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## Tefillah - 094 Seeking Advice

### ***The Torah Is Our Source of Advice***

In *Shemoneh Esrei*, we daven, "השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה ויועצינו כבתחילה" - "Return to us our judges of old, and our sages of counsel as they were in the beginning." We ask Hashem to be able to receive good advice.

It is written, "The advice of Hashem will last forever." The advice of Hashem is revealed in His Torah. It can be revealed to the one who learns the Torah in the proper way, in its pure form.

Shlomo HaMelech referred to the Torah as his "advice". The Mishnah in *Avos* states that if someone learns Torah *lishmah*, for its own sake, one of the benefits is that he merits to have direct advice from the Torah he learns; he merits the G-dly wisdom of the Torah.

That was all when we stood at Har Sinai, when we were on such an exalted level that our advice came straight from the Torah.

But when we went into exile, we lost this power of direct advice from the Torah. Rashi<sup>[1]</sup> states that when Achashveirosh went to the Sages to ask them for advice [if he should kill Vashti or not for embarrassing him], they responded that now that we are in exile, we have lost our power of advice, and therefore we cannot be relied upon.

The Maharal says that the Torah has gone into exile as well with us, ever since we were exiled from the land of Eretz Yisrael, and therefore we aren't on the level anymore to get advice straight from the Torah.

A classic example of bad advice is that the great Dovid HaMelech had a very wise advisor, Achitophel, yet he gave him bad advice. Achitophel was a Torah scholar, but the Sages tell us that he only learned the Torah superficially, and therefore the advice he gave was not truthful.

The source of holy advice comes from the Torah. But if a person doesn't learn Torah in the right way, even if he learns a lot of Torah and even if he knows a lot of Torah, he doesn't get the holy advice from the Torah, since he's not learning the Torah in its pure form.

We are living many generations after Achitophel. Yet, let us think about what we are *davening* for in *Shemoneh Esrei*, when we ask Hashem to restore true advice back to us, ויועצינו כבתחילה.

***We Must Daven To Receive Good Advice***

Throughout the generations, a Jew always knew that good advice only came from the Torah Sages, even if we were no longer at the great level we were at when we stood at Har Sinai. Understandably, a person always had to daven special to Hashem that he should merit to receive good advice.

If the great Dovid HaMelech had a *rebbe* who gave him bad advice, how much more so does everyone else need to *daven* that they should have a good teacher for advice.

When a person seeks advice from another person, he's often confident in the advice he's receiving, but why is he being so confident? If someone as great as Dovid HaMelech didn't merit to have a good advisor - in spite of the fact that his advisor was Achitophel, a massive Torah scholar, and the *rebbe* of Dovid HaMelech - how can anyone ever be confident in the advice he receives..? [So it's not such a simple matter when we seek advice].

But there is also a deeper issue that is involved in seeking advice from others.

The Steipler zt"l once said that in the new generation, we are exiled to the "doctors", due to the fact that people feel like they are at the mercy of doctors for everything. He said this about 30 years ago. Now it's 30 years later, and many changes have happened to our generation; it can be said that a whole new kind of exile has begun, especially in the more recent years.

30 years ago, the Steipler said there was an exile to our **bodies**, in that we are at the mercy of doctors. But in today's times, there is an exile to our **soul** taking place! In the *Refoeinu* blessing of Shemoneh Esrei, we ask Hashem for a recovery to our body (*refuas haguf*) and to our soul (*refuas hanefesh*). 30 years ago it was our body that needed a recovery. Now it can be said that we need a recovery of our soul, a *refuas hanefesh*.

Why are there so many emotional problems going on in today's times? Let's reflect a little into the root of all these problems going on in today's times.

### ***The New Generation***

People today are seeking a lot of advice, much more than they ever did in previous times. There are a few root reasons for this new phenomenon.

#### **1: A Stressed Out Generation**

The first reason is because in today's times, we live with a lot of stress. We live a hasty kind of life, and it's not the holy kind of haste that the Jewish people had when they left Egypt, which was called *chipazon d'kedushah* - it's rather an evil kind of haste, the power of *chipazon* being used for evil). People are very bogged down and stressed out by everything they're doing, and it makes the soul suffer. The lifestyle of the generation is *pizur hanefesh*, "a scattered soul", because people are doing way more than their capacity, and all this takes its toll on our soul.

