

# Session One: The Force of Habit

The second perek of the *Mesillas Yescharim* opens with an introduction to *zehirus*. Loosely translated as 'mindfulness', the *Ramchal* urges us to start paying attention to our everyday thoughts, actions and emotions. Without this, we are guaranteed to stumble through life without giving even a second thought as to who we are and who we want to be. If you want to maximize your potential in this world and gain an awareness of who you are, the second perek of the *Mussar Vaad* is essential listening.

הנה ענין הזהירות הוא שיהיה האדם נזהר במעשיו ובעניניו  
The idea of watchfulness is for one to be cautious of his deeds and matters,

מתבונן ומפקח על מעשיו ודרכיו  
contemplating and watching over his deeds and ways

הטובים הם אם לא  
whether they are good or evil;

לבלתי עזוב נפשו לסכנת האבדון חס וחלילה  
not abandoning his soul to the danger of destruction, G-d forbid,

ולא ילך במהלך הרגלו כעור באפלה.  
and not walking through the course of habit like a blind man in darkness.

והנה זה דבר שהשכל יחייבהו ודאי  
Reason certainly obligates this.

כי אחרי שיש לאדם דעה והשכל להציל את עצמו ולברוח מאבדון נשמתו  
For after a person has knowledge and reason to save himself and escape from  
the destruction of his soul,

איך יתכן שירצה להעלים עיניו מהצלתו  
how is it conceivable that he would willingly blind his eyes from saving  
himself?!

אין לך פחיתות והוללות רע מזה ודאי

והעושה כן הנה הוא פחות מהבהמות ומהחיות אשר בטבעם לשמור את עצמם  
One who does this is lower than beasts and wild animals whose nature it is to  
protect themselves,

ועל כן יברחו וינסו מכל מה שיראה להם היותו מזיק להם  
escaping and fleeing from whatever seems harmful to them.

The *Mesilas Yesharim* opens up the second *perek* with the definition, “*be’ir middas hazehirus*”  
defining the trait of *zehirus*. *Zehirus*, I guess we would define as watchfulness, mindfulness, but  
let’s begin.

“*hinei inyan hazehirus*” the matter of *zehirus* “*hu sheyuhei adam nizhar bumasav uve’inyanav*”  
is that a person should be careful in his action, in his ways “*kulomar*” what does it mean to say?  
“*misbonen umefakeiach*” contemplate and become wise “*al masav udrachav*” on his actions and  
his ways “*hatovim heim im lo*” are they good for him or not, “*luviltli ozal nafsho sakanas adam*  
*chas vuchalilah*” so as not to lead himself, his *nefesh* to the danger of abandonment of being lost.  
“*vulo yelech muhalech hagelo ki yelech bu’afelah*” and not to go in the ways that he’s  
accustomed like a blind man in darkness.

And with these words the *Mesilas Yesharim* begins the path of growth and begins the actual  
process of becoming a greater, better individual, being a better *eved Hashem*.

Now let’s keep in mind that this is after the introduction, meaning to say, after a person has spent  
a lot of time on the first *perek* and after a person knows “*ma chovasi bu’olam*”, I got it, I now

understand that I'm created for a few short years I understand that Hashem put me here to grow, to accomplish that there are battles out there, that I will be for eternity what I shape myself into and the stakes are grave.

I spent a lot of time on that, I focused on it, now I'm ready for the actual growth process. And the growth process are rungs in the ladder. The first rung is *zehirus* and the definition of it is exactly what the *Mesilas Yesharim* says, and that is that a person should be mindful, careful, in his actions, in his ways.

What does that mean? I should contemplate, I should become wise in my actions and my ways are they good for me or not?

Now this would seem to be the most basic issue that any thinking person should be constantly asking themselves. What I'm engaged in, what I'm doing, is it for my betterment? Is this activity for my betterment or my detriment? Is this habit that I have something that's good for me or something that's bad for me?

The way I'm spending my time, the way I speak to people, what I'm involved in. I should be constantly asking myself is this for my betterment, is this for my good? Will I be happy with it two years from now, five years from now, ten years from now, is this in my best interest?

