

BILVAVI

**MY
HEART
ASKS**

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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ADVICE TO STRENGTHEN TORAH LEARNING

What is the advice on how one can learn Torah during a time where he feels like he's in the dark, when he isn't understanding his learning and he doesn't feel connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu? I know that the Sages state that "*Mitzvos* are not given for the purpose of gaining enjoyment", and that a person has a responsibility to perform the *mitzvos* [regardless of how he feels]. But how can a person strengthen his Torah learning and have exertion in it, and to learn *lishmah* [for the sake of Torah learning], during a time when he feels a general sense of darkness?

ANSWER

It mainly depends on the approach that one has towards the *mitzvah* of Torah learning, from the start. A person has the abilities of thinking and emotion (intellect and heart), which he uses to connect to information. Whenever a person wants to connect to something, the connection must come from the appropriate source. The *mitzvah* of Torah study is about learning the wisdom of Hashem. At first when a person learn Torah, a person does not connect to the Torah through his heart. Rather, one first connects to Torah using his intellect. One simply connects intellectually to Hashem's wisdom. Certainly one also gains a true connection to HaKadosh Baruch Hu through Torah learning, for "Hashem and His wisdom are one", but when one begins learning Torah, he does not begin his connection to HaKadosh Baruch Hu from his feelings and heart. When a person merits to connect to the Torah through his intellect, by developing an intellectual desire to know the wisdom of the Torah, for Hashem's deep wisdom, only after that can one also merit a "heart" connection [to HaKadosh Baruch Hu through learning Torah].

Thus, at first when one begins to learn Torah, he must intellectually connect with the words of Torah, and it is not the appropriate time yet to become involved with feelings of closeness with Hashem.

If a person first approaches his Torah learning by using his heart and emotions, it will not be a proper connection to Torah. It will also cause his intellect to be subservient

to his heart. What will happen? At a time when his heart is opened to the spiritual and he feels the light of Hashem and he feels a connection to Him, his intellect will be working properly, but when his heart is not opened, his intellect will also be weakened, and it will be difficult for him to understand his learning. This is all because he is taking an “emotional” approach to Torah learning, which should have been preceded instead with an intellectual connection, not an emotional connection.

In contrast to the above, when a person has gained an intellectual connection for the actual words of the Torah, and his intellect desires Torah, his thinking will naturally work better, and he will be able to be stronger in his Torah learning and have exertion in it, even when his heart isn't opened. Furthermore, a person who has such a connection to Torah learning will merit that which is described in famous words of *sefer Eglei Tal*, “The main *mitzvah* of Torah study is to be joyous, happy, and blissful in one's Torah learning. Then one's Torah learning will be absorbed in his blood, and after he enjoys the words of Torah he becomes attached to the Torah. This is not a problem of “Mitzvos were not given for benefit.”

Clearly, even when a person has gained an intellectual connection to the Torah, there will be times when his thinking is clearer, and times when his thinking is not as clear. However, those times of unclear thinking will be a lot less. The actual loss of the clear thinking will also be on a far lesser level than a person who doesn't have an intellectual connection with Torah learning. When a person has gained an intellectual connection to Torah learning, his Torah learning will be much more consistent, because his intellect has become more stable and settled. This is in contrast to emotions, which are always changing.

During a time when one inevitably loses some clarity in his thinking, he should learn Torah on his current level. Sometimes a person needs to learn slower, and to make sure he understands each step of the Gemara, before proceeding to the next step. One can also write down the steps of the Gemara or whatever he's learning about, and organize the material he's learning in writing. This will require patience on his part. The more a person gains awareness to himself and of the changes to his state, the

better he will understand how he can align his efforts in Torah study based on his current level and capabilities, and in turn, he can gain more patience towards himself. There are also situations where a person may need to learn “easier” material than what he is used to learning.

All of these factors will vary, depending on one’s current situation, and depending on who the person is. Therefore, whenever one implements any of this advice, it should first be carefully weighed and considered by the person to see if he should use this advice or not, so that it isn’t coming from a desire to just [‘take it easy’ and] be lazy, and so that this shouldn’t lead to any slackening off from Torah study, *chas v’shalom*.

To summarize, the advice here is that a person needs to establish the proper approach towards learning Torah in general. That is how a person can merit to exert himself in Torah study and reveal his unique part in Torah, with the help of Hashem.

This path of connecting to one’s Torah learning is not a short one. Many ups and downs will come along the way, just as with everything else that is inner and true, which a person is trying to acquire. But if one tries hard and he davens to Hashem for help, without giving up, of him it is said, “If one says “I tried and I found”, believe him.”

[For additional resources on the topic of “connection” and “*lishmah*” in Torah learning, refer to the *shiurim* on *Nefesh HaChaim shaar IV*, on the beginning chapters of *Nefesh HaChaim: Gate IV*, Chapter 2].

LEARNING SHELO LISHMAH

When is it prohibited to learn Torah shelo lishmah? Aren’t we all learning shelo lishmah...? And how can a person work on lishmah and eliminate shelo lishmah?

ANSWER

Tosafos says that it is only forbidden to learn shelo lishmah when one learns in order to be mekanter, when he learns in order to challenge others and prove them wrong.

But there is no problem with learning for kavod (honor), and we rely on this view of Tosafos on a practical level. But in each thing we do, we should try to do one small degree of it with a bit of lishmah, and we should also have an aspiration to minimize our shelo lishmah and increase our lishmah.

LEARNING P'SHAT

How can I enjoy learning pshat when I'm not that drawn to learning pshat? I would rather be learning other areas of the Torah, such as derush and sod.

