

Living in the LIGHT

Revealing Hashem's Astounding
Fingerprints in the World Around Us



Rabbi Yehuda Schonfeld

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

Revealing Hashem's Astounding Fingerprints in the World
Around Us

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בס"ד
י"ח סיון, תשפ"ד

לכבוד הרב יהודה שאנפעלד, שליט"א

הובא לפני ספרך בענין נפלאות הבורא וטובותיו המופלאים שכל יום
עמנו, ותכליתו לעורר הלבבות להכיר חסדי ה' עלינו תמיד, והוא ענין חשוב
מאד.

ברכתי שיתקבל וימצא חן אצל אחינו בני ישראל ויזכה להמנות ממזכי
הרבים.

בברכת הצלחה,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "שמואל קמנצקי" (Shmuel Kamenetsky).

הן בא לפני ידידי יקירי הרב ר' יהודה שאהנפעלד שליט"א, בן ידידי יקירי ידיד מגדולי מקורבי בית אבא הרה"ג ר' יעקב שליט"א ובידו עלים לתרופה מספרו היקר והחשוב אשר בשם Living in the Light יקבנו, ובתוכו פרקים נרחבים לבאר יסודות האמונה בדברים ערבים ומתוקים, מפי ספרים וסופרים, וסידרו וערכו בשפה המדוברת בטוב טעם ודעת, ובשפה ברורה ונעימה.

שמעתי ממרן ראש הישיבה מו"ח הגרי"ח ש צ"ל לפרש דברי רש"י עה"פ (שמות ד', ח') 'והיה אם לא יאמינו לך ולא ישמעו לקול האות הראשון והאמינו לקול האות האחרון', וז"ל, משתאמר להם בשבילכם לקיתי על שספרתי עליכם לשה"ר יאמינו לך, שכבר למדו בכך שהמזדווגין להרע לישראל לוקים בנגעים, כגון פרעה ואבימלך בשביל שרה, עכ"ל. והרי צריך פירוש במה נזדווג משה רבינו ע"ה להרע לישראל באמרו והן לא יאמינו לי. ופירש מרן ראש הישיבה זצ"ל, שבאמת כלל ישראל במצרים, אף בהיותם במדרגה שפלה בחייהם יום יום בבחי' האמונה בהש"ת כמאמרם ז"ל הללו עובדי ע"ז והללו עובדי ע"ז, אמנם בפנימיות ובעומק נפשותם אמונתם איתנה וקיימת בבחי' יתד שלא תמוט, שהרי הם מאמינים בני מאמינים, שאמונתם מושרשת בהם מכח האבות והאמהות הקדושים. והרי אם משה רבינו אינו מכיר בכח אמונתם הרי הם בעצמם אינם מכירים, "אפילו משה רבינו ווייס נישט איז זיי אליין וויסען אודאי נישט", והיה משליחות משה רבינו להודיע להם שבאמת הם מלאים אמונה, ועליו להוציא אמונתם מכח אל הפועל, וזהו אומר ית' 'ושמעו לקולך'. ובאמרו משה רבינו 'והן לא יאמינו לי' בא לספר שחסר בהם כח האמונה, ובזה הם בסכנה שח"ו תכבה אש האמונה בקרבם, והרי"ז בחי' נוראה של מזדווג להרע להם וכמש"כ רש"י, וכן הוא בחי' כלל ישראל לדורי דורות עד נצח, שאמונתנו הקדושה מושרשת בנו בבחי' "תורת אמן", תורה של כנסת ישראל.

והנה דבר גדול עושה בעמיו ידידי הרב ר' יהודה שליט"א, אשר בא ללמד ולבאר לזרע עם קודש יסודות האמונה, ולהשריש בהם כי הם מאמינים בני מאמינים, ובתחבולות ועצות איך להשריש ולהחדיר האמונה בטבע נפשם בקיין ויסוד חזק. וגם אחז בתורת חסד שטרח ויגע לכתוב בשפה המדוברת בשפה ברורה ונעימה, אשר יהיו מובנים ומתוקים לכל, אשר עי"כ יוכלו להשיב את נפשם באור האמת והאמונה, וכבר כתב הרמב"ם בפירוש המשניות סוף מסכת ברכות "כי יקר בעיני ללמד עיקר מעיקרי הדת והאמונה יותר מכל אשר אלמדהו". וכבר איתמחי גברא ואיתמחי קמיעא שזכה מכבר להו"ל ספר Enjoy His World, להעמיק בהתבוננות בטובות וחסדי הבורא ית' במעשיו ובראיו הנפלאים, ועכשיו הניף ידו להוסיף עוד נדבך ואבן יקר בשורת חיבוריו, ספר בהדרכה מעשית ביסודות חיים באור האמונה.

והנני בזה לברכו מקרב לב, שאכן יזכהו השי"ת לברך על המוגמר, ולהוציא לאור עולם פרי עמלו ויגיעו, ולהמשיך דרכו ועלייתו בקודש ללמוד וללמד, וללכת מחיל אל חיל בקניני התורה"ק מתוך בריות גופא ונהורא מעליא ומתוך מנוחת הנפש והרחבת הדעת עד כי יבוא שילה בב"א.

הכו"ח ברגשי הוקרה והערצה רבה

319 תרי"ג 1952



Harav Boruch Hirschfeld Shlita
Rosh Kollel

אלול ה'תשפ"ה
Sept '25

Rabbi Yehuda Schonfeld, זצ"ל, has written an easy to read book called LIVING IN THE LIGHT. It is a practical guide for any reader to achieve life's goal of clinging to Hashem [Devarim 10:20]. Awareness of His presence, guidance and involvement in every aspect of creation can be felt by examining every detail of the world with Torah insight. This sefer prompts the reader to do so.

קדושה

B. Hirschfeld

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בס"ד

משה צבי דנציגר
ק"ק אור יעקב
ריינסר, ליקוואוד

I HAVE KNOWN ר' יהודה SCHWARTZ FOR MANY YEARS
AND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMPRESSED WITH HIS קו"פ OF
'ה' 13, WE SAW THE RESULTS OF HIS SINCERE SEARCH
IN HIS PREVIOUS BOOK "ENJOY HIS WORLD".

IN THIS BOOK ר' יהודה SHARES WITH US HOW BEING
COGNIZANT AND AWARE OF THE 'ה' 13 IN THE WORLD
WE LIVE IN CAN, SHOULD AND MUST WILL BRING ANY
THINKING PERSON TO A DEEP INTERNAL SYNC.

AT THE SAME TIME ר' יהודה EXPLAINS FOR US IN HIS
BEAUTIFUL STYLE, HOW THE מצוות ARE SO SWEET
OPPORTUNITIES FOR קיימת אלקים AND NOT IN A LIST OF
RESTRICTIVE LAWS.

I COMMEND ר' יהודה ON THIS WONDERFUL ספר. MAY HE BE
WIS THAT HIS HARD WORK RESULT IN HELPING MANY SERVE
THE רב with TRUE CONVICTION AND DEEP אמת.

באהבה וקיימות

שלח בברכה
ר' צבי

הסכמה מאת הרה"ג הרב משה בלומבערג שליט"א
ראש חבורה בית מדרש גבוה לייקוואוד נ. דו.

ה'תשנ"א

לכבוד ידידי ר' יהודה שליט"א

נהניתי מאד מספרך הנובע מלבך הטהור "ספר מאפילה לאור גדול" (ובדרך רמז הוא גימט' שנה
שלנו תשפ"ו גמט' "ושכנתי" בתוכו כל או"א) המאיר עיני מבקשי ה' בעינינים פשוטים אבל
נדרסים מבלי באי מועד וזמן להתבונן בהם, ונכתב בשפה מדוברת שהיא תועלת גדול בפרט לדור
החדש שצריכים חיוק מאד באמונה פשוטה בחשכת הגלות שדרים בה, וה' הטוב יתן לך ס"ד
מרובה שיתקבל ספרא דא בבתי ישראל הקדושים ולהמשיך הלאה בעבורתך להעיר ולהאיר קרבת
אלקים לי טוב וכסו"ס ועד.

