



## MAKE YOURSELF A RAV

### Introduction: Learning From All People

In the Mishnah in *Pirkei Avos* (1:2), Reb Yehoshua ben Perachia says, “Make for yourself a Rav (teacher), acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every person favorably.”

What does it mean to make for yourself a “Rav”?

The Rambam and the Maharal both explain this to mean that the Mishnah is careful to say “make” for yourself a teacher, not to “acquire” one, but when it comes to friends, the Mishnah instead says that you should acquire him, rather than to “make” for yourself a friend. Therefore, they explain, the Mishnah says to “make” for yourself a Rav, just like how you have to “make” for yourself a *sukkah*.

The Maharal, and others, also explain that the Mishnah is **not** referring to one’s primary teacher (“*rebbe muvhak*” – the teacher that you have learned most of your wisdom from). A person doesn’t choose his *rebbe muvhak*; the *rebbe muvhak* makes himself into the teacher of his student.

Rather, the Maharal explains, “Make for yourself a Rav” in the Mishnah refers to the fact that a person should learn from all people. Therefore, the Maharal explains, each person you meet can become your teacher, since you can learn from each person. That is the meaning of “make for yourself a teacher” – make each person into someone whom you will learn from.

The depth of “Make for yourself a teacher” is thus to learn from all people – not just to learn from how others speak, and not just to read the *sefarim* which they produce, but even to learn from others’ simple actions.

This is what the Maharal explains.

### How Do We Know Who Our Rav Is?

We need to reflect on this matter, that a person has to “make for himself a teacher”. There are many issues that people have with this statement of the Mishnah. We will try to understand this matter through the lens of *Daas Torah* [from the Torah’s perspective, and not from our own ideas], and we will try to clarify this matter a bit.

If a person needs a Rav\Rebbi, simply speaking, he must look for a Rav\Rebbi and make that person into a Rav\Rebbi for himself. If you think about it, though, it’s perplexing. How do you choose a Rav\Rebbi for yourself, when there is no Rav to begin with to guide you in your thinking?!

This question is a gnawing issue to anyone who seeks a Rav in his life. How is it possible for a person to make someone else into his Rav? Who says we can trust someone to be our Rav over us? Even if he’s a prominent person, who says that he is the Rav who is meant for one’s particular soul? Even after we find a Rav, how do we know if the Rav is taking the correct path in life?

In order for us to “make” for ourselves a Rav\Rebbi, we first have to choose him. That is simple to understand; if we never choose a Rav for ourselves, then we will never make for ourselves a Rav. So we obviously have to choose for ourselves a Rav first, before we are able to have a Rav. But how do we choose a Rav? Who is guiding in the first place, since we don’t have a Rav to help us choose...?

To make the question even stronger, a Rav\Rebbi is on a higher level than me. How am I able to take him upon myself as my Rav? Because I think that the Rav is correct and knows a lot? How can I make such a decision?! Who am I to decide that this person is my Rav, when I am not one

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to be able to validate his wisdom? How am I, a human being limited in my comprehension, able to decide such a thing? Who says that this person is supposed to be my Rav\Rebbi? And even if he is meant to be my Rav, who says that his rulings are the truth? And even if he's a Rav who speaks the truth, who says that this Rav's methods are meant for my particular soul? And even if this Rav is meant for my soul, maybe that changed? Maybe that was only yesterday, and not today...?

When it comes to having faith in Hashem, that's very understandable. Hashem is Perfect, so I can have blind faith in Him. But a Rav is only a human being; how can I trust him to be my Rav? After all, Reb Yochanan Kohen Gadol went off the *derech* on the last day of his life (according to one opinion of our Sages). So even if the Rav I have chosen for myself is a great person and he is meant to be my Rav, there is no guarantee that he will stay righteous, and therefore, how do I know as of today that my Rav is still supposed to be my Rav??

How is it possible for a person to figure out who his Rav is? This is not just a side issue that people have. It is the question of all questions, and it bothers anyone who thinks.