ANSWER

You need to be able to enjoy the intellect of the Torah, and to enjoy the clarity of just knowing the Torah's information and thinking. And that is besides for connecting to the Torah on a level that goes beyond reason and logical understanding.

HOW TO APPROACH ARGUMENTS IN CHAZAL

1) Whenever there is a *machlokes* (difference of views) between the Gemara and the Midrashim, do we need to come up with an approach of how there's not really a *machlokes*?

ANSWER

First understand the *machlokes* clearly, and then see how both views are correct (“*their words and their words are the words of the living G-d*”).

QUESTION

2) What does it mean that “Their words and their words are the words of the living G-d”, that both views in every argument of our Sages is always correct – does it mean that even though they argue, they are both right and both views are true, or does it mean that there's really no argument because we can always unify all the views together and see how it is not really an argument (for example, we can say that one

sage is coming from a lower view while another sage is coming from a higher view, or that each of them are coming from the view of different *Sefiros/Partzufin*)?

ANSWER

Below on this world, we need to believe that all the views of the Sages are truth. But we also need to go above and see a higher perspective, in which we unify all the views together. In that higher view, machlokes is not a divisive argument, but a *chalukah*, a share, where each sage is stating his view based on his personal portion and according to his personal root.

AVOIDING EGOTISM WHILE LEARNING TORAH

When learning *b'iyun* (in-depth), how can a person be saved from the natural feelings of conceitedness, learning in order to prove the other wrong, the feelings of competition, anger and impatience, and forgetting Hashem while learning (all of these problems I find are very common when I learn with in-depth analysis and when I'm trying to sharpen the mind).

ANSWER

Stay connected to the essence of the words of the Torah you are learning, and don't let your mind veer from the actual words of Torah you are learning.

TRANSITIONING FROM KOLEL TO THE WORKPLACE

1. I am a *kolel avreich* who spends most of the day learning Torah. Recently I gave a loan to a friend, using a *hester iska*, but he lost more money since then and he cannot pay me back right now. In the meantime I have had to pay the banks a lot of money. I have 5 children, *Baruch Hashem*, and my wife works, but her income is not enough to cover the expenses. I have always heard from my *Rebbeim* that a *kolel avreich* “eats from the *manna*”, and the truth is that I have seen much *siyata d'shmaya*. The question

is, what is my obligation of *hishtadlus* (effort) right now – do I need to go out to work, or should I just have *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem and *daven*?

2. How can I know what Hashem wants from me, and why these debts have incurred on me?

ANSWER

1. Some people have a soul that is rooted in the realm of “*asiyah*”, “action”, and therefore the very nature of their souls are drawn towards “action” – in particular, the “actions” which people need to do within this “world of action”. This is called *asiyah d’asiyah*, “action within action”. For those people, it is proper to engage in a profession which utilizes a physical talent that they have, according to whatever talent Hashem has graced one with. One needs to choose a livelihood that is as close as possible to *kedushah* (holiness). Others’ souls are rooted in *yetzirah d’asiyah*, “formation within action”, and their main talent lies in artistry, craftsmanship, and the like. Others have souls that are rooted in *beriah d’asiyah*, “creation/thinking within action”, and they excel mainly in areas of logical calculation. Others have souls that are rooted in *atzilus d’asiyah* “closeness/bonding within action”, and their main talent is in creativity, ideas.

In contrast to the above categories of souls (who are all rooted in *asiyah*\action and who need to engage in a profession, by their very soul root) are those whose souls have a more “inner” root [i.e. they may have a soul that is rooted in either *yetzirah*, *beriah*, or *atzilus*]. For them, it is appropriate to spend the main part of their life on developing their inner world.

That has always been the case, throughout the generations. However, in the current generation, which is unbridled in its breakdown of boundaries, going out to work opens a person to the world on the outside, and it is dangerous to one’s *ruchniyus* (spiritual development). Therefore, in today’s times, going out into the world to earn a profession is no longer a simple matter as it used to be, and it needs to be very carefully thought about beforehand. There are people who do not have conviction to

learn Torah all day, but if they go out to work, they are being exposed to the outside world and with no Torah learning to protect them spiritually. They are in spiritual danger, when they go out to work. On the other hand, if they stay in the *beis midrash* all day and they aren't learning, they are simply bored, and the Sages state that "boredom leads to insanity". Therefore, every case requires much thinking beforehand, and great *siyata d'shmaya*, in order for one to know if he should go to work, and what kind of profession it should be, and how, and all the other details involved. And a person will always need to daven earnestly, from the depth of the heart, in order to decide properly. He will also need to daven each day to be saved from all of the inappropriate sights and influences which are in all of the workplaces today.

It is clear that most people who have gone out to work in the last decade did not do so with enough thinking beforehand, and this has caused spiritual destruction to come upon the generation. There were people who went out to work and they didn't really need to, and the kinds of jobs which they chose were inappropriate for them, totally unbecoming for a person who is part of the Torah world. Because of this, the generation has become desolate and spiritually destroyed, through the outside world that has mixed into the once sheltered Torah world. It is the realization of the statement of the Sages, "There is no day that isn't more cursed than the day before it", because people who were once part of the Torah world are going to out to work in all kinds of unsuitable professions, and are thereby uprooted, *Rachmana Litzlan*, from all inner holiness. In addition to this, there is also the problem of men and women mixed together in the workplace. May Hashem redeem us all from this.

