



לזכות
משפחת קארנפעלד
בורביינק, קאליפורניא



Self-Care for Communal Leaders

Rabbi Alexander Zusha Ben-Nun (Bunin) was the supervisor of the Oholei Yosef Yitzchak Lubavitch network of schools in Eretz Yisroel. He and his wife founded the “Beiteinu” school in Ra’anana. In this letter, the Rebbe addresses how he should ensure his own spirituality is accounted for while he’s spending the bulk of his time working with others.



Rabbi Alexander Zusha, *sheyichye*
Greetings and blessings!

...Regarding the point of your letter where you write that occasionally you make a *cheshbon hanefesh* about the fact that you're busy educating others, but [you are concerned] about your own situation, which you have no time for.

You certainly know that this problem and this depression are age-old issues, disturbing anyone who is involved with communal work in general, and in particular in the area of communal work that completely occupies and encompasses the person. It is also clear that the solution and answer to this question is not the same for every person and in every place; times of peace aren't the same as times of war, nor times of crisis to ordinary years. Of course, one cannot compare someone with natural talent for activism to someone who has to push himself to do it. These things are clear and obvious if you think about them for even a short time with the worldview of our Torah, the "Torah of Life," whose "Great Rule" is to love one's fellow as oneself, and that whoever saves a single life is considered to have saved the whole world.

Accordingly, it is obvious that in our generation—an orphaned generation, but on the other hand, the generation of *ikvesa d'Meshicha*, the end of *galus* and immediate preparation for the beginning of the true *geulah*, about which it is said that it will be a complete *geulah*, meaning that not one Yid will remain in *galus*; both literal *galus* and spiritual *galus*—it is necessary that everyone participate in gathering *Yiddische neshamos* and bringing them close to the Redeemer of the Yidden, Hashem, who is the Giver of the Torah and mitzvos. No one is exempt from this holy work; at the very least [dedicate] some time each day, week, and month. The more a person's capabilities for this are, the more time he must spend doing it. This means that for some people, this is their primary work, and everything else

they do is to enable them to do this. In other words, this is the mitzvah in which you are "exceedingly scrupulous" (דב"י הוה זחיר טפי) (see the Alter Rebbe's *Igeres Hakodesh*, end of ch. 7, and *Sefer Hasichos Summer 5700* p. 22 and the footnote there). All of your Torah and mitzvos ascend through this mitzvah and all the blessings are drawn down through this mitzvah.

It is also clear that in order to collect the G-dly sparks and in order to bring people closer, it is not enough to be "saturated;" you must be "saturated enough to make another saturated."¹ This is something that is entrusted to each individual: to set aside as much time each day as necessary to work on yourself, מיט זיך און אין זיך [=with yourself and on yourself], even though most of your time is spent helping others. So that you don't err in estimating [how much time you should spend on working on yourself], you must remember well the saying we heard from my father-in-law, the Rebbe: "Just as you are not allowed to ignore your shortcomings, so too, you may not ignore your qualities." Another time he said, "The prohibition of *lashon hara* is not only regarding others, but also regarding oneself."² Since Hashem demands this of you, it is certain that you're able to fulfill it. It shouldn't have any effect if the beginning is beset by challenges or even stumbling-blocks, as Chazal tell us, "A person does not succeed in understanding words of Torah unless he stumbles in them [first]."³ There can be no greater lesson than this [for your situation, for you are dealing with matters] in the *halachos* of saving lives.

To use the Alter Rebbe's expression (Tanya ch. 44):

"Although [one may ask,] who is the man and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to approach and attain even a thousandth part of the degree of love felt by [Moshe,] 'The Faithful Shepherd,' nevertheless a minute portion and particle" [of Hashem's great goodness] exists in

every Yid, especially in activists involved in *chinuch*. [This portion of Hashem's goodness exists] at least in potential. It is therefore appropriate to consider the Torah of the Baal Shem Tov, which we heard from my father-in-law, the Rebbe, on Shabbos Bereishis 5697*, on the *possuk* "Arise, shine forth" (קומי אורי)⁴ as it was transcribed by someone who heard it:

“דער מאמר פון בעש״ט איז געווען לנשיאי ישראל, ואמר להם, איר נשיאי ישראל וואס לערנט אידן תורה און טוט פאר טובת הרבים וואס וועט זיין מיט אייך אליין, אויף דעם איז דער ענטפער, קומי אורי באור הפרטי והכללי כי בא אורך”

—The *maamar* of the Baal Shem Tov was to *nesiei Yisroel*, and he told them, ‘You, *nesiei Yisroel*, who teach Yidden Torah and do things for the good of the multitudes—what will be of you yourselves? The answer to this is: ‘Arise, shine forth—with the personal and general light—for your light has come.’”

