ASEI LECHA RAV:

Appoint for Yourself a Mashpia,

PART I

In 1986, the Lubavitcher Rebbe publicized a heartfelt request that everyone appoint a mashpia.

Words of the Rebbe on Chol Hamoed Sukkos, 5747 (October 19, 1986) as translated by JEM's Living Torah video magazine:

I recently publicized a heartfelt request that everyone "make for themselves a mentor," and to encourage others to do the same. Even if you think you don't need one, the Torah commands that you appoint a mentor for yourself.

Follow the advice of the Mishna, which says, "Make for yourself a mentor," [indicating that] you choose the mentor and you initiate the relationship.

If you find it difficult because there is no one "good enough" for you – Torah does not ask more than you are capable of; the very fact that the Mishna demands it is proof positive that you can achieve it, if you only really want to.

Every person must find a mentor and seek his advice in personal matters.

Which matters take precedence? Those areas in which the person himself knows that he is not acting correctly, or areas where one is unsure how to proceed. And out of love for your fellow Jew, encourage others to find their own mentor, as well.

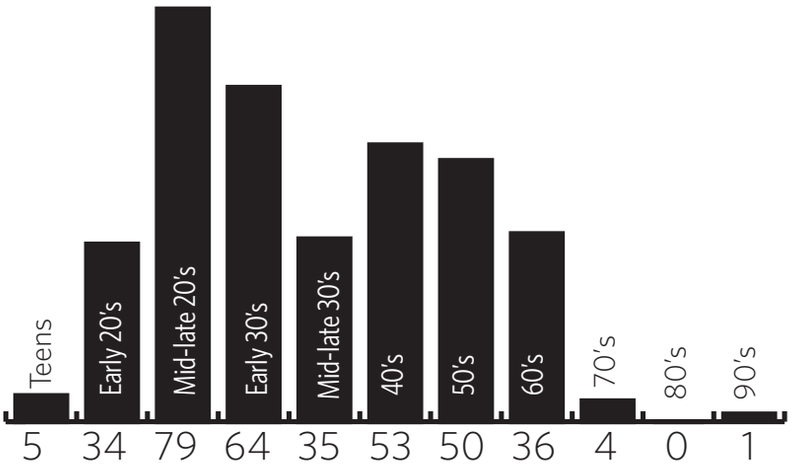
In 5746, when the Rebbe started this new campaign, N'shei Chabad immediately went into action, encouraging women to follow the Rebbe's call and appoint for themselves a mashpia. They wrote to the Rebbe an extensive report on their activities, and received the following response:

[Their letter] was received, and many thanks.

I will mention it at the Tzion.

All the above should be with great success, with an increase, and with joy and gladness of heart, and a fitting preparation for Yud Shvat.

That was 25 years ago. But what about today? How much do we still remember and take to heart the Rebbe's hora'ah to appoint ourselves a mentor? How important is it to us? To find out, *N'shei Chabad Newsletter* emailed a survey on mashpios (the newly coined feminine form of mashpiim) to everyone on our database (to sign up, go to nsheichabadnewsletter.com). The Beis Medrash Jewish Women's Circle also sent it to all its members.



Number of participants in each age group

The response was phenomenal! Well over 350 people filled out the survey, mostly women but some men, ranging in age from teens to 70's. We did not collect geographical data but it was evident from the responses that they came from around the world. The respondents did not only check off simple Yes/No or multiple choice questions. They actually gave us detailed, thoughtful responses to our questions, for which we are most grateful.

The respondents shared with us some of the highlights as well as the struggles they faced in fulfilling the Rebbe's hora'ah of *Aseh lecha rav*.

Most participants report that they are interested in having a mashpia. However, many have had difficulties in the past or in the present finding a suitable mashpia. We share these responses so that those who have similar struggles will know they're not alone. Our participants also shared what helped them overcome these obstacles. There are many who want a mashpia but don't know anyone to ask, and wish there was a list of people available and willing to serve as mashpia. In Part Two of this series, which will be published iy"H in the Pesach issue, we ask a number of notable mashpiim and mashpios in the community for their perspective.

DESCRIBE YOUR MASHPIA. WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE HIM OR HER?

