

BILVAVI

**MY
HEART
ASKS**

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

PARSHAS LECH LECHA 5782

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41 Questions Of 15-Year Old Bochur On Avodas Hashem

1) Does a person need to give up some of his ruchniyus for his friend?

ANSWER

Yes. Chazal said “It is worth it to commit a small sin to benefit your friend”. And when it comes to Torah learning, the Chasam Sofer said that a person has an obligation to give a tenth of his learning time by learning with another to help him. In general, as long as you can return afterwards to your own growth and it’s only a bit of a bother to you to help another’s ruchniyus, that is what you should do, but if helping another in his ruchniyus is getting in the way of your growth then you are not obligated to help the other.

QUESTION

2) On Shabbos Kodesh when a person desires to eat a certain food he is supposed to stop himself and say “L’Kavod Shabbos Kodesh” before eating it. Isn’t he fooling himself by saying that he’s eating out of honor for the Shabbos? Isn’t he just eating to satisfy his craving? How can one know if he’s doing the ratzon Hashem by eating it or if he’s just listening to the yetzer hora?

ANSWER

The advice of the Shelah HaKadosh is that one should just taste a bit of the food in honor of Shabbos.

QUESTION

3) How does a person learn Torah with pnimiyus, with his heart? How does a person come close to Hashem through learning?

ANSWER

Learn Nefesh HaChaim Shaar IV, and our series of shiurim on it.

QUESTION

4) Are we supposed to remind ourselves every half hour that Hashem exists, even in middle of learning? Do we need just to think about it quickly or do we need to analyze it deeply? And if we do need to analyze it, what points should we think deeply into?

ANSWER

The Nefesh HaChaim's view is that one should not think about Hashem while he is in learning, and the Baal Shem Tov held that a person should. Even according to the Baal Shem Tov, a person should just think about Hashem and not think so deeply about it.

QUESTION

5) It seems that the Litvish path of avodas Hashem is to just learn Torah all day and not be involved with trying to study what yiras Hashem and ahavas Hashem is. Is that a valid derech in avodas Hashem?

ANSWER

I don't know of such a derech in avodas Hashem – only those who learn Torah lishmah can be zocheh to everything by just learning Torah all day.

QUESTION

6) Sefer Igra D'Kallah says there are 12 ways of serving Hashem, based on the 12 tribes. How can a person know what his way of avodas Hashem needs to be?

ANSWER

One first needs to become clear about his personal soul's abilities, as explained in our sefer on Self-Recognition and Self-Actualization. Then he should analyze the concept of each of the 12 paths and see how they correspond to different powers of the soul. This can take years to figure out. In the beginning of one's way, one should choose which ever path he desires (after figuring out which path is most appropriate to his particular abilities), along with tefillah to Hashem that he should be helped.

QUESTION

7) Should a person always daven a long Shemoneh Esrei, or based on whatever he is in the mood of, either a short or long Shemoneh Esrei?

ANSWER

It depends on the circumstances. When a person feels that he wants to daven quicker, he should first double-check himself if perhaps it's coming from laziness. It also depends on one's personality.

QUESTION

8) What should a person do when he's in a time of katnus (low level inspiration and he feels 'out of it')? Should he continue to learn even though he feels burnt out and he should try to pull himself together, or should he learn sefarim that awaken more yiras Hashem and ahavas Hashem?

ANSWER

He should determine for himself a schedule of learning for his "normal" days and he should also determine a lighter schedule of learning for himself for when he will be in a time of katnus. And, during katnus, a person should learn whatever he wants.

QUESTION

9) If a 15-year old bochur feels that he is a very big baal gaavah (conceited) does he need to work on gaavah? I saw that Rav Wolbe zt"l said that bochurim shouldn't work on gaavah. What then should a bochur do if he's a baal gaavah?

ANSWER

It's better to wait on it, unless the gaavah is really glaring. I suggest learning the sefer on Self-Actualization (Hakarah Atzmis) so that you can learn how to identify what your best ability is, and only after figuring that out can you work on yourself properly.

QUESTION

10) Is it a problem if a person has a low self-image and doesn't think good of himself? And how does a person fix this issue?

ANSWER

Yes, it's a problem, because it is a sign that a person doesn't recognize himself well, and even worse, it brings a person to sadness and lowliness and this will prevent him from growing in avodas Hashem. The Sefer Tanya says that if a person thinks of himself as a rasha, he will feel low in his eyes and he won't be able to grow in serving Hashem.

QUESTION

11) I do certain chumros because I'm afraid, and not because I love Hashem so much. Should I continue to do these chumros?

ANSWER

Be machmir only a bit and doesn't be fully machmir.

QUESTION

12) Chazal said that there's no obligation to judge favorably someone who is a rasha. I have a tendency to judge others and think that the other person is a rasha. How can I work on this?

ANSWER

Discover a good quality in every Jew.

QUESTION

13) Is it a bad thing to eat candies and sweet treats?

ANSWER

If you feel a need to relax, you can taste something sweet.

QUESTION

14) Is it necessary for a person to clarify philosophy matters in order to strengthen his emunah?

ANSWER

There is no necessity !

QUESTION

15) Why shouldn't a 15-year old bochur learn until he is totally exhausted? And at what age should a person learn with such diligence until he's totally exhausted?

ANSWER

That is a dangerous path which has left many victims and only a few who took this path succeeded. There is no age when a person should start learning until he's

exhausted. Rather, when one matures in his soul, the danger for him is a bit less (through it's still a big danger for him).

QUESTION

16) The Ramchal says that when a person learns Torah shelo lishmah, he is ruining the upper worlds. Why then do people learn Torah shelo lishmah?

ANSWER

Hashem first created worlds and destroyed them (the worlds of Tohu), until He created our world, the world of Tikkun. People mimic the same process – there is first a “shell that comes before the fruit”. And Chazal said that a person doesn't acquire the truth of a halachah unless he first stumbles in it. (But a person has to make sure that everything he does is within the bounds of halachah.)

QUESTION

17) What are the thoughts that a person should think when he's starting to learn?

ANSWER

To strongly want to connect to the true level of Torah, with a yearning in one's heart along with an intellectual grasp.

QUESTION

18) What does it mean that the Shechinah has pain? If the Shechinah is Hashem's presence then how can the Shechinah be missing anything, since Hashem is perfect?

ANSWER

Hashem is the Root of all bestowal, while the Shechinah is the root where the creations begin to receive from Hashem. Thus anything which the creations are lacking causes pain to the Shechinah, for the Shechinah is their root.

QUESTION

19) Does it help to daven for yiras shomayim?

ANSWER

Yes.

QUESTION

20) Does a very emotional kind of person have a different way of serving Hashem than those who are “colder” and more rational who don’t get so emotional? And if yes, what is the way of serving Hashem for a more emotional kind of person?

ANSWER

Yes. He should awaken his emotions to anything that’s important. But he must stay balanced with his intellect, and he should make sure not to do things more precision.

QUESTION

21) Is knowing and internalizing that “there is a Creator” the same thing as contemplating how there is both a Creator and His created beings?

ANSWER

These are two different contemplations. There is the truth of His Havayah, and there is also the fact that he is the Borei, the Creator, in relation to all of that which He created.

QUESTION

22) Should a person say im yirtzeh Hashem (if Hashem wants)?

ANSWER

Yes.