Now you would assume that that's something that any thinking intelligent person would always be asking himself. Meaning, none of us are fools, no one we know goes out, whatever hey, let's just whatever. Obviously if I understand that things have consequences, my actions, my ways, my thoughts will have direct results, obviously I'm constantly thinking are they for my betterment, are they not, are they good for me or not. So why does the *Mesilas Yesharim* have to say that we have to train ourself, we have to learn, we have to be mindful, this is the first *middah*

and he's going to spend quite a number of *perakim* on defining this and how to acquire it, it sounds like any thinking person should do it if it means being mindful whether these actions, whether my ways are for my good or for my bad, doesn't everyone do that all the time, it's called basic thinking?

And I'd like to share with you that the answer is no. We don't do that, and I'll share with you exactly what I mean. Let's say I would ask you the following question, what is the greatest cause of sin? Let's say I would ask you, I want you to do a survey, an inventory, give me the real big causes of sin. What causes people to sin?

So likely you'll give me a pretty good list. Well, number one it's going to be lust, maybe honor, drive for money. Maybe anger, jealousy, ego, I'm sure that you'll come up with a very good, strong list and I'd like to share with you while all of those can cause sin and all of those can be a factor in a person not growing, I don't believe that those are the single greatest cause of sin.

The single greatest cause of sin is something called stupidity, simple stupidity. Have you ever engaged in something that was wrong, and you woke up two years later and said, wow I'm so happy I did that. That was great. It ruined my this world, it ruined my world to come, maybe I'm happy here, it made me feel badly, it messed me up but I'm so glad I did it. And the simple reality is that anything that we engage in that's not according to the *Torah*, doesn't do well for us here, nor in the world to come.

Hashem put us on the planet to grow and accomplish and Hashem wants us to earn our portion in the world to come, but the *Torah* that Hashem gave us is not just the guidebook to acquiring the world to come, it's also the guidebook to living a happy, successful life. And the more a person adopts a *Torah* lifestyle, the more a person lives the *Torah*, the happier they are here, the more

fulfilled, the more balanced, the better a human being they are. A humble, kindly person is very popular. An arrogant, selfish lout is not very good company.

A person who's in control, a person who is a master of himself, is a person who's balanced. A person who goes after his lust and his desire and ego and everything else, is out of control. And it doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that the *Torah's* ways are beautiful. The *Torah's* ways are helpful and a person who adopts the *Torah's* way, obviously his world to come is going to be great. But this world as well is much greater and every *mitzvah* helps me in the world to come and in this world. Every *averah* damages me in the world to come and hurts me in this world as well. The pleasure that I gain is passing, fleeting and gone.

Any pleasure, anything that you engage in, it happens and it's gone but the result is there, in me, permanently.

Jack the Lame used to have a quote, he was a health guru before there were health gurus, he used to say 'A moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips' meaning when you broke the diet, the pleasure that you had, how much pleasure, okay tasted good, the chocolate cake was okay, good it tasted, I get it. But you're suffering the consequence of that for years to come. And every sin that a person ever engages in, for years to come, weighs them down, is a part of them in a negative sense and every *mitzvah* the opposite, helps them and allows them to feel more fulfilled, more satisfied, more balanced.

So it's obvious that a thinking person is going to avoid much sin and the single greatest cause of sin is stupidity. For most of us, we don't commit grave crimes, we don't, we're not adulterers, we're not murderers, the sins that we're involved in are by and large things that we don't pay attention to.

We begin this, we begin that, we start habits, we start things and before you know it, we're two years down the path, five years down the path and we wonder how we get there. But it's not grave, huge, passionate battles. Oh my goodness, I'm pulled, do I, don't I.

The vast majority of the things we do wrong are just by rote, by habit, we do them and it's not thinking that causes almost all of it. And I believe that one of the greatest wonders in creation is something called freewill.

And let me share with you what I mean. I whom am speaking to you am a *neshamah*. I was under Hashem's throne of glory. Hashem put me in this body and He gave me a mission, grow, accomplish. Here's the *Torah* to live by, become the great human being you can be.