EXCITEMENT FOR TORAH AND CHASSIDUS

» *She was one of my high school teachers. She taught us Tanya, and I could see how her face would light up with excitement and passion. I saw that Torah and Chassidus meant a lot to her. I loved the way she dressed – in such a tzniusdik, aidel, and beautiful way. After a few months, I felt that she would be a dugma chaya for me and that I wanted to strive to be more like her (female, early 20's).*

FUN AND ENERGETIC

» *She's a young Shlucha, a lot of fun and very energetic. In high school when I met her she was super-involved in all the programs (female, early 20's).*

UNDERSTANDS ME

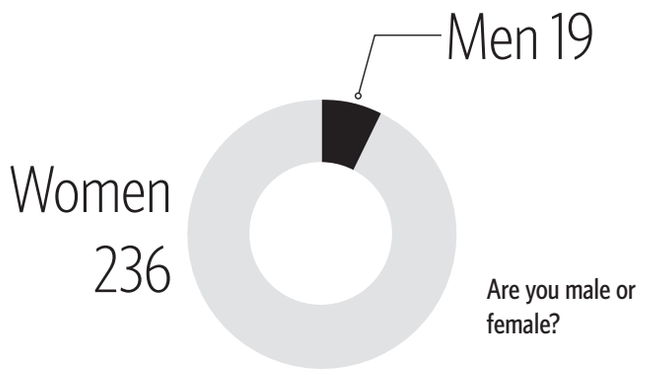
» *I ended up choosing an old family friend who knew a lot about my*

MEN FOR MEN, WOMEN FOR WOMEN

Let everyone, man, woman and child, fulfill the words of the Mishnah: "Provide yourself with a teacher," even if it involves bother and tedious work to find him or her. We speak of a Rav – teacher, counselor or mashpia, and women and girls must also appoint for themselves mashpios. In this way, from time to time you will visit your rabbi/mashpia and be examined and evaluated. How are you progressing in Torah study, in tzedakah, and in your general Divine service? Are you careful that all your actions should be for the sake of Heaven? This evaluation will lead to helpful and wise advice.

Knowing that you must report and be "examined" from time to time will sharpen your desire to advance even more.

This system is very important all year round, and my suggestion and soulful request is to publicize this widely, so that all Jews, men, women and children will fulfill the directive of the Mishnah, "Provide yourself with a teacher," and from time to time will be tested in their level of Divine service. This will certainly magnify and increase all areas of holiness and goodness in an ever-increasing way. *-The Rebbe*



background and therefore understood me without me having to work too hard explaining my situation (female, mid-20's).

DOWN-TO-EARTH

» *She is a very chassidishe yet down-do-earth young woman with strong values and practical advice. She balances raising a family with chinuch and Shlichus in a way I find admirable. After having the opportunity to speak to her several times, I felt she was the right choice (female, mid-20's).*

» *It was hashgachah protis. I heard him farbrenging once, and I knew how much I really needed a mashpia. He was clearly a real emesdiker chossid, but he was farbrenging about down-to-earth daily life struggles, so I gathered the courage – this was one of the hardest things in life for me to do – and I approached him, humbly and with embarrassment, asking him, "Can you be my mashpia?" After a short conversation, he answered, "Yes, for a trial period of one year." Boruch Hashem, it's now six years later and he is one of the biggest brochos in my life! If you print this, please thank him and encourage mashpiim to continue doing what they do. It is a priceless gift the Rebbe has given us (male, mid-20's).*

THE KIND OF PERSON I'M TRYING TO BE

» *She is the kind of person I want to be: Organized, patient, communicates well, always has a smile on her face (female, mid-20's).*

HONEST AND REAL

» *I davened A LOT and finally asked a friend for help, feeling I had no one else to turn to. She actually recommended her own mashpia (I was shocked) but it was/is a wonderful shidduch. My mashpia is honest, real, very chassidish and frum, very supportive, smart, and funny. Also very "together," but she admitted to losing her temper sometimes when I asked for advice on controlling mine. Boruch Hashem (female, mid-20's).*

CHESSED AND GEVURAH

» *My mashpia is very kind, nurturing, home-and family-centered. I see her as very strong and clear about her values and Yiddishkeit, and she raises her kids with this wonderful mix of strength and love. And her kids (the ones I know) are happy people who are confident, fun and lively. I chose her mainly because of how her children turned out: confident chassidim who are proud of who they are and comfortable with what they do (even if it's considered nerdy) and at the same time such open, down-to-earth people who are friendly with all types (female, late 20's).*

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES YOU FACED IN FINDING A MASHPIA?