QUESTION

23) What is the difference between thinking of Hashem throughout the day with thinking that we are standing before the King when we are davening Shemoneh Esrei?

ANSWER

During the day, you should only pause your thoughts every so often to think about how Hashem is in front of us. During Shemoneh Esrei, you should try to think about it throughout all of Shemoneh Esrei – according to your capabilities. Rav Chaim Brisker said that during Shemoneh Esrei if one doesn't think that he's standing in front of the King, he hasn't fulfilled Shemoneh Esrei, and that is why a drunkard is exempt from davening, because he can't think that he's in front of the King when he's davening.

QUESTION

24) Can a person daven that he shouldn't go through katnus (times where he feels no inspiration)? Is katnus an inevitable reality or can a person's tefillos help for this?

ANSWER

Yes, it is like davening for a spiritual miracle to happen [when is permitted]. Our tefillos should be that we should have less katnus, less quantity and superficiality, and that we should have more gadlus – more quality in our avodas Hashem. But that is at the beginning when we start to serve Hashem. At a later point, there is always “A tzaddik falls seven times and rises”. That is the process of avodas Hashem – but, it can all be gadlus, it is all growth, and it is just that sometimes there are ups and downs within our growth of gadlus.

QUESTION

25) How much of my learning time do I need to give up in order to answer others' questions when they come over to ask me questions on the Gemara? Is there a limit to it, or should I just have emunah in Hashem that He will help me learn even though I'm using most of my learning time to help others with their questions?

ANSWER

As long as you can easily return to your learning and to your own ruchniyus, you can give of your time to others and you don't need to be concerned that it's wasting your time.

QUESTION

26) How does a person work on davening better and understanding how tefillah works and what he's saying, etc.?

ANSWER

Think about the words of davening and internalize it in your heart, by thinking about it and by saying the words. And learn the words of Chazal on the subject of tefillah.

QUESTION

27) Should a 15-year old bochur learn sefarim that describe punishments of Gehinnom, for example, Sefer Shevet Mussar?

ANSWER

Yes, but he should also learn about ahavas Hashem (to love Hashem).

QUESTION

28) If I see people doing the right thing am I supposed to give them mussar, even though they will get angry or it will make them uncomfortable? And what is the proper way to rebuke others?

ANSWER

Only give mussar if they will be willing to accept the criticism.

QUESTION

29) Why is shemiras einayim (guarding our eyes) so important and how does it hold a person back from succeeding at learning?

ANSWER

The eye, which contains our sense of vision, is the most spiritual of all the senses. The eyes reveal our inner thoughts, and that is why the Gedolim are called the “eyes of the congregation”. When a person damages his vision by looking at what he shouldn’t, he damages his pure thinking, and his entire Torah learning will be missing something (because Torah learning utilizes our power of thought). Even worse, though, is that from being careless about what one looks at, one can come to actual tumah (defiling his holiness) because the Gemara says that if a person thinks about lewd things during the day, he will come to tumah at night. Also, the root of evil is when we don’t guard our eyes, and that is the true meaning of ayin ra, a bad eye, and when one damages his eyes by looking at what he shouldn’t, he becomes connected with all the evil forces in Creation – the root of the destruction of all the higher worlds.

QUESTION

30) Should a person be nervous about bittul Torah?

ANSWER

One should try to utilize every moment correctly, but he should do so amidst pleasantness.

QUESTION

31) If a person feels that he's not missing anything if Mashiach isn't here, is that kefirah (denying one of the principles of faith)?

ANSWER

The Rambam says that if a person doesn't await Mashiach, he is missing one of the 13 principles of faith.

QUESTION

32) How much time of the day should a person spend on learning mussar?

ANSWER

About a half-hour, and never more than an hour, a day.

QUESTION

33) Which mussar sefer should a person learn?

ANSWER

Nefesh HaChaim shaar IV.

QUESTION

34) When we make a Siyum who do we make a seudas mitzvah with a lot of food? Since it's about something ruchniyus shouldn't we instead celebrate it with less gashmiyus?

ANSWER

The ohr, the light of the ruchniyus of making a Siyum, purifies the gashmiyus of eating the festival meal there. That is why it's a seudas mitzvah. The purpose of ruchniyus is to bring the light of the Shechinah down to the physical realm, where the ruchniyus purifies the gashmiyus.

QUESTION

35) What is the gain of going to an Oneg Shabbos, going to a Tisch or going to a Simchas Beis HaShoeivah? When is it called bittul Torah and when is it not bittul Torah?

ANSWER

As long as a person gets an aliyah (he goes higher) in his ruchniyus from it, and he needs it in order to learn better and it makes him feel closer to Hashem, it is not bittul Torah.

QUESTION

36) The sefarim say all kinds of kavanos and different names of Hashem which enable a person to be saved from improper thoughts and other things. Why would having in mind these thoughts accomplish such awesome effects?

ANSWER

Just as there segulos (spiritual charms) that can affect physical things, so are there segulos that can affect our ruchniyus, our spiritual area. However, segulos to improve our ruchniyus don't build a person and they only aid him temporarily. So the main thing is to build up our ruchniyus properly.

QUESTION

37) How can it be that Elul is called Ani l'Dodi v'Dodi Li, which implies a love for Hashem, but it is also called Yomim Noraim, which implies being afraid of Hashem?

ANSWER

The word “Nora” is the trait of Yaakov Avinu, which is the trait of shleimus, the trait that comprises ahavah and yirah together – and that is the pnimiyus, the essence, behind all of these days of Yomim Noraim.

QUESTION

38) The beginning of Mesilas Yesharim says, “Chazal taught us...” that the purpose of the world is to come to the spiritual bliss of becoming connected with Hashem. Where is this Chazal?

ANSWER

The Torah says “And you shall cling to Him”, and Raboseinu (our teachers) explained that d'veykus (clinging to Hashem) is through the pleasure that comes from being close to Hashem. It is written “Then you will find bliss in Hashem”, and this is referring to the level of the future (the World To Come), but on This World we have the concept of oneg Shabbos, which is a semblance of the World To Come.

QUESTION

39) Should a 15-year old bochur do hisbodedus?

ANSWER

For a few minutes a day. He can do it even mentally. It all depends on the circumstances and the place he is in.

QUESTION

40) In yeshivah I sometimes am inclined to have a Taanis Dibbur (to abstain from talking) on Shabbos. Should I not do this, because I'm being different from everyone else? Or should I not be concerned about this (I really enjoy Taanis Dibbur because then I am saved from wasting so much learning time from talking to others).

ANSWER

You should be concerned.

QUESTION

41) Is it better to avoid the learning programs which give out prizes like money or sefarim for doing well on the tests? If I join such programs I feel that I will remember by learning better, plus the tests will help me review my learning. However, I would be reviewing my learning anyway even if I wouldn't take the test. Also, there are other learning programs which I want to join [i.e. Hilchos Shabbos programs] because it covers other areas of learning that I won't be able to cover in yeshiva, and I won't have time to learn those things if I don't join these programs, even though I really want to learn those other areas. Should I join those other learning programs?

ANSWER

If it will help you learn better, then go for it, but bear in mind the rule of Chazal is that you try to grab too much then you will only gain a little, whereas if you try to get a little more, then you will gain a lot.

