



with **RABBI YOSSE PALTIEL**

Q: What is the Rebbe's view on self-help books written by non-Jewish authors?

A: The easy thing would be for me to say that they are not allowed. But I don't think that's true.

The Rebbe directed certain *shluchim* towards self-help books to teach them about time-management skills and organization. Of course, this is anecdotal evidence, but I believe there is a time and place for self-help books that help you become a better servant of Hashem.

With that said, there are a few crucial guidelines to keep in mind.

The most important one is that we should not allow these books to define us. They should help us improve ourselves, but they shouldn't become our new personality. The minute a self-help book

becomes who we are, replacing our first and foremost identity as *chassidim*, we are moving away from *kedushah* towards *klipas nogah*. It's not forbidden, but it's not holy. And we don't want to fall down that slippery slope.

If you read a self-help book and it becomes your new "Chassidus" then you have a problem. Psychology isn't Chassidus, no modern trend can replace Chassidus, and anyone who equates the two is lying. Chassidus was given to us at Har Sinai, it was transmitted through Achiya Hashiloni and the Baal Shem Tov and the Rebbeim. This is our source of life, our philosophy, and we don't need a replacement.

One last point is that we should only read these books if we need them, not out of curiosity or for *shleimus* (to make

ourselves complete). A student came to me and said he wanted to read a non-Jewish book because "I like to know things." I told him that if he likes to know things there is plenty of Torah and Chassidus to explore.

Q: How can a woman be excited about *avodas Hashem* if she is dealing with the seeming mundanities of running a household all day?

A: Neither men nor women have the privilege of learning or *davening* all day long. A *bachur* or girl who has plenty of time to devote to spirituality is enjoying a luxury. It's not real life. Most people graduate and move on to work and raise families.

What you need to realize is that your material life is not holding you back from

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avodas Hashem—it is *avodas Hashem*!

“I was created to serve my Maker.” Men earning a living and women raising families (although today many women earn and many men are involved with running the household) are doing exactly what Hashem wants from them. It's not as obviously spiritual and holy as prayer and learning, but it's more important. It is actually making a *dirah b'tachtonim*.

With that said, if you are the kind of person who enjoys learning and *davening*, then you should prioritize it. Carve out time in your busy schedule for a *shiur*. But know that those brief interludes are a taste of Gan Eden. Most of the time, we need to serve Hashem here on earth.

Q: I learned in seminary that we are not supposed to want Moshiach for physical reasons, but in order to have the complete fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos on earth. I've been trying to wrap my head around that. How can we want Moshiach for spiritual reasons only? Is there something wrong with saying “we want Moshiach now” as a reaction to experiencing or observing human suffering?

A: You're supposed to want Moshiach, period. If you don't want Moshiach for the ideal reasons, then want it for less-than-ideal reasons. If you don't

want Moshiach because you wish to see the manifestation of G-dliness in this world, then you can certainly want Moshiach because you wish for pizza with extra cheese.

The real issue is not why you want Moshiach, but how you define Moshiach.

We all have a version of Moshiach that we were taught as children. No more pain, candy on trees, and reuniting with people who passed away. But it's important that our perception of Moshiach matures as we do. As we learn and grow, we discover what Moshiach really is.

Moshiach means that Hashem wins! This is Hashem's world, so it should *look* that way. Moshiach means that, finally, it is as it should be. Practically, this means that every human being will recognize Hashem's Presence in the world and the righteousness of living as He commanded. Yidden will serve Hashem through the 613 *mitzvos* and non-Jews, *lehavdil*, through the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*. Moshiach means that Hashem wins, goodness wins, truth wins. And as long as we know what Moshiach really means, we can want it for ulterior motives too.

To answer your second question: If you see someone sick or suffering, saying “we want Moshiach now” is like a knee-jerk reaction. And that's more than fine,

it's a prayer. But the Rebbe taught us to always want Moshiach, not just when things are difficult. Even on the best day of our lives, we should remember that *galus* is—by definition—intolerable.

Q: Thank G-d, I've been successful in business and accumulated a small fortune over years of hard work. Now I'm in my 30s and I want to stop obsessing over money. But every time I think I made it, I visit a friend's mansion and feel like I'm still far behind. How can I stop being jealous and feel happy with what I have?

A: I want to answer this question in two parts.

First, there is a difference between obsessing over money and working hard. The Rebbe's position was clear: A man was created to work. We each choose a life path—whether it's *shlichus*, *chinuch*, or business—and we are supposed to keep going, without slowing down or stopping, for the rest of our lives.

The American dream of retirement at an early age is a religious and psychological nightmare. People who retire don't know what to do with themselves. There's a video of an older successful businessman going to the Rebbe and asking, “When is it enough?” The Rebbe responded, “Never.”

So even if you're in your 30s, and you've already "made it," you shouldn't subdue the drive to keep working and earning. It's healthy and it keeps you alive. But how much money you have and how much money you spend on yourself are not the same thing. You can earn wealth and give it to *tzedakah*. You can be rich and live humbly.

Now let's discuss jealousy.

Chazal tells us that the nature of lust is that you never reach half of what your goal is. Jealousy is the same way. It doesn't matter how much you earn—you'll always find someone who has more, or something you don't have yet that you wish to acquire.

How can we overcome this *middah*?

The obvious answer is to stop looking at other people's mansions and start paying attention to people who have less than you.

The more complicated answer is to

ask yourself, "What does materialism get me?" If you honestly reflect, you will realize that materialism and spirituality are mutually exclusive. It says in *Orchos Tzaddikim* that just as fire and water cannot exist together, neither can materialism and spirituality. The pleasure of serving Hashem and the pleasure of collecting physical things don't align. The stuff you "need" is merely a distraction from your true purpose on earth.

Try redirecting your jealousy towards *ruchnius*. If you see someone who learns more Torah than you, or gives more *tzedakah* than you, that's a good reason to be jealous.

The *Mishnah* writes, "Who is rich? One who is happy with what he has." What the *Mishnah* is trying to do here is create an objective definition for being rich. If being rich just means you have

the most money in town, what happens when someone richer moves in? You're not rich anymore. So that can't be the definition. One who is happy with what he has is *always* rich, and no outside factors can change that.

I would suggest contemplating this *Mishnah*. You will be happy, and truly rich, when you realize that what you have is enough. ❧

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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