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The Month of Adar - A Time of Happiness

With the help of Hashem, we are in the month of Adar. (In a leap year, we merit to have two months of Adar). It is well-known what power is revealed during the month of Adar: it is the month where there is more *simchah* (happiness). The Sages state, “When Adar enters, we increase happiness.”^[1] To be more specific, the power which describes the month of Adar is known as “*sechok*” (laughter)^[2].

Let us reflect, with *siyata d’shmaya*, into what the roots of sadness are, so that we can learn how to remove sadness and reveal happiness in our life.

Reflecting On the Roots of Sadness

In whatever we think about, we can always discover details and roots. Either we can see the details involved in a matter, or we can see the roots of the matter. So when it comes to analyzing sadness, either we can think into the many different details that can cause sadness, or we can look into the roots of sadness, and see what the roots are that bring a person to sadness.

Here we will try to analyze the roots that cause sadness, as opposed to studying the many ‘branches’ that can bring on sadness. There are several “root” causes for sadness.

Two Sources of Sadness - In the Body and In the Soul

Man is comprised of four physical elements: fire, wind, water, and earth. These four elements are in all of Creation, and they are in man as well. Earth is the heaviest of the elements, and when it is left unbalanced by the other elements, the element of earth will weigh a person down with its heaviness, which ultimately causes a person to feel sadness.

Thus, sadness can stem from the heaviness that is found in our physical body, in our body’s element of earth. Our body was fashioned from the earth. Man comes from dirt, and the heaviness in this dirt that is part of his physical makeup can breed sadness, when one’s element of earth is imbalanced and it is weighing the person down. This is the first source for sadness: the element of earth, which is contained in the physical body.

When a person commits a sin (Heaven forbid), and certainly if he commits more sins, his soul becomes sad from this, because it does not want to be in a situation of sin. When a person sins and he does not immediately do *teshuvah*^[3] for it, the soul becomes sad at this, and when this is the

case, the sadness that a person feels is stemming from the soul.

Solving Sadness Due To Heaviness

Generally speaking, a person needs to get used to eating a lighter diet, as we discussed in the month of Shevat. Our body becomes heavy from the “earth” in us, so we need to be careful with what we eat. When we overeat, this makes us feel heavy, and heaviness causes us to be sad, since heaviness is a trait of earth, the root element for sadness. So we should get accustomed to eat light foods that won’t make us heavy.^[4]

In addition, when someone is drawn very much towards lethargy, he needs to get used to doing things enthusiastically, which will combat the nature of the ‘heaviness’ within him that is causing him to be sad. He should mainly work on this by practicing doing things energetically. For example, he should resolve upon himself that for 3 times a day, he will do something quickly and with enthusiasm.^[5]

This is the two-part solution that solves sadness that comes from feeling physically lethargic and sluggish. The first part of the solution is, to get used to a lighter diet. The second part of the solution is, to try to do 3 things a day with enthusiasm. This will enable a person to acquire the trait that described in the *Mishnah* in *Avos*, “as light as an eagle”, and to avoid the lethargy and sadness that is produced from the ‘heaviness’ in the body.

Solving Sadness of our Soul

The second source for sadness that we mentioned is, when sadness comes from the soul. The soul becomes sad when a person commits sins. The solution for this kind of sadness is to do earnest *teshuvah* from the depths of the heart.

Our Sages wrote that there are four main times to do *teshuvah*: before going to sleep at night, on Erev Shabbos, on Erev Rosh Chodesh, and on Erev Yom Kippur (which is the most important time to do *teshuvah*). These are the “general” times to do *teshuvah*, but if a person lives a more inner kind of life, he does *teshuvah* whenever he feels inner sadness coming from his soul, and he does so from the depths of his heart.

The *teshuvah* should not be done monotonously, but truthfully and earnestly, until a person feels that his *teshuvah* was genuine, to the point that “The One who knows all secrets (Hashem) can testify on him that his *teshuvah* is truthful.”^[6]

This is an internal way of living, in which a person trains himself to react to any time that he feels inner sadness by concentrating deeply and resolving to live like a more truthful kind of Jew: to resolve that one will truly submit oneself to the *Ribono Shel Olam*.^[7]

If one does *teshuvah* earnestly, he will find that his sadness will subside, either totally, or at least to a very large extent.