AWKWARDNESS ABOUT ASKING:

» *My challenge was getting over the notion that mashpia has to be an awkward concept – that it's [a forever commitment] like a marriage – and realizing that it could be anyone I consider a mentor, whose opinion I value (teen).*

» *The hardest part was not finding a mashpia, but asking her to be my mashpia. Once I asked the hard part was over. She is still my mashpia seven years later (female, mid-late 20's).*

» *I was very nervous and kept on pushing it off. I would often ask her random questions and see how she answered, which only proved to me how much I really admired her. So, towards the end of camp, I finally found the courage to ask her. The chassidishe camp environment got me to do it, especially since I learned a lot about having a mashpia at farbrengens and nightly chats. That was my best camp experience (female, late teens).*

» *I didn't know my present mashpia very well, and I had a lot of doubts about calling her to ask if she'd agree. What would she think of me? I barely know her. Maybe she'd think I'm a weirdo for asking her. Who am I to take her time anyway? Would I feel comfortable talking to her about things honestly and openly? (female, mid-late 20's).*

NO ONE SUITABLE IN THEIR LOCATION:

» *I still have not found a mashpia where I live, which I wanted at a certain point. One challenge is in my community the people I look up to are*

either principals in my kids' school or other community leaders with whom I need to have a different kind of relationship, and it's difficult to mix the two. Also, after getting married and older it has gotten harder to have the opportunity to connect to families and women whom I look up to (female, mid-30's).

» *I had a mashpia in the town I live in, but after a couple of years I realized she was just too close to the action. Then I heard about a mashpia website. I read all the bios and then contacted the first lady on the list and I love her (female, 40's).*

DIFFICULTY TRUSTING A MASHPIA WITH PERSONAL ISSUES:

» *I find it hard to become close to others and share my feelings and struggles with them (female, early 20's).*

» *I think it's very hard to truly be honest with a person by exposing the most vulnerable and innermost parts of my life with her. I feel like if I did have a mashpia, I would only speak to her about more superficial issues and not really personal and innermost ones. Then I would see it as pointless because it is only paying lip-service to what the Rebbe wants (female, early 30's).*

NOT WANTING TO TAKE UP TOO MUCH OF A PERSON'S TIME, OR NOT FINDING ANYONE WITH AVAILABLE TIME

» *Very hard to find someone that is chassidish and can relate to you, but most of all, they DON'T have time for you! I have a mashpia, but she asks me to email her, and can take a month to respond. It's not my first experience; the other one I had was amazing but she also just couldn't find time.... (female, early 20's).*

» *There is a part of me that feels guilty to ask someone. I feel like asking someone to be my mashpia really means asking her to spend more time on the phone with me, away from her family (female, mid- late 20's).*

» *I don't have one because I don't like to take a busy person's time. People who are good are usually busy. It would help me to know that the person is not pressed for time (female, mid-30's).*

» *A lot of times mashpiim are dynamic people involved in a lot of different projects and lives and they don't have time for another commitment (even when their heart is in the right place). I hate fighting for someone's attention, especially when you know they have so many demands and commitments (female, 40's).*

ONE-SIDED RELATIONSHIP:

» *It was hard to connect to someone when I was primarily the one sharing and it's not exactly a two-way friendship where both share (depends on the personality of the mashpia). Sometimes I felt uncomfortable to keep talking about myself and then not hearing back "personal" info (female, early 20's).*

» *I don't feel comfortable bothering someone, and it's not like I can pay her for it (female, early 20's).*

» *There's no application form or protocol. It seems necessary to [be somewhat aggressive to land] a mashpia (male, 40's).*

NOT FINDING ANYONE THEY LOOK UP TO OR RESPECT SUFFICIENTLY:

» *I had a hard time finding someone who would really match what I was looking for. I never found the right combination. On one hand I was looking for the ultimate chassidishe woman, and in line with my hashkafah, as I felt that was important for my hiskashrus, yet I also wanted someone approachable and who I felt had significant time. The ones who were approachable didn't have what I was looking for in the chassidishkeit aspect. I also think that it is very hard, especially for teens, to get the difference between a mentor and a therapist (female, early 20's).*

» *Very difficult to find someone who I can relate to and also have the appropriate awe of, to have kabbolas ol. Also, nobody has any time! (Male, mid- late 20's).*

» *I asked different people over the years*

I'M GLAD I TOOK THE STEP TO FIND A DIFFERENT ONE AND DIDN'T GIVE UP ON THE WHOLE MASHPIA THING

to be my mashpia, but nothing ever lasted. It was hard to find someone who was easy to get a hold of, knew me and my situation well, with a lot of life experience, who truly cared (female, mid- late 20's).