## The Difficulty In Choosing For Ourselves A Teacher

The word *rav* is related to the word *ribuy*, “many”, and it is also related to the word *riv*, argument. This hints to us that every *rav* is potentially a controversial *rav*, because a person has to go through much internal questioning about who his *rav* is. Korach was only able to argue on Moshe Rabbeinu because he couldn't come to terms with the concept of having a *rav*. He fought and argued with Moshe, because since Moshe was the *rav*, it was inevitable that there would be some *riv* (argument) about this.

The very concept of a *rav* is that he is someone who, as prominent as he is, invites *riv*\arguments from others. When people try to make for themselves a *Rav*, they go through a *riv* in their soul – they feel a battle going

on inside. People aren't able to clarify if a certain Rav is supposed to be their *rav*, and they feel a great argument going on inside their own soul as they try to clarify: “Is this person my *rav*...?”

The truth is that this power of the soul, *riv*, is rooted in the soul's power of *safek*, doubt. People have the tendency to doubt things, to be skeptical about things. For example, a person might even be learning Torah a whole day, and after some time, he begins to doubt if he's doing the right thing or not. From where does this come from? Why do people doubt themselves even when they are doing the right thing? It is because there is a nature in the soul to doubt things. It is the power of *riv*\*safek* in the soul – the tendency in people to have an inner struggle with things and be skeptical about things, unable to decide if they are doing the right thing or not.

The very concept of a *Rav* is that he is someone who is above the student's level. Therefore, it is very hard to be able to choose a *Rav* for yourself, because if he's beyond your understanding, how do you decide that he's meant to be your *Rav*? It's not possible for us to determine who can become our *Rav*. Who are we to decide this?

The Mishnah elsewhere says “Make for yourself a teacher, and remove yourself from doubt.” Once we have for ourselves a *Rav*, we will no longer have doubts; but how do we get to that point in the first place? What are we to do if we are having trouble choosing who our *Rav* is – who helps us decide this? Trying to choose a *Rav* creates an inner turmoil in our soul, a “*riv*”.

Even if a person has a *Rav*, it's not always because he chose the *Rav*; he might be simply acting in a habitual manner (*melumadah*). Indeed, we cannot choose our *Rav*. What is the solution??

## The Answer: Seeing Each Person As A Revelation of the Shechinah

To know the answer, let us think into the words of the

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Rambam and the Maharal we quoted, that the Mishnah is not addressing a rebbi *muvhak* (one's primary teacher), but rather how one must learn from all people. Let us think about what this means.

What is the difference between one's primary teacher and any other ordinary person we come across? We know that a *rebbe muvhak* is someone whom a person has learned most of his wisdom from. In other words, a *rebbe muvhak* is someone whom you place complete trust in, and therefore, the wisdom that is learned from a *rebbe muvhak* is directly from the *rebbe*. But with an ordinary person that we learn wisdom from, we understand that we aren't learning from him on a personal level, but rather, from the facts of wisdom we see being revealed.

The superficial understanding of this is that since each person possesses some wisdom, it only makes sense that there is what to learn from everybody. But there is really more to this. When a person doesn't have a Rav, and he instead learns from what each person has to impart, then he's actually learning directly from Hashem – and everyone that he encounters are merely His messengers to impart wisdom.

So when we learn from each person's wisdom, we indeed are not learning from him on a personal level; the wisdom we learn from each person is not supposed to be attributed to that *person* whom we are learning from. Rather, the way to understand this is that whomever we learn from is imparting to us wisdom that's coming directly from Hashem, and in this way, each person can be our teacher. The true definition of a Rav\teacher is that the Rav is revealing a hidden wisdom out into the open; he's taking something that's already there and showing it to us. He's not teaching us his personal wisdom – he is merely revealing to us the already existing wisdom of Hashem. This is the “Rav” referred to in the Mishnah – learning from each person, because each person can reveal Hashem's hidden wisdom to us.

The prime example of this is Moshe Rabbeinu, of

whom it is said, “The *Shechinah* spoke from his throat.” Whenever a person is learning something from his Rabbi\teacher, he has to view the Rabbi as someone who represents the *Shechinah*! If a person doesn't have this understanding, then he will not be able to choose for himself a Rav\Rebbi. But if we realize that each Rav\Rebbi can be Hashem's messenger to us, then we will be able to choose for ourselves a Rav.

