

# Mind over Matter vs. Environment & Action

Is our inner world shaped by our behaviour? Or do WE determine who we are?

## You shall not covet:

Many people have wondered about this commandment, how is it that a man not covet in his heart that which is beautiful [and] all that which appears pleasant in his eyes. I will give you a parable [to explain this]. You should know that a villager who thinks correctly and sees that the king's daughter is beautiful will not covet her in his heart, that he should be intimate with her; as he knows that this is impossible. And this villager will not think like one of the lunatics that desires that he should have wings to fly in the sky, when it is not possible. [This is like] that which a man does not desire to be intimate with his mother, even though she is beautiful, as they have accustomed him from his youth to know that it is forbidden to him. So must every enlightened person know that a beautiful woman or money is not attained by a person because of his wisdom or knowledge; rather it is from that which God apportioned to him...And once he knows that God forbade him the wife of his friend, it is more removed in his eyes than the daughter of the king is in the eyes of the villager. Therefore, he will 'rejoice in his portion' and he won't place in his heart to covet and desire something that is not his....

## Sefer HAchinuch. Mitzva #16: Not to break a bone in the Korban Pesach

For it is not honorable for the sons of kings and the advisers of the land to drag the bones and break them like dogs. Except for the impoverished among the people and the starving, it is not a proper thing to do this. And therefore, as we began to become the chosen of all nations, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" — and in each and every year at that time — it is fitting for us to do acts that show within us the great stature which we achieved at that time. And in the act and reenactment that we do, this thing is placed in our souls for eternity.

My son, do not think to pounce upon my words and say, "Why would God, may He be blessed, command us to do all of these commandments to commemorate that miracle; would we not remember it with one commemoration, [such that] it not be forgotten from the mouth of our offspring?" You must know that it is not from wisdom that you would [question] me about this, and it is your youthful thoughts that lead you to this.

## אבן עזרא שמות (הפירוש הארוך) פרק כ פסוק יג

(יג) לא תחמוד אנשים רבים יתמהו על זאת המצוה, איך יהיה אדם שלא יחמוד דבר יפה בלבו כל מה שהוא נחמד למראה עיניו. ועתה אתן לך משל. דע, כי איש כפרי שיש לו דעת נכונה, והוא ראה בת מלך שהיא יפה, לא יחמוד אותה בלבו שישכוב עמה, כי ידע כי זה לא יתכן. ואל תחשוב זה הכפרי שהוא כאחד מן המשוגעים, שיתאוה שיהיה לו כנפים לעוף השמים, ולא יתכן להיות, כאשר אין אדם מתאוה לשכב עם אמו, אעפ"י שהיא יפה, כי הרגילהו מנעוריו לדעת שהיא אסורה לו. ככה כל משכיל צריך שידע, כי אשה יפה או ממון לא ימצאנו אדם בעבור חכמתו ודעתו, רק כאשר חלק לו ה'. ואמר קהלת (לאשר) ולאדם שלא עמל בו יתננו חלקו (קהלת ב, כא). ואמרו חכמים, בני חיי ומזוני לאו בזכותא תליא מילתא אלא במזלא. ובעבור זה המשכיל לא יתאוה ולא יחמוד. ואחר שידע שאשת רעהו אסרה השם לו, יותר היא נשגבה בעיניו מבת מלך בלב הכפרי, על כן הוא ישמח בחלקו ואל ישים אל לבו לחמוד ולהתאוות דבר שאינו שלו, כי ידע שהשם לא רצה לתת לו, לא יוכל לקחתו בכחו ובמחשבותיו ותחבלותיו, ע"כ יבטח בבוראו שיכלכלנו ויעשה הטוב בעיניו.

