

Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by shmuel83 - 02 Sep 2020 04:57

So the inevitable happened, and I fell... after I had been doing really well guarding my eyes (I managed to stay clean for well over 90 days), I stumbled on an inappropriate website while using an unfiltered device.

This has taught me a few things:

- We cannot defeat the yetzer hara now. Forget it, it can't be done. B"H when Moshiach comes, he will remove it from the world, but until that time comes, we just have to learn not to engage with it. As we say each day when reciting the Shema, we must learn to not follow after our heart and after our eyes by which we go astray. If Hashem commanded us to do it, then we are capable of doing it.
- Filters do work. I installed some accountability software on my main computer and I found it did help me to stay on track.
- The environment is a huge source of temptation. I found it much easier to stay clean while I was working from home, though I did have some lustful thoughts as I am single and live alone. But because I had fewer distractions around me, I found I was less prone to entertain those thoughts.
- My biggest challenge has been reducing the time I spend on secular entertainment (music, TV, sport), as this can also lead to sin if allowed unchecked. I used to listen to music a lot to unwind, and I still do sometimes, but now I am trying to replace the time I used to spend on entertainment with Torah study (listening to kosher speakers only, like Rabbi Yosef Mizrachi, Rabbi Yaron Reuven, Rabbi Alon Anava) and davening. Strong *mussar* (for those who are not so addicted) is like an antibiotic for the yetzer hara.
- Being at home has actually helped me to daven with more intention, even if it is usually in my own language. Making time to talk to Hashem has helped me a lot, as has reciting tehillim.
- When I was trying to get to 90 days, I updated my count on GYE regularly, and the rewards for reaching each level really helped me to keep going. Each time I made it to a new level, I felt really great and it inspired me to continue. I did fall a few times trying to get to 90 days, and I donated \$50 to GYE each time. This was another motivator for me to stay away from things that might lead me to sin.

In a way the experience of falling has given me a reality check as I now understand that I cannot defeat the yetzer hara on my own, but rather I must establish and maintain systems that reduce the risk that I will fall. This is the battle of our generation and we cannot win it unless we equip ourselves with the weapons that we know are proven to work in the fight against the yetzer hara. But it can be done.

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by shmuel83 - 01 Oct 2020 09:48

Some advice for those of you recovering from a fall... I have noticed that my spiritual level does go down after a fall and I have to work harder to get back to where I was before the fall. Don't be too hard on yourself, otherwise the yetzer hara will try to bring you down. But the good news is we will be rewarded for each time we say no to our desires.

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by shmuel83 - 13 Oct 2020 04:44

So I had a fall last week, but it was more due to being careless and looking at things that I shouldn't. I stopped looking sooner than I used to before, and if I am honest I didn't really enjoy looking. Perhaps this means I am gaining more control over my eyes? I have stayed free of lust since then, and haven't actually had that many lustful thoughts lately. I have been trying to focus on davening and learning, but I am feeling depressed today, I think this is just another trap of the yetzer hara. I don't have the desire to look at anything inappropriate, heaven forbid. Maybe I will go and read some tehillim until this mood passes.

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by Captain - 13 Oct 2020 15:03

Read Appendix A of The Battle of the Generation <https://guardyoureyes.com/ebooks/item/the-battle-of-the-generation>. (skip to the back where it is)

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by shmuel83 - 15 Oct 2020 09:25

Thanks for that!

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by shmuel83 - 16 Oct 2020 01:01

I have noticed that sometimes after learning mussar, the yetzer hara will try to attack by getting me to feel bad about myself. Is this because he knows that learning mussar weakens our desire to sin, so he has to try a different line of attack?

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by Hashem Help Me - 16 Oct 2020 01:06

Disclaimer - the following is my opinion, definitely da'as Torah. Feel free to vehemently disagree.

If learning mussar causes you to have a lack of self worth, stop learning it chaver. Or get a rebbi who teaches you how to learn it without bashing yourself. In this parsha, one of the most important things is to have a very healthy sense of self worth. Don't do anything that compromises it.

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by Captain - 16 Oct 2020 01:24

What mussar are you learning?

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by wilnevergiveup - 16 Oct 2020 05:27

I would like to comment if I may. Although there are some who learn mussar to "break themselves down" emotionally in order to be inspired to do teshuvah, this hardly works for the average run of the mill type of guy not during Elul.

Mussar is not a magic button that you press and poof, you suddenly don't want to do *aveiros* anymore. Mussar has to work, it has to change you. It is more likely that the mussar is what is causing those feelings and maybe the whole thing is a ploy of the Y"H, I don't know.

The primary purpose of learning mussar is to develop an understanding of Hashem, how he runs the world, what is expected from us, how much he loves and cares about us and to strengthen our emunah and bitachon.

If what your learning doesn't have this affect, it can be that you need to try something else, or that you don't understand it properly.

GYE just sent out in one of the emails, the role of learning mussar, you can try to find it if you want.

In my experience (especially because I deal with low self esteem) learning mussar can cause a tremendous amount of guilt and high expectations, this is why it's so important to either have the proper understanding on how it relates to our every day lives when learning mussar, or to have a Rebbe or someone to help you understand the application.

That being said there are various seforim some that should be learned and some that are just not for everyone. There are contemporary ones as well although, if you are up to it, there is nothing like the originals.

