The great object in life is Sensation — to feel that we exist, even though in pain; it is this “craving void” which drives us to gaming, to battle, to travel, to intemperate but keenly felt pursuits of every description whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment.


I have often lusted in my heart.

Jimmy Carter, 39th President of the United States.
Many of the topics included in the Pardes curriculum are far-reaching and have broad ramifications. The intent of Pardes is to promote sensitivity and spiritual growth through exposure to a variety of Torah sources. It is not within the purview of Pardes to arrive at conclusions relevant to decisions of Halacha. Please consult your rabbi for personal decisions.

Foreword

Rabbi Yaacov Haber
Department of Jewish Education
Orthodox Union

President Bill Clinton
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President,

I'm writing to you about a problem that upsets all of us, something that you have spoken a lot about lately. There is an uprising of violence in this country. Not the type of violence that can be explained by psychological illnesses or abusive social conditions, but violence coming from the least expected places — children from good families and middle-class homes. When high school students murder their classmates in cold blood, we are horrified and confused. Then, when a wave of similar incidents sweeps the country, we realize that it was not a freak incident, but a sign of profound flaw in our lives and society.

I commend you, Mr. President, for approaching this problem with depth, for seeking underlying causes, and for trying to adjust our culture so that it does not breed violent behavior. You have rightly pointed to Hollywood, computer games and the Internet as sources of provocation, but I believe there is a fundamental mechanism in the human consciousness that we need to understand if we are to correct this problem.

The human being differs from the rest of G-d's creations. A human has a soul — a gift from G-d that enlivens the mind, senses the truth, and can rule the body. How quickly we would achieve perfection if the soul were in charge! However, the path to perfection is not so easy.
When the first man and woman ate the forbidden fruit, they created a gap — a hollow between body and soul. This hollow is the seat of all the creative urges of man — for good or for bad. It is a vacuum that cannot remain empty. For just as the mind loves to know, and the body loves to be satisfied, the space between loves to feel.

These feelings will ultimately influence the heart and body more than any other factor of the human psyche. We each choose how we fill the vacuum. Both violence and creativity all come from the same gap and fill the same gap. The gap can be filled with art, beauty, music, spirituality and holiness, which will move the heart and mind to express righteousness, happiness, sharing, and love. Or the gap can be filled with violence, lust and degradation; junk food for the soul. As one rap singer said, “When you are dead inside, even bad feelings make you feel alive.”

The Torah teaches that the eyes are the spies for the soul. They peer out into the world and search for satiation. They wish to bring home meaning. The view of the eyes becomes the vision of the heart.

I suggest that the issue of our youth is not about what they see, but about what they do not see. If negativity is only attractive to the empty soul, we must ask why the American soul is so empty. Despite the high quality of American education, a gap remains between our minds and our hearts. It is a gap that is starving to be filled with emotions, spirituality, and meaning. The eyes are scanning the whole world for goodness and hope. That is what they are really searching for on television, the Internet, and computers. Only when the gap remains empty, can Hollywood fill it with blood and guts — real and imagined.

Respectfully,
Rabbi Yaacov Haber
Director of Jewish Education,
Orthodox Union

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1 You have argued the case for stricter television ratings in your community. The town council agrees not to allow the airing of television shows that contain excessive violence or sex. You feel this is a moral victory, yet you still worry that perhaps those who set the standards are not on a high enough moral level. A representative of the town council invites you to be on the review committee that means you will have to watch the material to decide whether it is appropriate for viewing. How would you respond?

2 You just read a White House commission study that proves the negative affects that watching violence has on human behavior. It seems to ring true. That afternoon your child comes home from Hebrew School looking upset, almost horrified. You ask her what happened and she explains that in preparation for Yom HaShoah her class had watched a film about the Holocaust. Your child describes the shooting, gassings, burnings and torture and tells you how she couldn’t stop crying. You know the importance of Holocaust education, and yet....
It is customary to recite the following prayer before entering into a Torah discussion.

