

BILVAVI

**MY
HEART
ASKS**

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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...IMPORTANT MESSAGE...

The Rav, Shlita will not be answering
questions for now, unfortunately.

Thank you for understanding,
Staff of Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh

DEALING WITH FEARS

Is fear ever a good thing? For example, I live in a place in Eretz Yisrael where we need to protect our cars from rocks that Arabs sometimes throw at our cars, and sometimes there are life-endangering situations here which cause us to have real fear. Is this a constructive kind of fear to have?

ANSWER: *The only thing a person must ever be afraid of is the fact that he fears anything besides Hashem.* That is something to be truly afraid of, and it is the only pure fear which exists. Either we fear Hashem Himself, or we fear anything that is besides for Hashem – which essentially causes us to have the fears. Whenever we experience a fear, like when we feel fear from the Arabs, we should view it as an awakening to remind us that we are not afraid enough of Hashem, and that is why we have become afraid of something. It is an awakening to us that we are not close enough to Hashem; because if we would really feel close with Hashem, there would be no reason to fear anything.

Again, let me emphasize that this is not a mere intellectual definition. If a person would really believe that Hashem is close to him, he would not be afraid. When you are found with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, there is no fear there. So if a person experiences a fear, it is a reminder to the person that he needs to be afraid of the fact that he is not close enough to Hashem. That is why a person becomes afraid of the Arabs!

Q2: So if it is not a good kind of fear to have, is the fear showing us that something in ourselves needs to be fixed?

ANSWER: Correct. Every situation can be used for good. When someone is afraid and he needs to be calmed, either we can tell him, “Don’t be afraid” [which is a superficial approach], or, we can tell him, “This fear that you are having – use it to awaken in yourself a holy kind of fear, the fact that you don’t feel close enough to Hashem.” However, this only calms a person when he is in fact upset at the fact that he is not close to Hashem. If he doesn’t care, then telling him to be afraid of his lack of closeness to Hashem will not do anything for him, because he doesn’t fear it. Only if a person is afraid of not feeling close to Hashem, can he be calmed when he is afraid of the Arabs, that the source of his fear is just a reminder to him, that he is not close enough to Hashem.

Q3: When using the power of imagination to relive the past fearful experience, won’t this cause the fear to happen? Isn’t there a concept that thinking and imagining about the fear cause the fear to actually happen in reality?

ANSWER: That is a very good question! Indeed, it is possible for a person to “cause” bad things to happen when he imagines about them; the Sages say that if a person worries obsessively about poverty or other forms of suffering, the poverty or the suffering will chase after him. Therefore, we don’t try to deliberately imagine bad things.

Our intention here is that if a person is in any case experiencing fears in his imagination, we need to face this imaginary fear by bringing out into the open and then uprooting it with thoughts of *emunah* in Hashem and Hashem’s love for us. If a person is not having a problem with fears, we are

not encouraging him to use these ideas; we are only discussing here a person who is afraid of something in his imagination, and since this is the case, we need to get him to redirect his thoughts. When a person is afraid, he is suffering from his imagination, which means that he is lacking in *emunah* and in a feeling of Hashem's love, and it is the kind of person who needs to attack the imagination in the way we have described here.

So we are not encouraging a person to deliberately imagine something fearful and to increase his *emunah*. Why should he, if he doesn't have the fears? We are only addressing here someone who already has fears and we want to help such a person face those fears that he is in any case having. So you have asked a very good question.

Q4: We see that when the people were making the Golden Calf, they came to Aharon HaKohen about what they should do, and he was afraid of what would happen, so he gave them the idea of bringing together all the jewelry and make the Calf, to stall for time, because he feared for his life. So even Aharon HaKohen had fears of possibly getting killed. Why didn't he just use the method of dealing with fears, as described in this class?

ANSWER: Aharon *HaKohen* was afraid because he saw them kill Chur for opposing them, and he feared that they would do the same to him. Are you asking how it is possible that even our *Gedolim* and the biggest *tzaddikim* can become afraid? Is that what you mean to ask?

Q5: What I mean to ask is, why didn't Aharon HaKohen just use the method that the Rav has explained here, in order to solve his fear of getting killed.

ANSWER: The answer to this is because even the greatest *tzaddik* is not always completely attached to Hashem in total *d'veykus*, and for this reason, there is room for fear even in the biggest *tzaddikim*. This is known as the concept of "*tzeil haguf*" ("body shadow") – since even the greatest *tzaddikim* ultimately have physical body, there is always some part of a *tzaddik* that is not attached completely to Hashem, and this is why there is no *tzaddik* who is perfect.