Now I once upon a time knew that with absolute clarity and here is the question: How do you take a brilliant *neshamah*, that sees from one end of the earth to the other, that knows exactly why it's created, knows the consequences of every action and give it freewill? And the I whom am speaking to you in this body, am occluded, I'm blocked and there are four components, four separate factors that allow us to go to sleep, allow us to live in this state of semi-consciousness and requires an entire *Mesilas Yesharim*, an entire system of work for us to actually wake up, for us to grow.

And I'd like to share with you what those four components are:

The first reason why I forget why I'm here, the first reason why I need to contemplate and stop my business and ask myself the basic questions that I don't ask is simply the darkness of physicality. When my *neshamah*, when I was put into this body, it wasn't just a *neshamah* put into a robotic form, put into a metal robot, the body has its own drives and desires, appetites, hungers and the I whom am speaking to you am really comprised of both, both a holy *neshamah*

and *nefesh habahmi*, an animal soul with its drives, with its instincts and both are combined and that's the problem.

You see, put into this body, my *neshamah* becomes deadened, it's almost like novocain, you know when you go to the dentist, he gives you novocain, your lip, you're rrrr, you almost can't, you can drool, you won't even feel it, the body is novocain to my *neshamah*, I forget, I don't feel why is it that it could trample on *mitzvahs*? Why is it that I could hurt another human being's feelings and not even have it bother me?

The reason is because I don't feel it. But why don't I feel it, the *neshamah* would feel it. The *neshamah* would be aghast, how did I say those words, I hurt that person's feelings, how could I have done that?

The answer is I don't feel it because I'm in this body, and I'm deadened, I'm asleep and the darkness of physicality stops me from understanding, stops me from seeing, stops me from realizing. And if you'd like to know how it is that a human being has freewill, there are four components:

The first component is simply the darkness, the deadness of the body that stops me from feeling. But that alone wouldn't be sufficient. If Hashem just took the *neshamah* and put it into a body, yes it would be difficult, yes it would be hard and I still would need to work but it wouldn't be the fever-pitched battle that the *Mesilas Yesharim* described in the first *perek*, it wouldn't be this battle that's so, so tough.

The second component that adds to this dimension to allow for freewill is something called rationalization. You see I, the *neshamah* know exactly what's right, what's proper and I would

never allow myself to do the things that I do, how dare you do that? That's selfish. You're putting your needs before another person, what right do you have to do that?

How could you act that way? Do you understand what an embarrassment to yourself it is, to Hashem, how could you do that? The *neshamah* within me would never allow me to have real freewill because the *averos* that I do are things that are against my best interest and to allow the human being to actually have *bechirah*, Hashem created the second feature called rationalizations.

Rationalization is this free-flow ability to believe exactly what I want to believe. I can create fanciful worlds and believe them if I want to believe them. And you need no further proof than listening to some scientists who are so steeped into the world and they'll describe to you the big bang, and they'll describe to you the cosmic x-rays that began and they'll describe the physics and the incredible sophistication of this world and they recognize the wonder of it and they say Hahahah, just happened, just like that. Lucky rolling causing dice and a big bang, a big, big bang out of which came a hundred billion galaxies, each containing a hundred billion stars, it just happened.

I believe you get no more clear an example of rationalization than to listen to learned men of science, describe things that are so incredible and just attribute it to whatever. But if that's not good enough, let me share with you a very tactile example of rationalization. And the truth is they're all over, they're in our world and people we see, but let me share with you a classic because I think it is eye-opening.

Two-gun Crowley was a gangster living in the nineteen thirties, nineteen twenties, it was his hay day in New York City and he was known as quite a hardened criminal. The police commissioner said he would kill at the drop of a feather, the man was a ruthless killer.

Now interestingly enough, Two-gun Crowley fought his last battle with the police when he was in the west side, in his apartment and he was surrounded by a hundred and fifty policemen and it was a machine gun battle from all the different rooftops, shooting into his apartment and he was holding the New York City police department at bay for almost an hour. Ten thousand people gathered on the street to watch the scene, and finally he was shot, he was unconscious. They broke into his apartment from on top and they found him unconscious laying on a sheet of paper.