החומש בראשית ובראשית

משה בלומבערג

לכבוד ידידי ר' יהודה שליט"א

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אלקים לי טוב וכסו"ס ועד.

החומש בהערה והערצה

משה בלומבערג

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May Hashem *bentch* all of you with only good and may we merit to greet **Mashiach** together, *bimheira b'yameinu, amen*.

Note: There are so many people to thank for a project like this. If I left **You** out, please forgive me — it was my own oversight.

1

PART ONE

*Part One of this book is about the mitzvah of emunah,
as well as how to transform and uplift one's entire
relationship with Hashem.*

A LETTER TO THE READER

Dear Reader,

The world has a Creator who is involved in every aspect of our lives. It is a Torah *mitzvah* to be intensely aware of this—the *mitzvah* of *emunah* in Hashem. The purpose of this book is to provide fascinating evidence for Hashem’s presence in our lives to help you strengthen your *emunah*.

There are also tangible benefits to developing strong *emunah*. With strong *emunah*, a person will be composed—calm and ready to face the inevitable tests of life. In contrast, a person with weak *emunah* is vulnerable and ill-equipped to handle what comes his way. Even a small disturbance in his life can shake his faith in Hashem, *chas v’shalom*, with all the resulting anxieties and distresses.

Some people may feel that they already have strong *emunah*. “What can be added to what I already know?” they might wonder.

We can learn the answer from our greatest leader, Moshe Rabbeinu.

In the Torah, Moshe asked Hashem to reveal Himself completely to him.¹ He wanted to know Hashem on the deepest level possible.

But when this request was made, Moshe was already on an inconceivably high spiritual level, having already spent many days with Hashem, at the top of *Har Sinai*.² Yet Moshe *still* felt that his

¹ Shemos, 33:18.

² Moshe Rabbeinu spent forty days and nights on Har Sinai receiving the Torah, then

emunah was incomplete; he wanted to know Hashem on the ultimate, highest level possible! (However, Hashem said that one cannot achieve this level and still live.³)

This teaches us that one should never feel complacent in his level of *emunah*. Even Moshe Rabbeinu had room to grow—and he wanted to grow, because every degree of intensified *emunah* is a tremendous achievement.

How can one strengthen his *emunah*? Well, most people know that *emunah* can be gained from learning about the natural world, such as the complexity of living creatures—humans, animals, and plants. Every living thing, no matter how simple it may appear, is so staggeringly complicated that it simply could not have resulted from an accident. They all must have been made by an intelligent designer. Likewise, studying the incredible harmony and perfection of the celestial bodies, the laws of physics, and any of the other forces which make up our world will surely amaze every person and strengthen his *emunah* in the Creator.

But nature is just one of many areas that a person can study to find Hashem. In truth, there are so many such areas that were a person to study them, he'd be bursting with *emunah*!

In this book you will discover dozens of astounding 'fingerprints' of Hashem that you probably never thought about. They'll open your eyes to a new world of *emunah*.⁴

We'll begin by learning about the *mitzvah* of *emunah*. Then we'll go on to discover how to transform your relationship with Hashem, an important prerequisite to acquiring *emunah*. After

another forty days and nights on the mountain begging Hashem's forgiveness for the *chet ha'egel*, and then another forty days and nights receiving the Torah a second time.

³ Shemos 33:20.

⁴ This study is what the *sefer* Chovos HaLevavos calls '*bechina*,' reflection.

that, we'll go on to learn about the incredible fingerprints of Hashem—and you *really* don't want to miss those!

Yehuda

P.S. As mentioned, having *emunah* in Hashem is a *mitzvah min haTorah*. The *halacha* is that *mitzvos* require *kavana*, (intent to fulfill the *mitzvah*).⁵ Therefore, when reading this book, have in mind to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *emunah* in Hashem. Think:

I'm having in mind to fulfill the Mitzvah of Emunah in Hashem, as Hashem has commanded.

הריני מכוין לקיים
מצות אמונת השם
כאשר צוה השם

⁵ See the English *sefer* “Ka’asher Tziva Hashem” by Rabbi Daniel Garfinkel for an in-depth understanding of this topic.

CHAPTER ONE



Divine Fingerprints

The *sefer* Mesilas Yesharim explains that our purpose in this world is to come close to Hashem.⁶ If only we could live this way, with a constant awareness of Him! We'd always feel supported and comforted—never alone.

Alas, it isn't easy. The shrewd *yetzer hara* tries to convince us that there's no one to turn to. He wants us to forget about Hashem, so we'll feel free to act in ways that are wrong.

Of course, intellectually, we believe that Hashem is here, but

⁶ Mesilas Yesharim, beginning of chapter one:

שֶׁהָאָדָם לֹא נִבְרָא אֶלָּא לְהִתְעַנֵּג עַל ה' וְלִהְנוֹת מִזֵּיו שְׂכִינָתוֹ שֶׁזֶהוּ הַתַּעֲנוּג הָאֲמִתִּי וְהַעֲדוֹן הַגָּדוֹל מִכָּל הָעֲדוּנִים שֶׁיִּכּוֹלִים לְהַמְצִיא. וּמָקוֹם הָעֲדוֹן הַזֶּה בְּאַמֶּת הוּא הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא... וְכִשְׁתִּסְתַּכֵּל בְּדָבָר תִּרְאֶה כִּי הַשְׁלָמוֹת הָאֲמִתִּי הוּא רַק הַדְּבָקוֹת בּוֹ יִתְבָּרַר.

Mankind was created only to take delight in Hashem and to derive pleasure from the radiance of His *Shechinah* (Divine Presence), for this is the true delight and the greatest possible pleasure. The true location for this pleasure is in the World to Come. . . When you examine this matter, you will find that true perfection is nothing other than *d'veikus*, bonding with Hashem.

the *yetzer hara* is a cunning foe who makes it hard to feel it. How can we fend off his relentless attacks?

The answer is that Hashem has given us many reminders that He is here. If we make use of them, we will indeed live a wonderful life of closeness to Him. I call these reminders “Hashem’s fingerprints,”—clues and hints scattered all over the world that call out to us, reminding us that He is present. Sometimes the fingerprints whisper to us and sometimes they shout at us, but always, they surround us, waiting to be noticed. When we see and think about them, our *emunah*—our knowledge of Hashem, will be strengthened. And these fingerprints will help us, by encouraging us to live a life of faithful service to Hashem.

But before learning about the fingerprints of Hashem, we must first understand the *mitzvah* of *emunah*, which is the great foundation of Judaism. We’ll learn about the source of its obligation, the challenges to attaining it, the benefits of having it, and, crucially, how to transform your relationship with Hashem as a precursor to achieving *emunah* in an exciting and enduring way.

In Part Two of the book, we’ll explore and discover many astounding fingerprints of Hashem that can be found inside of us and throughout the world. This is a study valuable beyond description, for a deep *emunah* will provide one with success, peace, and tranquility in this world, and spiritual bliss in the next.

CHAPTER TWO



Eemunah

This chapter discusses the mitzvah of emunah and how a person can truly attain a strong awareness of Hashem.

What is Emunah?

The foundation of Judaism is *emunah* in Hashem.⁷ This means that one should be aware that there is a Creator Who oversees us and directs our lives with precision.

Emunah in Hashem is a *mitzvah min haTorah*, learned from the *pasuk*, 'אֲנִכִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים', I am Hashem, your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.⁸ The fact that Hashem took *Klal Yisroel* out of Egypt in such a miraculous manner, and with such precise

⁷ Makkos, 24a.

⁸ Shemos 20:2.

hashgacha, is proof that He oversees and controls every aspect of our lives.⁹ There's no question that these events occurred because our *mesora* (tradition) has meticulously passed it down to us, with all their details.

