

The *Torah* says “*lo saleh bumalos al mizbechi*” do not use steps to go to the *mizbeach*, to the altar, “*asher lo sugaleh ervascha alav*” so you shall not reveal your flesh upon it.

Rashi explains that the *kohanim* were the ones who did the *avodah* in the *mishkan*, in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the *kohen* wore a tunic, a long flowing robe. If there were steps on the way up to the *mizbeach*, when the *kohen* would spread his leg, even though he was wearing under garments and it doesn't really reveal the flesh, it's not respectful to the *mizbeach* and therefore the *Torah* says do not build steps, rather it should be a ramp, the *kohen* won't have to take large steps, as a result he won't reveal his flesh and it won't be a *bizayon*, it won't be a degradation to the *mizbeach*.

And on this *passuk*, Rashi says a *kal vechomer*, if the *Torah* is telling us not to embarrass the *mizbeach* an inanimate object, stones. Yet it has a purpose and the *Torah* says you should be careful not to act in a manner that's degrading, that's inappropriate to it, *kal vechomer* how much more so, you should be careful about another person's honor, why, because a person is created in the image of Hashem and the person cares about this honor. These are stones, they don't feel honor or dishonor, yet the *Torah* says they have a purpose, don't treat them in a manner that's degrading, surely your friend who's created in the image of G-D, surely, because he's very, very concerned about the way people speak to him, the way people act, surely you should not treat him with degradation, you should treat him with honor.

And that *kal vechomer*, Rashi says is what the end of the *passuk*'s telling us, don't reveal your flesh, to teach us how to treat other human beings, treat them with great accord, with great honor, don't debase them.

And that principle is a great principle, a wonderful concept but this Rashi's very difficult to understand. See Rashi says a *kal vechomer* if the *Torah* says you can't degrade the *mizbeach*, stones, surely you can't degrade a human being. And I'd like to ask the obvious question on that *kal vechomer*.

Imagine I say to you the following: I have a man over here who weighs two hundred pounds yet he can lift up a hundred eighty pounds. If a two hundred pound man can lift a hundred and eighty pounds, surely a man who weighs four hundred man, surely he can lift a hundred and eighty pounds.

That would be a terrible *kal vechomer*, why? Because it might well be that the two hundred pound man is a trained athlete, he might have trained for years to power life, to weight lift so for him a hundred and eighty pounds is nothing.

The man who weighs four hundred pounds might be terribly out of shape, might never have looked at a weight in his life and a hundred and eighty pounds may be far more than he could lift. That would be a poor example of a *kal vechomer*.

So too over here, what does Rashi mean if the *mizbeach*, the altar, you have to treat with honor, surely a human being? Wait a minute, the *mizbeach* is one of the most holy objects ever created. The *kohanim* were in the *mishkan*, in the *Beis Hamikdash* one of the holiest spots in the world, doing the *avodah*. Of course they have to act with extra regard, of course they have to go well beyond the call of duty, why? Because it is the *mizbeach*, this holy object, it's doing the *avodah*, surely they have to be careful not to embarrass the *mizbeach*. Man should be treated appropriately, you shouldn't embarrass him, but you don't see that from the *mizbeach*, you can't

learn out oh okay I have to be careful with the *mizbeach*'s honor, surely man. The *mizbeach* is one of the holiest objects ever created and you can't learn a *kal vechomer* from there, to man.

So what is Rashi saying, what does Rashi mean by this? And I'd like to see if we could better understand what in fact this Rashi means.

And to do that I'd like to share with you a very important observation. The *Derech Hashem* explains that Hashem created us for one reason, to give us opportunity to grow, to allow us to be *koneh*, to be acquire our world to come, Hashem only wants what's best for us and Hashem put us in this world to give us the opportunity to change the essence of ourself.

And the *Derech Hashem* explains that the essence of that change is based on choosing good or bad. Man has many choices for instance, humility is good, arrogance is bad. Mercy is good, cruelty is bad. Because man has the opportunity to choose, those choices shape who he is and for eternity he is what he made himself into. But explains the *Derech Hashem* it wasn't that simple. Why?

Because how do you give man a real opportunity to choose humility or arrogance, how do you give them a real temptation to choose mercy or cruelty? So explains the *Derech Hashem*, for that reason Hashem created different life settings. Hashem made some people wealthy and some people poor. Now there are some very major tests. You see the rich man is now tested, will he become arrogant or will he remain humble? Will he be merciful upon the poor man or will he be cruel? How will he act in that position?

