



## EITHER A CHAVRUSA OR HASHEM

## QUESTION

I want to understand something that happened to me once. I used to learn with a certain person that I enjoyed learning with very much during Bein HaZmanin. One day he told me he can't learn with me tonight. I had been looking forward to learning with him so much, so this was very disappointing to me. I became so sad from it that I felt like I couldn't move. I was laying on the floor in my room and began to talk to Hashem. I said, "Hashem, if he doesn't want to learn with me, then I would rather die. My main energy and happiness comes from learning with him. If he doesn't learn with me, then that means You decided on Rosh HaShanah that I would die this year. Am I indeed supposed to die this year, and today? If he doesn't learn with me, I would rather be dead than alive, just as Rochel said when she was in pain, "And if not, then I am dead." Hashem, either make my friend learn with me, or take my neshamah right now!!!"

I was in such a state of distress that I was trying to make myself "die" by trying to "push" my soul out of my body. I continued to daven to Hashem with my request to learn with my chavrusa, and was crying, for about 10 minutes straight. Suddenly the phone rang. "We can learn tonight", my chavrusa said to me.

I was immediately filled with joy and my energy returned to me, and I felt like I had been revived from the dead. I felt, "Wow, there's truly nothing that stands in the way of the will." I also see the power of davening strongly to Hashem and how I had pleaded with Hashem to give me what I wanted.

My question is: Why indeed did my chavrusa suddenly change his mind and decide he would learn with me? Is it because of what Chazal say that "In the way a person wants to go in, he is led"? Or is it because I davened so much from my heart? Or for some other reason?

## ANSWER

All of these reasons you mentioned were all factors. It was a nishyon (test) for you to wonder: "Who is it that I wish to become so deeply connected with? To Hashem, or to a certain person?"

## GROWTH ON YOM TOV

## QUESTION

1) Yom Tov is pretty stressful when I go away to my parents for Yom Tov. My kids can be wild and my mother wants me to run after the kids so they don't break anything. My grandfather is not an easy person to be around and tries to convince me not to sleep in the succah. All the more so if I get into arguments with my wife on Yom Tov. How can I feel simchas Yom Tov in spite of all these challenges which always ruin my Yom Tov?

## ANSWER

Every so often, pause for a few moments and focus inwardly, entering into your pnimiyus (inner soul), and that is where you can draw simchah (joy) from.

## QUESTION

2) Since I don't enjoy Yom Tov that much when I go to my parents for Yom Tov, and because of the general atmosphere there, is it possible that Hashem wants me to get all my simchas Yom Tov from just honoring my parents and also learning how to look past the faults of others?

## ANSWER

That can be a part of your growth on Yom Tov, but it can't be all of it. (Refer also to the answer above).

## QUESTION

3) What is better to learn on Yom Tov, to learn a sugya of Gemara or to learn things that have to do with the Yom Tov?

## ANSWER

It is preferable to learn a sugya [of Gemara or halachah] that is related to the Yom Tov, and through it you can find simchah on Yom Tov. In addition, learn about any concepts that have to do with the Yom Tov.

## GUIDANCE & FINDING ONE'S MAIN REBBI

**QUESTION** I'm sorry for this very long question. I want to know all about what it means to "Make for yourself a rebbi" (*having a Torah mentor to guide me in life*). I don't mean to ask about the Rav specifically, I just have general questions on the entire subject of what it means to have a Rav, something which is relevant for any person, and I have the impudence to ask these questions because "It is Torah, and I need to learn it."

1) What should a person do if he doesn't have a Rebbi and he wants to fulfill what the Sages say, "Make for yourself a Rav" and he wants to receive guidance for living? Or, on a very simple level, what should one do when he needs to find someone whom he can ask all his questions to? Does a person need to choose one person whom he will make into his Rebbi, or can he receive from many different teachers so that he can have a more integrated approach towards life?

### ANSWER

The Gemara says that when it comes to knowing the Torah's information (*girsa, the text*) one should only have one teacher for this, but when it comes to in-depth understanding (*iyun*) one should learn from several different teachers of how to think. It is possible and it is appropriate for most people to receive different aspects of thinking from each teacher he learns from. Each person is different when it comes to how many different Torah teachers they can learn from, because there are some people who become confused from learning several different approaches. So each person needs to learn Torah from different teachers depending on how much he can handle and to what extent.

**QUESTION** 2) How does a person have bittul (*humility and subordinating himself*) to his rebbi? Is it through acquiring a lot of Torah knowledge and wisdom from his rebbi, or does he need to just simply follow his Rebbi earnestly (*that is, if he heard from others that this particular rebbi is a tzaddik or a great person or a Gadol*), and that is how he can feel bittul towards the rebbi?