Shulchan Aruch O.H. 110

May it be Your will, Hashem my G-d and G-d of my fathers, that You illuminate my eyes with the light of your Torah and that You save me from all stumbling blocks and errors, whether it be in discussions of what is prohibited and what is permitted or in monetary matters, whether it be in any other Halachic decisions or just in theoretical study. I pray that I do not make any mistakes, and if I do, my study partners should not take delight in them. I pray that I should not proclaim the impure pure or the pure impure, the permitted forbidden or the forbidden permitted. I pray that I should not derive joy from the errors of my study partner. Open my eyes and allow me to see the wonders of Your Torah because it is from G-d that all wisdom comes forth, it is from His mouth that I will acquire wisdom and understanding. Amen.

Discussion Points

Is there anything wrong with fantasizing about sin?
1. Fantasizing about sinning is worse than sinning itself.

   Yoma 29a Source, p. 18

2. A person is where his thoughts are.

   R. Yisrael Baal Shem Tov; Noach 56
   Source, p. 18 Biography, p. 13

Is there anything wrong with watching the forbidden?
3. "Do not follow after your heart and after your eyes."

   Numbers 15:39 Source, p. 19

4. The heart and the eyes are the agents of the body and entice it to sin. The eyes see, the heart desires, and the body carries out the crime.

   Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar 17:6, 10:2
   Source, p. 19

5. Negative thoughts enter through the eye and influence the heart.

   That is why it is forbidden to look at the face of a wicked person (Megillah 28a), because his face exudes all the evil thoughts that are in his heart. By looking at him, they enter into one’s own heart. The opposite is true about looking in the face of a righteous person.

   Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen, Tzdikas Hatzadik 205
   Source, p. 20 Biography, p. 13

6. It is forbidden to watch bullfights, because one is watching murder.

   Talmud Avoda Zara 18b, according to the Bach
   Source, p. 21
G-d forbid that one should go to these places where people delight in watching acts of cruelty to animals. This causes a person to acquire traits of cruelty and viciousness. He destroys his own soul, and he comes to do these acts himself. This has never been the portion of the Jewish people. It is a clear mitzvah to make known the prohibition of going to these places.

Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef on the permissibility of going to bullfights, Yechave Da'as 3:67  
Source, p. 21

Visible incidences generate negative images in the human soul.

Nachmanodies, Devarim 23:14  
Source, p. 21  Biography, p. 14

To be able to think clearly, one must guard one's eyes. For the eyes only see through the power of the soul. The vision extends outward on behalf of the soul, and brings back images that are then placed in the highest levels of the psyche. These images will create confusion and damage.

Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas, Reishis Chochma, Shaar HaKedusha, chapter 8, par. 16  
Source, p. 22  Biography, p. 15

With the tiny spark of light that is found in the intellect of man, (imagination) a person can ascend to the heavens, or descend to the deepest depths. In the same moment, he can imagine the most esoteric secrets of the heavens, and perceive the most mundane aspects of earth. He can travel to the furthest corners of the world, and cross the deepest seas in an instant. He can imagine performing feats that he could not accomplish in a thousand years. With this same imagination, he can conceive brilliant insights in the holy Torah or any other area of wisdom. Therefore, it is forbidden to see or hear any evil thing. For when a person sees something forbidden, he damages his consciousness that derives from the highest holy place. And the damaged image remains fixed in the highest world as well.

Yeshod VeShoresh HaAvodah, chap. 5  
Source, p. 23

"If a person sins and deserves death, and you hang him on a tree, do not leave his carcass hanging on the tree, you must bury him."

Deuteronomy 21:22-23  
Source, p. 24

When a person sins, he abuses the spiritual force within him that could be used for good. Instead, his heart and body are energized by corrupt spirituality. This can be seen in his face. Therefore, it is forbidden to look at the face of a wicked person, for seeing the manifestation of impure spirituality will affect the viewer's own soul.

Rabbi Shmuel Adeles, MaHarSha on Megilah 28a  
Source, p. 24  Biography, p. 15

If a person looks at impure things, he draws upon himself the unclean spirit that rests upon that thing. This causes him to look at even worse things.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Koldnauer, Kav HaYashar, chap. 2  
Source, p. 25

The Anatomy of Fantasy

There is a great gap in the soul of man that stands between his knowledge and its actualization in his heart. Only when his knowledge and his heart are joined, with no space between them, will his actions reflect what he knows. But when the distance between them increases, then this empty space becomes the home of every bad thought, and every worldly desire and illusion enter in there, until they conquer the heart. This is what it means "the eye sees and the heart desires" — through the eyes, the vacuum is filled, and in that empty space, fantasy and illusions are created.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav MeEliyahu 1, p. 212  
Source, p. 25  Biography, p. 16

On the other hand...