Although our *mesora* is the solid base of our *emunah*, we must continuously work to increase our awareness of Hashem.¹⁰ A person is obligated not merely to believe in Hashem, but rather, **to know with certainty that Hashem is in total control of his life!**¹¹ In *sefer Kovetz Ma'amarim*, Rav Elchanan Wasserman writes that one's *emunah* must be even stronger than knowledge gained from seeing something!¹² A person can be tricked into thinking that he's seeing something when in fact, there is nothing there. But *emunah* must leave absolutely no room for doubt.

This goal may seem beyond the reach of humans. How is it possible to believe in Hashem more than the physical world, which we can see?

In the next section we'll learn the answer to this question.

A Definite Conclusion

The world seems to operate in a completely natural way. Hashem's

⁹ Biur Halachah 1:1, s.v. הוּא. See also Chapter 4, The Gift of the Exodus, for more about this *mitzvah*.

¹⁰ Rav Avigdor Miller said: "Some people's *emunah* is like a very thin layer of paint – you give a little scrape, and the paint comes off. Some people's *emunah* is thicker than that. And you have to work all your life to grow in *emunah*." (Lecture #E-252, November 2, 2000).

¹¹ ידעת היום. מה היום ברור בלא ספיקא אף אתה ברור בלא ספיקא וסוגה פסיקתא זוטרותא (לקח טוב) דברים פרשת ואתחנן דף ט עמוד א.

¹² Kovetz Ma'amarim, Madreigas B'emunah (Ma'amar 8), Paragraph one:

'כי האמונה בדבר ה' צריכה להיות יותר חזקה מראית החוש'

hashgacha is concealed from us. Can we really be expected to have total *emunah* in Him?”

The answer to this question is a resounding, “Yes!” However, we must first understand something about how the human mind operates, specifically, about the dynamic between one’s *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hara*.

In *Koheles*, Shlomo Hamelech describes the *yetzer hara* as a ‘king,’¹³ because it exercises powerful control over a person, stirring up desires and urges that the body’s limbs naturally obey, like a king’s subjects.¹⁴

But the *yetzer tov*, which is the intellect, is compared to a weak child.¹⁵ As we know, the body’s limbs don’t respond to the intellect in the same way that they respond to one’s physical urges.

The *yetzer tov* has only one advantage over the *yetzer hara*: it is wise, meaning that it can utilize logic to review the past and foresee future events. It can recognize probability and outcome. And with this wisdom, a person is able, and expected, to overcome the

¹³ Koheles 4:13.

¹⁴ Rashi.

¹⁵ Koheles 4:13.

powerful *yetzer hara*.^{16 17 18}

Now, with the wisdom of the *yetzer tov*, a person instantly concludes that the world surely has a Creator. In fact, it's simply ludicrous to think that this beautiful world came about by itself. It

¹⁶ Rabbi Aryeh Feldman, *Revel in Emunah – A Deep and Inspiring Journey through the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith based on shiurim of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l* (Feldheim Distribution, 2020) pp. 448-451.

¹⁷ Rav Moshe Shapiro also explains that a person's mind consists of two parts: the intellect [ed. *yetzer tov*], which is the seat of logic, and the imagination [ed. *yetzer hara*], which lacks any logic; it operates solely through imagery. The difference between these two is sharply perceived when one is asleep, at which time only the imagination functions, presenting the person with all sorts of visualizations (dreams). But since there is no participation of the intellect, the dreams are illogical and completely meaningless. See *Revel in Emunah – A Deep and Inspiring Journey through the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith based on shiurim of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l* by Rabbi Aryeh Feldman (Feldheim Distribution, 2020) p. 31 – 33.

אורחות חיים חלק א דין ברכו אות ג
ואמרו בדרש וכי מה אמונה יש כאן לפי שאדם נפשו כואבת עליו בלילה מטורח המלאכה שעשה ביום וכשישן בלילה נשמתו עולה לרקיע ואינו רוצה לשוב בקרבו ואומר לה הקדוש ברוך הוא שובי אל גוייתך שאיני רוצה לאבד אמונתי כנגדו שהוא האמין בי והפקידה אצלי ואמר בידך אפקיד רוחי ועושה הקדוש ברוך הוא אמונה ומחזירה אליו ובבקר עשה לו נס ומחדש כחו ואינו מרגיש מכל מה שטרח אתמול וזה הוא בבקר חסדך ואומר חדשים לבקרים רבה אמונתך.

¹⁸ With this, we can understand why *chazal* said, (מסכת אבות דרבי, מסכתות קטנות, that a person does not receive his *yetzer tov* until his *bar mitzvah*. (נתן נוסחא א פרק טז) That is when one's intellect is finally developed enough to counterbalance his powerful physical desires. See *Secrets of the Soul: Conversations with Rav Shlomo Hoffman, talmid of Rav Isaac Sher and confidant of Gedolei Yisrael*, Vol. 1 (Feldheim Publishers, 2020), p. 113, where Rav Shlomo Hoffman brings down Rabbeinu Yonah (Avos 3:15) who says that the sins of a person's youth are classified as accidental even when they were deliberate since in those years a person's urges are powerful and his intellect is weak. Rav Hoffman explained that some people reach a state of maturity at age eighteen, while others reach it at twenty-two. Until that time, his deliberate sins will be considered accidental.

really is clear—unless the *yetzer hara* intrudes.

And he intrudes! The *yetzer hara* feels very threatened by the burdensome implications of a Creator, so he rebels and starts launching emotional attacks on the intellect. He conjures up powerful feelings such as desires (“But I want!”), fears (“But what if?”), and pain from lack of understanding (“Why me?”).¹⁹

Obviously, an emotional “temper tantrum” can’t disprove the intellect’s logical conclusions—but it can ‘kick up sand’, meaning it can distract a person and convince him to abandon his firm convictions. Even a nonsensical attack can weaken one’s faith by causing the clear knowledge of his intellect to become obscured.

Then, with his faith weakened, the person might act in ways he doesn’t want to, committing sins that he will eventually regret. And he might continue to sin until the emotional ‘sands’ of desire fade away, and the clear, persuasive logic of the intellect reasserts itself. *Chazal* referred to this cycle when they said that a person does not sin unless a *ruach shtus* (foolish spirit) enters him.²⁰ If you work to strengthen your *emunah*, you can avoid the fall and fallout of this cycle.²¹

¹⁹ Every person has a powerful drive to enjoy life. The *yetzer hara* tries to convince us that only by following him will we be able to enjoy life. He tells us that the Torah prevents us from enjoying life in this world. However, in an incredible twist of irony, it’s only the *yetzer tov* who will help you enjoy life in this world! For all his “claims”, the *yetzer hara* actually wants you dead! (See Tehillim 37:32 and Sukkah 52b.) In fact, it’s quite easy to see how yielding to one’s *yetzer hara* is a fast track to misery and an early death. Only by listening to one’s *yetzer tov* and controlling his desires can one live a truly enjoyable life.

²⁰ Sotah 3a.

²¹ See Kovetz Ma’amarim where Rav Elchonon Wasserman explains that the truth of a Creator is abundantly clear to anyone, except that a person’s perception gets distorted by bribery. The *yetzer hara*’s bribery (enticement) to permit one to do as he pleases has the effect of distorting the intellect which gives a person an opening to deny Hashem

We can now answer the question, “Can we really be expected to have such strong *emunah* in Hashem that we’re more aware of Him than of the visible, physical world?”

The answer is yes! However, **this clear knowledge only exists in one part of a person’s mind: the logical intellect.**

If one clings to his intellect, he will be fully aware that Hashem is here. But if he leaves that haven of wisdom and starts paying attention to the desires, fears, or questions of the *yetzer hara*, the doubts will begin to creep in. His once firm awareness of Hashem will start fading, and with it, his values, and standards.

With this explanation, we can understand something about the word ‘אמונה’, which does not really mean ‘belief’, but rather, ‘loyalty.’²² If you will remain loyal to the logical conclusions of your intellect, you’ll know there is a God.