The poor man as well is now tested, why? Because the poor man is given what he needs just barely but it's not in the most honorable manner. Will he be satisfied with what he has? Will he trust that Hashem knows what Hashem's doing?

The wealthy man is tested, the poor man is tested but it's all but staged settings, we are but actors on a stage. When we leave this earth they don't ask us how much money, they don't ask us how pretty we were, they don't ask us how intelligent we were, those are all stage settings Hashem gives an exact life setting to each person and when we're done the only question they ask us is how much of me did I become.

And one of the most important principles that we've discussed previously is what I call WYSIWYG. WYSIWYG is an acronym, what you see is what you get. Word processors in the early days of computers, were big clunky things and if you wanted to underline a phrase, you would type into the typewriter, you would type into the keyboard, an open bracket, a u and a closed bracket. That's what you would see on your screen and that was a signal to your printer to underline that phrase.

If you wanted to bold a phrase it would be open bracket b, closed bracket, that's what you'd see on your screen and again your printer would know to bold that word.

In the late eighties, technology evolved, now when you open up Microsoft Word you click b and on the screen the word is bolded. What you see on the screen is what you get in the printer, WYSIWYG, and I believe that what you see is what you get is an apt parable for life.

You see here we're very caught up, very involved I'm wealthy, I'm poor, I'm rich, I'm not, I'm popular, I'm not. The curtain comes down, my life is over, my body is put in the ground and I separate. But exactly what I shape myself into is what I am. But you see my choices, how I used my time here, how I played my role, not what my role was, but how well did I play my role? And there's one more step that people often mistake:

People will say the following line – oh she has such great *middos*, she must be a *tzaddekes*. And that might very well be false, why? Because it could well be that a person has very fine character traits, but that could reflect very little upon them. Why? Because different people are born in different bodies with different temperaments, with different inclinations, and if you look on the scale of arrogance, humility, anger, patience, if you look through all the *middos*, you see that people have very different start points and the measure of the person isn't where they're at as they stand in front of you now, the question is where did they start and how much did they move the needle.

I know a man well who you would look at and say, okay, not that, not a bad guy but no great shakes. And I'd like to share with you I'm jealous of his world to come because I knew him when he was younger and he was a bombastic, ego ridden fellow. He spent twenty years and he worked on himself and he's not the most humble guy in the world but vastly different from where he began and that changed, taking down that inflated sense of self is dramatic growth.

The where the person is at right now, in front of you, is not the question, where did they start, how far did they go, how much did they move, how much did they change is the question. And with those two points in mind that when the game is over I am what I shape myself into and the fact is that each of us had different part points, I believe that creates a major question.

I was speaking in Manchester, England recently and I said over something akin to this, I mentioned the understanding life setting and a fellow asked me a question there that was absolutely profound. At the time I didn't realize it, at the time I gave him an answer but now in retrospect I realize he asked a very, very powerful question and that question is:

It's not fair. He said Rabbi if you tell me that WYSIWYG, when the curtain comes down, exactly what I am, exactly where I stop that's who I am, that's the way I am for eternity then it's not fair. Why? Because one person might have started with a great level of humility, patience and mercy and they moved themselves very little. Another guy might have started out as arrogant, may have been very angry by nature and he moved himself a lot.

But WYSIWYG means when the curtain comes down, what you see is what you get, they freeze at that point. That means for eternity this guy might still have anger and this guy, yes granted he doesn't have anger, but he didn't move himself. It's not fair, if everyone is a different starting point and when the curtain comes down we're exactly frozen in that moment, the whole system isn't fair?

And that question actually underscores much of *bechirah* and actually underscores much of what we were put on the earth to do. And let me share with you what I mean.

If you look out in the wild kingdom, you'll see exactly what Hashem intended every animal, every creature to do for a living. You see the beaver clearly was built and desires to build dams. The worker bee, to bring in the pollen, the cat to hunt the mouse. You see they each have an inborn inclination, the mouse doesn't think about the availability of various food stores, the cat doesn't think about whether mice have good protein sources or not, there's a desire, there's an instinct within each animal to earn its living, to do what it's supposed to do, but they're also given the tools and the aptitude.

