



WAYS OF AVODAS HASHEM

QUESTION Are the ways of serving Hashem which the Rav writes about in the sefarim all of the ways that apply to our generation?

ANSWER Generally, yes. If we get more specific, there are additional “branches” to each of these ways. (For example, I included the approach of the author of the “Sulam” [Rav Ashlag] in any of our shiurim on the sefarim of Kaballah.) If you have a different approach, I would be happy to hear of it.

QUESTION How do all of these ways comprise the complete structure of serving Hashem?

ANSWER Each approach is based on any one of the Ten Sefiros [Keser, Binah, Chochmah, Malchus, Yesod, Hod, Netzach, Tiferes, Gevurah, Chessed]. Through combining all of the approaches, a complete structure of serving Hashem is formed, so that one can become an adam hashaleim (complete man). One should trace the approach to its source in any of the Ten Sefiros.

QUESTION Whenever the Rav gives an order of steps to follow in order to have spiritual growth, is this the recommended order for every person to go in?

ANSWER There is never a specific order of steps that one must follow.

QUESTION And can the Rav make an organized list that summarizes all of the different ways of serving Hashem (so that I can know what to focus on)?

ANSWER: There are many different ways in avodas Hashem, and there is also an all-inclusive way, as the Arizal taught, that there were 12 individual

paths to cross the sea, for each of the 12 tribes, and there was also one path that included all of them together. The “all-inclusive” path is the root which contains everything [every path of avodas Hashem]. There are also “branches” of this “all-inclusive path”, and each of those branching paths contain a bit of each of the different paths that there are in avodas Hashem. An example of is the tikkun recited on the night of Shavuot, which contains a bit of each part of Torah.

TORAH LEARNING IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

QUESTION What is the role of Torah learning in a woman's life? Besides for helping her husband and children learn Torah, and besides for learning halachos that are applicable to women, does a woman get a mitzvah of learning Torah when learning the weekly parsha? Or is it better for her to sit and say Tehillim?

If a woman learns about emunah and about hashkafah (Torah view of matters), which are matters that everyone needs chizuk in, what are the boundaries of this? Can a woman learn the hidden parts of Torah? For example, in the sefarim of Rav Dessler and Rav Shimshon Pincus, there are Kabalistic concepts mentioned, such as ratzu v'shov (advancing and retreating between higher and lower levels), ayin (nothingness), oros u'keilim (light and vessels), the ten sefiros (Emanations), bechirah and yediah (free will vs. higher knowledge), and other delicate mystical concepts. And in the Rav's later sefarim of the Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh series [parts 6-9] there are very lofty spiritual concepts that are mentioned. If a person learns this superficially then perhaps it's not considered like really learning

kaballah, but then what would be the point for women to learn such sefarim if they are just reading it without understanding it with the depth that they are able to? Is it permitted, and is it proper, for women to clarify these lofty spiritual matters?

ANSWER It is appropriate for a woman to learn about the olam pnimi, the inner world, and in the language that can be translated into personal work for her soul, as opposed to the language of abstract wisdom. The language of wisdom (chochmah) is the language that speaks to men, whereas the language of the soul (nefesh) is what speaks to both men and women. It is known that the Baal Shem Tov was able to translate the language of wisdom, which is the language of Kaballah, into terms of the nefesh (soul).

When it comes to learning about our inner world in the language of the soul, any woman can learn about this according to her level and according to her intellectual and emotional capabilities, and one should be very careful not to overdo this studying.

FIGURING OUT MY SOUL ROOT

QUESTION Is there a way to know which “world” my soul comes from?

ANSWER The world of “Asiyah” corresponds to action. The word of “Yetzirah” corresponds to emotion. The world of “Beriah” corresponds to intellect. The world of “Atzilus” corresponds to d’veykus (attachment to G-d).

Each of these four “worlds” also has its own four subdivisions. For example, in the souls that are rooted in the world of Yetzirah (emotion), there are souls who are mainly (1) Asiyah within Yetzirah – their emotions are mainly expressed in their actions, for example, by doing acts of chessed (kindness) and love. (2) Yetzirah within Yetzirah – people who are entirely emotional. (3)

Beriah within Yetzirah – people who are aware of the wisdom within their feelings and middos. (4) Atzilus within Yetzirah – people who have d’veykus (attachment) in Hashem by way of their middos, becoming attached to the middos of Hashem.

The other “worlds” can also be divided into any of the 4 worlds. One should clarify where his soul comes from, based on the above. One can know this by identifying what his soul is mainly drawn towards, at his current level. There is a series of 3 shiurim on this topic called Olamos (Getting To Know Your Soul Root).

WHAT DO I WORK ON FIRST??

QUESTION It is hard for me to feel “grounded”. I don’t feel centered in my body. I feel like I am unbounded. Sometimes all I feel are my eyes, as if all my energy is in my head. It’s possible that physical exercise would help me become more grounded, but I have very little time in my day and I have a lot to do, both when it comes to family and work, and I have very little free time. I very much want to make the most of my time, and focus on that which is eternal, and to work directly with my soul. I want to do this sensibly. The Rav has said many times that it’s important to improve gradually, in steps.

But where do I begin??

Also, I thirstily drink up the Rav’s shiurim and sefarim, like a parched person in the desert who needs water, like a child in a candy store. I want to grow in all areas that the Rav talks about. Is there any order for me to go in? Does it make a difference which of the Rav’s sefarim or series I should begin with?

I very much appreciate that the Rav has taken of his precious time to read through my question. I am eagerly awaiting the Rav’s response. Thanks.