A person must ignore the *yetzer hara*’s emotional assaults on his intellect—the ‘what ifs’, ‘whys’ and ‘wants,’ and maintain his loyalty to the ironclad conclusions of his intellect. In this way, he’ll fulfill the great *mitzvah* of *emunah* in Hashem.

(Ma’amar *al emunah*).

²² “*Emunah* means loyalty. Loyalty, steadfastness, is a *middah gedolah ad me’od*. ... you have to know, training in loyalty is training in *emunah*. *Emunah* doesn’t mean belief, no. Everybody believes. *Emunah* means to be loyal. והאמין בה – Avrohom was loyal to Hashem, ויחשב לו לצדקה – and Hashem considered that a righteousness. So, you see it’s a righteousness to be loyal to Hashem.” – Rav Avigdor Miller, TAPE # E-168 (December 1998).

(Rav Miller once explained that the word ‘אמונה’ is related to the word ‘אם’, mother, since a mother exhibits great loyalty to her children.)

The Journey to Awareness

Although we strive for perfect *emunah* in Hashem, we must remember that *emunah* isn't all or nothing—it's a life-long journey of awareness. *Emunah* can penetrate one's mind on endlessly deeper levels.

With study, reflection, and time, a person will increasingly perceive Hashem's hand in his life. His awareness of Hashem will grow stronger and stronger, until eventually, his very senses will begin to react to this awareness.

This high level of *emunah* is one of the greatest goals that a Jew can strive for, and the purpose of this book is to assist the reader in achieving it.



לע"נ רבקה רחל בת מרדכי אלעזר הכהן

CHAPTER THREE



The Greatest Good

In this chapter we'll address one of the biggest challenges to attaining emunah: misunderstanding one's relationship with Hashem, which, sadly, can prevent a person from even wanting emunah.

The Big Challenge

One of the greatest challenges to having *emunah*—even for *frum* people—is that we feel uncomfortable with the implications of Hashem's presence. Although we try hard to learn His Torah and keep His *mitzvos*, we still often prefer to not think about Him.

Now, it's a natural human instinct to block out and ignore uncomfortable things. However, we must ask, "Why is it uncomfortable to let Hashem into our lives? He's our Creator, our only lifeline! We should be running towards Him with open arms!"

The answer is that unfortunately, many of us have come to view the Torah as merely a set of rules and restrictions meant to keep us ‘in line.’ And sadly, we think of Hashem as a kind of divine ‘Policeman,’ Who is looking to punish us for any violation.

This is the reason why many people don’t want to think about Hashem. It’s not complicated—it’s avoidance! After all, even people who want laws don’t like meeting the police!²³

The question is, why have we come to think of Hashem in this way?

Once, in a *shiur*, Harav Gershon Ribner, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Nesivas HaTorah said the following idea:

There is a famous story brought down in the gemara about a woman named Chana who had seven sons. These boys were forcibly brought before the governor, a wicked man who commanded the oldest son to prostrate himself before an idol. The boy declared his loyalty to the Torah and bravely refused. He was taken away and executed. The next son was summoned. Like his older brother, he too maintained his faith and refused to bow to the idol, and so he too was murdered.

One by one, each son was summoned, each refused

²³ There’s another reason why a person might not want to acknowledge Hashem’s presence in his life: A relationship with Him requires work. It means learning His Torah and fulfilling His *mitzvos*, which can be quite challenging at times. If one isn’t motivated to work hard, he will prefer to just not think about Hashem (*chas v’shalom*).

How can one overcome this hurdle? By calculating the effort being demanded of him relative to the reward he stands to receive. Imagine being offered ten billion dollars in exchange for keeping the *mitzvos*. Would anyone reject such an offer? Well, ten billion dollars is nothing compared to a relationship with Hashem! When one understands this clearly, the effort required will fade away in significance, and he’ll be able to achieve great spiritual success in his life.

to obey the governor, and each was murdered by the soldiers. Finally, the youngest son, who was but a little boy, was brought before the governor. At this point the governor felt humiliated and defeated by the iron will of the boys, so he concocted a scheme to save face before his court. He dropped his ring on the floor and instructed the boy to pick it up. In this way, the boy will appear to bow down, but he will intend only to pick up the ring and thus won't violate his beliefs.

But the little boy refused to even give the impression of idol worship. He proudly declared, "Hashem has promised to never trade Klal Yisroel for another nation, and we have promised never to trade Him for any other god!"

And he too was murdered.²⁴

Think for a moment about the love of Hashem that this young boy expressed before going to his death, saying, "*Hashem has promised to never trade Klal Yisroel for another nation, and we have promised never to trade Him for any other god!*"

These brave words reveal a *chinuch* saturated in devotion to Hashem and a feeling of being intensely loved by Him. This sense of love, explained Rav Ribner, is something that was given over to the children of earlier generations. But unfortunately, our generation didn't merit to receive it.²⁵

The reason why many people view Hashem as a divine policeman, is that they were given a *chinuch* that only emphasized fear of Him.

The Torah contains both expressions of Hashem's love for us as well as stiff warnings for what might happen if we disobey Him—

²⁴ Gittin 57b.

²⁵ Heard from Rabbi Gershon Ribner, *shlit"a*.

and a well-rounded *chinuch* must include both. If one received a *chinuch* that primarily focused on fear and punishments, then, no matter what one receives from Hashem, it will all be perceived through that lens. Such a person will be easy prey for the *yetzer hara*, which will pounce and quickly convince him that Hashem is just looking to punish him for his *aveiros*. It's not the truth but that's how he'll perceive his relationship with his Creator.

What can one do if he didn't receive the excellent *chinuch* that Chana gave her sons? Is there a way to correct this error? The answer is yes, and it's not as hard as it sounds.

In the upcoming sections we'll discover what a relationship with Hashem is truly supposed to be like. We'll learn the truth: that Hashem loves us intensely and truly wants to bestow upon us a destiny of happiness and glory. Then, with our new perspective, we'll be prepared to connect with Him on a level we never could have imagined.

A Good World

One of the simplest but most important ways to discover how much Hashem loves us is by seeing and appreciating everything He gives us. And what *doesn't* He give us?! Just look at the world He created—a spectacular, beautiful world, packed with enjoyments!

Sadly, there's a commonly held misconception that Hashem doesn't want us to enjoy *Olam Hazei*. But Rav Avigdor Miller, who constantly taught people to recognize Hashem through the incredible wonders of creation, also taught that Hashem wants and expects every person to enjoy this world *immensely*.

Someone once asked Rav Miller, "What would you say is the purpose of this world?"

The Rav responded, “Now, this world, we have to realize, was made for the purpose of having pleasure ... people not accustomed to thinking about this won’t appreciate that. You have to spend part of your lives studying the subject [of] how good this world is. You have to study that.”²⁶

Rav Miller once said that with the correct perspective, our hearts would melt just from looking at an apple! When we look at a beautiful apple, we see a delicious gift that Hashem personally created for us. And that’s just *one apple*! What about everything else? What happens to our hearts when we walk into a supermarket? And not



²⁶ Lecture #E-262 (January 2001).

just food. Every good thing we have is a personal gift from Hashem. For example, every morning He gives us a spectacular sunrise. Is there anything more beautiful than the quiet, peaceful morning? What about the summertime. Isn't the summer a beautiful gift from Hashem? Don't these things melt our hearts?

So, is Hashem our policeman just looking to find our mistakes? Just look at what He's giving us, and you'll realize that not only isn't He our policeman, but He loves us deeply, and only wants our good.

The *pasuk* says '*kamayim hapanim lapanim kein leiv ha'adam l'adam*. 'As water reflects an image, so too is one person's heart reflected by another's'.²⁷ When someone greets you with excitement, you just can't help liking him! This is a fundamental principal of human nature; a concept often discussed with regards to the subject of *bein adam l'chaveiro*.

