

## Jewish Living as the Cultivation of a Spiritual Practice (3 of 3)

*This series explores excerpts from Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira, the Piaseczner Rebbe (d.1943). The Piaseczner's inspiring and redemptive ideas address our inherent spiritual nature and how we awaken to the Divine presence within us.*

***This session discusses cultivating behavior that helps our soul become manifest: acting with genuineness, wholeheartedness and simplicity.***

This teaching is from the Piaseczner's *Bnei Machshava Tova*, entry 15.

We have established that the goal (תכלית) of our association is to enhance (לשכלל) our awareness (המחשבה): to draw out (להוציא), expand (להרחיב) and strengthen (לחזק) consciousness. This is not a purely mental activity (גילוי מחשבה). As part of this work, the soul itself is activated (גילוי הנפש). It is called upon to take mastery (שליטה) over our physical side (הגוף). If we constantly center ourselves (תתחנך) in this soulfulness, we will achieve levels of awareness that we can barely imagine (שער) or hope for (קוה). What more can we want (מה יחסר לו) than to have our soul as a constant companion (שנפש הולכת אצלו), ever pulling (מושכת) our consciousness to its sublime (מרום) and elevated perspective?

Since the goal of our practice (עבודה) and hope (תקווה) is to demonstrate our spiritual nature (גילוי הנפש), we must always behave (להתנהג) in a fashion that is suitable and welcoming (מסגלת) of the spirit (הנפש). We must avoid (להשמר) behaviors that pull us off course (מרחיק) by grounding us (מטמין) in the lowly and chaotic side our nature.

**Conduct yourself (תנהג) with simplicity (פשיטות) and genuineness (תמימות) at all times. Simple sincerity (תמימות) is the clothing that the soul wears in everyday life. Manipulation (ערמומיות) is the opposite of soulfulness (חוסר הפש); it is the triumph of rationalization (השכל). Far from the mindfulness that is indicative of the soul, this scheming is what the world defines as intelligent and powerful. This low level of mass consensus (שכל העולם) is the sole criterion for determining what is acceptable in thought, speech, and action in the value system of those who are unenlightened.**

When we speak of this craftiness and scheming, we do not refer exclusively to outright lies (שקר). Rather, we also mean to include the root of falsehood itself (ראשית השרק), which is the first inkling of untruth. What is the underlying motivation (סיבה) that brings a person to conceive and speak falsehood and untruth? It is the inner condition

(מצב הפש), a decayed state, that allows one to think and speak lies, to become crafty and convoluted in every way, **to live out of alignment (מעוקלים) with vitality, all existence and truth (לא חיים לא נמצאים ולא אמתיים).**

The seal (חותם) of the Holy One is Truth (אמת). The whole world bears this imprint. The flowering plant (צמח) is alive, it has the energy and the life pattern of its biological life form (חיות הנפש הצומחת) --- it is real (אמת). An artificial plant may look like a plant, but it is unreal (שקר). Truth is reality (המציאות), while lying partakes of unreality (אפסה) and nonbeing. Truth is an aspect of life (חיים). Falsehood emanates from the side of death (סטרא דמותא) since it lacks vitality and corresponds to nothing in life; it is vacuous (לא נמצא). What is real is true. A person whose every deed and word have the power of this reality (מציאות) in which his soul is found, is a person of truth and wholeheartedness (אמת ותמימות).

Plant live sprouts with wholeheartedness and simplicity (בתמימות ופשטות). There is no artifice, no faking. The plant grows because of the power within it (המציאות שבקרבו), because it has an innate compunction (מפשו שדוחקת) to flower and sprout. Just in this way, a small child behaves in accordance with the simplicity and wholeheartedness (בפשיטות ותמימות) of his inner being, in accordance with the existence of his soul (מציאות הנפש). **Any adult as well, who is guided by the light of his soul is also wholehearted and true (תמים ואמתי).**

However, if a person does not act in simplicity, in accordance with what flows from his heart and spirit (מלבו ונפשו), he will fall from living in truth and in his own true existence. His actions begin to bear the stamp of falsehood and death - he is already a liar (שקר). He may never overtly lie, saying of a tree, for example, "There's a rock," but he is a liar nonetheless. The first inkling (ייסוד) to utter such a blatant lie is the very same: a lack of reality and consonance with life (מסטרא דמותא), where there is no reality or soul in his thoughts, speech and actions.