The bat flies blind. And it catches insects in midflight. The incredible uncanny equilication, in the darkness of a cave it's able to see the fly, catch it in midflight. Spiders are blind, yet they're

able to eat insects left right and center, each animal was given the inclinations, the aptitude and the tools to earn its living, to go about this thing called life.

Man as well was given inclinations and man as well was given aptitude and tools. But here's one of the interesting things about man. If you study this phenomena called man what you might notice is that man is never satisfied. Man is never happy, and man always wants more.

Surely if it's money, if it's position it's power, but even more basic than that, talk to a child, what the child desperately craves is to be like the big boys. If you try to potty train a child, what do you say to Moishy, Moishy do you want to be like the big boys and wear *tzitzis*, if you go to the bathroom then you'll wear *tzitzis*.

There's an inborn need within the little child to be like the big boys and that's not something that stops. Throughout life there's a need, there's a craving to get to the next level, there's a craving for more. The business man attempts to get more money and more money, the author needs to write the next bestseller, the executive has to climb the corporate ladder. The politician, he might have started local politics, but he's never satisfied, he's got to move on to state politics, eventually to federal, national.

But the strangest part is what you read about kings who are completely empowered, despots and they own the land, have all the power in the land, and they're not satisfied. One country isn't enough and they go on a power quest and throughout history when you study this phenomena called man what you see is man always needs more, always craves more, always aspires for more.

The *Orchos Tzaddikim* explains that that is the *neshamah* of man that's coming out. Misguided, misdirected, but that need for growth, that need to get to the next level is the *neshamah* of man.

And that *neshamah* the *Derech Hashem* explains, was also given the power to change man. You see within me is an inborn need to grow, to become truly great. Not more money, position or power, but to change the essence of me, to literally be *dovek* to Hashem, cling to Hashem, to be a goodly, kindly, loving person within me is the inner drive, the inclination, the need to do that, and explains the *Derech Hashem* that the *neshamah* was given the power to change me.

And I can change radically. As a matter of fact he explains, the *neshamah* had the power to literally make man into a vastly different human being. The *neshamah* was created with one job, to perfect the human. And it was given the capacity to do it.

With that being said, I'd like to share with you a personal observation. When I started out in *yeshivah*, *beis medrash*, I was about nineteen. I began learning *Mesilas Yesharim*, it was a *mussar yeshivah*, *Chafetz Chaim Yeshivah* and I remember I set lofty goals. The description of the *tzaddikim*, the descriptions of great people and I knew that's where I was going to be, not today, not tomorrow, but I knew my long term goals and I set myself on that track.

And I spent years and years learning *mussar*, a tremendous amount maybe too much *mussar* in fact sometimes my *rebbeim* have told me that, and I dedicated myself to that goal of changing of growing, becoming exactly what the *Mesilas Yesharim* is describing.

And now I find myself a little bit down the line, I'm now at a stage where I've been at this game for quite a while, I already have grandchildren who are coming of age, so I've been at this game for quite a while and I have come to the following interesting observation:

It sure doesn't seem like it used to. When I started out I knew exactly, from *shas* and *poskim* for sure I'm going to know *shas*, no question, not now, but for sure thirty years from now, I knew for sure I would master *shas*. I knew for sure *ahavas yisrael*, what's the question, of course.

Anger, not me. Jealousy, not a chance. I knew exactly where I was headed and I was very focused, very driven and I really worked at it. And here's the observation, sadly enough I'm long, long, along the path and it sure doesn't seem that I got very far. And don't think that this is some kind of humility or self-deprecation over here, I'll give you a very simple for instance about what I mean.

The *Apter Rav* was known as the *Ohev Yisrael*, I once read something he wrote in his *sefer*, the *Ohev Yisrael* that I almost fell off my chair. He says don't call me an *ohev yisrael*, that's what people called him, a lover of *Klal Yisrael* because when he spoke about, what he wrote about, that's what he was, don't call me an *ohev yisrael*, why? Because I'm not. I'll prove it to you he says in writing. I still love my children more than I love other Jews.

Now that's an interesting thing to say, but he's right. The *Torah* says "*vu'ohavta lure'acha komocha*" that's what the *Torah* expects. Now I'm not exactly holding there.

