# ASEI LECHA RAV:

*Appoint for Yourself a Mashpia,*

## PART II

*If you missed Part I, you can still read it on our website, nsheichabadnewsletter.com/archives.*

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## A RAV'S PERSPECTIVE

The Gemara says, "*Ein adam choteh v'lo lo*." (A person does not sin if not for himself; if there is no personal gain). If you are having a hard time making a particular decision, it's possible to convince yourself that your preferred approach is the right one, even when it's not. Speaking to a friend can help clarify things.

We all make for ourselves a "rav," whether we realize it or not. Either it's a real Rav, or it's a friend, society, or an article you read online. If you don't make for yourself a proper Rav, someone or something else will fill that void.

A Rav is not only to help you make decisions, but also someone you report to. The words the Rebbe used were "mizman l'zman," from time to time, to be in touch with the mashpia. When there is a guest in the house we act differently. Our fear of Hashem is not enough; we need a person to report to. Knowing that we have a mashpia who will question why we chose to do such-and-such helps keep us from giving in to the nefesh hababamis. Rav Yochanan said, if only we feared Hashem as much as we fear humans....

Asei lecha rav. The term asei denotes a willful act – it is something that you have to make yourself do. When choosing a place to learn it says to learn in a place where your heart desires (*makom shelibo chafetz*). If you don't want to be in a particular yeshivah you will not learn well there. You need to be happy where you are in order to learn. The same concept applies to mashpia. Choose someone you like as a mashpia, someone you'll be happy to go to, who has the right character traits. You need to feel comfortable with the mashpia as a person.

Speaking to a mashpia may not always be a totally pleasant experience. You may have to use willpower in the beginning. It is not so easy to humble yourself to someone, to open up and be honest, and accept feedback and guidance. But once you make yourself do it, you'll be relieved.

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# A SHLUCHA'S PERSPECTIVE

**CHAYA GURARY**
*Baltimore, MD*

I was first introduced to the idea of a mashpia and encouraged to get one when I was in eighth grade.

At the time there were things that I wanted to do that my mother didn't allow me to, but she told me that if I get a mashpia and she allows it, then she will let me. To me, that was my key to freedom, so I agreed to the idea. What was it that tipped the scale? I wanted to wear a certain type of skirt that my mother felt was inappropriate. I decided that I'll get a mashpia and she would certainly let me, and that way I'll be able to do what I want...

Honestly, I don't remember what ended up happening with that skirt, if I was allowed to wear it in the end or not, but it was the beginning of many very special mashpia relationships.

My older sister knew a girl and made the connection for me. I started out by speaking with her once in a while. We would drive around for at least an hour or two, discussing different topics, different questions... Back then it was a lot of discussions concerning clothing, relationships, etc. but slowly it became an incredible outlet and source of real inspiration for me.

A couple of years later, still in high school, it was time for me to move on to another mashpia. I asked one of my Bnos Chabad leaders to be my mashpia and this time again I was fortunate to have someone invest herself in me, spending hours figuring out life with me. She even went so far as to prepare a little personalized "Megillah" with powerful thoughts for me to read each day I was away on Pesach vacation.

After seminary, I felt it was time to move on and I only found a new one a few years into my marriage. Of course, I speak to my mashpia significantly less than I did to the other ones as we're both busy mothers, wives and Shluchos, but for those times when I'm struggling with something and need the Rebbe's guidance, I turn to the person the Rebbe instructed us to get for this purpose: my mashpia. I am incredibly lucky to have someone warm, understanding and smart who is able to shed light and a different perspective, guiding me in the proper direction. I take this opportunity to deeply thank each of my mashpios for all that they invested in me. I hope I can now give back to others that which I received.

***WE WOULD DRIVE AROUND FOR AT LEAST AN HOUR OR TWO, DISCUSSING DIFFERENT TOPICS***

If I look back at the different experiences that I had throughout my life, and have to choose what it was that gave me the most in my Yiddishkeit and chassidishkeit, I have to say it was having a mashpia; having someone I looked up to, that I could relate to and talk to openly and comfortably, without being afraid of being judged or ridiculed for having such thoughts and questions.

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# "YOU HAVE CERTAIN GOALS THAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE"

**MRS. YOCHEVED BAITELMAN**
*Crown Heights*

**WHAT CAN YOU SHARE WITH ME ABOUT THE REBBE'S REQUEST TO GET A MASHPIA?**

The Rebbe expressed a heartfelt request, a bakashah nafshis, with regards to asei lecha rav, meaning to get ourselves a mashpia. "Please do me a favor." We'd all be happy to do the Rebbe a favor, right?

As the Rebbe said (Chol Hamoed Sukkos 5747, Oct. 19, 1986), "Every person must find a mentor and seek their advice on personal matters. … And out of love for your fellow Jew, encourage others to find their own mentor, as well."

Each of us has to have a Rav to pasken sha'alos, aside from a mashpia.

**WHAT ARE QUALITIES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING A MASHPIA?**

It should be someone with whom you're comfortable to speak and discuss things.

You're not signing a contract with one person. The idea of a mashpia is not to make big decisions yourself.

