

Session 6: I Never Do Anything Wrong



Why is that we rationalize away our shortcomings? When it comes others, their faults are clear. But ourselves? We find every excuse. This is problematic as it holds back our potential and damages our relationship with Hashem. In this class Rabbi Shafier gives us clear guidance on how to move beyond our ego while keeping our self-esteem intact.

ספר מסילת ישרים - פרק א

והנה שמו הקדוש ברוך הוא לאדם במקום שרבים בו המרחיקים אותו ממנו יתברך

Mesilas Yesharim - Perek 1

The Holy One, blessed be He, has put man in a place where the factors which distance him from the blessed G-d are numerous

והם הם התאוות החמריות אשר אם ימשך אחריהן

These are the physical lusts which if he is drawn after them

הנה הוא מתרחק והולך מן הטוב האמיתי

behold, he draws away and goes ever further from the true good.

ונמצא שהוא מושם באמת בתוך המלחמה החזקה

Thus, we see that man is truly placed in the midst of a raging battlefield.

כי כל עניני העולם בין לטוב בין לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם

For all matters of this world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials for a man.

One of the most unusual things about our religion is the extraordinary painstaking details of every *mitzvah*. Every single *mitzvah* has an extraordinary amount of specific ways to do it, if you do it this way, you are *yotzeh* you fulfil the *mitzvah*, if you do it that way, you're not.

And if you think about it, it probably should beg a question, why is the *Torah* so *makpid*?

Let me give you an example:

There is a *mitzvah* to blow the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. Now the Rambam's very clear in *hilchos tshuvah* as to the reason. He says even though of course it's a *gzeras hakassuv* but the underlying concept that we can relate is "*uru yesheinim mishenaschem*" wake up from your sleep.

As the *Rishonim* explain, when you hear the thunder of that *shofar*, it awakens within you a sense of dread, of fear, of trepidation and through that it brings you to *tshuvah*.

Okay, so I understand that. Yet I'd like to share with you that I have lived through many, many *shofar* blowings and rare it is that I ever feel a sense of dread, trepidation and I work on it. I work on the *inyan* of *shofar*, I work on the understanding behind it, and as a matter of fact I'd like to share with you that there are many more fear inspiring instruments. A French horn, a powerful trumpet, yet it has to be a *shofar* from a preferably a ram, it has to be complete, it can't have a crack in it. If it's from a *parah*, it's not *kosherat* all.

And the question is why? And if that doesn't really get you, how about almost every single *mitzvah* that we have has such particulars that if you don't do it, you're not *yotzeh* at all. You

could have a beautiful pair of *tefillin*, one crack in one letter and it's worthless, you did not fulfill the *mitzvah*. If you wore that pair of *tefillin* for eighty years and it wasn't complete, it didn't have every letter, in the right order, you didn't fulfill the *mitzvah* at all.

But even more than that, if the *parshiyos* were written in the wrong order. If the *shel yad* was written before the *shel rosh*, or put in the wrong order in the box, potentially you wouldn't be *yotzeh*. And the question is why? Why would the *Torah* be so particular, you have the *parshiyos* there, you're missing a letter, why does it have to be so, so exact, why does it have to be so specific?

And I believe that this question underscores something that we're not normally focused on and it's a very, very big *yesod* in all of our *avodas Hashem* and to understand this let me bring you back to a different part of history.

If you go back in history, maybe three hundred years ago, if you go back to the revolutionary war period in the United States of America, you would find a vastly different world than the world we live in now. Food, clothing, furniture, tools were so scarce, as a matter of fact, almost everything was made by hand, by the people themselves who used them.

How did you get a shirt in colonial times in America? The housewife would make the shirt. But what that meant in plain, simple language was she spun the wool and then she set up a loom and then she weaved together the fabric and then she dyed that wool which meant she had to cook the dyes, put the fabric in it, leave it out to dry. She had to then cut it, stitch it, a shirt, one shirt took weeks and weeks.

How do you make furniture? Let's say someone, a woman said to her husband, you know I would like a new dining room table. The man would go out, with an ax, fell some trees. Then he

would have to plane the wood, he'd have to line the wood up and he'd have to cut them and saw it. It was weeks and weeks, months and the average person living three hundred years ago, lived such a different life that it's hard to imagine.

And just as an illustration, I want you to imagine for a minute that you took a man who lived three hundred years ago and brought him into our world. He'd be astonished, not by the technological advances, he'd be astonished by the abundance, the plenty. How do you have so much stuff?

