

# The Torah AnyTimes

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## Rabbi Noah Weinberg zt"l Finding Your Teacher

**P**irkei Avos, Ethics of Our Fathers, teaches that we need 48 tools to properly use our life, to use our potential to get the most out of living. The tenth of the forty-eight is that of Shimush Chachamim, which means to serve (shimush) the wise man (chachamim). What does it mean to serve the wise man?

While the word shimush literally means to serve, it actually means to honor. We put a great emphasis on honor in Judaism. And what about the wise man? That refers to who do you consider important. Consider the wise man, teaches Judaism. Wisdom is the most important thing in this world. If the president of the United States would visit you, would you get up and give him some fruit and be ready to help him? Even if you are against his policies, you would. When a wise man comes to visit, you do the same. That's the first aspect.

The second aspect of honoring him is to learn from a wise man. Get teachers. If you want to live, get teachers, get in touch with those who understand what life is about.

It's a strange thing. Imagine I offered you a million dollars and all you had to do was put a bridge across the Hudson River, but there's one condition. One condition. You are the only engineer on the job. Would you take

the job? Sure! "I'm going to give it a go," you'd say. So how would you go about it? Would you get down there, take a couple of materials and start sticking them in and see what happens. No, no, no. Well, that's often what we do in life. A more prudent choice is to say, "Give me a year and I'll learn what to do. I'll work very hard and I'll come back. Then, I'll put the bridge together."

It took mankind a few thousand years to learn how to put a bridge across one of these rivers. You're not going to do it in twenty years of experimenting. So the idea is, how is it that it's so obvious to us that we don't build bridges without getting the information, but we think we can get married, raise children, stay happy, make a meaningful life, and we'll just figure it out? We'll play it by ear. And if we get a divorce, we'll lick our wounds and we'll start all over again. It's not a good idea. I don't have to know anything about marriage, you'll say. You like the other person, you get married. Then what happens after that? Well, then you get used to living together and, well, I guess we'll find out. No, no, no. You want to find out now.

So how do we go about number one of getting ourselves a wise teacher? First, recognize that we have a prejudice against having teachers. We don't like to be told anything. We don't like to be taught. We like to teach. We like to be important. We don't like to acknowledge that we

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need someone else's information.

Now, if somebody says, "Come on, I'll teach you, but there's a G-d, I'll just give you the information..." If the teacher leads me along the path of discovery, then I won't even notice what he's doing. If that's the case, then we don't mind being taught. I love to learn wisdom, we say, if I don't have to acknowledge that I'm being taught. The bottom line is that have a prejudice against being taught. It's important to see it because it'll stand in your way of being taught.

Number two is appreciating the need to be taught. Life is much more complicated than bridge-building or surgery. You'd never dream of trial and error when it comes to being doctor or engineer. And yet we attempt with trial and error for living. People love having experiences. I visit Europe and I learn about life. You're seeing people walking down the street, but you're not learning about life. You're not learning about marriage. To learn about life, you need somebody to teach you.

Number three is that. Realize how foolish it is to think that you can learn by trial and error. Do you have something that you would teach yourself if you met yourself five years ago? Would you be able to teach yourself some things about life, what to avoid, what to do, and use your time better? Some things you'd be able to teach yourself right now.

Would you have listened? Would it be a mistake not to listen? So, some of this is about looking at somebody five years older than you, ten years older than you, twenty years older. Do you think that he's learned something about living? Why don't you find out?

Why don't you start with your parents? Ask them, what do you know about marriage? What do you know about getting a job? What do you know about mistakes? Mark

Twain used to say, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

Why don't you find out now? Make a list of what you'd like to ask your parents. What do you think that they can tell you and go get it. You can gain something from this. We consider this honoring your father and mother. Your parents love it. You want to give them some pleasure? Get some information from them. Oh, boy. That will really make them happy.

Number five is a slogan in the United States. It comes from Otto Van Bismarck. "Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of others." It's a good slogan to constantly keep in mind. I ask people, "Did you ever make a mistake?" Everybody makes mistakes. Avoid it for yourself.

