



HOW TO DEAL WITH BIAS?

How objective are you? How much bias is involved in your decision-making process? And what lesson can we learn from the challenge of Tzefachad's five daughters to Moses?

TEACHER'S MANUAL

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JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



PARSHAT PINCHAS

Preface:

This week's lesson dwells on a fascinating story in this week's Torah portion, which the Rebbe uses as a lesson for the concept of *Aseh Lecha Rav*, the Mishna's command to appoint for yourself a mentor.

Many people often assume that religious Jews blindly follow opinions of rabbis like sheep. In this Sicha, the Rebbe presents a more nuanced approach, explaining why a personal mentor and guide is actually in our own best interest.

Every person, as the Rebbe explains here, suffers from internal biases and subjectivity. When faced with important life-decisions, we are often tempted to go in directions that are not truly in our best interest. Therefore, the best thing you can do is consult with someone else, someone wiser and of greater character than you, to help you reach a decision that is truly suited for you.

As we will learn from Moses, a person should never be afraid to seek wise counsel.

Contents:

A. Moses & the Five Daughters.....4

In this week's Torah portion, the Land of Israel is divided up among the People of Israel as they prepare to enter the land. Each family receives a portion which is destined to be passed on through the generations through their male heirs.

However, a group of women contested the decision. The daughters of the deceased Tzelafchad argued that they should be able to receive the portion of their father (source 1). Moses turned to G-d for guidance, and G-d told him that they were right—daughters without brothers would inherit their father's portion (source 2).

B. Was Moses Indecisive?.....8

It's a nice story, but there is something puzzling: Why couldn't Moses make his own decision?

Nachmanides explains (source 3 and cited by the Rebbe) that Moses was afraid of bias: When the women had presented their claim, they mentioned that their father was not one of Korach's men. That constituted flattery, and Moses no longer wanted to adjudicate their case.

In Judaism, bribery for a judge is considered a very severe sin, and bribery is not only in the form of cold cash. As Maimonides explains (source 4), our sages viewed even the slightest form of help as bribery, disqualifying them from potential cases.

C. Personal Bias.....11

The Rebbe points out how far fetched the bias is in the case of Moses: Moses was the most righteous Jewish leader of all time, the very source of the Torah that we study and treasure until this very day. On the other hand, the flattery was negligible: The story of Korach took place thirty-nine years earlier, and even then, Moses didn't really care for flattery or confirmation. He was just fine relying on G-d's support for his leadership. Still, Moses viewed this statement as disqualifying.

What is the lesson for ordinary people? We need to recognize that we are naturally biased, and therefore, whenever making decisions of great importance that will affect our spiritual future, we need to consult with those who are better and wiser than us. We each need to have a mentor.

D. Video & Story.....15

Introduction:

We are now in the last stage before entering the Land of Israel. The People of Israel, after forty years of spiritual preparation in the desert, are preparing to enter the Promised Land. Moses is now almost one-hundred-twenty years old, after forty years of leadership, at the height of his greatness.

During this period of time, a surprising event occurred: Five women challenge Moses before the entire nation with a *Halachic* question with significant social implications. But instead of showing leadership and reaching a decision, Moses decides to bring the question to G-d.

Why? What message was he trying to teach us?

A. Moses & the Five Daughters

Source 1 Numbers 27:1-4

When the Israelites prepared to enter the Land of Israel, the hottest topic on their minds was real estate. Which portion of the land would each tribe receive? What would be its quality? It was an important issue which would have long-lasting implications for their economic and social status.

First, the land was split into twelve portions. Then, G-d told Moses to hold a raffle. In one hat, they placed slips of paper with the names of each tribe, and in another hat, they placed slips of paper with each of the twelve portions. The leader of each tribe approached and pulled out a slip from each hat, and the two slips of paper were put together: that portion of land went to that tribe.

After the tribes received their portions, it was time to divvy up the portions among the individual families. Each family received one portion, which was to be their own—forever.

