

TURNING TO HASHEM

At first, the Jewish people heard Hashem's voice at Har Sinai, and afterwards they requested that Hashem's word should not come to them directly, but only through means of a medium, through Moshe. As a result of this change, when Moshe later became absent from them and they were in a state of pandemonium, they sought a replacement for Moshe, and that was what led them to make the *Eigel*, so that they could have some medium between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem. The event of standing at Sinai was one of the root events of the design of Creation, and therefore whatever took place at Har Sinai had effects for the rest of history, as well as on the level of the Torah that we received (the first set of *Luchos* which we lost was a very different level than the level of Torah we received from the second set of *Luchos*). The change in which *Klal Yisrael* would no longer hear Hashem's world directly, but only through means of a medium, forever changed the design of Creation.

Hashem, in His wisdom, allows for the created beings to have a connection with Him, in two possible ways - one way is in a "direct" manner, such as when a person stands before Him in *tefillah* and converses with Hashem. A second way of how we can connect to Hashem is an indirect manner, by means of a medium, which can serve as a bridging point between the creations and their Creator. Standing at Har Sinai contained both of these ways of connection. There was a revelation of Hashem there, and this was a direct connection between the created being and Creator, in which we heard the word of Hashem. And we also received the *Luchos*, the Torah, which is intrinsically tied with Hashem, and one can therefore connect to Hashem through the Torah.

When Hashem spoke to *Klal Yisrael* and they heard His word, this was a "direct" connection. We still retain this connection on some level today, in the form of *davening* to Him, as well as any time when we are doing His will, which "directly" connects us with Hashem. That was one aspect of standing at Har Sinai, the "direct" connection with Hashem. A second aspect of standing at Har Sinai was the revelation of the Torah, which serves as the bridging point between us and Hashem, enabling us to have *d'veykus* (attachment) in Hashem. If not for the *eigel*, we would have kept the "direct" connection to Hashem with no medium in between, of hearing Hashem's voice speaking to us directly, in addition to the connection to Hashem that we have via the means of the Torah. But when the people requested that Hashem's words be transmitted to them through a messenger, as opposed to hearing Hashem directly, this was the root that led to the *eigel*, whereupon we lost the "direct"

connection with Hashem. Ever since then, our main connection with Hashem must come via a "medium" - the Torah, by way of Moshe Rabbeinu who transmitted to us the Torah.

These two forms of connection to Hashem (direct connection, and connection through a medium) were already rooted into Creation. The connection to Hashem via a medium existed through Torah, represented primarily by Moshe, and all the *Chachomim* who transmitted the Torah to us after him. But before that, we had a direct connection with Hashem. After the *eigel*, our main connection to Hashem is through the Torah, while the "direct" connection to Hashem (without the means of the Torah) remains in a very hidden dimension. Ever since we received the second set of *Luchos*, our Torah learning is the main connection we have with Hashem, whereas our "direct" connection with Hashem, having a direct "*d'veykus* in Hashem, is hidden. The *Nefesh HaChaim* went to great lengths to explain how true *d'veykus* in Hashem means to learn Torah.

So there was a huge change that happened after the *eigel*. At Har Sinai, we had gained a way of direct communication with Hashem, the "word of Hashem" that was the "Torah", which we heard. (In addition to our ability to talk to Hashem, through *tefillah*). That was all before the *eigel*. As a result of the *eigel*, the "word of Hashem" to us is now hidden. Moshe could see Hashem's word more clearly than all other *Neviim*, and today it is still possible to have perceptions of *ruach hakodesh* and *bas kol*, but the "word of Hashem" is no longer openly revealed to us. For this reason, the *Nefesh HaChaim* wrote that *d'veykus* in Torah is to learn Torah as a means of *d'veykus* in Hashem.