And they took the piece of paper and it was drenched in his blood and on the piece of paper were written his last will and testament. And this is how it read, under my coat lies a lonely heart, but a good heart. A heart that would do no man any harm, and he signed it.

Now the interesting part of the story is how he ended up in that shootout in the upper east side. You see a little while earlier he had been in Central Park in his car, a policeman came by, now this was years ago, there was no radar, no satellite communication, a policeman asked him for identification, he could have easily driven off and there would have been nothing to say, but why take any chances, he reached it but instead of a wallet, he pulled out his gun, shot the policeman dead, jumped out of the car, pulled out the service revolver from the policeman's belt, shot him again, jumped back into his car, the police followed him, caught him in his apartment, that's a 'lonely heart, a heart that would do no man any harm'.

But the story doesn't end there. Dale Carnegie writes that he was overheard, you see he survived that gun battle, he was unconscious but he was still alive, they took him to the hospital, they

operated and he stood trial for murder of that policeman. And he was sentenced to be killed, he was sentenced to the electric chair.

On the way to the electric chair, he was overheard saying the words 'this is what I get for defending myself' and Dale Carnegie's point and it's very well made, is that that type of rationalization is not unusual in the criminal population. He says that he had ongoing conversations with the warden of Sing-Sing and the warden said that every single man in prison here, is innocent, they all have a reason, rationale why they had to, why they had to do, every man here is innocent. And this is not indicative of a criminal mind, it's indicative of a human mind.

You see, we human beings don't do things that are wrong. If they're wrong either I don't do them, or if I do do them, I just make them right. And we have this incredible capacity to take whatever belief system we want and adopt it. And I could have certain clauses, I hold of every *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch*, except this one. And granted this one may apply to you, not to me, I'm different and you could find honest, *erlich* people who do the strangest things, and how could you do that, the answer is for me it's different.

And we all have two sets of books, one set of books for the rest of the world and another set of books for me. My *Shulchan Aruch*, my code of conduct is a little different. You have to understand me, my circumstance, my situation and this is a basic reality but not by happenstance, not a quirk of human nature, built into the inner fabric of the human is this feature and why because only with this is there this essence of freewill.

You see, the *neshamah* is so pure and understands things so clearly that it would never allow me to do something wrong unless I could make it right. And suddenly what's wrong and evil and

immoral is okay. Or for me, under these circumstances, Hashem will understand, I understand, and before you know it, I change my version of reality and the second reason why we need a *Mesilas Yesharim*, and we need a tremendous amount of work, is because we have this capacity to rationalize.

The first problem is that we are in this body that so deadens our sensations, our feelings, I don't feel the holiness of *Shabbos*, I don't recognize what it means to eat kosher or *trief*, big deal *trief*, I don't feel the fact that it deadens my heart because my heart I deadened already.

The first reason is that in this heavy cloak of physicality I don't feel things, I don't recognize the value of a *mitzvah*, I don't recognize the damage I'm doing if I don't. The second problem is that I rationalize and rationalization allows me to take that which I knew was forbidden, make it permitted and suddenly my ways change.

But we don't change there. To actually give real freewill, and to make it a challenge that's really equal, you see at the end of the day, I'm given credit for making myself. But I, the *neshamah* know exactly why I'm here, I know exactly the reason for creation and I know the value of every *mitzvah*, the damage of every sin.

So in that state, how do I possibly have freewill? And even if you deaden me, and even if you give me rationalizations, I'm still not foolish, I'm still not stupid. And there are two more components that Hashem added to the human personality to make it actually an even battle so that I could just as easily be great and *kadosh* or whatever, waste my time and whatever.

And the third element, is something called emotions. Emotions are those feelings, sensations, they might be anger, they might be arrogance, they might be jealousy, they might be feeling down and depressed and there are forty or fifty of the different shades of emotions and you could

watch the psychologist's charts when they chart the faces to the emotion and you see there are quite a number of emotional states that the human being can be in.