By the way when the US mint first began printing coins, in the beginning of the United States of America, the mint printed one million pennies in three years. The first three years of operations, they produced one million pennies.

The US mint today produces a million pennies in about a half hour. Because now we have machinery and we have sophisticated machines that makes one man so much more productive that it's hard to imagine. In that world of three hundred years ago, if a man wanted to plow his field, he took an ox and it took him hours and hours and hours as a matter of fact, to produce a hundred bushels, five acres, it took him well over three hundred hours because he had to do it all by hand or maybe with his ox. Today there are huge combines, these phenomenally powerful machines that can do an entire huge, huge field in a couple of hours.

Harvesting grapes used to be a tremendous challenge because grapes are ripe within a very small window of time, about two weeks. But the problem is how do you get enough laborers to possibly pick all of the grapes in that short window of time?

And for farmers back then it was a huge challenge. They had to hire gangs of workers, a tremendous amount of extra workers to harvest the grapes that they don't go bad on the vine.

Today, one big machine, within a few hours does row after row after row of vine. What one man today can do, it would have taken a thousand men back then.

My grandfather had a small factory in Germany, pre-world war two and my father explained to me that his father, my grandfather was a successful businessman. He hired many other tailors and they would produce suits and these suits he would then go sell. So I once asked my father, so tell me, about how many suits did they produce?

Maybe six a week. Today if you go to any factory, in China, in India, you'll see machinery pumping out suits, thousands upon thousands, tens of thousands in a day. The production of the average human being has become so much more powerful because we multiply, we leverage by using machines.

And I dare say if you would take a person from that world and bring him into our world, he'd be astonished. And just for the fun of it, let's imagine that you're in your home, you have a bunch of kids and you have a good job and it happens to be that someone from that world comes to visit you and it happens to also be that it's moving day for you.

Imagine for a minute you work for a national firm and while they may not pay the largest salaries in the world, one of the benefits is that if you move, they bring you movers.

So imagine this man comes to visit you on moving day, you're in your house and he sees these five men running from room to room, taking clothes and blankets and pillows and he says to you how in the world, how in the world do you have so much stuff, you must be the richest man in the city, the country.

And you explain to him no, I'm just a regular guy. So how in the world do you have twenty suits? How do you have so many shirts? How do you have so many shoes?

See in his world no one had that much clothing. And you explain to him well, we have machinery. What do you mean machinery? You know these things that sort of like they do things. And you show him a machine or two. Maybe you show him a vacuum cleaner, maybe you show him a microwave oven and he says to you but where's the power?

And you show him well it's in the wall. You see there's electricity. What's electricity? Well it runs through the wall and it powers these things and.

Needless to say he'd be astonished, he'd be amazed, he wouldn't have words to even begin to understand your world. But stranger still.

Imagine that they filled up that moving truck with all of your worldly possessions, because it's filled from one end to the other with all of your clothing, materials and everything that you have, and then this man turns to you and says, I understand that you have all this stuff, but how in the world are you going to get enough horses to tie to that truck to move it. It's going to take twenty horses at least.

And you say to him twenty horses, what are you talking about? Come here, you ask one of the workers for the keys and you turn on the engine and rrrum and the engine starts and he says but how does it go? And you explain to him, you push the gas and it goes. What do you mean it pulls this whole truck? How could it be?

And again, in his world there'd be no explanation. There is no way that pushing down a pedal could possibly move tens of thousands of pounds of material goods, just physically can't be. And

the reason why in his mind it can't be is because he's living in a different world and he doesn't understand the leverage, he doesn't understand the power, he doesn't understand that which we take for granted because we're so used to these things called machinery, called industrial power, called the world we live in.

And I believe that concept is actually quite relevant to us. You see ancient man saw G-D. If you spoke to a man living a thousand years ago, he clearly saw Hashem in front of him. He put a seed in the ground and weeks later up came something and that something turned into wheat or corn and it was no explanation, in his world there was no understanding and therefore it had to be G-D.

Ancient man didn't understand disease or germs and when someone died young, he saw G-D. Ancient man saw G-D all day, every day because he didn't understand causality, he didn't understand cause and effect, and he saw a world that baffled him and the only explanation was G-D runs the world.