Let us sharpen the discussion a bit more.

We really cannot trust anyone in the world, not even the holiest people, to rely upon their wisdom. After all, “*Even in His holy ones, He does not trust.*” We cannot rely on any human being, no matter how great he is, and assume that he is always correct and teaching us the truth.<sup>1</sup> So how can we rely upon any Rabbi to teach us?

The answer is, that, indeed, we cannot rely on any person to guide us – that is, if we view the person as simply being a person. But if we look at someone else as a tool to transmit to us the word of Hashem, then we aren't believing in the person – we are believing in the wisdom of Hashem that can be revealed in that person.

Even Moshe Rabbeinu, the teacher of *Klal Yisrael*, was but a tool to reveal Hashem's will to the world. He was a means for us to receive Hashem's wisdom, as the “*Shechinah* spoke from his throat.” (Moshe has the same numerical value in Hebrew as the word *ratzon*, will.)

## The Meaning of Emunas Chachamim Believing the Words of Our Sages

There is a concept called *emunas chachamim*, to believe in the words of our Sages. To believe in our Sages' words doesn't mean to simply believe in the wisdom of the Sage, but to believe that the Sages' wisdom serves as a tool to reveal Hashem's will. *Emunas chachamim* means to believe

1 As the author brought before, that even one of the Sages in the times of the Talmud, Yochanan Kohen Gadol (according to one opinion) became a heretic on the last day of his life.

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in the *Shechinah* that is communicating to us, via the words of the Sages and all Torah authorities. For this reason, the Mishnah elsewhere says “fear your teacher as much as you fear Heaven.” In every Rav, there is a fear of Heaven – he is a means to communicate the *Shechinah* to us.

Let us return to our very troubling question: How do we choose for ourselves a Rav? The answer to this is based on what we have seen from the Rambam and the Maharal, who have explained that the Mishnah is referring to learning wisdom from all people. It does not mean that we can simply rely on other’s wisdom per se, but rather, we can view each person as a tool to reveal Hashem’s will to us. So when we learn from others’ wisdom, we aren’t learning from the information they are saying, but rather, we are learning from others *in the general sense*, that all people can be a tool to reveal Hashem’s wisdom. And once we believe in others’ wisdom in the general sense, we can then come to believe in the various details that they are imparting, as a result. So “Make for yourself a teacher” means to view each person as a Rav, because we are able to see in each person the revelation of the *Shechinah*. Understandably, a *rebbe muvhak* is also to be seen as a revelation of the *Shechinah*, but on a higher level than the usual, since there are different levels of a *rav*. That is the answer to the very bothersome issue; it is hard to accept. Of course, if someone never thinks about it, it won’t bother him, but for someone who does think, it’s a hard answer to accept. But this is the answer.

There are people who only believe in *Gedolim* (foremost leaders of the generation), but they don’t believe in accepting wisdom from anyone who’s not an accepted *Gadol*. Such people are missing true *emunas chachamim*, because as we explained, *emunas chachamim* is essentially to see how each person can be a revelation of the *Shechinah*.

## The Way To Learn From A Rabbi

This leads us to the following point. If someone is learning by a certain Rabbi and views the Rabbi to be a

wise person – but he doesn’t believe that the Rabbi can be a transmitter of the *Shechinah* – then he is simply receiving information from the Rabbi, and he is missing the source of the wisdom. He is missing a belief in his Rabbi – he is missing *emunas chachamim*. He’ll receive wisdom from his Rabbi, but he won’t connect with the Rabbi. And what will happen when he merely receives knowledge from his Rabbi, but he isn’t confident in his Rabbi? He will come to doubt his Rabbi.

*Emunas chachamim*, to believe in Torah Sages [and Torah authorities] is not to believe that the rabbi we are learning from is a wise person. It is rather to believe that the Rabbi is receiving a channel of wisdom from Heaven. It is for a person to connect himself to the *source* of wisdom in his Rabbi. This is the meaning of “Make for yourself a teacher, and remove yourself from doubt.” In other words, if we believe in the teacher that he can transmit to us Hashem’s will, we can then be rest assured, and then we will be removed from all doubt.