In essence, our generation is like a generation of *choilei nefesh* - "ill souls", due to all the *pizur hanefesh* going on in our mind. What is an "ill soul"? It's when someone lives with a scattered soul, doing so many things that are really above his normal abilities. It makes a person feel very tangled inside himself from all the things he's doing and all the many things he has to think about. The average person in our generation is stressed out inside from all the multi-tasking going on in today's times.

This is the first, simple reason why people are seeking advice on how to live: there is a very large amount of stress going on in today's generation, because people are living a very stressful kind of lifestyle, always doing so much. It harms our minds when we do so much.

(The solution to this would be to live a more serene kind of lifestyle, and detach from all the noise of life. Nu...)[2]

## 2: Scars From The Past

The second reason is because each soul has gone through many lives already (*gilgulim*). All of the stress has piled up on our souls from our previous lifetimes, and this all combines to generate an astronomical amount of stress to each of us on a personal level.[3]

## 3: Searching

The third reason why people are seeking advice is because these days, a new movement has begun throughout the world in which people are searching to fill an emptiness they are feeling inside.

Even non-Jews today are searching to abandon their emptiness and lead a more inner kind of life. It is not only in Eretz Yisrael that people are searching; it's all over the world that people are searching. But this new movement amongst the world to "search" has now entered the Jewish people, and now Jews too are also starting to "search."

### ***The Problem With 'Searching' In Life***

As a result, many non-Jewish ideas have entered our circles.

If a Jew would live properly, he would never feel an inner emptiness. He would feel holiness and purity. He would have Torah and live a life with Hashem. He would enjoy the beauty of Shabbos and taste enjoyment in the *mitzvos*. But often, a Jew is lacking a connection with his heart to what he does, even if he keeps all the Torah and mitzvos, and he feels empty inside, in spite of the very religious lifestyle he keeps. He then feels a need to "search" and find more meaning to his life.

But this is actually an idea that comes from the gentile world! He will start to search for an inner kind of life - which is what many non-Jews are searching for - but he's not necessarily looking to improve his holiness as a Jew. He is simply searching for "deeper meaning" in life, and this has nothing to do with searching for more holiness. It simply comes from an inner emptiness.

This new flood of "searching for meaning" has recently entered the Jewish people, even amongst Torah Jews.

The truth is that all of a person's emptiness can be filled when we learn the Torah, when we keep the *mitzvos*, when we keep *Yomim Tovim*. All emptiness can be filled when we live a life of holiness and when we live with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* in our life. It can be filled in any part of the Torah that we learn about.

But people don't think about that, and instead, people are searching for a new kind of life, and they don't seek to find it in the Torah. There is indeed an inner kind of life, but it is **only** found in the Torah, in the mitzvos, and in living a life with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. But astonishingly, a Jew can miss this point, and he instead thinks, "It's true that I have to learn Torah and do the mitzvos, but these are just obligations. I am not finding an inner kind of life in it. I must seek an inner kind of life from somewhere else."

What results from this? The result is that such a belief is destroying the generation! It is a deep and profound aspect of the exile we are in.

The Torah was given from Moshe and passed down through the generations. When people look for an inner kind of life but they don't seek it in the Torah, what happens? *"And the pit was empty, and it had no water in it"; but there are snakes and scorpions in it.*" In other words, when there is a lack of Torah in a person's life, all kinds of bad influences enter him.

### ***The Explosion of Learning Secular Psychology Amongst Torah Jews***

Up until around 25 years ago, there were only a few non-Jewish ideas that begun to enter us and became acceptable, where they would be mentioned in seminars or in psychology courses. But in today's generation, people read up on all the non-Jewish ideas about life. It has negatively affected the entire Torah world of Jewry; the non-Jewish ideas contain information that is totally not true to the Torah's view, and it has created a lot of confusion amongst Torah Jewry.

Now they have psychology courses that are given to religious Jews which are all borrowed from non-Jewish psychology, and people call it "Jewish" [but that doesn't make it Jewish].

When it comes to non-Jewish psychology, you can have one psychologist who says, "All your problems began when you were already a fetus in your mother." A second psychologist says, "All problems in a person are because your parents had a bad marriage. In order for you to get past your problems, you have to mentally destroy the image of your father in your mind." A third says, "The problems are coming from your personality." We won't get into all the views that are out there. The point is that all of these are ideas that do not come from a source of holiness.