I believe if you can get yourself an English copy of Chovos Halevavos, or the Kuzari, they are a great place to start (with Chovos Halevavos, the first sha'ar is very philosophical and complex and might be worth skipping at first).

Michtav MeiEliyahu is also a great sefer that shouldn't get you down, it's more *hashkafah* then mussar and he deals with a lot of the basic questions we may have.

Of course there are the sifrei Ramchal, they are the best of the best, but they are like gemara, needs to be learned one line at a time.

It's funny that everyone learns Mesilas Yesharim first because it's the sefer that the Ramchal wrote the last. Nothing wrong with that but I found that learning Mesilas Yesharim without a strong Hashkafah and foundation in emunah and bitachon wasn't really productive. Learning it after growing in those areas, it's a life changer.

Ramchal's Da'as Tevunos is a real gamechanger in Emunah and Bitachon but is difficult to learn and understand.

In short, your first goal in mussar should be *emunah*, *bitachon* and gratitude to Hashem. After you are strong in these areas you should start working on more.

There is a reason why the Chovos Halavavos starts with Sa'ar Hayichud, then Sha'ar Habechinah (reflecting on what Hashem does for us), and only then Sha'ar Avodas Elokim, because first we need to develop our emunah then our gratitude/obligation to Hashem and only then we are ready to work on serving him.

I hope this makes things clearer.

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by OivedElokim - 16 Oct 2020 21:05

If I may add: The objective of these studies is to develop a healthy worldview and understand HaShem and ourselves and the relationship we have with him. Not to beat ourselves up. If you find that a certain Sefer that isn't doing it for you, try to explore. In addition to the seforim mentioned above, I would suggest sifrei chassidus as well (more optimistic in tone, may suit your personality better) such as The seforim of the Baal haTanya, Reb Nachman and Reb Tzadok. It may be a different style than mussar, but they speak very much to struggling Jews such as us. It may be worth a try. ???? ???? ?? ???.

In any case, HaShem should bless you and the rest of us with continued success in our struggle as well as ????? ?? in the broader sense, and we should keep on giving nachas to the ????? ?? ????

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by shmuel83 - 18 Oct 2020 01:40

Thank you all for your comments - this is very helpful!

I have decided to keep it simple by spending around 20 minutes a day reading Chovos Halevavos in English. So far I have found that this is working for me.

I am also reading one chapter a day of Living Emunah by Rabbi David Ashear (the chapters are very short).

Others have suggested that I read the Tanya in English. I have done so in the past but I would like to pick it up again.

When I was first exposed to mussar such as Mesilas Yesarim, I loved it and wanted to learn more, but maybe I moved ahead too quickly before I had developed my emunah. Incidentally, I have been guilty of this in other areas of my life - I have been known to be impatient at times

Thanks again for the advice, and I'll let you know how it goes!

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by OivedElokim - 18 Oct 2020 02:12

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Absorb whatever you can from the sefrei hayirah. It will stand you in good stead when you need it

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by baalshemtov - 18 Oct 2020 14:49

You can definitely over come this, I also grew up secular and became religious in my 20's, it's been really difficult at times to stay on track however very doable, I was lucky enough to meet a mentor on this site that helped me see that I can do it, I still have falls but am able to go 300+ days without experiencing one, another thing I realized is the more holier we get the hardest the yetzer hara tries to get us down, I had a huge fall 2 days ago right after I took upon myself to start doing more in a specific area, but this goes to show you the yetzer hara just tries to bring us down because it knows we will over come it, continue strong holy brother you definitely got this

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by ColinColin - 25 Oct 2020 01:57

It is hard when you fall after a long time clean.

But know that all your hard work does count, that it gives you the tools and strength to keep clean.

Take things day by day.

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Re: Had a fall after more than 90 days clean
Posted by shmuel83 - 17 Nov 2020 04:40

Long time, no update!

I made it to 40 days clean again!

However, I noticed my desires starting to return in the last couple of days. I didn't act on them, B"H, but something in a recent GYE email helped me to get past it. As we all know, the eye is stimulated by negative images, but we should remember that positive images are powerful too. I found this to be a useful tool in counteracting the effects of the negative images that we can't avoid in day to day life. These were the positive images mentioned in the email:

- 1) When a person looks at the countenance of a tzadik, his soul is illuminated with light and holiness. (Degel Macheneh Ephraim)

- 2) Beholding the sefer Torah when it is raised before or after krias Torah and reading a word or two from the scroll imparts a great, holy light within us. (Magen Avraham, Chapter 134)

- 3) Viewing the "Shin" on either side of the Tephillin Shel Rosh imparts holiness.

- 4) Looking at water is good for the eyes. (Ibn Ezra)

- 5) Looking at the heavens imparts Yirat Shemayim. (The Vilna Gaon)

- 6) When reciting the Krias Shema in Shacharit it is good to look at the Tzitzit and touch them to the eyes when we say, u'reisem o'soh. (Shulchan Oruch 24:4)

- 7) Whoever brings the Tzitzit to the eyes when saying Parshat Tzitzit will never lose his sight. (Be'ar HaTiv)

Might be a good visualization exercise to try the next time you daven.

If we can practice visualizing holy images daily, we might have a better chance the next time we come across a negative image.

Any thoughts?

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