Yet it is always possible for a person to *minimize* his fears, using the method described here in this class. Although we can never totally uproot all of our fears, there is a very big difference between someone who has is consumed by fears with someone who has greatly minimized his fears.

There is also one more kind of fear which we did not speak about in this class: fears caused by sinning. We find that Yaakov *Avinu* was afraid of Esav, even though Hashem promised him that he would not be harmed, because he was afraid that perhaps he had sinned in the interim and that he was no longer worthy of Hashem's protection. However, in order for this kind of fear to be holy, a person needs to be balanced out with feeling Hashem's closeness. If one feels that Hashem is close by, then it is valid for him to fear the effects of sin. But if one does not feel this closeness, then fearing the effects of the sin is not a holy kind of fear.

Q6: So is this something else we need to fear (to fear the effects of sin)?

ANSWER: Yaakov *Avinu* had this fear, of being afraid of the effects of a possible sin. But even this fear that he had was ultimately stemming from the "*tzeil haguf*" ("body shadow"), from the

physical body of a *tzaddik*, the part which is not completely and perfectly attached with Hashem. But Yaakov Avinu had a balance between the inner layer of the soul (which contains no fear, for it is part and parcel with Hashem), and the outer layers of the soul, which fears sin. If a person does not feel enough closeness with Hashem, he will be dominated by more fears, fear of sin included. If a person becomes more connected to Hashem and he feels closer to Him, he is calmed on the inside, and the outer part of the self which feels the effects of fear will stay in balanced proportion. This is the kind of fear which our *tzaddikim* had. They had a fear of sin, which was equally balanced with a great feeling of closeness to Hashem.

Q7: When a person fears the effects of a sin, does this fear exist even in the inner part of the soul which only feels closeness to Hashem? Or does it exist only on the outer layers of the soul that experiences fear?

ANSWER: The inner part of the soul feels a complete closeness with Hashem, so it is not possible in that point to feel any fear of sin, because the inner part of the soul is above the point of sin. Therefore, when a person feels this part of the soul where he is completely attached with Hashem, there is no fear of sin, because there is no possibility of sin there.

Q8: So whenever a person feels a fear, it is a sign that something is wrong and that he needs to improve in some area? Does it mean that he has sinned, or that he is not close enough yet to Hashem? Fear is thus entirely a symptom that something is wrong?

ANSWER: You have defined it correctly. If a person is feeling a very intense fear, it is a sign that something is amiss. But if you keep feeling an alternation between fear and feeling close to Hashem – in other words, at the same time that you feel calmed by the knowledge that Hashem is near you, you are stilling experiencing a fear – this is called *pachad d'kedushah*, “holy fear”. If you do not feel that you are moving back and forth between these two feelings, it is a sign though that something is wrong [and that you need to work on your relationship with Hashem].

Q9: Is it possible for one to have fears that come from his previous gilgul (soul reincarnation)? And if it is possible, is a person allowed to take away his fears by going to a hypnotizer?

ANSWER: Yes, it is possible that one's fears come from a previous *gilgul*. Rav Chaim Vital said that his Rebbi, the *Arizal*, said that some of his fears came from his previous lifetime. Whenever the *Arizal* heard that someone had been killed, he felt fear, and he said that this was because in a previous *gilgul*, he had been one of the Ten Martyrs who were killed by the Romans.

As for going to a hypnotizer, this is not the ideal solution to solve our fears. First of all, you have to do your research on the hypnotizer in question and find out if he is a real *ben Torah*, who genuinely observes Torah and mitzvos. But even if he is a *frum* hypnotizer, there is a more inner issue involved with turning to hypnosis in order to deal with our fears: it would only be removing the outer garments of our fears, and it would not be uprooting the fear at its root. We want to get to the root of the fear and uproot it totally, as opposed to just removing its symptoms. The inner solution to fears which we have said here, which gets to the root of fear, is: that there is a deep place in our soul where we can feel close to Hashem and that we are with Him. This soothes our soul from all fears.

DESPAIR IN TORAH LEARNING & AVODAS HASHEM

If a person feels on giving up at succeeding in his Torah learning and in his *avodas Hashem* in life, how can he overcome this problem and succeed, with Hashem's help?

