and he put it over his face and he said, "Lady, how can I help you?" I remember, I couldn't believe it. He didn't want to be "infected."

If you talk to somebody, by nature, you look at them. When you look at somebody, by nature, you study them, even if you don't plan to, even if you're teaching them *Kabbalah*. And if you teach them whatever you're teaching them and if you're *shmoozing* with them, it's having an effect on your mind and the *yetzer hara* is right there. The *yetzer hara* already gets involved with you and he tries to get you.

LONG-DISTANCE CONVERSATION

Here is another story I witnessed many years later, when I was already married. I was driving by Ocean Parkway one afternoon in the summer. I noticed that the door of my grandfather's *shul* was wide open. I noticed the windows facing the street were wide open. My grandfather never kept the doors or the windows open. Maybe in the winter, he opened them a crack. But when there was nothing going on there, it was never open, and at that time of the day, nothing was going on. So I drove around, I pulled my car up, and I walked into the *shul* from the front door. When you walked in from the front door, you walked into the *ezras nashim*. The main entrance was from the side to get to the men. I saw a lady sitting in the middle of the *ezras nashim*, a *frumly* dressed lady, a *tznius* dressed lady. I saw that the curtain by the *ezras nashim* was down. I said to the lady, "Excuse me, can I help you?" And she said, "I'm talking to the *rav*." I said, "You're talking to the *rav*?" I said, "The *rav* is my grandfather. Where are you talking to the *rav*? He lives upstairs." All of a sudden, I heard my grandfather say, "Who's there?" I walked around to the front of the *ezras nashim*, and I saw my grandfather was sitting on a folding chair and he had a *Mesillas Yesharim* on his lap. I went over to see, because I thought - in my silliness, at first - that maybe she was his *chavrusa* and he was teaching her *Mesillas Yesharim*. No. She had something important to talk about, so he was talking to her, but he opened the windows, he opened the doors, and he sat there with the curtains closed. And after all that, he made sure to have a *Mesillas Yesharim* on his lap. He said, "That's for *shemira* -

protection.”

THE GRAVE NATURE OF TEMPTATION

There is a very famous statement of *Chazal* that says, אל תאמין בעצמך, don't trust yourself, עד יום מותך, don't trust yourself until the day you die (*Avos* 2:4). Do you know what that means, “until the day you die”? Until after you're dead. There was a certain great *tzaddik*, one of the great *tanaim*, who saw that and said: This is an error. It should say אל תאמין בעצמך עד יום זקנותך, “don't trust yourself until you get very old.” And he changed the text of the *Chazal*. He was sure it was an error. The Satan came to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and he said: May I test him? Hashem said: Be my guest. So the Satan dressed himself up in clothing and he appeared to this great *tzaddik* in the form of a beautiful woman, and she stood in front of him and she said, “Rabbi, I have such respect for you. If only I could marry a person like your stature, I would do anything to have the *zechus* just to be in your presence. I'm already tickled pink.” And the *tzaddik* didn't lose himself but the *tzaddik* *chapped*. What happened? Because he saw that his *yetzer hara* wasn't dead. You know what he said? “Okay, I hear you loud and clear. כמה גדולים דברי חכמים, how great are the words of the sages and how exact they are. Don't trust yourself until the day you die.”

It's amazing. You have to know you'll be on your deathbed, and you'll have pipes coming out of all your orifices, of all your holes. You'll have tubes. You'll have PICC lines. And you're going to be exposed to somebody who's not *tzenuah* and your *yetzer hara* is going to give you a *shukel*.

I'll never forget. There was a time when I experienced this. I was too young to understand what was going on. But I was in the room - a hospital room - with my great-grandfather, Rav Yaakov Moshe Lessin, a great *talmid* of the Alter of Slabodka, and I had the *zechus* to be there. The family took turns being by his bedside, attending to him, and making sure he was comfortable. I was a young boy, maybe 11 or 12, and they gave me a turn. There were a number of beds in the room. I remember, he was in the left corner. I would sit next to his bed, and I would engage him in conversation. At that point, he was already back in Slabodka. He was unaware that he was in America. So I would tell him over regards from the Alter, from his *Rebbi*, the Alter of Slabodka. I asked him, “Did you see the Chafetz Chaim?” He told me something he heard from the Chafetz Chaim. I was too young to even grasp what he was saying to me, but it was amazing. I would say, “I'm bringing him regards from the *Rebbi*.” Ahh, he was like in seventh heaven. He was saying *pessukim* all day long, and *Tehillim* and all kinds of interesting things.