Until this point, everything was nice and fine. But there was one problem: It was in everyone's interest that the tribal portions remain within the possession of the tribe. What if a woman married into another tribe and her children—members of their father's tribe—inherited her portion? To resolve this issue, the Torah says that only sons inherit fathers. The women were not left out; they had the portion of their husbands—in whichever tribe they may belong to.

But then an interesting thing happened. Five women came before Moses, as he sat flanked by Elazar the High Priest, the seventy elders and the entire People of Israel. These women wanted a different arrangement.

Imagine the scene: three and a half thousand years ago, before Moses and the entire People of Israel, five women present a different view of things, questioning the entire basis of Moses' decision.

This is how Torah recounts the story:

A petition was presented by the daughters of Tzelafchad, son of Chefer, son of Gilead, son of Makhir, son of Manasseh—of the family of Menasseh, Joseph's son. Their names were Machlah, No'ah, Chaglah, Milkah and Tirtzah.

וַתִּקְרַבְנָה בָּנוֹת צֶלְפַּחַד
בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה בְּיַד אֶלְעָזָר בְּנֵי מַכִּיר
בְּנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מְנַשֶּׁה
בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בָּנוֹתָיו
מַחֲלָה נָעִי וְחַגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה
וְתִרְצָה:

They stood before Moses, Elazar the priest, the elders, and the entire community at the Tabernacle entrance and said:

וַתַּעֲמֹדְנָה לְפָנַי מֹשֶׁה וְלִפְנֵי
אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְלִפְנֵי הַנְּשִׂיָאִים
וְכָל־הָעֵדָה פָּתַח אֶהֱל־מוֹעֵד
לְאָמֹר:

“Our father died in the desert. He was not among Korach’s party who protested against G-d; he died because of his own sin, and he left no sons.

אָבִינוּ מָת בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהוּא לֹא־
הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַנּוֹעֲדִים
עֲלֵיהֶ' בְּעֲדַת־קֹרַח כִּי־בָקָטְאוּ
מֵת וּבָנִים לֹא־הָיוּ לוֹ:

“Why should our father’s name be lost in his family because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father’s brothers.”

לָמָּה יִגָּרַע שֵׁם־אָבִינוּ מֵתוֹךְ
מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֵּן תְּנֶה־
לָנוּ אַחְזָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אָבִינוּ:

They were a family of girls. If they wouldn't receive the portion designated for their father, their father's name would be erased. They asked that, considering the circumstances, they be allowed to receive their father's portion.

You can imagine the impact of the question. Acquiescing to their request might overturn the entire system that had been established, and even undermine the existing societal norms of the era. Everybody waited to hear how Moses would react.

To everyone's surprise, Moses said, "It's a great question, and I don't have an answer. Let me ask G-d himself!"

As everybody waited, Moses presented the question to G-d and soon came back with an answer: the women were right. In the case of a family of girls, the daughters would inherit their father's land. Tzelafchad's daughters left happily, and everybody was impressed by their courage.

Read how the story plays out in the Torah:

Source 2 Numbers 27:5-11

Moses brought their case before G-d.

G-d spoke to Moses, saying:

“The daughters of Tzelafchad have a just claim. Give them a hereditary portion of land alongside their father’s brothers. Let their father’s inheritance thus pass over to them.

“Speak to the Israelites and tell them that if a man dies without a son, his inheritance shall go to his daughter.

“If he has no daughter, his inheritance shall go to his brothers.

“If he has no brothers, his inheritance should go to his father’s brothers.

“If his father had no brothers, his inheritance should go to the closest relative in his family, who shall then be his heir.” This was the decreed law for the Israelites, as G-d had commanded Moses.

וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִשְׁפָּטָן לִפְנֵי ה':

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

כֹּן בָּנוֹת צָלְפַחַד דְּבַרְתָּ נָתַן תָּתֵן לָהֶם אַחְזוֹת נַחֲלָה בְּתוֹךְ אַחֵי אֲבִיהֶם וְהֵעֲבַרְתָּ אֶת־נַחֲלַת אֲבִיהֶן לָהֶן:

וְאֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּדְבָר לֵאמֹר אִישׁ כִּי־יָמוּת וּבֵן אֵין לוֹ וְהֵעֲבַרְתֶּם אֶת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְבָתּוֹ:

וְאִם־אֵין לוֹ בֵּת וּנְתַתֶּם אֹת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְאָחָיו:

וְאִם־אֵין לוֹ אַחִים וּנְתַתֶּם אֹת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְאָחֵי אָבִיו:

וְאִם־אֵין אַחִים לְאָבִיו וּנְתַתֶּם אֹת־נַחֲלָתוֹ לְשֹׂאֲרוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ וַיִּרְשׁ אֹתָהּ וְהָיְתָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחֻקַּת מִשְׁפָּט כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת־מֹשֶׁה:

B. Was Moses Indecisive?

Source 3 Nachmanides* on verse 3

There is an interesting element to the story, which will be the focus of this lesson:

Why didn't Moses reach his own decision? Why was it necessary to bring the question before G-d? Did he suffer from indecisiveness?

The answer is hidden in the words of the women's presentation:

My literal interpretation:

They spoke this way because they thought that Moses hated Korach's party more than all other sinners who died in the desert, since they defied him personally and fought everything he did. They thought that Moses might say out of hatred, "Let no one extend kindness nor be gracious to these orphans; let their father's sin be remembered." Therefore, they informed him that their father was not among them.

ודעתי בדרך הפשט:

שאמרו ככה בעבור שחשבו, שמשה רבינו היה שונא עדת קרח יותר מכל החוטאים שמתו במדבר, שהם היו הקמים כנגדו והכופרים בכל מעשיו. וחשבו אולי בשנאתו אותם יאמר: אל יהי לו מושך חסד, ואל יהי חונן ליתומיו, יזכר עון אבותם אל ה' (תהלים קט יב יד), על כן הודיעוהו כי לא היה מהם.

>> The Rebbe

Moses Didn't Want to Appear Biased

The Torah relates that when Tzelafchad's daughters approached Moses and requested the portion of land designated for their father, Moses didn't dwell on the question and try to resolve it. Instead, he immediately brought the question before G-d.

מסופר בתורה שכאשר בנות צלפחד באו לפני משה עם שאלה ובקשה בנוגע לנחלת אביהן, "תנה לנו אחוזה בתוך אחי אבינו" - לא המתין משה רבינו לחשוב ולהתבונן כדי להשיב על שאלתן, אלא, הפנה מיד את השאלה להקב"ה, "ויקרב משה את משפטן לפני ה'".²

*Moses ben Nachman (1194-1270), commonly known as Nachmanides or Ramban, was a leading Sephardic Jewish sage in Catalonia. He wrote a famous commentary on the Torah which endeavors to uncover the spiritual depth of the text.

(1) פינחס, כז, ד.
(2) שם, ה.

Did Moses actually lack the ability to answer them? Rather, commentators explain, when the daughters of Tzelafchad revealed in their petition that their father was not one of Moses' enemies ("He was not among Korach's party who protested against G-d"), it was an act of flattery. If he would adjudicate their case, he would be guilty of accepting "bribery of things." Therefore, he avoided answering their question.

ובטעם הדבר - דלכאורה, היתכן שמושה רבינו לא היה יכול להשיב בעצמו על שאלתן - מבארים מפרשי המקרא³, "כיון שגלו בנות צלפחד בטענתן, שלא היה אביהן מעדת שונאיו של משה (והוא לא היה בתוך העדה הנועדים על ה' בעדת קורח)", היה בזה קירוב הדעת למשה. ואילו היה דן את דינן, היה כאילו נוטל שוחד דברים, ועל כן חשך עצמו מן הדין, ולא רצה לדון אותן."

Source 2 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Sanhedrin 23:3

The Torah says that bribery blinds even the righteous and sharply warns against it, but we tend to think of bribery as direct funds being transferred to a judge. However, the Rebbe used the term, "bribery of things." Maimonides explains, based on the Talmud, that a bribe can take on many forms, and our sages went to great lengths to avoid any vestige of self-interest when adjudicating cases.

Bribery does not only take the form of money; there is also "bribery of things."