So there is direct connection with Hashem, and there is also a connection to Hashem that is clothed in the form of a medium (Torah). The Torah currently hides Hashem within it. However, the *Ramchal* and others explained that although the *eigel* ruined the state of Creation and the level of the Jewish people was no longer the same as when they stood at Har Sinai, and the Torah that we have today is only on the level of the second *Luchos*, in spite of all this, the *Ramchal* says that we still retain some of the original level. The *Ramchal* proves this from the fact that the Torah says to celebrate Shavuot as the time of the giving of the Torah, and if we had truly lost it, there would no longer be a requirement to remember the giving of the Torah. It must be, says the *Ramchal*, that the original revelation of standing at Har Sinai still exists, and it is just very hidden from us today.

In the depths of a Jew's soul, there remains the power to turn directly to Hashem. But it is hidden. There are five names of the soul (*Nefesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, *Yechidah*), which

are like levels atop the other, and it is the innermost level (the *Yechidah*) which can turn directly to Hashem, while the external layers of the soul turn to Hashem by other means. But every Jew's soul contains both of these ways to connect to Hashem. There is a different *shoresh neshamah* (soul root) for each person, and there are also varying *madreigos* (levels) that a person may be on, which are factors that affect how much one can connect to Hashem directly versus through a medium. Every person needs a holy means that connects him to Hashem, but how much does a person need to turn directly to Hashem, and how much does he need to connect to Him indirectly, through the use of mediums? This was always a matter that depended on a person's *shoresh neshamah* and his personal *madreigah*, as mentioned.

If one only turns to Hashem directly, and he doesn't trust the power of the Sages and the *tzaddikim*, then he is being delusional. He is denying the second set of *Luchos*, which requires us to make use of a medium to connect to Hashem. Yet, if a person goes in the opposite extreme and he never turns to Hashem directly, and he will only turn to *tzaddikim* for help – or if he turns to the *Malachim* for help, or he turns to *segulos* and other various means, then he is missing the primary way of connecting to Hashem. Therefore, a person first has to recognize that he needs both a “direct” connection to Hashem, as well as connection to Hashem through a medium. (The less that a person is genuinely serving Hashem, the more he will seek connection to Hashem through a medium, through seeking blessings of *tzaddikim*, *segulos*, etc.)

That was always the case, but in the times we live in, in the *Acharis HaYomim* (end of days) when we are found in the depths of the exile, in a time of suffering like this, any person has the power to “directly” turn to Hashem. Chazal said that the possuk “*In your suffering, you will find*” refers to the suffering of the End of Days, when it is easier for us to find Hashem amidst our suffering. In the End of Days, there is much *hester panim* (Hashem hides His Presence from us) and there is great suffering, which we face both collectively as well as individually, and in a time of suffering, a person can turn more directly to Hashem. To give an idea of this, if a person is drowning in middle of the sea, he will not hope that a great *tzaddik* should *daven* for him. He will scream, from the depths of his heart directly to Hashem, to save him. This is like the situation of our generation right now. If one doesn't feel how we are in a time of suffering, he is simply out of touch with reality. In the end of exile we are in, where we face the “50th gate of *tumah*” which surrounds us from every angle, and our situation is like a person drowning in middle of the sea, with no one but Hashem to save us.

In the times we live in, our physical lives are not in that much danger (although we really have no idea what that will be like either), but our spiritual lives are. We are surrounded by *tumah*

(spiritual defilement), the presence of evil, on all sides. This is what the Sages meant when they said that there will be much suffering in the End of Days. There is certainly physical suffering today as well, but that is an offshoot of our dismal spiritual situation today. The evil today surrounds us from all sides, and it can make us feel similar to Eliezer ben Dordaya, who *davened* to all of the universe to save him, until he realized, “The matter is not dependent on anything but me”, and then he groaned and cried until his soul left him, which meant that he reached the place in his soul which turns directly to Hashem. This is the revelation we can come to in the End of Days - to uncover our soul's power of “direct” connection to Hashem.