Although, due to the missing end of the transcript, the conclusion of the matter is unclear, the problem is clear and it is also clear that we set aside Torah and *avodah* for the benefit of the community, and not only is this behavior allowed, but they are blessed with personal and general illumination as well.

To fully understand this matter to its depths, there is much to say at length, more than what is known, but since we are speaking practically, the way to decide how to act is known, as the Rebbe Rashab said, “Take this rule and remember it always: For anything that benefits or leads to actual *avodah*, any obstacle to that—even if the obstacle is a lofty one indeed—is merely a trick from the *nefesh habehamis*.” (Printed in *Hayom Yom* 23 Sivan 5703).


If you will listen to me, strengthen yourself in your work of educating Jewish boys and girls, whom you influence in and out of school. Look at the matter as it is in truth, at its essence—you are involved with people who are all children of Hashem. Anything that brings them closer to our Father in Heaven and any action done for this lasts forever above and gives endless *nachas* to Hashem. It is just that in order for this *avodah* to be successful, you and your wife need to be living examples for those you influence; i.e. living examples of a Jewish man and woman who live by the words of our holy Toah, and are permeated with the luminary of Torah, Chassidus. This requires a firm personal commitment, a commitment of time, and the study of Chassidus and keeping its guidelines and customs. Then, it is certain that the assurance will be fulfilled, that “Your mind and heart will become a thousand times as pure” (נעשה מוחו ולבו זכים אלף פעמים ככה), and this number of 1,000 is not an exaggeration. This means that by learning for one hour, you succeed in absorbing qualitatively and quantitatively as much as another would need 1,000 hours

to accomplish. In your personal life, too, you will ascend, going from strength to strength.

Of course, it's not an easy *avodah*, but where does the idea come from that every Yid needs to seek out an easy *avodah*? Especially nowadays, when the *Shechina* is in *galus* and there is doubled and redoubled darkness, and everything is with great effort. More than what I've written here is written between the lines, and I hope that this too will be enough if you consider it. May it be that we both reach the same understanding, since we both have the same goal—to spread forth the wellsprings of Chassidus so that they increasingly overtake, to the point of overtaking all of our Yiddish nation, and no man will teach his fellow [to know Hashem, for everyone will know Hashem]⁵ and the world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem.⁶

It is obvious that all of the above does not contradict what I believe I've written several times about your helping Kfar Chabad—on the contrary, this will actually help with that, as the Mishnah guarantees, one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah.⁷

As we approach Pesach, the time of our freedom, may it come to us and all Yidden for good, I bless you with a kosher and happy festival and true freedom; freedom from physical worries and from spiritual worries about anything that inhibits serving Hashem with joy and glad-heartedly, and may this freedom and joy continue forth to the entire year, especially since serving Hashem, as our Torah—the Torah of life—instructs us, applies to everything in a person's life, all day and night, as it is said, “In all your ways you shall know Him.”⁸

With the festival's greetings; may we share good news,⁹ 

1. A halachic concept relating to the definition of something as wet. One way to define it is when something is “saturated enough to make something saturated,” i.e. so saturated that if you were to touch it, your hand would be saturated to the point that the next thing your hand touches would become wet as well. See Brachos 25b, Yoma 78a. Here, the Rebbe is saying that one needs to be so saturated with Torah and mitzvos that the person one teaches can go on to teach others.

2. In other words, put aside as much time as you need to work on yourself but don't underestimate your qualities and thus overestimate how much time you need to work on yourself.

3. Gittin 43a. As Kli Yakar (Bereishis 45:24:5) explains, that in which a person makes mistakes is what they remember best, for someone who makes a mistake once or twice guards himself from it in the future.

4. Yeshayahu 60, 1.

5. Yirmiyahu 31, 33.

6. Yeshayahu 11, 9.

7. Mishnayos Maseches Avos 4, 2.

8. Mishlei 3, 6.

9. Igros Kodesh vol. 15, #5355 — p. 28.