» *Most of the role models in my community are either related to me or my husband doesn't get along with their husbands and I don't feel right talking to them (female, early 30's).*

» *I think it is my perfectionism rearing its ugly head... I keep trying to find the "perfect" mashpia, so I don't have one yet (female, 40's).*

MASHPIA IS NO LONGER AVAILABLE OR NOT AS SUITABLE AS BEFORE:

» *It took me two and a half years to find my mashpia; a woman I greatly respected and trusted. She unfortunately suffered a stroke only weeks after my engagement. Throughout the months before my chassunah and the first year and a half of marriage I had to look for temporary mashpios everywhere. It was SO painful and frustrating (female, mid- late 20's).*

» *I had one many years ago until she passed away. Since then I haven't found someone I could relate to and trust completely (female, 70's).*

» *I switched mashpios. I didn't feel I was really important to my first mashpia. I'm glad I took the step to find a different one and didn't give up on the whole mashpia thing (female, 40's).*

» *I lost contact with my mashpia after I got married when I found that there were things that she did that I was trying hard not to do myself and I haven't taken the time to find one since (female, early 20's).*

CONCERNS ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY:

» *I have too many private complicated issues and do not trust anyone to keep my stuff confidential. I have been burnt in the past. But I really wish I could find someone (female, 40's).*

» *Many people do not have a mashpia, my adult children included. One of my children had a mashpia blab his private problem to the school staff and administration. Another had a mashpia who shared confidential information with someone without asking my child's permission (female, 50's).*

80%

OF THOSE SURVEYED THINK IT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR EVERY LUBAVITCHER TO HAVE A MASHPIA

63%

HAVE A MASHPIA

85%

WHO DO NOT HAVE A MASHPIA WISH THEY DID

EMBARRASSMENT AND INHIBITION:

» *I am extremely introverted and have a very hard time approaching people. I also know very few people who would fit into the mashpia category. The few people who I know are generally teachers from high school whom I haven't had anything to do with in 10+ years, besides being extremely busy people. I don't feel I can approach them or connect with them (female, mid- late 20's).*

» *I tried different people out, but always felt very inhibited and worried about their opinion of me, because I only asked those whom I respected a lot (female, early 30's).*

» *The hard parts for me are: finding someone I trust and respect and not being too shy to ask. Feeling like she thinks I am weird. Knowing the "rules"; at what point am I becoming a burden. I really don't want to be. I hate imposing on people (female, early 30's).*

MASHPIA NOT UNDERSTANDING THEIR UNIQUE SITUATION:

» *I happen to have many, many challenges in my life with my marriage and my children and my health, much more than the average lady out there. It's very hard for me to find someone who can meet my challenges and actually be helpful (female, early 30's).*

» *Finding a mashpia who gets baalei teshuvah and their baggage is hard, especially for someone like me, who did not become frum through a*

Chabad program such as Machon Chana (female, late 30's).

» *As a teenager I had a hard time finding a mashpia. I had some family issues that I didn't feel comfortable revealing. My parents were BTs and at the time I didn't feel that there were any adult role models around who really understood the challenges of BT families (female, early 30's)*

» *I don't know too many people and my problems are huge and not generic. Most mashpios would not even know how to begin to advise me. I'm still looking for someone more available and experienced, to help me with my issues (female, 40's).*

» *I am still looking for the right one. I think that some Lubavitchers think that if you are a baal teshuvah you don't need someone so deeply versed in Torah, but the opposite is true. Most baalei teshuvah have been exposed to some very rough stuff and need someone who really sticks to halachah and knows halachah well to help them climb that ladder up (female, 60's).*

FEARS OF BEING JUDGED:

» *I struggle with finding someone who I respect but who will not judge me for my shortcomings. I think that I need to first accept that my laxness is not okay and to actually be looking to change significantly (female, early 20's).*

» *I did not bother because a lot of questions I have are not necessarily for a mashpia. I already went down that road and was not happy. I find them to be judgmental. I can use someone to talk to (not a therapist) but have not found anyone (female, mid-late 30's).*

» *I was very into my "name" and did not want to ruin it by telling someone about my faults or challenges (female, mid- late 20's).*