ANSWER You can work on one topic at a time, along with reading any of the other sefarim.

For now, it is recommended that you begin by learning the “Focus” sefer, which is part of the “4 Elements” series, which has just been released in Hebrew [also available in English for download as Fixing Your Focus].

FIGURING OUT MY MAIN ELEMENT

QUESTION I have two very strong aspects to my personality: The elements of “wind” and “water”. I don’t have that much “fire” or “earth” in my personality. I really want to know how I can know which of these dominant elements (water or wind) is my primary element. And, if for example my primary element is water, does that mean that my main personality is “wind-of-water”?

Thanks so much, from the depths of my heart!

ANSWER 1) Write down the strong points of your personality. Make a separate list and write down your main weaknesses. Then, make another list: Your strongest point, your second-to-strongest point, etc. and your greatest weakness, your second-to-greatest weakness, etc. Accordingly, you will be able to see which of your elements is more dominant, wind or water.

It is recommended that you use the series of the “Four Elements – Self-Recognition” in order to become clearer about this topic.

2) Usually, that is the case (your second-to-most dominant is your sub-personality. Thus, if your main element is water and your second to most dominant element is wind, your personality is wind-of-water]. However, sometimes there is a separation between your elements, and each element is apart from the other and they don’t overlap each other. For example, you element of

water may act independently from your wind, and your element of wind will act independently from your water [and they don’t interconnect.]

CRYING TO HASHEM FOR TOO LONG

QUESTION If a person has been crying all the time to the Ribono shel Olam for many years, to taste some real pleasure and vitality (especially when it comes to learning Torah), but he feels that Hashem is rejecting him, chas v’shalom, as if Hashem is pushing him away...what should such a person do? Should he continue not giving up, and keep crying to Hashem, hoping that he’ll soon get answered? I’ve told this to myself countless times in order to strengthen myself. Or, it is all a sign that he’s “not finding any sign of blessing” in his Torah learning, and therefore he should just go to work and support those who learn Torah?

I’ve always identified with the power of levad (alone) since I’m a child. It was always easy for me to reach a place of inner silence in myself, to the point that my tears would flow and I would daven a deep, heartfelt tefillah. Whenever I would feel a spark of some spiritual connection, either towards the Gemara I was learning or towards a section of sefer Tanya that I was learning, I would learn with tremendous emotion, pouring out my soul into it, and becoming very emotional in the process. Therefore it’s so hard for me that each day I find myself easily crying to Hashem, from a deep place in myself, but when it comes to learning Torah, I don’t feel that it’s our life, and I don’t find myself running after Torah learning as if it’s gold and treasure, like all the verses say.

I should point out that, Baruch Hashem, I am not chasing any physical lusts, and I don’t have any particular negative trait that’s ruining me. I have tried all kinds of avodah, but I feel like the verse, “And we do not know what should be done”. Much

thanks to the Rav. I identify very strongly with the Rav's personal account at the beginning of his way, but regarding myself, I feel that I have cried too much, and I just don't know what to do anymore.

ANSWER (1) Sit with yourself and reflect, and write down any of your accomplishments which you have so far been zoche to. Review this list every day, and thank Hashem, verbally. Your very involvement in what you "have" will give you a sense of stability, strength, and encouragement. Right now, you are too focused on what you didn't yet accomplish, and you're not thinking enough about what you do have.

(2) There is emotional pleasure, and there is intellectual pleasure. It seems that you are having emotional pleasure in your Torah learning, but you haven't yet found the intellectual pleasure in it. That is why your soul feels that you are majorly missing something.

In general, our emotional powers are usually more revealed to us than our intellectual powers. You should enter into in-depth Torah study, from connecting intellectually to your learning, and that is how you will find intellectual pleasure in your Torah learning. You can try listening to the series of "Getting To Know Your Way In Torah Learning" (Da Es Torasecha - Darkei HaLimud).

OVERDOING SELF-RECOGNITION

QUESTION What would the Rav say if a person has a lot of emotional problems and imbalances in his personality and he requires a lot of "therapy", but, instead of going to a therapist (who uses secular approaches and reads all the goyish psychology books), he instead listens to the Rav's shiurim for many hours of the day, in order to heal his soul and to learn how to balance out his soul?

It seems that there is more of a place for this kind of person to spend a lot of time analyzing his soul (for example, by listening to the Rav's shiurim

about the soul). And we know that just as a person needs to go to the doctor when he's not feeling well and it's not considered wasting time from Torah study, certainly when it comes to illnesses in our soul, such as when there are imbalances in one's personality, it seems that a person would need to spend much more time learning about himself and doing "therapy" with himself for a longer amount of time, until he becomes emotionally healthy.

There are probably many people like this, who have gone through all kinds of turbulence and rough situations and experiences in their life, and perhaps we can say that this is the situation of most people today (whether they are consciously aware of their issues or not).

So, it seems to me that even a man, whose main obligation is Torah study, would need to spend more time today in learning about his soul and how to balance himself out, by understanding about the 4 elements in his soul, and the 4 elements of his spouse, children, and parents, etc.

ANSWER A man may spend a bit of his time of the day learning about the soul, but not most of his day. First of all, for most people, spending a lot of time learning about themselves would make them confused and they wouldn't attain clarity anyway. Even more so, however [this would be an imbalanced approach, because] a person always needs a balance between his actions, words, character traits, and thinking, etc.

For most people, this [spending so much time on learning about the soul] would not create a proper balance in their lives.

Even for someone who has a much bigger need to learn about the soul and to balance out his personality, it would throw him off balance if he would spend too much time learning about his personal soul.

This is the approach that most people need to take.