

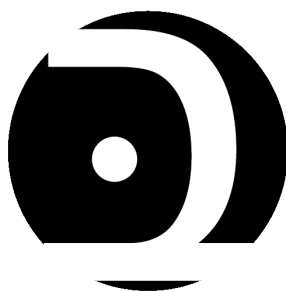
BILVAVI

**MY
HEART
ASKS**



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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DEFINITION OF A TZADDIK

How do we know who a *tzaddik* is? What are the specific levels that one has to reach, in order to be above everyone else?

ANSWER

There are many levels, as well as many types, of *tzaddikim*. But generally speaking, a *tzaddik* is someone who is (1) attached with Hashem and with the Torah, and he is also (2) attached to his soul-root (*shoresh neshamah*). The *tzaddik* reaches this through (1) purifying his physicality, (2) purifying his deeds, and (3) purifying his *middos* (character).

REPAIRING JEALOUSY

I get jealous of certain people when they have a certain good quality I wish I had. The jealousy is so painful that it feels like a needle going into my heart! (1) Where does jealousy come from? (2) The way I calm my jealousy is that I tell myself that someday I'll have what the other has. Is that a good way to treat my jealousy?

ANSWER

(1) Jealousy comes from an unwillingness to be less than another. It is not merely an unwillingness to be lower, but an unwillingness in relation to another person. There is good jealousy and bad jealousy. Good

jealousy is “wisdom of scholars” which increases wisdom. This is when one is jealous of another’s good accomplishments and because of this he is spurred on to achieve just like the other. Bad jealousy is when one wants to lower the other person from his higher status.

(2) This is not the ideal way [it is not good to treat jealousy by telling yourself that someday you will have what the other has]. What you need is to accept the personal share [i.e. your unique qualities or achievements] which Hashem has given you, and you need to be happy with it, from being deeply connected to your personal share.

OVERCOMING BODILY DRIVES

As a *bochur* I would like to know, how can I overcome the well-known *taavah* (lust) that teenagers-adolescents face?

ANSWER

Immerse your thoughts in a deep connection in your mind and soul to the depth of the sugyos you are learning. Sometimes, cool off the body with cold water, and it is better to immerse in a cold mikveh.

Review a few times the possuk, **אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה** (“A fire will burn on the Altar constantly, it shall not be extinguished”). Try to understand your feelings and emotional world, by learning Getting To Know Your Feelings, learn it with another and discuss it with him.

FEMININITY, FEMINISM & LESBIANISM

1) There are women today who are very intellectual and who have deep understanding, both when it comes to anything intellectual as well as in Torah matters, and there are G-d fearing women today who have written sefarim about avodas Hashem. Women of this caliber can sometimes feel as if they don’t have a feminine soul, as if they are men Torah scholars who have novel insights in avodas Hashem, and they can sometimes feel like they are men and not women, as if they have been given a man’s neshamah and not a woman’s neshamah – as if they are a manly soul inside a woman’s body.

ANSWER

Yes, that’s very true.

QUESTION

2) There’s a movement called “feminism” which believes that women are superior to men. This mainly started in America about 100 years ago, and it is a movement which believes that women are better than men and that we must honor women a lot and be very sensitive to them. And many men think that way as well, that women are intrinsically more important and more honorable than men. The Beis Yaakov schools are well-aware of this and they have been trying to fight this impure attitude. Is this really coming from a twisted use of the light of the future, where “a woman will become a crown to her husband”, where women will indeed be on a higher level than men? Is that being twisted around now by the impure forces of the

kelipos, through the feminist movement? There is also an opposite movement today, which believes that there is no difference between men and women and that men and women should be treated equally for everything. This is even more common than feminism. Is this also a twisted use of the light of the future, where everyone will be equal (*hishtavus*)?

ANSWER

Yes. Every concept has two levels to it. There are always 3 possibilities – one level being atop of the other, vice versa, and the level where they are both equal.

QUESTION

3) Another topic which this leads us to is that there's a certain bizarre tumah (moral depravity) today in which women are marrying each other. Chazal describe a case in which two women molested each other and what their halachic status is after this. Is this tumah the same tumah as the deeds of Sodom (men lusting after other men), in which men wanted to be married to men and not to women, and so too there is a tumah in which a woman wants to be married to a woman rather than to a man? Or this is a twisted form of the light of the future in which women won't need men, and that is why today this is being manifest in the side of kelipah, through women marrying each other? Unfortunately there have been stories within our own communities of same-gender marriages between women, and this tumah seems to be increasing. What is the way to view this and what is the solution?

ANSWER

It is rooted in the kelipah side to Atik and Arich [the levels of the future which are becoming manifest because we are close to the Geulah]. In the level of Arich, there is only the masculine with no feminine side to it [hence the kelipah of Arich is same-gender marriages between men, which is called the deeds of Sodom] and in the level of Atik there is only the feminine with no masculine side to it [hence the kelipah of Atik is same-gender marriages between women]. So this tumah is the kelipah side to Atik.