וְלֹא שְׁחָד מְמוֹן בְּלִבָּד אֶלָּא
אֶפְלוּ שְׁחָד דְּבָרִים.

A judge was once getting onto a small boat to cross a river. A person extended his hand and helped him get on. That person had a case, but the judge told him: "I cannot serve as a judge for you."

וּמַעֲשֵׂה בְּדִין אֶחָד שֶׁהָיָה עוֹלָה
בְּדוּגִית קִטְנָה לְעֵבֶר בְּנָהָר,
וּפָשַׁט אֶחָד יָדוֹ וְסִיעוֹ בְּעֵלְיָתוֹ,
וְהָיָה לוֹ דִּין. וְאָמַר לוֹ הַדִּין:
הֲרִינִי פְסוּל לְךָ לְדִין.

A person once removed a feather from a judge's scarf; another person once covered spittle that was lying before a judge. The judges told them: "I cannot serve as a judge for you."

וּמַעֲשֵׂה בְּאֶחָד שֶׁהֶעֱבִיר אֶבְרָה
נוֹצָה שֶׁל עוֹף מֵעַל רֵדִיד הַדִּין,
וְאַחַר כִּפָּה רַק מִלְּפָנֵי הַדִּין,
וְאָמַר לוֹ: הֲרִינִי פְסוּל לְךָ לְדִין.

A person once gave a priestly tithe to a judge who was a priest. The judge told him: “I cannot serve as a judge for you.”

A sharecropper of a field belonging to a judge would bring him figs from his field every Friday. He once came earlier and brought the figs on Thursday, because he wanted the judge to adjudicate a case. The judge told him: “I cannot serve as a judge for you.” Because the sharecropper brought them earlier than normal, the judge was disqualified—even though the figs belonged to him.

וּמַעֲשֶׂה בְּאֶחָד שֶׁהֵבִיא מִתְּנָה
אֶחָת מִמִּתְּנוֹת כְּהֵנָה לְדִין כֹּהֵן,
וְאָמַר לוֹ: פָּסוּל אֲנִי לְךָ לְדִין.

וּמַעֲשֶׂה בְּאֶרֶיס אֶחָד שֶׁל דֵּין
שֶׁהָיָה מְבִיא לוֹ תְּאֵנִים מִתּוֹךְ
שָׂדֵהוּ מִעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת לְעֶרֶב
שַׁבָּת. פְּעַם אֶחָת הִקְדִּים
וְהֵבִיא בַּחֲמִישִׁי בְּשַׁבָּת מִפְּנֵי
שֶׁהָיָה לוֹ דֵּין, וְאָמַר לוֹ הִדְדָּן:
הֲרִינִי פָּסוּל לְךָ לְדִין, אִף עַל
פִּי שֶׁהִתְאֲנִים מִשָּׁל דֵּין, הוֹאִיל
וְהֵבִיאָן שְׂלֵא בְּזִמְנָם נִפְסַל לוֹ
לְדִין:

This concept is based on the Torah’s statement, “Bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.” Bribery is not only defined as the blatant attempt to pay your way through the system. It can be anything that gives some sort of bias to the judge. The Torah says that it blinds the wise—i.e. the judge himself might be blinded by the impact of the gesture and not realize how it affects his judgement. Therefore, our sages always went to great lengths to ensure their impartiality, as expressed in these stories about the rabbis of the Talmud.

And a careful reading of this week’s parsha shows that Moses behaved likewise, as well.

C. Personal Bias

>> The Rebbe

Moses — The Greatest of All Jewish Leaders

Think about it:

On one hand, who is greater than Moses? The Torah was transmitted through him from Sinai to all generations. Every great Torah scholar owes his scholarship—and the authority that comes along with it—to the fact that Moses transmitted the Torah to Joshua, who in turn, transmitted it to the elders and so on, through the forty generations of the Torah's transmission (as listed by Maimonides in his introduction to Mishneh Torah) and in the generations that followed.

Moreover: This episode took place in the fortieth year when Moses reached his zenith, having received the *entire* Torah; after all, some Torah concepts were revealed *after* the revelation at Sinai, throughout the forty years in the desert. But by the fortieth year he had received the *entire* Torah, reaching the pinnacle of his perfection.

