

LISTEN TO BILVAVI ON KOL HALASHON ISRAEL 073.295.1245 USA 718.521.5231 (2&gt;4&gt;12)

**QUESTION 1:** How can a person know if he's ready to grow to another step?

**ANSWER** When a person feels that his current level of growth isn't stressing him and that he's natural at it, he is ready for the next step. If one feels that his current goals are a pressure on him and he feels many times that he has no desire to grow at his current level, it means he hasn't acquired his current level yet and he's certainly not ready to start working on the next step. When he feels it's easy to do it, now is the time to go to the next step.

**QUESTION 2** How can a person know what his current capabilities are?

**ANSWER** A person can't know this exactly, just as one cannot know exactly how much he needs to eat and sleep. But a person is able to have an idea of what's too extreme for him to do right now.

**QUESTION 3:** What should a person do if he can't figure it out? A person who gravitates towards extremities is likely to be imagining what his actual capabilities really are.

**ANSWER:** That is a very good question. Some people have souls that are very emotional, stormy, and imaginative, so they can't see things clearly and objectively, and they will need to find either an expert Rav or a wise friend whom they are close with, whom they can regularly seek advice with, because they aren't able to get clarity by thinking on their own. They also should realize that they can't act right away on every thought and feeling they have, and if they want to make any kind of change or resolution or commitment to something, they should push it off for another month and then re-assess to see if they still want to make that change, and usually a month later a person

discovers that he was mistaken about something. If a person suddenly gets an idea when he wakes up in the morning and immediately he decides to act on it, it is very likely that he will err. He got the idea when he felt inspired from some factor, and though he can act on it for a day or two, soon after he falls. If he would think about it for a month beforehand, then gradually the emotional inspiration will fade and then at the end of the month he can see that he had been acting from a place of faulty logic. This is how a person gains clarity. A person can also write down all the different thoughts, feelings, and ideas he had over the course of a month, and he will see all the shifts in his thoughts that took place. That is how a person can see that he doesn't know himself well, and this very awareness will give him more clarity about himself.

**QUESTION 4:** How can someone know if he's making the mistake of "jumping" to a higher level that he's not ready for yet?

**ANSWER:** The first thing one has to know is: "Where am I found?" [or, "What is my current level?"] The second thing to know is, "What is the next level of growth that I'm capable of right now?" He can try visualizing that a friend is coming to him and asking him this very question. He can now think more objectively. If he can do the above, the next step is to try for a few days or a week to go about acquiring his next stage of growth. Not to take on resolutions, but to simply experiment and try it out (*just like a person first tries out a new job for a few days to see if it's for him*). After a week he should re-assess. If he feels that he has acted too extreme, it means he was making an error. But if it didn't feel extreme to him then he can keep trying at it again for another period of time, this time a bit longer. If, after trying it out 3 times he feels relaxed and calm about the new changes, then the chance of him being mistaken are very low. Usually thought people

decide to take on changes for the year before they have even tried it out a little. How many people can keep to the changes they accepted on Rosh HaShanah? Not a lot, because they aren't being realistic. But if a person would first try out the change a bit before taking it on, though he may make mistakes, they will be a lot less. He is going at it sensibly. Along with davening to Hashem to guide him, he will succeed, and even if he makes mistakes, the mistakes won't be major and he is in a lot less danger of falling, after following the above.

**QUESTION 5:** By doing mitzvos it's easier to take on change and go at it slowly, but when it comes to not doing aveiros it's much harder not to do. How can a person grow slowly at not doing aveiros?

**ANSWER:** This is a sensitive issue. In the final generation where there are so many baalei teshuvah who have recently discovered Yiddishkeit, this question is often asked, and the Gedolim answered many of these kinds of questions, of how to guide baalei teshuvah, of how much to push them forward and how much can be ignored so that they don't fall back. There are certain rules though which don't change. Something which is clearly forbidden will always be forbidden and it can't be compromised in any situation. One has to do the will of the Creator right now, regardless if he feels he can make the change or not – if it's clearly the will of the Creator then he must do it. The only issue of taking on growth slowly is only when it's something that's not clearly forbidden (*for example, in the area of sanctifying permissible pleasures, which require gradual pulling back and which cannot be done rapidly*). In the last generation the Gedolim decided what to tell baalei teshuvah who fall back into doing their old aveiros. These are matters which need an expert, reliable Rav to guide a person in, and one can't know the answers to this on his own.

