

Mesilat Yesharim

Chapter One: Man's Duty in the World

The beginning of all spiritual work is to clarify and integrate/verify what you're meant to be doing here, and then commit to taking the steps to doing that.

The goal is the pleasure of Gd-consciousness - which is really to be had in the world to come. However, to be entitled to this pleasure, you have to go through this world - which is just a corridor and a means to building the relationship here and therefore earn the pleasure in the world to come. What we prepare in this world, we enjoy in the next. The means to achieve this are the mitzvot.

The purpose of life in olam hazeh is 'vani kirvat Elokim li tov - closeness to Hashem'. Every other goal is empty and meaningless.

Hashem has placed us in a battle where many factors cut us off from this closeness - namely - taiva. This whole world is a battle to come close and avoid those things that distance you.

To the degree you overcome your yetzer and taiva, you win.

You were not created for your situation in this world (DB-therefore should have no physical/material aspiration beyond what you need to reach the goal. Taken more takes you further from the goal). This world and everything in it is a means to an end.

No intelligent person can think we are here for this world

- a) No one is particularly happy
- b) Wouldn't need to have a neshama

Neshama hates the pleasures of this world. (Mussel of the villager and the princess). But once we realise that this world is where the neshama can earn its reward - it loves the opportunity this world presents.

Now you should realise the immense importance of mitzvot - to the extent you apply the means you get the goal and the opposite - forfeit the goal. Therefore we should be exacting in our performance of mitzvot like someone counting their gold.

So, the purpose of this world is

- A. Mitzvot
- B. Serve Hashem
- C. Stand up to tests

Pleasures of this world are only so we have nachas ruach and yishuv hadaas to do our avodah. Therefore all our attention should be given over to the Creator - and we should have NO OTHER PURPOSE! - shum tachlit acher

And everything we do big or small - other than to come close to Hashem and break the mechitzas that are getting in the way - materiality - and therefore been drawn after Hashem like iron to magnet.

Chase and hang on to anything that will get you there, and flee from anything that will distance you.

Chapter Two: Zehirut Vigilance

Contemplate and check everything you do - whether it is good (takes you to the goal) or bad (distances you). Save your soul and don't be blind. This is common sense. Once you know how to save yourself (and how to harm yourself) nothing more ridiculous than not doing so.

The yetzer hara burdens us so we have no time to contemplate our actions and the path we are taking (too busy with mundane stuff, question our values, our path)

Need Hashem's help and will get it if shows you really want it. If not, Hashem will leave you to it

Chapter Three: Elements of Vigilance	Two steps: - Contemplate what is the true good we should choose and what is the bad we should flee from. - Check to see if your deeds are in line with this Two times: - Before doing anything check if it's in line - After doing anything check if it was in line, what evil or good it contained and what methods he needs to preserve the good and get rid of the bad Two terms (erubin 13b): - Pishpush: Check to see what deeds are against ratzon Hashem - Mishmush: investigating even good deeds to see if they contain any evil motivation or aspect Make sure not just all our deeds are only good, but also bad habits or traits are removed. Must measure every day like merchant counting money - Cheshbon HaNefesh Need fixed times for this Two ways the yetzer messes us up and makes it hard to do this work, to see the truth. - We don't see the mistakes and errors and obstacles - Even worse, we see the bad as good and good as bad Need a mentor/guide who has already tread the path to help us through the maze.
Chapter Four: Acquiring Vigilance	Learning Torah helps with this - specifically Yirah-dikka stuff. Contemplate - How serious our obligation of avodah is - That there is a din at the end of the day Three types of people - Truly wise realise they should aspire for perfection and nothing less. Once this is clear - you will be fully committed to the means; good deeds and good traits. To fall short would be a tragedy for them. They will not rest and will be concerned to fall short. Yiras HaChet means fearing the effects that a sin will have on the aspiration of perfection. (you marmish have to have a burning ratzon for shleimut) Kol echad nichveh mechupato shel chavero (BB 75a) - see your friends level and feel like a fool for not attaining that when you could have. - Less wise: Anguish over position in world to come (form of honour seeking). Jealousy, embarrassment, humiliation at the status of friends higher than him, knowing he could have achieved that too, especially those they see as inferior to them in this world. Their yetzer hara makes the next world abstract that they don't really consider it or be concerned about it. So people don't pursue the truth and rather just go after their desires in olam hazeh and don't care about olam haba. This world is the place of free will, the place to do the work. If you don't do it here, it's too late. - Lowest level: reward and punishment. When they perceive the exactitude of judgement they will tremble and fear. All offences however light are taken into account. Yiras HaOnesh Where does rachamim fit in? - The punishment is delayed - It's not full - The chance for tshuva - How to do tshuva? - Recognise sin - Admits it - contemplates the wrongdoing - returns