The scientific revolution, the scientific method changed much of mankind's understanding. No longer was man locked away, the scientific method allowed human beings to delve into, and understand the cause and the effect. And the scientific method really is a brilliant body of techniques to study phenomenon, to watch what's observable, then to create theories and then to test those theories and mankind began uncovering tremendous amounts of depth behind what we live in in our life.

And the result of this great body of science is fantastic. We understand things, we understand cells, we understand seeds, we understand so much about life and the scientific method and all

that it brought, brought brilliance, brought a tremendous new vista of understanding to mankind and it is a wonderful, wonderful thing.

However, it also brought another interesting phenomenon, many, many people also discovered something. I don't need G-D, I understand why a seed grows. There's RNA that directs the cells to split, it directs which part to become the bark, which part to become the cellulose.

When man began understanding the systems behind what happens in nature, suddenly he felt I don't need G-D, I know it all. A little bit of a sad mistake that modern man makes because what he's discovered is the system that G-D uses to run the world. But the mistake he makes is, that he looks at G-D like some kind of cheap magician.

Imagine there was a magician, and the magician had some sort of sleight of hand, and he pulled a rabbit out of his hat and he made cards disappear. And if we studied him long enough, we'd find his trick, ah, that's the trick.

Really there's a trapdoor on the bottom, really there are mirrors, there's smoke, I get it.

When you discover the magician's trick, the magic is gone and you see the magician is no different than you and I, and therefore the magician is just like you and I. And apparently modern science, at least many scientist or many people believe that now that we've discovered the trick, ha, we debunk G-D, we don't need G-D, G-D's out of the equation.

The folly of that error is so huge that's difficult really to explain.

What you've discovered is the mechanisms, the levers, via which G-D runs the world. Nature is Hashem, nature is G-D's predictable planned method of running every aspect of this world. But if you've discovered rules, if you've discovered systems, you've discovered something that G-D

created and maintains, you didn't debunk G-D, you've now uncovered but a small, tiny little bit of the vast wisdom of our Creator.

But the opposite of debunking, now you're beginning to understand. Unlike ancient man who put a seed in the ground and didn't get it, now we could delve into the wonders, the vastness, the sophistication of the systems and it's not that we don't need G-D, it's that now at least we begin on some level to understand the basics.

But if the first mistake that modern man made was thinking he doesn't need G-D, there's another mistake that modern man made that might be maybe as egregious.

At almost every stage of the scientific development, man came to this point where he says ah, now we get it, we know just about all that we need to know. And it's rather astonishing when you look back in hindsight and you see the arrogance, of the leading minds of science when they think that they've conquered the last vista, they've conquered the final understanding.

University of Chicago was opened up in eighteen ninety four. Nicole Sin was a famous scientist at the time and his dedication speech is classic. The more important fundamental laws of facts and physical science have all been discovered and these are now so firmly established that the possibility of it ever being changed is so remote that's it almost not even worth thinking about.

That was in eighteen ninety four when mankind's understanding was so primitive, the atom if it was known at all was just a vague sort of concept. The cell even was just barely known, quantum mechanics wasn't known, the depth of scientific understanding was at its most primitive stage and just an illustration of this to see how far it went, towards the beginning of the nineteenth century, and we're talking not long, eighteen ninety nine, there was a movement by Charles

Duwel, who then was in charge, he was the head of the pattern office and he argued for closing the pattern office. He wanted to close the pattern office.

Why is that? Because in his words, all that is to be discovered, has been discovered. This was in eighteen ninety nine, there was no microwave popcorn back then. No man on the moon, no computers.

But in man's understanding all that is to be discovered, has been discovered. We have conquered all vistas, we know it all and each generation uncovers new worlds, worlds that the previous generation couldn't even imagine, couldn't even envision and each one thinks, now we've arrived, each one thinks now we have the understanding.

And I believe that in a very real sense, even though maybe you'll argue with me that today people are a little bit more humble and the vastness of the universe and the complexity of the laws are so awe-inspiring that maybe man has learnt a little bit of humility, but I believe still not so.

Because I believe that one of the great limitations of science is an extraordinarily limited concept. If my eyes see it, if my ears hear it, it exists and if not it doesn't exist. As an illustration of this point, Albert Einstein in his biography, Isaacson writes that he was not the most gifted child in the world, but he had an incredible sense of curiosity and at five years old one day he was sick in bed and his father brought him a compass and Einstein describes in his words that when he examined this compass and he saw that the needle would spin to the North, he saw it had strange powers, he literally began trembling and he grew cold. He realized something deeply hidden, had to be behind things and that moment remained with him for the rest of his life.