18 Questions About Ahavas Yisrael

Is there a kind of hisbodedus and tefillah that a person can do in order to increase his ahavas yisrael?

ANSWER Contemplate what achdus (true unity) is. First think about the concept of achdus Hashem (the unity of Hashem with all of the worlds), and think of the unity between the Creator and all His creations, and then think of the unity that must exist between all created beings. Gain a perspective of achdus on everything, and then from the depth of achdus that one reaches on his own level, one should daven for that achdus to be revealed.

QUESTION 2) Will speaking about ahavas yisrael help us internalize in our heart what we know about ahavas yisrael? For example if we repeat the verse “V’ohavta l’reiacha kamocho” several times and we say it from our heart, will the ahavas yisrael sink into our hearts?

ANSWER Yes!

QUESTION 3) Is there a kosher way for women to work on ahavas yisrael towards men, and the same vice versa, without compromising on halachah?

ANSWER A woman should not work on ahavas yisrael towards another individual man (and vice versa), only on loving a certain community, or loving the rest of Klal Yisrael on a collective level.

QUESTION 4) If I hate someone, can I imagine people that I love as if they’re all standing in a circle, and then imagine the person I hate that he’s standing in that circle of people I love?

ANSWER Yes, but don’t do this so much, because heavy use of the imagination can lead to imbalance and other problems.

QUESTION 5) Why is hatred the opposite of love? Hatred seems to imply that there is a connection between me and the other – since I am bothered by the lack of connection with the other, I hate him, because of the tension between us. But that is a kind of connection. Hatred doesn’t necessarily have to be an indication that I don’t love the other. The opposite of love seems to be “apathy” or “indifference” to the other – to have no feeling for the other, not love and not hatred.

ANSWER Any two opposite concepts will always bear one root. At the root, the opposite of love is hate. But at the branches, hate can show up as indifference to another, lack of connection to another, etc.

QUESTION 6) The Rav explained that women connect to each through emotion and not through an intellectual connection of daas. But weren't there women who had a lot of wisdom and daas, such as Devorah the prophetess, Beruriah the wife of Rebbi Meir, and the wife of On ben Peles, etc.

ANSWER For every general rule there are always exceptions.

QUESTION 7) What is the meaning of "Women have light daas"? Does it mean that women don't have daas and they don't have seichel and they only have emotion?

ANSWER It means that their daas isn't complete. They have "light" daas, but they do have daas. In the terms of Kabbalah, women have daas d'Gevuros (the "judgments") but they are missing daas d'Chassadim (the "kindnesses"). That is the meaning of what Chazal say that women are very analytical and judgmental of guests who come to their home. In more inner language, women are lacking the ability to "integrate opposites".

QUESTION 8) If a person only does kindness for his family, why does this mean that he doesn't have ahavas yisrael yet? How can it be that such a person is really still self-absorbed? It's certainly difficult to be busy all day with the family and it takes a lot of energy, so why is taking care of one's family still a degree of self-absorption and not yet ahavas yisrael? With the parent-child relationship it makes sense that it's not ahavas yisrael because a parent naturally loves their child, for the child is their extension, but a couple doing chessed for each other and getting along with each other does not come natural to them so why can't that be called ahavas yisrael?

ANSWER The love that one has for his children is because they comes from his body, because they were born from him, and because they are garments of his soul, but this love has nothing to do with ahavas yisrael. Love between spouses is often because they have no choice but to get along with each other and learn how to love each other, and

a husband has an obligation to love his wife like his own body. So love for one's spouse and children is only a small "spark" of ahavas yisrael.

QUESTION 9) What does it mean that a person is acting (1) above his capabilities (2) when a person is acting above his shoresh neshamah (soul level), and (3) when a person acts above his current level? They all sound like the same thing.

ANSWER When one acts above his capabilities, it means that he is exhausting his physical abilities and he won't be able to handle it. When one acts above his current level, it means that he is acting above his current level of pnimiyus that he's on right now. When one acts above his soul root, it means that he is doing something that's not meant for him to do. With most people, their current actual level is not aligned with their soul root [even if they are according to their current level, it is not aligned with their soul root, and vice versa].

QUESTION 10) When hating a sinner (which repairs him), does a person need to hate the sinner himself or just the evil acts that the sinner does?

ANSWER To hate the evil acts that he does.

QUESTION 11) What is the difference between the highest level of love, which is love that transcends logic (Echad/oneness), and unconditional love? They are both a love that isn't dependent on any reason.

ANSWER Unconditional love (love that is not dependent on anything) is when the love is above any factors, but it's still a logical kind of love because there's still some reason to love the other. For example, in a father's love for his child, he loves his child in spite of what the child does, but he still loves his child because this is his child. In contrast, the highest level of love which goes beyond logic is when there is no rational reason to love the other – it is to be intrinsically one with the other, in a way that transcends all logical reasoning.

QUESTION 12) If a person can deeply feel another person and because of this he can't stay centered within himself, is there a way for him to know when his love for another

is coming from an unhealthy place (nefesh habehaimis) and not from true ahavas yisrael? And is there a way to fix this problem of getting “consumed” in others? This problem is especially common in women, who are more emotional by nature and when they feel love and worry for another person, they over-identify with the other and they “merge” with their friend, and then they can fall into depression over every trouble that happens to their friend, etc.

ANSWER If the love is clean from ulterior motivations, then it is a love for the other that comes from one’s neshamah. If the love isn’t clean from ulterior motivations, then the love is stemming from one’s animal level of the soul (nefesh habehaimis). The way to fix the problem of becoming overly consumed in one’s love for another and getting too stuck in the other’s issues is, by learning how to have a deep connection to one’s inner self as well as to deeply attach oneself to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. To the degree that one does this, one will be less [co-]dependent on others.

QUESTION 13) What about a person who feels very stressed out from others as a result of his ahavas yisrael because he is always so involved with joining others in their pain? How can he continue to work on his ahavas yisrael without getting stressed from the pain of others?

ANSWER One should join in another’s pain only to the emotional extent that he can handle, and not beyond what he can handle emotionally.

QUESTION 14) What about a person who forgets about himself or he forgets about his family when he’s involved with giving to others? What causes this and how can he fix this problem?

ANSWER If the love is coming from deep in his soul, then it is a revelation of the root of love that transcends logic, or it is at least a spark of it. If the love is only superficial, though, it will create an imbalance in one’s soul [causing one to misplace his priorities on where he should be expending all his love and kindness on]. In either case, though, a person needs to fix himself by learning how to have a balance the faculties in his soul. This is an expansive topic.

QUESTION 15) Are there priorities in ahavas yisrael, i.e. wife first, children second, followed by parents, then friends, then community, then the rest of Klal Yisrael?

ANSWER Yes, family and relatives must come before all else. Refer to answer #5.

QUESTION 16) If a person doesn't love himself that much should he not work on ahavas yisrael? Does he first need to love himself well in order to work on ahavas yisrael?

ANSWER He should first work on attaining a healthy self-love, and only after that should he work on developing more ahavas yisrael.

QUESTION 17) If I feel apathetic and indifferent to someone, does that mean I hate him?

ANSWER On a subconscious level, yes.

QUESTION 18) If I only have a “spark” of ahavas yisrael (especially if it's a degree of the highest level of ahavas yisrael), is there any gain from this?

ANSWER Certainly!