	- has sincere and painful regret (wish not done, anguish) Then the sin will disappear from reality! The satisfaction and pleasure from the sin have been replaced with anguish and regret.
Chapter Five: Obstacles to vigilance and how to avoid them	Three Obstacles - Involvement in olam hazeh-dikka things - Frivolousness - Bad company a) Olam Hazeh (most common but actually the easiest to avoid) Too much pressure to pay attention to actions Avos 4:12 - limit worldly involvement - just what is necessary The key is Torah study. Need set times - Barati yetzer vbarati Torah tavlin - torah is the cure - there is no way to be cured without it. Doctor says take this medicine - have to take it! The darkness of this will will certainly overpower him step by step - Just learning Torah brings light - Need also cheshbon hanefesh - Don't waste time! Wise person uses all time for spiritual goals b) Frivolity and derision Leads to loss of emotional sensitivity - his reasoning and intellect no longer rule over his heart. Just a fool. Also leads to sin - not taking life/yirah seriously. Need focused awareness to have zehirut - shok leads one away from these thoughts getting into his heart. Not open to tochecha, motivation etc Destroys Mussar and Yirah Severe punishment for scorner! (He needs it because only way to correct him) c) Bad company Lets go of standards to impress friends Just need to purify and cleanse self and not follow the masses. Don't be bothered be ridiculers Infact should ridicule ridiculers. Don't lose money because of them, all the more so don't lose soul. Don't be ashamed
Chapter Six: Zerizus - Alacrity	Zehirut is focused on negative commandments, zehirut on positive ones (sur mrah ase tov) Run after and grasp mitzot - don't lose opportunity Yetzer hara does two things - pushes to bad, blocks from good Made from earth so nature is lethargic - must strengthen self to overcome nature Need great strength for this Lazy person isn't actively destructive- but is just the same - losing out Builds slowly over time - progresses to misinterpretations of Torah Leniencies etc Person knows a) how to save their soul and b) obligation to the master - just too lazy to do it. Major rule when it comes to prishut, every kulah must be examined - even appears reasonable and sound, could be atzlut

Chapter Seven: elements of alacrity	Two parts of alacrity Before the deed - Don't delay. As soon as the opportunity presents itself grab it Our nature tries to prevent this. Must overcome our nature After starting - Make sure you finish it, go through with it fully. Not just getting rid of burden Examples in Tanach of people who had alacrity - Avraham ran to serve the guests Someone who is on fire (tilhut nafsho) for service of Hashem won't sluggishly go about his business. Will run around. Not lethargic Works both ways - outer alacrity will fuel inner fire - go after actions What is most desirable in avodas Hashem is yearning of the heart (chefetz halev) and pining of the soul (tshukat haneshama) - tzama lecha nafshi Need to actively arouse this chemdah Can go beyond one's nature - first use what is in your ability can then move beyond. The external will arouse the internal
Chapter Eight: Acquiring alacrity	Vigilance is for negative commandments Alacrity is for positive commandments So the methods for acquiring are the same. - When we value the mitzvahs enough - of course will have alacrity - Consider all the good that Hashem does for us all the time - recognise our great debt to Hashem. Everyone has something to be grateful for Three levels - Truly wise: Sense of duty and value for mitvos - Middle guy: Reward in Olam Haba - Normal guy: Punishments in Olam Haba
Chapter 9: Factors that undermine alacrity and how to avoid them	- Desire for physical ease - Lazy to put in effort - Chasing physical pleasure Can't leave comfort zone. Can't get up to daven let alone run to do mitzvah Your ratzon has been imprisoned by our habits. Do what want, not what is right We are not in olam hazeh to rest - rather to work hard - tzarich she'yeda ha'adam, ki lo l'menucha hu b'olam hazeh ela l amal v'torach Be like a soldier - just chup some food and sleep when you need/can - be always at the ready Another factor messing up zrizut is fear - of time, of weather, accidents and illness. This is a big sin This world is temporary, avodah is kavua Material - be content with whatever comes your way, be prepared to work hard and be secure in trust of Hashem - bitachon
Chapter 10: Nekiyut Cleanliness	Nekiyut = Totally cleansed self of all bad middot and cheit, even subtle sins that could be justified - not just in action, in heart. (Zehirut = no outward sin but may be drawn through taiva/gaiva to justify subtle sin. Nature not changed) Zehirut, zerizut, ahavat Hashem will lead to nekiyut as connection to physical is diminished and fire for spiritual is aroused.

