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**WHY CAN'T I GIVE UP GEMARA FOR
KABALLAH & CHASSIDUS ?****QUESTION**

Obviously a person should not give up from working hard at learning Gemara in favor of learning only Kaballah, but what if a person is learning Gemara the entire day but doesn't feel fulfilled from this kind of learning and he also doesn't want to work so hard anymore at this kind of learning? Assuming that he has already learned how to exert himself at learning Gemara and he has already developed his mind well through learning Torah, is he incorrect to give up working hard at learning Gemara in favor of learning Chassidus, where he feels closer to Hashem but he doesn't have to strain his mind that much with this kind of learning? Though he may not have reached his personal portion in learning Torah yet, perhaps we can say that this is only because learning Gemara wasn't his true portion and instead his soul is meant to learn Kaballah and Chassidus.

Plus, there are also different soul-roots of Yosher and Igulim, and exertion is meant more for Yosher-souls whereas Igulim-souls don't do well with exertion, so why can't the Igulim-souls go learn Chassidus if this kind of learning is what they are meant for? Especially if exerting his mind at Gemara is stressful upon his soul because it's not his soul-root to exert himself at Gemara.

Also, to make the question stronger, Rav Wolbe writes in sefer Alei Shur that "There are those whose main portion is in Torah, and amongst them are those whose portion is Gemara, in iyun or bekiyus, or in learning Chumash, while the portion of others is in Mussar, and there are those whose portion is Chessed, while the portion of others is Tefillah, and we cannot belittle any of them, because each person has his own portion."

It seems from his words that those whose main strength lays in the area of the heart and who are drawn towards character improvement and closeness to Hashem (even if he also desires to know Torah and to work hard at learning Torah, but he considers this secondary in importance to closeness with Hashem) are indeed meant to pursue this more than exertion in Torah. Why then is a person making an error if he runs away from exertion in learning Gemara in favor of learning Kaballah or Chassidus?

ANSWER

Each person has his personal share in a part of the Torah, and that is where his main spiritual energy (*chiyus*) can be drawn from. For this, one needs to deeply clarify what his personal share in the Torah is. But many times, a person runs away from one part of Torah to another part of Torah because that is what he's more comfortable with. For example, when people never learn Mussar and spend all of their learning on Gemara, it is not because they aren't meant for learning Mussar (as the Gra says, that when a person truly has Torah there is no need for Mussar), but because they are simply running away from learning this area of Torah (in this case, Mussar). That is why a person has to deeply clarify what his personal share in Torah [area of Torah] is.

This is one of the most difficult tasks that there is and it remains vague for most people, and this is because most people are drawn after what they're used to or after what's more comfortable for them, and very few people are connected with their true share in the Torah.

QUESTION

2) Also, what if a person heard shiurim and learned about the "inner world" [as described in the Rav's shiurim and sefarim] but he suspects that if he takes this path he will slacken off from working hard at Gemara, since he won't be able to concentrate on the Gemara with his mind always thinking about his internal state and on how he has to balance his soul and reach shleimus (self-perfection), etc.? Should such a person stay away from learning about the "inner world"?

ANSWER

He will need to think a lot about how he can attain an inner balance between learning Gemara with learning Kaballah & Chassidus. Though his main portion in the Torah may be in learning how to develop his inner world, he will only become complete through learning Gemara.

ZIONISM VS. MAKING ALIYAH TO ERETZ YISRAEL**QUESTION**

I very much want to make aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. I understand that Mashiach is very close and that now it's time for us to "return home" now. However, I'm afraid of transgressing the "Three Oaths"

[as taught by the Satmar Rebbe zt”l]. I know that now’s the time for aliyah, and if not now, then never. However I need to make the move correctly and I need to know how to live in Eretz Yisrael with the proper attitude and hashkafos. How can I live in Eretz Yisrael without transgressing the Three Oaths?

ANSWER

Aliyah is about moving to Eretz Yisrael (*the Holy Land*) - and it is not about “moving to the country of Israel.” There is no halachic issue of going to live in “Eretz Yisrael” – there are only halachic issues for a person who wishes to live in “Israel”, the country of Israel that is associated with what is called “Medinas” Yisrael, the Israeli government [meaning that it all depends on what your attitude is, if you are coming to live in Eretz Yisrael because of the holy land that it is, which is the right attitude to have, or if you are coming to live in Israel due to Zionism, which is the wrong attitude to have and which is problematic].