25 General Avodas Hashem Questions

1) What is the purpose of life – d'veykus in Hashem or to give Him a nachas ruach? If it's the same thing then how it can be that this little detail of giving a nachas ruach to Hashem, which is the intention in every mitzvah, is really the purpose of life? Also, if I'm trying to give a nachas ruach to Hashem in everything I do then it feels like I'm serving myself, not Hashem, because I am doing it all so that I can be davuk in Hashem and become a perfected person. It's not lishmah. What is the goal that we need to be striving for in our lives?

ANSWER

Giving a nachas ruach to Hashem is not just another detail in serving Hashem. His entire nachas ruach from us is when we are davuk in Him and we are miskalel in Him. That is the main desire we need to have, and every other spiritual desire is just a

branch of this root desire. Nachas ruach means, “Do My ratzon. And what is my ratzon? That you should be davuk in Me.” Now, if you are being davuk in Hashem not because you want the bliss that comes from this but because you want to be davuk in Hashem regardless of any bliss, then you are doing it lishmah, and the same thing is true if you are being davuk in Hashem in order to give Him a nachas ruach: it is lishmah.

QUESTION

2) If our true self is our neshamah then what is the meaning of the “The soul you placed in me?”

ANSWER

From the perspective of This World, man is the Ruach level of the soul. From the perspective of the Next World, a day that is entirely Shabbos, man is a Neshamah, because Shabbos is called the day of the neshamah. Now that we are in the end of days, after midday of Erev Shabbos as the Gra discusses, the light of Shabbos is shining (and it shines stronger when the time to daven Minchah arrives). Thus the light is shining strongly now that we are a Neshamah. One needs to absorb this perspective well . That is also why the Neshamah level of the Torah – the secrets of Torah – are more revealed in the end of days, as the Leshem writes. That is why our today is more on the level of Neshamah, for one to say “I am a pure Neshamah”, and this shines the light of Shabbos within one’s soul. One should let this perspective penetrate him and gradually it will be revealed and he will sense it.

QUESTION

3) How do we know if we are being calm and relaxed when we serve Hashem and giving Him a nachas ruach? Maybe we are just being lazy.

ANSWER

Laziness comes from the dominance of the heaviness of the body. Nachas Ruach comes from being connected to our yishuv hadaas, to settling our mind, when we can act quickly but with a calm mind.

QUESTION

4) How can we know if we're really close to Hashem or if we're just imagining it?

ANSWER

A person needs the ability to grasp reality. Just like a person can be realistic on this world, by not imagining things and being grounded in reality, so too in the inner world a person can be realistic, where he is further from imagination and closer to reality. One can gain this ability to being grounded and realistic when it comes to being on this world - but he should make sure not to become mixed with the world today.

QUESTION

5) How can a person work on loving Hashem? By nature I'm not that emotional...

ANSWER

Listen to the series Maarachos B'Ahavas Hashem.

QUESTION

6) How can a Kohen feel more ahavas Yisrael when he's saying Birkas Kohanim?

ANSWER

Listen to the series "Getting To Love Your Fellow Jew."

QUESTION

7) Let's say I enjoy learning a certain perek of Gemara, but I'm learning it all for my own intellectual enjoyment and I want it to be more lishmah. How can I make my

learning more lishmah and how can I also make all of my avodas Hashem in general more lishmah?

ANSWER

Increasing lishmah is a gradual process. You can do it by getting used to learn even when you don't have cheishek (desire) or by reviewing Gemara when you don't feel like it, or by trying think more deeply into the Gemara even when you don't have the desire to concentrate that much right now.

QUESTION

8) What is the right way to get through Elul, Rosh HaShanah, Aseres Ymei Teshuvah, Yom Kippur in a way that we're not just surviving it but really utilizing it? To be uplifted from it and enjoy a bliss in Hashem and enjoy these days and await for these days to come and do it all in the right away, but without pressure or tension?

ANSWER

Try to feel that Hashem is in front of you and speak to Him simply, like a person talking to his friend, as the Mesillas Yesharim says.

QUESTION

9) What is the meaning of doing complete teshuvah which is expected of me during Yomim Noraim? And when does a person do complete teshuvah – once or every day? Do we have to do complete teshuvah by the time we reach Rosh HaShanah or do we have until Yom Kippur? From the tefillos that we daven during all of these days it seems that the teshuvah happens on its own from these very days.

ANSWER

Make a small kabalah (resolution) which makes your avodas Hashem more stable. During Yomim Noraim, you should be more intense about that kaballah. That is besides for doing cheshbon hanefesh and keeping away from doing aveiros.

QUESTION

10) If I feel that I do more teshuvah when I say viduy, in my own words and not using the Nusach, when should I do teshuvah?

ANSWER

Either you can do teshuvah for all the aveiros represented by each letter of viduy as you say each letter, or after you finish the nusach of viduy you can then add on anything that's on your heart.

QUESTION

11) How do we come to true regret over all aveiros from the whole year? Right after doing an aveirah it's easier to regret it, but after a long time a person don't feel pained that he did the aveirah, and certainly it's harder to feel pain and regret over so many aveiros at once which a person forgot about.

ANSWER

One has to think that whenever he is being prevented from growth in ruchniyus – whether he is being intellectually, emotionally or actively blocked from trying to make progress in his ruchniyus, all of this (at least to a large extent) is because of the effects of doing aveiros. So even if a person doesn't feel pain that he did an aveirah, he can at least feel pained over the effects that the aveirah is having on him. Also, one can have pain over the very fact that he isn't on the level of doing the will of Hashem.

QUESTION

12) What's more important to Hashem on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur – davening a long Shemoneh Esrei and asking Hashem for the future, or saying all the Piyutim?

ANSWER

You need to act according to your cheilek, and that's the main thing!

QUESTION

13) How can we be so focused on the davening and on the words we are saying, and also be calm? How can we feel closer to Hashem through davening?

ANSWER

Think about what you have gained until now, and also think of what you're missing. Throughout these days, keep going back and forth in your mind between focusing on what you have gained with what you still need.

QUESTION

14) How can a person make a true resolution for the future? I am anyhow trying to do the right thing every day, so what will tomorrow be any different than today...?

ANSWER

Refer to answer to question #9.

QUESTION

15) What is the avodah of Elul?

ANSWER

Ani L'Dodi v'Dodi Li – to feel that Hashem is Dodi (my Beloved).

QUESTION

16) How do we have more bittul to Hashem and how do we make Him into the Melech over us?

ANSWER

By making a small kaballah to do one thing every day that goes against your ratzon, and to do it because you want to do the ratzon Hashem over your ratzon.

QUESTION

17) How do I forgive someone with our full heart? Many times I want to forgive and I don't want the other to get punished because of what he did to me, but in the end I still feel some resentment in my heart at him for what he did to me.

ANSWER

It is a long process of purifying your heart. It includes purifying yourself from being connected to This World, purifying yourself from any traces of evil in you, and to increase your ahavas Yisrael.

QUESTION

18) How do I prepare for Yomim Noraim in a way that I don't feel pressure on me? Through mussar or chassidus?

ANSWER

Both. On one hand, you should want to reach your shleimus and tikkun, but you also need to feel a closeness with Hashem, that the King is in the field in Elul and He is closely within reach even to the simple folk. During learning, learn with a bit more of a deeper connection to the Torah.