Illicit thoughts only take hold of a heart that lacks wisdom.

Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, Hilchos Isurrei B'ah 22:21  
Source, p. 26  Biography, p. 17
15 G-d does not treat thoughts of sinning as though they were sins themselves.  
Talmud Kidushin 39b  Source, p. 27

16a “Do not follow after your heart and after your eyes.”  
Numbers 15:39  Source, p. 26

16b Does the heart influence the eyes, or do the eyes influence the heart? It written, “Do not follow after your heart and then after your eyes”? From here we learn that the heart influences the eyes.  
Sifri on Numbers  Source, p. 26

17 The eyes only see what the heart wants them to see. If the heart is impure and filled with desire, then that is what a person will see. But if the heart longs for Torah, then he will never see anything bad.  
RabbiYekusiel Halberstam, The Klausenberger Rebbe, talk on parashat Shelach 1981

18 Everything depends upon the individual and how well he knows himself. If he feels that his desires are overwhelming, and he needs to distance himself from them, he should be extra careful. But if he knows that his desires are under his control, and won’t produce illicit thoughts, then more things are permitted.  
Ritva on Talmud Kidushin 82a  Source, p. 28

19 A good person won’t do bad things.  
Talmud Brachos 29a  Source, p. 28

Biographies

The Ba’al Shem Tov (1700-1760)

Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, also known by the acronym the Besht, was the founder of the Chasidic movement. Although little first-hand knowledge is known about the Besht, one source states that he spent much of his early years outside the traditional structure of Talmudic education, but did gain much knowledge of Jewish mysticism. He went on to serve as a teacher’s assistant, elementary school instructor, and ritual slaughterer. After spending time in the Carpathian Mountains, he went through a spiritual metamorphosis, and became an itinerant healer, and after experiencing profound spiritual illuminations from heavenly teachers, went on to become a charismatic leader that attracted many of the greatest scholars of the period. This close following are the only recorders of his teachings, the Besht himself never authoring a text. His new mystical philosophy placed Kabbalah and prayer as the center of Jewish observance, through which one could come to an ecstatic awareness of the Divine Spirit in every aspect of the world. As the Besht and his followers came soon after the episode of Shabbai Zvi, they met harsh opposition from traditionalists who feared another false messianic movement.

Reb Tzadok HaKohein of Lublin (1823-1900)

Rav Tzadok, or “The Kohein” as he was known amongst Chassidim, was one of the most prolific authors in the history of the Chassidic movement. Born into a non-Chassidic rabbinic family, Rav Tzadok became famous as a child prodigy authoring articles and books, which later became classics. Later in life, Rav Tzadok became Chassidic and became a Chassid of the Izbitcher Rebbe. Having excelled in both the Chassidic and non-Chassidic world, Rav Tzadok’s writings became a synthesis of analytical logic and mysticism. Eventually, Rav Tzadok became the Rebbe of Lublin. His writings are treasured by scholars everywhere. Y.H.
Rabbi Moses Ben Nachman (Ramban)

Besides the Rambam, the Ramban was probably the greatest and most influential of the Rishonim. Born in Gerona, he remained there most of his life. Like the Rambam, he was equally distinguished in both Halacha and Hashkafa. His contributions to scholarship covered every area: his Talmudic commentaries combined the French school of analysis with the Spanish emphasis on halacha and every word he wrote was scrupulously examined in all of Spain; he wrote major works defending Alfas against the critique of Baal HaMaor and Ravad and Bahag against Rambam’s criticisms of his classification of mitzvos; he wrote masterful works of halacha such as Toras HaAdam on the laws of death and mourning including a philosophical section, Shaar HaGmul; he committed to writing derashos he had given on fundamental topics such a Rosh Hashanah, Koheles and Torah; he wrote an account of his public disputations in Barcelona with the convert Pablo Christiani in 1263; he composed poetry, but probably the most popular of his works is the Commentary on Chumash which he modestly directed to “calm the minds of those weary of galus, studying on Shabbos and Moadim.”

The Commentary is multi-dimensional including all methods of interpretation from simple pshat to esoteric Kabbala. The Ramban is not satisfied with explaining the verse at hand; he is concerned with the overall structure of the various chapters and their interconnections. Many of his explanations have become basic principles of Judaism. The Commentary is available in English translation.

