

When my children were little, we lived in Rochester, New York and not far from the city of Rochester, you drive a few miles and you'll see rows and rows, acres and acres, miles and miles of corn fields. And I remember one Sunday afternoon I took the kids on an interesting outing.

There was a farmer who had cut paths in his cornfield. Now corn grows very, very tall and typically when you're in the cornfield itself you, all you can see is corn to the front of you, to the left of you, to the right of you, because it grows well over six feet tall and a person standing in the center of a cornfield is not going to be able to see anything beyond the rows of corn.

In any case, this farmer designed something clever, he designed a maze within the cornfield I believe it was called the 'Amazing Maize Maze' in any case, I read about it, I decided I'm going to take the kids there.

And the kids were little at the time I had one in a stroller, a couple of little people walking along and I remember they explained to us what the maze was, you start and you make a left, you make a right, you go through and you try to find your way out of the maze.

I said, okay guys let's go. We were up to the challenge and we went into the cornfield maze. As we entered one of the kids said "Hey, Abba, let's make a left" so we made a left. One kid said "Let's make a right" make a right. Make a left and we're going and going and things are fine and we're having a good time trying to figure our way out, but after about ten minutes, fifteen minutes, I realized wait a minute this looks like we've been here before and I get a sort of sense of we may not be doing this as well as I thought so I say "Guys, let's try this way" so we tried to make a left and we tried to make a right.

Another ten minutes and the kids are getting a little *kvetchy* and it's getting hot and I realize we're getting into serious trouble over here and then I realized we were lost, dead lost.

Now it happened to be because this was an entertainment engagement, there was a way out. There was a fellow towards the center of the cornfield who sat on a very tall chair. He'd be looking down at everyone walking through the maze and if you ever got lost you would talk into this sort of like, almost old communication device, it would go through the ground and it would come up to him and then he would give you advice what to do.

In any case, I'm about ready to panic because we're lost, the kids are really *kvetchy* and it's getting pretty, pretty difficult. I call into the mouthpiece, I go "Help" and he says these words back to me "Keep your left hand on the corn" thank you very much, "keep your left hand on the corn," what does that mean?

"Keep your left hand on the corn" I keep my left hand on the corn, we walk, we walk, we walk, we walk, make a left, make a left, make a left, make a left, long story short, after about five minutes or so, we find ourselves out of the maze, "keep your left hand on the corn" means if you always keep your left hand, you're going to make all lefts from where you are, that's the way out.

And that was an entertaining afternoon but I believe it provides a powerful *mashal*. One of the most integral, vital *meshalim* that the *Mesilas Yesharim* gives us is what he calls the *gan hamevuchar*, the *gan hamevuchar* was a maze that people would make in the times of the Romans and it would be a garden maze and there's be a center part that the goal was to get there, and you'd be walking through the maze, you go left, you go right but you didn't really know and explains the *Mesilas Yesharim* that is a *mashal* for life.

Did you ever notice people somehow wake up at twenty or thirty and they tthhhh where's my path, where am I going? I don't know. Certainly life wasn't supposed to be like this. And explains the *Mesilas Yesharim* that's not by accident, it's by design. The life we lead, it's very, very difficult to find the path but it's very, very difficult to find the path because we're much like in that garden maze, we can't see beyond. All we can see are the trees in front of us, the corn in front of us, but we can't see the end goal.

We know where we're trying to get to, we know we're attempting but we can't see if it's a left or a right, we can't see where to go and explains the *Mesilas Yescharim* that is a *mashal* to life.

And he explains that the only hope you have is if you listen to those who went through the maze already. You have that fellow up there on the chair, he knows the pathways, he knows which way is the right way to turn, if you ask his advice, you ask those who went through this maze already who succeeded and got to the center part, got to the goal those people can advise you because when you're in the maze itself, left and right look the same, this path and that path look exactly identical and the *Mesilas Yescharim* explains that is one of the great secrets of life, you need advice.

You have to ask people older than you, people outside of yourself, hopefully you have *rebbeim*, you have people who could advise you but it can't be you. Why? I'm smart, I know things, maybe I have learnt?

