



*A Collection of Letters from Rabbi Yehoshua Gerzi*

*May the ones that have graduated our world be remembered and have an alia!*

*In loving memory of Mrs Raizel Bas R Yitzchak & R Shlomo Ben R Alter Mordechai Turetsky*

Apart from the first letter (written in 2017 by Reb Yehuda Raice), the other letters were written as a string of emails by some students. After leaving Eretz Yisrael in 2010 they had some questions about Avodat Hashem, which we had been learning throughout the year. The letters have been modified for use here.

*Letter #1*

*We know you've had many spiritual masters. What made your connection to Rabbi Singer so special and strong?*

*Response to letter # 1*

I would like to share something with you that is very important to me. Over the years many people have asked me (and I have asked myself) "What drew you to Rabbi Singer? What made him unique?"

Before meeting Rabbi Singer, I had met a large number of Rabbonim and teachers, and had been blessed to build relationships with many of them. They were very helpful and I'm grateful to all of them.

However, Rabbi Singer stood out; he changed my Avodah and put it on a different level.

There was an issue, a feeling that my friends and I had. We had been learning Gemara and Shulchan Aruch, Mussar, Chassidut and Machshava. However, we were feeling very frustrated by not having a clear and defined path in our Avodah.

The Seforim speak about Avodat Hashem, Tikun Hamidot, Emunah, Bitachon, Deveikut. The question for us was, how do we get there? What does it feel and look like? What is Ruach Hakodesh? Can we experience it? And how do we know if we are fooling ourselves or stuck in our own ego?

It was when I came to Rabbi Yosef Singer that I realized that this understanding was something I had desperately wanted and longed for. Rabbi Singer, or Zeidy, as I affectionately called him, lived those truths that I had seen in the Seforim.

Further, Rabbi Singer and his friends had a defined Derech that he'd received from his spiritual masters, and had himself mastered over the years. He simplified and codified this Derech with the utmost clarity, and he was

able to explain it to me in a methodical manner. In turn, I was able to practise these Avodot in my life in a real and practical way!

When I spent time with Rabbi Singer, I was able to see Torah and Avodah come alive, not just as words on paper. I experienced the teaching of Chazal, "Gadol shimusha melimudah" : "The service of a master is even greater than the study of books."

Zeidy was a beautiful individual. He had a pure innocence and he was always so present and unbelievably loving. In my family, we learned Tomer Devorah - and Zeidy lived Tomer Devorah!

The way Rabbi Singer connected and worked with people was gracious. People were healed by him, not only by his speaking to them, however but by his listening to them.

He once told me a story about a Chassid who came to the heilige Baal Shem Tov and said, "Rebbe, everyone wants to reveal their secrets to you! All these people come from far and near, even inanimate objects and animals ; how do you do it?" The Baal Shem Tov looked deeply into his talmid's eyes and replied, "I am devoted to Ahavah. The more you love, the safer people feel - and they naturally want to reveal their secrets to you." I saw such a person in Rabbi Singer!

There was another aspect to Rabbi Singer, which was something I only became aware of much later in our relationship; He was a master of navigating the tension of the human experience. By sharing his wisdom, he was able to guide others on the path of their lives' journeys.

Now, I have an internal chuckle when speaking to people because I hear myself in them and their inherently human struggles.

This is an opportunity to gratefully acknowledge how much I have learned from Rabbi Singer.

Allow me to explain:

Many people are looking for absolutes and certainties. Yet, ultimately, reality teaches us that the only absolute certainty is Hakadosh Baruch Hu. All else fluctuates; we are on a journey guided by Hashem. When we realize, accept and live with this fundamental truth, the inherent internal tension of existence resolves to a significant degree.

Learning from Rabbi Singer was all the more remarkable, because by the time I got to know Zeidy, he was suffering from a number of illnesses. Consequently, it was not easy to understand him. Despite this, his teachings still came alive.