QUESTION

19) How much time of the day should I spend on trying to become more internal, accessing my havayah/Yechidah, etc.?

ANSWER

Not more than a half hour a day. It depends on what aspect you are learning about, because sometimes it requires less time.

QUESTION

20) Why is it important to get into our “havayah”? Also, in yeshiva, how I can live more with my “havayah” when the very atmosphere in yeshivah is loud, intense and active, and it’s so hard for me to have yishuv hadaas?

ANSWER

It is so important because “For this is the entire person.” You need to find a few minutes of quiet every day for this – and usually, it’s possible to find some time.

QUESTION

21) Just like a person needs to regain his serenity by pausing his actions every so often, does a person also need to do this while he’s learning Torah? Doesn’t learning Torah need to be consecutive and without pause? And if one does need to pause his learning every so often, one should he do during that break? Does he need to be still thinking or is it a time to clear his mind and be in a state of ayin? And does a person also need to pause his davening every so often?

ANSWER

Yes. A person needs serenity in order his thoughts to perform properly, and without pausing one’s thoughts every so often while learning, one will not be able to think calmly and clearly when he’s learning. This is not a time to slacken off from learning, it is rather a space that allows one’s thoughts to become serene, to empty them out, and become tranquil in the mind. It’s no different than the need to relieve oneself, which is not considered like interrupting one’s learning.

QUESTION

22) Is it better to do what Hashem wants or to do what’s more socially acceptable by my friends in yeshivah?

ANSWER

Don’t be noticeably different from them - only a bit.

QUESTION

23) How can a person know if what he's doing is according to his shoresh neshamah?

ANSWER

The more a person acts lishmah, the more he will reach his personal portion, because through acting lishmah a person removes all the layers of him that are shelo lishmah.

QUESTION

24) How can I feel that Hashem loves me?

ANSWER

Think of everything that He gives you regularly. That is the first thing to start thinking about. Later take this thinking further by thinking that you are Hashem's child, for "You are children to Hashem."

QUESTION

25) How can I work on loving Hashem when I'm a young teenager?

ANSWER

The more you feel that Hashem loves you, the more your own love for Hashem will be awakened.

39 Questions On Avodas Hashem

QUESTION 1) How can we know what Hashem wants?

ANSWER When it comes to anything to do with halachah, you have to first clarify what the halachah is, and the halachah rules to us what the ratzon Hashem is. When the halachah about something isn't clear though, it is not possible to know for sure what the will of Hashem is. When it comes to those areas, one should figure out what he wants personally - and then he should do the opposite of what he wants. This

subjugates the evil motivations in oneself, purifying him more and removing the kelipah (shell) of his personal wishes which are preventing him from doing the will of Hashem. When that kelipah is removed, a person senses what the will of Hashem is.

QUESTION 2) I feel like every day I need to be doing teshuvah for not having enough kavanah in davening and for bittul Torah. I feel deep down that I'm a laughingstock. What should be my attitude about this?

ANSWER These areas (kavanah by davening and bittul Torah) always need teshuvah. R' Saadya Gaon wrote a famous response in which he said that because he has reached a higher level and he understands more now, he needs to teshuvah for all the avodah he did on the level he was on until now. The proper way to go about this is that every day, one should try to do better than yesterday, and not to become fazed from failures. As time goes on, one needs to see if he is getting better. If yes, then he can know that he's going in the right way. If no, then he needs to do teshuvah. As Rabbeinu Yonah says, when one is going in a path that is not good, he needs to do teshuvah. This means that he needs to look for the proper way that will be good for him personally.

QUESTION 3) Is it okay if a 15-year old bochur wants to fast in order to atone for any aveiros, at least by fasting for half a day until chatzos?

ANSWER The rule is, usually not. Sometimes there can be exceptions to a rule.

QUESTION 4) The Rav says that one should choose a path of serving Hashem by "purifying the heart", which shows the way for the person to know how to serve Hashem. How can I know what "purifying the heart" is and how to do it?

ANSWER By connecting to your purest, innermost desire according to the current level you are on.

QUESTION 5) The Rambam says that the mitzvah to fear Hashem means to "fear punishment", but the Mesillas Yesharim says that fear of punishment is not true yirah, for true yirah is yiras haromemus, to have a sense of awe from Hashem's exaltedness.

Why then does the Torah speak more about fear of punishment and not about yiras haromemus?

ANSWER Refer to commentary of Kinas Sofrim on Sefer HaMitzvos which discusses this.

QUESTION 6) Is fear of punishment the way to get to yiras haromemus? Or can a person directly reach yiras haromemus even without first working on fear of punishment?

ANSWER If you are working your way upwards, begin from fear of punishment, and if you are beginning from the highest point and working your way downwards, begin from yiras haromemus. In any case, though, a person needs both levels of yirah – fear of punishment, and awe of Hashem’s exaltedness. It is only a question of which level a person should begin with.

QUESTION 7) How indeed do we reach yiras haromemus? What do we contemplate in order to reach it, and how much time does one need to think about it?

ANSWER The Rambam says to contemplate how great the Creator is, by seeing how wondrous the Creation is, and how great the Torah is, and how the Torah is the wisdom of the Creator. This contemplation should be done for a few minutes a day.

QUESTION 8) What should a person learning during Bein HaSedorim (in between study sessions during yeshiva)? To learn Daf Yomi, or to make a seder of learning with more b’iyun without trying to cover more ground? And if it should be iyun, what is called learning b’iyun?

ANSWER This is relative to each person.

QUESTION 9) How can a person have more cheishek (desire and enthusiasm) when serving Hashem, especially at times where he doesn’t feel that much cheishek?

ANSWER Always identify the cheishek that you do have, whether it’s a lot or a little. Then connect to the amount of cheishek that you currently have. In this way you can always have some cheishek, and it will be like “A fire shall burn constantly within me”,

and you will be able to summon forth cheishek at times when you need to. At times you need to increase your cheishek through learning sefarim that make you excited, or through contemplating something, or through repeating pesukim (verses) with a loud voice, and sometimes in a weeping tone. It all depends on the situation.

QUESTION 10) For how much time a day should a person learn mussar?

ANSWER Between a half hour an hour a day.

QUESTION 11) What is a good sefer to learn on the Parsha?

ANSWER This is different for each individual.

QUESTION 12) The Rambam said that if one lives in a city of wicked people, he should go live in the deserted places, and the Chazon Ish said (in his times) that the yeshivos are considered like the “desert” to go live in today to be protected from the world. What about in today’s generation, where even in yeshivah a person needs to find a “desert” to escape to because there can be guys in yeshivah who are a bad influence? How can a person keep his distance from bad company in yeshiva if he’s around them all day? I think that ever since first grade, there are so many bad influences I’ve learned from others that I certainly was brought down from it. How should a person act with his friends in yeshivah in general?

ANSWER Find 1 or 2 friends who are close to your way of thinking – and then form a close, deep relationship with them. With everyone else, you just need to be respectful and pleasant towards them.

QUESTION 13) Does a person need to be with a chevra (a social circle of friends)? Or is this not really necessary?

ANSWER The world was created for companionship, and by our very human design, we need to connect with others. We need to become connected with our own self, and with others, and with the Torah, and with Hashem, and with the whole of Creation. Every person needs a balance between all of these different connections.

