

RESENTFUL OF MY PARENTS & GRANDPARENTS

QUESTION

What should a person do if he can't see anything good in his parents and grandparents?

At first, I used to be very angry at my parents and at their faults which they had, and because they didn't fulfill my childhood needs. After some time of doing a lot of soul-accounting, I came to the conclusion that I should just forgive them. This was mainly because I realized that my parents weren't the cause of their problems, since they themselves did not have good childhood with their own parents. So then I turned all of my anger at my grandparents. But then I later realized that my grandparents, too, were not at fault for being who they are, because they, too, probably did not receive a good childhood. So I came to the conclusion that the Ribono Shel Olam placed me into this situation.

My question is: How am I supposed to view my situation? Why did the Ribono Shel Olam place me in a situation where I didn't have a good childhood? Is it an atonement for my sins? Is it just a test on my emunah? Is it a tikkun (*repair*) for a previous lifetime? Is it simply that I need to just accept the suffering with temimus (*simplicity*) and not ask any questions? Or is it because it was to show me that I have a personal avodah to acquire a "good eye" and avoid seeing faults in others? Perhaps I need to work on all of the above....?

ANSWER

1. Every person contains at least one point that is good. It is upon you to work hard to discover at least one good point in every person.

2. Chazal state, "Do not judge your friend, until you reach his place." There is a well-known explanation of this from the Kotzker Rebbe, who said: "And indeed, you will never reach his place (*so you can never judge him*)." Think deeply into the life of another person and you will see that there are so many complex factors which shape a person and who he is today. Every person

is born with a certain nature and with certain abilities and limitations in his soul. Every person had a certain situation in his home, as well as the environment he grew up in, as well as many different childhood experiences. A person has gone through all kinds of events which affected him.

Therefore, you aren't able to fully know what another person has gone through – because you don't have all the information on him. The more a person matures in his soul, he absorbs the simple truth that it is impossible to judge even one person. "A judge does not see except what his eyes see", but our eyes only see a very partial picture of the situation. The only one who can completely judge another person is the Creator, Who sees everything. Even the Heavenly Court, which judges mankind, is only able to judge based on what they "see", and from the emunah that G-d will guide them in the decision on a person – because it is really a decision that is beyond the comprehension of even the Heavenly Court.

3. Have emunah (*faith*) that this is your unique lot. It should also be viewed as a tikkun for the past, just like all other suffering which purifies a person. Also, be aware that whatever you went through in this lifetime is the beginning of many different experiences and situations which you will go through afterwards, which all contribute to your general development – whether you have gone through a little, or a lot.

THE RAV'S VIEWS OF MODERN THERAPY

The Rav is of the view that a Jew should not go to a secular therapist, who received his knowledge from the gentiles, since the gentiles "mainly" deal with the "animal" area of the soul (*the nefesh habehaimis*) and not with the "G-dly" area of the soul (*the nefesh Elohis*). I have several questions about this, and it is relevant to me and also to anyone else who wants to know the Rav's view on this topic.

QUESTION 1) In "Getting To Know Your Feelings", the Rav says that "most" of the gentiles who treat issues in the human soul

are only addressing the “animal soul”, the nefesh habehaimis. Does this imply that there are some of them who do know how to deal with issues in the Jew’s “G-dly soul”, the nefesh Elohis?

ANSWER

1) A gentile is able to understand and deal with the spiritual aspects of a gentile’s soul, but not of a Jew’s soul. There are three levels: the nefesh habehaimis [the “animal” soul, which exists in both Jew and gentile], the soul [spiritual layer] of a gentile, and the soul [spiritual layer] of a Jew.

QUESTION

2) The Rav has said that the way to treat the issues in a Jew’s soul is only by way of the four elements of soul [earth, water, air and fire], and the Rav advised that if someone needs to go to a therapist, he should contact the “Four Elements Institute.” Is the Rav familiar with any therapists in America who treat patients using the Torah’s approach alone? If not, does the Rav know if there are any tzaddikim here in America whom one can go in order to treat any issues in his soul?

ANSWER

2) No. However, “The nation of Yisrael is never a widow” [there are always tzaddikim and Gedolim in Klal Yisrael].

QUESTION

3) Someone told me that there is a letter of the Alter of Kelm to a student in which he permitted his student to see a gentile psychologist, because just as it’s permitted to go to a gentile doctor to heal the body, so is it permitted to go to a gentile psychologist to heal issues in the soul – as long as the psychologist is an expert in the soul. Has the Rav ever heard of this? If it’s true, can we say that nowadays is more problematic than previous times?

QUESTION

4) Through learning the Rav’s sefarim and shiurim about the soul - the “Da Es” series and the “Four Elements” series – one is able to know and recognize his individual soul and learn how to treat the issues in his soul as much as possible. Does the Rav agree that there are certain extreme situations in which a person would not be helped by learning the Rav’s shiurim and sefarim, and that in these situations a person is allowed to see a secular therapist? For example, if a person needs serious help, or if he was born with major issues in his personality which require therapy, i.e. violent mood swings, intense rage, egotism or major self-absorption, a rough childhood, etc. – can such a person be helped by the Rav’s sefarim and shiurim, or does the Rav agree that such a person needs to see a therapist [even a secular one]?

