

מסילת ישרים

UNEDITED INTERNET EDITION

MESILLAS YESHARIM

PREFACE | INTRO | ZEHIRUS

Adapted From The Hebrew Shiurim Of "Mesillas Yesharim"

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מסילת ישרים. מבוא

The Rov's Preface to Mesillas Yesharim

It has become popular today to use *sefarim* that shorten everything for us and make everything brief, but, we must learn Torah for its source.

There are some *mussar sefarim* that are arranged according to topic, in alphabetical order of the *Aleph Beis*. This cannot provide a formula for Avodas Hashem; it isn't structured.

People often want to know what to do "*l'maaseh*" (practically speaking) how to serve Hashem, so they are attracted to such sefarim that take away all the hard work we need. Mussar requires in-depth study, no less than Gemara. To just know "what to do" isn't enough. If someone works all day at a job and he doesn't have the time, that's one thing, but a Ben Torah has no excuse.

Why must Mussar be learned in-depth?

In order to be affected by the Torah, we need to know about our soul. Torah is like the water we need to live on, but we need to contain it somewhere. With a properly built soul, the Torah can be held in us and then nourish us. The "water" has to be clean, though. When a person has bad middos, his "water" of Torah is contaminated, and such Torah will not have its desired effect on a person.

Middos are the foundation. Learning Torah with unrefined middos simply doesn't help a person. It's not that there is Torah and "also" Mussar; they go hand in hand. Avodas Hashem is not proper "etiquette" or manners. Without learning Mussar, we won't have good Middos, and we will not become a container to hold the Torah we learn.

We will attempt to learn sefer *Mesillas Yesharim*; the Vilna Gaon said it is the only sefer which can guide a person step-after-step to improve. Although there are other great classical sefarim that were written before it, such as *Chovos HaLevovos* and *Shaarei Teshuvah*, these sefarim do not give a step-after-step approach. Only *Mesillas Yesharim* offers such a formula.

מסילת ישרים. הקדמה.

Introduction of the Mesillas Yesharim

Why Do We Forget Mussar?

The Ramchal begins *sefer Mesillas Yesharim* with, “There is nothing new here; it is just to remind you what has been forgotten.” Why are these matters forgotten? You don’t forget to eat breakfast or put on Tefillin! So why do people forget the matters here? If it’s because people often forget about spirituality -- due to our physicality -- that can’t be the reason, because no one forgets other spiritual matters, such as putting on Tefillin. We are not unlearned people who never heard of these matters; we do know them, so why do we forget them?

We usually don’t run to go cash a check. But if we would know that it’s a \$10,000 check, we would run to cash it. If we look at ourselves like a \$10 check, we’ll forget about ourselves, but once we become aware of our real value, we wouldn’t forget – just like a person wouldn’t forget to cash a \$10,000 check.

It is not only our generation which is unaware of the importance of the “heart” and the middos. The Chovos HaLevovos already spoke about this problem and he too found it mind-boggling. How could it be that we forget matters of mussar, when the Torah and Chazal are full of Mussar??

So it’s an age-old problem; it is not because of our times. It is an internal kind of problem that has been around for a long time.

No one forgets what’s important. It seems like building up our soul is a side matter. You can find a *Ben Torah* who will strive hard to become a *Dayan*, and he learns *Choshen Mishpat* intensely for two years...with no time to even learn Mussar. His *Semichah* certificate to him is more important than working on himself, so he usually forgets to work on himself, and he pushes it off. Such people skip the first, basic step they need.

If you consider the matters here important, you’ll have no problem remembering it – you’ll want to remember it, just like you remember an important telephone number. Learn this sefer in order to remember it.

Using Our Heart To Remember

The Ramchal is saying that we forget these things. How do we come to remember them?

Some people have a superficial method in which they jot down notes on a paper and pull it out to remember it. But there is a more inner way – we will explain.

How do we remember things? There are two ways – one way is through our *seichel* (mind), and the other way is through our *lev* (heart). Let's say a person remembers his family; how does he remember them? Through his brain?? Hopefully not. An emotionally healthy person remembers his family because he loves them – he uses his heart to remember things that are important.

Sometimes we remember things only from our brain and not from our heart, but the true way to remember something is to use our heart. I once knew someone who memorized an entire phone book – but what is the point of this?! Such memory only involves the brain. To remember something important, we need to make use of our heart.

Let's think: when we remember something, are we using mostly our brain or our heart? You don't "remember" to eat breakfast, because it's so important. Spiritual matters should be so important to us that we shouldn't need our "brain" to remember it. It should be your life. That is how you "remember" with your heart – when something is life to you, it's internal.

A person might learn the laws of meat and milk and take a test on it, but then he forgets it all after. Why? It is because he only used his brain to remember the material. He didn't use his heart. The brain's memory is only superficial and doesn't last. We even find that one is not considered Halachically "dead" unless his heart has ceased to function; being brain-dead, though, is not yet death. This shows us that the heart is the essence of our life, while our brain is not.

Brain Memory Vs. Heart Memory

There is a vast difference between Torah you learn with your brain or your heart. We need our heart to remember what's important. We know that a person has to learn mussar and work on himself; why is this a necessary part in one's learning? We can explain.

Some people really absorb their learning, and the Torah is a part of them. It is written, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" Such people merit this because they learned Torah through their heart. Their hearts were in it.

Other learn very well, but it's only because they were born very smart or with a good memory. If these people would study in secular universities, they would also be immersed...their learning has nothing to do with the fact that they are learning Torah. It's just that they're bright or intellectually gifted.

Our Gedolim, even when they got very old and sick, still didn't forget their learning. This was even after their physical memory began to wane. The memory of their learning was retained in their heart. By contrast, when people only remember their learning from their brain, eventually the learning is forgotten. Of course, some holiness is still left in the person, due to the imprint left from the Torah while he learned it. But he loses his Torah knowledge, because all his Torah was only in his brain, and not in his heart.

Middos are called “Avodas HaLev” – service of the heart. It is not memory. But it accomplishes just as much as memory! If a person worked on his middos, he purifies his heart, and then he absorbs the Torah he learns.

Importance of Mussar (and a Warning)

A person thus has to make sure his heart is being used as a tool to receive the light of his Torah learning. His heart has to be in it – not just his thoughts.

We do not mean that one has to learn sefer Mesillas Yesharim for ten hours a day – *chas v’shalom!* It is just that we should understand that during the time we learn mussar (which should ideally be 30 minutes a day), we need to know that Mussar is an inseparable part of our learning. The Vilna Gaon said that Mussar is not considered an interruption of his learning, although he was known to never interrupt his learning for anything.

We daven, “Open my heart to Your Torah,” not “Open my brain to Your Torah”....

Reviewing with your Heart

The Mesillas Yesharim continues: “You, the reader, will not find anything new here in your mind.” Note that he only says that your “mind” will find nothing new here – it sounds like your “heart” will, though!

He continues to write that you will only gain from this sefer if you review it. Why is reviewing helpful?

Reviewing is helpful, as we can see even from worldly matters. But reviewing matters of Torah and mussar is not the same kind of reviewing that one does when he studies for a test in school. To review Mussar, it cannot be done in the same way one studies for an exam, although it is being used for a spiritual purpose. Such reviewing doesn’t affect the heart. We must remember, and review, Torah and mussar – using our heart, not our brain.

We will try to explain the world of spirituality, and then we will see why it is forgotten from us. We will also explain, with the help of Hashem, how we can remember these matters.

Ruchniyus | Spirituality Is Real

People usually don’t know what *ruchniyus* (spirituality) is. It is very vague to us; we have heard a little here and a little there, but that’s all we know.

Some people think they understand what *ruchniyus* is about. They think that *ruchniyus* is to have a good *davening*, or aspirations for holiness. Of course, we believe in *ruchniyus*, but the problem is that we don't see how *ruchniyus* is a reality.

How do we enter the inner world of *ruchniyus*?

Yes, we need to seek advice when it comes to *ruchniyus*, but there is a basic step we must all have that comes even before we seek advice. That is that we need to be mature and realistic. We need to realize that *ruchniyus* is a reality. The basis is to be realistic. Many people have aspirations for growth, but they fail, because they aren't realistic. Our aspirations aren't enough; they need stability. Our Emunah also has to be stable, or else we will act disconnected from reality.

Let's say a person starts making various improvements in his Avodas Hashem, and as a result, he doesn't keep a certain Halachah. This is a sign that his Avodas Hashem is not real Avodas Hashem; it's not in line with Torah. First, always see if what you're doing is keeping with the Torah. If it is, you can then begin to work on your Emunah, but if not, then you can't.

When you want to deepen your Avodas Hashem, first ask yourself: Are my aspirations truthful? Am I being realistic? Do I consider *ruchniyus* to be absolutely real?

All failures in Avodas Hashem come from not being unrealistic expectations in one's Avodas Hashem.

You Need An Inner Sense

How can a person consider *ruchniyus* to be real?

There are two methods: through the brain, and through the heart. The brain is a superficial way to perceive something. Your brain can know all the facts, but that still doesn't mean you consider the facts to be reality. It is only your heart which perceives something as reality.

Your heart perceives something through what is called "intuition." There are even some non-Jews who have it – there are people who have an inner sense about what to do in their business to make it successful; it is an ability in one's soul to sense certain realities. The heart not only feels emotions – it can feel reality.

A person can "know" something very well, yet he's in denial about it. His heart doesn't feel its reality. To illustrate, a widow knows intellectually that her husband has passed away, but she still doesn't feel that he's gone, because she is in denial. She knows it in her head, but her heart has not yet considered his death to be reality.

When a person only knows something with his brain but he's not yet aware of its reality, he is actually disconnected from reality. A check that bounces is a physical example of disconnection – the person doesn't honor his check because he's sort of in denial about their

reality. Avodas Hashem is the same: a person has to first be realistic about his expectations. You have to have “your feet on the ground” first.