QUESTION

4) As an aside, these same-gender marriages (either men marrying men or women marrying women) *Rachmana Litzlan* are people who claim (mostly) that they are involved in such behavior because they have gone through so much pain in their life and that they are full of anger at the opposite gender. For example, they are saying that if a woman was abused by her husband or in her childhood by her father, and then she gets divorced, the woman can develop a hatred for men and so she is repulsed by all men, and now she desires only closeness with women. And the men who marry men also say that they hate women and are repulsed by women, because they suffered from women (either from their mother or from their wives), so they turn to an intimate relationship with men in the hope of getting pleasure from men because they are turned off from women. Is this all an external reason for their behavior of *tumah*, which is not the root reason?

ANSWER

It is all an external reason.

SAME-GENDER ATTRACTION FROM A PREVIOUS LIFETIME

From previous responses of the Rav on the topic of same-gender attraction, it seems from the Rav's words that the source of this is in the *kelipas Sodom* (Sodomy). Is this also related to a previous lifetime, since a person can already be born with such a desire? And if it does come from a previous lifetime, why doesn't this interfere with a person's *bechirah* (free will)? And what should a person do if he feels a pull towards the same gender but he wants to change his **sexual** orientation?

The guidance and the time devoted of the Rav to answer on this topic is much appreciated, to guide our souls in this confused generation.

ANSWER

Sometimes it can come from previous lifetimes, and sometimes it is an effect of the *tumah* (the defilement and deviant influences) of the generation. The *tikkun* (repair) for it is to uproot *gaavah* (conceitedness) and also to erase one's connection to the lifestyle and direction that the generation today is taking.

DEFINING NORMAL

I grew up in a home where there was a big emphasis on being "normal", to behave normally, to walk normally, to *daven* normally, to learn Torah normally. The verse "*Within my nation I dwell*" was the motto in my house. Throughout the years I noticed that this produced all kinds of external orientations in my *avodas Hashem*, that my entire *Avodas Hashem* had to be limited to what was normal. For example, sometimes when I was alone and no one was watching, I wanted to scream out to Hashem and pour out my heart to Him in prayer, but I found this very difficult, because it wasn't "normal". Sometimes I feel a burning desire for Hashem when I am davening and I start moving intensely, and suddenly I grab a hold of myself and I remind myself that I am not acting normal. Then my desire becomes extinguished. My question is: What is the role of "normality" in *Avodas Hashem*?

ANSWER

1. Let's begin with a certain insight which can help us open up the point which you are dealing with.

The home you grew up in is not the only home where there was an important emphasis on being normal. In many other homes as well, there is a lot of emphasis on being "normal" – to varying extents. But each home differs regarding the definition of the word "normal", and what's included in being normal, and what is considered not normal. In some homes, a certain kind of behavior is considered normal, and in another home, the same behavior is viewed as not normal, and maybe it's even considered "weird". For example, in the example you gave of occasionally screaming out to Hashem during *davening*, there are some homes that would consider this to be completely normal. (This is besides for the fact that Chazal state that there are ten expressions of prayer, and one of them is *tzaakah*, to scream to Hashem).

It is now upon us to explain where these definitions made by people come from, and what causes people to form their conclusions about what's normal or not normal, and what causes people in general to revolve their lives around what's "normal".

We have a clear way of life arranged like a *Shulchan Aruch* (a set table) in our holy Torah, which consists of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. There are actions of mitzvos we need to do, as well as internal duties of the heart. Simply and clearly, it seems that the definition of a “normal” life of a Jew is an intrinsic definition, and that it does not need the approval of others. That is the outline, and now we will delve into the details of this.

2. Before we mention the common reasons which cause people to define for themselves what is considered normal or not normal, let’s first understand something behind this.

Any Jew with even a bit of *yiras shomayim* (fear of Heaven) who searches for truth, at some point needs to deal, to a certain extent, with an inner contradiction in himself. On one hand, he thinks about what his life should look like, and on the other hand, he thinks about how others view life and how his life compare with that view. One of the ways in which a person “settles” this contradiction is by introducing the idea of “normal”. Anything a person wants and is comfortable with is considered to him as “normal”, and anything he doesn’t want or isn’t comfortable with is removed from the category of “normal”. He is correct, because the Torah wasn’t given to angels, but to human beings, who need to keep the Torah in their “normal” fashion.

So we need to understand that a person’s definition of “normal” is actually a person’s notion of what he considers to be proper in the life of a Jew, and perhaps there are others who side with his view as well. Anything which a person doesn’t deem as proper is considered as not normal to him, and in that way, he doesn’t feel obliged to it. This is the subconscious process that takes place in a large amount of people.

3. Getting more specific, there are several factors which cause a person to define what’s normal.

One reason is due to upbringing. A person was raised since childhood with a certain understanding of what is normal. This factor was already mentioned in your question.

In some others, determining what is “normal” is largely affected by the importance they place on what others think of them. Either they are afraid that others will disdain them, or they simply want that others should hold them in high esteem. Therefore they try to align their behavior with whatever is expected of them in the eyes of others, so that they know for certain that they are “normal”.