The Ramban held that the mitzva of settling Eretz Yisrael applies even today and ultimately settled there himself during the last years of his life. When he arrived in Jerusalem there was hardly a minyan and he wrote “what had been the most sacred is now the most desecrated.” He organized a minyan and erected a synagogue.

Over the centuries his view on the mitzvah of settling the Land has been most influential. He also held that even mitzvos which were obligatory outside of the Holy Land did not achieve the level of shleimus as when performed within Eretz Yisrael. Looking back at the chaotic state of the Land during the periods of non-Jewish control, he interpreted Leviticus 26:32 as promising that Israel’s enemies will be unable to settle the Land. As part of the mitzva of settling the Land he included the admonition “that we not forsake the Land to others of the nations” (Numbers 33:53).

Recognizing the anguish people experience in everyday life without apparent explanation, he composed a major Commentary on the Book of Job. M.G.

Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas

Sixteenth century Kabbalist and disciple of the Master of Kabbala, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero. Rabbi Eliyahu authored the massive musar work, Reshit Chochma, which enjoyed great popularity and was reprinted many times. A number of abbreviated versions were also prepared and they, too, appeared in numerous editions. Rabbi Eliyahu and his rebbe, Rabbi Moshe, were so close, that Rabbi Chaim Vital stated that their souls were derived from the same root.

Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Edels — MaHarSha (1555-1631)

R. Shmuel wrote one of the most incisive and keenly analytical commentaries on the Talmud, Rashi and Tosafot. A model of logic and terseness it was quickly accepted and was printed in almost all editions of the Talmud. If one grasps the MaHarSha he has understood the Tosafot. R. Shmuel also wrote an extensive commentary on the aggadot of the Talmud which reflects his wide knowledge of philosophy and Kabbalah.

From the 16th to the 18th century Jewish autonomy reached its zenith in the Council of the Four Lands, through which the Jewish provinces were administered. The Council met twice a year at the Lublin and Yaroslav fairs. One of the greatest authorities of his day, the MaHarSha was an outstanding figure at the meetings of the Council. While away at the fairs he was absent from the Yeshiva when certain pages of the Talmud were studied. Because he could not benefit from the usual give and take when those pages were being studied, he refrained from printing his commentary on those pages. (See his remark at the end of the Seventh chapter of Shabbos and the Sixth chapter of Sanhedrin.)

For twenty years MaHarSha directed the Yeshiva in Posen. During this time all the expenses of the Yeshiva were assumed by his mother-in-law, Edel. In appreciation of her support he adopted her name. After her death he served as rabbi in the following prominent communities: Chelm, Lublin and Ostrog. His commentary on Aggada contains numerous references to the conditions and problems of his time. It also includes his sharp critique of contemporary failings such as wealth being a prerequisite to attaining positions in the community.

In his will, R. Yonah Landsofer admonishes his sons to be sure to carefully study Tosafot with the MaHarSha, as his commentary is true and
profound and “the spirit of G-d spoke through him for without the holy spirit it would have been impossible to compose such a work.”

The Hazon Ish had this to say about study of the MaHarSha: “I cannot refrain from pointing out that our generation has not done well in forsaking study of the MaHarSha which is a wonderful gift granted to Israel...to train them in laboring in Torah...which converts matter to spirit and body to soul... This holy book is full of profound ideas and trains a person in correct analysis. The Gaon R. Akiva Eger did not neglect any part of this work. From the day that this book was neglected the understanding of Pshat was lost and students became accustomed to facile analysis...."

On the door post of R. Shmuel’s house were inscribed the words, “No sojourner spent the night outside, my door was always open to the guest.” (Job 31:32) M.G.

Rabbi Eliezer Deisser (1891-1954)

Rabbi Desser was born into a family steeped in the musar movement founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter and he remained a musar personality for his entire life. However, his thought went considerably beyond the ordinary concerns of other musar thinkers and he integrated other systems and confronted different problems as well. Most of Rabbi Desser’s education took place at the Kelm Talmud Torah where his father had been an outstanding disciple of R. Simcha Zissel. The family resided in Homel where Eliyahu had the opportunity to meet outstanding Chabad thinkers. In 1929, he became a rabbi in London and in 1941 accepted the directorship of the Gateshead kollek. Over the years, he became familiar with Kabbalistic and Hasidic thought, particularly the thought of Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen and the Tanya.

