Caught In The Act

Contributed by Michael
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Question:To my chagrin, on several occasions I have entered adult sites on the Internet. Last week, my wife found out and reacted with a ton of anger and disgust. I tried to talk to her and explain, but she is unwilling to listen. She has even mentioned divorce. We have two children, and I find myself in dire need of advice.

Answer:

(By Rabbi Elakym Levanon, Rosh Yeshiva, Elon Moreh and Rabbi of the community)

In your question, you focus on your wife's reaction to your moral decline, and on the friction that has developed between you. However, the truth of the matter is, first you should be focusing on yourself, to discover how you allowed yourself, not only to fall into forbidden things on the Internet, but also how you are speeding down a one-way abyss.

You should know that everything stems from being drawn after your imagination, which seduces a person to embark on a voyage that goes nowhere. As the head of a family, you must remember that your most valuable treasure is your family, your wife and children. These are the foundation stones of your life, and you must deepen your connection to them, and increase your love for them, and in so doing come to overcome and turn off the destructive pull of imagination that has taken a hold of you.

Gazing at forbidden images is similar to the addiction to alcohol and drugs, which extract a person from the path of constructive living to a road without a future and without any positive value, to a way that is revolting to G-d and to the moral sensibilities of man, to what our Sages have termed an, "evil in the eyes of G-d and mankind." Therefore, your first goal must be to strengthen yourself for your family.

Regarding the damage to your marriage relationship, as a husband and father of the house, you must clarify what is your role and standing in the house. The Rambam, in the preface to his commentary on the Mishna, asks why was the Mishna of "Avot" (Ethics of the Fathers) placed next to the group of Mishnas called, "Nezikim," which deal with damages. The Mishna of Avot deals with the perfection of character traits, both on a personal level, between man and his fellow man, and between man and G-d. The Mishnas of Nezikim, on the other hand, deal with money and property matters and the like.

The Ramban explains that the Mishnas of Nezekim are especially for judges who must judge in money matters, damages, and their punishments. When a regular person fails to walk in a straight and honest path, the damage is limited to himself and his immediate surroundings. But if a judge corrupts his ways, he causes damage to the population at large. For this reason, in compiling the order of the Mishna, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi placed the tractate of Avot after Nezikim, in order to inspire judges toward personal improvement. So too, the transgressions of a man who is the head of a family, affect not only himself, but cause damage to his whole family. Your obligation is to take responsibility, and this will lead you to the emotional, psychological, and spiritual strengthening that you need.

In your role as head of the family, your task is to be a pillar of support for your wife. A wife needs and wants her husband to be even stronger than she is. She looks to him to lead her, with his head held high, throughout the pathways of life.

When the man of the house falls into evil ways, he undermines the foundations of the house, and takes the floor out from beneath the feet of his wife, so to speak.

Her support system collapses and she experiences a terrible vulnerability. A husband must also take into consideration the loss of faith between him and his wife that his actions cause. If until now, she relied on you for strength and emotional support, the moment you engage in unwholesome practices, especially since you were trying to hide this from her, the basic trust between a husband and wife is shattered. A breach of trust is something that causes a deep, bloody wound that can take years to heal and to rebuild anew.

I have written such a long response to alert you to recognize all of the factors at play: the need to redirect the power of the imagination; your standing as head of your family; your obligation to be an unwavering source of support to your family; and the great work needed to restore your wife's trust.

If, with this understanding, you approach your wife to speak about these matters, in order to continue together on a lifetime of building, I believe that she will listen to you and be happy to restore the fruitful connection so important to both of you and your children. Be strong and be brave. Chazak v'amatz!

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