Here's another observation. There is something in the world called anger and it's forbidden, we're not allowed to get angry. I'm embarrassed to say this, I'm sorry to say this, but I still get angry. I still let my feelings get hurt, I still feel differently when people speak nicely to me and when they speak in a not nice manner.

The *Chovos Halevovos* discusses two great *chassidim*, this means they lived let's say a thousand years ago, and one said to his friend, have you reached the level of equality yet? What does equality means? Where honor and degradation are the same to you. He asked his friend have you reached the level where you walk into a room and people treat you with great, great accord, oh look who walked in the room, or if you walk in the room and they make faces at you and they slur you, is it the same to you, did you reach that *madreigah* yet?

And his friend said no, not yet. The first person said it's very important, it's a big part of *avodas Hashem*. I would like to share with you, I'm not there. It bothers me deeply when people are nasty to me, they're mean to me, I hate to admit the fact but when people are nice to me, it feels good. But what's wrong with me? And why can't I just get it together?

And if you don't quite understand what I'm referring to, a very simple observation. I work on *davening*, I think about *davening*, I taught it in high school, I taught it later for years and years and I certainly considered it important.

And yet there are many times I'm sorry to say, that in the middle of *shmoneh esrei*, I find my mind somewhere else. How could that be, I'm talking to G-D, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Hashem right here, how could I space out, where did my brain go?

And it's not something that I take lightly, not something I ignore. I think about it, I work on it, and yet it doesn't seem to work. And here's one of the simple realities, it sure does seem that something's wrong. Why can't I just change? Why can't I just rid myself of the anger, why can't jealousy just be a thing of the past, why can't I just make myself into a vastly different human being as I want to be, as I plan to be, as I worked on myself to be?

I worked on *bitachon*, for years and years and years and I'd really got to a point where I said Hashem is here, Hashem takes care of me, Hashem loves me and I get it. And then a little dog, a little dog comes at me, ooohhh, where did my *bitachon* go, where did Hashem's presence go, what happened?

And the odd part about it is that again, on a personal level, I've worked very hard, very focused. Once upon a time I thought maybe there's something wrong with my brain, maybe my mother dropped me on my head as a kid. I don't know.

But it didn't take that long to become, to come to the realization that it's not just me. We human beings as a creed, we human beings as a species, find it very, very difficult to change. But wait a minute, that doesn't make sense, because the *neshamah* within me, I am the *neshamah*, desires to grow, to become greater and greater and the *Derech Hashem* said that the *neshamah* has the capacity to change me, why can't I change? Why can't I just get rid of the bad *middos*, just change the essence of me?

But the *Derech Hashem* explains the why. You see there is Adam *Harishon*, there is man, before the *chet*, before the sin and there's man after the sin. When Hashem created Adam *Harishon* and put Adam *Harishon* in *Gan Eden* before the sin, that's when the *neshamah* within him was powerful, pure and effective. When Adam *Harishon* opened his eyes, yes he had a body, but it was like a man wearing a bear costume, he was wearing the appendages, he was sort of wearing the costume of the bear but his mind was brilliantly clear, he experienced Hashem right there, he knew exactly why he was created.

He knew exactly what life was about and he had a tremendous ability to understand things.

When man ate from the *etz hadas*, that first sin, what he did was he radically changed the essence of man. Now no longer is man inside a bear costume, man is mixed into the bear, I who am speaking to you am pure *neshamah* with *nefesh habahami* mixed in, I have desires and needs and appetites and now I'm drunk. You see Adam *Harishon* before the sin, was outside desire. If there was a desire, he would look at it and say hmm that's interesting, should I or should I not? Is it wise, is it foolish?

After the *etz hadas*, now everything is mixed together and now I want, I, not me I do, I don't. I do, what am I? I am drunk in this bear essence, it's not a costume any longer, no longer

appendages that I wear mixed in to the essence of me is the *nefesh habahami* an animal soul of that bear and now I get drunk.

Passions flare up and I suddenly feel differently, look at things differently, I experience the world differently. I become drunk with those feeling and more than that I can never see beyond my nose, I don't understand life, I can't experience Hashem and man changed radically.

However, the *Derech Hashem* explains that there was another change, maybe more significant. Before the *chet*, before the sin, the *neshamah* of man was fully capable of changing the essence of him. You see when Hashem created Adam, Hashem put man in perfect balance with the ability to choose good or bad and the capacity to resist and then change the essence of him.