Identifying Your Sadness

From the two above possible reasons for sadness (feeling heaviness of the body, or feeling sad due to sins), a person should try to identify which kind of sadness it is when he’s feeling it.

If a person feels a sense of ‘heaviness’ in his body, if he is feeling somewhat sluggish and lethargic, then this stems from the body’s element of earth, and the solution for this kind of sadness as we said is, to get used to a lighter diet and to do things enthusiastically. But many times a person will feel that

the reason for his sadness is deeper than just a general sense of feeling lethargic. Such sadness is not stemming from heaviness of the body, but from a deeper source. It is coming from the depths of the *neshamah* (the soul), due to sins, which feels painful to the soul. When that is the case, the solution is to do earnest *teshuvah*.

If a person reflects a little and he has become a more internal kind of person, he will be able to keenly identify if the sadness he's feeling is coming from heaviness of the body (the element of earth in the body), or if it's coming from sins. And after identifying which kind of sadness it is, he should use the solutions above, accordingly.

We have so far mentioned two root causes for sadness, and how they can each be rectified, and how a person should go about identifying them.

A Third Cause for Sadness: Lacking a Sense of Purpose in Life

Until now we have explained, with *siyata d'shmaya*, about two kinds of sadness - a sadness that comes a feeling of 'heaviness' in the body, which is rooted in the body's element of earth; and sadness that comes from the soul, due to sins and improper actions. Now we will speak about a third kind of sadness, which is very common. This is when a person is living without any sense of direction in his life, when he doesn't know what he wants from himself, what his purpose is, and to where he is heading in his life.

Many times, when a person is having various failures in the external aspects of their life, or when one has time to think quietly about his personal situation, he will discover that he has no clear-cut direction in life. When a person is living without a sense of clear direction in his life, he is filled with all kinds of doubts about what to do and what not to do, and in a broader sense, he is filled with doubt about his entire life in general. This is the main kind of sadness which we see by most people, and the world is full of much of this kind of sadness in people.

We have so far given a general description of it, and now let's explore this deeper so that we can have a clearer understanding of it.

There is a well-known statement, written by the Rema, who says, "There is no happiness like the clarification of doubts." ^[8] These words imply that when there are no doubts, there is happiness, so if there are doubts, there cannot be happiness present, thus there will be sadness whenever a person has doubts. When a person is trying to make a decision but he is filled with doubt about how he should decide, his soul becomes sad, from this very state of being in doubt.

(A hint to this is that the Hebrew word for sadness, which is *atzvus* (עצבות) is from the word **עצב** (*etzev*), which is from the words **ב' עץ'**, which hints to the term "two options of advice (because the word **עץ** is also from the word **עצה**, advice) - in other words, when a person faces two conflicting paths of advice to take, he has *atzvus* (sadness.)

Sometimes a person is sad due to a particular doubt about something that he is going through, like if he isn't sure about whom to marry, if he doesn't know which house to buy and where to live, or if he's not sure about what kind of job he needs to work in. In these cases, a person can know clearly of the doubt that is plaguing his happiness. But in many cases, a person cannot name exactly a particular doubt is bothering him. He is just feeling doubtful about his entire life in general and which direction it is taking, and he feels a general lack of clarity towards his life. These are the kinds of doubts that fill the lives of many people, and therefore the world is full of this kind of sadness.

Lack of Centeredness

If we ask any believing Jew, "What are you living for?" he will surely answer that he is living in order to do the will of Hashem and fulfill the *mitzvos*. But if we look deeper into what's going on inside many people, we would discover that most people - while certainly saying that they this is what they live for, and that they know in their minds what they must do - their souls are not directed towards any one point that they are striving for. Their souls are scattered over many different points that they are involved with. When the soul is so spread out like this, and it is not aiming towards any one point in particular, this lack of direction towards anything clear results in a deep kind of sadness to the soul.

We can see that there are many people who are working towards a goal. Sometimes they have materialistic goals, and sometimes they have spiritual goals, but in either case, they are heading towards one point that they strive for. They are centered and focused on attaining a particular goal that they have, and this keeps them largely from falling into the pit of sadness.