A person thinks he knows a *masechta* of Gemara, but when he is asked about it, he suddenly can find that he doesn't remember a thing. His head feels like a cloud; he is full of random information. Why did he ever think he knew it in the first place? It is because his heart wasn't connected to reality.

Many times a person has a problem in spirituality, but it's actually a physical problem. For example, let's say someone has a problem of impulsive spending. He will not succeed in matters of *ruchniyus*, because he's not aware of reality. There are also people who forget they borrowed money or gave a pledge; such problems are not only physical problems, but they hamper one's Avodas Hashem, because when a person is disconnected from reality, he is already held back from the start.

There are people who lay in bed in the morning and miss the time to say *Kerias Shema* and to daven. This seems like a problem with *ruchniyus*, but the problem starts before: such people are not in touch with reality.

The fact that our heart is missing is a problem that started way before we begin to improve our *ruchniyus*. It is more about a disconnection from reality. We can bring many more examples, but the point is that when a person is disconnected from reality, he cannot begin to use his heart to improve in *ruchniyus*.

There are people who are very immersed in learning Torah, and when they walk in the street, they are totally spaced out about what's going on around them, and it is not because they have reached a high level in guarding their eyes from impure sights. They are simply absorbed in themselves! They might know some Torah, but they aren't acting properly – they are disconnected from reality. They are obviously learning Torah only from their intellect, but not from their heart.

What Do You Want From Me...!

A person can only start learning Mussar if he sees that he can make Gemara and Halacha practical in his life.

Chazal say that “Hashem wants the heart.” Many people know of this statement and justify themselves, complaining: “My heart is closed. What does Hashem want from me?!”

The root of the problem is not because these people aren't cut out for mussar or because they don't have good middos. It starts in the *beis midrash* – during learning!

A person complains that he has bad middos, such as evil lusts or jealousy. He thinks, "I know it's bad, but what can I do? I can't control it." This isn't a problem that has to do with the mind. It shows that the heart isn't there. The heart can internalize knowledge, but without accessing the heart, a person just "knows" that something is wrong, yet this doesn't affect him one bit. He needs a heart.

"Being Smart" Isn't Everything

Some people are smart and quick-witted, while others aren't so sharp. A person who is very quick-witted actually has a gift from Hashem; some get this through learning Torah, but there are those who are born with it naturally. That is one kind of person we find. Others aren't that smart from when they were born. Most people, in either case, go their whole life with the way they were born.

Someone who isn't so sharp and clever isn't interested in using his *seichel*\intellect, because he feels like it's not "him." He finds learning Torah to be too difficult and considers himself to have some learning disability. Others learn anyway, although they know they aren't smart, because they know deep down that learning Torah is important. But there are others who learn Torah because they are very smart, and they enjoy the intellectual stimulation of learning Torah. Such people would learn Torah even if there's no mitzvah to learn Torah, because they find Torah to be such an enjoyable thing to know. The point is that all types of people naturally learn Torah their whole life based on the personality they were born with – unless they work on themselves.

The kind of person who only learns Torah out of intellectual stimulation definitely has no deep connection to the Torah. He is attracted to the thinking of it, and he might even pursue becoming a Dayan and become an expert in the laws of *Choshen Mishpat* – after all, the monetary laws of the Torah bring out his intellectual prowess...of course, it's wonderful to use one's mind for the Torah, but there is more to learning Torah. The simple knowledge contained in the Torah isn't everything – there are also hidden, deeper parts of the Torah that we need to connect to.

The Wisdom of Internalizing

In a person, there is a mind and a heart. Those who are quick-witted and intellectual naturally excel more with their *seichel*\mind, and they are attracted to *p'shat* (simple meaning of Torah), but have no interest for *sod* (secrets of Torah). The secret parts of Torah have nothing to do with your intellect – they are heart matters. Only the heart of a person can understand deep wisdom; it is written, "My heart has seen much wisdom."

The Maggid of Mezritch said that Kaballah is not a secret – it is just a different language. It's like not being able to read Gemara because one is breaking his tongue over Aramaic. Although Kaballah is called “*sod*”, “secret”, it is really a code, because it's a language we need to learn and understand.

What is a secret? A secret is something that always remains a secret. *Sod* is the secret of a concept. In every concept, there is a secret – something we can never really understand. For example, the power of love is really a secret. We can never really understand love. It can never be fully explained. To illustrate, a child has a love for something, but it doesn't come from his intellect. Here we can see that love goes above intellect.

A person with only *seichel*\intellect has a hard time with Mussar. He doesn't see the depth in it. He tries to find contradictions in it but to no avail, and it feels dry to him. He's missing the whole point of Mussar, because Mussar is not an intellectual matter. *Seichel*\intellect alone is not enough for Avodas Hashem.

It is not possible to serve Hashem unless one combines intellect and heart together. People with *seichel* alone are usually weak in matters of the heart; they are very smart and sharp-witted, but they do not understand anything that has to do with emotions or feelings; they are emotionally cold, and it is hard to live with such a person.

Others are strong-hearted, but they are usually weak when it comes to their *seichel*, and they are weak when it comes to learning Torah and working hard at it. They sit down to learn but find that they can't get into the learning. They don't taste its enjoyment. (But if someone has even a little *seichel*, and he is pure from worldly desires, then he enjoys his learning -- not because of the mitzvah to learn Torah, but because it's enjoyable to learn Torah; he truly feels that the Torah is his life).

It is rare to find a person whose intellect and heart are balanced together. With *seichel* alone, a person's Avodas Hashem is cold and dry. There is no feeling. Yet when there is only feelings, a person sincerely wants to serve Hashem, but he doesn't know how. A person with only *seichel* thinks that a “*mussar shmuess*” is for people who work all day at a job, and he thinks, “I don't need *mussar*...”

A person with *seichel* alone knows that he needs a heart, but this knowledge doesn't affect him. He doesn't do anything to open up his heart more. Even if he understands that the heart has a role, he doesn't see why so much time needs to be spent on getting it.

The Mesillas Yesharim writes that the wisdom of Mussar is the deepest wisdom there is. When someone loves to learn Mussar or Agadta, it seems that he has no drive to learn regular Gemara, but that is only to a superficial onlooker, because really, Mussar is the deepest wisdom there is. Why indeed is it so deep?

It takes tremendous wisdom to unify the intellect with the heart. That is why Mussar is such a deep wisdom.

We can give an example. There are people who are very smart, and they even know how to help people with their problems. They know about the psychology of a man's thinking and a woman's thinking, and they know how to counsel men or women – individually. But they often do not know how to counsel a couple that comes to them for help. Why not? Don't these people know about the natures of men and women? They do, but to unify a man and a woman's differences together is a whole different kind of knowledge. You can know about a man and you can know about a woman, but to teach them how to get along in a marriage and see eye to eye is an altogether different kind of wisdom. So we see that it's a great wisdom to unify two different systems together.

That is why Mussar is so deep. It is about unifying the system of our intellect with the system of our heart, and this takes great wisdom. Even if you know all about the mind and all about the heart, knowing how to fuse them together is something else, and it is much harder to know.

Gemara is a wisdom, but it's only one kind of wisdom. It is only one side of the coin. The deepest wisdom is to know your soul, which is essentially how to unify your intellect with your heart. It's like how the sun and moon need each other to sustain the world.

Marriage is a great wisdom, because it is to know how to unify intellect with emotions. That is the purpose of marriage – to learn how to unify. When a person is having marital issues, it is a sign that he has a problem connecting his own heart to his mind.

Life is all about succeeding in making peace between the intellect and the heart. Chazal say that good intentions alone are a disaster. Using just the power of the heart can be dangerous. A caring person who doesn't know how to be an EMT can kill someone, even though he means well.

We know that there is something called *Yiras Hashem*. The meaning of “*Yiras Hashem*” is when one learns how to successfully combine his intellect with his heart. People have all heard of *Gehinnom*; why aren't people afraid of it? It is because they know about it in their minds, but they haven't internalized the concept in their heart. *Yiras Hashem* is a heart matter.

In order to reach the understanding that there is nothing but Hashem's existence, we need to combine our heart with our mind.

Of course, there is still a danger to trying to do so, but everything in life is dangerous. Life is full of dangers! Just because life is dangerous doesn't mean that we should run away from what life is about.

Only people whose mind and heart are fused together are living a harmonious kind of life.

There are people who are very immersed in learning Torah, but they also want to do *chessed* and have some feelings in their life for others. So they open up a *gemach* to do *chessed*. This is a wonderful feeling to have, but something is missing over here –why? The person is splitting up Torah and *Chessed* and saying that they are two separate things. The real attitude to have is that learning Torah also involves the heart, and doing *Chessed* also involves intellect.

When you do *chessed*, it's not entirely about feelings. It has to be a fusion of mind and emotion together, and that should be the attitude; and your learning as well should be a connection of your heart with your mind.

Hashem wants us to combine our intellect and mind together – not just to simply utilize both in our life, but that they always be fused together in one act. Unfortunately, there are people who take this to an extreme and think that the main thing is the heart, and they neglect learning Torah. But Chazal say that “an ignoramus cannot become righteous.” Without learning Torah properly, you can never become a Talmid Chochom, and you will not either become someone who serves Hashem.

Our *seichel*\intellect is built up through learning the Torah, and we need to build up our heart as well. If you do this, it will feel like a personal redemption taking place inside you.

Purity Alone Isn't Enough

There are people who want to become *tzaddikim*, but they have a problem: their hearts are open, but they aren't using any of their *seichel*. Others have a similar problem – they never think, so they always seek what to do “*l'maaseh*.”