There is a well-known teaching of our Sages that the greater the suffering, the more *ohr* (spiritual light) it contains. This really means that the more dismal one's situation is, the closer he is to turning directly to Hashem. Suffering has both an external layer and internal layer to it. The external layer is the pain of the suffering itself, but the inner layer of the suffering is a great *ohr* (a spiritual light, a revelation) that is coming with it: The ability to turn “directly” to Hashem.

We need to both turn to Hashem directly, as well as to turn to Him through various means, such as by seeking out the wise *tzaddikim* of each generation. But how much should we turn to Hashem directly, and how much should we seek various means to connect to Him? What should be the balance? The way to measure this is that the greater we are suffering, the more we need to turn to Hashem directly. The more a person feels the suffering of the End of Days, instead of seeking to run away from it and ignore it, one should use it to uncover the depths of his heart. Then a person can slowly learn how to turn directly to Hashem, with less emphasis on requiring any other means of connecting to Him.

This is the root of the concept that is called the “*ohr* of the *Geulah*” (the light of the Redemption). There is an argument in Chazal if the final *Geulah* will depend on *teshuvah* or not. According to one view in Chazal, if *Klal Yisrael* doesn't do *teshuvah*, a “king as harsh as Haman” will rule, and then everyone will be forced to do *teshuvah* and then become worthy of the *Geulah*. In other words, the suffering will be so great that everyone will turn directly to Hashem from it. The suffering in our times is talking to us deeply, at our core, to the point that we can each be spurred on to turn to Hashem, directly. Concerning the End of Days, Chazal said “The wisdom of *Chachomim* (sages) will rot” (*Sotah 49b*). There are many ways to understand this matter, but the deep meaning of this is that it will be such a time of suffering that people will stop turning to the sages and *tzaddikim* for help, and instead, they will realize that the only answer is to turn directly to Hashem.

When a person reaches this point, he will hear, in the depths of his soul, the “word of Hashem” that is in the Torah. Just as by Har Sinai the people heard the word of Hashem, so can our

own soul hear the word of Hashem in the Torah, when it turns directly to Hashem. The more a person is turning directly to Hashem, the more Hashem will reciprocate in return, and reveal to the person a Torah that is “His word”.

The way of a true life is that a person turns to Hashem both “directly” as well as through the means of a “medium”. **One can directly connect to Hashem by talking to Him privately, and one can spend as much time as he needs, talking to Hashem about anything and pouring out his heart to Him about anything bothers him.** As is well-known, the Chofetz Chaim would talk to Hashem for an hour or two a day, and he would talk to Hashem about anything that was troubling him, turning to Hashem directly. Of course, a person also needs to work his way upwards through the various levels of serving Hashem (as described in *Mesillas Yescharim*) as part of the way to become connected to Hashem.

But as these days continue and we get further into the End of Days, where the suffering increases, and we become further from the time when we stood at Har Sinai where we heard the word of Hashem, we are drawing closer to the end, so we are actually becoming closer to the state of standing at Har Sinai, of hearing the word of Hashem. Whereas in previous times we need to have a balance of direct connection with Hashem along with using various indirect ways to connect to Him, in the current times we live in, the End of Days, we are drawing closer to the “word of Hashem” of Har Sinai, and therefore there is more of an opportunity for us to place more emphasis on a “direct” connection with Hashem.

This is all a very subtle concept. One needs to talk to Hashem, and this is like the level of Torah we had at Har Sinai, in which we had a direct connection with Hashem. We can turn to Him through *tefillah*, first in the third-person (as implied in the word “*Baruch*”, “Blessed” is Hashem) and then directly, in the first-person (“*Attah*”, “You, Hashem”). And **in the times we live in, there should be more of a relationship with Hashem of אתה “Attah”, “You”, talking to Hashem directly.** The more that we are *zocheh* to turn to Hashem directly, it will be coming from the depths of the *lev tahor*, the pure heart that is within us. **But even if chas v’shalom we are not zocheh to reach this point of turning to Hashem directly, then we will be forced to turn to Him anyhow, from the great suffering of our times, which will leave a person with no choice other than to turn to directly to Hashem.** May Hashem give us the strength to build for ourselves the full spectrum of tools that we need in our *avodah*, and to use all that we need in order to become connected with Hashem, and along with this, may we be *zocheh* to reach the depth of life – the ability to turn, directly, to Hashem. May it become revealed, speedily in our times, the complete Reality of the One Who created everything, and then all of the creations together will simply and clearly turn to Hashem, Himself. שיחת השבוע. 220. כי. תשא. קשר. ישר. תשעז.