QUESTION 14) When learning Gemara, especially chazarah (reviewing), should a person first read the Gemara and try to understand and speak out every part of the Gemara to himself even if he already knows it? Or can he just read the Gemara and understand it mentally without ‘speaking it out’?

ANSWER The first time you are learning the Gemara, it is always better to explain it to yourself [verbally]. When it comes to reviewing one’s learning, though, every person is different.

QUESTION 15) Should a person avoid reading the various booklets of Divrei Torah (i.e. Parsha sheets or papers of chiddushei Torah) and instead just be focused on learning Gemara? Or maybe a person should read them so that he can get chizuk in his avodas Hashem?

ANSWER It’s better to get chizuk by learning an organized sefer where each chapter is based on the one before it. But sometimes a person needs to relax, so sometimes he needs to get chizuk from glancing every so often at weekly pamphlets of Divrei Torah.

QUESTION 16) What can a person do to better remember what he learns? I forget my learning very easily.

ANSWER The main thing is to become purified – the Hebrew word for “pure” is zach, equal to 27, the same amount as the 27 letters of the Aleph Beis, because through becoming “purified”, the letters of the Torah that one learns to leave an impression on him. Currently you should first try to understand well what you learn, then review what you learn, and also make sure to develop a love for the Torah in general and a love for knowledge of the Torah specifically.

QUESTION 17) Is there a concept of finishing Shas by a certain age (i.e. before the chasunah)?

ANSWER Yes.

QUESTION 18) Is it true that something is always either a mitzvah or an aveirah but there's no such thing as something that's "in between", not a mitzvah and not an aveirah? And why does a person need to undergo the suffering of the "beating of the grave" for having enjoyed permissible desires, if those desires weren't an aveirah?

ANSWER Since we have a mitzvah of "And you shall be holy", we are supposed to separate ourselves even from permissible desires, as the Ramban explained. The "beating in the grave" is needed to purify a person even from permissible desires even if he needed to engage in those desires because he didn't engage in those desires l'sheim shomayim – for example, times when he needed to eat, but he didn't eat l'sheim shomayim.

QUESTION 19) If someone comes to me to tell me about a difficult situation he is having or he tells me something not good that happened to him, how should I react to him? Give him chizuk that it's all for the good? Or to validate his pain and tell him I really feel for what you're going through?

ANSWER First identify with him in his pain, and after that strengthen his emunah that everything that happens is all for the good.

QUESTION 20) Is it correct to say that the purpose of why we all came onto the world is to reveal the honor of Heaven?

ANSWER The purpose is the complete revelation of Hashem on the world, and part of it is to reveal the honor of Heaven.

QUESTION 21) How can we make Shabbos more elevated and to utilize it properly?

ANSWER To become intrinsically connected with what Shabbos is. It is recommended to learn sefer Shabbos Malkesa and sefer Daas Shabbos.

QUESTION 22) Is it okay to use Otzar HaChochmah even if it's not connected to Internet, or should a person avoid this?

ANSWER It is permitted, but it is better to use it only when necessary, and that is especially true for younger bochurim.

QUESTION 23) The Mesillas Yesharim (231:2) quotes the practice of pious people who, before they would eat, they would say “I am going to eat in order to be healthy and strong to serve Hashem.” Should a person say this even if that’s not his intention?

ANSWER He should be aware that this is only partially his intention, and he should be aware that he has other intentions too when he eats. Then he should say that he is eating now to serve Hashem better, with intention that he wants this motivation to increase.

QUESTION 24) How can a person serve Hashem all the time with excitement?

ANSWER Most people do not have to serve Hashem with excitement all the time. A person usually needs to go back and forth, ratzu v’shov, between serving Hashem with excitement and serving Hashem calmly, in a cycle.

QUESTION 25) How can a person have both a love and fear of Hashem? If I love Hashem and I know that He loves me too, how can I be afraid of Him at the same time, if loving and fearing Him are a contradiction?

ANSWER It is like when a father loves his child, but he also has to punish sometimes. That is the attitude to have towards fear of punishment.

QUESTION 26) How can we firmly establish a feeling of loving Hashem on a constant basis?

ANSWER You may refer to the series of Maarrachot B’Ahavas Hashem.

QUESTION 27) When reviewing what I learn, what is the balance of how much to spend on first learning it and how much to spend on reviewing it?

ANSWER About an hour a day should be spent on reviewing what one learned, and one should also review during Bein HaZemanim, Erev Shabbos, and Shabbos.

QUESTION 28) The Shelah HaKadosh says that on Shabbos one should taste good food, does this mean to taste each of the foods on the Shabbos table or to just at a little more than the rest of the week?

ANSWER He should act according to his physical and emotional needs.

QUESTION 29) When a person sets aside time for hisbodedus, should he be davening for what he needs or should he be thanking Hashem for what he has? And does a person need to be totally alone when he does hisbodedus or can he do it around people?

ANSWER During hisbodedus a person should first thank Hashem for the past and then he should yell to Hashem about what he needs. It is possible to do hisbodedus when one is among others, but only if it is not recognizable to others and he is paying attention to others.

QUESTION 30) How can a person be very focused when he is learning and not get carried away in his mind about thinking about other things?

ANSWER He should stop trying to pressure himself to shut his mind out from everything. When his mind does wander, he should immediately return his thoughts again to what he was in middle of learning, and he not should think about the fact that he spaced out again.

ANSWER 31) I didn't understand what the Rav said that before a person is about to start learning Gemara, he should think that he wants to connect his mind and heart to the true level of Torah. What is the true level of Torah?

ANSWER See Nefesh HaChaim shaar 4.

QUESTION 32) When others come to me to ask me questions while I'm learning, do I only need to answer them if I can easily return to my learning and not lose out on my own learning?

ANSWER Only if you can easily return to an inner calmness, to your personal share, and to your connection to Torah and to Hashem.

QUESTION 33) When a person makes a siyum on a Masechta he finished, does he need to make a Siyum publicly or can he do it alone? I'm shy to do things in public.

ANSWER Once every so often, make a Siyum publicly.

QUESTION 34) What are the "12 ways of serving Hashem"?

ANSWER That is a very expansive topic! Refer to the series of Rosh Chodesh (Avodah, Essence, Mazal, Tribe).

QUESTION 35) For a week, I practiced the avodah of thinking about how there is a Creator and there are His creations, after every half hour interval of the day. I felt how it was a really amazing kind of thought, but suddenly after the week was over I couldn't remember it anymore, and even when I reminded myself of it, it felt dry and superficial. How can I make such thinking more exciting?

ANSWER Besides for that half-hour a day of daily contemplation, you also need to set aside daily time every day to talk Hashem simply and from the depth of your heart. Throughout the day as well, speak to Hashem mentally, and thanking Him and davening to Him, etc.

QUESTION 36) How can I feel like I'm standing in front of Hashem throughout all of Shemoneh Esrei? I can only think of it for half a minute and after that my mind wanders. And, how can I become more connected to davening?

ANSWER For now, this is enough, because if you try to grab too much you will only gain very little.

QUESTION 37) Is the Rav taking a certain path in avodas Hashem or is the Rav combining all the different paths together into one path? (And if it's all a certain path in avodas Hashem, why did the Rav choose this particular path?)

ANSWER A combination of paths, which reveals a fundamental, root path.