You can find a person who goes to the *mikvah* a lot, but he doesn't learn enough Torah. He is purifying himself all day – but he's empty! There are people who are known to be future-tellers and miracle workers who help people with their problems, yet they are far from the truthful thinking of the Torah. They are not “*Daas Torah*.” They might be very pure and be very spiritual, but they have no idea what to do with their spirituality. A person goes to the *mikvah* and he can even feel holiness from it, but he doesn't do anything with this holiness.

People erroneously think that in order to be a *tzaddik*, you have to do extreme things, like to finish Tehillim three times a day without interruption. Such acts are only half of a person's job.

A person who only uses his heart and always purifies himself, never using his *seichel* at all, is incorrect. Others see how wrong he is and come to despise the entire concept of the heart, because they see this person's mistakes.

If a person goes to the *mikvah* a lot but he doesn't seek to improve his learning, he might get a lot of purity of heart, but this has nothing to do with “*Chassidus*”, which is true righteousness. The heart is important, but it cannot be everything. Many people are very good-natured and love doing kindness for others, yet they are far from *Avodas Hashem*, because they only use their heart, and they never use their *seichel*.

Forgetting the Purpose of Life...

Avodas Hashem is comprised of many aspects. There are roots and details to it. We must not get involved in the details before we know what the roots are.

The root of all our Avodas Hashem is that we only do something in order to become close to Hashem. We need to talk to Hashem more often.

The purpose of learning Torah as well is to become close to Hashem. We know that Torah is the most important mitzvah, and many people merit to sit and learn all day, but the attitude often is, “Baruch Hashem, I have the zechus to learn Torah all day.” This is still a superficial mentality. The purpose of learning Torah is to become close to Hashem! It’s not just about being able to “sit and learn” all day.

There are people who sit and learn Torah their whole life, but they have the wrong attitude about learning. They know that Torah is the most important thing, but it is not because they have an awareness that learning Torah makes you more aware of Hashem. They never wonder why they are so far from Hashem. Does a person ever feel that his *seichel* has improved since a year ago? People are learning their whole life and even listening to shiurim, but their thinking often remains unchanged, and they don’t gain a holy kind of thinking.

A person might also be very frum and keep all the mitzvos correctly, but he misses the boat if he never seeks to purify his heart and mind. A person has to examine himself to see if his thoughts have become more purified since a year ago; for example, he should wonder, “Has my thinking become more in line with the Torah?”

The Point of Sefer Mesillas Yesharim

The point of sefer Mesillas Yesharim is not to learn how to become a sharp thinker. The point is to purify the heart, and to then unify our intellect’s knowledge with our heart. Mesillas Yesharim doesn’t teach you how to think; for that we have the Torah. The point of Mesillas Yesharim is to purify the heart – to improve how we feel, and then to integrate our intellect with our heart.

Does spirituality come natural to us? Yes and no. From our body’s perspective, it is not natural, but from our soul’s perspective, it is natural. The Zohar says that we receive new soul levels as we mature and advance in Avodas Hashem.

The Key: Revealing Your Soul

Just because we don’t feel a love for Hashem doesn’t mean we don’t have it within us. We have to reveal it – how? We need to discover how much we naturally want to love Hashem.

A superficial kind of person might say, “We must disconnect ourselves from all physical love so we can come to only love Hashem.” *Chas v’shalom!* This is erroneous.

Really, we love Hashem deep down. We just need to reveal it more.

There are three ways how we can reveal the soul: exertion in learning Torah, purifying ourselves through mikvah and fasting, and combining Yiras Hashem with Ahavas Hashem. But there is something we can do which will get us straight there – if we reveal our soul. Upon revealing our soul, we will automatically come to love and fear Hashem.

Uncovering Your Natural Feelings Buried Deep In You

Our middos are only half the problem. The other half of our problem is our *Yetzer Hora*, who makes things deter us.

Why don't we naturally feel a love for Hashem? It is because we are attached to this world. But if we reveal our soul, we can detach from this world, and we will automatically come to feel our natural love for Hashem that is deep down in us.

The Greatest Wisdom

Reb Yisrael Salanter said that it's harder to break a bad *middah* than to finish Shas. This is because there is more wisdom to breaking a bad *middah* than there is to Gemara. The wisdom about our soul is the greatest, deepest wisdom.

Daas – Clarifying the Truth

How can we actually come to purify our heart? We can do it by clarifying the facts and by doing things to purify our heart. To reach our heart, we need two things: *da'as*, and doing actions that will purify us. *Daas* is to clarify to ourselves what the truth is; we also need to do the mitzvos, which will affect us more and more.

Don't Let Mussar Slacken Gemara

It's more important to first learn parts of Torah that are more practical in your life. If a person only learns matters of Avodas Hashem but he doesn't learn Gemara, he will not gain anything at all; it is not the way toward success.

Acting By Rote

There is a problem that people do things by rote. Many things that people do are simply because “That’s what my father did.” But a person has to develop a depth in his actions.

Hisbonenus: Thinking About Hashem’s Greatness

The Mesillas Yesharim says that there are two things we need: *d’veykus* (attachment to Hashem) and *hislahatus* (enthusiasm). What is the difference between enthusiasm and real attachment to Hashem? If someone is enthusiastic about Hashem, isn’t that *d’veykus*? The difference is that enthusiasm is to have a desire for something, but it is not yet attachment. When a person is enthusiastic, he runs toward what he wants, but he’s not yet connected. *D’veykus* is when you actually become connected.

We need both enthusiasm as well as *d’veykus*. How can we get them? Through *hisbonenus* – reflecting about Hashem. There are two parts to *hisbonenus*: thinking about Hashem’s *gadlus* (greatness), and thinking about Hashem’s *romemus* (exaltedness). What is the difference? *Gadlus Hashem* is to think about Hashem’s actual existence, while *Romemus Hashem* is to think about how He is greater than me, and how lowly I am compared to Him.

Romemus Hashem means that one thinks how big Hashem is, as well as how small he feels next to Hashem. Together with thinking about *Gadlus Hashem*, these two abilities together can break your body’s hold on you. Think how limited you are, and how unlimited Hashem is. It will help you break your ego and reach *d’veykus* in Hashem.

The Root of All Problems: Imagination

The Ramchal continues: “How will we purify our thoughts if we never try to clean our defects which come from our body?”

There are three kinds of detrimental thoughts that come from our physical body: lusts, heresy, and imagination. Usually, our problems stem from imagination. Although lusts and heresy also exist, those kind of evil thoughts are usually not our problem. Our problems are usually coming from imagination. Many times we imagine that we are missing something in life, but it’s all in our imagination. People have all kinds of things they want, and they are all coming from their imagination. The imagination convinces a person that we need this and that.

People spend a lot of time worrying about the future, especially financial concerns. Most of the day is spent on imaginative thoughts. If you think about it, it’s pointless to think about the future. It isn’t constructive at all. Why not? It’s all imagination; it’s not a real thought worth thinking about. Rav Dessler zt”l writes that only the present moment is reality; to think about the future, he writes, is all in your imagination. The future isn’t here yet; why are you thinking about it? It’s all imagination.

Imagination causes a wide array of problems in our life. Even people immersed in learning Torah are affected by imagination in a very detrimental way. A person is learning a Masechta of Gemara, and instead of enjoying it, he keeps imagining when he will make a *siyum* on it already, and this mars his present enjoyment.

Our main job is thus to overcome our imagination! We need to build up our true mind, which are the real thoughts we need to have. Purifying our mind is essentially to get rid of our imagination, which is leading our thoughts, unless we work to uproot it.

Yashrus – Being “Straight Minded”

The Ramchal continues that we must perfect our *middos*.

How do work on our middos? The Ramchal says we need to have *yashrus* – to be “straight” minded. In other words, we need to balance each *middah*. We need balance, all the time. If a person loves the Torah, but he doesn’t love Hashem, this is a clear example of being off-balance.

Thinking In-Depth

The Ramchal continues that if we would only think more in-depth, we would be able to improve ourselves.

Herein lays a great fundamental: we need to be able to learn something in-depth. Learning in-depth requires a lot of patience. There are people who want to publish a sefer of their Torah thoughts, but they don’t have any patience to learn a *sugya* of Gemara in-depth. If you don’t have the patience to clarify Gemara, don’t put out a sefer! There are many people who print their “ideas” on the weekly *parsha* without even thinking into what they are learning....

The Intellect Vs. The Heart

There are two general methods how to serve Hashem – one way is through the intellect, and the other way is through the heart. This is an old discussion from many years ago. The method of the *Chovos HaLevovos* is to use your intellect to become close to Hashem and serve Him, but other great leaders held that it is better to make use of the heart.

But the *Mesillas Yesharim* here states that the intellect alone will not be enough for us, and we need to internalize our mind’s knowledge into our hearts.

Intellect Must Precede Heart

A very big problem is that people don't have enough *iyun* (in-depth thought). When people don't think enough, their *seichel* is weak, and they never even get to the starting point. But we need *seichel* first, before we begin to improve our heart. This we need to think more and analyze into what's important. When a person develops his mind more and then he internalizes it in his heart, he has *Yiras Hashem*.

Practically speaking, a person has to first learn very difficult *sugyos* of Gemara that make him think and use his *seichel*. Only after this can one attempt to learn about matters of *Yiras Hashem*, which involve the heart.

If You Have Only 30 Minutes A Day To Learn

Let's say a person only has a half hour a day to learn – what he should learn then? Should he learn Gemara or Halacha, or Mussar?

Reb Yisrael Salanter zt"l said Mussar! Why? Because if you learn Mussar, you will suddenly find time that you have time to also learn Gemara and Halacha....

The Solution to Desires

The Ramchal says that we must work to internalize our mind's knowledge.

Why is it so important to internalize? A person can know something very well with his mind, but it doesn't affect him. A very good example of this is a smoker. A smoker knows very well that smoking is unhealthy; why can't he stop? The answer is that he knows its unhealthy only in his mind, but his heart hasn't internalizes the truth yet.