The Rebbe often encouraged people to get a second medical opinion. I think with your own life questions, at least get one opinion!

It's important to note that a mashpia is not a Rav or a posek. A mashpia is not someone who tells us what to do, but someone who helps us gain clarity. A mashpia can also guide you when and how to ask a Rav a shailah. Only a Rav gives a psak.

**HOW OFTEN SHOULD ONE SPEAK TO A MASHPIA?**

A mashpia is someone you speak to regularly, not just when there is a big problem. If you find that there are certain things that you keep thinking about, rather than letting them clog your brain, speak to a mashpia.

When speaking to a mashpia you have to ask yourself, "Am I ready to deal with it?" You have to have the feeling that you are ready to do something about the situation.

My father, Rabbi Sholom Gordon a"h, told us: "We learn from the laws of bedikas chometz. You do not search for chometz in your neighbor's house. You only search on your own property. Chometz represents undesirable traits. We search for it in ourselves, not in our loved ones." So when speaking to a mashpia about a sholom bayis issue, for example, you are going to be asking, "What can I do to make my marriage better?" How can I change myself, my behavior?

If a mashpia is giving you guidance or advice, you should at least make an effort to follow through on her suggestions. You can't use a mashpia to talk, talk and talk, if you have no intention of actually doing something.

When a person calls me and then doesn't do even one thing from the advice given, I don't have the energy. This is my feeling. But others don't mind just listening.

**CAN YOU SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH FINDING A MASHPIA FOR YOURSELF, OR ANY DIFFICULTIES YOU MAY HAVE HAD, OR RESERVATIONS, WHEN THE REBBE FIRST CAME OUT WITH THE HORA'AH?**

Right away I took on more than one mashpia. I felt that one person could not give me answers with regard to all my life issues. The person I would speak to regarding chinuch, strengthening Chitas and improving in tznius, wasn't the same person who I would turn to

with advice on the day-to-day, physical aspects of raising my children.

Choose someone with whom you can have a good relationship. Of course, she should be a good, frum person, with hiskashrus, someone who has a lifestyle you'd like to emulate. Someone who treats her husband and children with respect – this is a TOP priority. A mashpia should be someone with good middos, who acts in a chassidishe and respectful way.

You have certain goals that you want to achieve. For example, maybe you have challenges getting your children out on time in the morning. So speak to people who do get their kids out on time in the morning. Find out how they do it.

**HOW DO I FIND A MASHPIA?**

For a newcomer to Crown Heights, I would say stick with the person you knew before you came here. Maybe eventually they could make an introductory call for you. If someone is new in town and wants to rent an apartment, the landlord will ask for references. Who is this person, is she trustworthy, who are her friends? A mashpia who gets a cold call, from someone she doesn't know, may do the same. She will ask around, who is this person?

If people who already know you introduce you to a new local mashpia, it makes a big difference. They can say to the new mashpia, "I know this woman, and she is trustworthy and sincere about her Yiddishkeit."

The mashpia has to connect with you too. It's not a one-way street. She has to feel comfortable talking to you.

**IS PAYING A MASHPIA SOMETHING THAT IS EXPECTED?**

No, I do not think a mashpia should be paid.

If someone chooses to give a gift, I think that's acceptable, but not required.

I do want to say, though, that one should pay a Rav, even if he doesn't charge. This is his parnassah. If you don't send a check on Chanukah or Purim, then certainly send one when selling chometz.

**I FEEL BAD ASKING SOMEONE SO BUSY, IMPORTANT, WITH LOTS OF RESPONSIBILITIES, TO BE MY MASHPIA.**

Either they'll want to or they won't want to. Take all the Shluchos, they live their lives helping people. Some people go on mivtza'im, some are mashpiim. You have to find someone who wants to do it, but don't get stuck on someone who doesn't want to do it.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK OF HAVING FAMILY MEMBERS BE ONE'S MASHPIA?**

If you feel that you can have an honest relationship, it's fine. I know people who have family members as a mashpia, and it has been very successful for 20 years, ever since the Rebbe asked for it.

You have to know what your relationship with the person is. Know how they look at you and how they perceive you...

**THE PEOPLE I RESPECT, I FEEL INTIMIDATED TALKING TO, AND FOR THE PEOPLE I FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING TO, I DON'T HAVE THAT SORT OF RESPECT.**

Sometimes, we put people on a pedestal, especially if you heard they are good at something that's an issue for you. But when you talk to them, you'll see they are really approachable.

If you know someone has expertise in a certain issue, call her, even if you feel a little intimidated by her. Ask about a subject you know she is comfortable with and can discuss easily. Who knows, she may turn out to be your mashpia....

A word to mashpios: a mashpia shouldn't impose on someone else standards that she does not keep herself.



Mrs. Yocheved Baitelman

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# "A MASHPIA IS NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR THINKING"

**RABBI MANIS FRIEDMAN**

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A MASHPIA AND A THERAPIST?**
First of all, a mashpia is not a doctor. The role of a mashpia is not to help people with depression or emotional problems. A mashpia is for when you need to know the right thing to do.