There are also souls who have a higher root than *asiyah* (action), and they may also need to work for income. Sometimes, going to work for them is a result of the exile, which places the soul in exile, in a place where it doesn't want to be. However, this matter is determined according to one's personal level of *bitachon* (trust in Hashem). Therefore, in each case, the following factors must be considered: what is the general situation of income for one's family, and what level of *bitachon* is the person on? After carefully weighing these two factors together, one can then decide what he needs to

do. A person is able to act a little above his current level of *bitachon* (and have a little bit more *bitachon* than he has right now), but not beyond that level. A person always needs to do a little bit of *hishtadlus* (effort), and to greatly strengthen his *bitachon*, acting a bit above his current level of *bitachon*. A soul which is more sensitive to the spiritual will be able to feel how it is easier to work on *bitachon*, than to have to work hard in order to make a living.

2. One should reflect on his personal weaknesses and then write them down. After that, one should think of the easiest weakness to work on, and then he should begin to repair it.

MY SON IS NOT MOTIVATED

My son works. He lives with us in our home, which Hashem has blessed us with sons and daughters. He is lazy. He sleeps until 9 in the morning and goes late to minyan. He's not interested in learning Torah. What can I do about this?

ANSWER

In order to influence another, there are several factors.

1. Pray for him from the depths of the heart, and with tears.
2. Through a genuine love for him, that you are out for his good.
3. Help him recognize that you are only interested in what's good for him.
4. Understand that he has *bechirah* (free will) and that no one else can choose for him.
5. Express the joy we can feel when we sense G-dly truth.
6. Have much deliberation and patience with him, and rejoice through the suffering, and rejoice whenever there is any progress.

Right now, the main avodah is the personal growth of the parents. The growth will be an inner process which causes meaningful, long-lasting change – in addition to all that was mentioned above.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT HASHEM WANTS FROM ME

We know that after we do anything, we can say that it was all from Hashem and it was all for the good. But how do we know before we are about to do something if Hashem wants us to do it or not, when we still have the bechirah (free will) to choose what we want to do? For example if we're not sure if we need to buy a certain car or not, or if we're not sure which direction to take when we are driving, how can we know what Hashem wants us to do?

ANSWER

It is impossible for you to say exactly what Hashem wants from you, unless it was revealed to the person from Shomayim. The right attitude to have, however, is to remove any personal *negios* (self-serving motivations), which reveals the ratzon Hashem in its place. This is said by the Ramban and it is also brought in sefer Toldos Yaakov Yosef.

INTOLERANCE TO THE SLIGHTEST CRITICISM

I am a 21-year old bochur and I feel like I'm choking – having gone through so many years of enduring my life. From a young age I was sensitive and anxious. I could be happy until the sky's limit but I could also have long bouts of sadness. I also got excited when I saw people who have bitachon, and I tried to copy them. From a young age, the way I solved my issues was by running away and leaving behind any place where I couldn't stand. I felt a lot of sibling rivalry towards my brother if he was chosen instead of me for something. Whenever I was criticized with words like "You're weird" or "You're annoying", I felt broken and I would cry. I felt like I was nothing and that I had no value. I am afraid of getting married because I don't want

my spouse to lower my self-esteem even more with criticism. I can't take criticism. I'm afraid I will get a 'dominating' wife who will be too critical of me and break me. My father was abusive and he forced the Torah on me. In yeshiva I got beat up a lot and insulted by other kids. I feel like I'm always cold, it's my personality, and I don't easily smile. It's difficult for me to see people who are apathetic and I, too, have grown very critical of others, and I have difficulty accepting others when I find fault with other.

For example, when I find people who are apathetic and not spiritual enough, or when people tell me to do something, I become afraid and I feel insulted and angry. I've lost my taste for life, I feel like my feelings are gone. I can't take my vicious cycle anymore. I want to stop being so critical of the reality around me, I want to stop getting insulted over every small word that people say to me.

But mainly I feel so hurt that Hashem put me in this situation where I'm so easily insulted and hurt. I really try to be better and to overcome my yetzer hora and learn more Torah. Every time I get insulted from another, I feel hurt that Hashem put me in this situation where I'm so sensitive and easily hurt. I feel like I am totally moser nefesh for Hashem, through davening, Shabbos, learning and doing chessed. I wish I could stop getting hurt and insulted by others and that Hashem would protect me. I wish Hashem would give me more bitachon in Him and show me that He's with me in my pain. I wish Hashem would guide me on how to reach my tikkun so that I won't have to go through any more pain.

I would be happy if the Rav can help me understand what the root of my issues are, and if I'm too self-absorbed how I can love myself in a healthy way, and how I can still like myself even when others insult me....I've been broken too much. I feel so limited and so vulnerable and helpless. Anyone can come and just destroy me with a little blow. I can't free myself from these feelings, I am always getting insulted and hurt, and I feel totally helpless to do anything about it!

Save me, Rav, because I've tried more than once to find the root of my issues.

ANSWER

You are too connected to what you don't have. You are too focused on the shortcomings of others, on their criticism and on your shortcomings. And you can't take any more, so you can't tolerate when anyone else exposes any of your shortcomings and you are always very drawn to whatever you're missing or whatever's not right with you. The root of your tikkun is to become connected to all that is good and positive. Take a pen and paper and write down all of your good points. Then list them in order of priority. Then, connect to your good points, mainly your strongest point. Become aware of it and utilize it more often. Whenever you are faced with difficulty, make sure to "escape" to your strongest good point and focus on it. This is how you will build for yourself a "world that is entirely good", and with every difficulty you will have a good place in yourself to escape to: your best quality. There are steps that need to come after that too, but this is a "good" beginning!