	Takes immense avodah because we are weak and tempted and rationalise things.
Chap 11: Details of cleanliness	Desire make us rationalise - "the eyes influence the heart to find justification for what seems pleasant and attractive." Money - eg can steal a bit in business, steal time from employer. Even doing a mitzvah during your work hours may be a transgression! Women - touch, sight, speech, hearing even thought Yoma 29a - thoughts of sin are worse than sin. Food - care in shechitah, any suspicion of not kosher - like poison Speech - Verbal abuse, lashon hara, lying, giving advice, Feelings/ Middot - hatred, vengeance, bearing a grudge, pride, anger, envy, lust Halacha - Shabbos, kulahs, mundane speech
Chap 12: Acquiring cleanliness	Method to acquire Nekiyut Continually learn halacha and mussar. Understand the truth and necessity of acquiring Nekiyut, crystal clear knowledge of halacha - nothing can stop you.
Chap 13: Prishut! Abstinence	First step towards Chassidut. Up to now just talking about Tzaddik. From now- Chassid. Zehirut (sur m'rah) - Zerizut (ase tov) Prishut (sur m'rah) Chassidut (ase tov) Kadesh Atzmecha B'Mutar Lecha! To abstain from permissible things as a barrier to forbidden things. Distance self from evil. Doraitas, D'Rabbanen Siyag, Personal extra things. We have been warned that some types of Prishut should be avoided 'hasn't the Torah and Sages given us enough issurim?' This is referring to complete asceticism and mortification of the body. We must take care of our physical being and dress appropriately - moderately When about to sin, hard to beat yetzer hara. Need to practice whilst still far from sin. There is no worldly pleasure that doesn't attract some form of sin. Eating and drinking leads to rebellion, adultery, suffering, greed, desires, theft, corruption - to feed his desire. Marital intimacy - really dangerous, feeds lust. Clothes - leads to arrogance. Strolling - wasting time "One must not benefit from anything in the world, other than what is essential to one's individual nature." For whatever reason you feel it's essential for you - (Me'ezev taam) Must go above and beyond what is permissible. Select individuals.
Chapter 14: Elements of Abstinence	3 elements: pleasures, halachic matters, social conduct. Pleasures - as before, only what is essential. Halachic concerns - always be machmir. Especially when in doubt. Even for minority viewpoint. Social conduct - hitbodedut. Isolation from people to serve Hashem. (Not extreme). Have a good crew, but then find space. When with people, limit speech, don't gaze beyond 4 amot.
Chapter 15: Acquiring abstinence	Consider the temporary, superficial, inferior, false nature of worldly pleasure and the evil they bring. Should come to loathe them - not hard to refrain at that point. The apparent good lasts a short time but the hidden bad is long lasting. No intelligent human would indulge. Food goes over your tongue for a few seconds and then is gone. Causes drowsiness and sickness. Contemplating this will free you. Thoughtlessness and bad company will mess this up. Most valuable thing is hitbodedut. Be careful - you can't jump levels in prishut. One step at a time.