### ANSWER

Both factors are required. There must be bittul on all levels (*to the actions, middos, Torah teachings, will and essence of the rebbi*) and that is a fundamental perspective.

**QUESTION** 3) Does a person need to have total bittul to ev-

erything that his rebbi says, whether he understands what his rebbi says or not (*and the entire need to understand what his rebbi says is purely because there is a mitzvah to learn Torah and understand Torah, and because one needs to become more connected to his Rebbi's thinking and to the soul of his Rebbi, but he must do what his Rebbi says even if he doesn't understand everything his rebbi says to do*)? Or should a person only accept what he understands, and anything he doesn't understand he should 'put aside on the shelf' until he eventually is zocheh to understand it?

### ANSWER

He should believe in all that he hears, and he should try to understand partially whatever he is taught, according to how much he can understand. But he must do what he is told by his rebbi, whether he understands the rebbi's words or not.

**QUESTION** 4) If a person often asks someone for advice [and considers the other to be somewhat of a rebbi to him whom he receives an approach in life from], and sometimes the person doesn't agree with that wise person's advice and has a hard time following it, and then the wise person or rebbi-kind of personality tells the person, "I can only guide you if you have total bittul to everything I say – only if you follow me blindly can I help you!", what should the person do?

### ANSWER

One can receive advice from any wise person. But one should not completely subordinate himself except to his main rebbi (*his rebbi muvhak*).

**QUESTION** 5) If a person is in doubt about which approach to take when it comes to serving Hashem [i.e. he's not sure if he should be serious and doing teshuvah and improving himself or if instead he should be having a more relaxed approach of having emunah and bitachon and being b'simchah, and countless other doubts that one may have about which approach he needs to take], does he need to just do whatever will make him happy and calmer? Or does he need to be more truthful and do what he thinks Hashem wants him to do even if it's more difficult for him and it doesn't necessarily make him happier and calmer?

### ANSWER

If a person isn't sure which approach to take, he should only follow the approach that makes him happier and calmer if the two choices in front of him are each proper paths in general.

And every so often, a person still needs to take an approach that is more truthful even if it doesn't make him happier and calmer, so that he can be humbled and learn how to work hard at serving Hashem.

**QUESTION** 6) What should a man be thinking about most of the day (*when he's not in front of the Gemara learning*)? Should he be thinking all the time about the Gemara he's in middle of learning or should he be thinking about serving Hashem (*including emunah, etc.*)? Should a man only think about avodas Hashem for a little bit of time a day and mainly be learning Gemara, or should a man be thinking most of the day about Hashem and how to serve Him, how to have good middos, subjects of mussar, chassidus, Kaballah, etc.?

### ANSWER

It depends on one's shoshon neshamah (*soul root*). There were Gedolim who spent most of the day thinking about what they were learning in the Gemara, while other Gedolim spent most of the day thinking about Hashem.

**QUESTION** 7) If a person has received Torah knowledge and guidance from many different mentors and teachers (*which seems to be the case for most people, who all had a lot of Rebbeim and Torah teachers throughout life, sometimes even having several different Roshei Yeshivos that they were connected with, and later receiving from additional mentors*), does that mean that a person becomes an integration of all the Torah teachings he learned? Or is he just a confused mixture of many different approaches?

For example, let's say a person doesn't know which area he should be focusing on in his avodas Hashem and he doesn't know what the main priority should be and what the proper attitude should be towards something, etc. Is it a good thing that he has heard so many different approaches, or will he just be confused and not know what he's supposed to do?

### ANSWER

This is relative to each person. Most people are not clear about what exactly they received from each of their Torah teachers.

**QUESTION** 8) Can a person be involved with several different approaches at once? And if yes, would that only be true about two approaches that are very similar to each other, or would it even apply to vastly different approaches? For example, can a person connect himself to a Rav or Rebbe who is very far removed from this world, barely taking pleasure in the physical

and always smashing his middos, and at the same time can a person also connect himself to a Rebbe who focuses more on joy and trusting Hashem and having no worries? Or, in a different example, can a person connect himself to a rebbe whose approach is more practical and mainstream and grounded, who focuses more on the revealed parts of Torah and on what's yashrus, and at the same time can a person also connect himself to a rebbe who mainly talks about Hashem's hidden mode of conduct? Another example: Can a person connect himself to a rebbe whose main approach is seriousness and yirah (*fear of Hashem*) and at the same learning from a rebbe whose main approach is ahavah (*love of Hashem*)? Or, can a person take an approach based on mussar and at the same take an approach of chassidus and d'veykus?

### ANSWER

It depends on how much one can absorb, how much he is able to expand, and it also depends on one's personal shoshon neshamah.