If so, he should have responded to the query of Tzelafchad's daughters. He was also surely aware that a scholar is obligated by Jewish law to respond to questions when they come before him!

והגע עצמך:

מחד גיסא - מי לנו גדול ממשה רבינו, "משה קיבל תורה מסיני ומסרה ליהושע וכו'"⁴, עד סוף הדורות, כך, שכל גדול בדורו, הרי, כל תורתו, וכל התוקף שלו שצריכים לשמוע לדבריו מכיון שאומר את דברי התורה, אינו אלא כתוצאה מזה שמשה רבינו מסר את התורה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וכן הלאה, במשך ארבעים הדורות דמקבלי התורה (כפי שמונה הרמב"ם בהקדמתו לספר משנה תורה), ועל דרך זה בדורות שלאחרי זה, עד לדורו.

ובפרט שמאורע זה אירע בשנת הארבעים, שאז היה משה רבינו בתכלית השלימות - לאחרי שקיבל כל התורה כולה, שהרי, כמה ענינים בתורה נתגלו לאחרי מעמד הר סיני, במשך הארבעים שנה, ונמצא, שבשנת הארבעים קיבל כבר כל התורה כולה, תכלית השלימות דמשה רבינו.

ומכיון שכן, היה משה רבינו צריך להשיב על שאלתן של בנות צלפחד: בודאי ידע משה רבינו את דינו של "תלמיד חכם שראוי להורות ואינו מורה"⁵.

(4) אבות רפ"א.
(5) סוטה כב, סע"א. ע"ז יט, ב.

It was a question posed not by one person but by five (Tzelafchad's five daughters) and posed in the presence of the elders and the entire community. Furthermore: It was regarding an essential matter for the Jewish people in general and for that generation in particular: the matter of settling the Land of Israel. We know of its importance from Moses' own discussion with the tribes of Gad and Reuben. If so, according to Torah—the Torah of Moses—he had the obligation and the right to answer the question on his own.

The Meaningless “Bribe”

On the other hand, the “*bribery of things*”—the women's statement that their father was not among Korach's group—was inconsequential.

Korach's rebellion took place thirty-nine years earlier. Even at the time, Moses didn't feel that he needed endorsements from human beings to prove his legitimacy; he relied on G-d Himself. He said, “G-d will demonstrate...G-d will create an opening in the ground...” and that indeed happened. When that occurred, even Korach and his party couldn't deny his legitimacy. Thirty-nine years later, Moses' leadership was unquestionable; there was no inherent flattery in affirming his authority.

Nonetheless, they made mention of the fact that their father hadn't questioned Moses' legitimacy thirty-nine years earlier—in the moments *before* the ground

ובמילא, כשבאים אליו עם שאלה, ולא רק איש אחד, אלא חמשה אנשים (חמש בנות צלפחד), ומה גם ששאלה זו נשאלת במעמד הנשיאים וכל העדה. ובפרט ששאלה זו היא בענין הכי עיקרי אצל (בני ישראל בכלל, ובמיוחד אצל) הדור שנכנסו לארץ - נחלת הארץ, כמובן מדבריו של משה רבינו, ברעש הכי גדול, בנוגע לבני גד ובני ראובן, עד כמה נוגע הענין דנחלה בארץ, הרי, על פי תורה, תורת משה, מוטל עליו החיוב והזכות להשיב על השאלה.

ולאידך גיסא - ה"שוחד דברים" ששייך כאן (באמרם שלא היה אביהן מעדת שונאיו של משה) הוא אפסי:

מחלוקת קורח אירעה לפני שלושים ותשע שנה, אשר, אפילו בשעת מעשה, לא היה משה רבינו זקוק לקירוב הדעת של בשר ודם (שאינו מעדת שונאיו כו') להוכחת צדקתו, שהרי סמך על הקב"ה, באמרו "בוקר ויודע ה' גו"⁷, "ואם בריאה יברא ה' וגו"⁸, ואכן היה בפועל, כך, שגם קורח ועדתו נוכחו בעליל בצדקתו של משה רבינו, ועל אחת כמה וכמה - שלושים ותשע שנה לאחרי כן, שאין כל משמעות ב"שוחד דברים" על דבר צדקתו של משה רבינו.