The exact same concept can apply to our relationship with Hashem. When we recognize that Hashem is excited about us, we'll react by becoming excited about Him. And when we pay attention to all the amazing things He gave us in this world, we'll realize that He's not just excited about us, He *loves* us! Then, *kimayim panim lapanim*, we'll love Him too. And that will be the end of viewing Him as our policeman.²⁸

Therefore, it's vital and critical for every person to enjoy and internalize the goodness of *olam hazeh*. Enjoying this world is the vehicle which will bring us to recognize how much Hashem loves and cares for us. And since we have so much good nowadays, it is

²⁷ Mishlei 27:19.

²⁸ We can now see what a terrible error it is for a person to think, "I'm so bad, Hashem probably hates me." Because if I convince myself that Hashem doesn't like me then I won't like Him. This thought is nothing but a terrible trick of the *yetzer hara* because it tears us away from Hashem, Who loves us so much.

easier than ever to do.²⁹

Ancient Jealousy

In the previous section, we discussed the goodness that Hashem gives to *all* people.

The next step is to think about the special gift of Torah that He gave just to Klal Yisroel. To help us, we'll take a trip back in time to visit the ancient nations who lived near Eretz Yisrael.

Let's start with a *mashal*:

It was a cold wintry evening and a hungry, homeless child, dressed in rags was walking down the street. Suddenly he stopped – as he passed a house, he noticed that the window curtain was left open. So the freezing, wretched child peered into the window, and what did he see? A cozy scene – a happy family sitting around a dinner table, talking and joking with each other. He saw a mother busily serving hot food to her children, and a crackling fire burning in the fireplace. The little orphan stood there, nose pressed against the window, burning with envy at those fortunate, privileged children!

This poor child is a great *mashal* for how the ancient gentile nations around Eretz Yisroel must have felt. That's because those people suffered from the worst social problems that you can imagine. First, a child was fortunate to make it past infancy. If the baby was a girl or if it had any type of medical problem, it's parents would

²⁹ See the book Hashem Wants You to Enjoy His World by this author for an in-depth understanding of the importance of enjoying *Olam Hazei*.

not think twice about simply killing it.³⁰ If the parents spared the baby, it could look forward to the possibility of being burned as a sacrifice to their god!

If the child made it past these horrors, he could look forward to a life of illiteracy, with no value for the individual, no equal justice, no regular day of rest, and no concept of *chesed*. There was the possibility of being captured and sold into slavery or being killed for public entertainment.³¹ And that was for the regular people. What about the more vulnerable people, like, widows, for example? Were they cared for by their communities? Actually, if she was fortunate, her society wouldn't *kill her*!³²

Can you imagine what such suffering could do to a person's psyche? And what did these people see when they peeked into our "window," into Eretz Yisroel? A close-knit nation with Torah values, with *chesed*, *Kibud av v'eim*, Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh, *Aliyas Regel*, the Beis Hamikdash, Yom Kippur, *Bikkurim*, *Shmittah*, *V'ahavta l'rayacha kamocha*.

In other words, they saw a happy nation, safe and at peace. And gentiles weren't allowed in—unless they converted. So they did! It was a no-brainer. They could see for themselves how wonderful it was to be a Jew!

³⁰ "To a certain extent, the Mohammedans and the Christians improved the other nations. For instance, when the Mohammedans came and when the Christians came, the murder of children stopped. The practice of killing babies stopped. Whereas [...] in old Japan, it was widely practiced to destroy children. In Greece and even in Rome, the weak were put to death." (Rav Avigdor Miller, *At Mount Sinai*, 103:48)

³¹ See *A World Without Judaism: How the Torah Changed Everything* by Sara Yoheved Rigler (aish.com/the_revolutionary_revolution).

³² For example, Hindu widows were burned alive on the funeral pyre of their husband—see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sati_\(practice\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sati_(practice)).

As Rav Avigdor Miller once said:

“Among the Jews there were many geirim; many people in those days from the Near East fell in love with Judaism. The Empress Poppaea, that's the wife of Nero, practiced Judaism in her palace. The wife of Nero practiced Judaism! It is well known. That's what the historians say. She was addicted to Judaism.

“In Damascus alone there were 10,000 Syrian women, gentiles, who considered themselves Jews. They weren't all converted but Judaism was very popular in those days.”³³

Of course, not all gentiles converted, but many of them did. They saw how blessed we were, and they hungered for our bliss. This should open our eyes to how much Hashem loves us, and how much happiness He granted us when He gave us His Torah.

By the way, although, *baruch* Hashem, many countries today don't suffer from the terrible problems that plagued the ancient nations, it's only because of our Torah and the influence that we had on the world.³⁴ So even non-Jews should celebrate the Torah, seeing that life is much better than it was in the past. But Klal Yisroel still has it best, and so we certainly should thank Hashem for the gift of His Torah.

Tzadik Hashem

Let's learn more about the amazing benefits the Torah provides us with.

Have you ever been to a *tzadik*? When a Jew feels lost and

³³ TAPE #150 (December 1976).

³⁴ See above note 31.

forlorn, he will often turn to a *tzadik*, to whom he can pour out his heart. He knows the *tzadik* will care for him, feel his pain, and do everything to help. Every Jew knows that in his study, he'll find compassion, understanding, and refuge.

Let's ask ourselves a question. Most *tzadikim* aren't born as angels of compassion. How did they end up as the address for all of our woes? Where did their deep reservoir of love and compassion come from? The answer is, it came from the Torah which the *tzadik* studied intensely, decade after decade. Torah transforms a person into someone who is willing to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of another, into someone who loves and cares for all Jews.³⁵

Think about this: If *tzadikim* become so saturated with love and compassion just from *learning* Torah, then surely Hashem, Who *wrote* the Torah must be *overflowing* with love for us. He is surely the *essence* of pure love and compassion!

That's why the Torah is called 'Toras Chesed',³⁶ which means that the entire Torah is one big *chesed*—for us. Just look at how it starts: Hashem creates a beautiful world and places Adam and Chava into the best part of it: *gan eden*, a garden paradise. Why did Hashem do all that? *Chesed*. And of all the people in the world who did Hashem love the most? Avraham *Avinu*, a *tzadik* who cared for complete strangers, even when he was elderly and ill.

We can clearly perceive Hashem's great love for us from the many *pesukim* of closeness and devotion in the Torah. In Shemos, Hashem says, "My firstborn son is Yisrael".³⁷ At Har Sinai, He said that if Klal Yisroel is loyal to Him, "they shall be to Me the most

³⁵ See Sefer Eitz Hachaim, Middos 76.

³⁶ Mishlei 31:26.

³⁷ Shemos 4:22.

beloved treasure of all peoples.” In Devarim, it says that the ‘friendship of Hashem is with B’nei Yisroel’.

Here are some *pesukim* in Tehillim that describe Hashem’s love for us:

“Hashem supports all the fallen ones and straightens all the bent.”

“All eyes look to You with hope and You give them their food in its proper time.”

“You open Your Hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.”

“Righteous is Hashem in all His ways and magnanimous in all His deeds.”

“Hashem is close to all who call upon Him; to all who call upon Him sincerely.”

“The will of those who fear Him He will do and their cry He will hear and save them.”

“Hashem protects all who love Him but all the wicked He will destroy.”³⁸

These are just a few *pesukim*. There are countless more, as well as many statements of *Chazal* which speak of Hashem’s love for us. In fact, the entire *sefer Shir Hashirim* is a description of Klal Yisroel as Hashem’s beloved companion. Yes, Hashem loves us like His

³⁸ תהלים קמה:יד-כ (אשרי)

own wife! In fact, Rav Shimshon Pincus used to say that the name of the Jewish people is really, “Mrs. Hashem!”³⁹

HaRav Gershon Ribner once explained that we can appreciate Hashem’s love for us by considering the *mitzvos* He gave us. For example, with the *mitzvah* of ‘*Ve’ahavta lere’acha kamocha*’ Hashem commanded your brothers and sisters to help you, no matter what you are going through. He commanded us to take in guests, look after the sick, return lost items, do ‘*p’rika and te’ina*’ (help overburdened people) – even our enemies. He said, “*pasoach tiftach*” – open up your hand to the poor – “*v’al yeira levavcha*”, and don’t do it with a bad heart.⁴⁰ He taught us to protect the property of others and warned us not to take advantage of the helpless. And how many times does the Torah instruct us to take the best care of widows and orphans?