His very essence was plastic. It was malleable. If you'd like to understand what that means, imagine you go on a diet, if you go on a diet, you're still going to crave chocolate or sweets or whatever. Hopefully you'll control, you won't eat the foods that you're not supposed to, but the bottom line is you still hunger for them, you still have an appetite because you can't exactly change the essence of you.

Adam *Harishon* could, if he felt that he should no longer crave a certain type of food, he changed the essence of him and if he felt that two thousand calories a day was sufficient, after that he would feel sated and no longer felt the appetite, the drive, the desire. You see his inner essence was malleable.

If he felt that arrogance was a bad trait, he would change it. He was able to choose right from wrong, bad from good. And he was able to change the very essence of him and in that state he was supposed to live in *Gan Eden* forever.

When man sinned, he change the very essence of the human race from that point on. At that point, now not only is man inside the bear, but now I can't change because I'm stuck inside over here. And I have these drives, I have these appetites, I may be able to stop and not give in to them, I may be able to resist, but I can't change the essence.

I could move with a little bit, I could change it after a long time, but there'll still be desires, there'll still be appetites, because I'm inside this bear body and this bear has hungers, needs and drives and now man cannot change.

And a simple reality is that there is Adam before the sin, Adam after the sin and they're categorically different types of people. Before the sin, it's true, Adam had great clarity and could change himself, afterwards, he no longer could. And explains the *Derech Hashem*, therefore Hashem had to introduce a whole new part of this calculation.

Now death was needed. You see Adam was put into *Gan Eden* and was supposed to live there forever in perfect situation. But once he sinned, now the entire system has been ruined, now man will go through life only after death, can there be an *olam haneshamos* and then *tchiyas hameissim*, and only with the rebuilding, with the whole new system is man actually able to perfect themselves.

And if you'd like to understand how growth really works, how change really functions within us, I have a simple *mashal* to understand how it really works.

Imagine you take a fifteen year old the gym. Imagine a fifteen year old decides he wants to get muscles, he wants to get strong, he wants to get physique, he wants to get strong so he goes to the gym. And he's a diligent fellow he pays careful attention to exactly what the coach says to do and he does four sets, eight rep teach, he does bicep curls and he comes home that evening, takes

out the tape measure and measures his bicep and says, hmm wait a minute I don't get it, same size, it didn't change. This exercise thing is not working because my bicep didn't grow.

So his father explains to him, you know you need a little time, a little patience. So he goes three days a week, week after week to the gym and he's very careful and he's very diligent and he does the exercises, exactly as told to do and after four weeks again he takes out the tape measure, measures his biceps and they're still not really any larger.

Hey, I guess this exercise thing don't work, it can't change, it just doesn't work.

So I'd like to share with you the mistake the young, the young fellow's making. You see lifting weights, will not make you strong. Lifting weights, breaks down the muscle, then the brain is given the signal that hey, there is more work load that's being demanded. The brain will divert amino acids will then build up the cells in the muscle and slowly, slowly, the muscle will gain strength, will become stronger.

But you see the exercise doesn't really make you stronger, the exercise tells the brain that it had better make you stronger so that you could do the work in the future. The real growth doesn't happen during the exercise, the growth only happens when you rest. You do the exercise, the brain gets a signal and then provided there's enough nourishment, provided there's ample rest time, then the body begins rebuilding.

And I believe that's a perfect parable for the way growth really works. You see the *Derech Hashem* explains that growth in our world really doesn't happen. We can't change in this world because I'm stuck inside this body and I can't move the needle. A little bit, a little bit, but I can't really change.

But once my body's put in the ground, I separate, I go to the *olam haneshamos* and then all of that work that I put in, much like that exercise in the gym, you did the lifting, now suddenly the growth happens. But the moment you die isn't where you remain forever. Where you die, you're in the *olam haneshamos*, but then all of that work that you put in, all the effort you put in, then manifests itself and you grow and you grow and you grow and you become the real person you're supposed to be.

So WYSIWYG doesn't mean what you see is what you get, you're stuck there, WYSIWYG means temporarily, as long as you're in this body, you're stuck at a point when the body's put in the ground, you separate and then in the *olam haneshamos* all of that work that you put in, now allows you to grow, you fill in and you become much greater.