In that same room was an *alter chatas*, a guy on the other side of the room, and this guy literally looked more dead than he was alive. His hands were tied to the bed because he would pull out his pipes. The guy *mamash* I'm telling you...He looked awful. He couldn't talk. He had something down his throat. At least one thing down his throat. He had something in his nose. The guy had lines in both hands. But every time the nurse came near his bed, he would go berserk. She would say to him, “Mr. So and So, you had better behave. You had better behave.” The guy was already a *meis*. I had no idea what she was talking about. I was thinking, “Why can't you treat him nicely? The guy's dead already. What do you mean ‘behave’? What is there to behave about?” But when I got older, I *chapped* what was going on there. It took me a few years to get smart, to realize what this ‘*chacham*’ from the *mah nishtanah*, this *rasha* was trying

to do. That's the power of the *yetzer*, rabbosai. Everybody has a *yetzer hara*. Don't convince yourself, and don't think that you're different. I don't care if you show me a guy who looks like a *tzaddik she'ein kemoso*.

I SEE A SAINTLY MAN

There was once a Muslim who befriended me, an Arab guy in this city. And one day he asked me about a *Yid* that he sees who looks like a saint. A guy who looks like a *tzaddik* dressed up in European clothes, like he's not from this world. "I see him walking on Bishop Road and turning into the park. His head is bent over, all the way over, and he's got a little book in his hand, and he doesn't pick his head up for anything in the world. What's the *pshat* with this guy? Who is that guy?" He says, "When I drive to work, I drive past here and I see him. I make a U-turn and come back again to get a second glimpse of him. I drive into the park to look at him. He's definitely a holy man." I said, "You know, you have a good *shmek*. You have a good sense of smell." I said, "You are right. He's a very holy man." He said, "What is he doing?" I said, "He's guarding his eyes. That's what he's doing. He's guarding his eyes."

A person has to know, it doesn't make a difference how young you are or how old you are, you have to guard your eyes, because ותראו - if you see something that's *meshukat*, even if you see a *sotah* getting terribly denigrated, you're still going to be affected.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER...

Now, there's a famous *pshat* that is said over in the name of my grandfather from my wife's side, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch. I heard it from Rav Shach. There was once a *shikur*, a drunk, and the guy *mamash* ended up every night on the floor, on the side of the road, wallowing in the dirt and in the dust. And when his children would come to get him, they would be so humiliated and so embarrassed they couldn't take it. They decided they're going to try to teach him a lesson. They looked around for another *shikur* who also made a fool of himself and embarrassed himself to no end through his drinking. They were hoping that when he'd be sane, when he'd be sober, he'd take a look at that and they'll say to him, "That's exactly what you look like. And everybody's laughing at you. Everybody's thinking *fech!* What kind of person are you?"

So they took their father, and the father was looking at this guy, and the guy looked like he was totally out of it. The son said, "Dad, you see what this guy looks like? You see the lesson we're trying to teach you. You see what happens?" Nu. So they figured everything's fine. What does the man do? The guy goes close to the *shikur*, he bends down and says, "Hey man, where did you get that good stuff from?" You know why? You become affected, and that's the nature of a person. You become affected.

If you see a guy in a drug-induced stupor, it's the same thing. Take Purim, for example. One of the most disgusting things on Purim is watching *bachurim* who have no degree of *yiras Shamayim*, no degree of *shaychus* to Torah, or modern boys, or boys who are not supposed to be modern, and they get *shikur* and they say things and they talk about things, and they *pashut* imagine for a few hours that they're *mamash shvartzes*, *goyim*. And they *pashut*, *mamash*, all end up *barfing* all over the place. I mean, it's so disgusting! Yet the next guy says, "You know, next year I've got to find out how he did it." He asks him,

“How much did you drink? How much did it take you to get to that level?” Because it’s expensive. So you want to know how to do it properly.

GETTING USED TO DISGUSTING THINGS

A person by nature is impressed. That’s how you are. You become influenced. You want to copy the most disgusting things that you see somebody do. If you never saw anybody do it, then you would never think of doing it. But if you saw it, you would. Let’s say a person watched certain movies and he saw disgusting things, things that are *mamash bal teshaktzu*, things that even a *chatzi*-normal person wouldn’t do. Not long ago, a *yungerman* told me that he loves to do the most *meshukatzdike* things possible. I told him, “But that’s disgusting.” He said, “For me it’s not.”