When a person has *taavos* (evil desires), it seems that his desires are holding him back from what he knows is the right thing. But that's not the real reason. It's really because the person doesn't even know what he's doing wrong, because he hasn't internalized that it's bad.

What can a person do about this? A person needs to inspire himself. The way to inspire yourself is to learn the Torah; if a person finds himself falling to a certain sin, he should learn very well about that sin, and this will inspire him to internalize his knowledge, and he will then become aware of why the sin is so bad.

Being Clever

There is a good example to explain this concept.

Rav Dessler zt”l gave up smoking, and he came up with a creative way to do so. He admitted to his students that he really wants to stop smoking, but it’s very hard for him to stop, because he’s addicted to it. As soon as he told his students, he stopped smoking -- cold turkey! How did he do this? He explained that he has a very big desire to smoke, but he has an even bigger desire: that he not lose the respect of his students, since he had told them that he is committed to giving up smoking. He replaced one desire for a bigger desire – the desire for respect. Since he knew that his respect was at stake if he doesn’t keep his word, it wasn’t worth it for him to smoke.

It’s not that he didn’t have a desire to smoke. He had the desire, but he switched it for an even bigger desire.

What he did was to use the innate power of *pikchus* (to be clever). That is what the Ramchal is really advising – to use your “cleverness” in order to internalize your knowledge.

Think About Hashem Every Day

The Ramchal says that there are five parts to our perfection: *yirah*, following Hashem’s ways, *ahavah*, *shleimus halev*, and *shemiras hamitzvos*.

There are three kinds of *yirah* (fear of Hashem): *yiras ha’onesh*, *yiras hakavod*, and *yiras haromemus*.

Why is that we don’t fear Hashem in the same way that we fear a king? We don’t think about Hashem enough, so we aren’t aware of Him. What, indeed, can we think about Hashem? What does it mean to think about Hashem? Think simply that Hashem is next to you.

It’s possible that a person is learning Torah the entire day, yet he never even once thinks about Hashem. He is so immersed in his learning that he forgets even Hashem. What can we do about this problem?

First, remember Hashem when you daven in the morning. Then, think of Hashem more throughout the day.

The Goal: Becoming Close to Hashem

The Ramchal then quotes Chazal, who say that just as Hashem is merciful, so must we be merciful. Why do we need good middos? What is the goal of having good middos?

The reason why we work on our middos is not only about self-improvement. It is more than that. It is because that will help us become close to Hashem – that is what should be our goal. We aren’t working on our middos so we can improve our middos – the goal should be because we want closeness to Hashem.

Receiving Love Vs. Giving Love

The Ramchal then discusses love of Hashem.

When people learn about Ahavas Hashem and that you have to love Hashem, they encounter a problem: I myself don't even feel so loved! People are so busy trying to get love that's missing in their life, and they aren't that interested in loving Hashem, because they'd rather "get" love than "give" love. But the truth about life is that you can never "get" love. If a person seeks to receive love from others, the sad reality is that he will never get it, because love is not something you "get" – it is something you "give"! And if you "give" love, you will "get" it.

When people are busy trying to receive love rather than give it, they become so self-absorbed in their ego. The person who seeks love isn't interested in forming a connection with another person – he just wants to feel "love" from another person. He wants to be loved, but he isn't really interested in forming a connection with someone else. When a person seeks love from someone, the other person doesn't feel a love for him, and there will never be any love formed between them. The person is just trying to "take" from the other person, and this of course does not cause love. This is the very sad reality of people who feel unloved and are seeking love from others.

Maybe a person will say, "Okay, I hear that. I have to give love also instead of always trying to receive it. But why can't I have both at the same time? I want to give love, but I also want to be loved as well." But such an attitude is still a mistake. As long as a person still wants to be loved, he cannot ever really give over love to others. So the only way is to give up trying to be loved, and instead decide that you will only try to give love.

Unity of the Jewish People

What is the meaning of Ahavas Yisrael – to love the Jewish people? It means to become one with all Jews. It is to relinquish your ego and instead integrate yourself with the entire Jewish people. It is to realize that the real "You" is actually part of a much greater picture. You don't exist for yourself – you are part of one collective essence: Klal Yisrael. That is "you."

In the future Redemption, even the non-Jews will become one with the Jewish people. There will be a unity throughout the universe. Although as a rule, Esav hates Yaakov – that is only for the time being. In the future, there will be total unity. The same goes for Yishmael and Yitzchok – their descendants will all be unified!

It is only nowadays that everything seems so separate and apart from each other. But in the future, unity will be revealed, and it will be revealed that all the seventy nations of the world are really one with the Jewish people, and because of this, they will all be driven to serve the Creator.

Purifying Our Desires

The inner point of life is to desire only Hashem and what He wants. All extraneous desires which we have are thus directly getting in the way of the true desire, which is to want only what Hashem wants. How can we purify our desires?

The Ramchal says that the way is through Torah and mitzvos, which purify the body.

The Four Ways To Serve Hashem

Hashem created the world with three lines (“*kavin*”): a right line, a left line and a middle line. The right line is *chessed* (kindness), the left line is *din* (strict judgment), and the middle line, which is *rachamim* (compassion). The right and left paths are both extreme to either side, while the middle path is the balanced blend between both paths. These are three different ways how He runs the world. The Torah is the middle path, which includes both the right and left paths; there are many other “side paths” that it’s possible to take, such as fasting and immersing in the snow, which are examples of the right path of *chessed*, all being extreme actions of devotion. The Kotzker Rebbe zt”l said that “all ways are dangerous”, alluding to extreme acts of pioussness, “except for the path of the Torah, which is the safest path to take.” Torah is the middle path, and it is also the path which the Mesillas Yesharim is taking.

There is actually a fourth way – *Mesirus Nefesh*. When a person is prepared to give up his life for Hashem, he jumps by all the rungs of the ladder and gets straight to the end point. We find this from Rabbi Elazer ben Durdaya, who did Teshuvah and immediately received Olam HaBa. *Mesirus Nefesh* enables one to attain all levels at once. By *Kerias Shema*, one is supposed to prepare to give up his life for Hashem. However, the way of “*Mesirus Nefesh*” is not the way which is delineated by Mesillas Yesharim; this sefer is speaking about the third way, which is a step-by-step process of growth that begins with Torah.

The Torah Helps You Choose

“Torah brings *zehirus*”. How does Torah bring *zehirus*? Many people learn Torah yet don’t have *zehirus*...so how does the Torah bring *zehirus*?

The answer is because it’s not an automatic thing. The Torah doesn’t “make” you have *zehirus*, but it shows you “how” you can have *zehirus*. The Torah helps you choose *zehirus*. Without Torah, we are sort of immature, like a child who doesn’t know how to decide. The Torah gives us the information we need in order to be able to know what our options are in life, which of course helps us decide better what to do.

When it comes to raising our children, we can't "make" a child go on the right path. It doesn't work that way. But what we can do is bring them to a certain point of maturity in which they are able to choose on their own what the right thing is.

The Torah is the base of the "ladder of growth" described in Mesillas Yesharim. If one doesn't learn Torah properly, his whole "ladder" will fall down, because it has no foundation....

Torah – The Basis of Your “Ladder”

Since Torah is the prerequisite to the ladder of growth, why does the Ramchal skip it? Why doesn't he explain what Torah is? The answer is because Torah isn't one of the "rungs" on the ladder – it is the very ground which the ladder stands upon. Torah is part of each step in the ladder! Without learning Torah, none of these steps of growth will last. Torah is needed along every step of the way throughout the levels described in this sefer. Torah is the basis – and the basis of Torah is Emunah.

Emunah – The Beginning Before The Beginning

Torah precedes all these levels of growth in this sefer, but Torah is only Torah when it is based on Emunah. Most people never succeed in basing their lives according to the carefully built plan in sefer Mesillas Yesharim, and the reason is because they haven't worked on their Emunah beforehand. Without Emunah, nothing can be gained.

Let's say a person when he is 17 or 20 or 30 years old finds a sefer which speaks about a certain point to work on, and he begins to work on that point. If that is his beginning point, and he doesn't have Emunah, then everything he is working on is only coming from his intellect, and he will never arrive at any closeness to Hashem, who is Endless and beyond intellect. That is why the prophet Chavakuk said that the work of the final generations is one thing alone: Emunah ("And the righteous shall live by their faith"). Everything begins with Emunah.

Unexpected Growth Can Help You Get To The Goal

The truth is that life isn't big enough for us to acquire all the levels described in sefer Mesillas Yesharim. There is a carefully built plan here, a ladder of growth that is step-by step; yet there is a way for a person to "jump" levels – when he receives unexpected growth. Although there is an order to go in one's Avodas Hashem, sometimes a person receives new levels that are out of the order – he can receive them as a gift from Hashem. In fact, even when one does go in the order described in this sefer, he still only gets to the end by "jumping" levels.

The Beginning Stage: Seichel Together With Emunah

A person has the innate ability of *seichel hayashar*, straight intellect. This, however, is not enough for life. Our *seichel hayashar* tells us that you can't get anywhere! Only use *seichel hayashar* in the beginning, but remember, you need Emunah also.

מסילת ישרים. פרק א. ביאור חובת אדם בעולמו

Chapter One:

The Purpose of Man on This World

Realizing Reality

“The pillar of Chassidus and the root of perfecting our Avodah is that a person should clarify and see the truth of what his purpose on this world is.” The Ramchal states that we have to make the facts “true” to us. How can we do this? By realizing the reality of these truths. We have to look them as reality.

Why Were We Created?