There is a kind of person who is honestly bothered by certain problems about the human psyche, so he learns non-Jewish psychology and then seeks to find sources of these ideas in the Torah. This is reminiscent of attempting to convert the non-Jews into Jews - to take every idea that's out there and attempt to find it in the Torah...

Of course, there are definitely ideas out there that are really found in the Torah, but the question on this person is, why does he search for ideas on the outside, when he could have started from the Torah...?

Even more so, in order to find how an idea out there is found in the Torah, one would have to be an unbelievably wise expert in the entire Torah, in all its revealed and hidden parts, to its full depth. If someone isn't like this [which he isn't], he thinks that there is a source for every non-Jewish idea he comes across. He'll somehow find a source for an idea in a sefer of Rav Dessler zt"l, in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, and in a statement of the Baal Shem Tov, and now he thinks that the non-Jewish idea has a source in the Torah. Often, this has nothing to do with spirituality, and it has rather become a way to live life.

People have all kinds of names for it: Personal therapist, life coach, "Guided Imagination" technique, etc. The common denominator between all of these methods of non-Jewish therapy is that they have no source in holiness.

*"And the pit is empty, and it has no water in it."* The reason why people are searching to find everything there is to know about life is coming from their emptiness, because they are not living a life of holiness. It is true that there are problems going on with our spirituality, but the answers to our problems are not found in non-Jewish psychology. It doesn't teach us how to live a life of more holiness.

## **Modern Psychology: The “New” Solutions To Our Problems?**

Let's say a person has a problem with his *middos*. What does he do? He pays a therapist and goes to him once a week to discuss all his problems he has with his *middos*, and the therapist advises him with all kinds of ideas that do not come from Torah or Chazal throughout the generation. He has “new” approaches to deal with problems.

How can it be that a person is unaware that this is a problem?? How can it be that all these “new” approaches have entered our circles to help us deal with our problems?

(Sometimes a person might even hear from certain *Rabbonim* that he should go for therapy, but you should know one thing: Most *Rabbonim* do not deal with this kind of field of knowledge, and therefore they will advise someone to go to a certain therapist (so that he can be healed) even if the therapist is a gentile, as long as the therapist is not a murderer, idol-worshipper or someone involved with illicit behavior. But one would have to be extremely wise in order to know if any idea from the non-Jewish world is true to Torah or not; every word requires intense scrutiny to see if it's in line with Torah or not, of how it's going to affect the person who uses the therapy. But there is almost no one who has the mental capacity to know if the therapy will not harm the person in other areas of life.)

We must understand what is resulting from this problem. People who go for therapy and go to a non-Jewish therapist become different people after being involved for a few years with this kind of knowledge. Even if a Chareidi Rabbi is a therapist and he's using non-Jewish ideas for therapy, it's the issue as going to a non-Jewish therapist. It doesn't make a difference; all of the ideas are originating from non-Jewish sources.

(Recently, an *avreich* told me that he paid 7000 shekel to join a psychology seminar, in which many *avreichim* come learn together in a *beis midrash* and learn psychology, where they then go and find sources for everything they learn. (For some reason, the Alter of Kelm didn't think of this...). After a week of being there, he told me that he learns there the writings of the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l, and Rav Dessler zt"l. That part was wonderful.

A week later I asked him, “What are you learning there now? Tell me something over there that you're learning about. Every *beis midrash* contains some *chiddush*.”

He told me, “We're learning about how to deal with negative emotions, like what do when you get insulted, how to react.”

I asked him, “And how?” I thought he was going to tell me something along the lines of having more *Ahavas Yisrael* (love for another Jew), that you should somehow find a way to love the other Jew who insults you, so that you won't have a negative feeling towards him.

He told me, “We're learning that whenever you get insulted by someone, you should imagine that the person is an ugly, atrocious creature. In your mind, play around with his face and turn him into an ugly creature in your mind. Imagine that his eyes and mouth are twisted and that his ears are oozing liquid. This way, you won't take his words seriously, because he's anyways an ugly monster in your eyes, so you save yourself the pain of being insulted.”

Why didn't Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz think of this ‘wonderful’ solution? Why didn't Rav Dessler think of that solution? Why not? It's because such a method goes against the basic concept of *Ahavas Yisrael*. A person who has *Ahavas Yisrael* would never fathom such a thing, to imagine in his mind that another Jew is an ugly creature.

People who are learning these kinds of ideas mean well. They have good intentions; they do not mean

bad. But it's a good intention that should not be fulfilled.