That may be very well and fine but even if you're a huge *talmid chacham*, you are caught in the maze, you can't see beyond the trees because you're left, right, they all look the same. And you need someone who's gone through the path already, you need someone who's gotten through to the center, who's succeeded to advise you, this is the *derech*, "*zeh haderech yelchu boh*", this is the path, this is the right way and no matter how strange it sounds to you, and no matter how difficult it seems because it's clear, wait I, it can't be left, it's got to be right, but the person who went through the maze already, understands, knows and is advising you "*zeh haderech yelchu boh*" and if you're wise you listen.

And I believe that this is one of the central *meshalim* to define life. Understanding that by definition I'm going to get lost, in the haze, I'm going to get lost in the different paths, and I need wisdom, I need guidance but I can't be my own eyes. My own eyes don't see.

It has to be someone who's gone through this path already, someone who succeeded, someone who's above the thick and the thin of it and explains the *Mesilas Yescharim* that's why we have to listen to *Chazal* when *Chazal* have given us directives, when they've given us advice, certainly we need advice

much more in our own time, we need people older, we need people outside ourselves to give us advice and this *mashal* defines life.

But one of the most amazing things is that the *Mesilas Yesharim* says, what is the key central piece of advice that *Chazal* gave us, those who have gone through the maze, those that have succeeded, what's the main integral, vital piece of advice they give us, "*bou cheshbon*" make a *chesbon*, to a reckoning, sit down and ask yourself, what do I gain? What do I lose?

Sit down and look at your daily activities, sit down and look at your months, look at your paths, look at your ways and ask yourself one single question, am I happy with the path I'm heading in, am I happy with the direction?

What we call a *chesbon hanefesh* but the *Mesilas Yesharim* then says something very, very telling he says I see a tremendous, tremendous need to do this daily reckoning on a daily basis. Not to do this reckoning once a month, not to do this on *Yom Kippur*, but this should be a part of a Jew's day. At least once a day you sit down and you ask yourself, where am I headed, where am I going. Am I happy with the way I used my time today? Am I happy with my choices? What could I correct, what could I strengthen and what could I do differently?

But he explains that much like a very, very wealthy merchant with many, many stores and much going on, has to constantly keep calculations, has to constantly keep track otherwise he'll lose total, total track of where things are at, a person has to do a daily *chesbon hanefesh*, daily look at his actions, his ways, he has to have a clear direction where he's headed and he ask himself am I on that path?

And this is one of the most difficult things to do and yet, explains the *Mesilas Yesharim*, one of the most powerful life-changing exercises. It doesn't sound that hard to do, but to actually block out ten minutes, twenty minutes, whatever it may be, and to ask yourself what are my life goals, where am I headed, what do I want to accomplish and how am I doing in accordance to those goals? What did I do today, what did I accomplish, what should I avoid in the future, and making these calculations, explains the *Mesilas*

*Yesharim*, is that key advice, those who succeeded at life, those who got through to the center and reached that pinnacle, this is the advice they give you.

And I'd like to share with you an observation or two about *cheshbon hanefesh*. Imagine the following, imagine it's Poland 1939 and I found out the Nazis have just attacked, they've just overrun the town. I escape and I find myself in the woods. Oh my goodness and I'm running and I'm running and I'm running and there I meet a few other people from my *shtetl*, most of the *shtetl* have been captured but a few other people and we run into the woods and in the center running and running, heading straight into the woods, we gather a few more people, a few more people, and after three days we meet a fellow and he says to us, you know guys I have a plan, we have to escape. The Nazis are everywhere, there's no way we could stay in this area, we can't live in the forest forever, we have to head down to the Black Sea and down around it and we're going to end up in Turkey.

And you say to him Turkey, that's a thousand miles. How are we going to get there? It's almost all woods, I have a map. And he shows you a map, a detailed map of exactly the woods, the mountains, the exact path.