“Chazal taught that a person was not created except for to bask in the pleasure of Hashem and enjoy the radiance of His Shechinah.” Why were we created? There are three opinions altogether what are purpose is. One reason is that we were created to reveal the “name of Hashem” onto the world. The second opinion is that we were created because Hashem wanted to bestow His goodness upon us. The third opinion is that we were created to reveal the “Unity” of Hashem. The Mesillas Yesharim is saying that we were created for pleasure, which is really describing the third view – we were created to reveal the Unity of Hashem. The ultimate enjoyment we can know is the pleasure a person has when he reveals the Unity of Hashem.

If we were created to bask in the pleasure of Hashem, isn't this serving Him for ulterior motives? Another question is, weren't we created for *d'veykus* in Hashem? The answer to this is that spiritual pleasure enables us to have a connection with Hashem. Having pleasure in spirituality is not the goal – it is only a tool we need in order to have *d'veykus* with Hashem.

Why is it that we need pleasure in order to connect? Nature was altered after the sin of Adam, and now we need some reason to want to connect to Hashem.

Pleasure Is Not The Goal

To “bask in the pleasure of Hashem” is only one part of our Avodah. The goal, though, is the actual connection with Hashem; at that point, we shouldn't need pleasure to want to connect with Hashem. We have to start out, though, with *shelo lishmah* – ulterior motives, because we don't do something unless we get pleasure out of it. However, even though we must start out *shelo lishmah*, we must have some aspiration even at the start to want to arrive at *lishmah*. It is not just that “eventually” we want to serve Hashem *lishmah*, but even now at the start of our way, we should already have a little spark of *lishmah*. For example, a person should have twenty minutes a day in which he learns *lishmah*.

Pleasure is a human need. We all need pleasure, and if we don't have the right kind of pleasure – which is the spiritual pleasure of enjoying a connection with Hashem – then we will unfortunately look for it in the wrong place. That is our human weakness. We need to thus give ourselves the right kind of pleasure – spiritual pleasure. If we don't give ourselves pleasure, our soul will be desperate for pleasure – and our body will lead us to the wrong kinds of pleasure.

If you ever feel empty and you feel a need to seek pleasure to fill that emptiness, realize where that feeling is coming from: your soul is demanding pleasure. It wants the real thing. For example, when you are eating and you feel pleasure in it, realize that this is really your soul's need for pleasure, and it is just that you are not yet on the level of withholding your physical pleasure. When you feel enjoyment in eating your food, realize that it is a message being sent from your soul: I want the real pleasure – I want the pleasure of being close to Hashem.

When Do We Have True Pleasure?

“The true place of this enjoyment is in the World to Come.” This is perplexing. If we're only going to get the real enjoyment in the Next World which we are not on yet, what is the point of telling us about the next world's pleasure? Is there no pleasure for us available on this world?!

But this question is a misconception, and it comes from a superficial outlook. A superficial mentality is that enjoyment is only in the next world; really, we can enjoy on even this world – this physical world can be a *me'in olam haba* (a “mini” World to Come) for us! You are able to experience enjoyment even on this world that is a taste of Olam HaBa. Our body holds us back from experiencing the full effect of this enjoyment, but because we have a soul in us, we are able to experience the true pleasure to some degree, even on this world.

This is the meaning of “a Torah scholar is called Shabbos.” A true Torah scholar reaches such spiritual delight on this world that he experiences a highly pleasurable kind of existence – a “Shabbos”-like state, which is a resemblance of the World To Come. (Shabbos is called *me'in olam haba*).

The main enjoyment, of course, will only be in the future, in the Next World (except for some rare individuals who have totally divested themselves from their physical body).

Knowing Your Current Level

How can a person know what level he is at in Avodas Hashem? The barometer should not be, “How much did I learn today”, or “How much tzedakah did I give today”. If this alone are his single aspirations in life, he is missing a heart. But if he feels an enjoyment coming from spirituality, it is a sign that his heart has become a place for the Shechinah to reside in.

Of course, our actions and our mitzvos also need to be examined, and we are not saying that this is not important. Even our superficial layer of life is important. But we are saying that we also need to examine where we are getting vitality out of. A person needs to ask himself, “Where am I getting my *chiyus* (vitality) from? Am I feeling more alive from *ruchniyus*...?”

This physical world we live on is able to become for us a taste of the World To Come. It is like how Chazal say that one should taste the Shabbos food on Erev Shabbos...

“This is what Chazal said: This world is like an entranceway to a palace.” How do we turn the “entranceway” into the “palace”? It is by enjoying spiritual pleasure, even on this world.

“The tools which bring us there are the mitzvos...thus we were placed on this world...as Chazal say, “Today you shall do it, and tomorrow you will receive reward for it.” Today, even on this physical world, we can get a little of the great reward awaiting us.

Is there anything holding us back?

Really, nothing holds us back! This is really the concept of *Zerizus* – to act with zeal – to realize that nothing holds you back. The only thing holding you back is yourself, when you decide not to try to improve.

“For the true perfection is only connection with Hashem.” Here the Ramchal is saying something else entirely: there is a kind of *d'veykus* in Hashem which is beyond enjoyment. The meaning of this is that although we can start out *shelo lishmah* – for the sake of enjoyment – eventually we must arrive at a point in which we want to have an actual connection with Hashem that is not about what we get out of it. It is an aspiration for a person to only want connection with Hashem – for the sake of just having the actual connection, regardless of what enjoyment you get out of it.

This is the “true” perfection – it is the real *d'veykus*.

“And this is what Dovid HaMelech said: And to me, only closeness to Hashem is good.” There are two different levels – *kirvas Hashem* (closeness to Hashem), which involves your “I”, and *d'vekyus* (attachment with Hashem), which is a gift that comes from Hashem that has nothing to do with your “I”; it is a perfected state that is above your existence, and it can come to you as a gift if you reach it.

We can become “close” to Hashem on our own, but the actual *d'veykus* with Hashem is something we can receive only as a gift.

“For only this is the true good.” A person can learn Mesillas Yesharim many times and know very well that our purpose is to come to have *d'veykus* with Hashem, but why personally does he want *d'veykus*? For the pleasure found in it – or because it is the truth...”

“However, in order to reach this good, we need to work on...the mitzvos.” Actions are the lowest part of our soul. Our soul is comprised of four parts: the highest part of our self is our actual existence, and within that is our thoughts, then our feelings, and then our actions.

Doing mitzvos alone do not bring us to have *d'veykus*. We need to have *pnimiyus* in what we do – we have to uncover an inner world in our actions.

“Hashem has placed man in a world which is full of obstacles.” We must be aware that this world is a dangerous place to our *ruchniyus*. We can't be naïve about the situation of this world and pretend that it's really a very good place; no, it is full of dangers.

Desires

“This is referring to evil desires.” It is our desires which prevent us from reaching our spiritual perfection. Desires is what is mainly responsible for our downfalls – not our other bad *middos* or sins, but our *taavos*\desires. Why is it that desires are what mainly hold us back, and not the other bad *middos* or sins?

There are four elements in Creation – fire, water, wind and earth. The two root elements are earth and water. When Adam sinned, he sinned because had a desire to eat from a forbidden tree. If so, desire is the root of all sin. On a deeper note, desire is really rooted in arrogance, because if a person wouldn't be haughty in the first place, he wouldn't come to have a wrong desire. Without getting into this discussion (it is very deep), after the sin, the root is desire, and arrogance is only the outer layer of desire. The root problem is desire – *taavah*. All sins are just results of *taavah*.

Taavah\desire is the main bad *middah* in us that holds us back from being close to Hashem. Why? The *Chovos HaLevovos* explains that this world and the next world is like fire and water, which cannot coexist. Any time a person has a desire for this materialistic world, that itself contradicts a desire to be close to Hashem.

However, don't we find desires for this world that are good, such as Oneg Shabbos – enjoying good food on Shabbos? What is so bad about having a desire for something on this world? We even have a requirement to eat tasty food on Shabbos; isn't this a contradiction to being close to Hashem?

The answer to this is that there is a fight going on between our body and our soul about what we want. When we reveal what our soul wants and pursue it – closeness to Hashem – our body feels opposed and seeks to fight the soul. When we only pursue materialism, our soul is unhappy and makes us feel very sad inside. There is a constant war going on between our body and our soul. When one is winning, the other side comes back with full force, ready to knock it over. It's a vicious cycle.

How To Overcome Desires

What can we do? We need to subjugate the body so that it won't oppose our soul. We do not mean *chas v'shalom* to engage in physical self-infliction; we are looking for a proper solution.

One way we can subdue our physicality is through exertion in learning Torah. This starves the body's physicality and holds it back.

A second way we can do is through Shabbos. On Shabbos, we feed the body – we are giving it what it wants and pacifying it, so that it will be at peace.

People have a misconception with the second way and they think that Shabbos is a time to indulge in food; they buy a lot of food on Shabbos, all in the name of “*L’kavod Shabbos...*” But this is the wrong attitude. The point of Oneg Shabbos is to give the body some pleasure, a little more than the usual, so that it will be pacified and not rebel against our spiritual pursuits. That should be the attitude – the point is not simply for the sake of giving pleasure to our body.

Everything Is A Test

“Everything on this world, whether for good or for bad, are a test.” Even good can be a test! For example, Torah is the epitome of “good.” Chazal say that “There is no good except Torah.” However, even the “good” of Torah can be “bad.” How? Chazal also say that if someone learns Torah only in order to argue with others, it is better had he not been born.

Another example: loving Hashem. Even loving Hashem can be a test, because if a person only serves Hashem when he loves him, he won’t be able to serve Hashem properly.

We know that there were many Holocaust survivors who denied Hashem after all the tragedy they went through. The Chazon Ish said about this that it’s not that these people “lost” their Emunah due to the trauma of the Holocaust – they never had Emunah to begin with. They believed in Hashem beforehand only when everything was going good for them, but as soon as reality turned grim, they no longer “loved” Hashem anymore.