ANSWER

1. First, let us analyze what brings a person to despair, generally and briefly, and then we can get further into the details.

A person begins his way in life in general, and his Torah learning and Avodas Hashem specifically, with a certain *ratzon* (will) to succeed and reach his goals – each person on his own level. A person's *ratzon* (will) keeps him motivated to reach his goals. When a person begins to see that in spite of his efforts, he is still not reaching the goal he's trying to reach, and that he's not even getting close to it – at least according to the way he sees reality – his soul slowly begins to feel, more and more, that it's impossible to reach his goals. Gradually, his motivation to invest effort is weakened. As a person continues like this, with disappointment following another disappointment, the negative feelings become strengthened, to the point that one's soul perceives that this has become reality, and the person reaches the conclusion that “I do not have the ability to attain whatever I wanted.” In other words, he despairs. He feels that he isn't able to invest his energies anymore in his goals, and on a more subtle level, he has stopped wanting to reach those goals.

Understandably, the degree which is this felt on will depend on how much he has given up. Usually, people do not give up totally. This is especially the case if a person is still seeking advice on how he can succeed – the very fact that he is seeking advice is an indication that he hasn't given up totally on succeeding.

Before we delve further into your specific case, let us first establish the fundamental point that is behind the approach here. An established fundamental is that every person has his own personal share in Torah and in serving Hashem. More specifically, every person has his “general” share in Torah and in serving Hashem, and every person also his “individual” share based on the time and spiritual level he is at. A person is also given the tools and the abilities to reach his personal share. On a deeper level, when one utilizes his potential abilities, that is precisely his personal share. Therefore, one's task on this world is to put in effort, and clearly he is given the ability to reach his own personal share and to give of himself entirely for this.

2. Now we will get to explaining the other factors which our general avodah consists of, so that one can know how to clarify and understand exactly what the source of feeling despair is, and the root of

how to rectify it. The factors in rectifying despair are: (1) One's *ratzon* (will) to reach his goals. (2) The exertion and effort that one needs to put in order to reach his goals. This also includes praying to Hashem for success. (3) The way of *avodah* which one needs to take. (4) The goal itself which a person is striving for.

As it will soon be explained, if one of the above factors is deficient, it will mean that a person is off-track and that his actions are not aligned in accordance with his actual capabilities and current level. This will lead him towards despair from reaching his goals. Let us now delve into each of these factors.

The factors of *ratzon* (will) and striving towards goals are two factors that are intertwined with each other. This is because one's *ratzon* (will) thrives on trying to reach a certain goal, as mentioned before, that the *ratzon* is the motivating force in the soul which leads one towards reaching his goals. A person is able to set all kinds of different goals for himself. Some of a person's goals are not proper to pursue, and these are goals which stem from an impaired place in one's soul. Other goals are worthy to pursue, and these are goals which will want to reach, but one must understand that even when it comes to such worthy goals, this doesn't yet mean that it is good for this particular person. For him, it may not be good. This point is where many people err. When people want to serve Hashem better, they may set goals for themselves which are unrealistic, according to their personal nature. For example, a person may have seen that others succeeding in reaching a certain spiritual goal, or he may have read in a sefer that there is a certain quality to aspire for, and he is under the impression that he must reflect that goal in his own personal *avodah* as well, without first thinking if that goal or quality is appropriate for him to pursue right now.

One of the detrimental results that this will lead to is despair. The person wants to reach a certain goal which isn't appropriate for him right now to pursue, and he will try to expend all of his energies in trying to reach that goal. Even if he tries very hard, he will not succeed in reaching that goal, if he doesn't have the capabilities for it right now. Understandably, this will cause him to despair from succeeding in his *avodas Hashem*. This is all because he has tried to reach a goal which he isn't realistic for him right now to pursue. He has entered into an endeavor which was, to begin with, a path that would ultimately lead him to disappointment and despair. (It should be noted that usually a person doesn't despair from a mistake like this that only happens once. Rather, a person tries in one area and tries in another area, without seeing success, until he eventually gets a general feeling that he can't succeed in *avodas Hashem*). Sometimes, this happens is lacking in his *ratzon*.