Chapter 16: Taharah! Purity	Refining one's heart and thoughts. (Tikkun haLev v'ha'machshavot). Prevent the yetzer hara from influencing our actions. All actions should be guided by wisdom and yirah, and not by sin and taivah Even if you have prishut, the motivation could be wrong. The little we do partake should still not be from taivah. Could be doing things lo lishmah - Deceive people, Honour, Monetary gain, Reward, Praise. Even if primarily do something for the right reason, to serve Gd, usually some ulterior motive attached. Even if had no intention to get praised, once we get it we do more to get more praise. We should really aspire to faultless divine service and should 'sift' each deed 13 times before offering it to Hashem! (Although of course each deed is valued for what it's worth). Everything about pure service to Hashem - lishma. Very hard but if love Hashem enough we'll aspire to this. The heart is the King over the body so must arouse this yearning for pure Divine service.
Chapter 17: Acquiring Purity	Contemplate and be completely clear about the base nature of worldly pleasure, be disgusted by it. Should feel like you are being coerced to take pleasure from this world. Need to do the same thing for honour - thoughts should only be for Hashem. Prepare to do mitzvahs! What am I about to do? Who am I about to do it in front of?
Chapter 18: Chassidut - Piety	This means to understand what his father wants even when asked once and jump to fulfil desire of the father and want to please him even beyond what was explicitly asked for. If there is love and strong attachment this will be the case. The mitzvahs are hints to the true desire of Hashem, should understand the real meaning and jump to go beyond is pleasing and fulfilling the desires of Hashem. What prishut is to the negative commandments, chassidut is to the positive ones. To go above and beyond to please Hashem.
Chapter 19: Elements of Piety	Three things 1) The DEED Adam l'makom - Meticulousness in every aspect of mitzvahs. Adam l'chavero - kindness and prevention of harm towards others. Physical, Financial and Spiritual. Particularly focus on laws of Brachos, Nezikim and Pirkei Avot. Acts of kindness are especially important - chesed leads to chassidut. Even not cause animals to suffer- rachamim 2) The APPLICATION The most important principles/pillars are Ahavat and Yirat Hashem YIRAH = awe of exaltedness. Tefillah and Mitzvahs must realise who he is standing in front of. Three things to attain this 1. Realise that you are literally standing in front of Hashem - have a real conversation as if speaking to a friend 2. Contemplate how marmish awesome Hashem is - beyond anything we could ever grasp. 3. Contemplate lowness of man - flesh and blood and aveiros Should be submissive, act like a servant in front of the King. Must greatly honour and embellish mitzvot eg anything we can do to honour Shabbos Must be able to take initiative beyond what he's told to do, based on what He knows the King wants. Honour Torah and scripture as well as Talmidei Chachmim Honour the Beis Midrash and Beis Knesset. All must come from yiras harommemus not yiras haonesh Ahavat Hashem - Simcha, Dveikus and Kinah. Yearn for closeness to Hashem. Just thinking and speaking about Hashem will bring immense Oneg - like when one mentions a beloved wife or only child. Will never let up on avodah and needs no encouragement. This is not conditional love because all He does for us (taluya).

	Needs to be instinctual love like father and son (eino taluya) The test of this comes in times of suffering. How get to this level? a) Emuna - know everything is for the good b) Higher level - don't even care about self - whole life is for honour of Hashem. Shows emuna just to increase the glory of Hashem. Dveikus - has no interest other than Hashem. Never any separation - (in thought and tangible experience). Simcha - many psukim speaking about the importance of Simcha. Kinaah - zealousness. Should want to destroy Hashem's enemies. Protest wrongdoing. Like standing up for a dear friend who is being insulted. 3) The INTENT If your intent is for any personal benefit - reward in the World to Come, closeness in this World - fine - not negative, but not ideal. Everything I do is solely to glorify Hashem. This comes from deepening the love and longing for His glory. At least through me Hashem's glory will be increased. Yearn for the whole creation to do the same. Feel pain at the diminution of Gd's glory, destruction of Beis HaMikdash and exile. Complete divorce from personal desires - only Kiddush Hashem. Pray only for redemption and revelation of glory of Gd. Should also be concerned for the generation. Should pray on their behalf. Hashem loves those who love his children.
Chap 20: Assessing Piety	The Yetzer Hara can make good things seem bad and bad things seem like mitzvahs. Three requirements for success a) Very truthful heart which only desire is to please Hashem b) Deeply analyse actions c) Completely trust Hashem Without all these, no chance of success. Must identify the consequences of the action. Even if it may seem good at first, need to look further (eg Kamtza and Bar Kamtza). Eg It's a mitzvah to rebuke someone - but not if it will lead them to even worse evil. If alacrity to perform a mitzvah would cause machlokes. Chumrahs in public may appear haughty. (DB - give up mikveh Erev Shabbos for Shalom Bayis. Daven Neitz but then be exhausted or haughty all day)
Chap 21: Acquiring Piety	Need profound histaklut and hitbonenut. Compare Hashem's greatness to our lowliness will bring Yirah and trembling. Contemplate a) Hashem's chesed to us b) How much He loves Jews c) The greatness of Torah and mitzvos This will arouse love and yearning for dveikus. When we relate to Hashem as a compassionate father, will want to do for Him as well. Need hitbodedut in order to have good hitbonenut. Should deeply contemplate Tehillim and read maase gadolim. What stops piety is a) preoccupation with olam hazeh-dikka worries and issues. Needs a one-track mind. b) Investment in olam hazeh-dikka pleasures. Bitachon can save us from these two vices. Parnassa comes from Hashem. We just need minimal hishtadlut to form a kli to receive it.