That is how even “good” can be a test, because if it’s taken away from us, it’s very hard; when a person has a steady job, it’s easy to love Hashem and be thankful to Him, but if he loses his job, he’s suddenly doubting Hashem, because now it’s not “good” anymore.

The Mesillas Yescharim is saying that life is a test. What is the attitude we should have about this? If a person looks at life with a sigh and says, “Oh well, life is a test...”, then he is mistaken, because he will lack joy in his life. The fact that life is all a test is not supposed to make us sad. A person has to see the good in every situation; he should just be aware that all good things are also a test.

Always see how everything in your life is a test. Even if today went by great and you didn’t have your usual difficulties – you didn’t get angry today at anybody and you had perfect Shalom Bayis today – you should still figure out how even that is a test too. All “good” is also a test!

We Also Need Menuchas Hanefesh

Don’t become discouraged by the words of the Mesillas Yescharim that life is a test and always full of difficulties. Although that is true, we also need *Menuchas Hanefesh* – tranquility. We need to take breaks sometimes. There are people who work greatly to improve in their Avodas Hashem, but they never seek how to have *Menuchas HaNefesh*. Without *Menuchas Hanefesh*, people fail even more than before they started to improve their Avodas Hashem.

Spirituality Isn’t Always Closeness to Hashem

“The more one overcomes his inclination and desires...the more he will reach Hashem and rejoice in Him.” To “reach” Hashem means that one can come to feel His presence in his life.

There are many people who are “searching” in life for answers to their problems, but this can still have nothing to do with Avodas Hashem. The only “search” a person should have for is to find Hashem.

The Rizhiner Rebbe zt”l said that there are even non-Jews who have uncovered an internal world than the physical world we are living in, but this isn’t *ruach hakodesh*, because they don’t do anything with what they discover. There are many “spiritual” non-Jews who know a lot about the spiritual world, but it does nothing to affect them; they don’t do anything with this knowledge. There are many people who have the power to tell the future; so what? Does this have anything to do with closeness to Hashem? Many people want “*ruach hakodesh*”... and it has nothing to do with a desire to become closer to Hashem. It is just a curiosity to know things.

Why indeed did Hashem give certain people the ability to tell the future or to pick up on certain secrets? It is a test, just like any other test. It’s actually a very big test, because if someone has *ruach hakodesh*, he is very tempted to get honor and attention from others. Anyone who was born with spiritual powers has a very big test in his life – a test of *kavod* (running after honor). Hashem created such powers so that these people will be able to overcome their desire for honor; but He did not create it so that people will become close to Him through it.

If someone has *ruach hakodesh* and he uses it to help people, this is good – but if he uses *ruach hakodesh* any more than that, he is misusing his powers for personal enjoyment.

How To Go About Physical Pleasure

“However...a person is pulled after this world...but if he controls himself, connects to the Creator and only uses this world as an aid to serve Him, he is uplifted, and he uplifts the world with him.” We have a body, and it has physical needs. How should we use it on this world?

Before a person gets married, this isn’t such a bothersome question. He understands well that you have to make only a little use of this world, and you shouldn’t be into physicality. But after a person gets married, physicality suddenly becomes a very big issue. It becomes harder to know how to use this world’s physical pleasures – how much to use them, and how much not to. There are no clearly defined rules, and it is hard to know how much physicality a person needs to engage in and how much not to.

How can a person know how much he needs to give to his body’s physical needs?

The first step is self control. A person needs to know: How much do I really need in order to enjoy myself on this world? If you are getting enjoyment out of life, then you don’t need any more pleasure than that.

But this is not enough, because even if you do give your body only what it needs to survive, now what? Reb Chatzkel Leventsein zt”l only ate exactly what he had to eat. Even if we all reach his level – now what?

The second step, then, is the intentions we are having.

The first battle we face is self-control. How much do we need to eat? For this, a person can go to a nutritionist and figure out how much he needs to eat in order to stay healthy. Now what? Now comes another job: to figure out if you are eating in order to enjoy the food or not. Even if a person always says a Tefillah to Hashem before he eats, his actual eating is still out of *taavoh* unless he works to uproot it.

Know that it is impossible for a person to suffocate his need for physical enjoyment. Chazal say that a person is conceived out of his parent’s desire for each other, and this makes us have physical desires. Since we do need physical enjoyment (besides for how much we need to eat, which is a health issue), the question becomes harder: How much do we really need to eat? How much do we need to eat to have some enjoyment, and how much is considered indulgence?

There is a way how you can work on this. The Vilna Gaon says that even on Shabbos when we are supposed to have Oneg Shabbos and eat foods we like, we still shouldn’t overeat. You can eat food you like on Shabbos, but decide then how much you really need in order to enjoy Shabbos.

It is a great difficulty we all face: knowing how to use this world for the sake of Avodas Hashem. Some never feel this challenge, and they just eat and eat as much they can afford...all in the name of “*l’sheim shomayim*” (for the sake of Heaven). But someone who wants to serve Hashem thinks about it, and it bothers him.

Knowing how much you need to enjoy yourself is called *histapkus* (frugality). The definition of it is not found in any *sefer*. Chazal say that we must sanctify even our permitted desires – and this indeed is a very vague part of our Avodas Hashem.

It is a lifelong test! Always clarify throughout your whole life how much physical pleasure you really need. The more you clarify this throughout your life, the more you will come to understand how much you need, and how much is unnecessary.

The Ramchal says that “you must use this world’s pleasures only to serve Hashem”. I will be very frank and open right now: I do not understand his words. It doesn’t make any sense to me, because the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* says that there is always a little bit of *shelo lishmah* in everything you do. Therefore it appears to me that the Ramchal in this sentence is referring to the times of Moshiach, when everything will be done *lishmah*. But right now in today’s world, it is simply not possible to only use this world with entirely pure motives.

Suffering

The Ramchal says that there is no happiness or peace on this world, because this world is full of pain, suffering, anxiety and nuisances, and then after all this, we die.

Why indeed did Hashem create the world this way? Did He create this world in order for us to suffer? The answer is because our purpose is to become close to Hashem, and suffering makes us remember our purpose. When we are too involved with our body, we forget about our goal. Hashem thus sends us suffering so we will want to escape our body's suffering by divesting ourselves from our body.

Is it possible to be serene on this world? It seems that we can't, but that is only if we stuck inside physicality. If we divest ourselves from our body and reveal a life of a soul, we remove ourselves from the body's suffering, and we will be able to find serenity on this world.

When people get old, they suffer physically. This purifies the body so that the soul will be able to enter the Next World more pure. Don't wait until you're old to get purified from your body! Start when you're young – by living a soul-based life.

Why did Hashem create us with a body and soul? The answer is because our body can never really experience any real enjoyment on its own. If we give ourselves spiritual enjoyment, then our body is able to feel some of it, and this is the only thing that even our body really enjoys.

After Breaking Physicality Comes Breaking Your Middos

Even after a person has broken his physicality and he has gotten through to experiencing life through his soul, there is still another great deterrent in his way that holds him back from reaching his purpose: bad *middos*.

You can have a person who has worked hard on his personal holiness, and he is perfect at "*kedushas habris*" (guarding the Holy Covenant), yet that itself can actually feed onto his bad *middos* (if he hasn't worked on his *middos*). A person can be excellent when it comes to *kedushah*, but if he doesn't work on his *middos*, his very *kedushah* will make him into a haughty person. He is using his *kedushah* for evil, because he will feel that he is better than the whole world: "After all, no one is as holy as I am."

The bad *middos* of a person, unless uprooted during one's lifetime, continue to cling to him after he dies. *Middos* are the ultimate accomplishment in one's self-improvement. A person who is exceptionally holy and has no desires for materialism – who still has bad *middos* – is worse off than a materialistic person who at least has good *middos*.

Yishuv HaDaas

"All the pleasures of this world are not proper to be used, unless one is using them to aid him in serving Hashem, so that he should be calm and have a proper frame of mind so that he will be able to do his service."

How do we make use of this world to give ourselves *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind)?

We need *da'as*. The way we get *da'as* is through exertion in learning Torah. *Daas* is the main aspect in *Avodas Hashem* – it is more important to think than to do. Many people want to become close to Hashem, but they only want to know “what to do.” They aren’t prepared to learn how to think differently. They don’t want to think – they just want to be told what to do.

Of course, we have to do actions also and be practical. But we also have to build up our inner world and always be thinking people. A Talmid Chochom always thinks. If we don’t understand why we need *Daas*, then it will be hard for us to understand why we need *Yishuv HaDaas*.

There are many examples of people who act without *Yishuv hadaas*. One example is people that “run” to do a mitzvah, throwing themselves into a frenzy in order to go do a mitzvah. Other examples include forgetting to eat meals, and being sleep-deprived.

How can one know if it’s necessary for him to use this world’s pleasures? As long as it takes away his *yishuv hadaas*, it is a sign that he needs it. There is a certain amount that you have to eat and sleep in order to have *yishuv hadaas*; if you aren’t getting enough to eat and you are hungry throughout the day, or you need more sleep, then you are missing *yishuv hadaas*, and you need to give your body what it needs.

Of course, don’t get carried away with this. A lack of indulgence is not a lack of *yishuv hadaas*! Just because we need *yishuv hadaas* doesn’t mean we should indulge in more than necessary.

The Baal Shem Tov encouraged his Chassidim to drink wine. Why did he do this? It was because he knew that since people work very hard at their *Avodas Hashem*, their physical body tends to rebel and feel sad inside that it is being denied pleasure. By giving them wine to drink, he was showing them that you need to pacify the body a little so that it won’t resent *Avodas Hashem*.

How can one achieve *yishuv hadaas*? Through learning Torah in-depth.

Only if we have *yishuv hadaas* do our deeds and mitzvos bring us closer to Hashem. We need to pay attention to what we are doing and become aware of everything we are doing in our life.