ואף על פי כן, מכיון שהזכירו שלפני שלושים ותשע שנה, ברגע שלפני "בריאה יברא ה'", כאשר היה מקום לשת

opened up, when it was still a reasonable assessment (adopted by Korach, his party and two-hundred-fifty prominent leaders, as Rashi points out). Therefore, Moses did not want to judge their case; he did not want to be suspect of any “bribery of things” that could potentially tilt his decision—despite being the incontestable Moses, “*Moshe Rabeinu*.”

Moses wrote this story in the Torah—the written Torah—which means that it is a lesson for every single Jewish man and woman: it tells us how careful we must be to avoid bribery—even an inconsequential form of bribery like trivial flattery to a person of the greatness of Moses.

דעות כו' (שהרי בניגוד למשה רבינו היו קורח ועדתו ומאיתיים וחמשים ראשי סנהדראות, כמובא בפירוש רש"י⁹), לא היה אביהן מעדת שונאיו של משה - שוב לא רצה משה רבינו לדון דין זה, כדי שלא יהיה מקום לחשש של "שוחד דברים" שיכול להטות ולשנות את הפסק דין האמיתי, למרות היותו "משה רבינו", פוסק שאין להרהר אחריו!

וסיפור זה כותב משה רבינו בספר התורה, חלק מתורה שבכתב, מלשון הוראה¹⁰ - הוראה לכל אחד ואחד מישראל, עד כמה יש להזהר מענין של "שוחד", כאמור, אפילו שוחד בענין הכי קל, ולאידך, ביחס לגדול שבגדולים שאין למעלה ממנו, משה רבינו!

[A joke is told about a famous Rabbinic judge who became deaf in his old age:

He was asked in jest, "The Torah says that bribery blinds the judge. Why did you become deaf and not blind?"

"That is because I never saw the bribery—I only heard about it," he replied.]

The Rebbe's talk seems to be a lesson for judges and people of power: even flattery regarding something which took place decades earlier is enough to cloud your sound judgment, and you need to take every precaution to avoid even the slightest hint of bias when making decisions that will impact someone else's future.

But what is its significance to ordinary people? What can we take from the story?

The Rebbe delivered this talk in 1986, when he promoted his campaign of "Aseh Lecha Rav—Appoint A Teacher for Yourself." According to the Mishnah, every person is obligated to appoint a mentor to guide him through life's choices.

The Rebbe explained that a person can never be fully objective about himself. We are naturally biased; when faced with life-choices, we often do not judge the situation correctly, and we

9 שם, א.

10 ראה רד"ק לתהלים יט. ח. גו"א ר"פ בראשית. זח"ג נג. ב.

make decisions that are selfish or even foolish. Therefore, the Rebbe encouraged everyone to have a personal mentor, a spiritual advisor, who would be able to provide objective advice when faced with a dilemma.

Many people had a difficult time accepting the proposition. Why should I not make my own decisions? Am I really so unwise when it comes to my own life?

This talk was delivered as a response to those questions.

The story of Moses, the Rebbe explained, teaches us how easy it is to be biased and influenced. If Moses was so afraid of bias, we should definitely be. Therefore, whenever we are faced with a question, it is better not to rely on yourself; consult with a friend or mentor, and the result will be far better.

>> The Rebbe

An Objective Opinion

If this is true of Moses, it is certainly true of ourselves.

Ordinary people are wholly incomparable to the greatness of Moses. Also, our “bribery” and biases are not memories from thirty-nine years ago but matters of current import which are relevant at this very moment! It is beyond a doubt that we cannot rely on our own judgment; we must consult with someone greater than ourselves—as the Mishnah says, “Appoint a teacher for yourself.”

You can appoint a mentor to your liking; the Mishnah said, “appoint a teacher”—you make the choice. But he must be greater than yourself, and you must commit to accept his judgment and to follow his advice.