» *I tried someone but she was too harsh, and the next one was too reserved. I felt I couldn't tell her some things that I was struggling with. I didn't feel understood (female, mid- late 20's).*

MASHPIA NOT SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE, OR GIVING INAPPROPRIATE ADVICE:

» *I asked questions about my daughters' shidduchim. One was helpful, the other was not (my daughter got engaged, but broke it off). The mashpia only saw the "standard line," didn't get the reality, and advised my daughter to continue after the girl began questioning it. We made a l'chaim and then my daughter broke it off herself (female, 50's).*

» *I found that mashpios aren't willing to deal with "real" issues. They will just send you off to a psychologist or therapist, and then wash their hands of you. They don't understand that there is a ruchnius component to all of these issues (female, mid-late 20's).*

NOT UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE MASHPIA:

» *I just thought it was for nebachs when I heard about it. The way it was presented in school was if you need help making decisions and someone to help guide you in your life to get one... until I realized it was for everyone, and something the Rebbe wanted so strongly, and I felt the need for one, only then (many years later) did I decide to get one. Once I made that decision, I had an easy time finding one (female, early 20's).*

IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A MASHPIA, WHAT WOULD HELP YOU TO GET ONE?

» *It would have helped me if it had been more of a matching system rather than having to pluck up your courage to ask. I think perhaps teens in schools can be assigned to a suggested one. They don't have to use her but they can know that she is okay with it so there is no fear of asking and rejection. I also feel that there should be guidelines on the relationship so boundaries aren't crossed. That way girls won't use their mashpia to pour out personal problems that may have to be done with a professional, and mashpios will be more willing to take on girls as they don't need to fear taking on more than they can handle. Guidelines can also be that you have a set time bi-monthly or monthly to call your mashpia and make a din v'cheshbon together with her. I think that would be very good. So the call is expected, you know what you are taking on, etc. (female, early 20's).*

» *If mashpiim were more available. If someone would make a frequent shiur or something similar and cultivate a relationship with girls and then tell them that they welcome private questions (female, early 20's).*

» *I think a listing of women who are willing to be mashpios or something like a shidduch website but somewhat anonymous until you found a match... checked by people to make sure those volunteering have substantial credentials/experience (female, mid-late 20's).*

» *If I met someone who is knowledgeable of both the chassidishe and secular world – it would be a lot easier (male, 40's).*

» *It would help me a lot to have a list of people who want to take on this role with a whole heart and who are in or past my stage of life. I would like there to be an interview or form to fill out to begin to see if this could work (female, 60's).*

HOW HAS HAVING A MASHPIA BEEN BENEFICIAL TO YOU? CAN YOU SHARE ANY SIGNIFICANT LIFE CHOICES YOU MADE BECAUSE OF THE MASHPIA'S ADVICE?

» *Most participants who have a mashpia reported that it has led to improvements in their life. People sought help from mashpiim and mashpios on a broad range of issues, including kashrus, chinuch, sholom bayis, family size, and tznius. They also*

I FEEL THAT THE REBBE'S BROCHOS AND GUIDANCE CLEARLY SHOWED THEMSELVES THROUGH ASKING A MASHPIA

received help in practical matters such as parnassah, job-searching, household organization and health issues.

» *My mashpia helped me look for and find a job that was suited to my personality and strengths, rather than the default option! This has been a tremendous brachah (female, early 20's).*

» *Having a mashpia has helped me become who I am. It's because of her that I'm married to my husband, and didn't break off my engagement because I got commitment-phobic. She recognized that I didn't have any real reason for my fears and she calmed me down and encouraged me, for which I am grateful beyond words (mid-late 20's).*

» *My mashpia saved my marriage! If not for her counseling and hours of time invested in us, I don't know how we would have stayed together. She promised me that things would get better and, with her tremendous help, they have (female, 50's).*

» *She gives me a broader perspective on my problems. She sees the bigger picture and gives me suggestions on how to improve (female, 50's).*

» *My youngest child was born only because of my mashpia's advice. I was uncertain if it was the right thing or not, because of certain chronic family challenges requiring tremendous time and energy from me. I asked my mashpia, who asked me a few smart questions, which led us both to clarity about it. I went ahead and had the baby although I was older and the other situations were still there (and not going away), and BOY ARE WE EVER GLAD to have our fantastic, inspiring 20-year-old ben zekunim who keeps us young (female, 60's).*

