

# REDUCING THE DISTANCE FROM HEAD TO HEART

*by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig*

After relating some of the miracles that G-d performed on behalf of the Jewish people, and prior to commanding us to keep the mitzvos (Divine commandments), the Torah instructs us, "You shall know this day and take to your heart that G-d, He is the Lord - in the heavens above and on the earth below - there is none other." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 4:39)

It is part of human nature that our rational knowledge that certain actions and attitudes are wrong, when this knowledge is not taken to heart, will most likely do nothing to change our behavior and help us to become better people. The Torah, therefore, advises us that in order to truly be a G-d conscious Jew we must take our knowledge of what is right and wrong and actively instill it within our hearts. Our challenge is: How exactly are we supposed to take this knowledge to heart? We are often fully cognizant that we have developed habits that, while enjoyable, are ultimately harmful. What do we have to do in order to bring our knowledge of right and wrong from our heads to our hearts?

In the preface of his classic work, *Mesilas Yesharim* (Path of the Just), Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1) states that it is quite possible that the reader will not find in the text many things of which he was not already aware. The stated purpose for writing the book was to remind people of these essential concepts and philosophies and, through constant and consistent review, the ideas will be inculcated into one's daily activity due to his heightened awareness.

Another approach to help us take these ideas from the conceptual to the practical is that of Rabbeinu Bachya (2), who advocates intense meditation upon the conceptual truth. A more profound understanding and appreciation of the ramifications of one's actions can help prevent him from justifying the negative consequence of the deed.

Whatever method works for a particular individual, the Torah is telling us that it is our responsibility to see to it that we take our knowledge of true right and wrong to heart, and act upon it. By setting aside time to focus upon our actions, understanding them, and reminding ourselves of the course we genuinely wish to follow, we will be able to excise our bad habits and become the type of people the Torah is encouraging us to become.

Have a Good Shabbos!

*(1) 1707-1746; of Padua, Italy, and Amsterdam; Mesilas Yesharim is one of the most popular Mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) works in Jewish literature: a moving, inspiring work describing*

*how a thoughtful Jew may climb the ladder of purification until he attains the level of holiness*

(2) 1263-1340; author of a Biblical commentary containing all four modes of interpretation: simple text definition, and midrashic, philosophical and kabbalistic exegeses

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