Whatever was explained earlier regarding attaining one's *ratzon* and goals, will also apply to this, the approach of one's *avodah*. Even if a person's motivations and goals are worthy for him to pursue, if he doesn't go about in a way that is healthy for his soul, he will not succeed, and he is prone to have

despair because of it. There are many people who don't succeed in *avodas Hashem* because they were lacking proper direction to begin with. They didn't have a way of how to attain what they want. Rather, they acted on inspiration alone, and they immediately tried to fulfill any practical advice which they learned about or heard about, in the hope that that this would give them a "small opening like the size of a needle" to open for them an "opening the size of an entranceway" [they hoped that their efforts would lead to assistance from Heaven]. But one cannot really succeed in this way. Such an approach will not help, whether it comes to material goals and certainly when it comes to spiritual goals.

Even in people who are able to organize for themselves an approach and how to do it, the goals will not be attained when they are pursued in a way that is not stable or consistent. These factors prevent people from progressing.

Additionally, there are also those who don't have an appropriate approach in their *avodas Hashem* to begin with – they are taking a path which isn't suitable for them.

Now we shall address the second aspect mentioned: the exertion that one needs to put in, to attain his goals. It is clear and simple that even if a person has a strong will to succeed and he also has a good approach to work with, if he doesn't try hard enough – whether due to laziness or other reasons – he will not reach his goals. As Chazal state, "If someone says "I didn't try but I still found success", do not believe him. Sometimes a person does not understand that he needs to try hard and also daven for success. After trying only a little bit, without seeing success, he becomes disappointed that he isn't yet finding success, and he gives up from trying further. On the other end of the spectrum are those who put in great effort, physically and mentally and emotionally, in an extreme way, and they often over-do themselves. Then they become broken and depressed. In any case, if one overdoes himself or if one tries too little, he will be prevented from succeeding, and this can bring him to despair.

As for *davening* for success, it is explained about at length in the words of Chazal and throughout many *sefarim* that a person needs to *daven* for success, but what is usually missing is the internalization in one's heart of how much one needs to *daven*. One must always remember that by truly praying from the depths of one's heart to reach his personal share in Torah and in *avodas Hashem*, his prayers are certainly accepted. Even more so, "the gates of tears never close".

Before continuing, let's emphasize the general point of all the words until now. It is clear to everyone that lack of success brings a person to despair. We have had to elaborate here at length about different points which can be the reason for lack of success, and this is because when a person understands that the reason he didn't succeed in the past is not because he can't succeed and because

he doesn't have the tools or talents to reach anything in learning Torah or in *avodas Hashem*, but probably because he entered into his efforts with a skewed approach that didn't allow him to truly succeed. From this point onward, one can know how to approach his *avodas Hashem* properly.

3. Let's also mention another two points, briefly, which can also be a reason for lack of success.

One factor that prevent success in *avodas Hashem* is, because any point of *avodas Hashem* takes time to acquire. It is always a gradual process, step after step, and each step is a 'stepstool' for the step after it. Many times when a person doesn't pay attention to the small steps he is taking and to the steps which he has so far acquired, he gives up from what he's working on, and as time goes on, he discontinues his work entirely. Also, when a person wants to see "quick" results and he doesn't succeed in getting it quickly enough, it seems to him that he cannot acquire it, so he gives up.

Another factor that prevents a person from success in *avodas Hashem* is when a person has certain unrefined *middos* which are getting in the way. Every person has some *middos* which he hasn't yet repaired, and it his lifelong work to work on those unrefined *middos*. But sometimes it is not a bad *middah* getting in his way, it can be a very good *middah*, but it isn't balanced. An imbalanced quality of a person can ruin all of one's *avodas Hashem* and prevent one from progressing and succeeding, even if one is trying very hard. Sometimes a person's bad *middah* can directly get in the way of one's *avodas Hashem* – for example, if a person has a very strong will to receive honor for his Torah learning or from his progress in *avodas Hashem*. Sometimes a person can be swayed by outside factors, such as a desire for money, which is one of the traits that remove a person from his inner world.

4. You have asked a very general question and therefore we have attempted here to open the discussion from several angles, and understandably, there is more to say. The point of all this was to help people in this situation [of despair from Torah learning and success in *avodas Hashem*], to identify where the root of despair is coming from, in their personal situation, and so that one can know what exactly he needs to deal with, in order to succeed. This should all be accompanied with the clear understanding that it is within reach of every person to reach his personal share [in Torah learning and *avodas Hashem*], and, understandably, with *siyata d'shmaya* (assistance from Heaven). One needs to try according to his current capabilities and according to his current spiritual level, to progress step-by-step, gradually and patiently, amidst joy and gratitude to Hashem on whatever one has already merited until now. One should also desire to progress further, with prayer to succeed and to come closer to his personal share, as we pray each day, ותן חלקנו בתורתך – “And give us our portion in Your Torah.”