So maybe I should note, the mashpia should notice when the person is listening or growing from what he or she is teaching, or if the person has a serious problem and is not taking it in. If the person can't listen, can't hear, can't receive, then there might be a need for professional help. But as long as the person is open and eager for guidance, then a mashpia can guide.

**SO WHO CAN BE A MASHPIA?**
Someone who is a little wiser than you, somebody whose standard of mitzvos and chassidishe sensitivity is a little better than your own, so they can elevate you to their level.

Everybody has a yetzer hara, everyone has their weaknesses. It doesn't have to be top secret.

You can trust a mashpia that they're mature enough not to go spreading lashon hara. And unfortunately there is no guarantee. But I think people know to be cautious and to trust their instinct. If you feel a person is not trustworthy then don't go there. To exclude everybody, to say I can't talk to anyone, I can't have a mashpia because the mashpia might think something [negative] of me, that's going too far.

**CAN YOU HAVE MORE THAN ONE MASHPIA?**
Sure. Just don't go to different mashpiim with the same question. But if you have certain mashpiim who help you with family things, you have mashpiim who help you with learning Chassidus, etc., I think that's perfectly okay. A mashpia is not a marriage. But to ask two mashpiim the same question, that's like asking two Rabbonim the same question.

You come to a mashpia because you want to be better. If you are capable of growing and capable of taking advice, then you are capable of becoming better. So you go to a mashpia and you say, "Will you please help me grow to the next level that I need to be on, either in learning or hiddur mitzvah or..."

One should go to a mashpia if one has a problem with sholom bayis, but is open to improvement, and wants to know how to make the marriage better – not to come and kvetch and complain about his or her spouse. The mashpia is not a marriage counselor. You come to a mashpia because you think you can do better, you just need some support and advice.

**WHAT ABOUT FAMILY MEMBERS BEING ONE'S MASHPIA?**
I think a close relative is not a good idea. You need someone who can be objective about your matzav. People who are too close to you may have the same problems you have. They can't be objective. They're either too critical or too lenient.

**WHAT IF YOU FEEL YOUR MASHPIA IS NOT GIVING GOOD ADVICE? SHOULD YOU FORCE YOURSELF TO LISTEN OUT OF KABBALAS OL?**
If you don't trust your mashpia, then you don't have one. Asking a mashpia is like asking the Rebbe, because the Rebbe says if you want my answer ask a mashpia. So the mashpia is b'hashgachah protis telling you what you need to hear.


Rabbi Manis Friedman

If you are not ready to trust him enough to do it, and you're just looking for advice that appeals to you, you are not really looking for a mashpia, you are looking for approval. When you talk to a mashpia, it has to be like looking up something in Shulchan Aruch. That's what it says, that's what you do.

That's the challenge – to have that kind of willingness. Otherwise you never get out of your box. A mashpia should be able to push you beyond your comfort zone.

**WHAT ABOUT BOTHERING SOMEONE WHO IS BUSY? THERE IS A CONCERN THAT YOU WILL BE WASTING THEIR TIME. ALSO, IS THERE A CERTAIN FREQUENCY WHICH ONE IS MEANT TO BE SPEAKING TO ONE'S MASHPIA?**

You can't make a rule about frequency. Being considerate of a mashpia's time is very thoughtful, very correct. So don't just carry on and take up a lot of unnecessary time.

Present your question clearly. Maybe even write it down before, and get to the point, because the main thing is to get instruction. You get your instruction, you go and you do. No debating, discussing and analyzing. It's guidance. Guidance shouldn't take that much time. More than an hour at a time would be very inconsiderate.

You can let the mashpia decide how often you should be speaking, if there is a need for another conversation or follow up.

**WHAT ABOUT DEVELOPING A HEALTHY SENSE OF TRUSTING ONESELF, NOT ALWAYS RUNNING TO A MASHPIA?**

Well, if you remember, the Rebbe advised a number of things. If you have financial business problems or questions, talk to yedidim u'mevinim, friends who understand business.

If you have a question with health, talk to a rofeh yedid.

If you have a question regarding yeshivah, talk to the hanhalah of a yeshivah.

You don't run to the mashpia with every question. You go to a mashpia because you want to be better. Better middos, more yiras Shomayim, you want to understand Chassidus better. That's what you go to a mashpia for.

It's not like you can't make up your mind about things so you ask your mashpia everything. Even when you ask your friends about business or a doctor about health, it doesn't mean that you can't trust your own wisdom. It means you have a question. A mashpia is not a replacement for thinking.

I mean, people wouldn't write to the Rebbe with business questions unless they really had a question. Anything they thought they could handle themselves, they did.

**WHAT'S OUR OBLIGATION OR RESPONSIBILITY IN TERMS OF BEING MASHPIA ON OTHERS? WHAT IF SOMEONE ASKS ME TO BE THEIR MASHPIA, BUT I DON'T THINK I AM "MASHPIA MATERIAL"?**

If you really don't think you can do it, you must be honest about it; not everyone is cut out to be a mashpia.

