

Mussar Kallah 2022: Walking the Path of Truth

Va'ad 2: Walking the Path of Truth in our Relationships¹

Introduction

This *va'ad* will focus on Truth/*Emet* in our interpersonal relationships, community and larger society. The focus will be on exploring where our inner truths create *timtum ha'lev*, a stopped-up heart and using complementary *middot* to help us bring healing, compassion, and transformative awareness to those places.

The format of this *va'ad* differs slightly from the first and has a greater focus on integrating the lessons within the *va'ad* process. Please allow your facilitator to guide you through this process according to what he or she feels is best. As before, there is no expectation that the group cover all the source texts included here and you are encouraged to revisit these materials in your own time.

May the study we engage in here contribute to greater compassion in our hearts and in the world.

Outline of this *va'ad* session:

- A. Welcome and Centering
- B. Check in
- C. Text Discussion and Integration
 - Text Discussion One
 - Integration/Journaling #1
 - Text Discussion Two (10 min)
 - Integration/Journaling #2
 - Text Discussion Three (10 min)
 - Integration/ Journaling #3
 - Text Discussion Four (10 min)
 - Integration/Journaling #4
- D. Take Away
- E. Closing

A. Welcome and Centering

¹ Prepared by Julie Dean and Avi Fertig.

Your group leader will begin the meeting by welcoming participants and leading a brief centering exercise to help you make the transition into the sacred space of the *va'ad*.

The Healing of the Hardened Heart by Rabbi Yael Levy

May we:

Free ourselves from stories that bind us to anger, jealousy and pain.
Let go of habits that perpetuate isolation and fear.
Free ourselves from reacting with harsh judgment and disdain.
Let go of ways of being that keep us from seeing ourselves in each other.

May the softening of the hardened heart guide us to enter into fuller connection with each other and the unfolding of all life.

B. Check In

Your *va'ad* leader will guide you in an exercise to share some personal thoughts and feelings to help us get a gauge on where everyone is as the session begins.

C. Text Discussion and Integration

The following texts all reflect on our current theme of walking the path of truth in our relationships. Your facilitator will lead you in a discussion of some of them, and you will have time to journal your own reflections after each text discussion.

Source 1: Inner truth and the *yetzer ha'ra* – we know *kavod*/honor is an essential practice and yet it can become increasingly difficult to sustain *kavod*/honor when we hold truths that are different from those of another person. The following texts are intended to help us explore hearing the voice of our *yetzer ha'ra*. We all have a *yetzer ha'ra*; it's time to get to know it a little better!

- a) Alan Morinis & Avi Fertig: Each of us has a unique *yetzer ha'ra*, perfectly programmed to match our own personal spiritual curriculum, and so you need to do your own reflection to grasp the pattern as it plays out in your own life.
- b) As Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote in *Derech Hashem (The Way of God)*:

“A human being is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to God. A person is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. A person must earn this perfection, however, through their

own free will... A person's inclinations are therefore balanced between good (*yetzer ha'tov*) and evil (*yetzer ha'ra*), and one is not compelled toward either of them. A person has the power of choice and is able to choose either side knowingly and willingly...."

- c) Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953, *Strive for Truth!*): "Even after the desires of one's heart have persuaded one to accept the false way as true, one still knows in one's heart of hearts that the true path is 'truer' than the other one... Every human being thus has the faculty of determining in their own heart where the real truth lies."
- ❖ Journaling #1: Choose one relationship in your life that challenges you. Not the biggest, most emotionally triggering situation in your life. Choose a situation in the mid-range, a relationship in which you wish to bring some healing. Allow yourself to hear your *yetzer ha'ra*: What is your truth about this situation? What is your biggest judgment of this person? What should or shouldn't they do?

Source 2: Exploring *Timtum Ha'lev* – a stopped up or barricaded heart.

- a) Alan Morinis and Avi Fertig: However, our hearts will act on that inclination [of deeper truth] only when they are open, and that is not always our heart's condition. When our hearts are closed or walled off, we are suffering from a spiritual ailment that the Mussar teachers call *timtum ha'lev*, meaning a blocked or barricaded heart—literally a stopped-up heart. Instead of being open, flowing and generous, we are apathetic, constipated, and unwilling at our core. The problem is not the human heart, the problem is an obstructed, hard heart.
- b) Deuteronomy 10:16:
"Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more."

