

A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by chosemyshem - 31 May 2024 14:44

Dear Rebbi,

I hope this letter finds you well. I apologize for sending a letter instead of telling you this in person, but it's still difficult for me to talk about these things. I'll get straight to the point.

You probably don't recall this incident way back when I was in Yeshiva. But one time I searched for pornographic content on the yeshiva's computers, and Rabbi X must've seen and told you. I remember that night at our seder you sat us down in a private corner of the beis medrash instead of our usual seat, and clearly wanted to talk to me about the incident. But you didn't.

I guess I just want to know why you didn't?

It's not that I'm second guessing your chinuch decisions. We both know that I've turned out pretty okay, and you take a very significant amount of the credit for that. But still, I want to know, why?

Maybe the question will make more sense if I explain why I'm asking. You see, the reason this incident came to mind was because a wise man told me to write out the entire history of my "acting out" to help me determine if I should join Sexaholics Anonymous. Despite my wonderful marriage, my serious commitment to sedarim, and my growth in avodas hashem, I somehow very often find myself spending hours watching pornography and masturbating. I don't know why and I just can't seem to stop. It's ruining my job, it's hurting my shalom bayis (although my wife does not know about this problem the effects are undeniable), and it's devouring my life.

I was never able to speak to anyone (even you!) about this. Not while I was a bochur and it was a "normal" problem, and certainly not after I was married and had no explanation as to why the problem was continuing. Not until I was driven to GYE and even that didn't help. Only then did I come to the extreme of talking to a real, albeit anonymous, person about my hidden shame.

That moment when you sat down with me in the corner of the bais medrash was the closest I

ever came to opening up about my problem. I remember the fear of being exposed and the shame that I felt. But I also remember the hope that finally, maybe finally, I'd be able to unload the burden.

Of course you didn't know my history of pornography abuse to know that it was more than a one-time "normal bochur tayveh." And how was anyone supposed to know that the problem would continue to haunt me so aggressively. It's even very likely that talking to me would have shamed me into withdrawing from our relationship and caused **vastly** more harm than good. But that one moment, more than any other in my ignominious career of acting out, brings to mind those famous words, "of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these: 'it might have been'."

I don't know if I'm writing this for an answer, or just to get this off my chest. And I'm certainly not writing it to change how you interact with other bochurim. Honestly, that was a pretty small molehill in the mountain of acting out. But I find it weighing on me. And so I wrote this letter. But I will not send it. Because you see Rebbi, even though you might be able to help me now like you might've been able to help me then, I'm still trapped behind the same wall of shame that I was trapped behind then.

Best,

Shem

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by Muttel - 31 May 2024 17:37

A beautifully written, poignant, and emotion laden letter. chosemyshem, this letter prompted an emotional outburst from me (yes, I'm crying in my office now). You see, I also have a letter I'd like to write. My letter may give a different perspective and may even provide your Rebbi's vantage point, albeit from my story that had far different outcomes...

Dear Shem,

I received your letter and I recall that incident as clearly as though it happened yesterday. The

moments when I heard what sort of putrid content you searched for *within the walls of the ?????* ????? to boot! I had in mind to speak to you about it and try to get you on the clean path, and I indeed pulled you to the other side of the BM for that purpose. However, I remembered a different incident that "Muttel" told me in his experiences of acting out that made me hold back. I don't know if I was correct, but at least please understand where I was coming from.

Muttel's Incident

Your friend Muttel recounted to me a couple of weeks before I heard about your pornographic search, how when he was a bochur, he'd been overheard by his dorm counselor having inappropriate conversations with roommates. They were discussing the possibility of acting out and describing some fantasies. Now, his mashgiach didn't waste any time calling him in and confronting him. The dressing down (pun intended) was severe. "The ??? ????? believes you don't have any ??? ???? whatsoever and are entirely removed from connecting to ??? ????." To engage in conversation like this! **In our Yeshiva?!?!?!?** There's no room for someone like you in our institution! He was promptly expelled from his Yeshiva, never to return.