## ספר החינוך, מצווה טז שלא לשבור עצם מכל עצמות הפסח, שנאמר 'ועצם לא תשברו בו' (שמות יב, מו).

משורשי המצווה

לזכור נסי מצרים, כמו שכתבנו במצוות אחרות, וגם זה גזע מן השורש הנזכר, שאין כבוד לבני מלכים ויועצי ארץ לגרור העצמות ולשברם ככלבים; לא יאות לעשות ככה כי אם לעניי העם הרעבים. ועל כן, בתחילת בואנו להיות סגולת העמים, ממלכת כוהנים וגוי קדוש, ובכל שנה ושנה באותו הזמן, ראוי לנו לעשות מעשים המראים בנו המעלה הגדולה שעלינו לה באותה שעה. ומתוך המעשה והדמיון שאנחנו עושים, נקבע בנפשותינו הדבר לעולם.

ואל תחשוב בני לתפוש על דברי ולומר, ולמה יצווה אותנו השם יתברך לעשות כל אלה לזיכרון אותו הנס, והלא בזיכרון אחד יעלה הדבר במחשבתנו ולא יישחך מפי זרענו? דע כי לא מחכמה תתפשני על זה, ומחשבת הנוער ישיאך לדבר כן.

And now, my son, "If you have understanding," "incline your ear and hear," and I will teach you to benefit from Torah and the commandments: You must know, that a man is acted upon according to his actions; and his heart and all his thoughts always follow after the actions that he does — whether good or bad.

And even he who in his heart is a complete sinner and all the desires of his heart are only for evil; if his spirit shall be enlightened and he will put his efforts and actions to persist in Torah and commandments — even if not for the sake of Heaven — he shall immediately incline towards the good. And from that which is not for its own sake comes that which is for its own sake [as opposed to being for personal gain]; for the hearts are drawn after the actions.

And even if a man is perfectly righteous and his heart is straight and innocent, desiring of Torah and the commandments; if he shall constantly deal with improper things, you could compare it to someone who was forced by the king to work a wicked craft — if he constantly works in that wicked craft — eventually, from his righteousness, he shall have become completely evil. For it is known and true that every man is acted upon according to his actions, as we have said. And the Sages, may their memory be blessed, said about this (Makkot 23b), "God wanted to grant merits to Israel, therefore he gave them many laws and commandments," to occupy all of our thoughts and all our deeds, to benefit us at our end [i.e. in the world to come]. Because from the good actions we are acted upon to be good and merit eternal life. And the Sages hinted at this (Menachot 43b) with their statement that anyone who has a mezuzah on his door, tsitsit on his garment and tefillin on his head is promised that he shall not sin — for these are constant commandments, and [so] he is constantly acted upon by them.

Therefore, surely observe what [you choose] to be your craft and your dealings, since you will be pulled by them and you will not pull them. And do not let your [evil] impulse assure you by saying, "Since my heart is complete and pure in the faith of God, what loss is there if I periodically enjoy the pleasures of men in the markets and the plazas — to joke with the jokers and to speak finely, and similarly, [to perform] those things for which one needs not bring up guilt-offerings and sin-offerings — do I not have a heart like them, 'my small finger is thicker than their loins,' and how would they pull me in behind them?" Do not [say this], my son. Guard yourself from them, lest you be trapped in their snare. Many have drunk the cup of poison due to this, but you should save your soul.

ועתה בני, אם בינה - שמעה זאת והטה אוזנך ושמע, אלמדך להועיל בתורה ובמצוות: דע, כי האדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו, ולבו וכל מחשבותיו תמיד אחר מעשיו שהוא עוסק בהם, אם טוב ואם רע.

ואפילו רשע גמור בלבבו וכל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום, אם יערה רוחו וישים השתדלותו ועסקו בהתמדה בתורה ובמצוות, ואפילו שלא לשם שמים, מיד ינטה אל הטוב, ומתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה, ובכוח מעשיו ימית היצר הרע, כי אחרי הפעולות נמשכים הלבבות.

