

Ask A Breslover: Getting The Best Advice (Hitbodedut)

written by Chaya Rivka Zwolinski
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Dear Breslover,

I've been through lots of pain the past two years. I am forced to deal with a crazy family situation, I am facing bankruptcy and I live with a chronic illness which is made worse by all the stress.

I asked someone for spiritual advice he told me that my suffering was an atonement for my sins.

I asked someone else for spiritual advice and he told me to thank Hashem for all the good things in my life. He told me to do this during hitbodedut for at least an hour a day. I couldn't stand to do it for more than a few minutes, it felt

totally fake, like I was lying to Hashem.

Someone else told me that if I thanked Hashem for my problems they would go away because I wouldn't need them anymore.

I feel like the people giving me advice don't understand what I'm going through.

H.M.

Dear H.M.,

The variety of Rebbe Nachman's teachings is vast. Sometimes teachings are more relevant, sometimes less. **What advice is good for you depends on who you are as a unique individual.**

Not all Rebbe Nachman's advice can be assimilated by everyone at all times. Sometimes, advice or feedback that is right for one person, may not be right for another. And sometimes when we are suffering what we need is simply a loving hug and someone to listen.

The Rebbe tells us our understanding and knowledge changes throughout our lives. He explains that when we come closer to Hashem and return to him, we do this on our present level of understanding. When that level of understanding changes, we may have to repeat some of this teshuvah because now we have greater clarity and insight and the teshuvah we did before needs to be refined.*

That being said, sometimes we do have to humble ourselves and accept the advice we're given, even if it does hurt a bit.

How do you know whether the advice you're receiving is right for you, right now, with what you are going through?

It's difficult to make a general rule about this, but might I suggest to you that if the advice you're hearing is so painful or difficult to follow that you find it devastating, mind-numbing or pointless, take a step back.

It's true that it's a Jewish ideal to thank Hashem for everything that happens in our lives. This means thanking Hashem for things even if we don't understand why they are happening, and even if they aren't what we desire. We can develop our faith and learn to trust that Hashem only does good for us, even if it's difficult. Right now, that might seem a future goal, something to work towards, and that's okay.

Hashem knows you and He knows what is really in your heart. He only wants you to do what you are able to do—He only wants you to take one small step. That step may very well be hitbodedut.

Except this time, hitbodedut can be without preconceived ideas of what the correct way to talk to Hashem is. It should be formula-free. This isn't my advice, it is actually the advice of Rebbe Nachman!

Rebbe Nachman tells us that we should talk to Hashem as if he is our teacher and our best friend. Sure, there are more "advanced" formulas for how to talk to Hashem. But at its essence, hitbodedut is really about your relationship with Hashem.

What I suggest is that you just tell Hashem how you are feeling. All of it. The heartache, the sadness, and even the anger. The real stuff. Get it out. Tell Him how you feel about your relationship with Him right now.

When you've reached the point where you feel yourself opening up, talking from a place of truth, perhaps more than you've ever talked truth before, you'll know it. You'll feel it. **And this is the point from which your salvation will spring.**

When you have worked through some of the pain, if you don't automatically feel grateful, you might consider asking Hashem to *help you feel the gratitude*. Ask Him to help open your heart so you can learn to see the good. Ask Him to help you trust that there is a hidden meaning behind what you are going

through. You could even ask Hashem to reveal to you the meaning in a way that you can understand.

This may or may not occur the first time you begin to talk to Hashem. You may need to begin by just asking Hashem to help you speak to Him. Maybe for only a few minutes. But: **If you talk to Hashem from the place where you're at, from a place of authenticity, you will eventually get there.** The only goal is developing your relationship with Hashem and getting in touch with your true self, your good point deep inside.

Yes, some people respond really well to the "fake it until you make it" strategy of getting to a space of equanimity and gratitude, but in my experience, not everyone is able to do this at first. And that's okay.

Whatever you decide to do, start from a place of truth. Don't beat yourself up and more important: Don't give up.

May you be blessed with salvation in the zechut of Rebbe Nachman ben Faiga who teaches us hitbodedut.

Chaya Rivka

BRI Women

*Advice (Likutey Eitzot), Published by Breslov Research Institute