Hey, listen we'll give it a try. We have nothing here. So you begin walking ten hours a day. You somehow stop every once in a while to eat berries and water and you're emaciated but you keep walking and walking, three days, four days and then on the fourth day you realize something, wait a minute, that fellow who's guiding us, that fellow whose plan this is, he has not checked the map once. I mean we've made all kinds of turns, this mountain, up this way, that, but he didn't check the map a single time.

And you go over to him and you say, can I ask you a question fellow, you know you had that map, detailed map of the path and all that good stuff, how come you never check it?

And he says, check the map, are you kidding? Ten hours a day we're walking, thirty, forty miles a day, we're not going to check, we're running, running, we're escaping the Nazis, we don't have to worry about checking the map.

And you quickly realize that he's a fool because the fact that you're covering ground is very nice but if you're circling back into the same path you started, you could walk for weeks, you'll walk for months and you may end up back in Poland.

And the only hope you have of getting to your destination is to check the map. Because if you don't check the map, you don't know if you're headed south, you're headed north, you're headed east, you're headed west and you don't know if you're retracing your steps or where you're going.

And I believe that that is the first purpose of a *cheshbon hanefesh*. Sitting down to a calculation of remembering the fact, I'm here for a few short years, I'm here with a mission, with a plan. Based on my vision of my plan, what are my goals? What do I want to accomplish? And am I reaching those goals? Am I heading towards those accomplishments?

And you could have all of the drive in the world, and you could be very, very motivated, working very hard but if you don't check the map, you don't know where you're going. And if you don't sit back and ask yourself where am I headed, what am I doing, am I happy with the results of my actions, of my ways, you might end up a year later, two years later, twenty years later and you say the words how in the world did I end up over here, how did I get here, how did I end up so far from where I was supposed to be?

But the truth is while this may be a good example, checking the map, it doesn't begin to explain the great difficulty of what we call life. You see the *Mesilas Yesharim* explains to us "*tosh choshech vehi lylah*" darkness, that is this world, darkness to the eye of man. There may be physical light, but my mind is darkened, I'm put into this body and in this heavy coat of physicality I cannot see.

I get lost in the haze, I get lost in desires and appetites and interests and I get so, so busy that I totally lose sight. And the *Mesilas Yesharim* explained that this is a *mashal*, "*tosh choshech vehi lylah*" darkness comes and it's night, explains the *Mesilas Yesharim* that the darkness of night can cause two types of mistakes.

The first kind of mistake if you're at night and you're walking, is you don't see the obstacle, you fall into the pit and you don't even realize it's there. And he explains that is such a common mistake. You fall, you trip and you say to yourself oh my goodness, I didn't even see the log in the road.

And why is that? Why is it that so many times we didn't even see it coming? We didn't even see it coming. There's a boxer once who was asked, what's the dangerous punch? He said the one you don't see coming.

But why is it, why is it that we get tripped up, we don't see it coming and only after we fall do we realize it?

Sunday was Abba's day, that's when I would take the kids out and very often it would end up with some kind of treats, usually again, we'd up on an activity and every so often we would go for ice cream and when my kids were real little and I would take one or two it was very cute, take them to the ice cream store and you'd buy one scoop, two scoop, but as the kids started getting older and instead of one or two it started getting three or four and sometimes five, I made an interesting discovery:

If you pay 3.99 for two scoops of ice cream, add some sprinkles and add some other thing on top, with five kids you're going to spend 25 dollars or more for ice cream. And at a certain point I said to the kids, guys this is crazy, we could go to the supermarket, buy two half gallons of any flavor you want, we could buy chocolate syrup, we could buy whipped cream, we could buy sprinkles and it would still be less and you could have as much ice cream, much more than here and you'll have another time as well.

And when I first proposed my brilliant idea to my kids, and my kids said nah we'd much rather eat in the store, I didn't get it. So a couple of months later I tried it again, and still uhu we'd much rather eat, but you'll have more ice cream and you'll have another time as well and you could pick the flavors and, no, we'd much rather eat in the store.

And I found it odd and this continued for years and for years I could not wrap my head around why did the kids want to eat in the store, what's the big deal?