Based upon this observation, we can uncover the solution for the deep sadness that fills most of the world - sadness that stems from lack of clarity and direction in life - by learning how to stay focused on a particular goal in life that each person can strive for. Our goal we want to develop, however, will be of a spiritual nature, and not of a materialistic concern. Yet, we can still learn a lesson from the goal-oriented people of the world and use their method of success, when it comes to our own spiritual potential. With the help of Hashem, we will explain this.

Having a Spiritual Goal

There are many observant Jews who go to learn a profession today, whether it is to become a doctor, lawyer, or whatever profession they choose. They are juggling many different aspects in their life, yet they are focused on attaining a certain goal, by going to school to learn about the profession that they are trying to attain, and this helps them stay centered as they aim for that goal. The fact that they are working towards a goal gives them a sense of happiness, from the mere fact that they know that they are heading towards a goal - whether the goal is a worthy one, or not.

Just as actively striving towards a particular goal can work for success in the material world, so can it work when we have a spiritual goal to strive for. There are some people who have spiritual goals, and they gain satisfaction and happiness from it whenever they are actively pursuing it.

For example, there are some people who feel that doing *chessed* for others is their spiritual goal in life. They open up a *gemach* or an organization that helps people, they are focused on what they are doing, as opposed to being not spread out over many different goals they want; they are involved solely in one goal that they are aiming for. Some people help others with money, some people help others with their advice, some people help others by lending their possessions to others, and there are many other ways as well how people help others. In all of these scenarios, the person is focused on a spiritual goal of *chessed* that he is aiming for.

Whether the goal is materialistic or spiritual, as long as person can stay focused and concentrated on pursuing his goal, his soul feels connected to something. He will be less prone to sadness, and he will find it easier to be happy.

Most people are usually doing many good and wonderful things, but they are not aiming for any one goal in particular that they are striving for. For example, if a woman is a housewife, she does many good things every day; she takes care of the house, she is constantly nourishing her husband and children with meals, and each of these acts involves countless achievements. In addition, a woman does many constructive acts each day besides for this. Yet, this doesn't necessarily make her happy, even though she is doing all of these good things.

Why? It is because she doesn't see how it all connects. She may feel very 'spread out' all over the place with all of these things that she does, and she does not feel that she is aiming towards anything in particular that she is living for. She would be very happy if she would just consider how all of these acts really connect into one piece. She could focus on the fact that all of these things are *chessed*, and then she would derive happiness from this – that is, if she considers *chessed* to be her goal. But when a woman doesn't consider all of what she does as part of a general goal that she is striving for, then in spite of all her many actual achievements, she will not be happy.

Every Jew, man and woman alike, needs to have a spiritual goal in his life to aim for. No matter how much countless wonderful acts a person is doing each day, a person will not actually be happy from all of this unless there is a particular spiritual goal that he/she is striving for.

Each person can have a different unique goal to strive for; it is not the same for all people.

Figuring Out Your Personal Spiritual Goal in Life

In the secular values of the material world, people are seeking wealth, status, and nice houses to live in, and that is what drives them to stay focused on their goals. But when we speak about the inner, spiritual world, the focus must be on a spiritual goal, on a certain inner point which we would want to aim towards, as we go about our day-to-day living.

Every person will have to sit with himself in a quiet place and try to figure out, as best as he can, of a spiritual goal that will speak to him and which he feels is closely attainable. A person needs to wonder: "What is a worthy, spiritual goal that I would want to aim towards and direct my whole life towards?" The point is to be focused on you can utilize your own potential, which lays dormant within you.

Once again, let us emphasize that there is a difference between how the secular world pursues their goals, with how a Torah Jew needs to pursue his goals. When a gentile speaks of having goals in life and on being focused and concentrated on working towards a goal, the attitude is to lay down the desire that you really want and how to get to what you want the most; how to attain that which you want badly. But when we speak of spiritual goals, the goals that a Torah Jew needs to have, which utilize the potential of our *neshamah* (Divine soul), the way of knowing our goals is a different process.

It is about how to actualize my actual potential that is within me, as opposed to getting what I want out of life. It is about figuring out which point speaks to me and is close to home by me, as opposed to something that my *nefesh habehaimis* (external, animalistic layer of the soul) wants, which are expressed in the gentile world. It is a clarification about the innermost point that I currently identify, which speaks to me. It is that point which a Jew needs to strive for, and to figure out how to actualize this potential.