ואפילו אם יהיה אדם צדיק גמור ולבבו ישר ותמים, חפץ בתורה ובמצוות, אם יעסוק תמיד בדברים של דופי - דרך משל, שהכריחו המלך ומינהו באומנות רעה, באמת אם כל עסקו תמיד כל היום באותה אומנות - ישוב בזמן מן הזמנים מצדקת לבו להיות רשע גמור. כי ידוע הדבר ואמת, שכל אדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו, כמו שאמרנו. ועל כן אמרו חכמים זיכרונם לברכה (מכות כג, ע"ב), רצה המקום לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצוות, כדי להתפיס בהן כל מחשבותינו ולהיות בהן כל עסקינו, להיטיב לנו באחריתנו. כי מתוך הפעולות הטובות אנחנו נפעלים להיות טובים וזוכים לחיי עד. ורמזו זיכרונם לברכה על זה באומרם (מנחות מג, ע"א): כול מי שיש לו מזוזה בפתחו וציצית בבגדו ותפילין בראשו - מובטח לו שלא יחטא, לפי שאלו מצוות תמידיות, ונפעל בהן תמיד.

לכן, אתה ראה גם ראה מה מלאכתך ועסקך, כי אחריהם תימשך ואתה לא תמשכם. ואל יבטיחך יצרך לומר: "אחרי היות לבי שלם ותמים באמונת אלהים, מה הפסד יש כי אתענג לפעמים בתענוגי אנשים, לשבת בשוקים וברחובות, להתלוצץ עם הלצים ולדבר צחות, וכיוצא באלו הדברים שאין מביאים עליהם אשמות וחטאות, הלא גם לי לבב כמו להם, קוטני עבה ממותניהם, ומדוע ימשכוני הם אחריהם?" אל בני! הישמר מפניהם פן תילכד ברשתם! רבים שתו מתוך כוס תרעלתם - ואתה את נפשך תציל.

אחר דעתך זה, אל יקשה עליך מעתה ריבוי המצוות בעניין זכירת נסי מצרים, שהם עמוד גדול בתורתנו. כי ברבות עסקינו בהם נתפעל אל הדבר, כמו שאמרנו.

## 1. The power of environment and Atomic Habits

Rabbi Sacks. A Letter in the Scroll pgs 61-64. **The Radical Ideas behind simple actions**

Walk into a shop, hand over a coin, and buy a newspaper. No transaction could be simpler. You do it without thinking about it.

Yet in this one event you are living on the surface of a series of institutions that, if fully excavated, would tell half the story of mankind.

The coin tells of the long evolution of man from hunter-gatherer to city dweller, where specialization and the division of labor led to the necessity of exchange, and thus a medium of exchange, and so eventually money, first as something valuable in itself (precious metal), then as abstract token.

The newspaper speaks of a series of technological advances from writing to printing to the most modern forms of instantaneous global communication. It is also part of a political history that gave us the idea that in a free society we are entitled to open access to information.

...To be a Jew is, on the face of it, to be involved in simple things...

### **Atomic Habits. James Clear page 27 - A SYSTEM OF ATOMIC HABITS**

If you're having trouble changing your habits, the problem isn't you. The problem is your system. Bad habits repeat themselves again and again not because you don't want to change, but because you have the wrong system for change.

You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your Systems.

Focusing on the overall system, rather than a single goal, is one of the core themes of this book. It is also one of the deeper meanings behind the word atomic. By now, you've probably realized that an atomic habit refers to a tiny change, a marginal gain, a 1 percent improvement. But atomic habits are not just any old habits, however small. They are little habits that are part of a larger system. Just as atoms are the building blocks of molecules, atomic habits are the building blocks of remarkable results.

Habits are like the atoms of our lives. Each one is a fundamental unit that contributes to your overall improvement. At first, these tiny routines seem insignificant, but soon they build on each other and fuel bigger wins that multiply to a degree that far outweighs the cost of their initial investment. They are both small and mighty. This is the meaning of the phrase atomic habits—a regular practice or routine that is not only small and easy to do, but also the source of incredible power; a component of the system of compound growth.