Yes, the Torah is *replete* with Hashem’s kindness, warmth and love. And we can clearly see the results of keeping these *mitzvos*: Torah communities are bursting with *chesed* and *tzedakah*. No community in the world comes close to ours when it comes to *chesed*.

And what about the special days of the year that Hashem gave us, such as Shabbos and the *Yamim Tovim*. Who doesn’t have wonderful memories from these holy days? Whether it is the delicious *seudos*, the beautiful singing in *shul*, the magnificent Pesach *sedarim*, the days spent in the sparkling *sukkah*, the *chol hamoed* trips, Chanukah *mesibos*, the excitement of Purim and so much more. Hashem knows that our lives are so busy, we would never take time

³⁹ Nefesh Shimshon, Gates of Emunah, p. 37. (Rav Shimshon Pincus, zt”l) (Feldheim Publishers, 2010).

⁴⁰

דברים פרק טו פסוק י - יא פרשת ראה
נתון תתן לו ולא יירע ללבך בתיך לו ...

to stop and enjoy life as He wants us to. He therefore made it a *mitzvah* (for which He'll reward us!) to take regular pauses from the mundane world to spend time in an uplifted *Yom Tov* atmosphere. These holy days all speak clearly to us of Hashem's great affection for us.

One more point: A Jew's entire life is collectively referred to as '*avodas Hashem*,' service of Hashem, and this includes many different duties. But there is one specific *mitzvah* in the Torah that is called 'serving Hashem.'⁴¹ With that name, we'd imagine something big and maybe even quite difficult, right?

But the *mitzvah* to serve Hashem is simply to daven, to open your heart, talk to Him, and ask Him for your needs.⁴² Is there a greater proof than this, that our relationship with Him is meant to be one of love and devotion? His *mitzvos* clearly demonstrate His tremendous love for us.

One may ask, "But what about the prohibitions of the Torah and the severe punishments we face for violating them? Where is the love there?"

Well, let's take the example of *lashon hara*, which Chazal famously say is one of the severest *aveiros*, worse than the three *aveiros chamuros* (severest sins), and carries one of the worst punishments. It makes sense, then, that when one learns *hilchos lashon hara*, his heart might sink. "Look at how many things I can do wrong," he may think. "If I even wink at someone the wrong way, I'll be severely punished!"

But wait a moment. Why are we always focusing on what *we're* not allowed to do to others? It's the exact opposite! *Lashon hara* is what other people aren't allowed to do to *us*! It's our shield of protection! These *halachos* mean that Hashem loves me so much, He

⁴¹ Devarim 11:13.

⁴² Ta'anis 2a.

forbids anyone to even wink in a nasty way about me. Yes, it's true that *lashon hara* means I also can't treat others poorly – but that's because, He loves them too.

And there's more. For as bad as it is to be hurt by other people's words, there's something far worse: to **be** a '*ba'al lashon hara*', a habitual gossipmonger—which is a *terrible* type of person to be. A sinner doesn't remain unaffected by his own deeds. He experiences terrible discomfort and guilt from his bad actions and from his inability to stop himself from hurting others. And this pain only increases in the next world when he will be inescapably confronted by his own evil choices and the destruction he caused. All this certainly applies to *lashon hara*. Being a critical type of person, one who spreads nasty words and causes others pain is awful—for the gossipier!

Hashem loves us and wants to save us from *being* a bad person. That's why He gave us *hilchos lashon hara*! It is for *our own benefit to not speak lashon hara* — so that we can be kind and pure, and not *chas v'shalom*, cruel and defiled. And just as *hilchos lashon hara* is for our benefit, so too are all the prohibitions of the Torah.

Here's another example of a *mitzvah* which seems restrictive but is for our own benefit: the *halachos* of *tznius* (modesty), which are among the most difficult for a woman to keep. We must realize that this *halacha* isn't a restriction but rather a tremendous gift—more valuable than diamonds to the woman herself.

When a couple stands together under the *chuppah*, everyone knows what they are hoping for: a long life together in a peaceful home where they'll grow, raise a family, and celebrate milestones. Eventually they'll be surrounded by children, grandchildren and maybe even great-grandchildren with countless good memories to share.

In other words, the couple hopes that they will stay loving and loyal to each other until the end of their lives.

But there's something that every couple needs in order to achieve this dream: a community that safeguards the *halachos* of *tznius*. The couple needs this protection to ensure that they'll stay completely loyal to each other because immodesty amongst women is a threat to every couple. As we know, when men become interested in other women, they begin to lose interest in their own wives. This results in broken homes, fatherless children and worse. Thus, the more society permits immodesty, the more vulnerable every person becomes in their own marriage!

Therefore, there is *nothing* better for a woman than to adhere carefully to the *halachos* of *tznius*, which serves as her own "marriage insurance", the best guarantee of the idyllic picture of happiness she wants. (And the same goes for a man and his *mitzvah* to guard his eyes.)

There are some *mitzvos* which demonstrate so much kindness from Hashem, it's simply amazing. For example, throughout the year a person often stumbles and may even do many *aveiros*. In His love for us, Hashem gave us the opportunity to do *teshuva*, and if we do, He'll forgive us. But not only does He *allow* us to do *teshuva*, He made it a *mitzvah* to do so! And, in order that we don't miss this priceless opportunity (because of how busy life can get), He assigned a special day for it—Yom Kippur—which comes around every year.

Not only that, but He even gave us a *mitzvah*—for which He'll reward us—to eat on the day before Yom Kippur so we aren't too hungry on the day when He's forgiving us for all the wrong things we did. Now *that's* an amazing Father!

Here are some more examples:

It's a Torah *mitzvah* to be healthy, as the *pasuk* says, '*V'nishmartem me'od lenafshoseichem*'—and you shall guard your life very much.'

But who doesn't want to be healthy? We all want it, as evidenced by the massive health, nutrition, medical, pharmaceutical and hospital industries. Health is an immense part of the global economy. But as much as we want to be healthy, Hashem wants us to be healthy even more. He wants it so much, He made it a *mitzvah*—for which He'll *reward* us—to be healthy. Wow! Can you imagine that Hashem will give us *s'char* for doing exactly what we already want? When we think about this, it becomes *impossible* to view Hashem as a policeman.

Here's another example: Hashem gave Kohanim the special *mitzvah* of *bentching* Klal Yisroel. In Eretz Yisroel they do it every single morning and in *chutz la'eret* it's done on Yom Tov.

Think about it: The *Kohanim* stand in front of the congregation and *bentch* us that we should have money, security, Torah, Hashem's favor, and peace. Who doesn't want these things? Would anyone turn down such a *bracha*? Yet not only did Hashem command Kohanim to *bentch* us, He also made it a *mitzvah* for us to receive the *bracha*. That means that He'll *reward* us for receiving a *bracha* for all the amazing things we already want! If that isn't true love, then what is?

In summary, it's clear that Hashem is our benevolent Father, who gave us the *mitzvos* to ensure our happiness. The *mitzvos* provide us with our own needs, ensuring our success in life, and providing us with help in hard times.

Noticing and focusing on the warmth and radiance of the Torah and *mitzvos* will help mend our incorrect perspectives, and our relationship with Hashem. The Torah will no longer be, *chas v'shalom*, a source of anxiety and fear, but rather a refuge of healing and a sanctuary of peace.

Truth be told, as children we knew the truth of this. We knew that the *shul* is a place of safety and goodness, and that *tzadikim* are full of love and kindness. And we knew that the Torah was

the source of it all. It was obvious! But when we got older and lost our innocence, the doubts crept in. Let's return to the truth of our youth. It may take some time to review and absorb this new/old concept, but when we do, it'll be the beginning of a renewed, exciting relationship with Hashem.