And emotions function in a number of ways. Number one it colors the way I view life and the way I view you. You could be a fine person, you could be a wonderful person and we could be getting along very well until you step on my toes, until you hurt my feelings, until you say the wrong line in the wrong time, in the wrong way and suddenly fchhh I see red. But when I see red, it's not that I'm angry, it's suddenly I view you in a vastly different way, I feel differently about you, I view you differently and if you ever speak to someone who's really angry at another human being, the way they describe him sounds like they're not human.

A person like that doesn't have any rights, a person like that doesn't have a right to live, doesn't have, you're talking about another Jew, you're talking, how could you speak that way, and that person might be your family, might be your spouse, and if you watch a person when they're angry, at another person, discussing that other person, you suddenly realize that their value system changes. The way they look at that person changes, they would never speak that way to anyone, but suddenly they're angry and suddenly it changes the way they act, the way they react, what they say to whom.

And the emotions that I'm constantly experiencing, color the way I view you, the way I view the world, the way I view things, if I'm down and depressed, *mitzvahs* don't mean much, my future doesn't mean much. If I'm happy and glad, everything shades and colors the way that I think and the way that I act.

But there's another element to the way emotions work that's even more interesting. Daniel Goldman, in his book Emotional Intelligence, describes very well the amygdala. The part of the

brain that actually is the part of the Olympic system, the Olympic system that controls the emotions.

You see when you said something to me, my eyes, see it, my ears hear it and it's processed to the brain, turned into electrical signals, along the optic nerve, along the auditory nerve and then it hits the front of the brain, the cortex and at that point I begin processing, I begin thinking should I react, should I not react, what should I say, how should I say. And I go through the brilliant thought process of a thinking person.

But if I get angry, something else happens. The amygdala hijacks. You see before I have a chance for it to hit the neo cortex, the frontal part of the brain that actually thinks, the amygdala short-circuits it and takes it right to the emotional center and right away I react.

You see what happens is it hijacks my thinking, you ever notice when people are angry, they're dumb. It's not that they make bad decisions, they become dumb, they don't see other possibilities and the reason is because the thinking part of the brain isn't consulted. The amygdala takes that right away to the emotional center of the brain and immediately I feel a reaction and the reason why I act dumb when I'm angry is because my brain got hijacked, it short-circuited, didn't go through the neo cortex, didn't go through the thinking part so I don't think of the different possibilities and the consequences and whatever, I just react because there is only one possibility, because I'm dumb.

Anger is dumb. But the reason why it's dumb is because it short-circuits the brain and doesn't allow me to think and I say dumb things, I do dumb things because I'm functionally dumb. And it's not just anger, it's many emotions, what they do is, they stop us from thinking.

And this is the third balancing factor, the first is the deadening of physicality, I don't feel things. The second is this ability to create fanciful worlds, to rationalize whatever I want, but the third is my emotions which both shape the way I feel but also short-circuit my brain, don't allow me to think.

But there's a fourth element, if you didn't think it was tough enough yet, Hashem introduced the fourth element. And that fourth element is something that we don't think about that much but I'd like to share with you what it is, it's something called habit.

Now habit is probably the greatest boon and the greatest feature that allows you to be productive. Let me explain to you what I mean. If you think back about the first time you drove a car, you probably, okay let me think okay, hand at, hand at, two o' clock and ten o' clock, okay and there's the gas, right? There's the brake, right okay remember look to the left, signal right, signal first down this way then look over your shoulder. Right, okay. It took all of your concentration to drive the car.

Now you could easily have a conversation with the person next to you and unfortunately maybe even on a cell phone, maybe even texting, the things you shouldn't be doing, all the while while your brain is doing those things in the background that used to take you so much time, so much focus previously to do.

You learn to do things by habit, by rote, so that you could free your brain up to do the important things hopefully having meaningful conversations or thinking, not doing dumb things.

Most men when they get dressed in the morning, put one leg first into their pants. Most men don't know which leg it is, but most men will put one leg in first. Now why do they do that, they

don't think hmm, let me think about based on my left-handedness I think it's probably wiser for me to stand on my right leg, and put my left, I do it every morning, that's how I do it.