» *Living in New London, in 1983, Rabbi Shlomo and Mrs. Esther Bluming encouraged me to continue a pregnancy when the doctors were pressuring me to abort. We had a healthy girl, who just recently got married! I did not know they were my mashpiim, at the time. They were just the local Chabad Rabbi and his wife. Mrs. Bluming was also pregnant at the same time and we had daughters a few months apart (female, 60's).*

» *My mashpia was extremely helpful guiding me through a crisis with one of my adult children. She was wise, compassionate, and optimistic that all would be well. It was a difficult time for me, but she helped guide me through the time needed for healing and moving forward (female, 60's).*

» *It would have been very helpful when my kids were younger. I felt like dealing with their problems was overwhelming. At that time, I often saw no hope. Now I realize, and my kids tell me, that we were good parents! Much of what we went through was probably quite normal (female, 60's).*

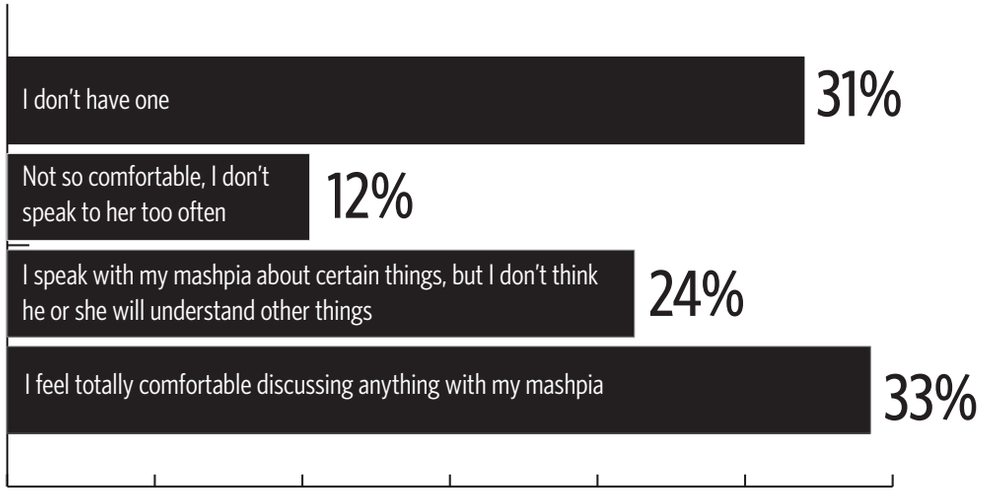
» *If your adult child has his own mashipa, I have found that it is very helpful to express your concerns through their mashpia (in confidence) when communication is difficult with that child. The mashpia might think that it is none of my business to be involved, and he can tell me so. On the other hand, a mashpia and a parent both want the best outcome for the one they are caring for, so any worthwhile, additional info might help the mashpia in dealing with the problem (female, 60's).*

FOR PEOPLE GRAPPLING WITH A TOUGH DECISION, FOLLOWING A MASHPIA'S ADVICE GAVE THEM PEACE OF MIND.

» *When faced with hard decisions, I never had to writhe in anguish over what I was supposed to do. I poured it out to my mashpia and together we found a solution (female, early 20's).*

» *My mashpia was beneficial while I was dating. She made me realize when I was dating a certain boy, that he was very controlling, and boruch Hashem I didn't continue with him. While I was dating my husband she encouraged it (when everything sounded right from my feedback). And in married life, she definitely saved my marriage. She told me when things were not normal, and to talk about it, and get help (female, early 20's).*

» *She told me not to lament over my children's shortcomings but to use professionals, or friends or tutors or whatever necessary, to get them up and running. That is her philosophy*



How comfortable are you talking to your mashpia?

– do the work it takes to get it done (female, 60's).

OTHERS FELT THAT BY ASKING THEIR MASHPIA, THEY WERE FULFILLING THE REBBE'S HORA'AH AND THUS IT WAS AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO GETTING AN ANSWER FROM THE REBBE HIMSELF:

» *I don't make any major decisions without his consent! Buying a house, taking a job, and even on a smaller scale he really keeps me on the right path b'ruchnius and it subsequently helps my family b'gashmius! There was a year in which I was not in contact and went ahead with decisions on my own; it was not the greatest year... This, however, only strengthened my resolution to have bittul and stay connected to him. Since then I keep in touch with him, and I truly feel he is a Shliach of the Rebbe for me (male, mid-late 20's).*