A huge powerful sense of humility, I don't understand things. I fundamentally don't get it.

One of the great mysteries of existence, is something called life. A tree is alive. A rock isn't. A cell is alive, a grain of sand isn't. But what's the difference? Why is it that the cells gather together? Why is it that they form organs? Why is it that those organs form bigger organisms? What is driving it all?

Why is it that it doesn't just sit there like any other inert object? And as much as modern men will come up with theories, the DNA, the genetic coding, it's all window dressing. And it never dressed, addresses the fundamental question, what's making it work? What's making it all happen?

And in existence is something that we have to call a life-force, but it doesn't make sense because there's nothing in the physical world to explain it. There are no tooth fairies, there are no magical elves. But what makes the seed grow? What makes it develop? Why is it?

And the Rambam explains and it's something that you'll find over and over in almost all the *Rishonim* that every physical entity has a corresponding spiritual entity. Any thing in the physical world has a spiritual component to it and the Rambam's very clear when he talks about the celestial bodies, the sun, the moon, the stars. Each one has a *balei nefesh vude'ah*, each of them has a we'll call it a *malach*, it's not a *malach* but it's a existence, a thinking intelligent *sar*, some spiritual force that a live *chayim vu'omdim*, they exist and they recognize and understand and are responsible for that object.

We say these words in *shabbos davening*. "*tovim me'oros shebara elokeinu*" Hashem the luminaries, the sun, the moon, they're great. "*budas*" You created with tremendous wisdom, "*smeichim buseisam*" they're joyful when they go out, "*vusassim buvoam*" and they're satisfied

when they return “*ossim bu'eimah rutzon konam*” they do with great fear, the will of their Creator.

If you study the words of *davening* and you'll see this over and over. There are powerful spiritual forces that guide every feature in this world. And every physical entity has a spiritual counterpart.

Chazal tell us that not a blade of grass grows, without a *malach* above telling it to grow. What that means in plain, simple language is there is no difference between an inner object, sand and a cell except that one has a spiritual force that's guiding it, that's controlling it and if you'd like to understand fundamentally, life itself from a physical standpoint, it makes no sense.

A human being lying there in a coma, looks as dead as door nail, a human being who is dead, looks as much alive as someone who's dead, what's the difference? Physiologically, all, everything's there, the heart, the lungs, everything's intact yet he's dead. What does that mean, what does it mean he's dead?

Well his soul left, what does it mean his soul? Everything that's alive has a *nefesh*, something that keeps it alive, anything if it's a tree, if it's a rock, a rock doesn't, if it's a tree, if it's a plant, it has a spiritual entity that keeps it alive, but anything that's in existence has a spiritual component that directs it, that keeps it.

But far more than just being a part of it, it is responsible and actually keeps that item in where it's supposed to be and as it's supposed to be.

The *Derech Hashem* explains that's it's not a parallel universe. It's not like there's a physical universe and then there's a spiritual universe, it's that when Hashem created the world, Hashem created the spiritual forces to be responsible and to guide everything in the physical world.

Every tree, every rock, every mountain, has a spiritual element to it that keeps it in existence and that guides it. When the sun comes out in the morning, that *malach*, that *sar*, whatever you'll call it, brings it out, controls it. There are very exact laws which Hashem created, via which it should follow, and it follows them dutifully but it's a *bal bechirah*, it's a logical, thinking, spiritual entity that has freewill, could deny Hashem, could not listen to Hashem and if you listen to the words in *davening*, many, many times we describe the tremendous *shirah*, the praise that the upper world sing to Hashem and you have to understand they're not billions of boom boxes, they're not tape recorders, just saying word, they're *balei dei'ah*, understanding just like you understand, I understand, I have freewill, you have freewill, they are like us, they're not blinded by physicality, they're not put into a body so that they get drunk and get all confused, but they fully can listen or cannot, they have decision making ability and they decide obviously what's good, what's right, what's proper because Hashem commanded it, and they follow dutifully.

And the sad reality is that while we are very, very sophisticated in terms of physical science, and we understand much of the mechanisms behind the physical world, we are completely clueless, we are spaced out and clueless, when it comes to an entire other dimension of reality.

