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The Soulful Faith in Every Jew (Middot HaRa'aya #10)

“The great faith in the Divine inherent in the heart of Jew is beyond assessment and beyond comparison...in the inner realm of the soul there is present the Divine light of yearning for the living God and for attachment to Him to the point of self-sacrifice.” (*Middot HaRa'aya, Emunah #10*)

Rav Kook contends that in the soul of every Jew exists a deep faith in God. Although at times this faith and attachment to the Creator may be “covered over by an outer filth” due to other influences, the core fire of faith is never extinguished.

Rav Kook cites two fascinating sources to anchor his position (*Ibid.*). The first is a passage in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 37a) which comments on the episode of our forefather Yitzchak imparting a blessing before his death. When Yaakov entered the room wearing the clothing of Esav, the verse says that Yitzchak could smell the distinctive smell of the clothing of his eldest son Esav (who wore his clothing in the field and for hunting). The Talmud comments on the verse: “And he [Yitzchak] smelled the

fragrance of Yaakov’s garments [*begadav*] and he blessed him’ (*Bereshit* 27:27), do not read *begadav*, which means “his garments” read it as *bogadav*, which means his ‘traitors’.”



Rav Abraham Isaac Kook zt"l

Apparently the Talmud is suggesting that Yitzchak knew that Esav had serious faults and had become “a traitor” to his faith and yet he was convinced that he deserved blessings because a Jewish soul always maintains a spark of pure faith in the Almighty.

In a second source Rav Kook cites the Midrash (*Bereshit Rabbah* 65:2) which tells the story of a Jewish traitor by

the name of Yosef Meshita who had sided with an enemy of Israel, The enemy asked that he enter the Temple and whatever he remove would be his. He entered and took the golden Menorah. When he returned to them they said that it's not appropriate for a commoner to make use of the Menorah. “Go in a second time and take what you want and it will be yours.” At that point Yosef refused. They then offered him an exorbitant amount of money. They began

to torture him and he still refused.

What caused Yosef to change his outlook and suddenly refuse to side with the enemy? Rav Kook suggested that his holy soul and inherent bond to the Creator had simply been blocked for many years and was finally freed. Rav Kook stated that the love was surely there all along: “What was revealed in the end was also present in the beginning, but it was covered over by outer filth, a result of the unclean influence of the nations...” (*Midot HaRa’aya, Emunah* #10)

THE HIDDEN LOVE OF THE BAAL HATANYA

Rav Kook’s proposition that a hidden faith in God abides in every Jewish soul surely echoes one of the celebrated teachings of the first Rebbe of Lubavitch found in his master work Tanya. In chapter 18 the Rebbe argues that the infinite light of God can be found within the soul of a Jew - no matter who he or she is. There is a hidden love which was inherited from our forefathers, who were great lovers of God, and therefore we have it within us.

It is noteworthy that the illustrious Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, who took issue with many of the other ideas espoused by Chassidut, agreed wholeheartedly with this notion. In his commentary on Pirkei Avot (*Ruach Chaim* 5:3) he highlights the fact that in the Mishna which lists the trials that Avraham endured, the Mishna employs the term “Avraham Avinu.” This addition of *Avinu* (our forefather) is meant to teach that he engraved in the soul of succeeding generations his unique attributes. Therefore even simple, unlearned Jews, have the fortitude to live their lives, and at times to give up their lives, for the sake of God in the same way Avraham was willing to give his life in



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Ur Kasdim for the sake of God. Rabbi Chaim Volozhin writes: “All the ten tests charted a course for us. Indeed, how many people feel the urge to go to the Holy Land, to Eretz Yisrael! This is from the test of *Lech Lecha* (“Go out from your land).” (*Ruach Chaim*, comment on Mishna 5:3)

ADDRESSING THE NON-BELIEVER

Rav Kook did not regard those Jews who questioned and even abandoned traditional Jewish living as necessarily being rebellious. He perceived them as people who often were sincerely searching for truth and deeper understanding. Thus, he said, it behooves the traditional Jewish community to address their doubts and share with them Torah teachings so that they will see the profound wisdom of the depth of our faith. “The present generation is not a low generation, but rather a very high and superior one...we must give it wisdom, and welcome it with an optimistic attitude. Its values of righteousness and ethics are extremely idealistic, and we only need to purify and elevate them.” (*Kevatzim Miktav Yad Kodsho 1, Pinkas Rishon l”Yaffo* 79, translated in *Spiritual Revolution* vol. 1, Shwartz, p. 172)

THE KOHEN QUALITY IN EVERY SOUL

Rav Kook felt that the notion of deep-rooted faith embedded in the heart of

every Jew is symbolized by the Chanukah story and the oil that remained untainted and shone brightly in the darkness of the onslaught of the Greeks. Rav Kook presented this idea in the following beautiful way: *She-men* (oil) represents *middot* (character traits) and *deot* (ideas). The Greeks defiled the Jewish people's thoughts and values in the days of Chanukah. However, every Jew has the quality of the Kohen, which is a faith in God and a longing to live a better life in the light of Hashem's Torah. The inner Kohen Gadol is representative of the unbreakable faith and love a Jew has for Hashem. When the inner Kohen Gadol becomes buried deep inside of us and almost is completely inaccessible, Hashem wakes up our emunah (faith) Himself. (Ain Aya, Shabbat daf 21)

BEGIN THE DAY WITH EMUNAH

It is worthy of note that one of the first words a Jew utters to begin his day is the word: *emunah*. The phrase recited each morning when one arises from their sleep, *Modeh ani*, concludes with the words *raba emunatecha* (great is Your faithfulness). Rav Kook suggested that God's great faith in his world and his creation means that He has faith in each individual. God's faith in humanity inevitably instills within each individual a powerful sense of confidence and purpose.

When a person recites *Modeh ani* and awakens to a new day, the message embedded in the words, *Modeh ani*, awakens a person to the awareness of the profound depth of God's faith in each of His creations. Every individual soul has been placed on this earth by God to fulfill a unique mission that is unique to every person. (*Siddur Olat Re'iya*, vol. 1, p. 3)

LIFE LESSONS

- Do something that will cause God's existence to be more clearly recognized in this world. Mention God's name in three conversations today.
- Stop for a moment before saying 'God willing' or 'thank God' and think about the words. Internalize them before speaking.
- Discover something beautiful about God's world that you never noticed before.
- Like Avraham, use your discovery to better appreciate the Oneness of God. ■



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