Now, this Muttel went on to have a very successful Yeshiva career, both as a bochur and a yungerman. However, he had a deep-seated trauma seared into his consciousness by that scathing label from the Mashgiach that constantly told him: **you will never have ??? ????!** **You're dirty, low, nasty, and a real failure.** This Muttel had porn and masturbation struggles too, and always had this thought that "I'm not a ??? ???? anyway.....".

Shem, as your Rebbe who didn't have experience dealing with bochurim struggling pornographic use, I was nervous to confront you, **scared I'd overreact and sear a similar label into you too- that of a NON- ??? ????....**

Please please forgive me if I miscalculated and I really could've saved you from the negative path you were on, but please also understand that I was nervous I'd address it in the wrong way and end up being like Muttel's mashgiach and do harm in place of good.....

Shem, I hope you can forgive my inaction, and continue on your path towards recovery with a heart at peace that my inaction was a Divinely decreed non action serving as a vicissitude sent by the RBS"O..... I'm doing my part and crying out to Hashem to help you and to atone for my missteps. Just know, that my action may have proved disastrous....

Muttel in the name of Shem's Rebbi.

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by chosemyshem - 31 May 2024 17:57

Muttel, thank you for sharing. That must have been tough to bring back up.

What that Mashgiach did is horrific. A special type of retzicha.

And I appreciate the reminder that this incident was also the ratzon hashem.

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by Muttel - 31 May 2024 18:12

Yup, had long long effects (happened 23 years ago...)

But BH with GYE total change is possible! For you, me and all of us!

GS!

Muttel

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by jonthen123 - 01 Jun 2024 19:17

hi chosemyshem and muttel i undersatnd you very berry good and it brings up alot of years of torture and sadness. loneliness etc,i wrote part of my story with this problem in a answer to

something in the BB FORM tittel Should wives older girls be educated in how commonyou could read there what i wrote, i think you both bring out the same point our rabbis or not trained and dont have the right information and tools to deal with this, i hope that they learn and understand that this needs to change asaps bcw there is so many boys top boys struggling with this ,

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by chaimoigen - 02 Jun 2024 03:19

This letter caused me a lot of pain. And it took me some time to figure out what I'm feeling, besides empathy.

I've been on the other side of the table. There have been people that I have been too timid and hesitant to approach and broach the topic.

Bochurim who have dropped hints, adults who have a certain look in their eyes when the topic comes up, etc. But I have hesitated to take the plunge and have the conversation. See, as long as I'm Chaim Oigen and I'm calling a guy from the forum it's ok, but I have hesitated to broach the subject with someone who doesnt know how well I understand the struggle, who may be afraid that I will be harsh or judgemental, and when I am afraid that he will never be able to look at me again.

But maybe that's wrong and selfish, maybe holding out a warm hand in real life is so important and I have to take the risk. I don't know. The guys who openly ask for help I have no problem helping, but it's situations like the one you're describing, Shem, that make me get frozen. I have a lot of pain and uncertainty about how to deal with these situations. I feel that erring on the side of caution is better, but I don't know...

I'll never forget my experience with one of my Rabbeim in Yeshiva.

I was shaking, but I opened up to him. He took me on a walk. I'll never forget how it felt when he put his hand on my shoulder and told me he understood, how he also had his struggles when he was young. He gave me eitzos. He helped me a lot. Followed up, made himself available, was always warm, caring and understanding. He believed in me. Those conversations helped me a lot then, and the seeds planted by that rebbe have BH continued to grow.

Recently, I mustered up the courage and tracked down his number and called him. He is long retired and very frail. After pleasantries, I took a deep breath and told him that I was calling to thank him for those conversations. How they made a big difference. At the time and for years later. He was quiet and then he told me "*Chaim, you were a good investment*". He told me he is proud of me, and of what I'm doing today. We need more Rabbaim like him.

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by frank.lee - 02 Jun 2024 07:12

This reminded me, I once had a Rebbe I was close to, we drove down to the beach somewhere, maybe he was giving me an opportunity to talk about this. We spoke about other things I think, I don't remember what.

