

REBBE

› **LESSON OBJECTIVE:**

Understand the need, role and place for a
Rebbe - Jewish leader - in our life

› **LESSON BREAKUP:**

- › The question
- › History
- › Why
- › Text
- › Conclusion
- › Practical lesson

> Overview:

THE QUESTION

- > Does needing someone else mean we are deficient? In the ideal situation can everyone connect to G-d independently? Does the fact that I rely on a Tzaddik mean I am being lazy or incomplete?

HISTORY

- > Take a look at some examples in history where blessings were received through the leader, such as Moshe - Moses.

WHY

- > What is the benefit of connecting with a Tzaddik? In this section we will understand how a Rebbe is analogous to the head of a body, and is therefore the source for the life of every limb and vein.

TEXT

- > (Optional) A quote from the Talmud. A quote from the Rebbe's Sich'a (public talk) with the core of the explanation.

CONCLUSION

- > Wrap up the idea and make sure the questions are answered and clearly.

PRACTICAL LESSON

- > What practical difference can this knowledge make in my life?

› Section 1 - The Question

Throughout our long, rich history, and in every generation, we hear about saints and righteous individuals—Tzaddikim, men and women whose connection, devotion and commitment to G-d was a step above the average. These are a group of special souls who are few and far between.

Then there is the leader of each generation, known as the Nosi or Rebbe.

No generation can be without one, and no generation can have more than one. They serve as the shepherd, father and guide to each and every individual, no matter the level of observance, commitment or age. They are the go-between for mortals to G-d. Being of a more G-dly persona, they are able to connect us to a reality that seems far removed from us. This was very clearly witnessed with Moses, at the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

He is probably the most famous one of our leaders, and he was the first. He blazed a path for all future leaders. In fact, the Zohar states that the leader of every generation has within him a spark of Moses' soul.

So what is the purpose and role of this leader in my day-to-day life?

Understandably, if I want to further my spiritual journey, I should turn to him for guidance and advice, but what if I am happy with where I stand? What if I want to make the journey alone, without the input of another? Do I still need to have a connection to this 'Moses'?

The question is deeper. Does the need for another individual to help me reach G-d mean that I have a deficiency? In the ideal situation, should I really be able to attain every level of divinity on my own, yet G-d in His kindness knows that many of us struggle, so He gave us an 'easy' way out, catering to my laziness?

BEFORE WE BEGIN OUR JOURNEY TO UNDERSTAND THIS FUNDAMENTAL TOPIC, LET'S ASK OURSELVES A QUESTION:

- › Can you think of a situation where you rely on someone else? Do you do it out of laziness or for a different reason?
- › Discuss the various rationales in asking others for help in personal areas of your life.

› Section 2: History

In order to understand the role a Rebbe plays in our lives, let us take a look through history and pay attention to some of the accounts.

MORDECHAI:

In the times of the Purim story, when the wicked Haman decreed that every single Jew was to be annihilated, G-d forbid, it was only natural that it was Mordechai, the Jewish leader at the time—the Moses of his generation, who inspired the Jewish people to pray, repent and beg G-d for mercy.

It was his role as the leader to be resolute in the face of such a dire circumstance.

YEHOSHUA - JOSHUA:

Joshua was charged with the awesome task of bringing the Jewish nation into the Promised Land. He had two daunting responsibilities ahead of him. The first was to help them settle in the pre-apportioned pieces of land designated for each tribe. The second was to remind, encourage and caution them to stay faithful to G-d and His Torah.

MOSES:

A lot can be said about Moses and his leadership over the Jewish nation. He is perhaps most famous for bringing about the ten plagues, splitting the sea, and ascending Mount Sinai.

These are all areas where we would expect a leader to get involved. However, the Talmud shares with us that the role of leader goes far beyond just that.

Throughout the journey of the Jewish people in the desert, all their physical needs were taken care of in a miraculous way. The Talmud tells us that they had Manna as food in the merit of Moses, the well of Miriam gave them water in her merit, and the clouds of glory protected the Jews in the merit of Aharon.

In fact, the moment Miriam passed away the well dried up, and when Aharon passed away the clouds left as well. It was only through Moses that they returned.

We see from here something quite profound. Although the merits of Aharon and Miriam brought about these blessings for the Jewish people, they were limited to their merit, so as soon as their souls left their bodies, they no longer continued.

Moses, however, was the leader. A leader never abandons his nation until they have been transferred to the care of the next leader and Rebbe. That is why the Manna continued to sustain the Jewish people even after the passing of Moses.