ANSWER 3-4) The rule is that “We cannot learn anything from a certain story that happened.” Certainly we cannot determine anything based on any private guidance that was given to one person, because there are all sorts of factors that we are not aware of.

QUESTION

5) Similar to the above question, does the Rav agree that there are certain extreme situations where a person requires medication, because his problems aren’t being solved by leaning sefarim or listening to shiurim?

ANSWER

5) There are extreme situations where a person needs an integrated approach, of both factors [medication, combined with learning sefarim and listening to shiurim].

QUESTION

6) In the sefer “Darkei HaChaim”, it says that HaGaon HaTzaddik Rav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz zt”l that yeshiva students shouldn’t learn about the nefesh (soul) because “it’s not our way” and “it’s not part of our mesorah (tradition)”. Does the Rav agree or disagree with this?

Much thanks to the Rav.

ANSWER

6) Yes. Rav Dessler zt”l introduced [the study of the soul] into the world of yeshivos, in a way that was clear and enlightening, would benefit the masses. Many of our Gedolim disagreed with him.

SLEEPINESS WHILE LEARNING

QUESTION

[For about 14 years already I am a baal teshuvah.]

In the last 8 years I have had a full seder at different kolelim (I switched to different kolelim throughout the years). I have a problem of falling asleep. Whenever I open a sefer, after a few minutes I find myself battling to stay awake, and therefore I am not succeeding at learning and I am not progressing in my learning. I am thinking of leaving the beis hamidrash because I am finding it so difficult to stay awake when I learn. I am seeking advice from the Rav on this. Thanks.

ANSWER

Your Inner Work: Chazal state that the word “beraishis” means that there are “two beginnings”. One beginning point is our emunah, which is also called ayin (when our existence is

negated, in deference to G-d's existence), referring to the power of serenity (*menuchah*). Another beginning point is *chochmah* (wisdom of Torah), which is also known as *yeish* (our existence), which essentially corresponds to our power of action (*maaseh*). One needs a balance between his abilities of serenity (*menuchah*) and action (*maaseh*).

As it seems from your situation, there was an imbalance from your past in your power of *ayin*/serenity. That is why you are having a hard time with your second “beginning” – learning the *chochmah* of the Torah.

In addition, it is also possible that you are betting deterred because you haven't yet clarified what your main area in Torah is. As a result, your connection to Torah learning isn't yet genuine. You also haven't yet clarified what your particular style of Torah learning should be. So, practically speaking, you should do the following:

(1) Get used to training yourself to think in-depth about Torah outside of your learning sessions. Begin to think more and more, and gradually you will actualize the potential of your intellect. (2) Correspondingly, you should slowly begin to clarify the particular area of Torah that appeals to you, as well as a particular “style” of learning Torah that appeals to you.

The more that you will be “awakening” your power of thought, the easier it will become for you to stay awake in your learning sessions. All of this is the “inner” work that you need to when it comes to do this.

Your External Work: There is also some “external” work for you to do here.

(1) Right now, at this point, you should learn parts of Torah which your heart desires, and to keep your thoughts awake by involving yourself with any questions you come across which are of particular interest to you, such as a question that affects *halachah*, or a particularly intriguing insight. Find any areas in Torah you can learn which are intellectually and emotionally appealing to you, which will keep you stimulated. (2) If possible, try to stand for some of the time that you learn. (3) Also, try swaying your hands, and other parts of the body, while you are learning. (4) Every so often, move to sit in a different seat and return to your seat later. (5) Besides for this, it is also proper for you to verbalize your learning, to “speak it out” clearly and enjoyably. (6) And, every so often, pause in the middle of your learning and daven from the depths of your heart that Hashem should open your heart to his Torah. (7) If you feel a need to learn *mussar*, learn *sefer Nefesh HaChaim* shaar IV. (8) You can also wake yourself up through external means when you need to, such as by drinking a beverage [i.e. a cup of water,

juice, soda or coffee] or by sucking on something [i.e. a candy] in your mouth.

STAYING FOCUSED WHILE SOCIALIZING

QUESTION

The reality is that we are living in a world of many distractions. How can we be realistic and be involved and connected with the reality around us, in a way that won't cause us to lose our power of focus?

ANSWER

Generally, a person who lives spiritually will try to live inwardly “apart” from his surroundings even as he lives amongst them, because he wants to grow. However, a person cannot totally separate himself from everyone else, and there is no need to do this either. A person needs to be involved with the world and to be very alert when he is around others, when he needs to be. This is especially true when he works at a job with others, or when he needs to be involved with family obligations. The same goes for whenever a person is around other people and he needs to be involved with them.

However, regarding this topic in general, the following points should be considered. What kind of company will a person be around? Will it involve any activities that are not permissible, such as seeing, speaking, or hearing anything objectionable? It is out of question for a person to stay in a place where this happens.