FRIENDSHIP ISSUES

1) The Rav advised that if someone is suffering because others don't smile at him or greet him enough the way he would like, he should choose for himself 1 or 2 friends whom he can receive compliments and smiles from. But what about in a case where a person has a nature to become emotionally dependent on others in order to feel secure about himself, and he can very easily become a co-dependent on his friends, which will only cause him more pain and which will make his friends uncomfortable around him?

ANSWER

In such a case, he should slowly limit how much he seeks out warmth/compliments from others. He should seek his needs from others for one day, then the next day he should hold himself back from this, and then repeating this cycle.

QUESTION

2) Should he be open with his close friends and tell them that he has a nature to be dependent on others and that he really wants to overcome this issue, but in the meantime he needs friends and he needs a smile from others? Or is this not recommended?

ANSWER

This should only be confided with in one friend, and it would have to be someone who is very understanding and who also has a very good heart, and who is interested in the well-being of his friend and wants to help him. Otherwise, it will do more harm than benefit for him.

QUESTION

3) What should a person do if he feels a strong physical attraction towards his friend (and on the same gender in general) and he wants to overcome this issue, but he also needs a lot of warmth from others and he isn't able to separate himself from the emotional need for friends, because he doesn't want to live in a cold world, and he needs to be connected with others – in such a situation, should he choose 2 or 3 friends and speak to them about his issue, and ask them to fulfill his emotional needs (of giving him love, attention, warmth, etc.) even though he also struggles with strong feelings of male attraction?

ANSWER

If this will cause him to increase his lustful thoughts towards men, then “there is no advice and no understanding against Hashem”, and therefore his *avodah* is to separate from others.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT BY GOING TO OPPOSITE EXTREME

1) If a person grew up in a home where the element of “earth” was very dominant, and today he is also very much “earth” in everything he does (though not as extreme as it was when he was growing up), is it possible that his main element can really be a different element, and he’s only very “earth”-type because that’s what kind of atmosphere he grew up in the home with?

ANSWER

Yes. A person needs to clarify his soul, and this is explained in *sefer Hakarah Atzmis* (Self-Recognition) and in the 4 Elements series.

QUESTION

2) If a person knows that he became a certain way because of the way he grew up, how does he change this? Does he need to identify his personality better in order to change, or does he simply need to change the thinking patterns that he acquired from his environment?

ANSWER

The main way of repair is for one to identify himself better (to gain a better understanding of his unique personality). Changing one’s thinking patterns is also a necessary factor, but it is only a partial factor and it is not the main part of changing.

QUESTION

3) Also, if an “earth”-type person wants to fix his nature, does he need to go in the opposite extreme, as the Rambam says, that a person who has a bad *middah* needs to first take the opposite extreme in order to come to the middle road? I am aware that the Rav advises people to start with small changes and not with extreme changes, but the Rambam seems to say differently, that a person needs to start improving by going in the opposite extreme. So let’s say a person is very the “earth”-type, for example he

suffers a lot from low self-worth and lowers himself in the eyes of others, does he need to fix this by going in the opposite extreme [i.e. blowing up his sense of self-worth]?

ANSWER

3) Most people are not built for extreme changes. Firstly, that needs a lot of inner strength, and also, when people make extreme changes, for most people it causes them to be anxious and it is jolting to other parts of their souls. It can only work for people who are able who can remain very calm and who are already very clear about their souls. Practically speaking, in our generation, there is a path by which one makes extreme changes in order to improve, and this is the view of Novhardok. But most of Raboseinu (our teachers) did not take this path. Also, the Rambam doesn't say to make extreme changes all at once, the Rambam only says to gradually make changes and slowly get to the opposite extreme, and to afterwards slowly come back and get to the middle point.

THE POWER OF JEWISH CHILDREN

Why do Chazal say that entire world stands on the merit of the Torah learning of children? Children don't have daas and they are exempt from mitzvos, so what special joy does Hashem have from the Torah learning of children?

ANSWER

The Gemara (Shabbos 119b) says, “Do not touch my anointed ones” – This refers to the children of the Jewish people.” They are called “anointed ones”, Mashiach, from the word masiach, to converse casually. Children converse in Torah casually and earnestly, resembling a “wholesome man who sits in the tents”, the quality of *temimus*, wholeness.

Chazal also said that “The world stands on the vane chatter of Jewish children.” Rav Papa said to Abaye, “And what about our Torah learning?” Abaye replied, “Chatter that has sin in it does not compare to chatter that has no sin in it.” Thus, the quality

of children is that their chatter has no sin in it. R' Aharon Kotler (*Mishnas Rebbi Aharon III, 104*) says that although in the mitzvah of Torah learning children are inferior to adults, they are superior in the aspect of keeping up the world with their Torah learning. See also *Zohar (Bo 39a)* and *Zohar (Vayikra 17b)* that children hold up the world give might to the Jewish people in exile. The *Tikkunei HaZohar (21a)* says that because of the children, there is Shechinah in the Jewish people. Especially in the era preceding Mashiach, the main spiritual illuminations are due to the children, who, as mentioned before, are called “Mashiach”, my anointed ones. The *Zohar Chodosh (Beraishis 13a)* says that the generation before Mashiach will survive due to the chatter of children, and it is through children that harsh decrees are nullified. It is brought in *Shelah, Torah Ohr, 100*. However, the Netziv (*Heemek Dovor Tetzaveh 28:41*) says that the anointed ones, the children, have exalted souls. This seems to imply that their quality is not because of their speech, but because of what they are. Sod Yesharim I says that even the actions of a child are greater than the actions of an adult. The angel who teaches children is Metatron, the chief angel.