There's a *lo sasei* in the *Torah*, don't keep alive a *machshifah*. What's a *machshifah*? *Kishuf* is it's called black magic. If I practice optical illusions, if I practice sleight of hand, that's not *kishuf*. Smoke and mirrors is not *kishuf*. *Kishuf* means I literally made that object disappear.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains everything physical has a spiritual counterpart and Hashem created various ways that a human being can manipulate the upper worlds. And if you manipulate the upper worlds, the upper worlds which the lower worlds are tuned to, are tied to, it changes the lower worlds as well.

And if you'd like to understand *kishuf*, it's that ancient man used to have understandings that modern man doesn't. And that is how to manipulate the upper worlds. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Ahron *Hakohen* stand in front of Paroh, there was an *os*, one of the signs, Ahron takes a staff, throws it on the floor and it turns into a serpent, a *nes*, a miracle. If we would see it, we'd pass out.

Could you imagine, a stick a big stick, he throws it on the floor and it turns into a slithering, live snake. A *mosfes*. Paroh was not exactly moved. The *medrash* tells us Paroh called for the academy, the students in the academy, the children, because every child in the academy knew that trick and they each took their staff, threw it on the floor and it turned into snakes as Ahron's staff did.

Okay Ahron trumped them because his staff after turning back into a staff, swallowed them all whole and was still the same size. But here's the point, school children were learned in upper world forces, they were fully aware, fully conversant, and they knew how to manipulate things in a way that we modern man, with all our sophistication, and all of our understanding, we don't have a clue.

And if you study *chumash*, you'll see this over and over. The *Derech Hashem* explains that there are things we're allowed to do and things we're not allowed to do. *Kishuf* is black magic, we're

not allowed to do, *Sefer Yetzirah* which was written by Avraham *Avinu* is something that we're allowed to do.

Now you and I don't know how but the *Gemara* brings down many examples of *Tanoim*, *Amoraim* who knew *Sefer Yetzirah*, the ways to manipulate the upper worlds and ways that are permitted, one example was two *Tanoim* were sitting in a field, *erev Shabbos*, they created a cow and ate that cow on *Shabbos*. And that means to say they created a cow that they then *shechted*, prepared, ate on *Shabbos*.

How do you create a cow? What do you mean create a cow?

The answer is that Hashem created this physical world tied to the upper world. And if you know how to manipulate the upper world, you change things, you make things appear, make things disappear. And with all of our sophistication we live in a very, very clueless world.

We look at people serve *avoda zara* who are idol worships, ah, primitives, what do you bow down to a totem pole, c'mon, what kind of foolish guy are you?

And it is true that many, many of the *ovdei avoda zara* were quite foolish, but it's also true that many of them were quite sophisticated because as the Rambam explains, what they were doing was, tapping into forces of nature. Hashem created various levels and various arrangements of things and when they worshipped the sun or the moon, it wasn't the physical sun or the physical moon, it was that *sar*, that spiritual force behind it and they thought they could influence it to help them and apparently to some extent they could.

You study Bilam, you study even Lavan, you see they had tremendous powers. And while we are so sophisticated, we are also clueless.

And as people living in a society, it's time for us to sort of open our eyes and recognize that that which my eye sees, isn't the only dimension. And it's a little ironic because we're very comfortable with that. You and I speak on a cell phone. You pick up a cell phone, there are no wires and yet you expect me to believe that I could speak to my brother in *Eretz Yisrael*, six thousand miles away? How could that be?

Well, you see there's a, this little device over here, it sends out a microwave to a satellite, three miles in the sky, that satellite communicates to another satellite, that sends it relay station which sends it to another, which finds this oh c'mon, you expect me to believe that? Do you expect me to believe that if I pick up this phone, I'm going to speak to him?

And even better, try it on facetime. When you see the face, I don't get it, how could it be, my eye doesn't see microwave, I don't see electricity. I don't see electricity coursing through the world, I don't see x-rays, I don't see any of these things that I'm so comfortable with and so much aware of.

And I believe the point is that whilst we get very comfortable with what science teaches us, we also have to take a lesson. And that lesson is, that which my eye sees, is not the end of existence and is not the end of the world. And every physical entity has a spiritual part behind it and that spiritual part is larger, more prominent and it is responsible for the physical part.