I'M SCARED OF CHANGING

When I begin to identify where my feelings are coming from, I feel fear, either because I am afraid of change, a fear of changing, or because I am afraid of how others will react to me if I would begin to change. How can I deal with this fear?

ANSWER

Instead of thinking that you will have to make big changes, think that you will only be making small changes, and try to make small changes only. You can only be afraid of change when it is big change. Big change feels scary to the soul. So instead, think that you will only be making small changes. Change is like water dripping on a rock; the rock only withers after many drops of water on it. It happens slowly and in very small amounts, not in one shot. When you have this attitude towards change, then there is no reason to change.

Usually, when you think about change, you wonder how you will get all the way to the end, and you become overwhelmed, because you see how much change you will have to undergo, in order to arrive at the goal. Instead, think that you will be taking small steps and that you are only going to get there slowly and over time.

INCLUDING HASHEM IN SELF-WORK

It is already more than half a year after I have been learning and practicing the *avodah* which the Rav describes in his meaningful *sefarim* and *shiurim*, which I greatly benefited from in my life. At first I was taking the approach described in the “*Bilvavi*” series of *sefarim*, and after this I continued to the approach of the “*Da Es*” series. I began from “*Da Es Atzmecha*” so that I could begin from the most elementary point possible. Before this, I had already been working on my *middos* for about 20 years. I also did an hour of *hisbodedus* every day and I spoke a lot with the Creator throughout the day. Currently I am taking the path of the “*Da Es*” series, for about 2 months already.

In the *Da Es sefarim*, the focus is not on the bond between oneself and the Creator. On one hand, I feel that it would be terrible to lose my bond with the Creator which I have merited to reach over the last few years. On the other hand, the approach of the “*Da Es*” series has been shining light on certain areas in my soul which needed repair, which I cannot ignore. For example, in *Da Es Atzmecha*, the Rav showed me that the will to give to others is a very necessary part of growth. However, the sefer *Da Es Atzmecha* doesn't guide a person on how to include the Creator in this. So

my question is: Should I continue this *avodah* of “giving” as usual, according to what I am learning in *Da Es Atzmecha*? Or should I use a different approach, as described in other *sefarim* of the Rav?

ANSWER

Continue what you are learning, at your gradual and fundamental pace. Correspondingly, you should also set aside a little time every day to speak with the Creator, simply and earnestly, about everything in your life. This should include praise, requests, and thanks, to the Creator. Include the Creator throughout all of your life, in general and in the specifics. Have simple conversations with Him throughout the day, simplistically and naturally. From this simplicity, you will go from place to place, throughout all the other areas of *avodah*.

KNOWING YOUR PERSONAL MISSION

What is the perspective that every Jew needs to have towards himself/herself, and how can we become more in touch with it? [How can I know precisely what my main, personal *avodah* in life is (besides for the general task that the Jewish people has)?

ANSWER:

That is a very complicating matter. Generally speaking, a person has to know his main quality and his main weakness in life, and these are the roots of his *avodah*. The rest are always details which one has to learn about himself, but the root of one’s task on this world is to know the depth of his main quality, and the depth of his weakest point. Then one can see the two extremes of his personality, and from then onward, one can figure out the rest of the details that are in between.

KNOWING YOUR PERSONAL SOUL

Q: Is there any sefer one can learn which teaches him about how to use his soul’s abilities?

A: Part of this study can be attained through the *sefarim* that explain the [four] elements of the soul. But as for knowing one’s personal soul, one will never know it through any *sefer* that is found in the world. One has to pray to Hashem to reach self-understanding. Either one can pray to Hashem that he should merit to understand himself from within, as the Gemara says that the “two kidneys of man are his advisors”, where one can “learn Torah from within himself”; or, one can pray to Hashem that he merit to be guided by someone who will help him understand his soul.

If one prays for this, truthfully and earnestly, and he cries to Hashem from the depths of his heart, Hashem will surely guide him to success. How? That is up to Hashem. But if someone is truly

searching for this and he is sincerely trying very hard, Hashem will guide him and he will attain what he desires.