We go through life just doing, just by habit, by rote and it's one of the greatest boons for productivity that Hashem ever gave us. Because if we had to think of every single decision, along that day we couldn't do anything. All day I'd be thinking how to hold the pen, how to move, how to, we're able to learn behaviors, we're able to learn reactions, we're able to learn to drive cars and navigate all kinds of different situations by rote so that our brain is free to do other things.

If you've ever had a new job, you'll probably find after the first day you're exhausted, you're just so tired. By why? Because everything was new. Where's the water cooler, where's the bathroom, you had to think, you had to pay attention, you were like constantly on but after a while it all becomes rote, you get up from your desk, you just walk to the bathroom, you don't think where it is, do I turn left, do I turn right. You get dressed, you put your shirt on, you put your jacket, we do things by rote, by habit and it's a huge boon for productivity.

However, it also comes with a huge cost. If every habit that I adopted was done with wisdom, I would be a hugely productive person. The problem is most of my habits were acquired long before I was thinking clearly, long before I realized the consequences, and there are so many habits that we have that are so destructive. Just listen to the way people talk to other people and many people it's sad, even the marriage, you could hear one spouse saying something and the other spouse gets all reactive. And it's only if they would play a tape recorder that they would realize they're not even communicating. They're not, they're just reacting by habit, by rote, excepting what that person was going to say and reacting to it and they didn't even say it.

The way we talk to people, the way we act is so robotic, so by rote, we have habits that rule everything that we do, if they're good habits, it's great, if they're not it's very, very destructive.

The way you speak to other people, I guarantee is by habit. You want a classic example: How many d's are there in butter? Right, butter, like you put on bread, how many d's are there in butter? So if you come from Brooklyn or Queens or most of this part of the country, you know that there are two d's in butter except that butter is spelt b u t t e r. But we don't say *butter*, we say butter. And if you say *butter*, they're going to look at you like you're from Mars.

The way I speak and it's not just pronunciation, the way I react, whether I say hi, how you doing, good morning, *shalom alechem*, who are you, what are you? The way I speak to people, the way I act, the way I react, my lines, my emotions are by habit. There are so many things that I do because that's the way I did them yesterday, the way I did them the day before, and if you don't stop analyze, scrutinize your habits, I guarantee you're wasting tremendous amount of time.

For most of us it's not sins of commission, most of us are not engaged in horrible sins of doing, we're involved in horrible sins of omission, not doing.

How many of us really are fully productive? How many of us really are growing human beings, I won't say twenty four seven, but how about the good part of the day. And when you begin analyzing yourself, you realize that habit rules over everything. And this is not just an accident, this fourth element is so powerful that the Gra explains that actually it's a powerful force that Hashem put into the world.

You see, not only your habits boon for a productivity, the Gra explains that anything that you do, you're given a *ruach mimarom*, a wind from above to want to do more of that. Whatever you

engage in, you want to do that again. And I found this over and over, the most trivial thing, if you play ping pong and you get into it, somehow the next day you want to play ping pong.

You play tennis, you get into it, you just want to do it. It's a *ruach mimarom*, whatever you do, they give you from above, a *ruach* to want to do more of it and explains the Gra that's the concept of "*mitzvah goreres mitzvah*" when you do a *mitzvah*, from up above they give you a wind, a *ruach*, a desire to do more of it and when you do something wrong, it's the opposite and again this is the fourth that allows for freewill.

You see, when you study the human being, a thinking, intelligent person and you see them wasting their life and you see them accomplishing a fraction of what they could accomplish, one of the questions you have to ask yourself is how could it be, what's *pshat*?

A brilliant, thinking man, a woman who has such potential and she's squandering, what are you doing? And the answer is that person is being a human being and to allow for freewill, Hashem created these features in the human.

Explains the *Mesilas Yesharim* the first thing that a thinking person must do is "*misbonen umefakeach*" he has to become wise, he has to contemplate, my actions and my ways. I have to do a time study, I have to do a study of my ways and my habits, I have to step outside myself and watch myself, look back on my day. Look back on my interactions and ask myself the most basic, fundamental question, was that good for me? Am I happy that I did that? Are the results things that I'm pleased with?