Number six is to learn from people who are wise, who have information about living, who are good at it. So you should really shop for a teacher. Now, how do you shop for a teacher? Let's say that you had this desire or ambition to learn how to fly. What would you do? You look up flying schools. You ask them, "Give me a few pilots that haven't crashed lately." It's a school. When you want something, that's what you do.

So, what are you looking for? You're looking for wisdom. Where would you go for that? Who would know? Who would be good at wisdom? Would you look it up in the classified telephone directory? You would go to the school of wisdom. The school of wisdom, not techniques. There, they'll give you a definition for goodness, for love, for happiness, for meaning. In lieu of this, if you come across somebody who has some wisdom, ask him, where'd you learn? Then go back to

where he got it. That's the way to look for a teacher.

Number seven is that you should keep a list of things that you want to know about life. You want to know what makes a marriage successful? You want to know how to use your full potential? You know that you have questions; it just takes time to dig it out.

Number eight is that if you are fortunate enough to have been taught, if you meet someone who gives you some wisdom, take recognition of it. Remember that you have a teacher and follow him. Keep in touch.

Number nine is that you should have a teacher for your whole life. The same teacher. Unless you find someone drastically better, you don't change. Unless you find a really, higher class teacher, you don't change. You stick with one teacher for your whole life and you don't shop around. You listen to him, you ask his advice and you fight it out with him. You don't have to agree with him, but you fight it out with him because when you start shopping, you'll find people who are less challenging to your prejudices. You'll choose the teacher that is more comfortable to you. So if you have a good teacher, you stick with it. This is the Jewish concept. Don't shop around for answers that you like. If it's an area of specialty that you're seeking, you ask your teacher, "Do you know anybody in this field?"

Number ten is that once you've accepted the teacher, if you disagree with him, you're not allowed to dismiss him. What you do is you talk up and either straighten him out or get yourself straightened out. That respect you owe your own teacher. In wisdom, if you have a teacher, you can't dismiss them. You can't say, "Forget

it.” You have to go back, figure out where is he making a mistake and how do I straighten him out? Or maybe he's right. That's the discipline of having a teacher. If he tells you you're nagging your kids and cut it out, you can't dismiss him. You've got to sit with it. “Wait a second now... but I'm not nagging my kids.” That's the power of having a teacher. The things that we don't like to hear, we just dismiss. But when you have a teacher and he's there and he tells you to do something counterpro-

ductive, you can't dismiss him. Say, “Well, on what basis is he saying that?” With that attitude, you're going to move forward in some way. I have to get over some bad mistakes, you say.

The Rabbis say that the wisest man that ever lived was Shlomo Hamelech. That's our tradition. The Rabbis say that as long as his teacher was alive, Shimi ben Geira, Shlomo didn't make any mistakes. As soon as he died, though, he made three bad ones. What does

that mean? So long as his teacher was alive, he figured, “It's all right for me to have a lot of gold and silver, but my teacher is going to come after me. How am I going to justify it?” But when Shimi ben Geira died, he said, “It'll be okay,” and he made a mistake.

That's the powerful discipline of having a teacher.

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## Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### Songs of Existence

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**P**erek Shira, a compilation of verses expressed by each part of the universe, forms an incredible tapestry of both literal and symbolic representation of the world's service of G-d. Animate and inanimate creatures stir in us the recognition of our place in the cosmos of life and relationship to Hashem. Let us explore a couple of such phenomena and touch the spirit within us that sings alike.

The lion says, “Hashem will go out like a mighty man, like a warrior. He will invoke passion. He will trumpet and shout. His enemies, He will overpower.”

The lion is traditionally known as the king of wild animals, and rightfully so. The male lion is crowned with a majestic mane and sits lazily like a pharaoh, fearing none. It has a characteristic ferocious roar that strikes terror in all within earshot. This is similar to the way all are locked in si-

lence when a king opens his mouth to speak. It hunts other animals without fear, consuming them even while they are still alive, as opposed to other predators that tend to first kill their prey before eating them and then commonly drag their food back to their lairs to eat in safety.

