



Letter to Shungob 11

My Dear Shungob,

I read in your last letter how you would like to persuade your patient to begin a new sinful habit. But is it true that you tried to do so by having one of his classmates directly tell him to? Idiot! Do you not know yet that that if he is directly confronted with the possibility of a new habit, he will immediately turn it down? Forgive my harshness, but that is not the way to go about this temptation. I am sorry to say that most of the humans are not dull-witted enough to accept a sin at face-value.

There are several undercover ways in which you can start your patient in this new habit, but let me suggest one: have him visit the movie theater. I have read reports written by our Evil-Education department, down in the sixth hell, that they have been able to teach humans more about sin through the films produced in the past seventy or so years than by all the books and pictures of humankind's previous existence. This is a very impressive advancement, Shungob. You see, in the past, we were only able to communicate with humans individually—each devil took its own victim. But now, with the creative distortion of technology reckoned by our Evil-Education crew, we can communicate to them on a much larger-scale. The value of the movie theater should not be underestimated, and I am sure that you will make good use of it.

The greatest advantage of having your patient see a film is not the mere exposure to sinful images, but more importantly, a subtle distortion of reality. You see, as your patient sits before the movie screen, he begins to believe that what he is seeing is how real life actually is. This is key. Have him see a film in which a character goes about doing all sorts of foul and sordid things but without experiencing any real consequences. For example, have the main character (the more famous, the better) flirt with girls, get into fighting sprawls, drink alcohol, and do a thousand others things while his life still seems to go on without any major problems. Thus, your patient will believe that he too can get away with such things without incurring the consequences. This is effective for the younger generation too. We have made many movies in which the young actors kiss and touch and "fall in love" and have all their romantic dreams realized; and to our delight, the younger generation of humans watch these films with their minds swimming and their reason drowning and their sense of reality dissipated to the air. Then, when they try to imitate the actors, they are hit with a rude awakening—all the supposed love and joy are not really there. But luckily, the young ones barely ever learn from their mistakes.

You might ask, why in the world do the humans imitate the actors in the first place if all they are doing is pretending? Well, don't you know that the actors who take part in creating the films—which they call "movie stars"—are considered role models for the general public? And for a reason I do not quite understand, it is considered good taste among the humans to imitate them. They see these role models as living the "real life," when it is precisely they who spend their entire careers acting made-up and fictitious lives. But do not let your patient see the absurdity in this; keep him in a mental stupor so that he imitates them without resistance.



But on the other hand, I do not want to down-play the importance of directly sinful images—they can be used to your advantage just as well if you are clever about it. Here is the traditional means. As he sits watching the film, make him believe that he is really enjoying it and that he is maybe even benefitting from it. Then, when you insert a sinful image every now or then, he will graciously excuse it with the reasoning that he cannot give up the entire film just for this one image. Hopefully, it will take him about ten minutes to forget about the image; once he has forgotten it, stick him with another. In this way, if the movie is two hours long, you will have succeeded in presenting him with at twelve sinful images without his objection. Then, you reap the harvest that night (and any other night you wish): as he goes to bed and shuts his eyes, cut out all the scenes which occurred between the images and present him with a chain of just the sinful images, one after the other. He will be shocked and wonder where such great temptations came from, and he will probably not attribute them to the film if your attack is gradual enough.

But there is a danger: your patient especially has the disorder of turning his eyes away whenever he sees a bad sight. This can be dealt with. If he begins to feel uneasy during a temptation scene, you must convince him that the thought of leaving the movie in the middle is just absurd. Appeal to his sense of embarrassment or laziness or whatever; just keep him in his seat. Imagine what would happen to the other people around him if he got up and left in the middle of a bad scene? their consciences might be pricked, and they would be made aware that what they are seeing, they really should not see. And to see him get up and leave might embolden them to do the same! We do not want that to happen, my dear Shumgeh. We need to keep things as they are: a crowd of semi-conscious humans laughing like play-dolls at every meaningless joke and staring intently at every detestable image. I strongly believe that, behind television, cinema is the strongest brainwashing tool we have.

There are many other things I would like to tell you about the value of the cinema, Shumgeh, but I will make only one more comment. A while back, those measly humans caught on to what we were doing—how we used cinema to spread our abysmal doctrine throughout the world and all. So they decided to institute a rather pitiful code to warn the viewers as to what was moral and what was not. Before the code, we had most of our best temptations put into what they now call “R” films. But the human vermin stopped allowing their children to attend the “R” films; so our Misleading-Media department has easily overcome this obstacle by slightly modifying the temptations to fit the “PG-13” category. This category seems to be the most popular nowadays, so we have dedicated the bulk of our efforts on it. And if the humans ever decide to get moral on us and abandon PG-13 films, we will then shift our attention to the PG category. We go with the flow. My advice to you: try to keep your patient away from the “R” movies, for fear that his sense of morality be awoken and he decide to stop attending the cinema. Instead, it would be better if he were to continually attend the “PG-13” films: where he is exposed to a continuous array of half-severe, but half-noticeable, temptations.

*Your Faithful Teacher,
Quagmire*