In conclusion:

We see from these few examples that the leader of each generation is the conduit through which all sustenance, blessings and nourishment, both physical and spiritual, reach the masses. Nothing can manifest itself in this world without first being channeled through the 'Moses'—Rebbe—of the generation. (See the Talmud quoted in section 4 for a fuller account of this idea.)

› Section 3: Why?

The word Rebbe (as mentioned, this is the term used to describe the leader of each generation) is an acronym for three Hebrew words—Rosh B’nei Yisroel, lit., the head of the Jewish people.

The Jewish nation is compared to one large body, with each member representing a different limb. Collectively, we are called G-d’s child, as the verse states, “You are children to the L-rd your G-d” (*Deuteronomy 14:1*). Even while we were still in Egypt, G-d speaks of us as “My firstborn child, Israel” (*Exodus 4:22*).

Beyond the simple implications of this relationship, what deeper idea lies within the metaphor of ‘one body’ employed by the Torah to describe our nation?

To understand this, let’s take a moment to emphasize just how profound the relationship between the brain and every limb really is.¹

One may argue: The brain is only one of many organs and limbs, just another muscle in the body with its own unique functions.

Obviously, this is not the case—any more than it would be correct to say that the eyes alone see or that just the mouth speaks. The various parts of the human being comprise a single, integrated whole; it is the person who sees, the person who speaks, the person who is aware. A cut or bruise to the toenail brings pain and discomfort to the entire body, by virtue of its direct connection with the brain that all the limbs share.

But the vitality of all the limbs and organs is dependent upon their maintaining their connection with their own mind. If a limb is amputated, G-d forbid, it is no longer capable of being connected to the brain and ceases to exist.

The same holds true for the Jewish nation, which is also comprised

1 See also Chabad.org/2770

of many “organs” and “limbs.” Israel has a heart, individuals whose lives exemplify compassion and piety; and hands, its great builders and achievers. Each and every individual is an integral part of the body of G-d’s firstborn.

But as with the physical makeup of our bodies, it is the mind which facilitates life, energy and animation to every other component. There are the great sages of each generation who devote their lives to the dissemination of the divine essence of Torah; whose entire beings are permeated with the awareness of G-d’s truth. These are the mind of the nation.

More specifically, this is the Rebbe, the Nosi, the Moses of each generation.

It is only by virtue of our connection to the ‘mind’ that we can have a connection to our Creator and Source, as the Rebbe writes in a letter:

Each and every one of us must know—that is, dwell upon and implant the awareness in his or her mind—that the Rebbe is our nassi and head; that he is the source and channel for all our material and spiritual needs, and that it is through our bond with him (and he has already instructed us in his letters how and by what means this is achieved) that we are bound and united with our source, and the source of our source, up to our ultimate source on high.²

It is thus self-understood that there can’t be a moment in time when the Jewish people do not have a leader at their helm, just as it is impossible for any limb to survive if the head is not functioning.

This leads us to an important and powerful truth: no shepherd ever abandons his flock. Therefore, even after his passing, the Rebbe continues to watch over us, shower us with blessings and channel life to us as he did before, and in an even greater measure.

2 Chabad.org/66722

We saw this with Moses, in whose merit the Jews had Manna even after his passing, and we see this today with the Rebbe, with the countless individuals who are helped and guided years after his physical passing.

How can we begin to understand such a profound idea?

The first step in the process is to change our frame of reference and view reality from a different perspective.

Let's put it this way:

To one whose self is his body, death of the body is death of the self. But for one whose self is his love, awe and faith, there is no death, only a passing. From a state of confinement in the body, he makes the passage to liberation. He continues to work within this world, and even more so than before.

The Talmud says that Jacob, our father, never died. Moses, also, never died. Neither did Rabbi Judah the Prince. They were very high souls who were one with Truth in an ultimate bond—and since Truth can never die, neither could they.

Yes, in our eyes we see death. A body is buried in the ground, and we must mourn the loss. But this is only part of the falseness of our world. In the World of Truth, they are still here as before.