## When We See Imperfections In Our Teachers

However, even if a person believes that his Rabbi can be a conduit of the *Shechinah*, he can still encounter another issue: he sees faults in his Rabbi. The greatest Rabbi in history was Moshe Rabbeinu, yet, there were some people who had grievances against him. This is a human weakness that exists by all people, even by those who have a Rabbi: we tend to see deficiencies in our teachers, even if it’s only a small deficiency we notice.

What should a person do if he notices a fault in his Rabbi? Should he simply try to focus on his Rabbi’s good points? This is a weak approach, and it will not really work.

The answer is, as the Mishnah says: “*Make for yourself a teacher*”. In other words, the Mishnah is addressing us even when we see doubts in our teacher. If we look at our Rabbi as merely a wise person, then we will prefer only a Rabbi whom we find to be to our liking, but if we



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see that the Rebbi isn't similar to our liking, we will end up focusing on his weaknesses. (Of course, we will notice his good points to...) This is obviously not the intention of the Mishnah. Rather, we are supposed to have *emunas chachamim* and see the Rav as a revelation of the *Shechinah*. We are able to see our Rebbi as if he's perfect! Of course, no one is perfect, and there is no Rebbi who is perfect. But when we have emunah that the *Shechinah* can speak from our Rebbi to us, then we can rely on our Rebbi – because the *Shechinah* is, after all, perfect.

Along these lines, the Maharal explains that “make for yourself a teacher” connotes that the Rebbi is already made and complete for us. It doesn't mean that the Rebbi is perfect; it means that *we can see perfection being revealed through him*, because we can have emunah that the *Shechinah* can speak from him. Thus, every Rebbi is already “complete” for you, and you only have to believe in him.

There are many *rabbonim* (Torah authorities) in *Klal Yisrael*. Throughout all the generations, there have always been doubts about *rabbonim*, because how do we know if the Rav is imparting to us the wisdom of G-d? This is an especially strong point, for we know that even Hashem does not trust the holiest *tzaddikim*, as we mentioned before. So how can we be confident in any Rav?

The answer is: When we see only good in others. Bilaam proclaimed, “*I do not see any sin in Yaakov.*” He saw that in essence, there is no evil in the Jewish people, and that there is only G-dliness revealed in us. Therefore, even if we see some deficiency in a Rav, we must remember that there is a G-dliness in every Jew. We can enter a world in which we see only good.

Therefore, “Make for yourself a teacher” is not just a means for us to avoid doubts. There is another point contained in this, and it is contained in the words of the Mishnah, “I have learned much from my teachers...and from my students, I have learned the most of all.” When

a student sees only good in his Rebbi, and he sees no bad in him, he actually uplifts his Rebbi into becoming a completely good being!

This is the depth of *emunas chachamim*. When we believe in the words of our teachers, it is not simply as a means for us to be able to receive knowledge from them. It is rather that because we place trust in them, we uplift our own teacher in doing so. Until we have this inner perspective, we see our Rebbi as having much good in him, along with some bad; when we attain the inner perspective, we see our Rebbi as having only good qualities in him, and if we have this belief, we indeed uplift the Rebbi to an entirely good place. If we achieve this perspective, we are essentially revealing total good on this world, which is a mixture of good and evil; we reveal complete good amongst the huge mixture of good and evil going on in the world.

“Make for yourself a teacher.” The Hebrew word for “make” is *asey*, which is related to the word *asiyah*, action. The Mishnah is hinting to us that even as we living in this world of action – *asiyah*, the lowest realm – which is a world that is mostly bad and contains only a small amount of good – if we make for ourselves a Rav, we reveal complete good amidst this world. When we reveal complete good amidst this world, we achieve the greatest rectification for this world, *asiyah*.

This is the amazing depth behind the concept of *emunas chachamim*. It is to reveal belief in the complete good in another, amidst this current world of *asiyah*, which is mostly evil. When we make for ourselves a Rav, not only do we connect to the middos and wisdom of the Rav, but we connect as well to his deeds.