And this social experiment for me came to its climax, when I did the next step. I took my grandkids and I did the same thing and I made the calculation of what it would cost to buy ice cream in a store and I said guys let's go to a supermarket, we'll buy two big containers of ice cream and chocolate syrup and whipped cream and sprinkles and we'll eat it at home and we'll have it a couple of times guys, okay, right?

No, Zeide, we'd much rather eat in the store.

Why is that?

And the answer is to the child the experience of eating in the store is wow, you get the pink spoon and you get to sit down and more than anything it's now, it's here. And it's a very different experience eating pizza in the pizza shop, eating ice cream in the ice cream store, than it is eating it at home.

Objectively it's no different but to the child living in the moment, it's a vastly different experience and the child is willing to give up so much for that moment.

In a very real sense I believe that defines the first mistake that the darkness of physicality causes to us. My mind's eye is blinded, I live in the moment and right now this looks so appealing, so alluring, I need it, I have to have it and I'm willing to trade anything and then six months later the glitter is gone, the appeal is gone and I'm left with the results and that is the first mistake of the darkness of physicality, it's very difficult for us to see past our noses, it's very difficult to see two months into the future, six years into the future. The child lives in the here and now.

If you ask a five year old would you rather the shiny red fire truck or a thousand dollars, most of the time the young child will choose the shiny red fire truck. Why? Because it glitters, it's beautiful, it's alluring, it's appealing.

Long term goals, seeing the future, understanding values is not something that comes natural to the child. And as mature as we may be, the darkness of physicality causes a blackness, a darkness to our mind's eye.

The first mistake that the darkness of physicality causes is we don't see the obstacles, we don't see the damage, we don't see the log in the road and we fall into that pit and we say oh my goodness, how did I get here.

And explains the *Mesilas Yesharim*, that that's the first mistake that the darkness of physicality causes. But there's a second mistake he explains that's far more egregious. And he explains that the darkness of night, causes a lack of clarity and sometimes you'd be walking on a road at night and it's dark and you see something right in front of you, you see it, it's right there, but because it's dark, you misrecognize what it is and you'll see a pillar as if it's a man, or you'll see a man and view it as a pillar.

It's not that you don't see it, you see it right there, but the problem is you misgauge what it is, it looks to you just like a man, or it looks to you just like a pillar, but that's not what it is at all.

And explains the *Mesilas Yesharim* that this is a far more dangerous problem than the first one. Why? Because the first one, eventually, maybe I could wake up. Eventually after falling and falling, I get it. It's not all that it seems like. The appeal, the allure of this world is passing, and eventually I could wake up and realize maybe I better pay attention.

But the second problem is far more dangerous, why? Because I see the object right in front of me and I recognize it exactly for what it is. It's a pillar, right there, a solid, strong inanimate object and the only problem is that my eye has fooled me and it's not a pillar but it's a man, or it's not a man but it's a pillar.

The second mistake is far more dangerous. Why? Because I see it, and then I hotly pursue it. And anyone that says to me, you're mistaken fellow, I say to him, look at the evidence, it's right there in front of you, it's right there, my eye sees it. Don't deny what my eye sees.

I would like to believe in your system but my senses deny them and I can't believe something that goes so clearly against what I know to be factual.

And the *Mesilas Yescharim* explains that this second problem is far more dangerous, because people hotly pursue agendas, they hotly pursue different *shitas* and all the while saying it's good, it's proper, it's what I need. And in history you don't have to look very far to find people pursuing with great *mesiras nefesh*, with great sacrifice, various ideals and the only problem was that the ideals were false.

In the United States of America in the 1950s, psychologists explained to the average common person that it's not good for the baby to pick it up. The baby is left best by itself. You give the baby a bottle, but to touch the baby too often makes the baby fussy, it pampers the baby and you're going to spoil the baby.

You're best off leaving the baby on its own, give it a bottle and leave it, that's the best thing for the child. But I'm not telling you that people, common people said this, trained psychologists, learned men and women who studied the field, reached conclusions that are so completely absurd.