If they are really persistent, they'll wear you down and you'll agree, but once you agree you have to take it seriously.

We're always either being influenced or doing the influencing. So we're being mashpia whether we know it or not. To be a formal mashpia, you need to wait until you're asked. But once you're asked, you have to take the responsibility.

The Rebbe once said by a farbrengen the mashpia doesn't wait for the mushpa to call him. He picks up the phone and calls him, but that's after you become a mashpia. You don't go recruiting.

*To hear or read more of Rabbi Manis Friedman, please visit itsgoodtoknow.com.*

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# "DON'T LOOK FOR PERFECT"

**RABBI AVROHOM LIPSZYC**

Many years ago, Rabbi Binyomin Klein related the following story. A bochur asked the Rebbe for permission to go to college, and wrote that he had received permission from his Rav. The Rebbe called in Rabbi Klein and asked him to find out from the Rav what his reasoning was for giving the bochur permission to go to college. The bochur's Rav responded, "He is going to go anyway, so what would be the point of my telling him no?" The Rebbe was very upset and told the bochur that he should disregard that Rav's advice.

I have witnessed such scenarios, in which the asei lecha rav became the blind leading the blind...

What is the solution? Should we choose our mashpia more wisely? What is the Rebbe's directive of asei lecha rav?

The Rebbe first spoke about getting a mashpia on Shabbos parshas Devarim, 5746, and repeated this instruction many times in the following weeks. In the first sichah the Rebbe said, "In addition to the teaching, 'Who is wise, he who learns from every person,' there is the teaching to make yourself a rav...

"Even if you are a gadol in yiras Shomayim and Torah knowledge, and cannot find someone above you, take someone beneath you, for a person cannot see for himself the advice that one can see for the other.

"The term 'asei' denotes forcing oneself, and it being difficult."

## A CLASSIC OBSTACLE TO ASEI LECHA RAV

In a chassidishe cheder, there is a beautiful emphasis on the holiness and perfection of all tzadikim, and thus, all our heroes and mentors from childhood are to us perfect and larger than life. In early childhood, our parents, grandparents, and older siblings are perfect in our eyes; they know and can do everything. Then, as we grow older, we have counselors and head counselors whom we idolize, as well as teachers, principals, and mashpiim. Eventually, we see that our parents and indeed just about everyone is only human. Tzadikim are so rare, as Tanya explains, that Hashem had to place a few in every generation, because we can't live without them. To see our mentors and people that we look up to as anoshim k'erkeinu, people of our caliber, can be shattering, and sometimes this can lead to a loss of trust in any rav.

This should not be!

I recall so vividly begging not to hear lashon hara about one of my mentors, thinking to myself that I just couldn't afford to be crushed and lose yet another giant in my life.

This, to me, is one of the most classic obstacles to asei lecha rav, to us making for ourselves a rav. And it's the yetzer hara all the way.

But when looking for a rav, aren't we supposed to find the most chassidishe, wise, and respected individual we know?

I suggest not!

## WHAT IS A SPONSOR?

In addiction recovery programs, a primary tool without which one cannot achieve recovery is to have a sponsor. The saying goes, "If you work the steps by yourself, without a sponsor except for yourself, you have a fool for a sponsor."

Well, who is this sponsor? He or she is a recovering addict, who has been where the sponsee is, and has worked the Twelve Steps, thus having an understanding of the steps.

So, the requirements to be a


Rabbi Avrohom Lipszyc

sponsor are a) an addict (addicts never stop being addicts, however, they can be in recovery), b) has sobriety, and c) knows how, and has himself or herself worked the steps.

Wow! What a surprise to me! The only reason a sponsor can be a sponsor is because he or she is as "crazy-wired" as the sponsee! In recovery a sponsee will often tell his sponsor, "Yes, you earned the right to be my sponsor, you are crazy enough!"

Together with this, the sponsor must have recovery time, and not be part of the "captured who cannot free themselves." He must have what the sponsee wants to have, a healthy recovery, and he must have a clear understanding of the process which leads from the insanity of addiction to the sobriety of recovery.

When I learned of this, I began to have a whole new understanding of the Rebbe's directive to asei lecha rav, and understand who I am looking for, and why and how I can trust him.

**FINDING A RAV**

In finding a rav, it may be best to take the same approach as addicts in recovery do in finding a sponsor. It isn't about who he or she may be according to conventional wisdom, as in very chassidish, brilliant, or the like. Most questions one would ask one's rav don't require holiness or brilliance as much as they require experiential wisdom and understanding. The mushpa needs to see in the eyes of the rav an understanding of the chaos, the pain, and the fear. The following story was once told by the Rebbe at a farbrengen (Sukkos, 5711). As a child, the Rebbe Rashab was playing Rebbe/chossid with his brother, Reb Zalman Aharon (Raza). The Rashab refused to play "Rebbe," because he said, "There is only one Rebbe [their grandfather, the Tzemach Tzedek]." So the Rashab played chossid, and Raza played Rebbe. The little "chossid" told the "Rebbe" about a deficiency in his avodas Hashem, and the "Rebbe" gave advice on how to correct it.