The root of children of the Jewish people is in the Torah, in the Aron, in the Keruvim who had the faces of children. The Keruvim, who had the faces of children, were above the Aron, hence the children of the Jewish people are on a level above the Luchos that were placed in the Aron, and that is why the world stands on Jewish children. Understand this very well.

UNANSWERED PRAYERS & BEYOND FRUSTRATED

I recently asked the Rav about my frustrations (Q&A 13833 – How Do I Get Close to Hashem) that I have because of all my unanswered *tefillos* for *ruchniyus* and in the lack of relationship that I feel with Hashem because I don't get anywhere with my *tefillos*, and the Rav answered me how the main point of life is to keep developing a relationship with Hashem. However, this answer only explains how all physical concerns and physical difficulties are really meant to uplift us closer to Hashem and not distance us from Him, how in spite of physical challenges or suffering we should still learn Torah with exertion and we get closer to Hashem. This is not really a

deficiency, though, because it's just temporary, more or less. I was asking about things that I'm missing in my *ruchniyus*.

It's certainly not a good thing that a person is far from Hashem and from the Torah. A person needs *ruchniyus* in order to live a true life. If a person doesn't understand his learning and is asking Hashem that he should understand his learning, or if he only understands his learning a little and he wants to understand it better, and his *tefillos* aren't being answered, it's certainly not a good thing. If he's asking Hashem for a chavrusa or for a Rav and he still doesn't have one no matter how much he davened for this, that means he doesn't have enough Torah in his life and then he will be distanced from Hashem, because it's only the Torah that purifies a person and he doesn't have it, so he remains in a bad situation. There's nothing worse than missing Torah in one's life, and if a person doesn't have enough Torah in his life no matter how much he davens for it, he's certainly missing something big and it's not a good thing for him to be in this situation, as we can see with what happens to people who don't learn. So it's doesn't make sense how Hashem doesn't answer all my *tefillos*. I am one of His children and asking Him for *siyata d'shmaya* - why am I not being answered? It's a strong question. Not only that, but Hashem Himself commands us to want this and He wants it more than His children want it, and He knows how much good will come from the Torah if His children are successful in it, especially in this generation where the only true way to be a *ben Torah* is to be in the *beis midrash* and learn Torah diligently amidst closeness to Hashem, and we can see simply how in this generation so many are sad because they don't have this, or they are sinking lower because of this deficiency, each person on his own level. Why does Hashem allow this to go on?

2) I am aware that when a person is missing something, this can be a catalyst for developing more of a relationship with Hashem, but if a person is missing something for a long time no matter how much he davens to get it, his connection to Hashem will weaken because he feels that he is far from Hashem because Hashem isn't answering him. Certainly every case is different and it depends on what a person is missing and how much he is davening for it, it depends on the person and on how

much he davened, but generally that is feeling, that a person will feel so far from Hashem when he isn't being answered no matter how much he davens.

3) Talking to Hashem throughout the day would make sense if it's a two-way street (so to speak) in the relationship with Hashem, but if one's relationship with Hashem feels like a one-way street, where a person just talks and talks to Hashem and nothing is happening from all of his tefillos, there's no relationship being created from this. The opposite happens, in fact. At first I used to daven so much to Hashem, but as time went on I stopped myself and thought, "Is anything really happening from all of this? What changed? Are my tefillos being accepted? Is Hashem speaking back to me? Maybe in previous generations this worked, and maybe there are a few special people in today's times who this works for, but not in today's times!" This is what it seems to be...

ANSWER

Even what we are missing in our ruchniyus is good for a person. It is through missing these things that one rises higher in the end, because it makes him yearn for even more ruchniyus. "More light comes from darkness." Light (success) comes from darkness (failures and difficulties), be it physical darkness or spiritual darkness (one's spiritual shortcomings). The light that comes after one's darkness is a much greater light than any light which isn't preceded by darkness. All of one's spiritual difficulties, which are a form of darkness, are the tools by which a person can receive a greater light, which he wouldn't have been able to receive had he not gone through the hard work of trying to remove his spiritual darkness.

Think well about these words, and then your perspective will change about your situation. It will be a truer perspective than the way you are seeing your situation of ruchniyus right now. It is upon you to gain this perspective of **יתרון אור מהחושך**, that more light comes precisely from darkness. In addition to that, the Ramchal writes in *Derech Hashem* and *Daas Tvunos* two general reasons why we need to undergo exertion and challenges in serving Hashem. (1) Because good cannot come to a person unless he first undergoes difficulty and tests – it doesn't come to him as a gift. (2) So

that it shouldn't feel like nahama d'kisufa, "bread of shame", meaning that if he doesn't work hard to succeed, he will feel ashamed, because a recipient feels embarrassed to take something from his giver when he doesn't deserve it at all. That is why hard work is needed in order to get anything good.

2) You feel like you have davened so long for the things you are asking for and that it's taking too much time, but that's all according to the way you understand it. Hashem has endless reasons, because He is called EinSof (Infinite), and according to His thinking which is infinite, the amount of tefillos that you need to spend on davening for something is the exact amount that you need to be putting it, nothing less and nothing more. You need to believe that this is all for your ultimate good. And Chazal taught that some tefillos are answered right away while other tefillos are answered at a later time. A tefillah may be answered 20 years later – and it's all for your good, even for the good of your ruchniyus.

3) The purpose of davening to Hashem personal tefillos is not mainly so that your tefillos will be accepted and answered. It is all a tool to create a relationship with Him. So the main thing is not to request of Hashem, "Give me this and give me that". Rather, the purpose is to speak with Him. Examples include thanking Him for what gave you, telling Him everything that is happening to you, and amidst that conversation with Him you can also include requests to Him. What is needed here is a change of perspective. Change you way you think about it – see it all from a different perspective, one which is far deeper.