If a person succeeds at uncovering the spiritual point that speaks to him the most right now at his current level, he is engaged in utilizing his potential, and he will succeed at removing the deep sadness of the soul, the pain of the soul when there is a lack of clarity and direction in life.

However, in order to figure out what the goal will be, it is not an easy thing to figure out so quickly, and it will not take a few minutes. A person needs to sit with himself quietly and try to go deeper into himself and recognize himself better and better, until he can get to know what his deepest spiritual ambition is. Often a person will need to speak to someone else for help with this.

A person will also need to *daven* to Hashem for help with this, that he should merit to discover a spiritual goal that he wants to aim for. If he can get himself to cry to Hashem for this, he should do so.

But even more so, we must understand that we will not get to it so fast. We don't immediately see what our deepest spiritual desire is. But at one's own current level, one can try to figure out a spiritual goal that speaks very much to him, and to aim towards it in his day-to-day life.

Slowly as time goes on, a person will gradually be able to uncover an even deeper spiritual goal that he will want, and then direct himself accordingly to actualize that goal.

The Prerequisite to Happiness

We need to understand the following point, which is a prerequisite to *simchah* (happiness). It is a very root and essential point to be aware of: *simchah* is not just based on that which I want to attain but haven't yet attained. It is mainly based on whatever I have attained thus far.

If a person is not focused on any one goal in particular, he will not be clear of what he wants to reach, and he will not either be clear of what he has already reached thus far.

These two points are unclear to a person when he doesn't have a goal. Upon having a goal, a person first needs to clarify what he wants to reach, but at the same time, he must also be aware of what he has already attained thus far. He needs to always remind himself of this: to be clear in what he wants to reach, and to be clear in what he has gained so far. That which you have already attained is actually the root of your *simchah*, and that which you are aiming for, which you haven't yet gotten, is the factor that takes away sadness.

Thus, *simchah* is comprised of two factors: the removal of our sadness, and the revelation of happiness itself. Anything you have attained thus far is included in your aspect of "*someach b'chelko*", "being happy with one's lot" (which is the revelation of happiness), and anything which you haven't gotten but which you are aiming to get, is what takes away sadness, when you are involving yourself in trying to get there.

Let's review this again so that we are clear about it: there are two parts to *simchah* – the removal of sadness, and the revelation of happiness. When I am focused on attaining a certain goal, this removes my current sadness [because the soul will feel like it is moving towards a certain direction]; to be more specific, it removes the doubts that create sadness. And where do I derive *simchah* from in the present? From that which I have attained thus far; this is the "*someiach b'chelko*" that reveals happiness in one's present state.

Now we can understand the following. We mentioned earlier the difference between the gentile and Torah approaches of being goal-oriented. The way of the gentiles, which is especially the case in our current generation, focuses on what you should want out of life, and how to get it. It is about "getting what you want". When you get it, you are happy, because that was what you wanted, you aimed for it, and you got it. That is Western mentality. By contrast, the Torah has a different approach to being goal-oriented: it is about actualizing the "I". For we need to wonder: What is the "I" in us that wants things?

If "being happy with my lot" means that I got what I wanted, that would mean that I partially have what I want and I partially don't have what I want. There is a rule, "He who wants a hundred, will want two hundred." We are never completely satisfied when we attain what we want, because the next day we will want something else, and then we are back to where we started. There is no "lot" to be happy with here.

But if I tried to reach something which my "I" wanted – if it came from a very deep inner drive – then when I do attain that which I want, it is not simply that I have gotten what I wanted, but it is a part of my very "I." If I wanted something that was a part of my "I" and I reach it, then I have attained a

revelation of my "I", something that is part of me. The happiness that results from that is coming from the actualization of the "I" - the happiness that comes when one utilizes his potential. When the "I" is brought out from its potential state and it is actualized, there is resulting happiness.

We need to understand this deep point, which is very clear. When a person wants something, and he attained it either partially or even completely, the happiness that results from this is just superficial; it is an incomplete happiness. The happiness will be fleeting, and sadness will soon follow.