After hearing his response, the Rashab told his brother, "You are not a Rebbe!"

"Why not?" asked Reb Zalman Aharon.

The Rebbe Rashab answered, "A Rebbe would give a sigh first before replying."

However, of what use is a krechtz without understanding the way back home? Thus, the criterion of the rav is his understanding of Yiddishkeit, Chassidus, and the Rebbe's view of living life. Here again, not just understanding from the mind or heart, but from the *"m'bsorai echzah* – from my own flesh do I see."

**JUST DO IT!**

Don't look for perfection. Instead, find someone who travels a journey of life similar to yours, who lives the life you wish to live. Ask him for his telephone number and if it is okay one evening or on a Sunday to sit down and talk. Feel comfortable little by little, and then just do it, by asking him if he is willing to be your rav. Then, I would suggest that you go to the Ohel and notify the Rebbe, and ask for help, guidance, and a blessing for willingness to be open to what the mashpia will tell you to do.

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# MYSHLIACH

**MRS. ELKY RAITPORT**

**EVEN CHILDREN NEED TO HAVE A MASHPIA!**

Every child should have a mashpia. Children can also be mashpia on others, as evidenced from this quote from the Rebbe:

"... In order for the mashpiim to be effective, they must be filled with a spirit of ahavas Yisroel, and therefore a special printing of Kuntres Ahavas Yisroel will be printed for the mashpiim. A special kuntres will also be published for children with sayings about ahavas Yisroel which will be on a child's level, starting with the saying: "Love your fellow as yourself; Rabbi Akiva said, this is a great principle of the Torah," which is one of the Twelve Pesukim. This kuntres will be given to those children who are mashpiim, and it will definitely give added success to their work. (This excerpt is taken from *To Love a Fellow Jew,* published by SIE, compiled and translated by Rabbi Nissan Dovid Dubov.)

Eight-year-old Mendy Zaklas of Zagreb, Croatia, spends lots of time playing piano, experimenting and sounding out his favorite Lubavitcher niggunim. His twin sister Dina and younger siblings Hinda and Yehuda serve as his devoted sounding board, audience and cheering squad as he entertains them with his lively concerts during many an afternoon.

"I have lots of friends," Mendy tells me, referring to the many of Zagreb's 6,000 Jews that have come through the Zaklases' doors. As for likeminded peers, though, the nearest ones live in Vienna, four and a half hours away by car. And then there's Shneor. He's just a phone call away.

"Shneor is my MyShliach friend," Mendy explains, describing the 21-year-old bochur whose Sunday afternoon phone calls he anticipates all week long. "He tells the most interesting stories, like the ones from Bosi L'Gani, but what I enjoy most is learning Hayom Yom with him."

With this year marking 70 years since the publication of Hayom Yom, Shneor makes a point of discussing a selection with Mendy during every conversation. "I don't necessarily choose the Hayom Yom's entry of that particular day," he explains. "I choose an entry of the upcoming week that can easily be read and [forgotten] without a person finding specific inspiration within it, and introduce Mendy to the layers of meaning and personal teachings that can be found upon digging just a little deeper."

Mrs. Raizel Zaklas adds, "MyShliach provides something so essential to the life of a child on Shlichus and even to his parents. The need for each child to have a mashpia, someone to lovingly encourage him to follow the right path through a one-on-one connection, reflects our need, as well. MyShliach is a weekly boost that keeps us all going."

"An incredible amount of Mendy's Chassidishkeit can be credited to MyShliach," Rabbi Pinny Zaklas agrees.

Launched in 5766 for a pilot group of 50 boys, MyShliach's Ach/Achos Sheli program was created to connect yaldei hashluchim around the world with "big brother" figures for weekly, hour-long one-on-one sessions of learning and farbrenging. Expanding one year later to include a girls' track, the program has served as a veritable lifeline for over 1,000 yaldei hashluchim spanning 150 cities throughout 20 countries.

"Though MyShliach does provide learning resources to the mentors, there is no set curriculum," explains girls' coordinator Mrs. Malkie Wilshansky. "When registering, parents are able to specify how they'd like the mashpia to

spend his or her time with their child. For some, the focus is on reviewing a possuk Chumash, learning a new perek of mishnayos, or tackling a sichah. For others, the Ach/Achos Sheli is simply about a listening ear and an inspirational role model."

But regardless of how the time is spent, a kesher is built. "We've had chavrusas stay in touch for more than five years," exclaims director Rabbi Mendy Shanowitz. "Bochurim have flown in to attend the bar mitzvahs of 'their children' and children have traveled to the weddings of their mashpiim. Recently, chavrusas Yaakov Landau of Thornhill, Ontario, and Meir Shlomo Gordon of London, England, celebrated a siyum marking the conclusion of their learning the entire Kitzur Shulchan Aruch over the course of three years!

"We're constantly in touch with the parents," says Rabbi Shanowitz, who encourages parents to call right away if any concerns arise. The Ach/Achos Sheli program is just one of the many resources that MyShliach provides for children of Shluchim, in keeping with its motto of "caring for the wellbeing of the children of Shluchim."