### **MOTIVATION IS OVERRATED; ENVIRONMENT OFTEN MATTERS MORE (Page 81)**

ANNE THORNDIKE, A primary care physician at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, had a crazy idea. She believed she could improve the eating habits of thousands of hospital staff and visitors without changing their willpower or motivation in the slightest way. In fact, she didn't plan on talking to them at all.

Thorndike and her colleagues designed a six-month study to alter the "choice architecture" of the hospital cafeteria. They started by changing how drinks were arranged in the room. Originally, the refrigerators located next to the cash registers in the cafeteria were filled with only soda. The researchers added water as an option to each one. Additionally, they placed baskets of bottled water next to the food stations throughout the room. Soda was still in the primary refrigerators, but water was now available at all drink locations.

Over the next three months, the number of soda sales at the hospital dropped by 11.4 percent. Meanwhile, sales of bottled water increased by 25.8 percent. They made similar adjustments-and saw similar results-with the food in the cafeteria. Nobody had said a word to anyone eating there.

## 2. THE POWER OF DECISION MAKING

Rambam. Mishneh Torah. Laws of Teshuva ch.5  
Chapter 5

**Every person is endowed with a free will; if he desires to bend himself toward the good path and to be just it is within the power of his hand to reach out for it, and if he desires to bend himself to a bad path and to be wicked it is within the power of his hand to reach out for it.** This is known from what it is written in the Torah, saying: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" ([Gen. 3.22](#)), that is as if saying: "Behold, this species, man, stands alone in the world, and there is no other kind like him, as regards this subject of being able of his own accord, by his reason and thought, to know the good and the evil, and to do whatever his inclination dictates him with none to stay his hand from either doing good or evil; and, being that he is so, 'Lest he put forth his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'"

2. Permit not your thought to dwell upon that which ridiculous fools of other peoples and a majority of asinine individuals among the children of Israel say, that the Holy One, blessed is He! decrees at the very embryonic state of every man whether he should be just or wicked. The matter is not so. Every man is capable of being as just as Moses our Master or as wicked as Jeroboam, wise or incony, merciful or human, miser or philanthropist, and so in all other tendencies. There is none to either force things upon him or to decree things against him; either to pull him one way or draw him another way, but he alone, of his own free will, with the consent of his mind, bends to any path he may desire to follow. It is concerning this that Jeremiah said: "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not the evil and the good" ([Lam. 3. 38](#)), This is as if saying, that the Creator forces not the sons of man, and makes no decrees against them that they should do good or evil, but that it all is in their own keeping

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5769-lech-lecha-the-long-walk-to-freedom/>

For almost as long as we have documentary evidence, human beings have attributed their misfortunes to factors other than the human will and the "responsible self." They still do today. In the past, men blamed the stars, the fates, the furies, the gods. Today they blame their parents, their environment, their genes, the educational system, the media, the politicians, and when all else fails – the Jews.

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רמב"ם ה' תשובה פרק ה

א רשות כל אדם נתונה לו: אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק, הרשות בידו; ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע, הרשות בידו. הוא שכתוב בתורה "הן האדם היה כאחד ממנו, לדעת, טוב ורע" ([בראשית ג,כב](#)--(כלומר הן מין זה של אדם היה אחד בעולם, ואין לו מין שני דומה לו בזה העניין, שיהא הוא מעצמו בדעתו ובמחשבתו יודע הטוב והרע ועושה כל מה שהוא חפץ, ואין לו מי שיעכב על ידו מלעשות הטוב או הרע. וכיון שכן הוא, "פן ישלח ידו" (שם).