FEELING SLUGGISH

What should a person do if he feels heavy and sluggish, if he feels like he is being weighed down by something which always causes him to feel physically sluggish ?

ANSWER Briefly, here are some practical points. (1) Train the body to get moving more, such as by walking. (2) Train yourself to walk quickly sometimes. (2) Train

yourself to practice jumping. Move your hands quickly sometimes, etc. Also, eat a lighter diet.

This is all true when it comes to physical sluggishness, but since there's stress in the soul that's causing it, one needs to figure out what's bothering him and causing him to feel more sluggish. Sometimes it is coming from laziness, and sometimes it is coming from being sad about something.

TOXIC CO-DEPENDENCY

A few years ago, I befriended a young teenage boy who looked a bit “at risk” and in need of counseling. He was falling in with the Internet and his *ruchniyus* (spiritual situation) was plummeting downhill. I felt sorry for him and began to look after him. I learned with him *b'chavrusa* (as a Torah learning partner) every day. The problem was that he began to feel like he depended on me, and at an alarming level. He would buy gifts for me. He would order hot meals to my house. And if I wouldn't answer his phone calls as soon as he called, he immediately said to me, “So you don't really love me. That's why you don't answer right away.” He would always ask me: “What does your wife think of me? What does she think of our friendship?” And he would greet my wife in the street and then tell me that he saw her and greeted her. Every movement I made and every word I said to him was immediately analyzed by him, to see if I “loved” him or not.

When I realized that this was getting too much for me, I became afraid of continuing my relationship with him, but then I immediately felt guilty for not saving his *ruchniyus*. Still, I began to slowly cut back on how much time I spent with him, and I would only learn with him a few times a week instead of every day.

His reaction to this was: “You don't really love me.” I explained to him that I simply couldn't learn with him every day anymore, and he would keep repeating to me “So you don't really love me.” Then I decided I had enough, so I stopped learning with him altogether. He went and told everyone that I betrayed him. People were calling me and telling me that I'm a *rasha* for abandoning him. He also caused a fight in my

family, by going over to one of my brother-in-laws and telling him that that I hated that particular brother-in-law.

I later moved to a different city, and had nothing to do with him for 3 years. Then I had to come back for some time, and he began to badmouth me again to everyone, telling people in shul and in my neighborhood how terrible I was. People told me that he was literally crying to them about me about the pain that I caused him for suddenly abandoning him. I attempted to form a light, casual relationship with him, but he still felt that I had betrayed him and he was not ready to form a close, comfortable relationship with me again.

That is the outline of the story, and I remain with 3 questions. (1) What is the source of being emotionally dependent on another? What is the spiritual source of it? (2) How can a person prevent another from becoming emotionally dependent on him? (3) What is my *avodah* as the one who gets pursued by others who form a dependency on me?

I should point out that in addition to this person, there are at least 9 different people who developed a dependency on me, some more and some less, but not nearly enough as the person in this story. I feel like there's something I need to fix, and to cut off any relationship that is made against my will, when I see that I don't have any other choice but to put an end to the relationship. Yet I also feel that if Hashem was the One who created the relationship between me and the other and it all came from Him, maybe there's a connection that's supposed to be made between my *neshamah* and the *neshamah* of the other who feels dependent on me, and perhaps it would be wrong for me to put an end to the relationship, in spite of all the issues it caused me.

I can really use the Rav's guidance on this matter, thanks.

ANSWER

(1) Sometimes this problem [being co-dependent others] comes from lack of self-confidence. Sometimes it is coming from the need to feel dependent on HaKadosh Baruch Hu being channeled in the wrong direction. (2) To prevent this problem from

occurring [in which another is feeding on you for emotional stability], you need to set forth clear boundaries from the start, and along with this you should seek to build the other person's soul, slowly building him up. (3) Set forth clear boundaries and also give the other the strength to build himself up. As a general note, create a situation of building the other person, as opposed to "helping" him.

MARRYING 2 WIVES

1) The Zohar says that before the soul comes down onto the world, it has a male half and a feminine half, and the two parts come together again through marriage, by the chuppah and kiddushin (betrothal). If so, why does the Torah permit a man to marry two wives? Which wife is the man's true half? 2) Also, was it completely ideal in the times of our Avos to marry two wives or was this a pressing circumstance or because they needed to beget children?

ANSWER

(1) A man has two halves – his upper half and his lower half. We see this by Yaakov, whose upper half was designated for Leah and whose lower half was designated for Rochel. This is a deep matter. (2) It was totally ideal for people in the times of the Avos to marry more than one wife.

WHEN SHOULD I STOP DAVENING FOR SOMETHING?

When a person *davens* for a certain thing, does he need to know at what point he should stop davening for it? If a person has been *davening* for a long time for something and he has not seen any change does Hashem want him to stop *davening* for it, or to keep *davening*?

ANSWER The main goal of our davening should not be about the results of our *tefillos*, but to use our problems and deficiencies as a way to build a relationship with Hashem [by *davening* about it]. That is why if a person feels that he's not getting

closer to Hashem by *davening* about a certain thing, he should stop *davening* about it so much and instead he should only *daven* about it every so often - only because we need to *daven* to fill what we are lacking in [and not making our relationship with Hashem dependent on our requests to Him to get answered].

QUESTION 2) When a person wants something from Hashem, does he need to keep davening about the thing that he wants? And if yes, then what is the way to do it? Should he be *davening* to Hashem about it throughout the day?

