

KEVER OF THE AISH KODESH



Basic facts about the Aish Kodesh

- ▶ **Kalonymus Kalman Shapira** was a Grand Rabbi of **Piaseczno, Poland**.
- ▶ He was **murdered by the Nazis** during the Holocaust.
- ▶ He was deeply focused on the education of children and young men, establishing the yeshiva **Da'as Moshe** in 1923 which became one of the largest Chassidic yeshivot in Warsaw between the wars.
- ▶ His most important and well-known work is **Chovas HaTalmidim**.
- ▶ After the invasion of Poland, Rabbi Shapira was interned with a few of his chassidim in the **Warsaw Ghetto**, where he ran a secret synagogue. He invested enormous efforts in **maintaining Jewish life in the ghetto**, including arranging for mikveh immersions and kosher marriages.
- ▶ Rabbi Shapira is well-known for a book that he wrote while in the ghetto. The book, which is a compilation of weekly sermons to his students, contends with **complex questions of faith** in the face of the mounting suffering of the Jews in the ghetto. When it became apparent to Rabbi Shapira that the end of the ghetto and all its inhabitants was near, he buried the book in a canister. This canister was found by a construction worker after the end of the war. The book was published in Israel in 1960 under the title **Aish Kodesh**.

Excerpts from Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira's Journal ("To Heal the Soul")

CHAPTER 1: BEQUEATHING A SPIRITUAL JOURNAL TO POSTERITY

How rewarding it would be if after the end of our lives, we could live another seventy years. We struggle a lifetime training ourselves to uncover our self-deceptions and to nurture the inner greatness of our souls. Then, in a second lifetime, we could reap the fulfillment of living a perfected life even in this imperfect world. But suddenly, after decades of struggle, instead we are gone...taken back into the womb of God.

This being the case, the second best thing is to record your inner life in a journal. This will not be something you do to earn immortal fame as an author, but rather to engrave your soul-portrait on paper. Write down all your inner struggles, your setbacks and successes, and grant them eternal life. This way your very essence, the personality of your soul, your spiritual attainments, your life's inner treasures, will live on forever in the lives of your spiritual heirs as generations come and go.

CHAPTER 2: WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

If your life's aim is to serve God with constant improvement and to reach age seventy beyond your bar mitzvah level, then here is the thing to do:

Each year, clarify a goal and envision the actualized "you" of next year. Visualize who this "you" will be: his attainments...his daily life...his character...and his inner essence. Use this envisioned "you" also as a gauge to know how far you still have to go. Is your present daily progress enough to create the reality of that envisioned future "you"?

But if next year comes and you have not actualized that "you," it is as if your life has been cut short. The new "you" was aborted, it is not alive now, you are still an old "you" of perhaps years ago.

This is the meaning of "And Avraham was old, advanced in years" (Genesis 24:1): The Avraham of this year was the advanced Avraham of this year, not the Avraham of the past.

CHAPTER 30: THE POWER OF JEWISH JOY AND TEARS

A record of some thoughts and feelings from the High Holidays and Festivals of 1993, especially from the dancing.

"God! Do You hear our cries? What will You do with the countless Jewish tears that were shed during these past Days of Awe? What will You do with the oceans of Jewish tears spilled over the last two decades? During the past twenty-five hun-

dred years? Have these waters of hold passion been, God forbid, lost like rivers into the ocean? And what are You doing with all Your own tears, so to speak, that You shed every day over our desolation and our affliction?

“God! Intimate and Immanent Creator! You have crated worlds beyond worlds, and in each You have created countless creatures. Yet in all the vast infiniteness of Your universes, only man have you created to serve You. All of the others do not really serve You and cannot proclaim You as the ultimate Master.

“And out of all mankind, it is only the Jew who, with his heart and soul, is ready to serve You. Merciful Father, we bear suffering to serve You, and You seem to watch from the distance! Our souls pour forth with our tears in order to serve You, and You seem to watch with impassion! The entire world derides us and beats us because we refuse to deny You- are You, too, going to beat us? We seek asylum from holocausts in Your Presence- are You to then conceal Your holy Presence? We lift our spirits by calling to our Father in Heaven- are You then to shut out our cries by closing the gates of Heaven?

“Surely we have sinned and You have many claims against us, but God!- let our prosecutors bear witness: throughout all the cosmos only Your Jewish People rose to say Selichot! Who but Your Jewish People resounded the shofar throughout the heavens, and who so enlightened the upper world with Yom Kippur, sukkah and lulav if not Your Jewish People?

...”Please, God! Hear the voice of our cries! Have pity on Yourself, so to speak, and on us- Your children and servants. Draw us out of the darkness and near to You! True, what are our actions, our repentance and penance before You Whose holy angels tremble with awe? Who is really worthy of Your Presence? But still, have we not purified our very souls by immersing in the oceans of our tears? See how each one of us, when outpouring his bitter soul, is at the same time rejoicing in Your Presence, totally surrendering his very essence to Your will and cleaning his mind of any unwanted presence. No slightest thought will now enter my mind to spoil the bliss of this moment. All is now Light and holiness...My very being I surrender to this Light. Is our immersing in these holy waters not enough even for our low level in order that we enter Your Presence?

“God! We rely on Your justness and rejoice in Your salvation!”