I think there is a sh.ta in Yeshiva that we don't talk about this. Let the guy figure it out. Not sure why. I think it's based on mesora. Maybe we need to adapt to a different world. But they can answer that even back then, ppl had taava and challenges of mzl, even prior to internet.

New school yeshivas are more open to talk about these topics, from my experience...

Maybe we, and GYE, can make a difference on this front?

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by proudyungerman - 02 Jun 2024 14:27

What can I say...this hurts for me too. A lot.

For a long time I struggled alone. At two points in Yeshiva I actually got up the guts to open up to a Rebbi of mine.

The first time was after the Mashgiach gave us a vaad (in the dark*) where he spoke about the regular ??? ????? struggles of a bochur. At some point after the vaad I opened up to him. I honestly don't even remember that conversation, I know that I spoke to him at least a few more times, but I don't remember any particularly helpful ideas.

The second time I was in second year Beis Medrash and I was extremely frustrated. I had been struggling, and failing, for years. I was fed up.

This Rebbi had a certain shtultz to him that made me a little more nervous to approach him. I gathered up the huts, walked up the stairs, and, with my heart pounding through my chest and my legs literally shaking, I knocked on his office door. I walked in and blurted out that I am struggling with ??? ????? and I need help.

He was very nice about it and immediately put me at ease. We spent a while talking about it, he gave me a lot of chizuk, and I felt much better. I spoke to him a few more times after that, each time feeling calmed after speaking to him. I will never forget the positive way he initially responded and the warm way he relaxed my raging emotions.

However, at the end of the day, he didn't have any practical ideas for me as to how to overcome this challenge. All he was able to offer me was chizuk.

That hurt, too much.

(Since I found GYE it has been an idea in my head to actually send a letter to my Rebbeim in yeshiva and tell them the whole story, where I am now, and how I got here. We'll see...)

[*Edit: This was a weekly vaad that for some unknown reason took place in the dark. It happened to be nice when this sensitive topic came up and you can just listen and not worry about your surroundings...)

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by chosemyshem - 02 Jun 2024 17:19

Still not sure why I wrote that letter. But reading some of these very excellent and thought provoking replies and experiences got me thinking some more. I'm not really bothered about

why he chose to stay quiet in my specific situation. I trust him. Nor do I really care if Rabbeim are properly equipped to handle the youth of today or whatever.

I guess what's bothering me is why does this aveira specifically have to be so hard to discuss? In yeshiva or out why did I stay quiet.

Look, it's not like no Rebbe ever mentioned it. "Tayvas nashim" "kedusha," even "zera l'vatala" and "pornography" were all raised in shmuezen in yeshiva, even by this specific Rebbe. So the topic was not taboo. And I was (and still am) very close to this Rebbe so I should've been able to say something. And while it's not like it's easy to admit you feel out of control about anything, I know I would've opened up if I felt this out of control about, say, anger or alcohol abuse.

But there's so much shame about this. Even people who posted they did open up to a Rebbe did so with fear and trembling. Why??

This complaint isn't specifically limited to yeshivos - although that is a place we should all feel comfortable enough to be able to get the help we need. Even now, I can't open up to my shul Rav, who is great and understanding and all. But there's a wall of shame...

[Kind of a side rant influenced greatly by an overdose on Dov posts: Even in this group of people who we [u]all know suffer with us[/u] we're still hiding and posting anonymously and prevaricating. Obviously there is a safety concern with an open forum. But why do I feel that it would be very difficult to meet someone I know is safe "IRL"?]

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Re: A letter to my Rebbe

Posted by redfaced - 02 Jun 2024 19:31

[chosemyschem wrote on 02 Jun 2024 17:19:](#)

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I guess that means you haven't met any of the heroes here in person?

Big Ml mistake.