The only genuine happiness which exists is not when I simply attain what I want, but when I reveal my "I"; when I actualize the potential of my "I". That is *simchah*. For if something is not a part of me and it is only on my outside, reaching it will not give me true and inner *simchah*, even it is a wonderful thing to attain; whether it is a physical attainment, or even if it is a spiritual attainment. By contrast, if I achieve something that is small but it actualized my "I" in the process in getting there, then the happiness I will experience is coming from my "I" when I get it. You can only have real *simchah* in something that is a part of your "I."

The meaning of "*someiach b'chelko*" (being happy with one's lot) means that even if my "lot" is small - like when I compare myself with others and I see that others have more than me - I can still be *someiach b'chelko*.

How indeed can one be happy if he sees that others have reached more than him? The depth of this is because *simchah* does not come from what I acquire. If it would come from what I acquire, then I can never be happy, because in comparison to others, I may have acquired very little. *Simchah* rather comes from actualizing the potential of my "I." When my "I" is actualized, when I have reached something which is "me", there is resulting *simchah*.

For this reason, if a person does not have true self-recognition, he is not aware of any actualization of his potential, and he finds nothing to be happy about. If he hears the words here that have been explained until now, he will not be satisfied, and he will feel, "In the end of the day, I don't have much to be happy about. Even the things I do have in my life are minimal compared to what others have. Others have much more than me to be happy about. So how can I be happy with what I have, when I see that everyone else around has more than me [both physically and spiritually]...?"

When a person finds it impossible to be happy with what he has, it can only be because he is out of touch with his "I". He is unaware that the only thing which truly gives us happiness is when one utilizes his personal potential. If he would be aware of his "I" and he would be aware that only actualizing his potential is what provides happiness, he would have a whole different perspective towards life, and he wouldn't need answers to his question, for he would be above this question.

When a person lives only superficially, he will remain with the question, and it pains him. He will not be able to happy with what he has. But when a person comes out of superficiality and he realizes that happiness does not come from acquiring things, but from actualizing the "I", he will feel that everything he attains is a part of his "I", and the *simchah* that he experiences will be a happiness in his very "I" as it is.

We are speaking about a totally different perspective of *simchah* here! It is not a *simchah* that comes from getting what you want, where you remain unsatisfied by the things you haven't yet gotten to. It is a *simchah* that one has in his very "I".

It is difficult to explain it any more than how it has been explained here, but herein lays an entirely different and deeper perspective of *simchah* - for anyone who understands what we mean here.

Summary

In summary, we have explained three main underlying reasons for sadness.

The first source of sadness comes from our body, when we have a feeling of 'heaviness' that dominates us and makes us lethargic. This can be counteracted with watching what we eat, together with doing things enthusiastically each day.

A second source of sadness comes from our soul, when there are sins that we haven't done *teshuvah* about yet. The solution for this is to train oneself to doing *teshuvah* on a regular basis, from the depths of the heart. A person should awaken himself to *teshuvah* for every time that he feels a deep and inner sadness.

The third cause of sadness, which is the most common kind of sadness that people have, is when people don't feel fulfilled in their life, and they lack a sense of direction in life. The solution for this is two-fold: to realize what we have already gained so far in our life, as well as to be focused on a certain spiritual goal that speaks to us. Unfortunately, most people in the world are suffering in their souls from this kind of sadness - they feel like they are not aiming for any particular goal in life.

In Conclusion

All that we have explained here until now, understandably, is but the introduction for one to get to the complete and true *simchah*, which is described in the verse, **שמחו צדיקים בה** - "*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*" We did not speak here about this kind of *simchah*, but that is the desired goal of all that has been explained here.

May we merit from Hashem to feel true happiness in our life - by being happy even with even the parts of ourselves that we haven't yet actualized, as well as by being happy with the parts of ourselves that we have actualized; and that all of us together should rejoice, in the Creator - as it is written, "*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*"

Questions & Answers with the Rav

Q1: Does this idea (of being focused and connected to one spiritual goal in our life) also apply to other areas in life, such as marital peace, children, and livelihood, and other areas of our life?

A: This question stems from living a superficial kind of life, where a person is experiencing life from outside of himself/herself, and not from the inside. When a person lives inwardly, all of these aspects mentioned (marital peace, children, livelihood) are placed in secondary focus to the main point that he is directed towards. When one is not directed towards any one inner point in his life, he will go through the motions, and sometimes his focus will be on his marriage, sometimes on his source of livelihood, and sometimes on his children. But when there is one inner point that he is directing himself towards, none of these things will take over his focus, because he is heading towards a larger picture than any of these aspects.