And so the opposite of what you and I understand to be the basic mechanics of human functioning, the infant needs the mother's touch. The infant needs the bonding. And sometimes if you become students of the wrong opinion, you hotly pursue an ideal only to find out ten years later, twenty years later that the ideal was unfounded.

Communism was a beautiful concept. Socialism begins with the concept of why should one have more than the other, why should there be competition, all should share, all should have equal. And communism began from a socialistic stand point and it began with an ideal.

School teachers, mothers, fathers bought into it and they became tremendous proponents of the communist system. And forget the millions of people who were killed by Stalin, forget the millions of people who suffered, communism as a system of government failed. It was a failed social experiment and

factories didn't produce. Russia which had been the bread-basket of Europe, couldn't feed its own and communism failed.

But the saddest part of it was that so many people sacrificed, so many people gave so much for it. And when you find out that that which you believe in to be good, that which you believe in to be proper, and an ideal and you gave up so much for it only to find out that it was exactly the opposite.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains to us that there is a *lo sasei* in the *Torah* "*lo sosuru acharei luvavchem vu'acharei enechem*" we say it in *shma* twice a day. Don't veer after your eyes and after your heart.

We're all familiar with don't veer after your eyes, that means don't gaze with lust, don't allow your eyes to pull you to things that have appeal, control yourself. I get it.

But what does "*lo sosuru acharei luvavchem*" mean, don't be pulled after your heart, explains the *Sefer Hachinuch* "*zu apikorsus*" but what is *apikorsus*?

He explains that any *machshavah*, *zar*, anything that's the opposite of the *Torah*, any strange thought process that's the opposite of *das Torah*, is "*acharei luvavchem*". It may look so wonderful, it may look so appealing and it may sound to my eye and to your eye as if it's a wonderful, wonderful concept but if it goes against the *Torah*, well guess what? it's *hepech das Torah*, it's *krum*, it's wrong and you violate a *lo sasei*.

Let me give you an example or two, first a simple one.

If you say to me, you know something, I don't like the way meat tastes and therefore I don't eat meat.

Absolutely fine. If you say to me, I just don't enjoy the way I feel after I eat, I get too heavy after I eat meat, it just, I don't know, I don't eat meat. Absolutely fine.

However, if you say to me, you know we're all just occupants of the same planet, what right does a two legged occupant of the planet have to consume, to actually eat another four legged occupant, it's barbaric, it's horrible. To eat meat is evil.

If you say those words, you are *hepach das Torah*, you're the opposite of the *Torah's* perception. Because the *Torah* tells us that *Hashem* created everything for man, *Hashem* created the cosmos, the sun, the stars, everything for us and everything in creation has its purpose. If you *shecht* an animal properly, eat it in the right way in the right time, it's *kadosh*, it's holy, it's a very proper and good use of that object.

And if you feel that you're more moral than the *Torah*, if you feel that you're a little bit better than those primitive people who eat meat, then you are in that category of *hepach das Torah*, you are against the *Torah's* way, you violate that *lo sasei* of "*vu'acharei luvavchem*" and it's really any concept that goes against the *Torah's* vision.

If you believe in feminism, not as a good way but more women need to have a different role, the *Torah* gave them a wrong role. The *Torah* gave them a quoisted??? (26:25) role, chained to the stove, why should a woman be the necessarily be the mother, why should the woman have that role, let her be out there in the workforce, as an equal, serving in the man's role.

Well guess what? That concept is *hepach das Torah*, *Hashem* created men, *Hashem* created women. They're created with equal opportunity to grow, to accomplish but with vastly different roles and if you're not comfortable with that, because society at large has influenced your thinking, that thought process did not come from the *Torah* and those ideals did not come from a *Torah* based value system.

And I'd like to share with you one more interesting observation. Everyone today feels bad for the victim. I want you to imagine the following. Imagine that you're a fly on the wall in a psychiatrist's office. When a man walks into the office stark naked, painted brown head to toe with a big fishhook in his mouth.

And he sits down in a chair next to the psychiatrist and he says, doctor, doctor, help. What's the matter, what's the matter? I'm a worm, I'm a worm, and the fish, the fish is going to eat me, the fish is going to eat me. I'm a worm, I'm a worm.

