

Ask A Breslover: Which Questions Are OK To Ask?

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Q: The Rebbe speaks many times in Sichot HaRan (Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom) about not learning Sifrei Hamachakrim (philosophical works) or thinking about such questions. The Rebbe also writes in Torah 62 that questions that have answers to them a person must answer. What are the two types of questions the Rebbe speaks about?

A: Simply put, the two types of questions come from two stages of Creation. Those which originate from the tzimtzum/chalul hapanui (aka the Vacated Space) are unanswerable and are to be avoided. (Why they are unanswerable requires more writing than e-mail allows for.)

Those which come from sheviras hakeilim (breaking of the keilim), do have answers. One may engage in these, but only to the extent he is able. At a certain point – which varies from individual to individual – these questions drift close to the border of the first kind and become unanswerable. So one must be on guard that he doesn't exceed the limit of his abilities. For this reason, some in Breslov say to avoid even these kinds of questions.

Ask Hashem to lead you on the path that is best for you.

Hope this helped.

kol tuv.

Ozer Bergman

The following is source material found in Rebbe Nachman's Wisdom on the topic of Philosophy:

5. The Rebbe emphatically denounced all books dealing with philosophy. He said that such works contain absolutely no wisdom compared to such sacred works as the ***Maharsha**** and the ***Maharam Shif***. All that philosophy can do is build one argument upon another, in a vain attempt to arrive at some conclusion. But wisdom like that in the Torah is not found there at all. The Rebbe said that one who knows nothing of such books is most fortunate, for he walks a sincere path, simply fearing G-d's punishment. The only way to begin serving G-d is through the fear of retribution. Without it, it is impossible to even take the first step. Even the righteous must have such fear, for few can devote themselves to G-d merely because they love Him so deeply. One can also serve G-d out of a sense of awe, because He is so great and powerful. This is a higher level of fear, but it is also very difficult to attain. For most people, the path to devotion is the simple fear of punishment". When a person becomes involved in philosophy, his mind becomes filled with doubts and questions. These reinforce his inborn wickedness. It is man's nature to be drawn to worldly temptations, and this can be overcome only through the fear of punishment. Only then can one actually begin serving G-d. But philosophy raises doubts and questions, strengthening one's natural inclination away from G-d. This is why a person can never become G-dly through the study of philosophy. Although such works do contain some good thoughts, they do not have any good effect. The end result is usually great confusion, where one loses much more than he gains. This is besides the actual prohibitions against studying such works. The Rebbe often told us how fortunate we were because Moses

our teacher showed us the right way. He began the Torah without any philosophical proof, with the simple words, "In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth. "We are commanded to believe in G-d through faith alone, and not enter into speculation. Although the Zohar belittles the mere fear of punishment, our moral classics write that this is still the main gateway to true devotion. The Rebbe said that all scientific discoveries and inventions come from on high. Without such inspiration, they could never be discovered. But when the time comes for an idea to be revealed to the world, the necessary inspiration is granted to a researcher from on high. A thought enters his mind, and it is thus revealed. "Many people may have previously sought this idea, but it still eluded them. Only when the time comes for it to be revealed can the inspiration be found. All inspiration comes from the place associated with the seeker. If one seeks secular wisdom, then it does not come from the Holy, but from the Other Side. [The same is true when one discovers new meanings and ideas in his sacred studies. Were the ideas not granted from on high, it would never occur to him. All wisdom comes from on high, each thing emanating from its proper place. Each idea has its own place, and there are thousands and thousands of different levels. All discoveries, sacred or profane, have a root above, each in its own particular place.]

32. Strengthen yourself in faith, completely avoiding all speculation. Do not engage in philosophy, but believe in G-d with innocent faith. It may seem that the average person is very far from philosophical involvement, but many embrace it to some degree. Everybody philosophizes. Even young children often have confusing theories. You must carefully remove all speculation from your heart. Cast it away and do not think about it at all. All you need is a pure faith in G-d and in the true Tzadikim. We have received the Torah through Moses our teacher, and it has been transmitted to us by the awesome Tzadikim of each generation. There is no question as to their integrity and they can be relied upon without question. All