Even though he had been a vibrant speaker in his younger days, it seemed he held his cards close to his chest and didn't share much in his later years. Therefore, I had to prepare myself before speaking with him. It took a lot of work to tease the information out of him and connect the bits and pieces of his different ideas and teachings. Through this process I was able to assimilate his teachings, while he empowered me to be myself. Empowering others was one of Rabbi Singer's overarching goals.

In each encounter, there was always a sense of very deep love that he shared, and over time I was able to learn and gain from him an amazing "bird's-eye view" of Avodas Hashem. I was amazed, as what seemed to be disparate parts, actually beautifully fit together into a holistic whole.

Rabbi Singer opened many doors for me and taught me that in Avodat Hashem there are many introductions within introductions (hagdamos shebetoch hagdamos).

One of the first teachings he clarified for me was a foundation for all personal development, and specifically spiritual growth:

1) We need to have a clear and defined goal to the best of our ability. We need an understanding and a vision of how to look at the world, our relationships with others, and how we want ourselves to look and feel internally. Even though many goals are relative to where we are currently positioned, this overall goal is a broader view of the terrain of life.

2) We need a path to get to that end-goal; a qualitative and quantitative roadmap that can be broken down into stages that dictate the steps needed to get from where we currently are to our ultimate goal and destination.

3) We need the ability to monitor our growth, to change and to develop; to recognize the signposts along the way in order to determine where exactly we are located along this journey, and whether or not we are headed in the right direction.

4) We need to have a mentor. This must be someone with whom we can build a good healthy relationship. Ideally this individual will be a true master, one who has achieved some level of enlightenment and can guide us on our journey. For example, we can ask him or her what the goal is when employing a specific middah. How does proper use of any specific middah look and feel? We should be able to share what it is that we are currently going through and experiencing. In turn, their role is to help us obtain a clear vision of what we are working towards, compassionately helping us move from where we currently are, and showing us the signposts that mark the way!

I would like to share one example of a clear definition or guidepost that lets us know exactly where we are within an experience: One Motzei Shabbat I was with Rabbi Singer and we were working on the avodah within Nefesh, Ruach and Neshama (NaRaN). I asked him, "How do you know if you are in Ruach or have gone up to Neshama? He answered me (and I didn't

realize how profound this answer was at the time) :“When you are in Ruach you are aware of yourself in makom – in space. Ruach is a place of self-awareness within the context of your surroundings in the present moment. However, when you enter into Neshama the experience is one where you forget and lose awareness of where you are within space. Many minutes or even hours can pass. Then, when you open your eyes and return, there is a slight shock as you come back to yourself. This is similar to a person waking up in an unfamiliar place. When they awaken they are startled for a moment as they regain their bearings.

When I came to Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Singer introduced me to many great Rabbonim, including Rav Isaac Shapira, Rav Chaim Sinwani and the Kretchnover Rebbe. They may use different language at times, yet the experience was very similar. All of these masters understood the crucial process explained above. They were able to help me ascertain the location of where I wanted to go and they clearly defined the roadmap of the journey (including the signs and experiences I was likely to encounter along the way). As a result, I would have greater insight where I was at any particular point in time.

At this juncture , I would like to add a Yesod that I picked up being at the feet of the afore-named tzaddikim: ‘Listening’.

The Sfat Emet in Lech Lecha and the Torat Emet (Rav Laybale Eiger) state that the Hakadosh Baruch Hu transmitted a message to the world by way of

a Bat Kol that goes forth every day. This message was to be conveyed to the entire human race, yet it was Avraham Avinu and Yitro that were open to hearing it.

I have come to recognize that these aforementioned tzadikim are, in essence, encouraging me to 'hear' that which has always been there.

My friends, we have a lot to think about, and with Hashem's help we will grow together and we will achieve our goals! May we all be blessed to grow to greater levels of commitment, clarity, and Avodah. May we go from strength to strength!

Lovingly & respectfully,

Yehoshua Gerzi.