The Vilna Gaon wanted to come live in Eretz Yisrael, and so did the Baal Shem Tov, and Baba Sali came to live here, and so did many other great holy leaders from all different sects of Jewry from the past. And even many chassidim of Satmar are living in Eretz Yisrael. The attitude you need to have towards aliyah is that you will be moving to “Eretz Yisrael” [the holy land], and not to the “Medinas Yisrael” (*the country of Israel, which is the secular, Zionist culture that is not Eretz Yisrael*).

WHY DOES THE RAV EMPHASIZE 4 ELEMENTS

QUESTION

The Rav mentions that there are other paths of avodas Hashem besides for the “4 elements” approach, and I would be happy to know what those other ways are. Also, I want to know why the Rav chooses to go with the 4 elements approach more than any other path in avodas Hashem.

ANSWER

The sefer Tomer Devorah lists 13 steps of avodas Hashem, based on the 13 middos of rachamim of Hashem. The sefer Mesillas Yesharim lists 10 steps of avodas Hashem, based on the ten steps of growth taught by the Sage Rabbi Pinchos ben Yair, based on the Ten Sefiros. However, the path of 4 elements is closer to home with most people, because it speaks even to the animal level of the soul (*the nefesh habehaimis*) since it is an approach by which one can repair his natural imbalances. This is because the 4 elements are really part of the secret of the Iggulim (*the circles*), as explained in the sefer Leshem, and the avodah that corresponds to Iggulim is the avodah of repairing the nefesh habehaimis. The 4 elements approach is also an approach that balances even our Nefesh Elohis (*G-dly soul*). That is why Rav Chaim Vital in sefer Shaarei Kedushah explains how to repair the animal soul by working with the 4 elements (*fire, wind, water and earth*).

ALTERNATIVES TO FASTING

QUESTION

There are rabbis today who say that people need to fast for a certain amount of times in order to be forgiven for certain sins, just as the Arizal taught. Does the Rav agree with that approach? And is there an alternative way, other than fasting and other calculated forms of repentance, by which a person to be forgiven by Hashem for the sins he committed?

ANSWER

This is a lengthy discussion, and I will mention just a few of the alternatives to fasting.

1) Through a combination of Torah learning and doing acts of chessed, one’s sins are forgiven. We learn this from the Gemara that even though Eli HaKohen’s descendants were decreed to die young, their descendants Abaye and Rava lived longer because they applied themselves especially to Torah study and in doing acts of kindness for others.

2) The Vilna Gaon said that the main suffering a person needs to go through on this world is not through fasting and physical pain, but through breaking one’s desires that are verbal-related [i.e. lashon hora] and breaking one’s sins that are lust-related, and included in this is nullifying one’s wishes and desires.

3) Another method of being forgiven for sins is, when one lovingly accepts any of his suffering that Hashem sends his way.

4) It is written, “For all sins, love covers over.” There is also a statement in our Sages, “A little bit of light pushes away a lot of darkness.” This was the way of the Baal Shem Tov [by focusing more on increasing your good acts, as opposed to dwelling on your sins, in turn you will merit Hashem’s love to cover over your sins].

ELEMENTS OF THE GRA AND REBBI NACHMAN

QUESTION

I saw the Rav’s response that the Baal Shem Tov’s primary soul element was the element of water. I was wondering: What was the primary element of Rebbi Nachman of Bresslev’s soul, and what was the primary element of the Gra’s soul? And how can any person become connected to the elements any of the approaches of our Gedolim?

ANSWER

Rebbi Nachman’s main element was fire. He was the one who said, “A fire will burn in me until the coming of Mashiach.” His approach in avodas Hashem was to have continuous growth, destroying his previous level, and constantly demanding higher levels of growth from himself.

The Gra's main element was earth. His approach was to give organization and structure to any matter of Torah that he wrote about. And, like earth, he applied all of his exertion and effort into carrying the yoke of Torah upon him throughout his toil in learning Torah.

By deeply understanding the 4 elements, and also by having a deep understanding of the approach and path of a Gadol [one can thereby gain spiritual illumination from the path of a particular Gadol].