If you'd like to understand modern man with all of his great wisdom, if you'd like to understand what it's like, I want you to imagine the following:

Imagine that you and I went to a remote part of Africa. Now we found a tribe, a tribe that had almost no exposure to civilization. And from that tribe we took a man, a very primitive man who lives still with his line cloth and his spear, and we put him on a plane. And on this plane we're

getting closer to JFK and as we're coming down, we're landing, we point out, look at that you see the Van Wykes, you see all those cars? And he says oh look at that car, in and out, and out, he says wow it's wondrous what you guys have invented. I mean things that drive themselves, they just go by themselves.

And you say to him, they don't drive themselves, each car has a driver. What do you mean driver, it's a tiny, what do you mean driver?

In his primitive understanding, he sees little vehicles, he assumes they move on their own.

Excuse me. He doesn't recognize that every car has a driver. And that if there wasn't a driver, the car would stop or crash but it wouldn't get to its destination.

What we have to recognize as well is that every physical entity in the world has forces guiding it, and much like a car has a driver, if those forces weren't there, it wouldn't get to its destination.

When you come home Friday night and you say *shalom alechem*, you sing those verses, you're singing to the *malachim* that escorted you back from *shul* to your house. Every action that a person does, creates a *malach*.

Chazal tell us, if you do a *mitzvah*, it creates a powerful *malach*, on the good. If you do something the opposite, it creates a powerful *malach* on the bad.

Would you like to understand why there's such painstaking detail in every *mitzvah*? It's because every *mitzvah* has powerful impact, powerful affects. Not in the physical world, but in the upper worlds. When Hashem created the human being, Hashem put us into a position of power, Hashem put us into a world that we can control. If we use the physical world in the right way, in the right time, it creates tremendous changes in the upper worlds and we may not see it, but affective it is.

And much like a powerful machine, it does far more than anything I could ever imagine, far more than I could do with my bare hand. And much like if you were to take a primitive man from three hundred years ago even and bring him into our world, he would never imagine the productivity of the average human being, how does one man pull ten thousand pounds. What do you mean you push on the gas, it can't be. He doesn't recognize machinery, he doesn't recognize levers, he doesn't know that world so he'll never understand.

But when you begin understanding that there are different worlds, you begin to understand that when Hashem put us into this world, Hashem gave us tremendous opportunities to change the upper world which changes this world, which becomes my world to come forever.

But the impact and the affect are far beyond anything I could do in the physical world. I may think I'm powerful, I'm strong, I'm very, very corporal, very physical, very limited. But if I use these powerful machines, then I change upper worlds.

But of course, much like any machine, there are rules. Laws how it has to be used. If you don't plug the vacuum cleaner into the world, it's not gonna work. If you don't put gas in the tank, the car's not gonna go. And if you drop your cell phone into a sink full of water, it's not going to function.

Do you know why there's such a incredible painstaking detail, it's for exactly that reason. The *mitzvahs* that Hashem gave us, change upper worlds, they have tremendous, tremendous impact, powerful machines that do more than we can ever imagine. But of course much like any machines it has to be functional. And if in your *tefillin* there's one letter that's touching the other or there's a letter missing or it's cracked, it doesn't work.

But why? I'm a good guy, I paid money, I tried. You're a good guy, feel bad, but you didn't use the machine.

And this is a very important concept and a very powerful lesson because if you don't focus on this, you will not understand much about our religion at all. If you take *or*, take a cow and you take that leather and you prepare that leather *lushem tefillin*, perfect good for *tefillin*, you could write the *parshah* on it.

Of course you can't use it for a *sefer Torah*, different level it won't work. If you prepared it for *mezuzah*, great for *mezuzah*, it'll never work for *tefillin*, or if you did it for *tefillin* it'll work for *mezuzah* because it's progressive, it's *mezuzah, tefillin, Torah*.

But why? Why? There's no explanation in the physical world because the physical world is corporeal, is thick, once you understand that the upper worlds, once you understand there's something called *kedushah*, and *kedushah* has very real rules to them, not arbitrary we may not understand them now we may understand them more or less, but Chazal understood them, they give us very exact guidelines and when you study any *mitzvah* you see the extraordinary detail because that detail matters, because it changes upper worlds or it doesn't, based on whether in fact it's effective.

If your *lulav* is split down the middle, doesn't work, it just doesn't accomplish in the upper world what you would like it to do. As much as you try, as much as you shake it, it's *passul*. If you have four spots on the top of it then it's *passul*, you're done, finished.