Now imagine that that man walks in, painted brown, fishhook in his mouth, I'm a worm, I'm a worm and the psychiatrist says to him oh I see you're feeling inadequate. I have a suggestion for you, outside my office there's a garden, here's a shovel, why don't you dig a big, big hole in that garden and climb in and then you'll feel more comfortable, you'll be at, at peace, you'll be much more in your own skin.

You see that fellow is suffering but giving him bad advice is not going to alleviate his suffering. There are many, many people today who suffer with various situations and if you have a string of letters that you spell out whatever letters they spell, but if you believe that deviate behavior and having a lifestyle that's the opposite if *Torah* is going to now bring you joy and happiness, you are sadly mistaken.

The *Torah* lays out the exact way that a person will achieve *shleimus*, perfection and be happy. A man is supposed to marry a woman and in that role, both are supposed to find joy and happiness. If you feel that you've found a new way and you're now going to allow people to find themselves with different identities, with different realities, you are sadly mistaken.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not telling you that people don't experience this and I'm not telling you that people don't have desires, if a man is married to his wife, happily married, he has to train himself not to look, not to think about a woman, that's part of being a holy, proper Jew.

And so too there are various desires, you work on it, you control, you begin to grow. But if you go to the board of ethics and they say to you no, give in to your ways and in fact we have to educate at a young age, we have a *toevah* education department, we propagate it to every school, we put the curriculum out there, whatever you feel, however you identify, we'll have a bathroom for you, we'll have a gender for you, it's all good, it's all okay.

I'm not telling you that's morally reckless, I'm not telling you that that's bankrupt from an ethical stand point, I'm telling you it's sad because it's damaging the person because guess what, the Creator of the heavens and the earth also made man and Hashem created us with a nature, with a *teva* and Hashem gave us a guidebook as to how to live.

And that guidebook tells us the right and proper way and if you give in to your desires and it falls under a riveric??? (30:40) of a new way, an advanced way, mankind has evolved, we're no longer phobic, we're no longer fear of mongers, we're now comfortable, we embrace the alphabet. Guess what? You're not going to bring joy and happiness to anyone least of all the person who is suffering with that issue.

Because any desire, the more you give into it, the more you allow it to come to the fore, it becomes bigger and bigger, stronger and stronger and it doesn't lead to joy and it doesn't lead to happiness.

I believe what the *Mesilas Yesharim* is sharing with us is a profound concept, the garden maze *mashal* means that we are lost in the path, and we cannot see. When I took my kids to the Amazing Maize Maze, it really looked the left way, the right way, I could not tell how to get out of this maze and that's life. Each road looks like the next and more than that, I get it already, I've been living this thing called life for a while and I began to realize this is the path to go.

And the only problem is I can't see two inches beyond my nose. And explains the *Mesilas Yesharim* you have to ask those people, you've got the guide up there on a chair, that person who succeeded at life, that person who really reached the center, you ask him for advice.

The advice that *Chazal* give us is you have to ask advice, you have to ask those older and wiser, you have to consult with *Chazal* and you have to make a daily reckoning. You have to have your goals, you have to ask yourself how am I doing compared to those.

And more than anything, when you come up with an approach that's the opposite of the *Torah*, you have to say to yourself, I get it, to my mind's eye it really looks this way, but guess what my eye is wrong. The *Mesilas Yesharim* explains that's darkness of physicality, much like the darkness of night causes me to make two mistakes.

The first mistake I make is I don't see what's in front of me. I don't see the results, I don't see myself two years from now, five years from now and like that child who will gladly take the shiny red fire truck because wow, a thousand dollars that's green and crumpled, I want the red, shiny thing.

As much as we'd like to think we're mature and we're thought out, we're caught in the haze of physicality, the darkness of night blocks my vision and I don't see the danger and I have to listen to *Chazal*, I have to listen to the ways of the *Torah* because the *Torah* has the wisdom.

But the second mistake is far more dangerous, the second mistake that the darkness of night makes is that I see, I see the pillar right there but I don't realize it's a man. I see the man right there, but I don't realize it's actually a pillar.