Q2: Can the Rav give me specific questions that I can ask myself in order to get clarity in

what my main point is that I should be focused on in life?

A: This is a very fundamental question to ask, which is hard to answer in a brief amount of time. To put it forth in general terms, every person needs to know: **(1)** The strongest positive quality that he possesses, **(2)** and after that, he should know what the “deepest” thing is that he experiences in his soul. **(3)** After a person knows both of these factors and he has the combined knowledge of both of these factors together, he should then reach a third stage: the deepest part of himself that he curren

However, this is really a very big question, and it is like the request of the person in the *Mishnah* [in the times of Hilel and Shamaï] who asked, “Teach me the entire Torah on one foot.”

Q3: How does this idea of ‘figuring out our main point’ fit into our general goal of life, which is to learn Torah and do mitzvos? Are there really two goals in life - our personal goals, and then our general goal in life (which is Torah and mitzvos)? How do we integrate the goal of keeping Torah and mitzvos with having my own personal spiritual goal?

A: Torah and mitzvos are the purpose and goal that applies to all of *Klal Yisrael*, and in that aspect, all of our goals are equal. But within our general goal of Torah and mitzvos, there is also the individual and private goal that each Jew must strive for. The Sages say that everyone is different and that everyone thinks differently (Berachos 57a). Each person contains a point which no one else has. The private goal of each Jew is not meant, *chas v’shalom*, to take away from the general goal, which is keeping Torah and mitzvos. Rather, each of us needs to bring out our individual point and fulfill our own private and unique mission.

Our personal goals in life are not to be viewed as a ‘separate’ goal that we have other than Torah and mitzvos; rather, our personal goals in life are a goal within our general goal, which is Torah and mitzvos, which enables us to have a connection with Hashem. The individual mission of a Jew is within the general goal of keeping all of the Torah and *mitzvos*, and it can be a particular *mitzvah* or *middah* (character trait) that he is meant to perfect; so it is all within the general goal of Torah and mitzvos.

Each person has a point where he is stronger than others; within Torah and mitzvos, there is also a person’s individuality. The purpose of one’s individuality and unique strong point is a path for him to get to the goal of Torah and mitzvos, and not as a purpose unto itself. Rather, utilizing our unique potential and individuality is our own way of how we can connect ourselves with Hashem, which is our general goal in which we are all the same in.

Q4: Isn’t the fact that we are all created with a “tzelem elokim” (“in the image of G-d”) also a point in which all Jews are the same in?

A: When Hashem created people, did He create them all with the same height, looks, natures and personality? Are we all the same, or are we different? We are all created different from each other. We each look differently, we each have different *middos*, we each have different ways of thinking, and we are different from each other in many ways. Why did Hashem make us differently? It is to show us that we each have a unique aspect - within the path of Torah and mitzvos - in how we can each come to recognize the Creator. Our individuality is a detail contained within a larger whole. It is not excluded from the whole, rather, it is within it. Each person needs to reveal his individual, unique point - and each person’s unique point is different from anyone else’s. Although Torah and mitzvos are the general goal of *Klal Yisrael*, within Torah and mitzvos there is also each person’s individuality.

Q5: Would learning about the “Ten Sefiros” help a person reach his\her particular strong point in life?

A:How did you hear about the *Sefiros*? There are two ways how this knowledge is learned – either in a holy manner, or in a manner which creates confusion.

Q6: Assuming that we learn this information from a Rav who is knowledgeable in these things....?

A: If you find a person who is far removed from materialism of this world and he is a reliable and trustworthy person who can teach Kaballah to women, then yes. But this has to be researched well. Usually when people start studying Kaballah, they become very confused. If you go to learn Kaballah, you are entering into something where there is a possibility of becoming very confused.

Q7: Is there a particular sefer the Rav can suggest that one can learn which will help him understand himself?

A:There is no one way to take; there are many *sefarim* like this. I can't say which particular *sefer* to learn. If you are used to listening to our *shiurim*, then you can try learning sefer “*Da Es Nafshecha*” (“Getting To Know Your Soul”, of this author). But there are other *sefarim* too which can help you understand yourself.