ARMILOS VS. MASHIACH BEN YOSEF

QUESTION

It is said by some commentaries on the Siddur that one should daven for Mashiach ben Yosef in the final war so that he shouldn't be killed by the wicked "Armilos". Elsewhere, this evil figure is called "Romilos". My question is, who is this Armilos? And what is the concept of Armilos on the inner level, and what evil force does Armilos represent? And is there a difference if he is called Armilos or Romilos?

ANSWER

Targum Yehonasan (*Yeshayahu 11:4*) describes the death of a wicked figure, "Armilos", at the end of the final war. He exists in a large stone found in Rome, and when the time for the final war arrives, the stone will fall and this giant figure "Armilos" will emerge from it. (See also the commentary of Tzror HaMor to *Devarim 24:8*). He will be the nemesis to Mashiach ben Yosef, and the Arizal explains, when one davens for Mashiach, he should daven especially that Mashiach ben Yosef should not be killed by the wicked Armilos.

The root of the birth of Armilos is explained in Heichalos Rabasi (39:2): He will be born from an engraved image, and half of him will come from a stone and his other half will come from the engraved image.

Thus, Armilos is the root of the "heart of stone" within man. He will be the only stone that produces offspring, and therefore his power can counter the offspring of Yosef. The sefer Dan Yadin says that Armilos is another name for Gog and Magog, who are two brothers, and Armilos has two heads. That is why he has two names – Armilos and Romilos. The Ohr HaChaim (*Bamidbar 24:17*) also discusses this.

Armilos is the chief ruler of the Erev Rav, as explained in sefer Kol HaTor (*vol.I*), and in the sefer Kol HaTor (*vol.II*) also adds further that [the tribe of] Ephraim [who descends from Yosef and whom Mashiach ben Yosef will descend from] will wage war against Armilos. The sefer Kinas Hashem Tzevaos (*vol.II*) of the Ramchal says that Armilos is the "secret of Amalek."

MASHIACH IN OUR AVODAS HASHEM

QUESTION

Lately I have lost my inspiration when it comes to davening. I don't think that my davening has any power. I have been learning sefarim where I felt connected to the teachings of certain tzaddikim of the past, but now I feel that I have just become conceited and brazen by thinking that I have any connection to these tzaddikim and these teachings. It seems that in earlier generations, people became holier by connecting to tzaddikim and their teachings. Does this also need to be done in our times, in order to have true aliyah (*spiritual growth*)?

ANSWER

Our Sages teach that there two beginning points to start from: Keser and Chochmah. When one starts with Keser, it is by beginning from a simple bond with HaKadosh Baruch Hu without using any intermediaries. This is also known as the "illumination of Mashiach ben Dovid". The other beginning point is Chochmah. When one begins with Chochmah, he connects to HaKadosh Baruch Hu through the wisdom of tzaddikim. This is the "illumination of Mashiach ben Yosef". Every person needs both of these aspects in his avodas Hashem – but in the final generations, the main way of connecting to Hashem is through the illumination of Mashiach ben Dovid [by starting from Keser, which is to form a simple, earnest bond with Hashem].

HAVING A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT

QUESTION

We know that there's a basic rule that a person needs to have a basic sense of self-esteem and happiness about himself in order to serve Hashem b'simchah (*with joy*) and in order to achieve any growth in avodas Hashem, and Rebbi Nachman of Bresslov says that everyday should keep reminding himself of his nekudos tovov (*good points*). But what should a person do if he is naturally drawn towards certain sins which are severe in the eyes of Hashem, like if he has a nature to talk lashon hora or to enjoy lashon hora, or if by his very nature he gets easily turned on towards lusts after women, or towards same-gender relationships, or if he feels all the time a desire to touch people in appropriate places, etc.? How is such a person supposed to be happy with himself, even with his good points, when he is naturally drawn towards certain sins or behaviors which anger the Creator and he is regularly rebelling against Hashem?

ANSWER

A person is comprised of opposite aspects in his character, because the entire Creation is composed of opposites. Therefore, there is a time for a person to feel good about himself and to reflect on his good and positive points, and there is also a time for a person to feel sad about his sins. During the time that a person is reminding

himself of how good he is, he must be immersed in a state of joy, to the point that his joy transcends all logical reasoning – in spite of the fact that he has good, logical reasons not to be happy with himself.