לע"נ ר' יוסף אריה אפרים בן צבי יבל"ח

CHAPTER FOUR



To Serve the King

In this chapter we'll get a peek at the astounding pleasures and glory that Hashem has planned for us in this world and the Next. Learning about them will encourage us to serve Him with love and devotion.

The Real Adventure

In addition to the protection and benefits listed in the previous chapter, the *mitzvos* provide us with something interesting and exciting: a d v e n t u r e.

Yes, adventure!

Most people have a thirst for new and interesting experiences. Many express this yearning by traveling the world, visiting and exploring faraway places and cultures, and meeting new people.

However, Rav Avigdor Miller once said that the greatest ad-

venture in life isn't in some faraway country—it's right inside of us! As exciting as a regular, worldly experience is, it doesn't come close to what a person will experience on a journey of spiritual growth,

This may sound surprising. Of course, everyone knows that growth in *ruchniyus* is good, but is it so exciting that no journey or adventure can compare to it? The answer is yes, because, while a typical adventure is stimulating and interesting, it doesn't nourish the soul. A person's soul only feels fulfillment through spiritual growth, with progress and achievements in coming closer to Hash-em. Additionally, a trip, party or cruise might be fun, but when it's over, it's over, and the pleasure is gone—unlike spiritual pleasure which lasts forever.⁴³

But these aren't the main reasons why growth in *ruchniyus* is more exciting than worldly adventures. The real reason is that no matter where a person travels, he will never leave this world. He might go to Antarctica or even to outer space, but he'll still be in the same universe, regulated by the same laws of physics and human behavior. But a *spiritual* adventure changes the *person!* *He evolves into an entirely new being*—an elevated being, who lives life in a completely different way—a lofty way.

Instead of experiencing life as a helpless shred of matter in a storm of meaningless events, the spiritually developed person becomes a highly significant being, infused with a great sense of purpose. His every action has cosmic ramifications, with the potential to earn himself eternal glory—or catastrophic disgrace. Each moment brings opportunities for fantastic achievements in self-development and universal improvement. He feels personally cared for by the all-powerful Creator of the universe. And, as he fills his

⁴³ When a person achieves a spiritual goal, he feels accomplished and proud, feelings which never fade or dissipate. On the contrary, they increase over time. This is unlike physical pleasures, which disappear quickly and never return.

mind with Torah, his clarity of thinking and scope of understanding steadily grows to encompass the entire span of history. Best of all, he earns favor in the Eyes of Hashem Himself.⁴⁴

Now, *that's* an experience!⁴⁵

This life-transformation is the result of developing strong *emunah* in Hashem. When a person is young, he is lulled by the steady rhythm of life to believe that this is a natural, predictable world of causes and effects. But when he starts to grow in *emunah*, it begins to dawn on him that he's been wrong all along. The world isn't the place he thought it was. He's left the darkness behind and moved into a bright new world.

Beyond the Adventure

I once heard the following *mashal*, which carries an amazing lesson:

There was once a powerful king who summoned a group of citizens to the royal palace. When they arrived, the king instructed them to accompany his soldiers and obey their orders. The soldiers led the group to a large diamond mine, distributed pickaxes and large burlap sacks, and ordered the citizens to begin extracting gemstones from the earth.

Fearing the soldiers, the group entered the deep, dark tunnels and started digging out diamonds. Slowly but sure-

⁴⁴ The *sefer Sfas Emes* says that a person's *avodah* in the world is to find favor in the Eyes of Hashem (Parshas Noach, Pg. 80).

⁴⁵ This transition isn't a one-time event. Every day that a person grows in *ruchniyus*, he experiences this on a new, deeper level, making each day a new adventure.

ly, they filled their sacks with enormous, precious stones.

Three weeks of intense labor passed in this way.

One morning, the soldiers summoned the group. All the sacks were collected, and clean clothes were handed to the workers. "Prepare yourselves," they said. "We will be returning to the palace, where the king will address you."

The group was brought back to the palace where they stood trembling before the king. They had no way of knowing he was satisfied with the treasures they had produced.

The king said to them, "Your efforts on behalf of the country are greatly appreciated. Now, as you prepare to return to your families, I am authorizing a special gift to be given to you." With those words, each person was given his own sack full of the very diamonds he had dug out!

The workers were stunned. All their labor had been for themselves! But not everyone was happy with the surprising turn of events.

Some of the group had worked diligently to dig as many diamonds as they could. And those people were ecstatic when they realized they would get to enjoy the wealth they'd produced.

But some of the workers had resented being forced into the king's service. They had put in as little effort as they dared. Now they gazed miserably at their mostly empty sacks. "If only..." they thought, "If only we had trusted the king and put in our full efforts. We could have been rich forever."

The *nimshal* is that our King, Hashem, gave us many *mitzvos* to perform. However, the *mitzvos* aren't for Hashem. They're for ourselves! We're the beneficiaries of our own labors. This knowledge should motivate us to perform as many *mitzvos* as possible. Doing

the bare minimum only hurts ourselves.

But how exactly do the *mitzvos* benefit us?

Rav Avigdor Miller once explained that a person's greatest desire is for honor—and this is what the righteous will receive in *Olam Haba*. Hashem will give vast amounts of honor for all the good things a person accomplished in this world.

“We must understand that a person wants kavod, glory more than anything else in this world...”

“The main kavod, of course, is in the World to Come, where Hashem will smile approvingly on those who accomplished something with their lives. That smile of approval is the greatest kavod that could be.”⁴⁶

The *mitzvos* benefit us personally since they are the means for us to receive honor and glory from Hashem. And the honor He'll give us will be commensurate with the effort it took to perform them.⁴⁷

So, not only are the *mitzvos* our way of serving Hashem, and not only do they provide us with the best, most interesting life in

⁴⁶ Ohr Avigdor Mesillas Yesarim, Vol. 1 (Simchas Hachaim Publishers, 2018), p. 274. See Bava Basra, 75a. See also Chapter 2, section Kavod, Kavod, Kavod. (p. 112)

⁴⁷ We can now understand something fundamental about the reward of the World to Come and why man must earn it through his own efforts. After all, if Hashem created the world to do kindness to man, why doesn't He give us *Olam Haba* for free? The answer given is that it would be *'nahama d'chisufa'*—bread of shame, meaning that it would be embarrassing to receive an unearned portion of *Olam Haba*. However, this answer is often followed up by the question, 'Why didn't Hashem simply create the world in such a way that man isn't embarrassed to receive a free reward? But now we have the answer. As we explained, the reward of *Olam Haba* is honor and glory for all that one accomplished in this world. Can you imagine receiving glory for something you never did? It would be a total lie! In the World of Truth, one cannot enjoy honor for things he didn't do. Therefore, there's no choice but for man to work for his *Olam Haba*.

this world, but they'll also be our glory and source of pride for all of eternity. As we say in davening, “*Ki heim chayeinu v'orech yameinu.*”—the Torah itself is our life, in this world and the next.

Doing Great Things

In addition to their great reward, the *mitzvos* enable us to make monumental contributions to the world.

In *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains that when a person learns Torah and performs *mitzvos*, he is sustaining and impacting the entire universe, causing great events to occur that we cannot even begin to fathom. Unbeknownst to us, our ‘small’ deeds are changing the world in huge ways.⁴⁸

Mitzvos are thus incredible gifts from Hashem that enable us to improve the entire universe with our deeds. Eventually, when we discover what our *mitzvos* accomplished, we'll bask in the glory of our personal contribution to the world.

However, although we look forward to that time, one shouldn't wait until his life is over to think about it.