**QUESTION 7:** So if a person got used to do something forbidden, he won't be able to rapidly "jump" out of it?

**ANSWER:** When a person is doing something that's clearly forbidden, this is the only time where he in fact he must jump out of it. It is just that most people can't even do this. If a person earnestly says that he is able to handle the change then we cannot tell him not to change. He's doing something forbidden, so we can't tell him to do otherwise. Here we are discussing a different problem, when people say they can't separate from all their forbidden behavior all at once. It is a

delicate issue because this involves sins of the Torah, not merely levels of growth. But if to begin with we merely tell him to try at it, there are things he can handle for a short period of time but which he won't be able to do for a long period. For example if a person tries to get only 3 hours of sleep, for how many days can he do this? A person can't try extreme changes for too long. But if tell him to begin trying something out, he can keep to it and slowly he will understand that yes, it's difficult, but then he can better accept that he can't do more. Instead of feeling like a failure, he can realize from the start that he was merely trying out a new change for a short period of time. That is the healthy and proper way to do it – on one hand not to slacken off from being idealistic, but at the same time, knowing from the start that he doesn't have to end up in "failure" later.

**QUESTION 8:** But if a baal teshuvah is told that his growth is limited, then we are stifling his great fiery enthusiasm.

**ANSWER:** That's very true, but practically speaking we have to give him a step by step plan to work with. We can tell him "Try for a week learning for these hours of the day." Don't tell him that he needs to learn a certain amount, just tell him to try this for a week. Like this, even if he couldn't keep to it, he won't feel that he failed. Instead he will feel that he tried something and saw that it wasn't compatible with him. If we would have told him "Learn for these hours of the day" and he fails with the task, he feels like a failure. That is why we need to instead tell him to try it out as an experiment.

**QUESTION 9:** How can it be that one day a person has yiras shomayim and the next day he doesn't? What changed?

**ANSWER:** There isn't one answer to this - there are several possible reasons for it. Everything always goes through changes, nothing stays the same. Everything in creation comes from the spiritual, it is always changing. Only Hashem doesn't change. Every person changes, either a person is going up or down. But extreme changes have to be avoided.

[הכרת כוחות ושימוש השמחה 013 אש דרוה דעפר עבר את השם בשמחה]

**QUESTION 1:** Should we first feel joy, and then working on feeling that we are a soul, that we are a “portion of G-d from above” – or, should we first feel that we are a soul?

**ANSWER:** If you try to first feel joy that you are “a portion of G-d from above” is one way, in which you are starting from the joy, or, you can look at your good points (*especially your best quality*) and reach joy like this. That is one way, and it is how you work your way upwards by starting from below. But the way mentioned here in this class is to start from above. To start from a high place - to first feel you are soul, and that is how you find joy, and from there you can begin working on everything else you need to fix – working your way downwards. Either path is good.

**QUESTION 2:** But we are older already and it's hard to get past all the negativity and bad stuff we've developed from all that we've accumulated from so many years.

**ANSWER:** Raboseinu tell us 2 ways to serve Hashem. Either a person gets into the dirt and mud and tries to clean himself off from it, or, a person builds for himself a new, clean house. He has to make sure not to bring any dirty objects into the new house. It's true that at an older age a person feels like he has wasted and sabotaged most of his life, but there is a verse how older people can become joyful in old age. It's easier to start again anew than to be busy all the time with all the dirt from the past.

Certainly you need to face that dirt at some point and clear it up, but the main focus has to be on focusing on the positive and on what you can build now – and after that you can deal with the dirt of the past. If each of us were to be busy cleaning up all the dirt and garbage and faults in our life that's from our past, an entire lifetime of 70 years wouldn't be enough.

In summary, most of the time and most of our energy and focus has to be on building up the positive. Very little of our time and energy should be spend on focusing on fixing our faults and problems and mistakes. We need to deal with that bad stuff of course, and if we don't, then we remain with it. But most of

the time we need to be spending most of our energy on building up the positive: Focusing on our strengths and abilities and our good parts, and using them.

**QUESTION 3:** How can it be that we are able to identify ourselves as a “portion of G-d from above”, what does that mean exactly?

**ANSWER:** This is a very, very deep question, and much has been written about this subject. Briefly and clearly, the answer is that all of Creation is one unit – a means of revelation of Hashem so that all of Creation should recognize Him, and in the Shemoneh Esrei of Rosh HaShanah we declare how every creation will recognize Him as the Creator and King Who rules over all. The concept that we are a “portion of G-d from above” means that our entire existence is nothing but to know of the Creator, and in depth, there is nothing else.