*For more information, visit www.myshliach.com or call 718-467-4400 x 338. MyShliach is a project of Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch.*



Zaklas Family

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# THERAPIST VS. MASHPIA

**MRS. ALIZA HOROWITZ**

**THERAPIST VS. MASHPIA**

Everyone in this world faces challenges in life and needs help to understand and solve them. Therapy may be helpful depending on the scope of the problem and the sensitivities of the person. The following case study highlights the unique contributions of the therapist. Names and details have been changed to protect of the privacy of the patient.

Shayna grew up in an out-of-town Chabad community. She was the sixth of seven siblings. When Shayna was five years old, her maternal grandmother died in a tragic accident, leaving Shayna's mother, Esther, in shock. Esther became seriously depressed and unable to


Mrs. Aliza Horowitz

care for her young daughter. Shayna's father took over the functioning of the home while holding down a full-time job. Although during this time Shayna's basic needs were taken care of, she was deeply impacted by her mother's inability to nurture her, and began to retreat into herself. The children at school teased her and shunned her for her odd behavior. Shayna began to feel lonely and unlovable. Although Shayna's mother eventually recovered from her grief and was able to function well again, something inside of Shayna did not spring back. The feeling that "there is something wrong with me" was always there like a wound that does not heal.

At age 21 Shayna moved to Crown Heights. Once she settled into the community she found an older woman to be a role model and a mashpia. Mrs. Cohen was compassionate and understanding. Together they learned the Rebbe's teachings about marriage and bitachon. They talked regularly and Shayna tried hard to implement Mrs. Cohen's advice. Although Shayna threw herself into her work of teaching preschool and learning Torah, she couldn't shake the increasingly overwhelming feelings that were welling up inside of her. She was unable to concentrate at work, cried for no apparent reason, and no longer enjoyed the things she had always liked to do. When Shayna stopped calling for several weeks, Mrs. Cohen became alarmed. At this point she urged Shayna to get professional help.

Shayna was 23 years old when she came to me for her first therapy session. She was very sad and felt she was at the end of her rope. When Shayna and I began working we had to address the pain that she had tried hard to avoid feeling. She needed to examine and explore the feelings and thoughts that were overwhelming her. To help her be able to do that, she had to learn some skills that would make it tolerable. Slowly we built a trusting relationship and created a therapeutic space where she could go back and work through the deeper issues that resulted from the trauma of her mother withdrawing emotionally at an important developmental stage.

This case is an example of the difference between the role of a mashpia and that of a therapist. Both are committed to the person developing to their full potential. A mashpia helps a person see her spiritual blind spots, and for many people this is all that is needed. Therapists have expertise in the treatment of emotional disorders through the use of therapeutic techniques. The therapist steps in when there are deeper problems that are blocking the person from being able to function in one or more important areas of life, such as home, work, or relationships. The work of the mashpia and the therapist can be complementary, as in the case above, where the mashpia saw that Shayna needed an additional kind of help. Psychotherapy is more than talking about problems, more than encouragement and more than giving good advice. Through clinical intervention and the interactions in this unique relationship – which exists solely for the benefit of the person seeking help – symptoms can be relieved and problems in living solved.

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# "TRUST DEVELOPS SLOWLY"

**MRS. BRONYA SHAFFER**
*Crown Heights*

**WHO SAYS I NEED ADVICE?**
It's impossible for a person to go through life without ever needing to ask anyone anything – decorating advice, cooking advice, financial advice, marriage advice...

The Rebbe said that a mashpia is someone you check in with specifically in the areas of Torah, tefillah and tzedakah. A mashpia is someone you are accountable to.

This is something that the world recognizes is a helpful thing. We see this today with Weight Watchers, or Alcoholic Anonymous - people have a sponsor.

The Rebbe didn't say a mashpia is only for people who didn't go to yeshivah, or for people who don't know so much, or for people who are not so chassidish. I think the underlying unsaid theme here is: Everybody needs someone to speak to.

**WHO SAYS A MASHPIA IS SO SMART, AND WHY SHOULD SHE BE SO POWERFUL?**
Sometimes someone calls me and asks something. I tell them, let me think about this, I will discuss this with my mashpia, who will often tell me she needs to discuss it with her mashpia...

It's quite a wondrous thing.

It is clear that mashpia-mushpa is a unique relationship. Once, when my daughter was working and also going to school, I saw her sitting at the table late one night, half asleep.

I say to her, "Why don't you go to bed?"

She said, "I can't; I didn't learn Chitas yet."

"So learn Chitas," I said.

"I'm too tired," she replied.

As a mother, I have rachmanus, I tell her, go to sleep, and you'll do Chitas tomorrow. As a mother this is a totally appropriate response.

A mashpia, on the other hand, may tell her, if you stop one day, it opens the door for stopping another. Push yourself, and do it.

**HOW DOES SOMEONE DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH A MASHPIA?**
Slowly. Calling a mashpia isn't like calling a dentist: Make an appointment, take an X-ray, have a cavity filled, done. If one speaks with someone regularly, a relationship will develop naturally.

