



The Meaning of Wholesomeness: Rebbe Shalom Dov Ber of Lubavitch, the Rashab

Rebbe Shalom Dov Ber Schneerson, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, was the founder of the Lubavitch yeshiva network, Tomchei Temimim and was called 'the Rambam of Chassidut.' He was born on the 20th of Cheshvan in 5621 (November, 1860) and passed away on the second of Nissan, 5680 (1920). He was laid to rest in Rostov in Russia.

Once a major meeting of rabbis was planned in Petersburg to discuss the burning issues of the day and their impact on the Jews of the region. All the great Torah scholars of the generation attended. Among them were the Rebbe Rashab representing the Chassidim and Rabbi Haim of Brisk, representing the Lithuanian stream of Judaism. A preparatory meeting was called for the Sunday before the meeting in one of the towns. The Rebbe Rashab, accompanied by one of his senior Chassidim, reached the town before Shabbat. They found an inn, the Rebbe prayed with the congregation at the local synagogue and all the while, they did not reveal the Rebbe's identity to anyone.

On Sunday, Rabbi Haim of Brisk arrived at the town. Everyone heard of the arrival of the Torah giant and went out to welcome him. Rabbi Haim, who knew that the Rebbe Rashab was already there, asked where the Lubavitcher Rebbe was staying – but nobody knew. Only after some investigation did they understand that the guest who had prayed at the synagogue over Shabbat was none other than the Rebbe, himself. "How could it be that the Lubavitcher Rebbe was staying here and you did not know?" Rabbi Haim rebuked the townspeople.

In those days, in emergency situations for the Jews, all the Torah leaders would gather together to search for a solution. The great Chassidim and great Lithuanian rabbis would come together with love for each other. Not only that, but Rabbi Haim of Brisk would always completely adopt the Rebbe Rashab's opinion. This raised more than a few eyebrows among the rabbis there. "Why do you always concur with the Lubavitcher Rebbe's opinion? What authority does he have for you?" they asked Rabbi Haim. "All of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's pockets are filled with self-sacrifice," Rabbi Haim of Brisk answered. "When self-sacrifice is needed, he just inserts his hand into his pocket and pulls some out. Do you think that I shouldn't listen to a person with so much self-sacrifice? Do you think that I shouldn't answer amen to his opinion?"

From this story, we can learn about wholesomeness (*temimut*) - an attribute that the Rebbe Rashab, the founder of the Tomchei Temimim yeshivahs, highlighted as the core attribute of Chassidut.

The Alter Rebbe said that one must “live with the times,” with the Torah portion of the week. Our sages explain the first verse in the Torah portion of Chayei Sarah, “And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years, the years of the life of Sarah,” with the verse in Psalms 37:8 “God knows the days of *temimim* (the wholesome).” They explain that “just as they are wholesome, so their years are wholesome - twenty years old like a seven-year-old for beauty, one hundred years old like a twenty-year-old regarding sin.” A number of commentators ask a question about this explanation (which is also quoted by Rashi): Is a seven-year-old more beautiful than a twenty-year-old? On the surface, just the opposite is true!

The commentators explain something very important, which is the inner meaning of the explanation of “God knows the days of *temimim*” regarding Sarah, the first *temimah*. They explain that a seven-year-old does not know that she is beautiful, and thus, her beauty is simply sincere. Her beauty is part of her natural consciousness. She is not conscious of herself. She did not yet eat of the Tree of Knowledge and is not conceited. She doesn’t stand in front of the mirror thinking how pretty she is. If a young woman of twenty is still not conscious of her beauty, we say that “twenty years old like a seven-year-old.” This explanation best defines the attribute of *temimut*, wholesomeness.

When we understand the attribute of *temimut* in this manner, we see that it is the rectification of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, Eve’s sin, which injected mankind with excessive self-consciousness. Sarah rectified Eve’s sin.

According to Jewish law, a man should not look in a mirror as part of the prohibition against men wearing women’s attire. A woman, however, is allowed to look in the mirror. Some commentators explain that a woman is allowed to have self-consciousness, which is prohibited for a man. But here we see the opposite: When a righteous woman, like Sarah, looks in the mirror she experiences a divestment of physicality. She is not conscious of herself (which is not true of a man who looks in the mirror). A righteous woman can even put on makeup without consciousness of self. This is the true beauty of a daughter of Israel, the beauty of “God knows the days of the *temimim*.”

One of the great Torah scholars of the later generations, the Maharam Shif, explains the praise for a bride, “A beautiful and graceful bride,” in the same manner. What is her grace? He explains that she is not conscious of her beauty, it is wholesome beauty. When we do not have self-consciousness, we are wholesome and not looking to stand out (*blitus*, in the language of Chassidut). Even if nobody recognizes us (as was the case with the Rebbe Rashab in the town), it is just fine.