**QUESTION** 9) After a person figures out who his main rebbe is (*at least for the time being, because it seems that a person can change who his main rebbe is later in life, for example if his rebbe is niftar and now he needs to find a new rebbe*), how should he view his previous Rebbeim and Torah teachers that he has learned from? Does he simply need to feel grateful to them and to express his gratitude to them, or does he need to actually view all of them as being part of his chinuch (*education*) in Torah and avodas Hashem?

### ANSWER

As long as one received a recognizable chunk of understanding from any of his teachers, he should view that teacher as a major part of his Torah education in both Torah and avodah.

**QUESTION** 10) What does it mean that the Gadol HaDor (*the greatest one in the generation*) is automatically one's rebbe muvhak (*the main rebbe*) whom he must follow? If one has a main rebbe who doesn't always do like the Gadol HaDor, which rebbe should he follow, his main rebbe or the Gadol HaDor?

### ANSWER

Out of concern that the answer to this won't be understood properly, I will choose not to answer this question.

**QUESTION** 11) Does it make sense that there are two types of people, "Yosef" and Yehudah", and that if one has a shoshon

neshamah of Yehudah, it means he is more independent and he doesn't need a Rebbe to guide him, because he can turn directly to Hashem, whereas someone with a shoresh neshamah in Yosef needs a rebbe to guide him, just as we see that Yaakov guided Yosef but he didn't guide Yehudah? (And Kalev, who came from Yehudah, went to daven for himself before going with the Spies, whereas Yehoshua, who came from Yosef, had Moshe davening for him, because the "Yehudah" type of person doesn't need a rebbe as much and he can go straight to Hashem for help, whereas a "Yosef" type of person needs a rebbe to help him?

### ANSWER

That is very true. Yosef is rooted in Yesod which is rooted in Chochmah, which receives wisdom from the level above it [from Keser]. Yehudah is rooted in Malchus which is rooted in Keser, which has nothing above it except for Hashem.

**QUESTION** 12) Since most Rebbeim seem to have an approach that is usually an "integration" and combination of several approaches that they learned from their own Rebbeim, the question is, that there are an endless amount of permutations of different combined approaches, so how can a person ever choose a Rebbe, if every Rebbe is really an integration of a few different approaches together then how do we need if one integration is better than a different integration?

### ANSWER

This is a general and fundamental question: What path of avodas Hashem should a person choose? That is why a person needs to choose a Rav or rebbe who is the closest to that integration.

**QUESTION** 13) If a person went to Litvishe yeshivos and feels a connection to Chassidus, does he need to find for himself a Rebbe who knows both the Litvish and Chassidish approaches, or does he need to remain Litvish and not integrate any Chassidus into his approach (*and therefore he should not choose a Rebbe who teaches Chassidus, since this goes against the Litvishe path that he's part of*)?

### ANSWER

One should choose a Rav who generally understands him (*who knows the general personality of his nefesh*).

**QUESTION [ABBREVIATED]** 14) The Rav says often that a person

should recognize different approaches of serving Hashem and not to look at others as being mistaken or having a wrong approach in serving Hashem, since there are many ways to get to Hashem. What about certain paths of avodas Hashem which hold clearly that only their way is the right way and they do not accept anyone else's view, because as far as they are concerned, the truth only stands with them and everyone else who doesn't have their view is crazy or mistaken? Does that come from immaturity or does it come from having a different shoresh neshamah than others?

### ANSWER

It doesn't seem to me that everything you mentioned in your question is on the mark. Only the hamon am (*the general crowd, the 'street talk'*) thinks like that, but the actual leaders of those paths aren't thinking in those terms. Every wise person has a limit of how much he understands, and he can also grasp the thinking of others. Every wise person will stick to his approach, but he will also make sure to understand others, at least a little bit.

**QUESTION** 15) If a person doesn't have Rebbe, should he bind his soul with the soul of Rebbe Nachman of Breslev? Or is this not enough and a person needs an active Rebbe who is alive on this world?

### ANSWER

At the very least, one needs to follow a rebbe for some time of his life, and during that time in which he follows a rebbe, he must humble himself to him. That is what R' Avraham Yurevitch zt"l told me [*dayan of the Edah Hachareidis, Yerushalayim, known as the Vitepsker Rebbe*]. It is better to choose a Rebbe who is alive, because our physical body is able to relate better to someone who is alive rather than someone who is not on this world, and thereby feel more humbled, to the rebbe.

**QUESTION** 16) If a person has a nature to see faults in everyone and therefore he also sees faults in his rebbe, is that a sign that he can't follow this rebbe because he won't feel bittul to his rebbe? Or should he just work on his bad middah of seeing faults in others and he should continue to follow his rebbe even though he sees faults in him?

### ANSWER

He needs to work on his middos.