**WHAT ARE QUALITIES TO LOOK FOR IN A MASHPIA?**
Someone older, with more life experience.

Someone whom you trust.

Someone whose opinions you respect.

**HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A MASHPIA IS TRUSTWORTHY?**
Trust develops slowly. It's like asking, how do you trust a pharmacist? We patronize pharmacies with a reputation that's earned them the public trust. It doesn't happen instantly; trust is built and earned. You will seek out a mashpia whom you know – by reputation – to be trustworthy, and then as you get to know her, the trust will build.

Nobody can live life without trusting anyone at all.

When trust is betrayed it's very painful.

The single most important point to keep in mind, while finding the right mashpia: You have to know the information you are disclosing won't go anywhere.

If you are a mashpia, when someone tells you something, you have an ethical and moral responsibility, as well as a halachic responsibility,

to maintain confidentiality.

When someone discloses something personal, it doesn't belong to you. You don't have the right to tell it to anyone else. This is personal integrity.

Speak with someone you trust who will not betray your confidence. Here's a hint: If a mashpia shares personal information about others with you, it's quite likely that she is sharing your personal information with others.

People who come to a mashpia need to be assured in words that everything discussed will be kept confidential. This is especially important to say to younger people, unless there is a danger. In that case I will call your parents, but I will tell you first that I am calling.

If someone shares suicidal thoughts, for example, I will have to speak with someone. If I see a closet eating disorder, I have to speak up. But the same applies. I tell the person that I am making this call because her life is in danger.

Even in friendships, if a friend tells you "swear to me" and then discloses something terrible that she did, I am not going to tell. But if they say some suicidal or potentially harmful things, then I will have to tell someone.

### WHAT IF IT'S EMBARRASSING FOR A PERSON TO SPEAK WITH A MASHPIA?

Embarrassment can become like a prison and cripple you. It's a self-imposed disability.

Embarrassment is a sense of shame.

A strong sense of shame doesn't allow us to create strong relationships. Shame is, "I don't think I am worthy enough for someone to take time and effort on my behalf. If I allow myself to be too vulnerable, the person will think less of me."

Shame is also the inability to accept our inadequacies. If I have to name one emotion which keeps us from being involved in healthy satisfying relationships, it is shame.

### WHAT IF MY MASHPIA MAKES ME FEEL INADEQUATE? LESS THAN...?

First of all, no one can make you feel anything if you don't let them. If speaking with a mashpia makes you feel worse rather than better, then don't talk to her. Find someone else. Someone can tell you spinach is very healthy and good for you, but if you get a stomach ache every time you eat it, then you can get those health benefits with other vegetables; don't keep eating spinach!

### IS PAYING A MASHPIA SOMETHING THAT IS EXPECTED?

Being a mashpia is not a profession. It's personal. There aren't any rates.

I do know of people who charge for their time. They can't afford not to; they spend many hours a day speaking with people; they could be working instead.

But it's not a profession.

You could ask a mashpia, "Would you like to be paid for your time?" and see what she says.

### HOW DO I KNOW IF I SHOULD SPEAK TO A MASHPIA OR A THERAPIST?

A mashpia is someone from whom you seek advice and guidance.

A mashpia does not take the place of a therapist who's educated, trained and has experience in certain areas of human needs, related to emotional or physical wellbeing.

Sometimes though it seems like there is a fine line: Is this something that needs a mashpia's advice, or is this something that needs professional consultation?

What do you do? Go to a good mashpia, she will tell you if you need a therapist.

We do recognize that there are emotional ills that people suffer from and there is a very specific way of treating them. For example, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), PPD (Post-Partum Depression), abuse, addiction, phobias, panic disorders, OCD... These and others need more than just good judgment and a well-intentioned mashpia. A mashpia cannot take the place of a person who is expertly trained, credentialed and licensed in the field of emotional/mental health.

Someone who is in therapy also needs a mashpia. A mashpia is not a therapist and a therapist is not a mashpia.

Someone may consult with a therapist and the therapist sees there is no underlying pathological issue. A good, ethical therapist may then say, go discuss this with Rav so and so, he gives good advice on such matters.

A therapist deals with pathology and health. A mashpia deals with morality and values.

### WHAT IF A MASHPIA GIVES ADVICE THAT IS NOT GOOD?

If you know that, then it's already good!

### DOES IT MATTER HOW OLD A MASHPIA IS?

She should be someone with more life experience than you. If you are both grandmothers, and have similar

life experiences, then it's not such a big deal if she is younger than you.

Everyone needs a mashpia.

**THERE ARE SOME WHO SAY TO TRUST WHATEVER A MASHPIA TELLS YOU, BECAUSE THE FACT THAT THEY ARE YOUR MASHPIA IS HASHGACHAH PROTIS. WOULD YOU COMMENT ON THIS?**

It sounds very spiritual but this is not always the reality.

We don't have a choice in the parents or siblings we have – this is hashgachah protis. This is the reality and we have to make the best we can of it.

But is a mashpia on the same plane? We actually choose our mashpia.