And that's much more difficult because I see it with my mind's eye, I recognize it. Don't tell me it's not there, it's there, I see the man he's right there, right, don't tell me he's inanimate, don't tell me it's made of marble.

And any time that a person has a thought process, an ideal that's the opposite of the *Torah*, explains the *Sefer Hachinuch*, you've violated a *lo sasei* in the *Torah*, don't be pulled "*acharei luvavchem*". But it seems so ideal, it seems so grand, it seems like such a higher form of living, much greater than, than primitive people back in the *Torah's* time and that vision that you have is based on being totally enveloped in the darkness of night, being enveloped in this darkness of physicality and it looks to your mind's eye to be great, to be wonderful, but guess what, you're wrong.

And any thought process that a person has that's the opposite of the *Torah*, number one you violate that *lo sasei*, but number two, you're wrong. Your Creator, the One Who made you, says differently and if He says differently, guess what? Who do you think's correct, who do you think's more moral, who do you think's more ethical?

But more than that, who knows the nature of the human better, you or the One Who made you? And any time you find yourself with a system of thought, of philosophy that goes against the *Torah*, it looks so much more advanced, so much more sophisticated, know and understand you're falling for the darkness of night and the results will be found two years later, ten years later, twenty years later, maybe not until you leave this earth but explains the *Mesilas Yeshtarim* what you need to do is you need to consult *Chazal*, you have to learn, you have to ask advice, you have to ask advice on your path on your ways. You have to have *rebbeim*, you have to have guides, you have to ask people who are not in your thick and thin, who are not caught in the haze and you have to ask them is this the path?

And more than anything *Mesilas Yeshtarim* says the advice they give us is to make a reckoning, to do this calculation. Number one I have to set my life goal, I have to have real vision of where I want to be. And then on a regular basis I have to sit down and check myself against that map because much like that fellow running from the Nazis, if you have a thousand mile trek and your goal is to escape through Turkey, but you don't check the map, you don't know where you're going to end up, if it's Lodz or if it's Warsaw or where you're going to be because unless you check the map, you might be walking the right way, the wrong way, but you'll never know and unless you have a very clear map of life and unless you check that map on a regular basis, you'll never know which way you're heading.

You have to ask advice, you have to create for yourself goals, mission statements and you have to check against those mission statements on a regular basis because otherwise who knows.

And this garden maze *mashal* I believe defines very, very well life. You're in the path but you don't know if it's left, you don't know if it's right and to your mind's eye it looks so smart and it looks so wonderful and you hotly pursue it. How many people do you know who hotly pursue something as a *shitah*, this is my *shitah*, *bitul torah*, talking in *davening*, I'm not one of those *frummer*, this is what I do, this is my way.

People don't just say I'm mistaken, I'm wrong, am, this is my path. And when you realize that it certainly violates a *lo sasei* in the *Torah* but more than that, it's a darkness of night that's fooling your mind's eye,

you begin to realize it's not for your betterment. It's not something you're going to be happy with, two years from now, ten years from now, like that child who doesn't see the consequences, doesn't know that he's going to have to one day earn a living so he doesn't care about school, but that's the child.

And a child has a parent who says but you're going to school anyway, because you're going to be an adult and you're going to have to deal with responsibilities of life.

But being that adult for ourselves is not always so easy. Being that adult means stepping away from the fray, stepping away from the thick and the thin, analyzing my life, asking advice, setting life goals and then asking myself are my actions, are my ways in line with those goals.

And I want to close with one last observation.

In 1973, the Supreme Court in the United States of America voted and changed the law of the land, states could no longer outlaw abortion, abortion became legal in the United States of America. Up until that point, a woman could only get an abortion if it was a danger to the mother, or something of extreme circumstances, but as of 1973 in the famous Row versus Wade case, Supreme Court voted that abortion is now legal across fifty states.

Now the back story was quite interesting, Row versus Wade, Wade was the DA, who was this woman, Row. Row was actually Jane Row, it's an assumed name, it wasn't her real name, but actually her name is Norma Makorvy and the story was that she was pregnant and it was 1969 and she was not married and didn't want to be pregnant and in her fifth month of pregnancy she tries to figure out a way to no longer be pregnant.