If a person is unclear if he will be encountering any of these issues at the place, or if he needs to be there for whatever reason, then each situation like this needs to be weighed carefully. These factors will need to be considered: How important is it for him to really be there? What are the possible dangers that he will encounter there, and what are the possible solutions to such issues? For example, it is told of the Chofetz Chaim that once he was on a train and there was a conversation of *lashon hora* taking place. He decided that since there is no requirement of *yaharog v'al yaavor* (be killed, rather than commit the sin), he is not obligated to open the window and jump outside the train. But as soon as the train reached the next stop, he got off the train, even though he didn't originally plan on getting off there.

One needs to know that if he will have to be amongst a group of people for a considerable amount of time, he is apt to lose his focus on his central priority of the day. Once a person begins to answer others and make small talk with them, he disconnects from his inner world and he becomes involved with

the outer, external world. This causes him to lose his focus, and his soul becomes scattered from this.

The proper approach to this situation is that one needs to be able to guard his inner solitude, even as he is amongst a group of people. The Chovos HaLevovos says that a pious person remains in solitude even as he is amongst a large group of people. Of course, one must always be respectful to others and greet others, out of *derech erez*, and one must act in a pleasant way to others, and also give them a pleasant-looking face. If someone else asks him a question, he should respond briefly, showing interest in the other person's words and talking with a pleasant tone to another, but he should not do more than that. For all the time that one finds himself around others, one should enter into his inner world, focused and deep in thought about a Torah insight, which he prepared beforehand for himself to think about when he will be around others.

If a person feels that he cannot remain heavily focused in his thoughts when he is around others [i.e. when is at a social event], he should focus his vision on a certain object nearby him. When others talk to him, he should respond to them, as explained earlier, but immediately after responding, he should re-focus on the object he was looking at before [in order to maintain his focus and not lose it]. Although this is a very external method to maintain focus, but it can help a person strongly develop his power of focus.

HALACHAH ALWAYS LIKE BEIS HILEL

QUESTION

In the Rav's shiurim on sefer Mesillas Yesharim (*in the chapter on mishkal hachassidus*) the Rav seems to be saying that the Ramchal elsewhere writes that the halachah is always like Beis Hilel. Where is a source for this? Also, can the Rav explain a little more about this?

ANSWER

In Creation there are three "lines" (*kavin*), the *kav yemin* (right line), the *kav sm'ol* (left line) and the *kav emtza* (middle line). The halachah always follows the *kav emtza*, the "middle line", which decides between the right line and the left line, between *chesed* (kindness) and *gevurah* (strength), between leniency and stringency. When the halachah is decided like the more lenient opinion, the middle line is leaning towards the right line. When the halachah is decided like the more stringent opinion, the middle line is leaning towards the left line.

Beis Shammai represents the "left line", the more stringent opinion, which represents *iyun*, in-depth and analytical, back-

and-forth discussions of the halachah, breaking it down into details. Beis Hilel represents the "right line", the more lenient opinion, which represents *temimus* (*the simplistic and non-rational*).

The Arizal [Rabbi Yitzchok Luria] represents *din* (judgment), as implied by his name, Yitzchok, who represents judgment. That is why the Arizal broke down everything into details (*peratim*). Therefore, according to the Arizal, the halachah in the future will always be like Beis Shammai, because the Arizal's soul-root is *din*, judgment.

In contrast, the Ramchal [Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato] always speaks about general rules (*kelalim*), as opposed to details. All of the Ramchal's works lay out the general rules, the *kelalim*. Thus, the Ramchal leans towards the view of *chesed* (kindness). This is why the Ramchal said that he is writing all of the "general rules" so that all questions can fall away. The Ramchal's path is to remove *din* (judgment), to show how a question isn't even a question to begin with, because all questions come from a strengthening of *din*, as is well-known. This is why all of the Ramchal's works are about the concept of *yichud Hashem* (*the oneness of Hashem*), which is essentially the concept of *emunah* (belief in G-d) rooted in *temimus* (*simplistic, non-rational belief*). The Ramchal's writings show how wisdom is rooted in *ayin* (*in the spiritual and non-rational*). The Ramchal shows how the illumination of Hashem's *yichud* can be understood logically, but most of his words explain it in terms of non-rational *emunah*. Only minimally does the Ramchal explain concepts in an intellectual manner.

The 6,000 year period we are in will be followed by a century of "destruction". After that, Hashem will renew His world, which will be followed by an eighth century, a ninth century, and a tenth century. This is described by the Ramchal in sefer Bris Menuchah.

The eighth century represents the "left line", which corresponds to *binah* (understanding and details). That is when the halachah will be like Beis Shammai. The ninth century corresponds to the "right line", which corresponds to *chochmah* (original and raw wisdom), and that is when the halachah will follow Beis Hilel. The tenth century will be the "integration of opposites" (*kelilas hafachim*). According to the Arizal, the halachah at that time will lean towards the "left line" (*din/judgment*) and it will follow the opinion of Beis Shammai. This corresponds to the spiritual dimension known as *Atik*. According to the Ramchal, the halachah at that time will lean towards the "right line" (*chesed/kindness*), and it will follow the opinion of Beis Hilel. This corresponds to the spiritual dimension known as *Arikh*.