A totally new kind of [evil] movement has entered us; this wasn't around a few years ago. There were only a few people then who learned these kinds of things, because there are always individuals throughout the generations who do the wrong thing. But it used to be that it was just individuals who learned non-Jewish psychology. Today, there is a movement going on amongst the masses to learn non-Jewish psychology. People justify these ideas with the argument that "As long as it doesn't say in *Shulchan Aruch* it's forbidden, there's nothing wrong with it."

People wonder, "What's the difference?! Why should it bother us?" But it should bother us for two reasons. First of all, non-Jewish psychology is good and evil mixed together in one. Of course, we cannot say that it's totally evil, because there is nothing which doesn't contain some good. But there's still evil mixed together with it, so much that it's scary.

### ***Psychology Cannot Replace The Torah***

Another problem with it, a bigger problem, is that people are getting their feelings from non-Jewish psychology, and it's their whole source of enjoyment in life. It's like they have found a new Torah. Until now, there was always the Torah of the Jewish people, and people also knew that the non-Jews had their own "Torah" (so to speak); the various wisdoms which the non-Jewish nations preached. But today, a third "Torah" is going on - to put the non-Jewish "Torah" into our own Torah.

It doesn't matter if the therapy is geared toward helping a person overcome his bad *middos*, or his negative emotions, or if he it's his imagination which is bothering him. It's all the same thing - it's a "new Torah" that people are learning about. The actual Torah we have really contains the answers to all our problems, if only we would seek it.

### ***Motivations In Learning Psychology***

There is another problem with it as well. Psychology has become a way for people to make money, just like anything else in the world that becomes popular: it becomes another way for people to make money. People go to psychology courses solely as a way to make money from it.

I understand that those who teach psychology want to teach it, because when a person knows something well, he naturally wishes he could give over that knowledge to others. Let us in fact assume that there is a non-Jewish teacher of psychology who truly understands it; what does he understand? He understands the non-Jewish soul, not the Jewish soul. (If he would understand what the Jewish soul is, he probably wouldn't want to teach about it.) So let's assume that this non-Jewish professor does know a little about the non-Jewish soul. He opens up a course (*Baruch Hashem...*) for anyone to come learn psychology. What happens?

People need to take a course so they can get a job and make money, so they try these psychology courses. They learn about psychology, but they don't know what they're learning about; they're just in it to make money.

Now, if someone has a feel for psychology, if he has a little bit of a desire to help people understand themselves, it's understandable that he wants to study psychology. If someone has a feel for music, he can succeed in learning how to become a musician, but if he doesn't have that feel, his music won't sound good, even if he becomes a musician. If he doesn't have a feel for what it is, no matter how much he studies it, he won't know it. You can only build upon something when you already have a feel for it. Most people going to these psychology courses are not doing so because they have a real interest in psychology, but because they need to make money. As a result, they never really know what they're studying - so they will not be able to be successful with the study of psychology.

Even those who have a good heart and wish to help people with their knowledge won't succeed with psychology, because they're involving themselves with a study that is very deep, something that you really have to know well in order to understand it and apply it. And since they're mainly studying it so that they can make money, they are not really trying to understand the knowledge that they are "studying" about.

Psychology is the study of the soul, and the study of the soul is vast and deep. Even if someone is drawn towards studying psychology and he wants to help people with it, the problem is that he doesn't know what he's talking about; he only learned it so that he have a profession in life. People will come to him for help and he thinks he knows how to help them, while in reality he has no understanding of the person he is dealing with, because all the psychology he learned was from a non-Jewish teacher, who does not understand the soul in its entirety.

And if someone doesn't succeed at his psychology course and tries a different place that teaches psychology, he makes himself even more confused.

### ***The Real Solution For A Jew***

Shlomo HaMelech said that the Torah was his source of advice. If a person would feel Hashem in his life, if Hashem and the Torah is the center of his life, he would easily dismiss all the advice that he encounters from the outside world. He would realize that none of this advice is befitting for a Jew's soul, which is of a holy nation.

But since we live in a generation where the holiness of Torah is hidden from us, people are allowing all kinds of ideas from the outside to enter us, and they even build their entire lives based on these ideas. In this generation, almost every single non-Jewish idea has already been allowed into the Jewish nation.