If you had the wrong *kavana*, doesn't work. But why? But why is a good question until you begin understanding what you're doing. And the truth be told, we'll never fully understand it, but when you focus on the fact that we're dealing with things way out of our normal understanding,

way out of our dimension, you begin to get a certain glimpse, and a certain understanding and perspective.

And I have one more step I would like to share with you. Of late I've learnt a new little habit. I have learnt to *daven* in a complete whisper. Now you may wonder, why do I *daven* in a complete whisper it's usually *bukol*, when you *daven* with a voice it's a *mu'orer*, it awakens the *kavana*, it's much easier.

So the reason why I sort of learnt to *daven* in a whisper is because I have gone to different *minyanim* at different times in my life some of which are like a library, I'm afraid of *gezel sheinah*, I'm afraid of waking up they guy next to me and I don't want to be guilty of *gezel sheinah* so I've learnt to *daven* in a whisper.

And if you think I'm being facetious, fortunately I am but there's some truth to it. If you go to certain *minyanim* or you watch certain people *daven*, you're looking at someone who looks brain dead and he may not have any *kavana* whatsoever and you may say, they're wasting their time, I mean isn't *tefillah* supposed to be *avodah shebulev*, it's heart service, it's supposed to be connecting to my Creator, it's supposed to be an emotional appeal and connection, a recognition of Hashem's presence. And it is. And while it's a hundred percent true, I'd like to share with you a fascinating *halachah*.

If you *daven* an entire *shacharis* from beginning to end and don't have any *kavana* at all, except for the first paragraph of *shema* and the first *brachas* in *shmoneh esrei*, you are *yotzei davening* totally and completely.

Meaning to say everything that you could accomplish was accomplished. Maybe not the highest level, obviously more *kavana* is better and if you really recognize and think about it and recognize you speak to Hashem, it's a much higher level, but you were *yotzei*.

However, *daven* the most meaningful, significant *shmoneh esrei* in the world, connecting to Hashem, speaking to Hashem, right there, but forget *yalev vuyavo* when you're obligated to, or say *sein tal umatar* when you're not supposed to and you're not *yotzei*.

But why? But why?

The but why is that while it's true that *kavana* is essential for *davening* and it's a huge part of it, it's but a part. You see every *mitzvah* has the *mitzvah* itself and every *mitzvah* has *hiddurim*, additional things.

And you should work on *davening*, you should work on having *kavana*, but you should also recognize that the words themselves are powerful. Even if you space out, even if you're totally not there, Chazal drafted those words with tremendous holiness and they affect upper worlds.

Shma, during *kabalas ol malchus shomayim*, you have to accept Hashem's sovereignty, first *passuk* of *shma*, first *brachas* in *shmoneh esrei*, but other than that, if you *davened* an entire *davening* and had no *kavana* whatsoever, you still had a tremendous affect on the upper worlds and the reason that I share that with you is not because I think we should learn to be lazy in *kavana*, quite the opposite, we should really learn to work on and grow but because it shares with us an interesting perspective.

And that is I was gifted when Chazal created the various systems of my growth, when Hashem gave me the *mitzvahs* in the *Torah*, they're powerful implements, powerful tools, machines that

change the upper worlds whether I know what I'm doing or not, whether I'm spaced in or not, and if I *davened* that whole *shmoneh esrei* totally completely unconscious, but at least in the first *brachah* I had in mind I'm speaking to Hashem, bingo, I changed the upper worlds, I did tremendous things.

I don't realize it, I take three takes step back and say where am I, who am I, what am I? But the bottom line is they are powerful tools. And I think it's very important for us to recognize.

You see if we were to see a person who knew *kishuf*, imagine we had one of Paroh's kids, one of Paroh's head magicians and we saw him literally take water, throw it on the floor and it turns into blood, oh my goodness, wow, the power, we'd be astonished.

We have much greater power. We change the upper worlds. We're given powerful machines, powerful systems to use. But you gotta use them.

We don't live in the upper worlds. We never really would get that full understanding until we leave this physical existence, but it's very important to understand the impact of the upper worlds, number one because I learn to value the *mitzvahs* and number two I learn why it is that there are such details and specificity to every *mitzvah*.

Why is it that if you take a *kalei habishul*, something that's easily cooked and you put it into a *kli rishon*, into a hot pot on *Shabbos*, you're dead, you're toast. Put it into a *kli shlishi*, third you're okay. Why, why why?

