



Mesilat Yesharim The First Step: Caution Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Mesilat Yesharim tells us that the purpose of man in this world is *l'hisaneg el Hashem* -to derive joy by coming closer to Hashem. The Ramchal based his sefer on the words of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair in the Gemara Avoda Zarah which lists the steps of how we can reach this goal. The first step is *zehirut*, being careful with how one acts towards Hashem and others. It refers to the negative commandments, that which is forbidden. *Zerizut* which is the next step refers to positive commandments that which one must do with alacrity and enthusiasm. *Zehirut* comes before *zerizut*. One should be very cautious about sinning. Perhaps I will do something that will put my soul in danger.

Imagine a banquet hall filled with a thousand people. Every person has two drinking

glasses at his setting, one filled with water and one with champagne. Someone gets up and announces that he put a bit of poison in one of the glasses and it's not recognizable which one. The chances that the poison is in your glass is close to nil. Would you drink it? Of course not. *Zehirut hamitzvot* means being thoroughly scrupulous, making sure your clear of any doubt of sin whether in your relationship with people or your observance of *mitzvot*.

Every morning we recite, "The soul you placed within me is pure..." If one perceives sin as a blemish on the soul much like a stain on a beautiful dress one will be extra careful to stay far away from wrongdoings. *Yisrael* can be read as *sar kel* - the ambassadors of Hashem. We are the representatives of Hashem in this world. Therefore a person must be mindful of how he acts so as not to destroy Hashem's

image along with his own soul. Emulating Hashem is our purpose. Therefore the Mesilat Yesharim tells us, if you walk through life without ever thinking- how will I perfect myself, how will I become a better individual, then you have never practiced *zehirut*. If you need to get somewhere and you hear there's a backup of traffic 15 miles from your destination, you begin to think of alternative routes. So too one should think, what will be if I find myself in a situation of sin, what other path can I take? *Hisbonenut* is thinking- How will I get to my destination? How will I live this day? How will I eat, talk, sleep, and relate to people? How can I perfect myself? It's contemplating and thinking about alternate possibilities. The first step is *zehirut* -being careful. This will set us on the road to higher levels in avodat Hashem.