There are others who don’t want to place that much effort into Torah and avodas Hashem, and they would rather continue to live as they are used to, staying within their comfort zone. Within that “zone”, they come up with a definition of what’s normal or not normal.

Others define “normal” based on their personal preference, on whatever speaks to them, on whatever they feel drawn towards. This is either due to their personal nature, or due to any formed beliefs. This kind of person will determine something as “not normal” if he feels a personal disgust towards something.

There are also those who believe that a certain way of thinking is correct, and therefore, anyone else who doesn’t think like them is not normal. They have certain patterns of thinking, according to their nature, and when they meet another person who thinks differently than they do (since the other has a different soul root than theirs and therefore he thinks differently than them), they consider the other person to be not normal. Only those who conform to their thinking are “normal” to them.

4. The next point we will discuss is a more inner point, which is more relevant to *avodas Hashem*.

There are people who place a lot of emphasis on “normal” when it comes Torah and *avodas Hashem*: to “learn” in a normal way, to *daven* normally, etc. This is because they are wary of the problem of “delusions” that exist in people who seek spiritual growth in their Torah learning and *avodas Hashem*. Indeed, there are many people who to live a very lofty and more spiritual kind of life, and in the process, they begin to lose touch with their own reality, and instead they are found more and more in their delusions and aspirations. They identify themselves based on what they think of themselves and by whatever they think is expected of them: to look like someone who is a *masmid* (very diligent learner), or a very brilliant learner, or a great *baal middos* (person of refined character traits), or an *oved Hashem* (someone on a high level of piety and devotion to G-d). In any of these cases, the person is making a fundamental mistake about *avodas Hashem*. This unfortunate reality [of highly aspirational people who become delusional in their Torah learning or *avodas Hashem*] has caused people to avoid aiming high in *avodas Hashem*, and to instead “just be like everyone else”, to avoid the problem of being disconnected from reality. In their eyes, only if a person learns or davens in a certain way is he being “realistic”, not delusional, and hence “normal”.

These people are certainly right about the fact that a person shouldn’t be out of touch with himself and that there is no place for delusions in *avodas Hashem*. However, while they do have this argument, they are still making a mistake which we shall now address, and especially because it also causes additional mistakes.

Many times people have various beliefs which they hold only strongly, and they live their lives based on these beliefs and they educate their children accordingly. Although they begin with a valid point, eventually their belief gets taken too far and it is no longer a proper belief. With regards to our current discussion (normality), on one hand, people have a true and valid point that a person shouldn’t become delusional in *avodas Hashem*. However, when this becomes translated into ignoring verses in the Torah and statements of Chazal – simply because, after all, people “don’t live like that” – then their emphasis on being “normal” has been taken too far, and they have the wrong perspective.

5. We can add on another important point which is also relevant to *avodas Hashem*, and it completes the aforementioned point.

The very concept of “normal” implies that all people need to be a certain way. Each person has his own definition of what’s normal, and he thinks and feels that all people need to align their lives more or less with his idea of normal. But we should understand clearly that even if a person would recognize his true path in *avodas Hashem* (which, in many cases, doesn’t happen, only superficially), this doesn’t mean that another person also needs that same path in *avodas Hashem*. This is because the Sages state, “Just as all faces are not equal, so are all their *de’os* (ways of thinking) not equal.” (*Berachos 58a*).

Every person needs to serve Hashem from being who “he” truly is, according to his unique nature, and according to his current level. One cannot serve Hashem according to what he imagines is expected of him, nor can he serve Hashem based on what he “wishes” his current level is. This definition needs to accompany one throughout all of his life. All the time, a person must try to recognize his true personality and his current level, and accordingly, he should align his actions and behavior with that.

Thus, from an inner perspective, the definition of a “normal” **inner** kind of life is when a person lives his life according to his unique personality, and if something does not fit his unique personality, it is considered “not normal” for him to do.

6. To complete this topic: There are several factors which determine what proper normal behavior is. It depends on the situation. But as a general definition, we can say that it is appropriate for a person to avoid acting in a “strange” way that is not practiced in his community – anything that will cause other people to stare at him. The Gemara says that “a person should not deviate from the custom” (*Bava Metziah 86b*), and the Sages said that when one goes to a certain town, he should behave with the manners that are practiced in that town (*Beraishis Rabbah 48:14*). However, along with all this, a person should make sure not to lose the inner perspective mentioned before [that a person needs to act according to his unique personality and according to his current level].

If you want some practical advice which can help you in your situation, perhaps you can pick doing a small action which is not done exactly according to the way everyone else does it. However, make sure to do this in a discreet manner, so that others don’t notice. Doing such actions can open up your soul to a more inner perspective, and to help your soul become free, to a certain extent, from the superficial perspective about what’s considered “normal”.

Correspondingly, you should also clarify what’s uniquely “normal” for you, based on your particular personality.



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