This wholeheartedness (תמים) and simplicity (פשט) make up the delightful quality (חן) of a child. When you speak with a child, you have the sensation of interacting with his soul (נפשו). When you ask him something, he lets the question penetrate to the core of his being (חודרת עד לנפשו), and from there you have his answer (תשובה). His answer is wholehearted (תמימה) and simple (פשוטה). The child puts his entire heart into his response (כל לבו נותן הוא בתשובתו).

It is not necessary for you to surrender your awareness or be indiscriminating (בלא דעת), as a child can be, **but you must be wholehearted (תמים)**. If you are asked a question, do not sit around and calculate: “How will I answer him (איך להשיב)?” Etiquette demands (נימוס), I should say this; If I answer him in this way, he will think that I am wise (חכם). In order to control his perception of me, I should say thus.” In the end your answer will be a bag of wind (אוסף של רוח). You may be polite, you may be thought of as intelligent or whatever goal you had. But you and your soul will be missing (אתה עם נפשך חסרים). This is not the way of reality (מציאות) and life (חיות), of spirit (אפס ובוהו) and truth (אמת). This is falsehood (שקר), nothingness and emptiness (אפס ובוהו).

Above all else, **answer with sincerity (רצינות)**. Speak from your heart, with wholeheartedness (בתמימות) and simplicity (פשטות). Use your reasoning (שכל) only to determine (להבחין) that you are not making a mistake (אין טועה). Your mental review itself needs to be simple (פשוט) and sincere (רציני). Your mind is used as tool (כלי) to facilitate (לשמש) the straightforward expression of your heart. If you find that a truthful answer will be harmful to you (תזיק לך) or you have some other obstacle (מניעה) to speaking truthfully, simply say, as our sages advise, “I do not know” (איני יודע) (Talmud *Berachot* 4a), and leave it at that. But do not twist and bend things to produce a convoluted response (תשובה נפתולה) that lacks sincerity and simplicity (בלא רצינות ובלא פשטות).

There are many obstacles that prevent a person (מניעות) from being wholehearted and sincere. One is false humility (עניוות מרומה), whereby a person is so intimidated by society and its mores (בטל לפני העולם), he so values the ways of the world and the opinions of others that he prostrates himself before them entirely (כורע כולו לפניהם).

Any

insight or perspective he may have held becomes obliterated. It is never expressed. The entire essence of his heart and soul (וכל עצמות לבו ונפשו) are as nothing; they are crushed and not in the least manifest (התגלות). He is so impressed by the value system of the latest trend that he loses (נאבד) perspective on the basic issues of right and wrong

(לדעת מה טוב ומה רע), what he must do and what he must avoid

(מה עליו לעשות וממה להמנע). He comes to measure (מודד) everything according to the current whim and fashion. If the mass culture values it, it is good. If people seem to hate it, he is convinced that it must be bad.

This is off the mark. Quite the contrary (אדרבא). Imagine (תצייר) that you are the only person alive (יחידי), and none of what you did impacted anyone else nor would any of your actions ever be for an ulterior motive. You must never devalue (לא תתבטל את)

(עצמך) what you yourself know and feel to be true in order to accommodate the whims and wiles of the world around you.

Even when your actions do please and help your fellows, do so solely because you have a responsibility (שחוב עליך) to help and comfort other people --- not for any superficial design or ulterior motive. Allow yourself to sense the urgency within (דחיפה פנימית), the organic tendency, the small voice that says, "So you are commanded (מצווה) and so you must do (לעשות)."

If you make this a regular practice, your heart, soul and inner sense of integrity, will become manifest (תתגלה). You will sense (הרגשת) what is needed in each situation. Your deeds, words and your perspective and all your interactions with others will be filled (מלאים) with your soul and her power, as it emanates (המתפשט) from your innermost self (בקרברך), directing you to grow, behave and be in continuous relationship with God in all of your affairs.

**Yiscah Smith** is a Jewish educator, spiritual activist and published author who addresses the spiritual practice of encountering the Divine spark within, the foundation of authentic living. She employs her personal story of the joys and struggles with her spirituality, Jewish tradition and commitment to authentic living. As a spiritual trailblazer, she exemplifies what it means to carve one's own path: understanding one's inner being and cultivating the integrity to remaining faithful to that understanding, unapologetically. Yiscah encourages, ennobles and empowers others to do the same.

Yiscah is adjunct faculty and teaches Jewish meditative practice and spiritual texts at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies and in her home in Jerusalem. She provides as well spiritual mentoring to individuals seeking an awareness of the Divine spark within. Yiscah is also a public speaker, both in Israel and abroad.

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