one must do is follow in their footsteps, believing in G-d with innocent simplicity, and keeping commandments of the Torah as taught by our holy ancestors. When a person is sincere and unquestioning, then he can be worthy that G-d illuminate him with the aspect of Desire, which is even higher than Wisdom. The attribute of Wisdom is actually higher than Faith". Still one must avoid the wisdom of speculation and rely on faith alone. Faith has great power, and when one follows its path, he can achieve Desire, a level even higher than Wisdom. When one is worthy of Desire, he feels a great longing and yearning toward G-d. This feeling becomes so intense that he does not know what to do. And he cries out But there is a philosopher in every man's heart. He is the Evil One, who raises questions in one's mind. We must humble him and eject him, strengthening ourselves in faith and emptying the heart of all questions. There are sins that lead a person to skepticism. This can also result from the fact that a person was not conceived in holiness, especially if he himself is guilty of similar sins. All these things are detrimental to one's faith.

40. We have often discussed the prohibition against having anything at all to do with philosophical works. This includes even philosophical works of the great rabbis. Even these are not permitted, as brought in many places in our sacred literature. Such things are not the portion of Jacob" and we have nothing at all to do with them. We believe that G-d created and sustains the world and will renew it some day. For this we do not need philosophy. Most books on religious philosophy ask questions that appear very difficult while providing very weak answers. If one probes deeper, he can refute the answer and render it completely useless. One with true wisdom can realize that the questions themselves are nothing. They are mere vanity and striving after wind." Therefore, it is best to avoid such books completely. It is very surprising that many people are drawn to philosophy, yet have no interest in such fascinating Kabbalistic works as the

Zohar and the writings of the This is why we play with a Dreidle on Chanukah. Chanukah is an aspect of the Holy Temple. The primary concept of the Temple is the revolving wheel. The Temple was in the category of "the superior below and the inferior above'."G-d lowered His presence into the Temple and this is "the superior below." The Temple's pattern was engraved on high,' "the inferior above." The Temple is therefore like a Dreidle, a rotating wheel, where everything revolves and is reversed. The Temple refutes philosophical logic. G-d is above every transcendental concept, and it is beyond all logic that He should constrict Himself into the vessels of the Temple. "Behold the heaven, and the heaven of heaven cannot contain You, how much less this Temple'. " But G-d brought His presence into the Temple, and so destroyed all philosophical logic. Philosophy cannot explain how man can have any influence on high. I t cannot say how a mere animal can be sacrificed and rise as a sweet savor giving pleasure to G-d. They explain that this pleasure is the fulfillment of His will, but how can we even apply the concept of desire to G-d. But G-d placed His presence in the Temple and accepts the animal as a sweet savor. He made the fact contradict philosophical logic. After all this we can return to our original discussion. We have no need of philosophy, which is anyway strongly forbidden. We must have faith in G-d, that He created, sustains, and will eventually renew all worlds. You would always direct yourself towards the path of life. You might be confronted with every type of confusion, worry and frustration, but you would still eventually end up on the right path. Even if you sinned, you would regret it and find the true path in the end. It becomes much more difficult when others confuse you. You might associate with those who think they know something about philosophy. Or you might have friends who are involved in studies that ridicule everything sacred. Such people can confuse you and frustrate you more than anything else. The world may consider this sophistication, but it can result in great confusion. It teaches that all values are relative and everything is

absolutely permissible. This is especially true of philosophy, which can cause tremendous spiritual damage, as discussed earlier. There is also a certain sarcasm, even among those who seem religious. This is as harmful as philosophy. This sarcasm is literally the same as philosophical skepticism. It can even be worse, since most Jews recognize the dangers of philosophy and avoid it. They know that it can drag them down into the deepest pit. But Jews are not so heedful of avoiding sarcasm and sophistication, especially when it emanates from people who appear to be religious. This makes it all the more dangerous. There are people who seem religious and disguise all their sarcasm in the language of truth. People do not avoid them, thinking that they are on the right path. These are the ones who can cause the most harm, frustrating and confusing one who truly wants to serve G-d. The person engaged in philosophy will find repentance very difficult. He has been well taught to sin without guilt or remorse and does not suffer when he transgresses. His repentance must therefore balance this unmitigated pleasure. Look carefully in the **Shelah** in the section called **Mesechta Shavuos**. There you will find the stern prohibition against becoming involved in philosophy. He writes that one who studies philosophy can lose his portion in the Future World and be eternally damned. He also quotes the opinion of many earlier sages, all agreeing that this is among the worst possible sins. This is also discussed in many other sacred works. The Rebbe said that this is absolutely false and there is a reference that states that this interpretation was first used by Karaites. The only way to know G-d is through faith. This is the only path to knowledge and perception of G-d's true greatness. Thus it is written (Hos. 2:22), "And I will betroth you to me with faith, and you shall know G-d. ? I n **Lekutey Halachos** there is also a long discussion explaining clearly that true knowledge of G-d comes only through faith. There are many passages that tell us to know G-d. It is written (Deut. 4:39), "Know this day and consider it in your heart. . . ." It is also written (1 Chr. 28:9), "Know the G-d of your father." There is also (Ps.