What do you mean, if I wasn't pleased, I wouldn't do it. Right? Wrong. When I'm doing, I'm busy, I'm doing. I'm by robotic habit, we're emotionally carried away, we're not thinking or rationalizing or just not even feeling it. I'm busy doing, engaged and therefore I have to step

away, look at my life, look at my time usage, look at my interactions with other people and ask myself the most basic question, was that for my betterment is that for my detriment? Am I happy with the results, will I be happy two years from now, five years from now, ten years from now?

And even though that sounds so obvious and it sounds like something everyone does all the time, no one does it.

Tom Watson was the chairman of IBM. IBM was the leading manufacture, leading in its industry, it lost its luster when it made a mistake about the computer revolution, but IBM was considered one of the ultimate successful companies and it was Tom Watson, as the CO, as the founder whose vision guided that company and there's a famous picture of Tom Watson's office, he's sitting on his desk and as you walk into this palatial, beautiful office, over is an arch as you walk in and on the arch are the letters t h I n k, think. Because Tom Watson found that leaders in industries, tycoons, people who are paid a fortune of money at the time, weren't doing this most basic thing.

How could it be? These were brilliant people, educated, learned in many different fields, how could they be so dumb? And the answer is that is the human condition. And again, the *Mesilas Yesharim* explains to us that a thinking person must still go through this process. You could be brilliant, you could be insightful, you could be wonderfully intellectual but you must stop, "*misbonen umefakeach*", contemplate, become wise to your actions and your ways and the simple reality is that we human beings can be very astute, brilliant to everyone else, but not to ourselves.

Your flaws, huh, I could tell you in a heartbeat. Your shortcomings I'll rattle them out. Mine, somehow I'm blind as a bat. And it's not by accident, there are four reasons because when

Hashem took this holy *neshamah* called I, and gave me this opportunity to grow, to accomplish, but challenged me, it required some major features that should give me freewill.

The first feature is I was put into this body and it's novocain to the soul, I don't feel the *kedushah* of a *Shabbos*, I don't feel Hashem's presence, I could *daven* a *shmoneh esrei*, really be talking to Hashem right there and suddenly I space out and I'm three thousand miles away and I don't wake up until I take three steps back after *shmoneh esrei*, where am I?

Novocain for the soul, being in this body I don't feel the value of *mitzvahs*, I don't feel the damage of *averos*, I don't feel your pain, I don't feel, I'm deaded.

The second problem is that in this body, I have this incredible capacity to rationalize. This capacity to rationalize allows me to take things that are forbidden, things that are wrong and make them one hundred percent permitted. I'm allowed to. I'm allowed to do this, I'm allowed to do that, I can do what I want.

When you find a Tougan Crowley, describing a good heart, a heart that would do no man any harm, he meant it. In his mental state, that's how he viewed himself, there's no human being alive that views himself as, I'm evil and criminal, maybe there's some psychopathic, but even then the psychopath, they don't have the sense of conscious.

Ask anyone, in their heart of hearts, I'm a good person. Everyone rides the white steed, wears the white hat, the most heinous criminal you'll find in his heart of hearts thinks of himself as a good person, a person who would do no harm.

And the reason for this is because that's the way Hashem gave us freewill. Because if I were clearly rational and I saw the outcome of my actions, I wouldn't have freewill, I would never

allow me to do that. Number one it's bad for me, I don't damage myself, I don't drink bleach, I don't cut myself because it's stupid, it's foolish. So how do I engage in self-destructive behaviors?

The answer is I have to become blind to them. I don't feel them and even if they're clearly wrong, I rationalize, listen it's as much as you could expect from a person from my background. Of course can I learn more, of course I could but from my background and what I'm involved in, I'm doing pretty good.

I, I could do much, whatever it's okay. You are different, me, and that's that second power could rationalization.

