**The Power of Influence**



**#1**

**Question: Which people have influenced you the most in your life?**

**#2**

**Laws of Understanding 6:1, Rambam (Maimonides)**

*It is the way of a person to be drawn in his outlook and deeds after the ways of his peers and friends, acting in accordance with the practices of those in his community.*

For this reason, the Rambam proceeds to exhort the individual to do whatever he can to ensure that he lives in a positive environment.

**Louise Beal**

Love thy neighbor as thyself, but choose your neighborhood.

**Questions:**

* **In all the ways you have been influenced – which are the main positive traits you have acquired?**
* **In all the ways you have been influenced – which are the main negative traits you have acquired?**
* **When is it easy for other people to have an influence on you?**
* **When is it difficult for other people to have an influence on you?**

**#3**

**The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey**

… It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen.

Look at the word responsibility - “response-ability” - the ability to choose our own response. Highly proactive people recognize that responsibility. They do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior. Their behavior is a product of their own choice, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feeling.

**Questions:**

* **What do you think about this statement?**
* **Is it in any way contradicting the previous sources? How do you resolve this?**
* **What fences could you make for yourself to ensure that others do not have a negative influence on you?**
* **How can you change the effect of the negative influences on you?**

**#4**

The prophecies in the book of Ovadyah (chap. 1) are devoted to the future downfall of Esav -  
(arch enemy of the Jews and Godliness). The Talmud wonders, what is it about Ovadyah that made him the one to prophesize about Esav?

**Talmud Sanhedrin 39b**

*Said the Holy One, Blessed is He, "Let Ovadyah come who dwelt among two wicked people [his parents - Achav and Izevel] and did not learn from their deeds, and prophecy regarding Esav who lived among two righteous [his parents - Yitzchak and Rivka] and did not learn from their deeds.*

**Questions:**

* **How can a person learn to act in a manner opposite to that which others have tried to instill in him?**
* **Did you or someone whom you know ever resist other people’s exerting a positive influence?**
* **Did you or someone whom you know ever resist other people’s exerting a negative influence?**

**#5**

**Mishnah, Pirkei Avos 1:6**

*Establish a rabbi (teacher) for yourself, acquire a friend ...*

**Question: If you had a choice, which person would you want to have the greatest influence on you?**

**#6**

**Aggadah, Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein**

*While choosing a positive environment is overwhelmingly important, it is worthwhile noting that there may be more to it than merely deciding which neighborhood to live in. There is a concept called "ayin tova," which literally means “a good eye". It refers to a benevolent and positive outlook, seeing the best in people. The opposite is "ayin raah"- “a bad eye", having a critical and condemning outlook which only sees the bad in people. As most people have good points and bad points, the eye of the beholder will determine which aspects to focus on, and thus to define people. Moreover, there are many actions whereby the definition of the action as good or bad is itself a matter of interpretation.*

*A good eye will ascribe sincere motivation and good will on the part of the doer; whereas a bad eye will see an act of falsehood and suspect motivation.*

*The consequence of this idea is that while it is imperative to try and seek out good surroundings, to a certain degree the question of whether one has succeeded in doing so depends on how he looks at them. Even good people can still be either a positive environment or a negative one, depending on whether the individual possesses a good or bad eye. In this respect, it is possible to "choose one's neighborhood" without ever moving from the spot!*

**Based on Rabbi Y. L. Diskin**

*When you give an unknown person the benefit of the doubt, you are expressing a positive outlook about this person, and, by extension, about people in general. You are affirming that people are essentially good, and this in turn influences you to aspire to be good and take your place among them. If you interpret their deeds negatively, your assumption that they did do something wrong is an expression of your general assessment of people. You expect that they did the wrong thing, because "that is what people do." This negative opinion of people leaves you with low aspirations for your own spiritual endeavors, for you have created a negative environment for yourself, and it will not bring out the best in you.*

**Question: How do you relate to these excerpts?**

**#7**

**Question: What’s your takeaway from today’s discussion?**