ב אל יעבור במחשבתך דבר זה שאומרים טיפשי האומות ורוב גולמי בני ישראל, שהקדוש ברוך הוא גוזר על האדם מתחילת ברייתו להיות צדיק או רשע. אין הדבר כן, אלא כל אדם ואדם ראוי להיות צדיק כמשה רבנו או רשע כירובעם, או חכם או סכל, או רחמן או אכזרי, או כיליי או שוע; וכן שאר כל הדעות.

ג ואין לו מי שיכפהו ולא גוזר עליו, ולא מי שמושכו לאחד משני הדרכים, אלא הוא מעצמו ומדעתו נוטה לאיזה דרך שירצה. הוא שירמיהו אומר "מפי עליון לא תצא, הרעות והטוב" ([איכה ג, לח](#)--(כלומר אין הבורא גוזר על האדם לא להיות טוב, ולא להיות רע.

We live in an age of "Please sir, it wasn't me." ... Marx said that human behaviour is determined by economic factors such as the ownership of land. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your **land**. Spinoza said that conduct is driven by instincts given at birth. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your place of **birth**. Freud said that we are influenced by our relationship with our father. Therefore G-d said to Abraham: Leave your **father's house**.

Liberty is not a given of the human situation. Like the other distinctive achievements of the spirit – art, literature, music, poetry – it needs training, discipline, apprenticeship, the most demanding routines and the most painstaking attention to detail. No one composed a great novel or symphony without years of preparation. That is why most theories of human behaviour are simply false. They claim that we are either free or not; either we have choice or our behaviour is causally determined. Freedom is not an either/or. It is a process. It begins with dependence and only slowly, gradually, does it become liberty, the ability to stand back from the pressures and influences on you and act in response to educated conscience, judgment, wisdom, moral literacy. It is, in short, a journey: Abraham's journey.

That is the deep meaning of the words Lech Lekha. Normally they are translated as, "Go, leave, travel." What they really mean is: journey [lekh] to yourself [lekha]. Leave behind all external influences that turn us into victims of circumstances beyond our control, and travel inward to the self. It is there – only there – that freedom is born, practised and sustained.

### Yoma 35b

Our Rabbis taught: The poor, the rich, the sinner come before the [heavenly] court

They say to the poor: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah? If he says: I was poor and worried about my sustenance, they would say to him: Were you poorer than Hillel? It was reported about Hillel the Elder that every day he used to work and earn one tropaik, half of which he would give to the guard at the House of Learning, the other half being spent for his food and for that of his family. One day he found nothing to earn and the guard at the House of Learning would not permit him to enter. He climbed up and sat upon the window, to hear the words of the living God from the mouth of Shemayah and Abtalion — They say, that day was the eve of Sabbath in the winter solstice and snow fell down upon him from heaven. When the dawn rose, Shemayah said to Abtalion: Brother Abtalion, on every day this house is light and to-day it is dark, is it perhaps a cloudy day. They looked up and saw the figure of a man in the window. They went up and found him covered by three cubits of snow. They removed him, bathed and anointed him and placed him opposite the fire and they said: This man deserves that the Sabbath be profaned on his behalf.

To the rich man they said: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah?

If he said: I was rich and occupied with my possessions, they would say to him: Were you perchance richer than R. Eleazar? It was reported about R. Eleazar b. Harsom that his father left him a thousand cities on the continent and over against that one thousand boats on the sea. Every

### יומא לה עמ' ב

**ת"ר עני ועשיר ורשע באין לדין לעני  
אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה  
אם אומר עני הייתי וטרוד במזונותי**