» *In many situations, I feel that the Rebbe's brochos and guidance clearly showed themselves through asking a mashpia. I felt tremendous clarity from her, not because she is a genius, but because this is how the Rebbe told us to get guidance. Work issues, avoiding machlokes among family or shluchim, shidduchim questions... This survey inspires me to make more frequent contact with my mashpia, although I feel that she is so busy (female, 60's).*

» *My mashpia is not brilliant and not particularly intuitive, either. She's just a very dear friend to whom I can tell anything. And yet when I tell her, "Sori, this is a mashpia question," she figuratively puts on her mashpia hat and then when she replies, I am often stunned at the brilliance and intuition she displays. I am positive it is the Rebbe speaking to me through her. There's no other explanation (female, 50's).*

MANY SEEK HELP IN DEALING WITH INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT:

» *It's important to have someone who can see your situation objectively, especially in relationship issues, where a person cannot be objective (female, mid-30's).*

» *The main reason I finally sought a mashpia was because I was really being emotionally abused by my mother-in-law for many years. I have always been respectful and dutiful towards her and never stood up for myself. My husband was not able to help with this. With my mashpia's help, I learned to stand up for myself and set limits. This has changed my life (female, 40's).*

» *My mashpia is someone I can be completely honest with. Otherwise, what's the point? I tell her how I feel about certain people I have to deal with. I tell her that I will try to work through this or that, but it's going to be hard or I just don't know if I can do it. She has encouraged me to speak to people I don't like in the proper way. She keeps me calm (female, 40's).*

MANY SAID THAT THE MASHPIA GUIDED THEIR THINKING RATHER THAN PROVIDE SPECIFIC ADVICE.

» *She never tells me what to do but just asked me the right questions and I would get my answers through it...*

(female, mid-30's).

» *There are no specific life choices I can think of now, but in general it's more of a shift of attitude that takes place after having impromptu phone farbrengens with my mashpia, rather than a specific direction I have chosen as a result of our long-winded conversations/farbrengens (female, mid-late 30's).*

EVEN IF THE MASHPIA COULD NOT RESPOND TO THE PERSON'S PROBLEM DIRECTLY, THE MASHPIA COULD OFTEN REFER THEM TO A RESOURCE FOR MORE HELP:

» *She has helped me with getting the right rabbinic advice in several very difficult situations (she knew who would have the most expertise in each case and was usually on target). She helped me when I didn't know if I could handle having another child, and another... B"H I listened to her advice — she helped me to survive it all and to have the biggest, most beautiful family possible (female, 60's).*

» *She has a huge network and knows Chabad within and out. Also, she has married off all her kids and has experience with shidduchim. I follow her advice, especially when it comes to the engagement and preparation for the weddings (female, 40's).*

NOT ALWAYS WERE PEOPLE HAPPY WITH WHAT THE MASHPIA HAD TO SAY...

» *She can be very tough on me, and I get VERY mad at her. But I try to do what she tells me. Once the issues between me and my husband were horrible, and she gave me the strangest advice and I was quite skeptical about it, but I tried it and he's still talking about the time when I said such and such and it helped him so much (female, 50's).*

» *I had a mashpia and when issues started to arise in my marriage she became way too intense for me, pushing me to take steps which I was not ready for a that point, to put my foot down with my spouse which at that point I could not do. A couple years down the line I ended up doing what she said but I was more ready then. (female, mid-late 20's).*

» *My husband used to explode every month when it was time to pay the bills. I seriously thought he needed anger management. Then my mashpia suggested I say, "It sure is hard for you to cover all these bills." That was all he needed.*

IN THE SURVEY WE GENERALLY FOUND THAT THE YOUNGER THEY WERE WHEN THEY ESTABLISHED A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MASHPIA, THE MORE LIKELY IT IS THAT THEY ARE STILL IN TOUCH. SOME HAVE HAD THE SAME MASHPIA FOR 10-20+ YEARS.

» *My mashpia has known me for more than 20 years. She has a perspective on my life that nobody else has. She knows the things that I've struggled with and she sees how I've dealt with challenges in my life. When I feel discouraged she is there to remind me of my successes, things that nobody else knows about. There are many things I don't need to explain because she understands without me saying a word (female, mid-late 30's).*

MANY HAD MORE THAN ONE PERSON THAT THEY SOUGHT ADVICE FROM REGULARLY:

» *I have a few different mashpios for different things. When I see someone who has an area of their life going really well, I generally just try to learn from them, and if they are willing I ask their advice (female, mid-late 40's).*

NOT ONLY FOR LUBAVITCHERS!