Chap 22: Anavah Humility	Must never aggrandise oneself. Humble in deed and thought. Tocho K'Baro How to be humble? Contemplate one's faults and lacking in avodah realise not worthy of honour and praise. Can't be haughty because everything good about you Hashem gave you. Intelligence, wealth, strength. Like a poor person who receives a gift - should feel ashamed. And the greater the gift the more ashamed you should feel! We are really on such a low level compared to previous generations, there is really nothing to feel conceited about. 4 ways of expressing humility: a) Conduct self is lowly manner ... Speech - softly and kindly Physical bearing - don't walk to erect and proudly Within the community - don't sit in honoured place, be with the lowly people. b) Bearing insult ...(only people with big egos get insulted) Overlook sins people do to you, forgive easily, c) Don't chase honour and positions of authority It's a great burden and responsibility. Should hate and spurn honour (not good for ego) d) Respect all people Someone with humility has minimum concern for this world and its vanities. His company is pleasant and people approve of him. He doesn't get angry or argue. He is quiet and calm.
Chap 23: Acquiring Humility	Two factors - Habit and Contemplation Act humble. Sit in not honoured place, wear respectable but not fancy clothes. External actions will help fight natural tendency to conceit and bring internal change. Contemplation - a) Pirkei Avos 3:1 - know from where you came ... Physicality is lowly, death is final and we will have to give account in front of Hashem. Visualise standing before Hashem and all the pure beings and tzaddikim and Him saying 'Where is the conceit and pride you had in the world?' b) Also consider that things change - health, wealth, position - comes and goes. c) We have a great duty in this world and who can say they are living up to it? d) Be aware of the weakness of our understanding and the many mistakes we can make - we must learn from people and seek advice. What detracts from humility? a) Investing in extravagance and taiva take away from humility and we forget Hashem. So it is wise to afflict ourselves sometimes. b) Foolishness and ignorance. c) Associating with flatterers. We are weak and needy of praise. These words are actually like the venom of a snake and fill him with haughtiness. We see this in most people in a position of power. Be careful of who you associate with because they can damage you (spiritually) more than food and drink can. There is nothing better for a person than to have honest friends who will lovingly point out their bad points and give them rebuke.
Chap 24: Yirat HaCheit Fear of Sin	Two Types of Yirah Yirat HaOnesh - fear of punishment to body for violating the Torah The best prevention for doing something is fear of harm to oneself. It's a low form of Yirah.

	Yirat HaRomemut - Refrain from sinning because of Gd's great glory. Need to first develop real understanding of Gd's greatness and our lowliness. This comes into play when praying/doing mitzvah or on verge of doing a sin. Yirat HaRomemus appears during tefillah or avodah or when a sin presets itself. Yirat HaCheit - should always be conscious of action that they not go against Gd. We should tremble and shudder, aware that we are in front of Hashem, afraid to mess up Must be extremely careful that actions bear no closeness to aveirahs.
Chap 25: Acquiring Yirah	Contemplate 2 things a) Hashem is marmish everywhere b) Hashem sees and oversees everything Gain the consciousness that we are always in front of Hashem and He even sees our thoughts. Got to be diligent in this practice - don't get distracted This yirah isn't natural - you have to train yourself. Small steps in training yourself Should contemplate this marmish all the time, until the truth is engraved in your consciousness that you are marmish actually standing in front of Hashem at all times.
Chap 26: Kedusha Holiness	First you sanctify yourself, and then you are sanctified. You must completely detach from materiality, consistently cleaving to Hashem. We can't do this alone seeing as we are human, so the final stage is a gift. We can pursue true knowledge and sanctification of deeds - then Hashem will rest His holiness on us. Difference between Tahara and Kedusha. Tahara - material involvement is only the necessities. If he could do without them he would. Kedusha - cleaving to Hashem constantly, walking around in state of Ahavat Hashem, as if in Olam Habah whilst here. So their food and drink and anything they use in this world is spiritually elevated, like korbanot. It serves the Tzaddik it is uplifted. To reach this level must masters all the levels before it, and even then ultimately it's a gift. Hitbonenut on the greatness of Hashem and the might of his exaltedness. Need immense prishut and study Kabbalah. Thoughts must be lofty when engaged in mundane matters. Very important to have solitude and seclusion (hitbodedut) What gets in the way of kedusha - socialising. You need to be alone. After that he will reach ruach hakodesh - beyond human capabilities and receive the key to the resurrection of the dead. There is a path to Chassidut that is suitable to each person no matter what their station in life.