The hardest type of difficulty is the kind you are not aware of! But if we have *yishuv hadaas*, we will be aware of everything, and it will be much easier.

מסילת ישרים. פרק ב. ביאור מדת הזהירות

Chapter Two

Zehirus: Being Careful

How To Become More Careful With the Mitzvos

In the introduction and first chapter, we explained the purpose of man, but we still have not explained how we can practically get to our purpose. At first the Ramchal has a chapter explaining the concept of the level, and then he devotes another chapter to explaining how we can acquire each level.

The first rung of the ladder is *zehirus* – being careful. *Zehirus* causes us to think what to be careful from. When a person acts careful with how he observes the Torah, he gets *siyata d'shamaya* to be saved from committing a sin.

There are many stories told about Baba Sali, who told guests that he was confident that nothing non-kosher ever ended up in his house. How did he merit this protection? Because he was so careful, he received *siyata d'shmaya* to be saved from stumbling.

Torah brings one to have *zehirus*. Only Torah can bring one to have *zehirus*. This is because by yourself, you aren't protected from the *yetzer hora*. But through learning Torah, you have the light to be protected from the *yetzer hora*.

We are usually not to stumble in physical matters, but with spiritual matters we aren't so careful.

If a person can't learn for ten hours a day, what does Hashem want from him to do? It's not his job to transform himself into a *masmid*. Hashem wants this person to just get a taste for learning, and from there, everything else will come.

We can't suddenly have *Yiras Shomayim*, even when we become idealistic to grow. *Yiras Shomayim* doesn't come so fast. First, we have to become connected. If it's a Halacha that one isn't keeping, then has to start keeping the Halacha, whether he feels connected or not to Hashem. We are referring to something which is not a Halacha; if one wants to improve in areas of mussar, first he needs to become connected to Hashem, and after that he can gain *Yiras Shomayim*.

Thus, only the Torah brings *zehirus*, because the Torah makes you become connected. When you are connected to *Yiddishkeit*, you are then closer to *Yiras Shomayim*.

Zehirus – Realizing the Reality of Ruchniyus

“One who acts by rote is worse than animals.” Why is acting mechanically considered to be worse than an animal’s behavior? Animals don’t have a yetzer hora, while we do. What’s the comparison? It is because we must go back to our nature, which is no less than how an animal acts naturally.

To have zehirus, we must reveal it from within by shining our soul onto our body, and also by realizing the reality of *ruchniyus*.

Zehirus is not just to know what to be careful in. It is to realize that *ruchniyus* is real. If a person doesn’t see how *ruchniyus* is real, first he needs to reflect on it with his seichel (mind) (besides for breaking his desires).

Why don’t we want *ruchniyus*? It is really because we are choosing not to. A person subconsciously “chooses” to close his eyes and not see reality, and that is why he doesn’t see *ruchniyus*.

There is however, a small spark of *ruchniyus* that is always deep down in us, and after we have a failure, this little spark is what gives us a little push to get up after we fall.

Reflection

The Mesillas Yesharim continues that people naturally do not reflect on important matters; the prophet Yirmiyahu calls this the “way a horse acts during a war”.

Why don’t people have reflection on important matters?

Two things hold us back. One deterrent is our pull toward materialism, and if a person works, he has another deterrent – his business.

But a person can build up his Yiras Shomayim through learning Torah and then reflecting on his learning. If you can reflect on what you learn in Torah, then you can have the stability to reflect on matters of Yiras Shomayim.

The yetzer hora keeps us very busy from reflecting, though. It has three tactics to hold us back: getting us to sin, the pull toward materialism, and worrying about making a living. All these factors together steer us away from thinking about what’s really important.

There are even people who are immersed all day in spiritual matters, but they too aren’t careful when it comes to keeping the Torah! They are even busy carrying out all the “mitzvos”, but they have no “*yishuv hadaas*.”

Many people even reflect on matters of Yiras Shomayim, yet they still don’t succeed in leaving their sins – why? It is because they aren’t doing so from their heart; their heart is still not in it.

A person only sins because he hasn’t internalized in his heart what’s wrong.

How can a person internalize that a sin is wrong? Through having time every day to reflect and think into how bad it is. This will help the truth sink into his heart more and more until he finally internalizes what a sin is.

However, there is a danger to spending time alone: your thoughts might wander to emptiness. What we need to do is to make “space” in ourselves to be able to think. How can we do this?

We need to know how to relax! When you relax, you have to empty out your thoughts. That is how you relax – you need to silence everything going on. This is very hard for most people to do, because people don’t like to sit still and do nothing.

Feeling Empty

People have a natural desire to fill their emptiness inside. Many people go to work not because they have to make a living, but simply because work gives them more meaning in life, since they feel empty inside.

Feeling empty is really a holy power of our soul, but we need to know how it can be holy and constructive. We need to know how fill our emptiness. First, we need to develop a holy kind of feeling empty, and then, we need to fill our emptiness with holiness.

We are supposed to await the Redemption, and this is really because we have an innate power to “feel lacking” somewhat. This is a holy power which we need to learn how to use.

We must fill our emptiness. It’s not enough to always “fill” ourselves up by putting in efforts and asking a Rebbi what to do. First, one has to develop a feeling of emptiness, and then he should seek to fill it up.

This can help a person actually come to appreciate his own accomplishments more. People aren’t happy with their *ruchniyus* in spite of all their efforts, and the reason is because they never felt what they were missing in the first place. In order to appreciate your *ruchniyus*, you need to first feel a certain emptiness at some point in your life.

We can compare this to a spoiled child who grew up in a wealthy home where he was pampered all day with every possible kind of luxury, and he was never taught the value of money. By contrast, when someone grows up in a frugal home, he knows what the value of money is, because he knows what it’s like to feel poor, and he thus comes to value money.

We have to feel empty and thirsty inside for *ruchniyus* in the first place in order to be able to appreciate it. “My soul thirsts for You, G-d.” This feeling of emptiness will help us connect more to *ruchniyus*.

How can we do this?

Two people can be learning together, and they are both learning the same Gemara together and understanding it...yet it’s possible that they are miles apart, because one of them is really

thirsty for Torah, while the other isn't. Only the one who is thirsty for the Torah is connected to it.

There are many people who learn Torah and do mitzvos, but they don't feel connected to their ruchniyus, because they never felt their own emptiness. They always "fill" themselves up with Torah and mitzvos, but they never realized they have emptiness. But it is only when you feel your emptiness that you can feel connected to Yiddishkeit and ruchniyus.

"It is simple that even if a person is very clever, he still cannot be saved on his own from the yetzer hora, if not for Hashem helping him." Why can't we beat the yetzer hora on our own? We do we need Hashem to help us win over it? It is because of the above idea – we need to first feel empty, and only after this feeling can we become connected to the truths of ruchniyus. After feeling our inner emptiness, Hashem will then help us and we can be saved from the evil inclination, but without that, we will just be on our own, and no matter how smart we are, we will not be able to defeat the yetzer hora's arguments.

These words of the Mesillas Yesharim, that it is impossible to defeat the yetzer hora without Hashem's help, is really based on Chazal, who state that "Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of heaven." The question on this statement of Chazal is: Why is only Yiras Shomayim in the hands of Hashem? Isn't Torah and mitzvos also only in the hands of Hashem? The answer to this question is because Yiras Shomayim is the key to everything.

All we can do is get Yiras Shomayim. Everything else – all other levels – comes on its own, as a result of Yiras Shomayim. Yiras Shomayim is the key.

Even after we get Yiras Shomayim, we can still fall to the yetzer hora. We always need siyata d'shmaya. Soon, we will see how even Yiras Shomayim we can't get unless we have siyata d'shmaya.

What exactly is Yiras Shomayim?

Yiras Shomayim is essentially to recognize our Creator – seeing how Hashem is in our life. This is also a gift which we receive from Hashem after working hard at Avodas Hashem.

There are many levels to Yiras Shomayim, but even the lowest level, which is fear of Gehinnom (yiras ha'onesh) only comes as a gift from Hashem. Although "everything is in the hands of heaven except for fear of heaven", yiras shomayim is our lifelong job, and we can't get it on our own.

The Two Stages of Avodas Hashem – Building Up Your Self and then Nullifying It

"And this is what Chazal have said: If I am not for me, who will be for me?" Zehirus is really a result of recognizing who you are "I" is.

Our purpose is to eventually leave our ego and nullify our self. This is called *bittul*, and it is also called *ayin*, "nothingness." But the first step in our Avodas Hashem is to worry about yourself – in other words, to be very concerned about your spiritual situation. Many people make a mistake with this and skip over the first stage, which is to first build up the self.

People want to immediately jump to the goal, which is to nullify the self, without first building up a healthy sense of self-esteem, and this is detrimental. Although the goal is to eventually come to leave our ego entirely, we first need to build up a solid base, and that is to build up the “I”.

A Person Needs Daas To See Reality

In order to realize the reality of *ruchniyus* – which is what *zehirus* is all about – a person needs the power of *Daas*. *Daas* is the awareness of reality. A person needs to use his *Daas* and see how *ruchniyus* is real, and be aware to that reality. Without *Daas*, a person doesn’t see reality, and when people don’t see reality, all they see is illusions of reality.

Daas is the opposite of *dimayon* (imagination). The two cannot go together.

All of us are somewhat disillusioned and live from imagination, but the question is how much. It is an issue when a person’s entire life is based on imagination and he doesn’t see reality at all.

Our imagination is what is responsible for preventing us from fully having *Yiras Shomayim*.

Many people that you have to be on high levels in *Avodas Hashem*, but really, it’s not about “high levels.” You just have to realize reality – to live what reality is.

To summarize *Zehirus*, there are 3 steps: Step One is to realize reality; realize what you have. Step Two is to know what to be careful in. Step Three is to know how to be careful (this will be explained in the next chapter).