POPULAR BUT SUFFERING INSIDE

First of all I want to thank the Rav for all that he has done to help me in my *ruchniyus*. I am a *mesivta* (high school) age *yeshiva bochur* who learns in one of the best *yeshivos* in America. For a few years already I am dealing with an issue of constant negative feelings, recurring thoughts of low self-worth, fears, and other negative emotions. About a year ago I began to take some medication for my compulsive thoughts and negative feelings, and *Baruch Hashem*, I have seen much progress. In spite of that, however, I have a long way to go until I will be totally healthy. Although I have learned how to accept, to a certain degree, that this is the will of Hashem [that I should have these issues], it is still very hard for me, because it is very bothersome to my *Avodas Hashem* – with regards to my Torah learning, my *davening*, my daily schedule, and the development of my inner world. This has caused me much agony in my soul. Perhaps the Rav can *daven* for me? My name is_____.

I am considered a very successful and popular *bochur* in my *yeshiva* – it is possible that I have been affected by *ayin hara* (a ‘bad eye’)? How can I deal with my situation?

Every word of encouragement from the Rav will be very much appreciated and accepted by me. Thank you.

ANSWER

The more that one believes, in his mind and heart, palpably, that it is only Hashem Who orchestrates everything that will ever happen, one’s soul will readily desire to do the will of the Creator, from the awareness that only He is in charge, and that no human being can change or help him - only if Hashem allows it. Slowly as one carries this awareness with him, one’s soul will become more connected with Hashem and feel cognizance of Hashem’s presence. Then one will be able to do everything with intention to do Hashem’s will, and not out of a desire to please other people. The more that a person becomes concerned with doing Hashem’s will - as opposed to being tied down to social approval and doing only whatever finds him favorable in the eyes of others - the more that one’s soul becomes connected with Hashem. Slowly, one becomes calm, tranquil and serene, for he will be exerting himself according to his true capabilities and according to what Hashem wants from him.

On one hand, a person can accept his suffering with love, because he can know that it is all for his good. At the same time, a person will be calm and not demand more from himself that is beyond his

current level of capability, and he will only act according to his actual capabilities on his current level. Slowly, with *siyata d'shmaya*, the crushing feelings of low self-worth, fears and anxieties, etc. will be removed, and one will become freed from these negative thoughts that had previously been plaguing his actions and feelings.

May you find true peace, through a healthy body and soul, through constant spiritual growth, amidst a settled mind, tranquility, and joy.

SOCIAL ANXIETY

Before I ask my question I would like to express my *hakaros hatov* to the Rav. With the help of the Rav's talmidim and through the Rav's, teachings I have B"H been *zoche* to begin building my inner world for the past year. I literally feel like I have converted to Judaism and have never had such a year of spiritual growth. My dilemma is as follows. I am someone who by nature has a very outgoing personality and I love schmoozing with people and enjoy their company. However, since I've been a child, when I meet people who are wealthier, better looking, funnier, cooler, etc... I begin to feel terrified and totally shut down. I am unable to talk and my heart pounds away. These people I think awaken a feeling of *shiflus* (unworthiness) in me, and I feel unworthy to talk to them and to be their friend. I know this is wrong to think and I have learnt all the mussar about how people are nothing in terms of impressing them and have tried setting it in my heart literally thousands of times, but to no avail. This causes me tremendous emotional pain, and my parents have spent thousands of dollars on therapist and medications for me. At the same time, when I am feeling "myself" and am not nervous around people I am the center of attention and the funniest, quickest guy in the group. When I am in that zone I develop a tremendous amount of *gaavah* (conceit) and have a very hard time connecting to Hashem and my Torah learning, because of the *gaavah* which blocks the connection. This problem was so bad that for a couple of months the psychiatrists thought I was "bipolar" because I would go from being the loudest guy to being withdrawn, quiet, and depressed. B"H that diagnosis was wrong but I am still struggling immensely to stay afloat emotionally and mentally. So I would like to ask the Rav: Should I be working on fixing my *middah* of *shiflus* (feelings of unworthiness), or should I be working on my *middah* of *yirah* (awareness of Hashem)? And what should I be doing about the *gaavah* I have when I am feeling good [about myself]? Also how should I go about practically working on this?