And this concept that the *Derech Hashem* explains to us allows us to understand why in fact change is so difficult. Why in fact it's so hard to really change the essence of me. To understand how growth actually works, requires that understanding that most of it happens in the *olam haneshamos*.

However, that is growth that happens in our world as well and you could see a person twenty years later, thirty years later, and he is greatly changed. And we know many such concepts, "*mitzvah gorreres mitzvah*" you do one *mitzvah*, you want to do another *mitzvah*. You do another *mitzvah*, you start the ball rolling and before you know it you're on the right path and you're growing and you're growing and you do change.

So what does the *Derech Hashem* mean you can't really change, obviously you can change. And more than that, you'll see great *tzaddikim*, you'll see people of high stature and you know, you feel their presence, they say that the Gra, people who would walk in the room, they'd oh the

Gra's here. So if you want to understand what happens in our world, I believe really it's very, very simple.

Imagine that as I go through my day, I make right choices. Those choices can't change the *nefesh habahami*, I'm stuck but I made the right choice. And imagine there's sort of a shadow, shadow image of me and as I exercise here, that shadow image gets stronger and stronger, bigger and bigger and you do the right thing, spend your time appropriately year after year that shadow gets larger and larger, fuller and fuller, bigger and bigger and you could have two people, one with a tiny little shadow, the other one with a huge, huge powerful shadow.

That shadow influences us. It doesn't directly affect us, but if I do the right thing, my *neshamah* glows and it has more strength, it's not able to change me because I'm stuck and that's the way Hashem made the system now, but my *neshamah* becomes larger, starts glowing, that shadow becomes bigger and bigger and bigger and if you could imagine two men, one at the end of his life with a small little *neshamah*. The other one with a huge, powerful shadow, granted again he was still stuck in his body, granted he was stuck where he was, but once he leaves this body he's no longer drunk, the *nefesh habahami*, the animal soul no longer influences, no longer keeps where he is.

That shadow which is huge, which is really his *neshamah* but it couldn't change him as long as it was stuck in the body, suddenly he the essence of him, is allowed to expand into it and for eternity he is this glowing, powerful, huge entity.

But most of that happens not here. And if you'd like to understand why it is that it's so hard to change it's because the system is broken and it's supposed to be that way. After *chet* of Adam

*Harishon*, no longer can my *neshamah* do that which it wants to do, that which instinctively it desires to do.

What I can do is make the right choices, and when I make the right choices, my *neshamah* grows. And it grows and the shadow becomes larger and larger and that influences me, it pulls me more towards doing the right thing.

But at the end of the day I can't really expand, I can't really change the essence of me to a very real extent I'm stuck where I am. But if you'd like to understand that *kal vechomer* that Rashi told us, I believe it's really quite simple.

As holy as the *mizbeach* is, there is no comparison between the holiest object created and the *neshamah* of man. And as great as the *avodah* of the *kohen* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, doesn't compare to the *kedushah*, the holiness of man's *neshamah*.

The problem that we have is we see the physical, I see you in the bear, you see me in the bear and I look at you as a bear. If that's all you are, then you're right, Rashi makes no sense. A cow is a cow. A cow's important, a cow's nice but if I decide that I want to eat that cow, I'm fully allowed to *shecht* it and have Elsie the cow for dinner. Because a cow at the end of the day is made to serve man but when I look at you and I say okay, a different sort of animal, I don't see who you are.

And the reason why we might ask that question on Rashi is because *mizbeach*, oh that's holy, a person, whatever. Like another animal, another person who occupies, and even though we know it's not true, on the operative level I think we really feel that way. I'll share with you a classic example:

I saw this with my own eyes. On a *tefillin shel yad*, many men wear a sort of cardboard kind of covering, really it's to protect the *yad*, the *shel yad* because the corners are sensitive, etc. In any case I was once in the *Beis Medrash* and one of those cardboard coverings of the *shel yad* was on the floor, another fellow walked by, picked it up and put it on the table for the fellow who it had fallen off his *tefillin*. The fellow who's *tefillin* it had fallen off of said to the other guy who picked it up, he said, thank you very much. The guy who picked the *tefillin* cover up said, huh it wasn't for you, the *tefillin* cover is *kadosh*, I had to pick it up off the floor.

