



Q: I am a *baal teshuvah*. Should I stay in my Chabad House town or move to a *frum* community?

A: The answer to this question depends on your individual circumstances, your spouse, your children, your job, and more. So while I can't give you a direct answer, I will share my slightly controversial opinion on this debate.

In many cases, when people become religious, they form a powerful bond with their *shluchim*. It's almost like a parent-child relationship. The involvement, personal care, and concern run deep. When *baalei teshuvah* decide to move away from their *shluchim*—whether because they wish to be surrounded by a *frum* community or to seek *chinuch* opportunities for their children—they often pay a heavy price. They go from feeling loved, cared for, and important in their hometown to feeling

abandoned, alone, and invisible in a large community.

I know several *baalei teshuvah* who never left their Chabad House towns. It's possible that, as a result, they never became as religious as they could have. Or their children were not given the same education as kids living in *frum* communities. But because they kept their bond with their *shluchim*, they did better overall. And when I look at how their children grew up and what they became, I think it was the right choice.

My gut tells me that *baalei teshuvah* should try, to whatever extent possible, to stay near their *shluchim*.

However, one of the advantages of living in a religious community is that it drives us to raise our own levels of observance. If we are surrounded by people who are completely accepting of us and admiring of us, we are less likely

to grow. When *baalei teshuvah* choose to stay in their hometowns, they should be conscious of this fact. Nobody will judge them and nobody will expect them to elevate their religious observance. They will need to find the push from within.

Q: We are told to do everything with *kabbalas ol*. But what if *kabbalas ol* makes me feel resentful towards Hashem and *Yiddishkeit*?

A: Unfortunately, *kabbalas ol* is a serious misnomer. Many young people interpret it as meaning, "Do what I say just because I said so." When parents and teachers say, "Have some *kabbalas ol*," this is what they are implying: Submit to my will.

But it's a travesty that *kabbalas ol* is being used this way, because it actually means the opposite.

Kabbalah means to accept, not to

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impose. To have *kabbalas ol* does not mean, "I'm doing what you said because you said so." It means, "I am doing what you said because I choose to." However, included *in* that acceptance and choice is: I choose to do it even when I don't understand it. Moreover, I choose to do it even when I don't want it and don't like it, because it is what Hashem wants. I accept His authority.

In that short sentence there are two key ideas: 1) His authority, and 2) my acceptance. This empowers us to do things way beyond our level by acceptance alone. But we must freely accept; it can't be imposed.

Parents, trust your children. Teachers, trust your students. The correct answer to, "I don't want to do it," is, "When you're ready, you will do it."

Instead, we say, "You have to do it." That backfires.

Showing young people that we trust them is what causes them to do the right thing. Hashem does not force us to keep His Torah and *mitzvos*. He trusts us to accept Torah and *mitzvos* with our free will.

And when we choose to observe Hashem's commandments with

genuine *kabbalas ol*, we give Hashem the greatest *nachas*, because in accepting His *mitzvos*, we are accepting Him.

Q: According to modern psychology, it's unhealthy when one's beliefs and actions don't align. What if I believe in Judaism but don't fully practice it?

A: First of all, while psychology is sometimes necessary, it is perhaps a bit too sensitive. The idea that in order to be healthy, you must never feel guilty and never feel like a hypocrite is ludicrous. When our actions don't line up with our ideals, we feel ashamed. That is a healthy, natural emotion which inspires us to do better. If we never felt guilt, shame, or jealousy, for that matter, we would stagnate. No one is perfect, so it is reasonable to be aware of areas that still need improvement. That shouldn't destroy us; it should and could frame our growth going forward.

Particularly for someone who is just starting to become religious, it is important not to be too self-critical. New *baalei teshuvah* tend to be very clear and uncompromising, but they should not belittle themselves or feel

ashamed of their areas of weakness. Instead, they should tell themselves:

"I don't keep Shabbos YET."

"I don't keep Kosher YET."

Not because they don't believe, but because they know they have to take it one step at a time. That is the only path to sustainable *Yiddishkeit*.

So there is a balance between healthy guilt and giving ourselves grace.

I know of a man who went to the Rebbe for *yechidus* and said, "I have a weakness, something I do which is against Torah. Is there any point of me becoming religious if I am not going to change this aspect of my life?"

The Rebbe responded, "A Jew must do as many *mitzvos* as he possibly can."

These words are precise. The Rebbe neither condoned nor criticized the man. He addressed the question: Yes, you should do what you can. Even if there is a *mitzvah* which you feel you may never complete. Just do the best you can.

Q: What can I do during the good times of life to prepare for the hard times?

A: First of all, I want to point out that to

constantly expect trouble and wonder what you'll do when it arrives is a needlessly hard way to live.

As grown-ups, we need to try and live our lives as our children do—laughing and loving as much as we can—though for us this isn't carefree, it is work. The work of joy.

Having said that, one critical tool of a grown-up (a tool that serves us especially well in hard times) is discipline.

The only way to do the right thing during a hard time is if you are already in the habit of doing it. If you're a typical American, you have been spoon-fed the belief that you should always do what you want when you want it. When things are going well,

that might be fine, but what about when things go awry? You lose the ability to function.

If you were raised by strict parents, you probably hated it, but one day you will recognize what a unique gift they gave you, the gift of deeply ingrained discipline. When times are hard, you will always have those habits to fall back on, as explained in the Alter Rebbe's introduction to the *Shaar Hayichud* section in *Tanya* which is also called *Chinuch Kattan*.

There is a pervasive philosophy in America today that parents should be their children's best friends, teachers and students should be on a first-name basis, and children should never be rebuked for bad behavior. But the

math isn't adding up. It isn't leading to happier, healthier, and more successful children. Because discipline is a necessary skill that helps human beings function and thrive. And discipline must be taught; it doesn't come naturally.

If nobody ever taught you discipline, it's not too late. You can still teach it to yourself. Good luck!

This article was transcribed and edited by Musia Kaplan from tapes of Rabbi Yossi Paltiel's classes. Women are invited to come learn Chassidus with Rabbi Paltiel in person. Rabbi Paltiel gives two Chassidus classes Sunday mornings in the 770 women's section, one beginning at 11 a.m. (Tanya) and one beginning at 11:50 a.m. (Hayom Yom). To check on these classes or for any other information, email info@insidechassidus.org.



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