His essays and letters have been collected in four volumes (several volumes under the title Strive for Truth have been edited and translated into English by Rabbi Aryeh Carmel). His topics include perennial questions such as free will and faith as well as contemporary problems in education, evolution and how to respond to the Holocaust.

His personal character and modesty complemented and affirmed his thought. On the last Sukkoth of his life he visited the sukkah of the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish, upon seeing Rabbi Desser, rose and rushed toward him. Not imagining that he was coming toward him, Rabbi Desser turned to the door to see who the distinguished guest was that the Chazon Ish was so honoring. M.G.

Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon — The Rambam (1135-1204)

Moyses Maimonides is known as the greatest Jewish philosopher and codifier of Jewish law in history. Born in Cordova, Spain, he was forced to flee from fanatical Moslems at the age of thirteen, where he traveled with his family to North Africa, and ten years later to Palestine. As a result of the devastation left by the Crusaders, Palestine was virtually uninhabitable, forcing the family to move to Fostat (current day Cairo). Throughout these journeys, the young Maimonides had concentrated on Torah studies under the guidance of his father, and by the time he reached Fostat had become a famous scholar. Supported by his merchant brother, the Rambam was able to write copiously, gaining international acclaim in both Jewish and secular fields of knowledge. After the tragic death of his brother, the responsibility of supporting his family fell on the Rambam’s shoulders, and through his fame he was appointed chief physician of the Sultan. Despite the immense workload that was required, not only with his responsibilities to the royal family, but to the entire Egyptian community as the official Nagid (royally appointed leader), and to the halachic questions of world Jewry known as responsa, the Rambam was remarkably able to complete some of his greatest Jewish works, including his philosophical work The Guide for the Perplexed and his magnum opus the Mishna Torah — the great codification of all Jewish law. While he was considered an undisputed leader of world Jewry at the time, there was bitter opposition to much of his works because they incorporated much of Aristotelian philosophy that went against the traditional purist ideology of much of Ashkenazic Jewry, and others believed his codifications would make much of the role of the rabbi and the oral tradition obsolete. M.G.
Sources

1.
Yoma 29a

2.
R. Yisrael Baal Shem Tov; Noach 56

3.
Numbers 15:39

4.
Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar 17:6, 10:2
5. 

Rabbi Tsoddik HaKohen, Tsidkas Hatzadik 205

6. 

Talmud Avoda Zara 18b, according to the Bach

7. 

Rabbi Ovdiah Yosef, Yehave Da’as 3:67

8. 

Nachmanides, Devarim 23:14

VIOLENCE
9.

Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas, Reishis Chochmah, Shaar HaKedusha, 8:16

10.

Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah, chap. 5

VIOLENCE 23
11a.
Deuteronomy 21:22-23

11b.
Rabbi Shmuel Adeles, Maharsha on Megilah 28a

12.
Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Koldnauer, Kav HaYashar, chap. 2

13.
Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav MeEliyahu 1, p. 212
14.
Maimonides, Mishnah Torah, Hilchos Isurrei Bi'ah 22:21

15.
Talmud Kidushin 39b

tongia rebi eykup amor alin
lcl kel matzor emzorach echabav
batarot shamir schelat ba'al
shailim hitzot hashemim shel
be baykod av u'mosft
lamsu irimkor demir moladu
yekuf kel b'iluha kek bim
lamsu iseb kel derakhami dem
hir shemor le'avod ale
labicha hama le'gevil
uvelhal lebeer la'al hame
bnul hahem beymotim
enel mit ham echom zohavim
sheh zeh yekuf erim hana
shel zeh aleyu dimk la
lotzom shevulim torb lotzom
yirimor demir lotzom shevulim
aror olinera la'ol mift hoh
r, eykup mousa(h) olinera
mof erer be'ehadah hoh melufom
recha alin kehiah melufom
lamesha olimera mof erer be'ehadah
beykup hoh olimera lotzom
tom(ah) hahem beyt yisrael balmem
aino gev hek kemar a
sela derec shevul derah baha
ulema aman la'ol anigal mofier
ulula by hikul del la'im
lid mehohor.
18.
Ritva on Talmud Kidushin 82a

19.
Talmud Brachos 29a

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