I said to myself, wow, wow, the *tefillin* cover, *tashmishei kedushah*, that's holy, a human being, whatever, you, you whatever, and sad to say that is an emotional experience that we often feel. If we knew the holiness of the *neshamah*, the *kedushah* of the *neshamah*, we'd be blown away. I would look at you with awe and trepidation. The reason why I don't look at you that way is because I don't even relate to my own *neshamah* that way, I don't recognize its need to grow, the *neshamah* that I have, the I can't really change, so I begin thinking of myself like the bear, like the animal that's all I am, just a human being flesh and blood, I look at myself that way, I look at you that way, and guess what? Why do I have to treat you with that much honor, you're not that important, you know.

And every once in a while you begin to understand life in a very different way. And when you do that, you begin to understand that Hashem created us for tremendous greatness, well beyond anything we can envision or imagine. And there are great, deep needs within me, I need to change, I need to grow, I need to really really do things for other people, I have those needs but I also have opposite needs. I have the need to sleep and to eat and to take care of me, and what's in it for me and what about me, what about me, what about me?

And I am ever challenged with those two contradictions. But it's not like Adam *Harishon* outside of me, deep within me are needs, appetites and desires but deep within me are also aspirations to grow and I am ever in conflict.

The hard part to realize is the tremendous change that accomplish in me. Every time I resist, every time I hold back and the opposite, every time I do what I'm supposed to do, I'm changing the essence of me, I don't see it, I don't feel it. My *neshamah* is stymied, it's held in check and it can't do that which it should do to enable me to change the essence of me and to understand that nevertheless my *neshamah* grows, it becomes huge, it becomes bigger and bigger, that shadow becomes larger and larger, it can't directly change me but it can influence me if we understood that, we'd have a vastly different understanding about *neshamos*.

It is true that every sin that I engage in, damages me makes me into a darker person, sullies me. My *neshamah* becomes a little bit held in check more but it's even more true that every time I do what I'm supposed to, it has a profound effect.

Chazal tell us the reward to punishment is five hundred to one. So it's true, I failed, I blew it, I messed up and I may have to suffer in this world, maybe in *gehinnom* I don't know and that's terrible and I have to work on it, granted, and at the same time do you understand what I accomplish, when I win one time? Do you understand what I accomplish when I resist? Do you understand what I accomplish when I say to myself, I don't want to do this, but there's another Jew in pain and I'm going to feel his pain and I reach out for him?

I change the essence of me, my *neshamah* grows tremendously, becomes huge becomes powerful and you do that day after day, week after week, your *neshamah* becomes this huge

powerhouse, I don't feel it, I don't sense it because again, I can't change, I'm stuck, I'm stuck in this body, I'm stuck where I am but my *neshamah* becomes profoundly larger.

And when you understand this, you begin to understand life in a vastly different way. It is true that when I deal with reality of me, there are going to be many things that I'm not going to be able to change, there are many things that I'm going to continue, I'm sorry to say, to do wrong.

I come to *Yom Kippur* every year, with that same understanding that I had the year before, Adam *Harishon* for one sin, was held so accountable, I don't have one thing I did wrong during the year, I don't stand there on *Yom Kippur* and *klap al cheit* for one thing I did wrong during the year.

If you're a human being and you're realistic and you understand, you realize that we violate *averos* on a regular basis. We do things that are clearly, really wrong. If you speak *lashan hara*, and that means one story about one person, not the worst thing in the world, it's not, but you know it's derogatory right?

If you count the *lo saseis* you violate, it's frightening and I do it. And more than that, many times do I always have perfect *kavanah* in *davening* am I *yotzeh shmoneh esrei*? Maybe yes, maybe no. If you don't have *kavanah* in *avos*, you're not *yotzeh shmoneh esrei* that means those *brachos* are *levatalah*.

And if you think about the simple reality, we are going to mess up and there are many things we're going to do wrong and here's one of those great challenges, how do you live with that? And you have to understand this is the reality of our lives, we're kind of like that bear or more like a bull in a china shop, meaning to say I'm in a world where there's so much opportunity right in front of me, I could grow, I could accomplish, I could do worlds, but I'm in this bear, I'm

in here and I'm going to clumsily knock things over. And there are people that have delicate feelings that are right around and I may smash them, I may hit them, I don't realize, I don't think about, I didn't realize, I didn't even realize that bothers you, I didn't even think about it.