ANSWER Throughout the day, one should be *davening* for one particular request. As the day goes on, whenever a need for something arises, a person should *daven* about that particular need during the relevant time. And once a day, a person should *daven* for all of his personal requests.

CHARISMA

1) We daven a *tefillah* that we should “find *chein* (grace or charisma) in the eyes of Hashem and people”. What is the difference between seeking to find *chein* (to be found charismatic) with seeking *kavod* (honor)?

ANSWER

Kavod (honor) is given to a person based on the actions of others [who decide to honor him], whereas *chein* (charisma) is given to a person for free, and as a hint, *chein* is from the word *chinam* (free).

QUESTION

2) In terms of the 4 elements of the soul, where does *chein* (charisma) come from?

ANSWER

When a person finds *chein* by others due to the countenance on his face, such *chein* comes from the element of “fire”. When a person finds *chein* in the eyes of others due

to his charismatic body language, this comes from “air”. When a people feel pulled and attracted towards someone, such *chein* comes from the element of “water”. When people feel confident and reliant on someone, such *chein* comes from the element of “earth”, the element of stability.

QUESTION

3) What is a good way to make use of trying to find *chein*?

ANSWER

When one has the understanding that even if something or someone doesn't have *chein*, the thing or the person can still be good, because *chein* is merely an additional quality to have. *Chein* is like a *matnas chinam*, a free gift that can come only after one has received his due payment.

QUESTION

4) What is the opposite of *chein*?

ANSWER

Sefer Yetzirah says that the opposite of *chein* is *kiyur*, disgust.

FRIENDS WHO DON'T REMEMBER ME

Sometimes it will happen that I meet a friend whom I haven't seen in years, and we had a warm friendship that was a bit deep – just as with any friendship made in Yeshivah, in which we're connected together through Torah and avodah – and now, after having parted ways for several years, we meet again, and I go over to say hello – and the other doesn't even remember me. He barely remembers my name. He says “I'm sorry....but what's your name again?” This has happened more than once, and recently this even happened with a friend who came to my wedding, whom I hadn't seen in a while, and then when I met him and I greeted him warmly, he forgot who I

was! He didn't even know my name anymore! And he had been such a good friend of mine! On another occasion, a good friend of mine was talking to me and he suddenly asked me, "What yeshiva did you learn in again..." I was bewildered at how he could forget which yeshivah I learned in, if we were such close friends. I felt like maybe he just pretends to be my friend, because how can a good friend forget such a thing? And I also know of a Rosh Yeshivah who forgot his talmid's name even though he knew him and had been very close to him. There's a lot to say about each of the stories and they are each bringing up different points, but what I mainly want to know is:

(1) What causes this? Why does this happen? (2) How can I get over the hurt that I feel when an old friend of mine doesn't remember me or forgot my name, and this makes me feel like we were never friends in the first place? (3) Is this all a message to me that we live in a world of falsity and there is only one true connection we can have, which is our relationship with Hashem? If yes, then how should a person view his friends, especially those whom he had a deep connection with?

ANSWER

(1) Your relationships with others are a 'one-way-street'. You perceive relationships on a much deeper level than most people do – and that is why you are suffering so much for all of your life. You need to channel your need for deep connection towards having a deep relationship with Hashem and to Klal Yisrael. You should not make your life dependent on any certain person, because in most situations this only leads to disappointment in others. (2) In addition to the above, you need to change your perspective towards how you need to relate to others in general, not just how you relate to this individual person or that individual person. What is needed here is for you to change your perspective towards relationships entirely. (3) To save yourself from pain, there is external and internal work to do. On the external level, set certain boundaries to your relationships [only allow yourself to connect to another to a certain extent]. At the inner level, realize that all souls of the Jewish people are bound with each other completely. There are only rare instances where one remains deeply

connected to another person, but this is only a minority. Most relationships/friendships are not strong enough [to withstand the test of time]. Now, if your 2 closest friends in your life would have forgotten you, your feelings of abandonment would make more sense. But you are having the same reaction to those who weren't even of your closest friends, and therefore you need to change your approach, by placing boundaries on how much you allow yourself to deeply connect to others.

THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

1) *What does the soul see at the first moment it leaves the body?*

ANSWER

It depends on what the person's level is. If one is *zocheh*, he sees the light of the *Shechinah* and he melts into it, and then he leaves [the world]. If one is at a lower level, he sees his relatives or those whom he was close with, who come to greet him. There are others who see both [the light of the *Shechinah* and also their relatives/close friends].

QUESTION

2) *Is the soul afraid at death?*

ANSWER

Refer to the previous answer, regarding the soul's fear. However, that is only after the soul leaves the body. But before that, if one is not *zocheh*, he sees the Angel of Death wielding its sword, as the Gemara says. See sefer *Raishis Chochmah, shaar haYirah*, and *Maseches Chibut HaKever*.

QUESTION

3) *If a person sees himself as a soul (neshamah) even during this lifetime, will this ease the process for the soul at death?*

ANSWER

Yes, certainly. Part of the fear is because the soul is separating from the body, and therefore when one learns to identify himself as a soul already in his lifetimes, it makes the transition a lot easier.

QUESTION

4) *Is there anything the Rav can tell me to see all of this [the transition of the soul at death] in a way that's not frightening?*

ANSWER

Feel that you are with Hashem, constantly, at all times and in every place, and He is watching you, with His endless love.