אומרים לו כלום עני היית יותר מהלל אמרו עליו על הלל הזקן שבכל יום ויום היה עושה ומשתכר בטרפעיך חציו היה נותן לשומר בית המדרש וחציו לפרנסתו ולפרנסת אנשי ביתו פעם אחת לא מצא להשתכר ולא הניחו שומר בית המדרש להכנס עלה ונתלה וישב על פי ארובה כדי שישמע דברי אלהים חיים מפי שמעיה ואבטליון אמרו אותו היום ערב שבת היה ותקופת טבת היתה וירד עליו שלג מן השמים כשעלה עמוד השחר אמר לו שמעיה לאבטליון אבטליון אחי בכל יום הבית מאיר והיום אפל שמא יום המעונן הוא הציצו עיניהן וראו דמות אדם בארובה עלו ומצאו עליו רום שלש אמות שלג פרקוהו והרחיצוהו וסיכוהו והושיבוהו כנגד המדורה אמרו ראוי זה לחלל עליו את השבת

**עשיר** אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת בתורה אם אומר עשיר הייתי וטרוד הייתי בנכסי אומרים לו כלום עשיר היית יותר מרבי אלעזר אמרו עליו על רבי אלעזר בן חרסום שהניח לו אביו אלף עיירות ביבשה וכנגדן אלף ספינות בים ובכל יום ויום נוטל נאד של קמח על כתיפו ומהלך מעיר לעיר וממדינה

day he would take a sack of flour on his shoulder and go from city to city and from province to province to study the Torah. One day his servants found him and seized him for public service. He said to them: I beg of you, let me go to study the Torah. They said: By the life of R. Eleazar b. Harsom, we shall not let you go. [He gave them much money so that they let him go]. He had never seen them, for he was sitting all day and night, occupying himself with the Torah.

To the evil person they would say: Why have you not occupied yourself with the Torah?

If he said: I was beautiful and upset by sensual passion, they would say to him: Were you perchance more beautiful than Joseph? It was told of Joseph the virtuous that the wife of Potiphar every day endeavoured to entice him with words — The garments she put on for him in the morning, she did not wear in the evening, those she had put on in the evening, she did not wear in the morning. She said to him: Yield to me! He said: No. She said: I shall have you imprisoned. He said: The Lord releases the bound. She said: I shall bend thy proud stature. He replied: The Lord raises those who are bowed down. She said: I shall blind your eyes. He replied: The Lord opens the eyes of the blind. She offered him a thousand talents of silver to make him yield to her, to lie with her, to be near her, but he would not listen to her; not to 'lie with her' in this world, not 'to be with her' in the world to come.

— Thus [the example of] Hillel condemns the poor, [the example of] R. Eleazar b. Harsom condemns the rich, and Joseph the virtuous condemns the sensual.

למדינה ללמוד תורה פעם אחת מצאוהו עבדיו ועשו בו אנגריא אמר להן בבקשה מכם הניחוני ואלך ללמוד תורה אמרו לו חיי רבי אלעזר בן חרסום שאין מניחין אותך ומימיו לא הלך וראה אותן אלא יושב ועוסק בתורה כל היום וכל הלילה

**רשע אומרים לו מפני מה לא עסקת**

**בתורה אם אמר נאה הייתי וטרוד ביצרי (היה) אומרים לו כלום נאה היית מיוסף**

אמרו עליו על יוסף הצדיק בכל יום ויום היתה אשת פוטיפר משדלתו בדברים בגדים שלבשה לו שחרית לא לבשה לו ערבית בגדים שלבשה לו ערבית לא לבשה לו שחרית אמרה לו השמע לי אמר לה לא אמרה לו הריני חובשתך בבית האסורין אמר לה ([תהלים קמו, ז](#)) ה' מתיר אסורים הריני כופפת קומתך ([תהלים קמו, ח](#)) ה' זוקף כפופים הריני מסמא את

עיניך ([תהלים קמו, ח](#)) ה' פוקח עורים נתנה לו אלף ככרי כסף לשמוע אליה לשכב אצלה להיות עמה ולא רצה לשמוע אליה לשכב אצלה בעוה"ז להיות עמה לעוה"ב

**נמצא הלל מחייב את העניים רבי אלעזר בן חרסום מחייב את העשירים יוסף מחייב את הרשעים:**