Now, where did he get it from? From *yeshivah*? Did he get it from another *bachur*? No. You know where the *yungerman* got it from? He saw things he shouldn’t have seen, and he watched enough of it, and it became impressed and embedded in his soul. Today, what’s an ultimate disgust for a rational and healthy mind is not disgusting to him. That’s what happens.

I once heard something from Rav Shalom Schwadron. He said he once was walking on the street in Yerushalayim and was overcome by such a strong smell. He couldn’t believe it. He started to gag. He looked around. He couldn’t see where it was coming from. When he came to the corner, he turned and he saw there was a big, open, huge hole. It was an open cesspool where everybody’s evacuations were stored. He said he had to hold himself back from gagging. But he walked past the big *loch*, and in the *loch*, he saw Arab workers. They were sitting on a ledge, eating lunch. They were eating pita inside this most disgusting place! And he said to himself, “How could they eat?! It’s not *shayach*.” So what would you think? You would think it has no *shaychus* to you. You would never even relate to this. You think for these Arabs it was natural to them? No, it wasn’t. But what happens is they did it. Once they saw somebody else do it, they said, “That’s disgusting.” “Try it.” And after a while, they were doing it themselves.

A person who exposes himself becomes affected. And once you become like that, you lose your whole *adinus* of your *neshamah*, your whole sensitivity of your *neshamah*. Now you say: “It’s harmless.” You tell a guy, “That’s *mamash* awful.” You know what the guy tells you? “For you, it’s awful. For me, it’s not.” That’s a guy who’s already messed up, totally.

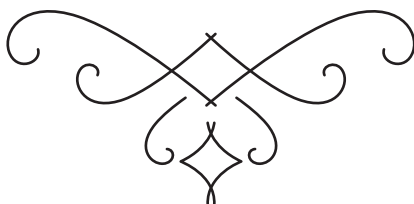
WAYS TO SAVE OUR DELICATE SOULS

A person has to have *rachmanus* on his own *neshamah*, and he has to take steps first to protect himself from being exposed to this. The Chazon Ish used to take his nephews in the street, and he used to have a game with them. He used to say to them, “Let’s see if we could walk in the street with our eyes closed from here to the *shul*. Let’s see if we can get there holding hands to get there without our eyes open.” What was he doing, playing games with them? No. He was training them. Like my grandfather.

My grandfather was once walking in the street in the summer on Ocean Parkway, and there was a young man accompanying my grandfather. A *rosh yeshivah* came and asked if he could accompany and join the group. My grandfather said, “You’re welcome to come.” Every once in a while, my

grandfather would point at the floor, and the young man would bend down and pick something up. When they got to their destination, my grandfather turned to the *bachur* and said, "Okay, I'll take them now." And he put a couple of rubber bands that he found in the street in my grandfather's hand. The *bachur* walked away, and the *rosh yeshivah* turned to my grandfather. He said, "You need rubber bands that badly? I'll get you rubber bands. It's not an expensive product." He said, "I was taking a walk with this young man, and I noticed that the walks were a stumbling block for him because he couldn't keep his eyes to himself. I didn't want to give him *mussar* straight out. So what did I do? I said I'm going to ask him a favor to help me collect rubber bands. He was very happy to do that. And that way he never lifted his eyes off the ground, because he was always looking for the rubber bands." A brilliant idea! My Zeida was looking at the ground. This *bachur* was looking at the ground. That was a tremendous, tremendous *zach*.

Rabosai, let's have *rachmanus* on ourselves. Let's try, instead of dancing and being like that *shikur*, or like those Arabs who are dipping their pita in that new type of *techinah*, to try to get yourself away from a despicable, disgusting behavior, and hopefully you'll be *zocheh* to have a *shtickel taharah* in your *neshamah* and you'll stop engaging in this behavior.



❧ IN SUMMARY ❧

The Torah teaches us how much we are affected by whatever we see and how far we must go to neutralize bad things we have seen. If we see a *sotah* being degraded, it is not enough to feel disgusted or scared by what we have seen. Since whatever disgusting things we see remain imprinted on our *neshamos* for our entire lives, we must proactively protect our *neshamos*. In the case of someone who sees a *sotah*, protection is created by the viewer becoming a *nazir*. We too must be aware of the *maasim* and *halichos* that the Torah wants us to stay far away from, and protect our eyes in order to stay away from the temptation of *aveiros*. This is especially relevant in the area of *kedushah*. This week I will (*bli neder*) learn about protecting my eyes to prevent myself from doing *aveiros*, and I will commit to one real action to reduce exposure to negative influences.

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