QUESTION 38) Can a person be at peace with all of the ways of serving Hashem and take all of them? Or does each individual need to choose particular path in avodas Hashem that suits him?

ANSWER Each individual needs to choose the particular path in avodas Hashem that suits him.

QUESTION 39) What is the proper way to go about going to an Oneg Shabbos? How can a person know if he grew more in his ruchniyus from an Oneg Shabbos? How can a person know before he goes if he will grow from it or if he is just wasting him time going?

ANSWER Don't examine every time. Instead, when Shabbos is over, try to discern if you grew or didn't grow, from the Oneg Shabbos.

Women & Learning Agadta

Do women have a better understanding at matters of agadta, mussar, machshavah and Chassidus, which is the "heart" part of Torah? Or are women always inferior when it comes to their understanding in Torah and therefore they don't properly understand Torah, whether regular Gemara or agadta? (And it's just that they have a better understanding of soul matters and their internal world)?

ANSWER Anything that requires "heart understanding" requires expanded consciousness called Ima, and anything which requires feelings of the heart is called Tevunah [both which can be understood by women].

What Does The Rav Do To Calm Down?

Does the Rav ever make use of any external methods in order to attain calmness and be in a more meditative state? Does the Rav ever listen to music or songs in order to become calm, and if yes, what type of music or songs does the Rav listen to? Does the Rav eat certain kinds of food or drink hot coffee in order to get calm?

ANSWER This is a difficult question to answer. You are asking about methods to serve Hashem “from below to above”, by calming down and awakening the soul. However, I mainly do not make use of these methods, because I prefer to go “from above to below.”

I use music in order to calm my mind and body, such as by listening to the old, classical songs of Chabad. I also take hot coffee and the like in order to calm down the basic emotional needs of the soul, and to relax the body in general. Any of the other external methods which I also make use of are mentioned at length in Da Es Nishmatecha (Torah Way To Enlightenment) and also in the Hisbodedus (Inner Silence) series. These methods are not my actual way of serving Hashem, they are just external advice that I use every so often when I feel the need for it – mainly to attain calmness.

Nigleh Vs. Nistar

When there is a machlokes (dispute) between the pshat (the surface level of Torah, or nigleh) and the sod (the secret level of Torah, or nistar) of a matter, how do we understand such arguments? Are they arguing about what the facts are?

ANSWER The Vilna Gaon said that there is never an argument between pshat (nigleh) and sod (nistar). If it seems to a person that there is a machlokes between the pshat and the sod of the matter, either the person doesn't understand the pshat or he doesn't understand the sod.

Fusion of Chassidus Into The Litvish Path

The Rav often quotes Chassidic concepts, especially concepts that are sourced in the words of Rebbi Nachman of Bresslov and other Chassidic giants. However I've seen the words of the Steipler, as well as his son Rav Chaim Kanievsky, as well as Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul, who were very against bochurim in the Litvishe world who became 'caught by the trap' of Chassidus, and they were especially against Bresslov, which the

Litvishe world shunned entirely. How are we to understand this? [Why is the Rav fusing Chassidus into the Litvishe path]? And according to Chassidus, the concept of connecting to a tzaddik is one of the fundamentals of serving Hashem, but the academic and intellectual world (especially the Litvishe world) totally disregards this concept as being entirely unimportant. What is the truth? How can either of these two extremes (Chassidus versus the Litvishe path) both be right?

ANSWER

There are many ways in serving Hashem, and all of them are true. In my upbringing, in the beginning of my years when I began to mature, I learned in Yeshivas Pachad Yitzchok, by my teacher, the Gaon Rebbe Yonasan David, shlit”a. From him, I received an inner way of looking at the Torah. This beis midrash (Pachad Yitzchok) was founded by Rav Yitzchok Hutner zt”l, who said on himself, “To the Litvish, I am too Chassidish, and to the Chassidish, I am too Litvish.” It was there in that place (Pachad Yitzchok) where an atmosphere of pnimiyus took hold, where all parts of Torah are gathered together and fused together, though it was not always openly recognizable there.

After that, I received from the Rosh Yeshivah [of Ponovezh], HaGaon Rav Gershon Edelstein shlit”a, and I spoke with him at length about general topics, as well as this topic in particular [fusing Chassidus into the Litvish way of serving Hashem]. I asked him: When teaching many others, should I fuse Chassidus into what I am teaching? He answered me, “I already received certain concepts from Rav Dessler zt”l, and you can see that Rav Dessler often quotes Chassidic concepts, in sefer Michtav M’Eliyahu.” He also said to me, “Do not be fazed by people who will oppose you because of this.”

Rising To Higher Worlds During Davening

Each part of davening corresponds to one of the four realms (Asiyah, Yetzirah, Beriah and Atzilus). What does that mean? Does that mean we are found on any of those

realms during certain parts of davening? How do we connect ourselves with the four worlds as we daven?

ANSWER Asiyah is action, Yetzirah is middos, Beriah is mochin (mind) and Atzilus is d'veykus. If one is worthy, he connects to every level and actually ascends to the higher worlds, in his davening. All of these ascensions to higher worlds are in the depths of the soul – in one's middos (emotions) and thoughts.

The Rav's Answers

When the Rav answers people's questions is it a general answer for everyone or it a specific answer to the one asking it? It seems that the answer to a question depends on who is asking it, because sometimes we need to know who is asking the question or at least feel out his personality and then answer accordingly. Or maybe the Rav's answers are always universal?

ANSWER

The answer to any question is subject to change, depending on the place where it's being written, the time in which it is being written, the shift of emotions/thoughts within the soul, and also it depends on the one asking the question. Therefore, while all of the answers are in the category of Torah, chochmah, they are not a ruling as to what to do practically. That is why sometimes the same question can get different answers.

Struggling With Learning

I am a baal teshuvah and recently moved to Eretz Yisrael. I love to learn hashfakah and mussar and am very into self-awareness and learning about the nefesh and about pnimiyus etc. But I struggle with learning Gemara. Every time I learn, it's a struggle...any advice to help me?

ANSWER

You are praiseworthy for being zocheh to come to learn Torah in Eretz Yisrael. It is important that your basis should be learning Gemara b'iyun (in-depth) according to your level, and to go from sugya to sugya. And write down your summaries and conclusions of each sugya. Also have fixed times every day for learning bekiyus (simplistic learning) so that you can learn and know perek after perek, and Masechta after Masechta. You can still be involved with developing your inner world of pnimiyus but it must be balanced with learning Gemara, and when it comes to learning these matters you should also write down your summaries and conclusions, on each topic you learn. Be strong, be strong, rise and succeed! Blessed are you in coming here!

Lomdus Vs. Pilpul

What's lomdus, what's pilpul, and how are they different?

ANSWER

Pilpul is to combine together the branches [of the sugya] and to differentiate between them. Lomdus – true lomdus, that is – is to get to the root of a matter, and from there one can build all the branches. Whereas pilpul sharpens the mind and puts together information, lomdus (true lomdus) enables one to get to the root of the matter.

Kabbalah & Chassidus

I have seen the Rav's responses about the order learning pnimiyus haTorah (Kaballah) according to the paths of the Gra and Ramchal and Arizal. When it comes to my learning I enjoy learning Gemara and halachah in-depth, but when it comes to my avodas Hashem I am more drawn towards the path of Chassidus. What is the way to start learning Kaballah according to the path of Chassidus? And at what point should I start learning Kaballah according to the Ramchal and Gra?