Why what's wrong with me? What's wrong with me is I'm stuck in here. And understanding that the real growth isn't here, allows me to deal with that simple reality that a, I'm going to be moving the needle very, very slowly, and b, there are things I'm going to end up doing wrong and if I have the courage to say to myself, I get it, it's wrong, it's not *muttar*, I can then say to my Creator, Hashem, I'm sorry. I legitimately wish I didn't, I hope to do different. And when I leave this bear suit, when I leave this bear body, it's put in the ground, push in a heartbeat I instantly understand things differently, instantly I recognize things and every time that I resisted, every time during that course of life, that I curled that barbell, that I worked and I exercised, everything my *neshamah* became suddenly whooshes into that huge form called me, it's true WYSIWYG, it's me, but everything that I couldn't accomplish in this world, everything that I couldn't change in this world, suddenly changes.

I believe that this Rashi is teaching us a fundamental concept, I am not the bear, and you're not the bear. I have to treat you with tremendous regard because you're created in the *tzelem* of Hashem, you but not the outside, not the body, the *chelek elokim mimal*, you whom I'm speaking to, the I inside. And because that's who you are, I have to treat you with tremendous regard, far more regard than I would treat the *mizbeach*, more than a *sefer Torah*.

I have to treat you with tremendous, tremendous regard because that is the *kedushah* of you and by the same token I have to understand that I too am a *neshamah* and I have to understand that I could accomplish worlds, I can change the essence of me, I become huge, or the opposite. The

big problem is I don't feel it, I don't understand it. Can people change? The answer is yes. Very slowly, in small amounts.

So you want to say oh my goodness, there is no hope? There is a lot of hope but the real changes won't happen here, the real changes are when we leave this earth then suddenly all the work I put in, becomes who I am. You can find two people here who are vastly different and they really are, and if you understand what life's about, you'll see people who in a physical way are very different. I'll give you a *mashal*:

Imagine a young person begins running and really dedicates himself to running and running and running then he becomes a marathon runner. And he becomes a world class athlete and he's actually able to run a marathon in a little over two hours which is now the world class, record.

That man is very, very fast. If you know what running a marathon in about two hours means, it means about four and a half minutes a mile. If you've ever tried to run a mile in seven minutes you'll know it's a great, great feat of fitness.

Here's a man who trained himself that is able to run a mile in four and a half minutes and he does it for twenty six point two miles, that's phenomenal. The difference between the fitness level of him and anyone else is astonishing, he's vastly different, he's so radically different, you can't even consider them in the same league.

Nevertheless if you want to go from New York city to Chicago, I don't suggest you put on your running shoes, because you could be the fastest marathon runner in the world but it's seven hundred miles. And you're not sprinting or running seven hundred miles.

If you want to go from New York city to Chicago, you get in a car. And you get in a car and suddenly it's sixty miles an hour and suddenly you're able to do it in twelve world.

You see in this world there will be differences between people, vast differences, I could work on my *middos*, or I could give in. I become holy or the opposite. And it's much like an athlete, if you work on yourself, you become more fit, more fit, and you could have one person who's sluggish and slow, another person who's fast and the more you train the faster you get, the faster you'll get.

And you'll have two people who as they go through life are vastly different planes, but in reality that's only in the physical level. Yes it's true that one is a much faster runner, yes it's true that one's respiratory breathing is much better than the other, yes it's true that the fitness level between the athlete and non-athlete is vastly different, but at the end of the day they are still human beings, they still have limits, they can only run a marathon a month at most, they can't do it four, five days in a row.

But you get in a car and suddenly you're going sixty miles an hour. Change in this world is in the physical world. When we leave this earth, suddenly it's whoosh, all the real work that I did, all the real labor I put in, suddenly transforms, it's like getting in a race car and suddenly going two hundred miles an hour because all of the years of work and work and work, suddenly whooshes forward into me.

Why? Because my *neshamah* was growing. My *neshamah* was growing bigger and bigger, the real changes in the physical world were just influences that influenced me more, they're real, you could work on anger, you could work on humility, and you will see changes but they're really only changes in the limited sense.

When we leave this earth, then forever we are what we shaped ourselves into. May Hashem give us the wisdom, the understanding to put this into practice and to realize the power of the *neshamah*, to realize what I could accomplish in the few years I have in this life.