So she lives in Texas and in Texas certainly the law of that state is abortions are illegal so she approaches two ambitious lawyers, Sarah Wellington and Linda Coffee and they bring her case to trial, to the Supreme Court. The claim was she was raped, the claim was that she didn't want this child, didn't want the union and now she's forced into it.

In any case the case wasn't decided until 1973 obviously she had the child. She gave birth to this baby and a number of years later the case was tried and this is the famous Jane Roe case where the Supreme Court voted because of her case, the Supreme Court voted and decided that abortion is now legal in the United States of America.

Now interestingly enough this woman, Makorvy came out later with a very different opinion. In her book One by Love that she wrote in 1997, she describes how she was sitting in an office and she saw a poster of fetal development. The baby at six weeks, the baby at a month, the baby as it formed and the progression, she said, was so obvious.

At a certain point she said Norma, Norma I said to myself, they're right, they're right, she said it dawned on me, that's a baby. And she describes it as if blinders fell off her eyes and suddenly I understood the truth, that's a baby, I felt crushed under the truth of this realization and she recanted, publicly she came out against abortion, she did everything she could to petition against it, she wrote books, she involved everyone she could and as a matter of fact, in two thousand and five, she brought a case, petitioning the Supreme Court to overturn the 1973 decision, it wasn't heard and she wasn't given her day in court, the petition was denied.

Okay, now clearly this woman had an opinion that killing babies in the womb is okay, fifth month, sixth month, seventh month, doesn't matter, ninth month, doesn't matter. Later she recanted and had a different opinion, okay, so what?

Well I'll share with you the so what. In the United States of America, currently, the annual rate of abortion is 926,000, nine hundred and twenty six thousand abortions are done every year in this country. Two thousand and five hundred a day. But even more shocking, the centers for disease control and prevention estimates that between 1970 and 2014, if you take approximately the years of Row versus Wade, when the Supreme Court changed in '73 till about now, there were approximately forty four

million legally induced abortions. Ah shucks, I made a mistakes, it's killing babies, I didn't realize it at the time.

Do you understand what this woman had to live with for the rest of her life? It wasn't that she was an innocent bystander, she was the catalyst, she was the cause, it was her case that changed the law of the land and it's on her scorecard that forty four million babies were killed and I'm discussing babies at nine months, whatever the age may be.

And to be wrong on that kind of level isn't just an oops, shucks, I made a mistake. But here's the simple reality, that is our life. I may not be responsible for the Supreme Court decisions, but I am responsible for my decisions. I may not be responsible for the state of the union, but I sure am responsible for the state of me.

And who I am for eternity is based on one thing, my choices, my decisions. And a oh shucks oops, made a little bit of an error, is not a big deal if you had gluten for breakfast as opposed to protein. But decisions that we make on a regular basis are far, far weightier and understanding that my mind's eye is blind, understanding that the darkness of physicality doesn't allow me to see the dangers, and sometimes I'll see it and it looks so wonderful, but it's the exact opposite and therefore I have to recognize that there are those that went through the path already, those that succeeded and I have to ask them, what is the *derech*, what is the way?

I have to see guidance, I have to seek advice, and based on that wisdom I have to set my life's goals and then I have to do the most difficult part, I have to check myself on a regular basis.

When I was younger I learned in *Yeshivah*, and I set my path well and I had *rebbeim* and I had direction and I really did okay that's very nice, but where are you holding now? Are you in line today your ideals of yesteryear? If you were well-programmed earlier, if your goals were proper then are you remaining in, well I'm working now, I'm busy, I'm, that's very nice you may have a different set of responsibilities but as a person, you are responsible for you.

And what the *Mesilas Yesharim* is sharing with us is this garden maze *mashal*, is the definition of life.

Recognizing that there are so many paths, recognize I can't see my way, learning to trust *Chazal* and then regularly checking myself is the key to growing, is the key to being a successful human being.