ANSWER

1) There is basically no organized Kaballah sefer according to the path of Chassidus. It is important to see the sefarim of R' Aharon of Strotchele, the student of the Baal HaTanya, who authored the sefer Shaarei HaYichud V'Ha'Emunah. Recently a sefer called Shaarei Hishtalshelus came out which organizes and explains it all very well. 2) Chassidus also makes partial use of the Ramchal's teachings, and you can see this in the teachings of the Magid of Metzritch (sefer Toras HaMagid). But some sefarim of Chassidus did not agree to the Ramchal's approach and did not include it in their paths, such as the sefarim of the Kamarner and Ziditchov. To my feeble knowledge, it would be proper to begin learning Kaballah according to the Ramchal and Gra, and only afterwards to begin Kaballah according to Chassidus, because Chassidus is the "addition" upon those previous paths.

Gehinnom Inmates & Mashiach's Arrival

When Mashiach's arrival "illuminates all of the worlds", will those being judged in Gehinnom also partake of it?

ANSWER

Yes, each person on his own level.

The End Approaching

1) In a recent booklet from the late Rav of Tehillos Yisrael, HaTzaddik Rav Aharon Tzvi Rumpler zt"l said (a few weeks before he was niftar, which was shortly before the coronavirus began), "From the year 5760 until 5780, it is already 20 years that have passed [since 5760, which the *Leshem* said is the final time that the *Geulah* can come, which the *Leshem* explains can really extend for another 20-30 years after that as the time for the *Geulah*], and I can't fathom that things can continue like this anymore for even another year, 2 years, or 3 years. But the preparations for the complete *Geulah* have certainly begun." These words were said on Hoshana Rabbah 5780, a

few weeks before he passed away and shortly before corona began. The question is: According to Rav Rampler's words, 2 years have already passed, so there can only be 1 year left in which Mashiach has to come in his preordained time of arrival. Does that have to be the case? Or can Mashiach be prevented from coming *chas v'shalom* even after this year, and then *chas v'shalom* there may be a situation of the dreaded curse of *chaimah shefuchah* ("outpouring of wrath" which can supersede any of the previous troubling times), *chas v'shalom*?

ANSWER

From the year 5780 and onward, a *his-porerus* (crumbling) of the world has begun. The root of this is because Chazal said that the world will be for 6000 years followed by *chad charuv* (lit. 1000 years of destruction), of being destroyed, and since we are very close to the time of *chad charuv*, the world is already beginning to be destroyed. This is because we are past the cosmic "9th hour" of Erev Shabbos and close to the time period of "*plag minchah*", and that is why everything is beginning to crumble. Any sensible person can see that more and more things are falling apart and being destroyed.

It is known that when many tzaddikim saw the Geulah before they were niftar, they were really seeing their own personal Geulah but they thought that they were seeing the collective Geulah. We are awaiting Mashiach's arrival every day and we should not be making any calculations about when he's coming!!

QUESTION

2) Now that all the possible times for Mashiach's arrival have already passed (as Rava said in the Gemara *Sanhedrin 97b*, "All the ends have already finished"), is it permissible to think about what will be in the end and to talk to others about this? Shouldn't we at least be telling people that Mashiach is coming soon and therefore we need to be prepared for his arrival and do teshuvah? (Maybe a message such as "Mashiach is coming so soon! Maybe this week, maybe tomorrow, maybe today! Do

you want to remain with your smartphone and still have your Internet connection when Mashiach shows up??”).

ANSWER

A person has to search for the truth and keep to it simply because it is the truth, and this has nothing to do with Mashiach coming soon or not. Sometimes a person can use the fact that Mashiach is coming soon as an incentive of believing that he might be coming today, but a person cannot build base his entire perspective on this. Rather, we must simply await for his coming every day.

QUESTION

3) The Rav has said in several responses that we should not be thinking of when Mashiach can be coming. But what I don't understand is, don't we need to know what he is coming so that we can properly prepare for his arrival? So that we can prepare personally and collectively? If we would know that Mashiach has to come by a certain time this year on a certain date, then all of Klal Yisrael would be motivated to prepare for Mashiach and to stop living superficially. It's true that that we need to await Mashiach every day, but don't we see that people aren't truly awaiting his arrival as much as they should be? If we would know the time when Mashiach is coming then it would be so much more likely and easier for everyone to do teshuvah in order to greet Mashiach properly!

ANSWER

HaKadosh Baruch Hu doesn't want us to know when Mashiach is coming. Instead, *“Suddenly the master will come to his sanctuary.”*

Shema – Ain Od Milvado

The sefer Sheairis Yisrael says that during davening up until Shema and Shemoneh Esrei, a person should feel connected to a tzaddik. Why shouldn't a person feel connected to a tzaddik by Shema and Shemoneh Esrei?

ANSWER It is because during the recitation of Shema Yisrael, it is the time of yichuda illah (unifying Hashem above in the spiritual realm) which is the mode of Ain Od Milvado, in which there is nothing besides for Hashem, and therefore during Shema there is no concept of connecting to a tzaddik, only to Hashem alone.

Significance of Mikveh & Learning Zohar

What is the importance of going to the mikveh even for a Litvisheh avreich? Does even a Litvish person also need to go to the mikveh, and if yes, how often? How important is this? Also, does learning Zohar also apply to a Litvish avreich, and if yes, how often?

ANSWER

There is never one way in avodas Hashem, there are many ways. Some of those ways held that going to the mikveh is one of the most important aspects of serving Hashem. The Mesillas Yesharim (ch.18) mentions the practice of those who would “immerse in the frost and snow [to use it as a freezing cold mikveh], which was needed for those doing teshuvah and partially needed for those who wish to practice abstinence, but Chassidus (piety) is not founded on this at all, for only good conduct can be attributed as Chassidus.”

Whenever a person needs to purify his body for Tevilas Ezra reasons [whenever he becomes obligated to immerse due to any of the situations that obligate Tevilas Ezra], it is certainly proper for him to immerse in the mikveh. One should also immerse in the Mikveh on Erev Shabbos and Erev Yom Tov, which is simple to understand. Besides for that, one should try not to go by 3 days without having gone to the mikveh. And when one immerses in the mikveh, he should be doing teshuvah from the depth of his heart.

Regarding learning Zohar, the Chazon Ish said that the mussar sefer which inspires him the most is the sefer Zohar. It is proper to learn the Zohar with the commentary of Matok M'Devash.

What Is The Heart?

1) What is the “heart”? 2) Where can I learn about the “70 soul faculties”?

ANSWER

(1) The heart is the product of the extension of Binah. The Binah faculty of the mind extends into the body, where it becomes a new creation: the heart. This is explained by the Arizal. The concept of the heart is hakarah (recognizing), and a more external level of the heart is hargashah (feelings), and the most external level of the heart is hispaalus (reactiveness). You may learn about this in the series “Getting To Know Your Heart”. Refer to the Arizal’s words in Eitz Chaim, shaar 31:4.

(2) Refer to the series “Getting To Know Your 70 Soul Faculties” and also the sefer Shivim Kochos HaNefesh L’Gra by Rav Greenwald zt”l who was a student of the Steipler zt”l, which explains the 70 soul faculties listed by the Gra.



Questions in all spheres of life in general
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