» *Just mentioning that I am not Lubavitch and I have a mashpia and feel that it's very important. It's not just a Lubavitcher thing (female, 50's).*

» *I am not affiliated with Lubavitch except for the fact that I read the N'shei Chabad Newsletter avidly. However, I was very taken with the concept of mashpia when I heard about it years ago. I read about it in the N'shei. I believe every person, and of course especially when a person is frum in this secular, vulgar world, needs a mentor and someone who can provide hadrachah as well as support, from a position of greater knowledge, experience, and maturity (female, mid-late 20's).*

HOW TO CHOOSE A MENTOR:

MODESTY, COMPASSION AND KINDNESS

A talk given by the Rebbe on Purim 5747 (March 15, 1987)

Translated by Living Torah – Jewish Educational Media (JEM)

Twice in the first chapter of Pirkei Avos we are instructed: "Provide yourself with a teacher." A person is not fully objective when it comes to himself, so he must force himself to find and appoint for himself a spiritual mentor.

Before making any serious decision, the first step must be, as my father-in-law, the Rebbe, stressed: See what the Shulchan Aruch says about it.

Now, the Shulchan Aruch itself has several commentaries, and, in addition, there are those who pretend to be able to interpret

"I am told to find a mentor who resembles an angel, but I've never seen an angel?"

Jewish law, so there's no end to how it can be manipulated.

How important, then, it is to have a qualified and objective third party, who will not be "bribed" by self-interest. "Bribery" is not when one intentionally makes a false ruling because one received some underhanded payoff. Torah says that bribery blinds and distorts one's perception until one actually believes one has done what is good – to the point that one actually sees evil to be good, and good to be evil; one sees sweet to be bitter, and bitter to be sweet.

Therefore, one must have an objective spiritual mentor. But one must know how to choose a qualified mentor, so the Gemara teaches what qualities to look for:

"He must be an angel of G-d, L-d of Hosts" – a term borrowed from the prophet Malachi, in his prophecies about the Redemption.

And the Gemara explains further: "If the mentor does indeed resemble an angel of G-d then, as the verse continues, 'seek Torah's teachings from his mouth.'"

But if, G-d forbid, he is not, then the opposite is true: Do not seek his advice.

One may ask: "I am told to find a mentor who resembles an angel, but I've never seen an angel."

Yet one still has the obligation to find one. So how should one deal with this conundrum? One can go ahead and choose a mentor, but one will never be sure whether or not the mentor truly resembles an angel.

So what is gained by choosing one in the first place? One will never know for sure whether to obey him, or not!

The solution is: Look it up in Mishneh Torah of the Rambam. There the Rambam states a principle, that one can go straight from studying the Chumash to studying his Mishneh Torah, and there one will find all he needs to know about Jewish practice.

Where would the Rambam describe angels in his Code? What relevance do they have in a codification of Jewish law? Yet we do indeed find that they are relevant:

The Gemara states, in describing the World to Come – which refers, according to the Rambam, to a time when the soul will be released from the confines of the body – "People will resemble the Ministering Angels. There will be no envy, no rivalry, and so on."

Thus, the Rambam has described what it means to be a Ministering Angel. The Ministering Angels resemble the soul as it is free of the corruption of the body. The Rambam says so based on the Gemara which describes a time free of envy, rivalry, war and hatred, with all the details listed in Tractate Brachos.

But what does that mean, since the Rambam does not spell it out clearly? What should one look for in a mentor?

So then there is the Gemara in Tractate Yevamos, which states: "There are three identifying signs of a Jew: He is modest, compassionate, kind and giving."

The Jewish People are quite diverse – they are teachers, shochtim, mohelim, Torah scholars, businessmen, and so on – but above all – and this is discussed by the Rambam and in the Gemara – what counts is how they act in these three areas.

So one must observe whether this person has these three qualities of modesty, compassion and kindness. Such things cannot be hidden. If he claims to be modest behind closed doors, or that he is kind behind closed doors, or that he is compassionate behind closed doors, that doesn't constitute an identifying sign.

Signs, by definition, must be seen by another, to serve as proof to the observer that one is modest, compassionate and kind. One must be able to see openly how his mentor lives his life. If he is clearly modest, compassionate and kind in his public conduct, these are the indicators that he is, in fact, a mentor who resembles an angel of God, with all the requisite sublime qualities.■