And in this physical world we live in you'll never know an answer. You'll never understand *borer*, you'll never understand much of any *melacha*, you'll never understand any of the *mitzvahs*.

Once you understand that these are powerful tools, Hashem warned us against things that change the upper worlds in a damaging sense, Hashem commanded us to do things that create powerful impacts and changes in the upper worlds, and every *mitzvah* that we engage in, has a huge impact, miles and miles, leagues and leagues above anything you and I can imagine but it takes a little while to sort of learn it, to understand it.

I think there's a tremendous lesson to learn from exactly this point, painstaking detail. Because when you see that, you understand that we're dealing with a different world. When you understand that if you took a man from the seventeen hundreds and brought him into our world, he wouldn't understand our world. How do you have so much clothing? How does one man have such a big house? How could you possibly have cut so many trees?

And you explain to him that I didn't cut the trees, there's this powerful combine and goes through a forest, just cuts it down like it's nothing. He can't relate to it because he doesn't understand machinery. And in that sense it's difficult for us to understand the changes in the upper world but that's something we have to work on. We have to work on understanding it, we have to work on recognizing it, and again we don't live in the upper worlds, we'll never really be there, but it's important for us to recognize how much Chazal understood the impact because then we could begin valuing the *mitzvahs*, then we could begin being careful.

Every single physical entity has a spiritual counterpart, that spiritual counterpart isn't just there, it's responsible for its existence, when I use anything in the physical world in its right way, I give it a *kiyum*, I give it reinforcements, strengthening, I elevate it. I don't elevate the chair I sit on, but that chair has a spiritual component and it becomes more of a *davar shebikedushah* it becomes holy.

What do you mean it becomes holy? Holy chair, this is a holy chair. Why? Because I used it properly.

And you and I may not see it, but that's the impact, that's the effect. And when you begin studying these things and realizing it you understand the powerful, powerful impact that we can have and again the opposite because *rachmana litzlan* they could be disastrous.

I think there's a tremendous lesson. When you take a man out the ancient world, a man who had machinery and it was machines produced a million pennies in three years, and you explain to him the phenomenal productivity that we have, he'd be aghast.

That's us to the upper world.

We also have to recognize one of the great shortcomings of science and that is that in his arrogance, man believes he replaces G-D. I don't need G-D because I know the systems, I know the mechanisms, I debunk G-D. You found the system via which G-D runs the world, but you understand but a tiny, tiny little bit because even if you would merit understanding all of the physical world, that's not the underpinnings of it, that's not the life force, that's not what's keeping it in existence.

There's a whole other dimension and while we're very sophisticated in a physical sciences, we're extraordinarily primitive in the spiritual ones.

And that's something that we need to think about, something we need to understand. And I want to close with one little story that I think is very eye opening.

There was a fellow, he was in college not religious, he was Jewish and he was in a fraternity and there was a frat party fraternity party and they were all drinking and doing whatever they were

doing and somebody discovered one of the fellows in the fraternity discovered that there were some scrolls on the walls. Apparently there was a Jewish fraternity, there were some scrolls and he took them off the wall and they were *mezuzas*.

And this fellow, Mark was one of the fellows in the group and this other guy, found these scrolls, showed them to Mark and said hey, these are cool, let's burn them. Let's burn them and make a little fire. And Mark said, you can't do that. You can't do that, they're holy.

And the fellow said to Mark, what do you mean they're holy? They're holy, they're a scroll.

What do you mean they're holy the fellow said to Mark. I don't know but you, you can't burn them, they're holy.

And the fellow turned to Mark and said, you expect us to care when you don't even know what they are?

That night Mark went to bed, tears streaming down his cheeks because he didn't know what it meant that they were holy and he didn't know what it meant. And he went on to discover what they were about, what they meant.

And in a very real sense, I think that's us. As sophisticated as we may be, we're much like Mark, we don't get it, we don't understand it. *Tefillin, tzitzis, mezuzah*, whatever, I don't know. And you have to delve in, have to understand the most we'll get is but an inkling, but that inkling opens our mind's eye, I'm changing the upper worlds by doing these things, I'm changing things to the extent that I can't envision or imagine, but it has to be exact, it has to be the way Chazal said it, the way Hashem said it because only then does it accomplish.

When we recognize the value, the incredible opportunity, it's empowering, it's invigorating because we recognize the power that Hashem gave us the opportunity to change myself, change the upper worlds to accomplish tremendous things that Hashem gave to each of us.