And the proof: We are still here. For if these high souls would not be with us in our world, all that we know would cease to exist.³

› Section 4: Text (optional)

From this text we see that even the physical needs of the Jewish people are channeled through the leader of the generation:

TALMUD, TRACTATE TAANIT, 9A

ר' יוסי בר' יהודה אומר שלשה פרנסים טובים עמדו לישראל אלו הן משה ואהרן ומרים וג' מתנות טובות ניתנו על ידם ואלו הן באר וענן ומן באר בזכות מרים עמוד ענן בזכות אהרן מן בזכות משה מתה מרים נסתלק הבאר שנאמר ותמת שם מרים וכתוב בתריה ולא היה מים לעדה וחזרה בזכות שניהן מת אהרן נסתלקו ענני כבוד ושמע הכנעני מלך ערד מה שמועה שמע שמת אהרן ונסתלקו ענני כבוד וכסבור ניתנה לו רשות להלחם בישראל והיינו דכתיב ויראו כל העדה כי גוע אהרן אמר ר' אבהו אל תקרי ויראו אלא וייראו כדדריש ר"ל דאר"ל כי משמש בארבע לשונות אי דלמא אלא דהא חזרו שניהם בזכות משה

Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Yehuda, says: Three good sustainers rose up for the Jewish people during the exodus from Egypt, and they are: Moses, Aaron and Miriam. And three good gifts were given from Heaven through their agency, and they are: The well of water, the pillar of cloud, and the manna. He elaborates: The well was given to the Jewish people in the merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud was in the merit of Aaron; and the manna in the merit of Moses. When Miriam died the well disappeared, as it is stated: "And Miriam died there" (Numbers 20:1), and it says thereafter in the next verse: "And there was no water for the congregation" (Numbers 20:2). But the well returned in the merit of both Moses and Aaron. When Aaron died the clouds of glory disappeared, as it is stated: "And the Canaanite, the king of Arad heard" (Numbers 33:40). What report did he hear? He heard that Aaron had died and the clouds of glory had disappeared, and he thought that the Jewish people were no longer protected by Heaven and therefore he had been given permission to go to war against the Jewish people.... [The baraita continues:] Both the well and the clouds of glory returned in the merit of Moses.

From the following text we see that the leader of the generation is concerned with the welfare of his people even after his passing:

און ניט נאר מצד דעם וואס „אף כאן
עומד ומשמש (ממרום)“⁶⁹ — וואס דאס
איז ניט שייך צו זען בעיני בשר — נאר
אויך דערפאר וואס די פעולות ועינים
וואס זיי האבן אויפגעטאן פאר אידן
בחיים חיותם בעלמא דין, זיינען א
פעולה נמשכת — מ'איז זיך „מסתפק“
פון זיי אויך נאך זייער הסתלקות פון
עולם הזה.

ח. דערפון האט מען דעם לימוד
בנוגע צו נשיאי ישראל בכל דור ודור,
אז אויך נאך הסתלקותם, ווען בעיני
בשר זעט מען ניט זייער השפעה באופן
גלוי (ע"ד ווי דער מז' נאך מיתת משה,
וואס מ'האט א קוק געטאן אין וועלט
האט מען געזען אז פסק מלירד) — איז
אבער דא דער כלל מפורסם, אז „לא
יפרדו מעל צאן מרעיתם“⁶⁸;

From this we have a lesson regarding the leader of the Jewish nation in each and every generation. Even after their passing, when we can't physically see the nourishment they are providing (as was the case with Moses where the Manna ceased to fall upon his passing), we are encouraged by the rule that "they would never leave their flock stranded."

This is not only because they continue to watch and serve from on High, which is something that can't be seen by the physical eye. Rather, what they began during their lifetime continues to go on, and we continue to be sustained by them.

› Section 5: Conclusion

With this new understanding, we can address the questions raised in the opening section.

It is now clear that relying on a leader doesn't mean that we are lacking, deficient or unhealthy G-d forbid.

Quite the contrary; it is the sign of a healthy and working body when we turn to our brain for life, direction and sustenance. G-d created each limb with its specific purpose and needs. By making sure we are attached to the mind in a healthy manner, we can accomplish what was set out for us to do.

Let's return to our question for discussion. Did you notice that there are certain things in life we aren't able to do by ourselves, simply because G-d made it that way? Childbirth, education etc.

› Section 6: Practical Lesson

The greatest way to insure we have a healthy connection to our head—the Rebbe, the leader of this generation, is by accepting a good resolution; an extra good deed. By doing so, we cleanse the 'body' and insure that all the arteries, veins and muscles are in working order, allowing the flow of life to emanate from the 'mind' and circulate throughout the entire body. It is also appropriate and encouraged to pray at the Ohel, the holy resting place of the Rebbe. It is there that our connection to our source of energy is most strongly felt. An appropriate alternative for one who can't be physically present is to send a letter or an email to be read at the Ohel.

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