QUESTION

5) *When the soul leaves the body, does it realize that it woke up from a dream, now that it has left the world and it is at the true kind of life?*

ANSWER

Yes. It is like what is written about the future, that when we return to Tziyon we will realize that during the exile “*Then, we were like dreamers.*” Life on This World is all a dream, compared to life in the Next World. As an aside, only think about these topics for a little bit of time during the day, but for the rest of the day,

LIVING WITH HASHEM – THE CHAYAH & YECHIDAH

How can a person feel that his entire source of *chiyus* (energy) comes from Hashem and that He is the source of all a person's life-giving energy? And how can a person live by this on a 24/7 basis?

ANSWER This is explained extensively in sefer “*Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*”, Part One. If we consider this more deeply, this level is really the *Chayah* level of the soul (the five levels of the soul, from lowest to highest, are: *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, and Yechidah*). And even more so, the source of all energy - the source of the *Chayah* level of the soul – is in the *Yechidah* level of the soul.

AGAINST LEARNING KABBALAH

I saw that HaGaon R' Dovid Soloveitchik shlit”a is very against learning Kaballah, because it is *gaavah* (conceitedness) for people to learn Kaballah before they mastered Gemara, and people who go learn Kaballah are fooling themselves as if they are already know Gemara well-enough to enter into this secret part of the Torah, and also because it is laziness and an escape from working hard at Gemara. In light of the above, is the *derech* of Brisk not meant for people who want to learn the area of *pnimiyus* of Torah?

Also, what is the way of *avodas Hashem* of Brisk? Brisk stands out uniquely as a world unto itself that is completely independent from all other ways of yeshivos, both in their way of learning and in their way of life. What is the inner root behind the *derech* of Brisk, and how can a person know if the *derech* of Brisk is for him or not?

ANSWER

[When it comes to the study of Kaballah], the style of learning in Brisk doesn't fit with the simple way to learn Kaballah. However, the path of Brisk is not in contradiction with the learning of Kaballah as explained according to *Gra*. Even more,

the way of learning of Brisk is actually a proper basis for in-depth, analytical learning which is not abstract, but well-defined. The *Divrei Torah* that comes from Brisk is essentially all about giving proper definitions to something, to get to the root of a point, and usually, there are two roots to every matter. Through finding the root(s) of a matter, one uncovers all the different points and *dinim* (*halachos*) that stem from it – each *din* is established based on its root.

The path of *avodas Hashem* of Brisk is: to be totally subservient to *ratzon Hashem* (to Hashem's will). And from that sense of subservience, one becomes afraid of *chas v'shalom* transgressing His will. In Kabbalistic terms, this is called the *kav s'mol*, the “left line”. In the area of Torah learning it manifests as giving definitions and boundaries to each thing, and in the area of *avodas Hashem* it manifests as *yirah*, fear of Hashem. But certainly there is plenty of *ahavas Hashem* there too – and wondrously so. But *yirah* is the root there, both when it comes to *avodah* and in Torah. Upon subtle analysis there is actually a huge difference between the paths of the Beis HaLevi, R' Chaim, and the Brisker Rov. It is enough to mention this just to give some understanding of this. Every person has to examine the nature of his own *nefesh* and his *shoresh neshamah* (soul root) to know if any path of *avodas Hashem* is for him or not, and that is a very broad matter.

PAIN OF THE SHECHINAH

1) *What is the pain of the Shechinah?*

ANSWER

1) It is when there is a lot of restricted, limited level of the revelation of Hashem in His world. The word pain, *tzaar*, is from the word *tzar*, narrow, which implies *tzimtzum*, constriction. There is proper *tzimtzum* and then there is increased *tzimtzum*, and when *tzimtzum* is very much increased, it is pain of the Shechinah.

QUESTION

2) If I feel the pain of others is that called the pain of the Shechinah?

ANSWER

2) Yes! Every pain of a Jew is Hashem's pain. The root of the pain on this world is in the pain above.

QUESTION

3) Is the Shechinah something that's separate from our neshamos or is it a part of our neshamos?

ANSWER

3) The Shechinah is the root of all neshamos.

QUESTION

4) When I feel another's pain do I also need to identify with the pain that the Shechinah has over this or is the mere fact that I am pained about a tragedy or another's pain is enough to be called joining with the pain of the Shechinah?

ANSWER

4) Both. There is pain below by joining with the pain of other Jews down below on this world, and there is also the root pain, which is the Shechinah's pain. Whenever there is pain below on this world (when a Jew has pain), there is also pain above. And when there is pain above, there will also be pain below on this world.

QUESTION

5) How can a woman connect to the pain of the Shechinah in day-to-day life?

ANSWER

5) Let it penetrate, and reveal a desire, to reveal Hashem and to reveal His glory on the world. This is the inner will of every Jew. When this will is uncovered, a person

will feel pain that Hashem's glory yet been fully revealed. To the extent that you want Hashem's glory to be revealed on the world, that is how much pain you will be able to feel, over its absence.

QUESTION

6) *How can we learn about the pain of the Shechinah?*

ANSWER

I don't know of a sefer that's organized just on this topic. It is a matter that's scattered throughout the words of our Sages. In the last couple years there are new editions of Kinnos that also collect together all the different words of our Sages, about the concept of the *tzaar HaShechinah*.

”

There are some of you who might find this intro a bit odd but you have to keep in mind two things. The first is that the Rav comes from a different background from most of us. He never read a secular book in his life. Secondly, we have a lot of problems. We are very mixed up—we were raised very far from kedusha and even the best of us have been infected and affected by things that are not pure Torah. Sometimes we come across a view that’s expressed from that perspective of pure Torah by a contemporary person. So, not coming from a perspective of pure Torah, hearing something that comes from pure Torah does not always click.

”

Rav Moshe Weinberger,
in "Getting to Know Your Self"
more than 10 years ago



Questions in all spheres of life in general
and the *nefesh* in particular
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