

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Rabbi Cohen Introduction to Mesilas Yesharim - notes from Aug 21 2007

I would like to make an introduction for the first perek in Mesilas Yesharim that the last pasuk in sefer Koheles, written by King Solomon the wisest of all human beings, Shlomo HaMelech tells us what is going to be in the future? What is going to be with this world of ours. Shlomo HaMelech tells us I will tell you what is going to be with this world of ours. There is going to come a time that things will be good. Everyone will listen to Hakodosh Baruch Hu, and this means not just hearing, I hear You. No. I understand You and I feel You. Not only will we hear HKB's words and all the ten commandments and mitzvahs of the Torah. Not only will we hear You, I understand it, my mind will understand it, AND my heart will feel it. I will feel the words. This is the meaning – the entire world and creation will hear and do. We hear, we will feel it, in the mind and heart. When we stood at Sinai, we saw it ..it was not hefker. A world without an owner, shapeless. The pasuk is telling us, the future will be for mankind, that we will fear HKB and observe His commandments. This should be the end of the sentence but there are three more words...not only will the world come to recognize the Creator of the world, this is what man is...what man really is. Not that he will develop into something that he is not. This is what we should have always been, this is what we are, to listen to HKB and have yiras shemayim.

The meforshim explain as follows. What does it mean kzecha because Mesilas Yesharim discusses man, it doesn't discuss history of the Jewish people, our past or our present or our future, it discusses man himself, Adom himself, the purpose of man being in this world. Shlomo HaMelech which preceded Mesilas Yesharim by many years says this is man. The Zohar says "In sefer Bereshis, HKB said naaseh adom – in the plural, let us make man. " Which is a very dangerous pasek, because it means that the Ribono Shel Adom not only made man, but He needed a partner, He couldn't do it Himself. Let US make man. Rashi points out that those words are a pandora's box, those words let us make man shows that the Ribono Shel Olam is not the only Creator, that there are other Creators – He had a partnership –We should make man and THAT IS NOT TRUE G-d Forbid. There is only one Creator of the World. Elokim. The Creator of the World.

That language is sent to tell us that HKB created man with derech erez kovod a Torah – how He spoke – He didn't say I will make man, He said We will make man. If a person gives a lecture for an hour and a half – to an audience of 100's of students – and he can hear a pin drop – and he asks many questions and gives many answers, yet throughout the shiur, he says "We have asked the following question and We will now give the following answer, and we have the following difficulty and we found the following solution. Who is WE? It is only the lecturer. It is You. I am asking the questions, I am giving the answer..be honest with yourself- we are just taking notes – you asked the question and you are answering it. I. this is gaiva, arrogance.

HKB created the world with the lashon of we to show the humility of HKB, His simplicity, to show the derech erez. It is We even though the truth of the matter is that it is I, to show the humbleness of HKB. We understand it is I. Even though it is a dangerous word, because an apikoris could say the Almighty needed help to create the world, it is very important. Yet, he did have help, not in the creation, but in the material. The zohar says he took the whole animal kingdom and he put it to man. Man has the personality of many of the behemos of the creation. He is a man. The ability of a lion, a tiger, a wild animal, a snake, is within man. Man is like the Bronx zoo. He is a Zoo, and I don't think I have to give too many proofs of that. You will never say I don't believe you –did you ever look at the papers, at today's news? How many killings, murders, rapes...what is happening to man? Every single day, and this is nothing to do with the terrorists – this is caused by man who is angry. But the man said he killed his wife – they had a lengthy argument and he killed her. He went in front of the judge and he asked him are you guilty or not guilty. He went in front of the judge and he said not guilty. The judge said did you kill your wife. Yes. I am not guilty. How can you not be guilty? He answered, Judge, you have to understand my situation. If you had a wife the way I had you would have also killed her, you have to understand me. She drove me nuts. She irritated me and aggravated me. Therefore I take revenge. That is an animal. I take revenge. You get angry at me I get angry at you. You started the fight first, so I fought back. So the lawyer says, yes, my client did something very bad, very evil. But he didn't start it. He didn't start it. What was he supposed to do say Thank you after he was offended by the other person? That is an animalistic concept. That is what man is. Let us make man. Bring

into man the animal. Now put in the tzelem elokim. Therefore the end of the pasuk is man has animalistic characteristics but he also has yiras Hashem, that is what the end of the pasuk tells us, that man is your Elokim, besides all the other personality traits that there are, gaiva, sinah, jealousy, he has a feeling of revenge, nekama, but besides all that, he has something that can get him through it all, he has Elokim, Yiras Hashem. Not just fear of G-d because of punishment if we violate the laws of the Torah the 365 commandments, but from admiration because he wants to be closer to HKB. This is what Shlomo tells us. And you will see the admiration and love and fear for Hashem as you get closer to Him because that is what man really is, not just an animal. He is above that. He is not just another animal with intelligence.