The third is this thing called emotions. Emotions allow me to feel. And my feelings shape the way I view things, the way I look at things and my feelings also can make me dumb as sin. Dumb because the brain is shut off. When you see the young man falling in love, oooh and he's going to and you explain to him, do you understand that she is the worst thing in the world for you, you understand she flies on a broom at night, you are talking to deaf ears.

Because he clearly sees, he understands, his emotions have shaped his reality and his brain is shut off and that's one of the great dangers of being a human being, we all have it, we all engage in it and you have to step outside yourself after the event, look at it, ask yourself what did I do, how did I do?

But the fourth element is something called habit. Habits are things that we do because we did them yesterday, we did them the day before, and again as the Gra explains, Hashem gives us a *ruach* a wind, because that allows for freewill and allows a person to actually really to be challenged.

But it really requires doing. You see habits are formed, I did it before, I did it the day before, I never think about it, and I could go about this thing called life just doing and doing and doing and unless I analyze my habits, and unless I stand outside myself and look, I don't have a clue.

Number one I could be wasting huge amount of time. Number two I could be acting in a very negative way. I clearly remember having a conversation with a man for an hour on the telephone and when we're done I called up a good friend of mine, from a *????* (39:53) we had learnt *buchavrusah* for five years and I called him up and I said to him Chaim, tell me, be honest with me, we're friends, I want you to be honest with me, am I a nice guy?

Chaim said yeah. No Chaim, honest, please I'm asking you this is *luto'eles* be honest, am I a nice guy. Chaim said yeah. No c'mon Chaim, be honest. I want you, didn't really honest, be honest. What's your problem, you're a nice guy, what's your problem?

You know what my problem was? My problem was I just spoke to a man for an hour, he was the most obnoxious, aggressive, offensive thing I could ever imagine and I said to myself, there is no way in the world he could recognize how I view him, he would jump off a cliff. It's clear that he's created a whole façade, a whole mindset where what he's doing is right and justified and proper and the way he acts and the way he speaks and the way he that's what's right, what's good.

I said to myself, my goodness, maybe I'm the same. How do I know? And while in that case, *baruch Hashem* I don't think it was justified, but looking in that mirror and trying to understand who it is that I'm looking at, and what is that I feel, what is it that I do and how do others perceive it, requires stepping away.

What the *Mesilas Yesharim* explains to us is the first job of a growing person is “*luhisbonen ulefakeach*” be wise, to contemplate, to become wise, to ask myself the key question, are my actions and my ways for my betterment, are they for my detriment? Am I happy with them, am I not. I have to look, I have to study, I have to become wise to myself. I have to become a student of human nature but not human nature, my nature. I too am a human, and I have to become wise to myself. The only way to do that is to stop, take time, look at yourself from an objective standpoint, you go for long walks on the beach, you go for long walks when there is no distraction, no noise, no business, and you find quiet time and you think.

You think through your day, think through your actions, you think through what you do and you recognize in fact what’s good, what’s wrong and what you accomplished. Many, many people spend untold amounts of time, just spinning their wheels, they don’t accomplish a fraction of what they could have done. Hashem created us, gave us this opportunity to grow and accomplish, Hashem gave us a *Torah* to guide us and Hashem wants us to be happy in this world. This is the *prozdor*, it’s a corridor, it’s the purpose of our existence but we do pass through and Hashem is the ultimate *metiv*, the ultimate giver and Hashem wants us to enjoy this world as well.

And therefore Hashem gave us the *Torah*. The *Torah* is the way to gain the world to come, to grow, to accomplish, but it’s also a way to enjoy this world, to be happy, to be fulfilled, to be balanced. A person who lives the *Torah* way is happy, fulfilled, it’s a beautiful life. So how’s it possible that we don’t all keep the *Torah* a hundred percent? How’s it possible we’re not *tzaddikim*, growing, accomplishing at the highest level?

The answer is because we’re put into this bitter, bitter battle. And the reason why it’s so difficult is because if we have all these features, the deadening of the body, rationalizations, emotions,

habits and the only way that a person can really grow is to study themselves. To step outside themselves, look at themselves, analyze themselves. When they do that, Hashem helps, they start growing, and they start becoming the person they're supposed to be.