100:3), "Know that the L-rd is G-d." None of these verses have anything to do with philosophy. Their lesson is that we should constantly know that G-d is there and not forget Him for an instant. Great kings constantly remind their subjects to know that they have a ruler. This is especailly true of soldiers. They are continuously trained to know their lord and king. His fear must be on their faces in order that they serve him absolutely. A king's subjects are constantly told, "Know that you have a lord and master." They are not told to philosophize about it, but to keep it in mind and not forget it. They are told to always think of the king and not do anything against his will. our faith without any sophistication or philosophy.

71. The Rebbe downgraded all philosophical works, ridiculing them in every possible way. He made it clear to us that the authors of such works knew absolutely nothing. Speaking at length about this, he revealed many wise sayings containing an awesome wondrous truth. Every word was sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, entering the depths of all our hearts. We have already written about this at length. Some has been published, but i t is not even a thousandth of what he said. The way he spoke is also impossible to describe. The words were both sweet and awesome, coming from his lips with holiness, purity, trembling and awe. One could speak to the Rebbe of the most mundane affairs and still bear witness that his words contained all the world's grace. During the last two years of his life after he returned from Lemberg, he constantly dwelt on faith. We could see that every word, both holy and mundane, was only spoken to bring faith into the world. I t is written (Ps. 119:86), "All your commandments are faith. This is the foundation of the entire Torah and its commandments."

225. A man had been told that it was impossible to understand the Kaballah without fasting and frequent Mikvah immersion. He saw the Rebbe in Uman and asked him about this. The Rebbe answered, "It is possible to know the wisdom of Kaballah without this. For it is wisdom... "The reason why the main

Kaballistic work, ***Etz Chaim***, is so difficult to understand is because it is not written in order. "Where science and philosophy end, that is where [true wisdom, which is] Kabbalah begins."

85. [Scientists and philosophers can only speculate within the limits of the physical world. They can reach up to the stars and galaxies, but beyond that, they know absolutely nothing. Even their understanding of the physical world is very incomplete, as they themselves admit. The wisdom of Kabbalah begins where their wisdom ends, beyond the physical world. The Kabbalah includes the entire physical world as part of the World of Action. Its teachings then go beyond the World of Action, to the Universe of Formation, Creation and Emanation. The World of Action also has a spiritual level beyond the realm of science and philosophy. The Kabbalah speaks only of the spiritual roots of the World of Action and above. Therefore, the Kabbalah begins where scientific knowledge ends.] Speaking of awesome degrees of perception, the Rebbe once said: The wisdom of philosophy ends with the physical world. Beyond the stars, it can only imagine G-d's essence. There are really many levels of worlds beyond this. This truth is only found in the Kabbalah. It is written (Isa. 40:28), "His understanding cannot be grasped." One who knows the truth of Kabbalah well perceives this. For there is level above level.

87. The Rebbe once saw a book containing writings of the Ari not found elsewhere. This work speaks of the levels of development before the Universe of Emanation contained in the World of the Garment. This is also discussed in the work, ***VaYakhel Moshe***. I was very surprised when the Rebbe told me this. I had thought that there was nothing higher than Emanation and was astonished to discover Kabbalistic teachings speaking of higher levels. I expressed my surprise to the Rebbe, and he remained silent for a while. Then he said, "Don't you realize that philosophers think that all knowledge

ends with the stars? . . . “This is also the case with True Knowledge. Even in the transcendental worlds there are levels above levels, high above high, without limit or bound.