וּמִלְתֶּם אֶת עַרְלֹת לִבְבְּכֶם וְעֲרַפְכֶם לֹא תִקְשׁוּ עוֹד

Ramban says, "Cut away/Initiate (lit., circumcise) the blockage of your hearts so that your hearts will be open to know the truth."

Ibn Ezra says similarly, "It is also possible to interpret it [to mean] to purify the heart until it understands truth."

- c) Alan Morinis: You need to ask yourself what is blocking your heart from functioning in its natural state. As the blockages are removed, you will

return to joy and out of that will come the pure, unbridled and spontaneous generosity that is the truest reflection of your humanity.

- ❖ Journaling #2: How does *timtum ha'lev* impact your interaction with the person you described in your journaling? When you look honestly at your own experience of *timtum ha'lev*, which *middot* do you notice being impacted by your blocked/stopped up heart: humility (*anavah*), patience (*savlanut*), mindful speech (*shmirat ha'lashon*), lovingkindness (*chesed*), etc. Briefly describe how these *middot* are impacted.

Source 3: Attaining *Shivron Ha'lev* – This term refers to the opposite of *timtum ha'lev*. Literally meaning a “broken heart” (but NOT in the sense of sadness), one may choose to see this as the process of cracking open or softening a hardened heart, allowing the light of compassion to make room for *kavod*.

- a) Rabbi Yisrael Salanter tells us that the study (and practice) of Mussar is designed to combat *timtum ha'lev*. *Ohr Yisrael*, Letter 7
- b) Rebbe Elazar publicly taught that one should be “soft as a reed, not hard like cedar.” (Talmud Ta’anit 20a)
- c) Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Growth through Torah*:

Rabbi Bloch teaches that a person needs to be rooted very strongly in their principles and ideals. Nothing should uproot you from your values. But perhaps, surprisingly, the way to do this is to be pliant like the reed. This means being soft and flexible when relating to others. A person who is obstinate and inflexible when dealing with others might seem to be stronger, but that is an illusion. Such a person can be broken more easily. A lack of flexibility means that any movement will be forced and lead to breakage. Apparent strength is in reality a weakness. Softness and gentleness combined with persistence in keeping one’s principles is the approach that wins out in the end.

- ❖ Journaling #3: Stand in their Shoes. Using the scenario from the first two journaling exercises, ask yourself: What is it like to be this person? What do you know of their personal history? Why do they believe or act like they do? Briefly describe what you know or imagine to be their struggles, their pain.

Source 4: Softening through Compassion/*Rachamim*

- a) Sifre D'varim 49: "Just as God is called compassionate and gracious, so you too must be compassionate and gracious."
 - b) *Orchot Tzaddikim*: "Compassion is an extremely noble soul-trait. Anything that one can do to cultivate this soul-trait, one should exert oneself to do. Just as one wishes to receive compassion in one's own time of need, so too one should have compassion on others when they are in need. As it is written, 'And you should love your neighbor as yourself' [Leviticus 19:18]."
 - c) Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570): "In everyone there is actually a part of one's fellow human, and therefore a person should want one's fellow's happiness and honor as much as their own, because he or she is really yourself, and that is why we were commanded to 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"
- ❖ Journaling #4: What is this situation trying to teach you? What is one small, doable action you can take toward continuing to become 'softer like a reed' rather than 'harder like a cedar?' Some examples might include:
- Listening with a more open countenance
 - Including them in your prayers for healing
 - Replacing negative judgments with a phrase for *Kavod/Honor*
 - Catching yourself and stopping *lashon ha'ra* about this person

D. Take Away

Your *va'ad* leader will invite each participant to share one take away from this session.

E. Closing

Ezekiel 36: "I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

May we each go forth with courage and joy as we hold our truths and the truths of others with, humility, honor and compassion.

This completes the second of the three *va'ad* meetings that are on the schedule for the Kallah.