

Our Conversation

A Journal of Women's תורה Insights

Introduction

We are all familiar with the structure of the רבי's שיחות: a number of questions on רש"י's commentary are posed and then the רבי brilliantly resolves every difficulty. However, what if the שיחה ended with the questions and you had to come up with the answers? On שבת פרשת וישב תשמ"ד, the רבי asked a number of questions on a רש"י at the farbrengen, but he gave no answers. When no one sent in any answers the following week, he made an announcement that the weekly שבת farbrengens would pause for three weeks until שבת מברכים פרשת וירא when he repeated the questions again. That week, hundreds of people submitted answers: men, women and children.

The רבי's intention was clear. When you are responsible to uncover something new in תורה it is the most powerful motivation to learn— and it makes it your own. As חסידים of the רבי, we were not meant to be passive recipients of his תורה, but rather to learn from the רבי to see the תורה the way he does. The inclusion of women in this process was initiated already by the רבי פריערדיקער רבי in his instruction to the Riga women's group, אחות התמימים, that they should develop תורה essays reflecting on their learning in their own voice with their own thoughts. Thus, when establishing נשי ובנות חב"ד, the רבי noted that the women should produce publications on תורה topics to inspire fellow Chabad women, their own sons and daughters, and the broader Jewish People.

Alongside the practical motivation and excitement of developing your own exposition of ideas in התורה, פנימיות התורה, there is a spiritual significance to this process. Revealing something new in תורה through your own efforts reveals the "בלי גבול" nature of the תורה— that it can be unfolded infinitely. In addition, when a person innovates something new, this is a revelation of their own unique essence. It allows a person to reach beyond their conscious powers and tap into a deeper, more essential connection to the נשמה. When we do this, we tap into the state of גאולה, when the "ומלאה הארץ דעה את ה'." Therefore, the רבי taught that in this auspicious time preceding the גאולה, every איד has a חיוב to produce חידושי תורה.

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Overview

This spring, Batsheva Learning Center will בעזרת ה' publish its first annual journal of women's תורה insights, including essays by scholars and educators from around the world. We're creating a special section for high school submissions—and we're inviting YOU to be part of this groundbreaking project!

This is your opportunity to:

- Challenge yourself to think deeply about how תורה illuminates every part of חסידות.
- Develop your skills for researching and writing תורה concepts.
- Share your original תורה insights with readers around the world.

All students who have studied ענינה של תורת קונטרס are invited to participate.

Only ten essays will be selected for publication.

Selected writers will work with our editorial team through multiple rounds of review, helping you refine your ideas and produce a polished, high-quality essay for the journal.

Theme

This essay challenge is inspired by קונטרס ענינה של תורת חסידות, where the רבי explains the essence of חסידות and how it interacts with every other aspect of תורה. Using מודה אני as a case study, the רבי explores how חסידות both stands apart from other branches of תורה and profoundly influences them.

Your goal is to choose another topic or idea in תורה - it can be story in תני"ך, a מצוה, or an area of הלכה - and analyze the relationship between חסידות and פרד"ס, using the framework laid out in the קונטרס. You will demonstrate how חסידות uncovers a deeper dimension that illuminates and reveals the inner meaning of the classic interpretations.

Guidelines

Length:

900-1,200 words

Sources:

- Include at least 3 primary sources
- Minimum: 2 נגלה sources and 1 חסידות source
- Incorporate relevant explanations from at least two dimensions of דרוש, רמז, פשט, or סוד in addition to the explanation of חסידות

General Structure:

I. Introduction: Present your question/topic and why it matters

II. Traditional explanations: Introduce and analyze your classical sources

III. The Chassidic insight: Articulate your essential point

IV. Illumination: Show how חסידות interacts with the other explanations (using Principles 1-3 below)

V. Practical Impact: Explain how this insight shapes real life (Principle 4 below)

VI. Conclusion: Synthesis your ideas and offer final thoughts

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Four Key Principles of חסידות

Your essay should demonstrate the following core principles:

Principle 1: חסידות Goes Beyond Limits

While the four branches of פד"ס remain within their respective frameworks, חסידות transcends these boundaries.

In your essay: Identify which level of פד"ס your classic sources fit into, and show how the insights goes beyond those limits.

Principle 2: חסידות Connects the Dots

Sometimes different explanations about the same topic seem disconnected or contradictory. חסידות shows how they are all expressing one essential truth.

In your essay: Show how your חסידות insight unifies your sources into one coherent understanding.

Principle 3: חסידות Reveals What Was Always There

חסידות does not contradict the traditional sources - it shows you what was hidden in them all along. The same text suddenly "comes alive" when you see its deeper dimension.

In your essay: Show that your חסידות insight was already hinted at in the traditional sources, and demonstrate how those sources feel different once you uncover this deeper layer.

Principle 4: Essence is Conveyed through the Practical

תורה ideas aren't just for learning - they must impact how we live. The essence of a חסידות teaching is revealed most profoundly when it transforms our actual behavior and experience.

In your essay: Conclude your essay by demonstrating the practical impact this insight has on a person's life. How does it help us with real challenges? What do we do or feel differently?

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Evaluation Rubric

Your essay will be evaluated on:

Content & Scholarship (40%)

- Do you accurately represent and integrate your sources?
- Do you show a deep understanding of the תורה insight?
- Is your insight original and thoughtful?

Application of Four Principles (30%)

- Do you identify limitations of other explanations and show how תורה transcends them?
- Do you demonstrate how תורה links your sources together?
- Do you show how תורה reveals what was already there?
- Do you articulate real practical impact?

Writing & Clarity (20%)

- Is your essay well-organized with logical flow?
- Are complex ideas explained clearly?
- Is your writing grammatically correct and engaging?

Practical Impact (10%)

- Does your insight address real questions or challenges?
- Are your applications specific and concrete?
- Does this meaningfully deepen understanding or affect behavior?

Submissions

Please email any questions you have about the project and your submission to:

journal@batshevalearningcenter.com

Timeline

- January 28/ י"ג שבט: Submissions Due
- February 27/ י"ג אדר: Essays selected for publication
- March-April: Development and revision process