ANSWER

You should set aside some time alone to yourself (making sure you are also balanced by having friends and enjoying being around them), and build for yourself a world of your "self", your own

internal world, an internal space where there is just you, alone, and which only you can enter. It is the internal world of connection to yourself, to the good that is in you, to your very “I”. Thereafter, whenever you meet other people who awaken feelings of unworthiness in you, you can enter within, into your very existence, and from there, you can receive strength and inspiration. For now, don’t bust yourself trying to fix the trait of *gaavah*, until after you have solidly built for yourself an inner world of your own.

The foundation of repairing all problems is when you have built your own inner world, with a strong and powerful connection to your inner self. It is a pure and subtle connection to who you are: to your true self. In order to do it, you should identify the most positive aspect of your personality and connect to it - on the intellectual level, on the emotional level, and on a “soul” level. And you should actively connect to that positive aspect of your personality. You should accustom yourself to sitting with yourself alone at times, in silence, and slowly you can gain a love for this silence. It is recommended that you listen to the series of *הכרת הנפש – ארבעת היסודות* (*Four Elements – Self-Recognition*), and to practically act upon those lessons.

It is for you to reflect upon and understand that a person has an “inner world” – a complete world, in and of itself. In contrast to this inner space in yourself, there is also the outer part of your existence, which turns outward to others. As long as a person isn’t strongly connected to his own inner world, his encounters with others will cause him to go outward from himself, and the person will try to adapt himself to his surroundings, and he will be very reactive to whatever takes place outside of him. That is why, in your situation, when you meet people whom you feel are successful, you feel unworthy about yourself, and your inner core is being influenced and shaped by what takes place outside of you.

In contrast to this, if you would become stronger within yourself, you wouldn’t be that reactive to others. You would be only minimally reactive to them, so you wouldn’t be as affected from others, and also, the frequency of your reactivity to others would also be a lot less, and it wouldn’t affect you on such a core level. Becoming strongly connected to your own inner self would allow you to be more comfortable around others, because you wouldn’t feel a need to be the center of the social circle. It is very possible that others have certain expectations from you and they want you to be a certain way, and that is why you also expect this from yourself, to try to become more popular and be noticed by others. But when people seek social approval, this actually stems from an inner emptiness, to take leave of one’s true self, and a desperate attempt to show others “who I really am” - but it is actually *not* who you really are.

Therefore, whether the issue is feeling unworthy or feeling a need to be popular amongst your peers because you aren’t strongly connected enough to your true self, the solution is to reveal your own

inner world and to enter it regularly. The more you will live like this, most of your issues will be solved, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

SOLVING LIFE ISSUES THROUGH GOAL-FOCUSING

By becoming more focused and connected to a spiritual goal in our life, will this also help solve other issues in one's life, such as problems in marriage, raising children, earning livelihood, and other areas of life?

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

QUESTION 2: *Can the Rav give me specific questions that I can ask myself in order to get clarity in what my main point is that I should be focused on in life?*

ANSWER: This is a very fundamental question to ask, which is hard to answer in a brief amount of time. To put it forth in general times, every person needs to know: (1) The strongest positive quality that he possesses, (2) and after that, he should know what the “deepest” thing is that he experiences in his soul. (3) After a person knows both of these factors and he has the combined knowledge of both of these factors together, he should then reach a third stage: the deepest part of himself that he currently recognizes. (4) After that, he can slowly reach deeper experiences.

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

STAYING WITHIN COMFORT ZONE

Should a person mainly do what is difficult for him to do, or should a person mainly do things that better suit his personality?

ANSWER: Generally speaking, in the beginning stages of a person's improvement, he must make sure that he is doing whatever he is obligated and responsible to do. That should be clear. When it comes to doing things that he is not obligated to do, he should mainly do things that suit his

personality. One should also try to do at least one thing that doesn't suit his personality, which is difficult for him to do, and to force himself to do it.

So, generally speaking, a person needs to do mainly what suits his personality [besides for his obligations and responsibilities in life, which he must do anyhow], along with doing at least one thing that is hard for him to do, so that he is balanced. Often a person thinks that a certain undertaking is suitable for his personality to do, when it is really not, because he has never learned how to go against his own personality, and therefore he has never left his comfort zone. But if a person forces himself to do at least one thing that is hard for him to do, he has trained himself to leave his comfort zone sometimes, and this will slowly show him what his true personality is and what he should mainly pursue. In fact, the very idea of forcing yourself to do something that doesn't suit your character is what lies at the core of nullifying yourself to do Hashem's will.



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