

Beis Midrash Journal Articles

Introduction

We are all familiar with the structure of the רבי's שיחות רש"י: 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 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 גשי 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, 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 חידושי תורה חיוב to produce.

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Overview

This spring, Batsheva Learning Center will publish our first annual journal of women's תורה insights. Under the guidance of Mrs. Pessy Stolik, one of the journal's editors, you will research, develop, and write an original insight on a topic you have studied at the Beis Midrash. Selected submissions will be published in the journal.

The goal of this assignment is to strengthen your skills in learning, analyzing, and communicating תורה ideas in a thoughtful, thorough and nuanced way.

Theme

The theme for this year's journal centers around תורה קונטרס עיניה של תורת החסידות utilizing the structure of the קונטרס as a template for the articles. Before writing your article, study the קונטרס thoroughly in order to understand its core ideas.

Your goal is to apply the system of analysis that the רבי uses for מודה אני to another area of תורה, demonstrating the relationship that חסידות has with the other dimensions of תורה.

For your article, you may choose to analyze a story from תני"ך, הלכה, a midrash, or something else. Your article should demonstrate the following four key principles that are developed in the קונטרס:

1. חסידות conveys essence that transcends any specific form or limitation
2. חסידות links the other תורה explanations with each other
3. חסידות illuminates the other levels without contradicting them
4. The essence of חסידות is revealed most profoundly in its practical impact

Guidelines

Length:

1000-3000 words

Sources:

- Include at least 5 primary source (minimum 2 נגלה sources and 1 חסידות source)
- Incorporate explanations on your topic from at least two dimensions of פשט, רמז, or דרוש in addition to the explanation of חסידות

General Structure:

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

II. Traditional explanations: Present your sources

III. The Chassidic insight: Articulate your essential point

IV. Illumination: Explain how חסידות relates to and enriches the other explanations (Principles 1-3)

V. Practical Impact: Demonstrate how this insight changes our lives (Principle 4)

VI. Conclusion: Synthesis and final thoughts

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Evaluation Rubric

Content & Scholarship (40%)

- Source Mastery: Accurate representation and integration of sources
- Depth of Understanding: Demonstrates deep understanding of Chassidic thought and its unique insights
- Originality: Offers a novel insight, making new connections or addressing questions in new ways

Application of Four Principles (30%)

- Principle 1: Identifies forms/limitations and shows how תורתנו transcends them
- Principle 2: Demonstrates how Chassidic insight links traditional sources
- Principle 3: Explains how תורתנו illuminates traditional sources without contradicting them
- Principle 4: Shows how essence is revealed through its practical application

Structure & Clarity (20%)

- Organization: Logical flow throughout the essay
- Accessibility: Clear explanations of complex ideas
- Writing quality: Strong, grammatically accurate writing

Practical Impact & Relevance (10%)

- Authenticity: Addresses real questions/challenges
- Specificity: Concrete rather than vague applications
- Transformation: Shows genuine change in understanding or behavior
- Integration: Conceptual insight naturally flows into practical impact

Writing Workshops

Throughout the year, Mrs. Stolik will visit the Beis Midrash to run writing workshops to guide you through selecting a topic, researching sources, developing your ideas, and crafting your essay. She will also be available for individual meetings to review drafts and offer personalized feedback.

Timeline

- November:** Journal introduction
- December:** Workshop core principles
- January:** Topic selection and research
- February:** Incorporating sources and developing ideas
- February 17:** First Draft Due
- March:** Peer review and individual meetings with Mrs. Stolik
- March 19:** Final Draft Due
- April:** Final review and editing by the journal's editorial team