ומזה מובן - במכל שכן וקל וחומר -
בנוגע לעניננו:

כאשר מדובר אודות אנשים שלא בערך
לגמרי ביחס לגדלותו של משה רבינו,
ולאידך, ה"שוחד" שעומד בפניהם
הוא (לא זכרון מאורע שהתרחש לפני
ל"ט שנה, כי אם) דבר שבהוה, הנוגע
ברגע זה ממש, ... הרי בודאי ובודאי
שאינו יכול לסמוך על עצמו, כי אם,
לברר ולשאול אצל גדול ממנו, "עשה
לך רב".

הברירה היא בידו לבחור לעצמו איזה
רב שרוצה - "עשה לך רב", אתה
בעצמך: אבל, צריך לבחור "רב", גדול
ממנו, שיקבל את דעתו ויקיים את
דבריו.

It could be very difficult to make this commitment—after all, nobody is smarter than yourself... Indeed, the Mishnah says “appoint” using the Hebrew term “aseh,” which implies coercion. But you certainly have the ability to do it—because G-d does not request that which is not within our power.

וכאמור, גם כאשר הדבר כרוך בקשיים, שהרי "מי ידמה לו" ... - כמודגש בדיוק הלשון "עשה לך רב", מלשון כפי'. ובודאי שהדבר הוא בכחו וביכלתו, שהרי "איני מבקש כו' אלא לפי כחן", כנ"ל.

Third night of Sukkot, 1986

Toras Menachem 5747 v. 1 p. 209

Video Chabad.org/1203577

Each night of Sukkot, the Rebbe would address the crowd after the evening services. This week's lesson was delivered in one such talk on Sukkot 1986. The full talk lasted for over an hour, but the following is the portion of the talk where the Rebbe spoke about the ideas we just learned.



Story My Encounter with the Rebbe vol. 18

When the Rebbe delivered this talk, he made an interesting comment: Someone had written to him that he was having a hard time finding a mentor that was “acceptable” to him. The Rebbe pointed out that his approach was flawed: the whole point of appointing a mentor was so that he could point out his own unacceptable behaviors!

The audience at the talk numbered over one thousand people, and most of them heard this comment and didn't make much of it, but there was one person who jumped.

Mr. Zalmon Jaffe was an English businessman with a very warm and open relationship with the Rebbe. He was spending that Sukkot in the Rebbe's presence (he is seen in the picture standing near the Rebbe), and he knew exactly what the Rebbe was talking about.

He explained in his diary that some time earlier, he had written to the Rebbe about this topic:

“My obvious choice for a mentor is, of course, the Rebbe. But I am told that the Rebbe does not accept this nomination. The only other person would be my son, Avrohom - would that be possible? At my age, can the Rebbe suggest anyone else who would be acceptable to me?”

“The Rebbe replied with a short note on my letter that I could not take my son as my Mashpia, because it is contrary to ‘Kibud Av’ (Honour to one's father).

“I have written before that at a Farbrengen, it is a well-known fact that although the Rebbe is speaking to everyone collectively, he is also talking to each one individually. I had ample proof of this at the Sicha last night. ‘oi vay,’ was I in trouble.

“Was the Rebbe talking to me? I am pretty certain that he was. The Rebbe said that somebody had written to him stating that he wants a Rav who would be acceptable to him (to the writer).

“I checked my copy of the letter I had sent to the Rebbe, and yes—I had really written that I wanted a Rav who would be ‘acceptable’ to me.

“The Rebbe continued, in Yiddish, of course, that it would be an ‘och and vay’ if the Rav had to be acceptable (this word was spoken in English). If he did not like him or was dissatisfied with his decisions or rulings, then he would get rid of him—fire him. The Rebbe really berated me. Fortunately, only a few members of my family knew to the Rebbe referred.

“After all this excitement I decided that I had better get fixed up with a Mashpia, straight away, and whether acceptable or not, before I left for home. Rabbi Akiva Cohen was presently at Crown Heights. What better Rav could I get! I approached him. He refused—and suggested, very modestly, another name. However, after much persuasion he finally accepted my proposal that he should become my Mashpia.”