HOW EVIL IMAGINATION WORKS

QUESTION

The Midrash Tanchuma says that when Avraham was taking Yitzchok to the Akeidah, the Satan tried to stop him in many different ways, by creating a mirage of a dangerous river in his path with different perils to stop him, and Satan kept appearing as different people in order to convince him to turn back. When Avraham waded into the illusory “river” he felt how deep and dangerous it was and he was considering turning back, but he kept resolving that he will fulfill Hashem’s will and he will carry on no matter how hard it was for him. Here’s my question: Was the river being imagined or not? The Satan was creating an illusion and it wasn’t a real river, but how then was Avraham able to feel it when he waded into it?

ANSWER

The yetzer hora (*evil inclination*) is entirely the imagination. The angel in charge of Gehinnom is called “Dumah”, from the word medameh (*the imagination*), and when a person sins because of listening to his yetzer hora, he becomes attached to the imagination, and therefore he is under control of the angel Dumah – who then uses the imagination to further control the person. Think about this very well: The entire secret of evil and sinning thrives on the imagination!!! The power of the yetzer hora is that it can make a person actually feel that what he is imagining is real. This faulty perception entered man ever since Adam ate from the Eitz HaDaas (*the Tree of Knowledge*), which is identified as the power of imagination, as explained by the Sforno and the Gra. It is the ability to mix reality with fantasy.

The depth of nullifying the yetzer hora, then, is by separating from our imagination and connecting ourselves more with reality. This is a deep and subtle matter.

INTEGRATING INTO CHAREIDI SOCIETY IN ERETZ YISRAEL

QUESTION

We are a family of baalei teshuvah and we moved to Eretz Yisrael in the hope of integrating with Chareidi society. However, my son is having a hard time in yeshiva here, he’s tired all the time and he gets up late, he’s not focusing on his learning, and he’s overly concerned about his social stance with others and if he appears dressed “Chareidi” enough for his friends. On one hand we’re very happy that we’re living in Eretz Yisrael where Hashem wants us to be, but at the

same time we feel out of place here amongst Chareidi society. Our son is trying so hard to fit in, but it’s never enough. We’re constantly feeling left out and turned down.

It seems like we have much more problems than your average person. We have so much aspirations to grow, and we even had a lot of siyata d’shmaya from Hashem to get to where we are today, and we feel that Hashem was with us every step of the way. But on the other hand we feel like we need to do so much work on ourselves and that we need to come out of so many old childhood habits. We struggle with many issues and certain middos that are easy and natural for Chareidim to deal with but which are much more difficult for us to deal with and fix, given our not frum background.

I also understand that Corona has created all kinds of new opportunities to do teshuvah and that it has shown us who we truly are, though the picture isn’t clear yet. We really want to work on ourselves and do what Hashem wants from us. What is it that we need to fix exactly, and what can we tell our children to help them integrate better with their peers and environment?

ANSWER

Firstly, you should be credited in that you have accomplished a lot so far throughout your journey through life and you have shown exemplary mesirus nefesh (*self-sacrifice*) for Hashem, from how you started out and until now.

For most people who try to integrate themselves into Chareidi society in Eretz Yisrael, the process does not go smoothly and pleasantly. The environment here does not fit everyone’s personality, and in fact, it is not for everyone. The proper attitude to have is that instead of trying to fit into society here, you need to be focused on how you can personally become closer to Hashem, and you can use Chareidi system and schools according to your abilities as a tool to get closer to Hashem. However, you should not be trying to fit in totally with Chareidi society, because in most cases when people try to do this, they become very disappointed and miserable in the process.

Your main drive should be to build and develop your own self, along with making sure that you have some friends who share similar goals to you, and you can also try a little to integrate yourself with the Chareidi environment as much as needed. Accordingly, you can then know where you should live, which schools you should be sending your children to. It’s not always best to look for the “best school” that has the highest success rate.

Concerning your son, you should also find a study partner for your son, and he should be someone who is married, with a warm and understanding personality, who can create a relationship with your son and tutor him, and to be a friend to him for life. This will hopefully help your son develop into his own unique personality and an inner world of his own, so that he isn’t mainly concerned about how well he is competing with his peers.