

Big Questions in Jewish Spirituality



Foreword

There is a reason that the first two words of this curriculum are “Big Questions.” In the search for meaning, students yearn for answers to questions that may not have been asked in recent generations. And they have only grown bigger and bigger.

Jewish education has long excelled in teaching the “what” and “how” of Jewish life, equipping students with the practices, skills, and knowledge necessary to live a committed Jewish life. Yet today’s generation faces new and complex challenges. Bombarded with so many competing values, students feel pulled in every direction, deepening their thirst for meaning and driving their demand for answers to life’s biggest questions.

Why does Judaism matter? How does it connect to my identity, purpose, and relationships?

The events of and following October 7, 2023 did not create this demand, but they certainly exposed, exacerbated, and amplified the yearning for connection. At this critical juncture, we are called upon to reimagine Jewish education—infusing it with greater depth, relevance, and inspiration to meet the spiritual needs of today’s generation. R. Kook explained:

חלק גדול מהדור הצעיר איננו חש כל כבוד לכל מה שהורגל, לא מפני שאופלה נפשו... כי אם מפני שעלה עד המקום... מפני מיעוט העבודה בתלמודם של יסודי הרגש והדעת שבמרחב התורה—“הועם זהב ושונא הכתם הטוב” (איכה ד:א) עד שנדמה לו שהכל הוא שפל הרבה מערכו. (מאמר הדור)

A significant portion of the younger generation does not feel any respect for what they have been accustomed to—not because their souls have been darkened... Rather, it is because they have ascended to a level where... due to the lack of effort invested in studying the foundational emotions and intellect within the vast expanse of Torah—“the gold has become dim, the fine gold has changed” (Lamentations 4:1), and it seems to them as though all of it is far beneath their dignity. (Ma’amar Hador)

In our times, this means amplifying a dimension of Torah that has always existed but was not emphasized in most mainstream circles: *Pnimiyut*, the inner dimension. Including many areas, *Pnimiyut* addresses the deeper spiritual truths that connect practices to their broader context and purpose. It enriches our understanding of our connection to God, the meaning of creation, and the complexities of the soul.

While *Sod*, literally the secrets of the Torah, has not been revealed to the masses and serves as an essential counterpoint to the revealed Torah, it is in this realm that some of the greatest teachers and thinkers have attempted to address the “why” questions through the lens of Jewish faith and text. As Ramchal writes:

הנה ידוע כי האדם בנוי מנשמה וגוף ובתורה הפשט והסוד (מאמר הויכוח, הקדמה)

Just as a person is composed of body and soul, so too does the Torah comprise its literal understanding and secrets. (Ma’amar Havikuach, Introduction)

By integrating these two aspects, we can offer a complete and transformative Jewish education for the youth of today.

This curriculum returns to foundational ideas of spirituality in an accessible way. Through carefully crafted units, this work gently guides educators and students alike in exploring spiritual concepts that enrich their understanding of Torah and connect them to everyday practices.

Each unit poses a “big question” in spirituality and provides sources, teaching material, and student-centered activities fostering meaningful discussion and exploration. From this perspective, it empowers students to explore the essential questions of life, deepen their relationship with God, and connect their personal stories to the broader tapestry of Jewish tradition.

This curriculum presents Judaism in a way that today’s generation is yearning for—one that speaks to their deepest questions and aspirations. By bridging the “what” and “how” of Torah with the “why,” it paves the way for a vibrant future of Jewish learning that inspires and endures.

This work represents Share's first foray into the world of education, building on our broader mission to meet the spiritual needs of today's world by revealing the inner dimensions of Torah through a range of initiatives, including online content, publishing, curricula, events and supporting current and future leaders and influencers. To learn more about Share visit share.fund.

We are honored to partner with the Lookstein Center at Bar-Ilan University, whose expertise in Jewish education and dedication to empowering teachers made them the perfect partners for this project. Their innovative approach and passion for spirituality in the classroom has been instrumental in shaping a curriculum that we believe will inspire and transform students and educators alike. We are indebted to the incredible team whose hard work, creativity, and commitment were pivotal in bringing this vision to life. This work is the culmination of extensive surveys, studies, and research into the educational and spiritual needs of Jewish students and educators, as well as years of development and refinement.

However, this curriculum is only complete when you, the educator, make it your own and learn it with your students—the custodians of our future. Partner with us and all those on this journey, to help share meaningful and relevant Torah for your students by addressing with them Big Questions in Jewish Spirituality.

This curriculum is accompanied by teacher training (see next page) and practical resources to support its implementation.

Keep reading to learn more, or visit: lookstein.org/bigquestions

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