Everything else are merely parts of how we come to know the Creator. For example tikkun hamiddos, what does that have to do with knowing the Creator? Is it just a separate thing we have to do? But the whole source that we have to fix our middos is learned from the verse “This is my G-d and I will glorify Him” which the Sages said means “I and Him” - resemble Him. Just as He is compassionate so should you be compassionate.”

We must recognize what the Creator's compassion is, but if we do not have enough compassion ourselves then we cannot begin to recognize the Creator's compassion. Thus being a “portion of G-d from above” means that our entire task on this world is to recognize the Creator. When we realize that all that we have in our life for all of eternity is to come to know G-d, and that everything we do is for the purpose of coming to recognize Him more completely – and to teach this to others, according to our capabilities – that is the depth of the concept of being a portion of G-d from above, to say it clearly and simply.

**QUESTION 4:** When I try to be happy at a family celebration how can I be happy when I know others who are suffering or in pain or going through a hard time? I can't be happy when I'm supposed to be,



because I keep hearing of others who are going through difficulty and suffering.

**ANSWER:** The question is very clear, and there are 2 ways to answer this question, an external answer and an inner answer.

The external answer to this question is to know how time of the day we should be spending on joining in the joy of others and how much time of the day we should be spending on joining in the sorrow of others. Most people, if they would be spending most of the day joining in the sorrow of others, they would fall into depression from this, they wouldn't be able to stay stable. Joining in others' sorrow entails sadness and pain. They identify so much with pain and then they fall into sadness from there. It becomes turned from joining into the pain of others into walling in sadness and depression. This is why Rebbi Nachman of BreslEv told his chassidim, "I can make self-accounting a lot without falling into depression from this, but you should not make self-accounting, you would fall into depression from it. There is atzvus-sadness and there is merirus-bitterness which is not detrimental sadness but holy pain, as the Baal HaTanya explains. Practically speaking, most of the day every person should try to be in a state of joy, and only for a small part of the day should we join in the pain of others. Don't be busy trying to hear the sad stories in others' lives and don't read the newspapers, which are filled with the problems of the world and of people. Just pick one small part of the day in which you join in the pain of the Shechinah and in the pain of Klal Yisrael.

There is also an internal answer to this question. There was a story with Rav Yitzchok Hutner, where one day a close talmid of his made a Bris, and on the same day one of his talmidim had a father who was niftar. So he had go to the Levayah and Bris right after each other. He went to the Bris and was happy, and then he went to the Levayah. A talmid said to him, "How is it that you can from a joyful Bris to a sad Levayah?" He answered, "I have a place in my heart where I can handle conflicting scenarios and emotions."

If a person can truly be happy with others and also join in the pain of others without falling into sadness

from this, this is the ideal situation and this is like the verse "Rejoice with trembling".

Most of the time though people can't work out of the contradiction between joining in other's pain and joining in others' joy, and they fall into depression or sadness from joining in the pain of others, and this is actually not because they are really joining in the pain of others but because they are consumed with sadness afterwards. Joy and pain aren't a contradiction and they can co-exist together in one state – it is only joy and sadness which are a contradiction that can't co-exist together.

The Baal HaTanya says of a way how one can know this. A person makes a self-accounting and discovers faults in himself. He is bitter from it. Does that cause him to be sad or happy? If he becomes sad it means that his bitterness causes him to fall into sadness. But if from his bitterness he becomes happy (*that now he knows himself better and sees what he has to fix*), this causes him to do teshuvah and he is happy from that. If he goes through the pain properly then it leads to good results, to doing teshuvah and being happy. If he truly joins in the pain of others, his hope for the Geulah increases. He becomes joyous from it and he can wait the Geulah happily. But if he cannot handle the emotions of joining in another's pain, he falls from the pain into sadness. There is a verse, "From You I run to You." When a person has pain, where does he run to in the end? To Hashem. If he reaches deep sadness in the soul he can't take it, so what should he do? He should run to Hashem and there he will find joy. This is the true, deep way to live life.

**QUESTION 5:** What are the barriers that prevent us from this? Our aveiros (*sins*)?

**ANSWER:** There are 2 barriers that we have – our body, and our animal soul. Our body is totally material, our animal soul is a subtler form of materialism. One kind of barrier that gets in our way is body-desires – when we overdo materialism. Another barrier is our animal soul – our unfixed character traits.

[שיעורים בארה"ב אייר תשפ"ג 012 ההתמקדות בהג השבועות]