מסילת ישרים. פרק ג. בביאור חלקי הזהירות

Chapter Three

The Parts of Zehirus

Everything Is A Mix of Good and Bad

“If a person wants to be clever for himself, he needs two thoughts. First, he needs to reflect what the true good is that a man should choose, and he also needs to know about the utter evil which he must run from.” What is “utter evil”?

The more you reflect, the more “good” you will see how the true good is, and the more “evil” you will see how true evil is. How many times in your life must you clarify truths? Once in your life is not enough. The more you clarify it to yourself, the more you see the truth, and you see what “good” is, as well as what “evil” truly means.

Really, everything is a mix of good and evil, as a result from the sin of Adam. Our job is to sift out all the bad from the good. In order to do this, a person needs to know a lot of Torah.

It’s hard to know if something is a good thing or a bad thing. People often judge others, saying – “This person is a good person”, or “This person is a bad person”. But really, there is no such thing as an entirely good person or an entirely bad person. Everyone is a mix.

How can we think as we’re doing something if it’s good? Through getting our brain to work, which is through Torah. A person can’t have *Zehirus* unless he knows how think about what to be careful in. It is the Torah which shows you how to think.

A person has to make a cheshbon hanefesh (self-accounting). How does a person make a cheshbon hanefesh? We can’t remember every detail of what we did throughout the day. We should make a cheshbon hanefesh of our general situation in life, if he’s keeping the mitzvos or not. Write down which direction you think you are headed in.

Being Clever

There is a great rule in Avodas Hashem: *pikchus* – the ability to be clever.

We find that many times, having a good heart and having good intentions isn’t enough to help you succeed in life. You need a certain ability of being clever. A very good example of this is marriage. In a marriage, it’s not enough to be a kind person in order to be a good spouse. If a husband isn’t clever with how he handles his marriage, the fact that he has a good heart will not help him. He might buy things for his wife all the time when she doesn’t want it, because he has such a good heart...he isn’t being clever.

A very big cause for problems in Avodas Hashem has to do with a lack of being clever.

We cannot tell you exactly how to act in every situation in life and how you can be clever, just like there are no exact rules with how to raise good children. But there is a basic formula which we can give over.

That basic formula is to see if each thing you are doing is bringing you closer to Hashem or not.

For example, right now we are learning about *Zehirus*. See if your *Zehirus* is bringing you to have more closeness to Hashem or not.

How indeed can you know this? How do you know if what you're doing is bringing you closer to Hashem or not? Maybe it's all just in your imagination?

The more and more you inspect yourself, the more and more you will be able to get a clearer picture of yourself. You have to keep suspecting yourself that maybe you're wrong. After all, there is no Shulchan Aruch for these matters. You must never stop checking your motivations.

Unfortunately, many people involved in Avodas Hashem are simply not in touch with reality. People think that Avodas Hashem is "spirituality" or something lofty; they don't see *ruchniyus* as reality.

When we make a *cheshbon hanefesh* on our *Zehirus*, we have to ask ourselves if we are using our intellect or our heart. Either one alone cannot suffice.

First Learn and Then Think

"See what is good for you to be diligent in and strengthen yourself in it." First, be a *masmid* and learn Torah diligently. Only after that should you attempt to deepen your thinking in it.

There is a problem that people start but don't finish. Many times this is because a person takes on too much at once. What is the solution for this problem?

See if it's realistic or not for you to do it.

The *Mesillas Yescharim* says that we need to examine our actions in two ways: *phishpush* and *mishmash*. The first part is *phishpush* – to examine if we are doing anything wrong in our life. We need to discover what we need to fix.

After we discover what we are doing wrong in our life, what do we do about it? How do we get rid of the evil within us?

From all the four elements, fire is the destroying element. Learn how to use your element of fire in the soul in order to destroy any presence of evil in your life.

We need to develop more our power of thought. A person has to start to think more. If you ever have a question, instead of jumping to see the answer, first think for two minutes and try to come up with an answer.

Even someone learning Torah doesn't always build up his thinking.

We should mainly learn how to think more when it comes to our learning. In learning Torah, there are two parts – getting used to learning more, and learning how to think. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l said “nothing comes out of a masmid.” He meant that learning all day alone isn't enough to make someone successful in his learning, because a person has to think also. You can have a masmid who learns all day, but he never thinks into his learning. He won't be successful.

A person goes to a shiur and he listens to it very well. Is he thinking into it also? Is he thinking deeply into what he hears?

If someone isn't prepared to think deeply, he won't be able to learn Mesillas Yesharim, because there is nothing new here.

Someone once told me that he is capable of giving a *mussar shmuess* just as good as Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l. What is his mistake? He only learns mussar intellectually; it's all in his head, but what he says has no comparison to what Rav Chatzkel Levenstein, even if he would guess everything that Rav Chatzkel said. Why? Rav Chatzkel spoke from his essence, but this person doesn't. Mussar is not an intellectual matter. It is to think deeply into simple matters.

How can we see the reality of what a mitzvah is and what a sin is?

See how a mitzvah is a part of your soul, and an aveirah cuts off part of your soul.

Our real problem in Avodas Hashem is not simply because we have a yetzer hora, but because we don't see reality. Materialism is what deters our eyes from seeing reality. Materialistic pursuits blur reality, like wearing the wrong glasses.

Chazal say that “if someone says I will sin and repent, he will not be able to repent.” The problem of this person is that he is so blurred by materialism that he will never see the truth. Although we all possess an intellect that can see reality, our intellect is blurred when we run after materialistic desires.

When a person is still attached to materialism, he is living in darkness, and he can't see *ruchniyus*. This physical world is really a place of darkness; when one is attached to it, he can't see the reality.

However, this is supposed to make us realize something. Although this world is a dark place, there is a way to use “darkness” for good, and that is when we realize that our whole life is

full of doubts. We have to realize that life is full of doubts, and then we will realize how much we need Hashem. This can actually be the happiest realization one can come to.

We really don't know what life will bring. There is no way to know it. We must realize more and more how much we need Hashem to survive in life. We have to realize that we are in darkness.

The Mesillas Yescharim continues that fools repeat their past mistakes. We all go through many experiences and difficulties in life. Many times we are suddenly faced with a new difficulty and we don't know why we are going through the difficulty. The issue is not that we have difficulties – we all have difficulties. The question is if we will learn from our past difficulties, if we will take any lesson out of them.

“The second mistake that a person makes, worse than the first mistake, is that his vision is fooled, and he mistakes evil for good and misplaces good for evil.” This is the problem of imagination, which fools us. How does imagination work? No one imagines something that doesn't exist at all. We imagine something by exaggerating something – by taking something and blowing it up more than it is.

There are all kinds of examples of how people exaggerate things. This is our main problem – imagination is leading our life.

One common example is how often people distort the truth. A person, if he wants to believe that a certain action is permitted to do (when it's not clear), will come up with every proof thinkable that it's okay. He will distort the truth so he can arrive at his preconceived notions.

Many times a person comes to a Rov with a Halachic question, and he wants the Rov to permit something for him. He'll phrase the question in a way that the Rov will permit it! He'll leave out this detail and that detail, and then the Rov will tell him, “It's permissible...” By deliberately leaving out details, he fools the Rov!

If a person wants to arrive at a certain conclusion he has formed in his head, no sefer will prove to him otherwise. He is mentally bribed. You can't argue with him and prove him wrong; no matter how many sources you show him, he'll somehow refute it.

What should we do when we have a doubt? The Mesillas Yescharim says to make a cheshbon hanefesh (self accounting). What does this help?

Don't think that making a cheshbon hanefesh will automatically show you the answer. Even the greatest tzaddikim don't know everything; people mistakenly think that tzaddikim know everything. What, then, can a person do to know the truth of what he has to do?

Generally speaking, there are two ways. The first way is what the Mesillas Yescharim says, which is to make a cheshbon hanefesh. Even if a person doesn't arrive at the total truth, at least he will be closer to the truth.

The second way is to go to a tzaddik and ask his advice. However, as we said, even a total tzaddik doesn't know everything. He knows more than most people, but his knowledge is still only partial. He doesn't have all the information. If so, we still have a problem. What are we supposed to do?? How are we supposed to ever know what to do??

The answer is: Emunah!! Whenever in doubt, have Emunah in Hashem and trust in Him that He can lead you to the truthful answer. There can be many ways how you will be led there – as long as you have Emunah.

Making a cheshbon hanefesh is the way how we can work on our middos. This seems strange to many people, because what does thinking have to do with middos? But the answer is because working on your middos doesn't come from advice. It involves deep thinking; it is a wisdom. The way to think about your middos is through cheshbon hanefesh.

We need to think all the time, not just sometimes. We have to get used to thinking more often.

People think that making a cheshbon hanefesh is a simple matter for unlearned people. But the truth is that cheshbon hanefesh is only possible when you know how to think deeply. If a person isn't immersed in learning Torah, his brain is for sure not working properly as it should, and he won't be able to sit down and make a proper cheshbon hanefesh.

Our Avodas Hashem is not based on advice and on “what to do.” It needs a lot of thinking.

In order to learn how to think deeply, we need solitude for this. Why? The superficial reason is because we need peace and quiet in order to think properly, but the deeper reason is because true thinking only comes to a person when he's alone. True thinking is really the *ohr penimi* (the “inner light”), a deep spiritual power, which only comes to a person when he is alone, away from people.

“To think what is the true way that the Torah says a person should go in, and after this, one should reflect on his actions if they are going in the proper way or not.” The first thing a person needs to do is to figure out what the Torah holds it is upon him to do. He first needs the actual information of what he has to do. After that, a person should examine himself and see if his actions are in line with the Torah or not.

Until now the Ramchal has only explained the parts of *zechirus*; in the next chapter, we will learn the way to acquiring *zechirus*.