HAVING A REBBI & TURNING TO HASHEM

QUESTION How does a person fulfill עשה לך רב, to make for yourself a Rav or Rebbi? **ANSWER** By becoming connected to the Rebbi through the 5 general areas of the nefesh (soul), which are (from lowest to highest area) the areas of maaseh (action), dibur (words), machshavah (thought), hergesh (feeling), and mochin (perception). A person needs to become connected to his Rebbi through maaseh (action), by observing the rebbi’s conduct (shimush chachomim), as well as following the rulings of his rebbi. A person also needs to say the divrei Torah of his rebbi. A person also needs to think and study the words of his rebbi. A person also needs to feel an intrinsic connection with his Rebbi, through the deep feelings that he has in his soul, for his Rebbi. Finally, the highest level of connecting to one’s rebbi is mochin, which is to become connected to the very approach, the mehalech, of his rebbi.

QUESTION Is there a deeper reason why a person is having trouble finding a suitable Rebbi for him? And what can a person do about it? Also, if I don’t have a chavrusa, what should be the attitude? **ANSWER** The rebbi is the root to the talmid, who is the “branch” of his rebbi, just like a tree has roots and branches to it, and just as a father is the root of his children. A rebbi is not just a person who teaches Torah to the talmid, he is the root of his talmid. Now, the “branch” - the talmid - might not have found himself yet and he doesn’t know where he should be spending his main energies on. When he can’t find himself, he can’t find his rebbi either. Or, he might be unable to identify that a certain rebbi is really his root, and that is why he isn’t finding his rebbi. But every person has a rebbi that’s meant for him. As for finding a chavrusa, it is both. Hashem wants you to have a chavrusa, because Chazal say, “Either a chavrusa or death.” But you need to view your chavrusa as a messenger of Hashem, to help your learning.

QUESTION Does a person need to have bittul (to submit himself) to a rebbi as long as he heard words of Torah from him and heard that this person is a tzaddik? Do both of these conditions have to be met or does one of them suffice? Even if we know that a certain person is a tzaddik or wise person, how do we know that he isn’t motivated by self-serving interests (negios)? And, how can one know who his Rebbi should be? **ANSWER** It is impossible to know exactly. There is no exact way to know it. After doing all your research and clarifying, you need to daven and have emunah that Hashem will guide you to the proper Rebbi. Then, accept him as your Rav, from the emunah that Hashem has guided you to him. You always need to purify yourself, in case you were not zocheh yet to the right Rebbi for you. But, as of now, trust your current Rebbi now that you have chosen to follow him, and heed his voice. And it should be that way for all your life.

QUESTION If a person often asks someone for advice [and considers the other to be somewhat of a rebbi to him

whom he receives an approach in life from], and sometimes the person doesn't agree with that wise person's advice and has a hard time following it, does he need to have total bittul (to surrender his daas) to the person whom he is asking advice from since he considers that person to be a Rebbe to him? **ANSWER** One can receive advice from any Chochom (wise person), but one should not completely subordinate himself except to his main rebbe (his rebbe muvhak).

QUESTION After a person figures out who his main rebbe is (at least for the time being, because it seems that a person can change who his main rebbe is later in life, for example if his rebbe is niftar and now he needs to find a new rebbe), how should he view his previous Rebbeim that he has learned from? Does he simply need to feel grateful to them and to express his gratitude to them, or does he need to actually view all of them as being part of his chinuch (education) in Torah and avodas Hashem? **ANSWER** As long as one received a recognizable chunk of understanding from any of his Rebeim, he should view that Rebbe as a major part of his Torah chinuch (education), both in the Torah and avodah that he has learned from them.