The existence of the lion is a symbol of the ultimate King and Warrior, Hashem. It sings of Hashem going out to vanquish His enemies like a charging and roaring lion, overpowering His foes without fear. For this reason, the lion is engraved upon Hashem's Throne of Glory.

King David was compared to a young lion, and it was also the symbol and banner of his tribe. This virtue of kingship is apparent to a lesser extent in the entire Jewish nation. Even in our times of exile, when we have no kings and we are not a significant world power, we nonetheless represent Hashem's kingship in the world. When the non-Jewish prophet, Bila'am, bless-

ed the Jewish nation in the desert, he compared them to the lion. When the Jewish people rise in the morning and overcome the earthiness of their physicality in order to declare Hashem King through praise and through prayer, the lion's roar resounds throughout all Jewish prayer halls. They do not rest at night until they have first declared anew their allegiance to the King of the universe, through the bedtime Shema, and entrust their souls securely into His hold. They conduct themselves with majesty and with the surety of an uncontested monarch. With leonine courage, they tirelessly strive to perform the will of the king of the world.

Although enemy nations from the outside and the evil inclination from the inside have tried throughout history to vanquish them, they still remain strong, vigorously set on their course. Such a nation will not retire from the annals of history until Hashem's kingship is realized in His world.

Jewish majesty runs through your

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veins, take pride in your heritage and rejoice upon your lot. Every small but firm step taken to make Hashem's kingship known in this world gives voice to the celestial lion etched on the Throne of Glory.

And now let's turn to one other.

The dog.

The dog says, "Come, let us prostrate ourselves and kneel. Let us bow before Hashem, our Maker." The dog is a dedicated and cherished pet that recognizes its master and subjects itself entirely to his will. Dog in Hebrew is kelev, which is said to be a contraction of the words, "Kulo lev," meaning "All heart." This refers to the dog's unashamed expression of its heart. Even small dogs bark impudently at others many times their size if that is what they feel. It is this heart that is attuned to the emotions of its master, with whom it is bound in devoted companionship.

The dog has the understanding to appreciate the hand that feeds it, and it reciprocates with unquestioning obedience, friendship and adoration. There is an old parable. Throw a dog a bone and it will lick the dust of your

feet. It will protect its master, even at the risk of its own life. Canines are carnivores. Nonetheless, game hunters would make use of hunting dogs to bear down prey and hold it for them. The dog would not eat the meal itself, but rather save it for its revered master.

There are innumerable breeds of dogs and they fill a variety of essential roles in society. Yet the universal role of every dog is its song to the creator, in which it invites mankind to serve the ultimate master with comparable allegiance. "Come, let us prostrate ourselves and kneel. Let us bow before Hashem, our Maker."

The dog hears our call, We too should hear its call to serve our Master and Benefactor. Hashem has done more for us than any master has done for his servant and any king has done for his nation. He created us, removed us from our shackles of Egyptian slavery, and granted us the bounty of the world in the Land of Israel. Day by day, it is He who provides our basic needs of food and shelter and a life far more blessed than that of a dog. And this is all

nothing compared to what He has promised us in the future.

If a dog can be loyal to its master for the sake of a dry bone, all the more so we are more capable of true appreciation and gratitude, should prostrate ourselves and perform our devoted divine service as a labor of love and passion. The dog will be loyal even to the lowliest of masters. We should surely submit ourselves wholeheartedly to the will of the living G-d upon whom we are entirely dependent. Recognize Hashem as your own master and devote your life to Him. Never distance yourself from Him. If He disciplines you, do not become disheartened. He is training you to perfection. Hold back from trivial, prohibited benefits and merit to the far greater treasures the Master has promised. Take pleasure fulfilling His will and enjoy His constant company. He is your G-d and the sole reason for your existence.

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