When we have a medical question, we go to a doctor. Even if the doctor is someone you went to as a kid, has seen all your kids, you've trusted them all your life – if they tell you something that you're not totally comfortable with, stop and think. Seek the advice of another doctor. The Rebbe would often say to get a second opinion, and/or to consult a doctor who is a friend.

***THE ONES WHO ARE MOST EAGER TO TELL YOU WHAT TO DO ARE THE PEOPLE TO RUN AWAY FROM***

Even when speaking to a Rav, if you go to one Rav but you are not sure he understood your situation, or something is unsettling about his advice, you can go to another Rav. (Of course, you need to tell Rav B that you spoke with Rav A and what he said.) I remember Rav Zalman Shimon Dworkin, Rav of Crown Heights in the olden days, saying to someone, "I don't know, go ask Rav Moshe [Feinstein]. Get another opinion." Essentially, one needs to develop an understanding or awareness that the psak or advice they received may not be appropriate for the situation and needs clarification.

To the Rebbe, people would completely mevatel themselves.

**IF THE MASHPIA IS VERY FIRM THAT I SHOULD DO SUCH-AND-SUCH, MUST I LISTEN?**

The ones who are most eager to tell you what to do are the people to run away from.

When you hear someone say, "Don't listen to anyone else; I am telling you what to do," put on your running shoes.

**ANY WORDS OF ADVICE TO ONE WHO IS IN THE MASHPIA POSITION?**

We need to be sensitive, especially to someone who is in a vulnerable place. Before giving advice, you might need to ask advice, what to say and what to do. You should seek counsel yourself.

One needs to take time to speak to one's mashpia, and the mashpia needs to take the time to listen. For example, you call a Rav when you have a taharas hamishpachah question. Now, if you just give him the question, he will give you an answer. But if you tell him you have been trying to have children for ten years, well, perhaps the answer may differ slightly.

You may tell a mashpia that you want to learn more, so you decide to learn every night for an hour after the kids are asleep. This sounds wonderful.

But what you didn't tell your mashpia is that your husband comes home after a long day, and wants you to be available. You are busy learning on the phone with your friend and he is resentful that you are not available. He feels ignored. It may not be right, but it's reality.

Even in halachah a psak can differ depending on a slight change of circumstances.

**DO PEOPLE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO BECOME MASHPIIM FOR OTHERS?**

The Rebbe said to make for yourself a mashpia, not make yourself into a mashpia. Someone busy with her 12 children may need to focus on them right now, and really needs to ask her mashpia what her role is in terms of being mashpia on others, though automatically we already are, even though we may not formally be mashpia to others.

The Rebbe wants us to get a mashpia, yet there are many ways and different perspectives.

Once I spoke in Bais Rivkah High

School and a girl got up and said, "This is so frustrating. This teacher says one thing and this teacher says something else. It's so confusing! Which is right?"

I told her, "Look how beautiful this is. These teachers are all in Bais Rivkah. That means everything here is okay and kosher and you have different opinions. You choose. Yiddishkeit and Chassidishkeit are not narrow. Not one box. You'll each find the teacher that speaks to you within the walls of Bais Rivkah. Different voices saying different things but all devoted to the things the Rebbe wanted."

**DOES IT REALLY WORK? IT SOUNDS ALMOST MIRACULOUS!**

Perhaps we need to do more advertising about the benefits of the mashpia relationship. Human nature is such that we sometimes don't recognize the value of what's in our own home. The Rebbe offered us this gem, strongly encouraging each and every one of us to embrace the idea of acquiring a mashpia. Whenever I've introduced the subject to girls in non-Chabad high schools and seminaries, it's been met with a great deal of interest and excitement; mentoring, coaching... these are now part of the vocabulary and consciousness of our society.

A mashpia is to our psyche what a personal trainer is to physical fitness; invaluable to personal growth and healthy development.


Rabbi Michoel Gourarie

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# LESSON FROM LAG B'OMER

**RABBI MICHOEL GOURARIE**
*Sydney, Australia*

One of the many Lag B'omer traditions is for children to go on outings and play with bows and arrows. Among the many reasons for this custom is one that has an important life lesson.

To use a bow and arrow effectively, the shooter must first pull the bow towards himself. Once the bow is pulled as far back as possible, the arrow can be released with significant force and hopefully meets its target quickly and accurately.

The lesson here is simple but powerful. Affecting the world around us is more successful when we first move inwards. When we look deeply into our own soul, realizing the amazing potential that we possess, only then can we influence others.

The Rebbe of Kotzk once said: "When I was younger I thought I would change the world. I then decided that I would work on my city, and later concentrated just on my family. But now I have decided just to try and change myself." I do not believe the Kotzker Rebbe meant that he would work only on himself and ignore others. After all, he led a big community and was responsible for thousands of followers. What he was saying is that the only effective way to change other people is to begin with ourselves.

Improving our own character and personality is within our control. We choose to progress or stagnate, to become angry or stay calm, to give or to hold back. We cannot control other people, but we can influence them by moving inwards. Changing ourselves will change others.■

*To receive Rabbi Gourarie's divrei Torah and words of inspiration, email rabbig@bina.com.au.*