That's the best part of this place . The warm eyes and tight hug behind every member here

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by chosemyshem - 02 Jun 2024 21:14

[redfaced wrote on 02 Jun 2024 19:31:](#)

[chosemyshem wrote on 02 Jun 2024 17:19:](#)

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While I doubt every member has warm eyes and a tight hug, I'm sure many (or at least a couple) of them do. And I'm completely maskim that it's helpful (and enjoyable) to meet. But what percentage of GYE members do you think are meeting up in person with other people? I'd bet a very small fraction of the active members, which itself is a tiny fraction of people who sign up. Because 1. wall of shame (and 2. GYE is not designed to encourage that. But the ikkar is 1.)

Even anonymously calling someone like HHM is a significant hurdle for many/most people. Certainly meeting up with someone in person is a real difficulty for most people, unless I'm missing the boat significantly. Kal v'chomer ben bno shel kal v'chomer to actually open up to someone in real life, someone who isn't a fellow luster, someone who knows the real you, is extremely difficult. But why? Why is there so much shame?

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by youknowwho - 02 Jun 2024 22:35

[chosemyschem wrote on 02 Jun 2024 21:14:](#)

[redfaced wrote on 02 Jun 2024 19:31:](#)

[chosemyschem wrote on 02 Jun 2024 17:19:](#)

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While I doubt every member has warm eyes and a tight hug, I'm sure many (or at least a couple) of them do.

Some members have red slits for eyes and an evil, cold snort in store for you. To each their own.

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by gye365s - 03 Jun 2024 00:05

[chosemyschem wrote on 02 Jun 2024 17:19:](#)

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But there's so much shame about this. Even people who posted they did open up to a Rebbi did so with fear and trembling. Why??

Good question. I want to think about that more.

Perhaps among other reasons it is related to kedusha. I don't know how to put it into words, but intimacy is one of the holiest things. When we mess with tayva, we are tainting that purity of bonding and creation. It's meant to be the most special thing, and we're using it selfishly.

To tell someone that we took Hashem's most precious gems and pawned them for cheap drugs is hard to admit, even to ourselves. The YH takes full advantage of this. Shame and guilt are his strongest weapons today, and this battle is over the highest levels of kedusha.

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by ??? ????? ????? ??? - 03 Jun 2024 01:15

[chaimoigen wrote on 02 Jun 2024 03:19:](#)

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This touched me deeply. Thank you for sharing, chaimoigen. I would hope that we would all be like that rebbi putting our hand on our student's shoulder and telling them years later "you were a good investment." Beautiful.

I have several years professional experience as a counselor and, at least for me, it took a lot of practice, courage, and comfort with being wrong to ask what might seem to be more intrusive questions or offer more intrusive suggestions. So, I totally get your point about:

but I have hesitated to broach the subject with someone who doesn't know how well I understand the struggle, who may be afraid that I will be harsh or judgemental, and when I am afraid that he will never be able to look at me again.

As for the other side of it...I was right there with you all as a bochur. "What is he going to think about me if I tell him that?" I had a lot of pride. Not necessarily unhealthy pride. I wanted to be seen as a masmid. The guy who is always on time for davening. Good middos. "Oh, by the way, rebbi, I also can't go four days of Bein HaZmanim without viewing pornography and masturbating." Obviously, that is the wrong attitude. Ideally, if someone goes to the rebbi and says, "rebbe, I want to do the ratzon Hashem, but I am having a hard time with this aspect and I need help," that rebbi should kiss him on the head. That is a mevakesh Hashem.

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Re: A letter to my Rebbi

Posted by Muttel - 06 Jun 2024 22:33

@chosemyschem and everyone else here - something happened today that may make us feel

better. It may give us hope and allow us to pacify our inner child that has suffered far too long in one way or another.

I'm a Rebbi and a talmid came to me yesterday asking for permission (bless him for doing that!) to watch movies this off shabbos. It became apparent that he struggled with masturbation, and he also owned up to watching porn since he's 12. I took the opposite approach of choosemyshem's Rebbi and had a long talk with him today - essentially giving him the talk I got from HHM (minus marriage related advice) along with the advice of many others here.

He was flabbergasted at the tools and the idea of living "trigger free". I'll keep everyone posted on his shteigen, but know that our falls can help others..... even the very young (19).....

have a great night!

Muttel

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