**In the future, we will once again return to the state of before Adam's sin, in which he had no Rebbi – a level in which there was no need for any teacher, because all the wisdom can be learned from within ourselves.**

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## Example 2 – Contemplating Joy

In the same vein, we can also approach the idea of joy. We can give an intellectual definition to what the meaning of joy is. We can also feel joyous, where we experience an emotional reaction because we are joyous. But the inner way to recognize joy is that if you are learning about joy, you first contemplate the meaning of joy, and then you try to see the different kinds of joy you know of from your own experiences. You first think about it and analyze it, and then you see where it's found in you. That is how you come to recognize joy, from your own self.

Now that we have given these two examples, let's bring out the point stronger. As mentioned earlier, when people are learning and absorbing information about something, either they perceive it on an intellectual level, or through their emotions.

Let's say we would ask people how they experience a certain emotion in their own lives, such as in the case of love. What is the reaction? Some people will say right away, "There's no one that I love. Perhaps I have some desire for others, but I have difficulty loving even myself, so I certainly don't have a genuine love for others."

Similarly, in the case of joy, a person might also say right away, "I don't experience any joy in my life. My main element is the element of earth, which prevents me from experiencing joy. My whole existence is that of sadness. There is absolutely no joy in my life, not a trace of it. So how can I even begin to locate where I experience joy in my life, if I don't even recognize it?" A person may have this attitude as well when it comes to all other character traits or powers of the soul.

The problem with the person's attitude here is that it is coming from a superficial perspective, where a person can only recognize something based on how he views it in the world outside of him. Everyone has a certain way of how he views himself. When a person has a superficial perspective towards himself, and he tries to identify where a certain emotion in him is, he might be unable to identify it in himself and then conclude that he does not possess any joy, he

has no love in him, no enthusiasm in him, etc.

## The Inner Perspective: Everything Is Already Inside Of You, In Potential

The truth, though, is totally different. Every person has all of the positive qualities already in him, as well as all of the negative traits, in him. (When I say every person, I mean every person!) The only differences between people are in the percentages of how the good or bad quality is manifest in them, and in how they show up in the person. But all of the existing middos (character traits) are present in every single person.

What we are saying here is a total, fundamental change of perspective. It is a transition from a superficial perspective to an inner perspective. This fundamental perspective has much bearing on the general development of a person's soul and in his avodah (inner work). Let us focus here on a particular result of this fundamental perspective, which is directly relevant to our current discussion.

When a person has the superficial perspective, if he is trying to uncover love, he will try to acquire love from a source outside of him, and if he is trying to uncover joy, he will try to acquire it from an outer source. But if he has gained the inner perspective, as explained above, he will try to uncover love and joy from within him, and expand whatever love and joy is already existing in him. Compare it to blowing on a coal, which can become a flame if we keep blowing on it. So if one wishes to acquire joy, he needs to reveal whatever joy is already present in his soul, and expand it. [The same goes for love, or any other function of our soul which we want to develop]. This is the inner, fundamental way of avodah.

Thus, the inner perspective mentioned here has two important results. Firstly, it means that one needs to experience a matter from within, in order to acquire an understanding of the matter. Secondly, it means that all of the character traits are already present within you, and that your task is merely to activate it from its potential state, expanding further upon your inner power.

Here, we have mainly elaborated upon the first outcome of the inner perspective, which is, that in order to have a true grasp on anything we learn about, we first need to contemplate the matter on an intellectual level, and after we have intellectually understood it, each on our own level, we should then begin to reflect where that particular matter exists in our life, namely, where it is found within our own soul.

### The Basis Of The Inner Approach Here

Therefore, in whatever we will speak about in the coming lessons, with Hashem's help – as well as in whatever you learn about in other places, or in other sefarim – the plan of action will be as follows. Understandably, as you are first hearing about certain concepts, there will not be enough time to put them into practice. But after you hear about the concepts which we will explain in the coming lessons, you should first try to contemplate them with your mind, and then you need to try to identify where the certain concept is found within your soul.

That will be the outline here, and it is the practical course of action which will be accompanying us, with the help of Hashem, in the coming lessons, for all that we will be discussing. At first we need to contemplate the matters we will be discussing, so that we can at least have some intellectual understanding of them, and then we need to sit and reflect and see where these matters are found within our own souls. That part will be the individual work of each person.