Intelligence. A dog doesn't have intelligence.

This introduction to Mesilas Yesharim, which tells us that there are gates of righteousness, of ethics of mussar, it directs us how to live a daily life. He tells us in the first chapter the foundation of chassidus, which means to follow the law to the fullest. You know what chassidus means? A kind person who goes above and beyond the law. The foundation of chassidus means nachas ruach, HKB is part of us. We should all strive for it. If you have children, you will see your baby in the cradle, you will see him 1 two three years old, he gives me nachas. He is not going to give me nachas if he marries a nonJew. I am not going to smile if he doesn't put on tefillin every day – what is there to smile about? I will smile when he lives the derech of Torah, I will smile with a satisfaction. A smile is unique to a person, not an animal. An animal can eat and sleep and jump and sounds, but it can't smile. An animal can laugh but not smile. Why? Smiling comes from the soul and an animal has no soul. No olam haba, no other world for this animal who won the Kentucky Derby in the preakness...he doesn't go to heaven. We are part of HKB and our smile shows that. Not laugh. It is a smile, the face lights up, only a nefesh that has a soul can do this.

Mesilas Yesharim starts off that the foundation of Chassidus, of giving HKB a nachas ruach of smiling, and the roots of doing HKB's acts wholeheartedly, how does one come to this madrega, how does one become serious to this idea of worshipping HKB in such a manner – he should be clear in his mind, what is man's obligation in this world. This is what he should ask himself. We learn in the Gemara – if you are a bal choiv – you owe money to someone and he has a right to take the shirt off your back. You have to pay him a certain amount of money or he can take your shirt. You are obligated. Your property, your body, your shirt belongs to him. You are indebted to him because he gave you a loan. You needed a loan and he gave it to you and without interest, you are obligated to him. And what about us? Are we committed to HKB from the moment we get up in the morning we are able to get out of bed? As you get older it isn't so easy to get out of bed if you have arthritis, it gets into the bones. It is hard to get out of bed. I have difficulty. But we are able to walk and we do walk. We should thank HKB for every moment.

We are obligated and this is something people don't like. We are all this way. We don't like a person who is a parasite, that lives off others, who doesn't do a stitch of work and takes off others. You don't have to know Yiddish to know that is word – a schnorr- not me. You can say anything about me but don't say I am a schnorr. That is a terrible thing to say. Take and take, cigarette, candy, get anything you can for nothing. A schnorr. We don't like a schnorr. What are we with HKB? He gives and gives, life, ability, to eat, to sleep, to be successful, a mind to create, a mind to have love, a mind for parnassah, a mind to be a parent, everything. We are all schnorrs. What do we give back to HKB...we daven once a year on Yom Kippur? Three times a day? Whatever we do it will never be enough. What is our obligation to HKB? What should my yearning and desire and goal be in this world. Every human being should ask this. What is our obligation and what should be our desire and our goal in this life? A career? What is your career? Is that the ikur? Career? I have to prepare for my career. My son will be a doctor, he is 5. My daughter will be the governer, she is 6.

A man was dying of cancer, 32 years old. He had a 3 year old son and what was he crying about? I will never see my son play baseball. I will never see it. Someone suggested he go to NYU hospital and he took treatments and there was a remission. He will live. He says thank you! My son will be a big leaguer. He will be a great player, and I will see that thank you. What a life. This is what we hear in the world. This is not our purpose. Our purpose in this world is to have hana, enjoyment, from closeness to HKB. And that is only in the world to come, not in this world. This world is a corridor, a pathway, a taste, one potato chip of what is in store for us. This is the purpose. You have to hear this all day long because we forget it. There is so much in this world that counters this basic concept you know it, you feel it. If a person feels this way, he is not so depressed about a career, a shidduch, because that is not the ultimate of this life, the ultimate is our davening, our mitzvohs, our chesed, this is our purpose. Hopefully, through mesilas yesharim it will become crystal clear without any doubt that this is our purpose. What Shlomo is telling us, that in the end we will listen to HKB, this is the purpose of man. We should be zocheh to see it more pronounced in our world and schools and personal life. This world is only a tunnel, a hallway, for the olam HaEmes. We get closer, and we can see what HKB has done for us in our body, this brings us to a higher madrega, brings us to fear and admiration of HKB.