How can it be that people who learn Torah and keep the mitzvos go to learn about how to live their lives from a non-Jewish therapist, who has no love and fear for Hashem, who has no love for a Jew? If he doesn't love Hashem and he doesn't love a Jew, what is his source of advice...?

The words here are not meant to attack the entire world of therapy, but it certainly concerns *most* of the therapy going on today. There are of course individual Jews who practice therapy that is line with the holy Torah, and they do not use any of the non-Jewish ideas. But they are only individuals.

We *daven* in *Shemoneh Esrei* that Hashem should restore to us our judges, who advises us wisely. This does not mean that we are asking to understand what we learn; that is also true, and it is also an unbelievable accomplishment if we can understand what we learn. But asking for understanding is not the depth of what we ask for. What we are really asking for is that the Torah's wisdom should fill our entire life, down to every last detail in how we live our life. That we should understand that the answer to every problem is in the Torah, and we just need to be able to see it. And if we aren't finding our answers in the Torah, we must come to the painful conclusion that it's because we are not connected enough to the holiness of the Torah, that we aren't connected enough with Hashem in our life.

As an example, a person might be sitting for a large part of the day in shul on Tisha B'Av, yet he never realizes that he is supposed to feel like he's in mourning. A person might be davening all day in shul on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, yet he never even understands once that he must do *teshuvah*.

### ***In Conclusion***

The fabric of our holiness amongst Torah Jewry has been affected negatively, to a very large extent, in the last few years. It's not that we are done for, but the point is that it is not a small amount of Jews that have become affected by the non-Jewish ideas about life.

There is a Torah, and there is a Rebbe who teaches it. There is a relationship between a student and his Rebbe, and this was the way it always was throughout the generations.

Nobody can change the entire situation for the world of Torah Jewry right now. But each individual Jew can understand, on his own personal level, of what's going on today, of the problem that is going on, and to seek the truth. In whatever idea we come across, we have to know if it's true to the Torah or not.

. "השיבה שופטינו כבראשונה ויועצינו כבתחילה". "We ask Hashem to return to us our source of good advice.

May we merit from Hashem to receive the true and solid advice that we need, the kind of advice that will last forever for us. *"The advice of Hashem will last forever."*

When we are full of problems, what we are really missing is the sweetness of Torah, and therefore we are missing the knowledge about our soul. The soul suffers inside when it isn't connected to the sweetness of the holy Torah.

But one thing is clear: the solutions to our problems are not found in the outside world. The remedy to our problems cannot be found *anywhere* in the outside world. Even when it seems that it is, even when it seems tempting for us to seek solutions outside the Torah, we must know that the solution is not found there. Even if it is a solution that seems to be proving successful results, it is doing more harm to us than good, in a way that we can't see.

In whatever painful situation we ever find ourselves in, we must find a way to use it to come closer to Hashem and His Torah from it. We must realize that the relief to all our problems - both physical and spiritual - are only found when we connect with Hashem and the Torah. How much more so is this true when we are faced with a spiritual problem.

May we all merit the building of the Beis HaMikdash, today - Amen.

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In a shiur entitled, [Rosh Chodesh Avodah - 009 Kislev: Sleep](#) [1] the Rav asked:

How could a person become aware of what is going on deep inside him?

One way is by learning the sefarim of our Gedolim that teach us about our soul, such as the sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu from Rav Dessler zt"l. It is a wonderful sefer that takes apart all the abilities of the human soul in great detail. Learn this sefer in a deep way and see how what he says is going on inside of you.

In addition, the Rav recommended to study a number of seforim at the end of this class on [Rosh Chodesh Avodah - 009 Kislev: Sleep](#):

[1] Besides for *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, there is also two volumes of *sefer Sifsei Chaim* on *Middos*, and there is also *Shiurei Daas* from R' Bloch zt"l (which is much deeper); there is also *sefer HaMeoros HaGedolim* from R' Chaim Zaitchik zt"l, and there is also *sefer Beis Kelm*.

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[1] Megillah 12b

[2] It may be helpful to see the author's sefer *עד את מנוחתך*, which is available in English at the Bilvavi website in a full PDF, "Search For Serenity", which offers strategies on how to maintain a calmer kind of life.

[3] For an amazing solution to deal with these issues, see the shiur on *Rosh Chodesh Avodah: Elul: Renewal*, which is also printed in the final chapter of the book *Getting To Know Your Feelings*.

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**Links**

[1] <https://bilvavi.net/english/rosh-chodesh-avodah-009-kislev-sleep>