



# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## On the Air with Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

From Ha-Rav's weekly radio programs in Israel

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### Visiting a cemetery

Q: Is there a reason not to go to a cemetery?

A: No, people have always had the practice to visit cemeteries to honor the deceased on a yahrzeit and to pray at the graves of righteous people. This is an ancient custom. Calev ben Yefuneh prayed at the grave of our forefathers in Hevron (Sotah 34b and brought in Rashi to Bamidbar 13:22) and Yaakov buried Rachel on the road so that the Jews could pray there when they went to exile in Babylonia (Bereshit Rabbah 82:10 and Rashi to Bereshit 48:7). Some authorities do say that one should not go because a cemetery is an impure place. The custom of the family of Ha-Rav Yosef Soloveitchik – which included the Beit Halevi and Rabbi Chaim Brisker – was not to visit cemeteries based on a teaching of the Vilna Gaon. This is brought in "Nefesh Ha-Rav" (p. 254) on Rav Soloveitchik. And this is the custom of Beit Brisk, their physical and spiritual descendants. They also add the reason that it should not appear as if one is making requests of the deceased. In the letter of the Vilna Gaon, written on his way to the Land of Israel, he wrote that one should not go to cemeteries at all, but this was specifically for women, because he wrote the letter to his wife. Therefore, there are authorities who do not visit. And there are some authorities such as the Satmar Rebbe who said that one should not visit cemeteries too often, but visit only on a yahrzeit. But the majority of authorities say that one can visit, except for cohanim; and many righteous and

G-d-fearing people do so all of the time. In matters such as these which are not clear laws but customs, we say: Go and see how the people act and follow them.

#### A widow who is sick and hair covering

Q: I am a widow and I am very sick. It is very difficult for me to cover my hair. It itches, it is hot, etc... Am I obligated to cover my hair?

A: Quite simply, a widow is obligated to cover her hair. It is difficult for many women to cover their hair because it bothers them, it itches, etc... There are a few solutions: you can wear an extremely thin scarf which will not be hot. It should be the same color as your hair so that it is not possible to see your hair through it. You can also wear a thin wig, even made from your own hair. If your own hair does not make you hot, a wig made from your hair should not make you hot either. All of this is when you are outside of your house. You do not need to cover your hair when you are inside your house. If someone comes to visit, you can cover your hair. Many women follow these suggestions which they find helpful. If they do not help you, there is a leniency that a widow need not cover her hair. A married woman is obligation to cover her hair by the Torah and a widow is obligated by the Rabbis. Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein in Shut Igrot Moshe (Even Ha-Ezer 1:57) asked: is there a mitzvah for a woman to cover her hair or a transgression for a woman to expose her hair? There is a major difference: it is forbidden to perform transgressions, but if someone is not able to perform a mitzvah, what can he do? It is doubtful if it is a mitzvah or a transgression and since a widow covering her hair is a Rabbinic obligation, one can be lenient in a case of doubt. Rav Feinstein wrote (ibid.) that a widow who cannot find work on account of her hair-covering can be lenient in this extenuating circumstance. He also has a Teshuvah (Even Ha-Ezer 4:32 #4) that a divorcee - who is also obligated by the Rabbis to cover her hair - who cannot finding a spouse because people think she is married because she covers her hair may also be lenient. The same applies when a widow cannot find work, a divorcee cannot find a spouse or a widow's head feels like it is going to explode and itches, etc... Based on Rav Feinstein's Teshuvah, you can be lenient (this leniency would not apply to a married woman since she is obligated by the Torah), but I first recommend seriously trying the other solutions I gave.

#### Serving Hashem through emotion or intellect

Q: How should one serve Hashem through emotion or with intellect?

A: It is written on almost every page of the book "Mesillat Yesharim" that one needs to serve Hashem through intellect. A person is obligated to be good and to distance himself from evil. How can a person improve himself? Answer: through intellect. The intellect is the

main power of a person. Animals also possess emotion. The fact that you have an emotion does not make you a man. For example, apes have an incredible motherly emotion to the point of self-sacrifice. They hold their babies for five years even when they gather food or fight off an enemy. Animals also have emotion, a body, desires, imaginations, etc... The Rambam therefore writes in "Shemoneh Perakim" (chapter 1) that the intellect must reign over all of these powers. The intellect is the king. Not a ruler who murders all of his citizens so he can reign since he is alone, but one who takes care of them. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi also wrote this in the book "Ha-Kuzari" (in the third section) when he discussed the righteous person, who is similar to a king who provides all of the needs of his citizens; and when he asks them to rally around the flag, they come running. The same applies to the intellect which gives each human power his status and role. The intellect examines if a given emotion is positive or negative. If you are excited about our state and army, this is a good emotion. But being excited by some actor – what kind of emotion is this?! A person certainly needs to be excited – if he does not he is not human – but the question is what is he excited about. How can we know which emotion has deep meaning and which does not? This is the job of the intellect. We learn Torah and know what is right and wrong. To our distress, it is true that emotion and imagination control most people of the world, but we are not discussing what exists, but what should exist. What should exist is that the main power should be the intellect. The intellect is the company commander which gives the orders. Emotion began ruling the world with the sin of Adam. Hashem said: do not eat from this tree. "But it is beautiful..." and so he ate from the tree. From that time, man has not been directly controlled by his intellect, but has been enslaved to emotions and imagination. But Hashem had mercy on us and gave us the Torah which teaches us what is good and evil, what is a mitzvah and what is a transgression, what is a law and what is a stringency, etc... We therefore know how to act in the world, and we can examine an emotion through the intellect. For example, "I hate you" – the Torah says "Do not hate people." "I am jealous" – the Torah says "Do not be jealous." "But I have a powerful emotion" – the Torah says "Do not be jealous of another person." The Torah clarifies for us a prohibited emotion which must be eliminated, a permissible emotion which can remain, and a supreme emotion which should be strengthened.

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