This course of action, with *siyata d'shmaya*, will help each person enter into the inner world. It is not merely an entry into mental contemplation, nor is it merely an entry into the realm of practical action. It is the way which helps a person enter into his own self, using a fundamental and consistent approach.

That is why I will repeat and emphasize that the words here of this lesson are the general structure of inner *avodah*. It is not just a definition of the general structure, but the means by which a person can enter into an inner way of living, which we will discuss with Hashem's help, from this point onward. Without giving this introduction, those

listening would simply hear the lessons, think about them, and try to practice the outcomes from them. But now that we have given this introduction, we have explained that whatever we hear about or try to experience needs to first be identified within ourselves, experienced from within. Through that, whatever we hear about can then enter us and turn into a revelation from within ourselves.

At first, it is recommended that whenever we learn about something, we should try to locate it within at least one experience that we have. After that, we should try to see it in different 'colors' [perspectives]. The more one continues on this path mentioned here, with *siyata d'shmaya*, one's *avodah* will not be coming from his outside, but from the inside.

### Developing The Power of Subtlety

Even more so, it will cause a person to understand things from a deeper place, and gradually, a person will reach subtler levels of understanding. The path which we described here, besides for helping a person enter into the inner world, is also a means by which a person can develop the power of subtlety (in Hebrew, *dakus*, or *dakut*).

I must emphasize and repeat that the approach here has two different results – it is the way by which a person can enter the inner world, and it also leads to a subtler understanding of matters. We shall now explain why this is so, but first we needed to emphasize the two different gains, so that they should be clearly understood.

When a person understands something in his intellect, with most people, the intellect has not yet been refined to understand subtleties. The same is true for emotional understanding. When most people are emotionally moved by something, they are understanding it from that place of emotion and it often lacks an accurate understanding of the matter. But when a person experiences something through his power of recognition (*hakarah*) – meaning, from his soul's abilities, combined with intellectual contemplation of the matter – this experience provides a person with a subtle grasp of the matter.

The ability being described here [*hakarah*\recognition,

which enables a person to have dakut\subtle understanding] is mentioned in the Gemara as “Extra understanding (binah yesairah) was given to woman, who can recognize her guests.” It is a power to reach inner subtlety, to have a better grasp of the reality at hand. The more that a person works with the inner path mentioned in this lesson, slowly [s]he will enter into the soul’s power of binah yesairah, “extra understanding”, and he\she will begin to feel more the reality that is within him\her. This will be all the more so when one can grasp subtleties.

The inner world is built upon (1) intellectual depth, (2) emotional depth, and (3) subtlety. If we do not take the path presented here, we will only know of a superficial understanding of matters, comprised of very general definitions and shallow emotional reactions. By contrast, if we take the path mentioned here, with siyata d’shmaya, making sure to contemplate these matters in our minds, each on his\her own level, and we are also trying to experience these matters within our own emotions – we will then be experiencing our knowledge on a deeper level, and this will gradually develop in us a power to experience subtleties.

This will also sharpen our own minds, when we are experiencing matters from within ourselves. Our experiences will then become subtler, which, in turn, will sharpen the intellect, and the cycle will repeat. This is how the process leads to intellectual depth, emotional depth, and subtlety – and together, these factors build our inner world, which is pure and clean.

### An Outline Of The Inner Work To Come

With the help of Hashem, the coming lessons will not as focused on intellectual depth, relatively speaking, in comparison to how much we will be focusing on developing emotional depth and on subtleties within our emotions. These two factors together will greatly comprise the coming lessons, with siyata d’shmaya.

As we get used to identifying a concept as it is found within ourselves, together with intellectual contemplation, we can further traverse this path, which we will continue, with siyata d’shmaya, in the coming lessons.

NEXT WEEK: Q & A WITH THE RAV

בס"ד

הַסְדֵּיךָ
הַזֵּדִיךָ לָהֶ'

the Mechaber of the  
**Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh &  
 Da Es Atzmecha sefarim**  
 HaRav Isamar Shwartz, shlit"א

will be in Lakewood for the week  
 of parshas Vayeitzei Nov. 27 - Dec. 3.

TO SCHEDULE A DRASHA OR MAKE AN APPOINTMENT  
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