Q8: Are there are other sefarim that the Rav can suggest we should learn, in order to understand ourselves?

A: Let me explain what the difficulty with this is. Most of the *sefarim*\books which are being written today are taking ideas from gentile authors, and people are attempting to convert these ideas into *kedushah*\holiness. There is no *sefer* [about self-knowledge] being produced today that is entirely based on Torah and with no traces of non-Jewish ideas. Therefore, it is hard to know which parts of new *sefarim* are appropriate for us and which parts are not appropriate, because we don't know if it's taken from secular knowledge or not. That is why I can't recommend any on *sefer* [about self-knowledge] to learn - I do not know if everything that is written there is appropriate for a Jew to look at. Some of the *sefarim* being written today are borrowed from gentile thinking and the authors are trying to bring it into Judaism, and that is why I can't say to learn them or not to learn them; for this reason, it is a complicated matter to address.

Q9: Are there no sefarim written by our Rishonim (earlier sages) and Acharonim (later sages) which can help us understand ourselves? Aren't those sefarim entirely sourced in kedushah?

A: The *sefarim* written by the *Rishonim* were not written in an orderly style that speaks to our own language, so they are not that accessible to our generation. There are only a few parts in these *sefarim* which are written clearly, and they are hard for someone in our generation to go learn and

come out with anything concrete from it.

As for the sefarim written by our later *gedolim*, such as the sefarim of the Alter of Kelm [*“Chochmah U’Mussar”*], the sefarim of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l [*“Daas Torah”* and *“Daas Chochmah U’Mussar”*] and the sefarim of Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt”l [*“Ohr Yechezkel”*] – in order to know how to learn these sefarim properly, one needs to be a great *bar daas* (a very knowledgeable, wise, and sensible person) to learn these sefarim in a clear manner, to know when and where to apply the lessons.

There are those in our generation who do try to learn these sefarim in a clear manner, but at the same time, they are also learning non-Jewish books along with it. But when learning gentile ideas, one would have to be an even greater *bar daas* to know which parts of it are appropriate for a Jew and which parts should be discarded. And it indeed hard to know which ideas are taken from Torah and Chazal and which parts are being taken from gentiles, in the books and *sefarim* that are being learned today.

Therefore, it is difficult for me to answer this question.

Q10: *If I am into my health or I am a healer who makes others healthy, is this considered to be using my strongest point for a spiritual goal, or is it just an external factor in my life which is not part of goal in life as an individual?*

A: If a person identifies his field of practice as being the strongest innermost point that he is focused on – in this particular case, health - what will happen one day when he eventually takes leave of the world, where the soul leaves the body? What does a person remain with? We all leave the world one day, and our health isn’t here anymore. Health is not part of who we are. But if you are concerned about health because you like to help others, that could be a very big lead to part of who you are, because then it is a spiritual goal. Meaning, if you are a healer because you want to do *chessed* to others – and you consider this your goal in life – then this is a spiritual goal, and this will make you happy. But if you’re not doing it for a spiritual reason, and it’s just because you are “into health” and you ‘also’ happen to do *chessed* with it, then it’s not a spiritual goal in your life, and it won’t give you happiness.

[1] [9] Talmud Bavli Taanis 29a

[2] [10] Sefer Yetzira 5:5 [see Rosh Chodesh Avodah_013_The Power of Laughter, for how to use the power of sechok/laughter in the month of Adar].

[3] [11] repentance

[4] [12] This was discussed in the shiur of Rosh Chodesh Avodah_011_Elevated Eating; see also Fixing Your Earth_010_Counteracting Laziness

[5] [13] Editor’s Note: It is said about Reb Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l that he would practice doing things

against his will for 5 times a day, in order to counter the nature of laziness (and another note, the Rav explained this in terms of getting used to bittul haratzon (nullifying one's will). Perhaps the reason for the Rav's recommendation of doing this 3 times a day, as opposed to 5 times a day as Reb Yeruchem did, is so that even simpler people (like us), who are not the level of Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, can also practice it, on our own level.

[6] ^[14] A quote from the Ramban

[7] ^[15] Master of the world

[8] ^[16] Toras HaOlah

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