QUESTION I heard from a certain mashpia that there are two types of people, a "Yosef" type and Yehudah" type, and if one has a "shoresh neshamah" of Yehudah, it means he is more independent and he doesn't need a Rebbe as much to guide him because he can turn directly to Hashem, whereas someone with a "shoresh neshamah" in Yosef always needs a rebbe to guide him, just as we see that Yaakov guided Yosef but he didn't guide Yehudah? **ANSWER** That is very true. [In terms of Kaballah], Yosef is called Yesod, which is rooted in Chochmah, which receives wisdom from the level above it [from the level of Keser], while Yehudah is called Malchus, which is rooted in Keser, which has nothing above it except for Hashem.

QUESTION Does this mean that those with a shoresh neshamah in Yehudah don't need a Rebbe to guide them at all? **ANSWER** Let me clarify this: Every person needs a Rebbe. It is just that if one has a shoresh neshamah (soul-root) in "Yehudah", at first he will need a rebbe constantly, but later when he matures, he can become more independent. Even then, he will still need a rebbe to consult with, from time to time. Whereas a person with a shoresh neshamah in "Yosef" will always need a rebbe close by to guide him.

QUESTION If a person doesn't have a Rebbe, can he make "Reb Nachman of Breslev" into his rebbe (by doing "hiskashrus hanefesh", binding his soul to Rebbe Nachman)? Or does a person need an active Rebbe who is alive on this world? **ANSWER** At the very least, one needs to follow a Rebbe for some time of his life, and during that time in which he follows the Rebbe, he must humble himself to him. That is what R' Avraham Yurevitch zt"l told me. It is better to choose a Rebbe who is alive, because [even though our neshamah can connect to a Rebbe who isn't alive], our guf (body) needs to be able to relate to a rebbe who is alive and on the physical world, as opposed to a Rebbe that is no longer living on the world, so that he can feel more humbled to the Rebbe.

QUESTION What is the purpose of this Q&A system? If a person has his own Rav or Rebbe, then he should be asking his Rav/Rebbe for everything. **ANSWER** I am not a "Rav". My entire avodah is to give clarity on a matter, which is at least half the answer.

QUESTION From all the guidance I've received from these answers, I feel that the Rav is an exceptional talmid chochom and tzaddik, and I wish I could support the Rav financially and have the zechus of supporting a tzaddik. **ANSWER** לב יודע מרת נפשו, "The heart knows the bitterness of his soul", I am no tzaddik!

QUESTION What should a person do if he doesn't have someone to guide him in avodas Hashem and things that are related to pnimiyus? **ANSWER** Try to clarify a matter as much as you can [with someone who is capable of helping you clarify a matter.] But beyond that (for anything you can't clarify enough), Chazal said that "We have no one to lean on except on our Father in Heaven", where all we can do is daven and place our hope and bitachon in Hashem.

QUESTION What does Hashem want from us by giving us this challenge of all the confusion about the COVID vaccine? **ANSWER** Chazal already said at the end of Sotah [49b] that in the final generation, אין לנו להשען אלא על אבינו שבשמים "We will have no one to rely on, except for our Father in Heaven." It has already been explained in the words of Raboseinu that Chazal meant that there will be no one around us whom we can rely upon, and it will be just "הוא והקב"ה, The person and HaKadosh Baruch Hu." This is because, in the final days, everything around us is so confusing - and that is the situation which we are in currently.

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The Rav shlit"a is no longer receiving questions. It is not possible to continue the responsa system for the time being due to the heavy load placed on the Rav Shlita and on the very small staff that helps prepare the Rav's Torah's for publication.

QUESTION What should I do if I need additional guidance from the Rav and I can't get answers from the Rav?"

ANSWER Daven to Hashem. Give up your own ratzon for Hashem's ratzon and then you will receive even greater clarity, bs"d