In *parshas Vayeishev*, the Torah tells us about how Yosef's brothers plotted to kill him. But Reuven intervened and prevented them from killing him outright. He told the brothers to cast Yosef into a pit instead, intending to return later and bring him back to

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נפש החיים שער א פרק ג

כן בדמיון זה כביכול ברא הוא יתברך את האדם והשליטו על רבי רבון כחות ועולמות אין מספר. ומסר בידו שיהא הוא המדבר והמנהיג אותם ע"י כל פרטי תנועות מעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו וכל סדרי הנהגותיו הן לטוב או להיפך ח"ו כי במעשיו ודבוריו ומחשבותיו הטובים הוא מקיים ונותן כח בכמה כחות ועולמות עליונים הקדושים ומוסיף בהם קדושה ואור כמ"ש (ישעי' נ"א) ואשים דברי בפיו ג' לנטוע שמים וליסוד ארץ. וכמאמרם ז"ל אל תקרא בניך אלא בוניך כי המה המסדרים עולמות העליונים כבונה המסדר בנינו ונותנים בהם רב כח ובהיפוך ח"ו ע"י מעשיו או דבוריו ומחשבותיו אשר לא טובים. הוא מהרס ר"ל כמה כחות ועולמות עליונים הקדושים לאין ערך ושיעור כמ"ש (שם מ"ט) מהרסין ומחריבין וגו'. או מחשיך או מקטין אורם וקדושתם ח"ו. ומוסיף כח לעומת זה במדורות הטומאה ר"ל.

their father.

But after Reuven left, the remaining brothers spotted a caravan of merchants. Seeing an opportunity, they decided to sell Yosef as a slave, rather than letting him die in the pit.

The Yalkut Shimoni says that if Reuven had known that the Torah would record how he saved Yosef's life, he wouldn't have just prevented the brothers from killing Yosef. Instead, he would have put Yosef onto his shoulders and brought him straight back to their father.⁴⁹

I once heard a beautiful explanation for why Reuven would have acted in such dramatic way.

When Reuven saved Yosef, he had no idea what would result from his intervention. The brothers had a very low opinion of Yosef, and Reuven probably shared that opinion. True, he stepped in and saved Yosef's life, but not because of Yosef's great potential. Never in his wildest dreams could he have known how great Yosef would become!

But, as we know, Yosef indeed became one of the greatest tzadikim who ever lived, and our eternal symbol of moral purity. He saved most of civilization from death by hunger. And it was he who supported the fledgling nation of Klal Yisroel in Egypt, enabling their tremendous population growth and setting the stage for the great exodus from Egypt and the receiving of the Torah. All this happened just because Reuven saved him!

⁴⁹ Yalkut Shimoni *parshas vayeishev remez* 141.

ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת וישב רמז קמא.
ואיני מצילו א"ל הקדוש ברוך הוא אתה פתחת בהצלה תחלה חייך שאין מפרישין ערי מקלט תחלה
אלא בתחומך ה"ד את בצר במדבר בארץ המישור לראובני למדתך תורה דרך ארץ שכשהאדם עושה
מצוה יהא עושה אותה בלב שמח, שאלו היה יודע ראובן שהקב"ה כותב אחריו וישמע ראובן ויצילהו
מידם [ל"ז, כ"א] בכתפיו היה טוענו ומוליכו אצל אביו.

If Reuven had known what Yosef was destined to achieve, would he have told the brothers put Yosef in the pit? Unthinkable! He would have grabbed Yosef and bolted! After all, this was Yosef HaTzadik, the great rescuer and hero of mankind that he was saving! Reuven would have been so filled with enthusiasm from the greatness of his act that he would have outrun the brothers even while carrying Yosef on his shoulders.

This *midrash* contains a phenomenal lesson, applicable to every person in his daily life:

When one understands the significance of his actions, his behavior changes. Instead of performing his deeds half-heartedly, he becomes excited, *alive* with purpose, performing them with confidence and fiery enthusiasm.

It is thus crucial for one to recognize the immense power of our Torah and *mitzvos*, for doing so will enable him to serve Hashem the way Reuven would have...if only he'd known.

The Very Greatest Pleasure

We've explained that in *Olam Haba* we'll receive great honor and glory for the *mitzvos* we did. But this is only a general idea because in truth we have no comprehension of the reward that is reserved for *Olam Haba*. As the *pasuk* teaches us, '*ayin lo ra'asa Elokim zula secha*,'⁵⁰ which means that only Hashem understands what the reward of *Olam Haba* will be like.

A famous *Mishna* says, '*one moment of spiritual bliss in Olam Haba is better than all the life of this world*.'⁵¹

⁵⁰ Yeshaya 64:3, see Brachos 34b.

⁵¹ Avos, 4:22.

In Sefer Michtav M'Eliyahu, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler clarifies this bold statement with an even bolder explanation. He writes that if we could condense all the pleasure that every person in history ever experienced in *Olam Haze'h*, it still wouldn't equal a moment's pleasure of someone standing outside *Olam Haba*, inhaling the fragrance coming from within!⁵²

Therefore, it's obvious why we can't understand the reward that awaits us in *Olam Haba*: It's so pleasurable that it's simply unfathomable to the human mind. But as astoundingly enjoyable as it is, there's something even better, something for which we'd give it all up.

That same *mishna* also states:

'One moment of repentance and good deeds in this world is better than all of Olam Haba.'

What does this mean? How can an aroma of *Olam Haba* be more pleasurable than all of *Olam Haze'h* while at the same time, a moment of *teshuva* or good deeds in this world is even more pleasurable than that?

In his book 'Why?' Rabbi Doniel Hool gives us an astounding explanation based on the Sefer HaChinuch which says:

There are those who do mitzvos with the sole intention to reap the reward, for they know that by doing mitzvos they will be bestowed with goodness and blessing, and it is with this in mind that they always do mitzvos, and, indeed, these people will have a portion in eternal life and the G-dly Gan Eden, however, they haven't reached to the heart of Hashem's good intentions.

There are, however, those who have merited to have Hashem place in their hearts an understanding and true appreciation of Hashem's exalted traits. By truly recog-

⁵² See Michtav M'Eliyahu, Chelek 1, *s'char mitzvah b'hai alma* (Pg. 4).

*nizing Hashem, their hearts are tied with a genuine and everlasting love for Hashem—to the extent that they place all their intentions in doing mitzvos— just to fulfill the will of G-d-because of their tremendous love for Him. And they don't even pay attention to the reward that they'll receive by doing the mitzvos. And this is the greatest level of service to G-d that the three holy Avos (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) attained— as well as many of their descendants, all of blessed memory, and this is the highest level that a human being can ever attain.*⁵³

In other words, doing *mitzvos* simply because you know it is the Will of G-d is the highest possible level in *avodas Hashem*.

Writes Rabbi Hool:

Let's see what the Pele Yoetz (in the chapter of *s'char*) and the Chafetz Chaim (Shem Olam, chapter 12) say to explain the *mishnah*, 'One moment of Torah (*or teshuvah*) in this world is worth more than all of Olam Haba.'

They explain that, in this world, we have a very limited understanding of who Hashem actually is. But in the World to Come, when the veil of falsehood of this earthly world is removed from our eyes, we will see the absolute truth with real "eyes." Then we will see who Hashem, the King of kings, actually is and His true greatness. We will see thousands upon thousands of groups of angels rushing with joy and enthusiasm to do the will of Hashem—immediately following the command from Hashem—without the slightest delay, and then we will have a true

⁵³ Sefer HaChinuch, Parshas Terumah, *mitzvah* 95.

appreciation of the actual greatness of Hashem.

At that time:

(1) You can have all of *Olam Haba* for free— that's everyone's *Olam Haba*— for free.

Or

(2) you get absolutely no *Olam Haba*, but, instead, you can go back to earth and do one more *mitzvah* now that you really know who Hashem is, i.e., you can make Hashem "smile" one more time.

What would you choose?

You would actually choose option number two!

In fact, the Chafetz Chaim says that when you get to *Olam Haba*, even though you see that the bliss of eternal reward is so tremendous, nevertheless, you will beg them in Heaven to exchange all of your *Olam Haba* for the chance to do one more *mitzvah*—one more time to do the Will of Hashem! But they will not let you!

My *rebbe*, Hagaon Rav Gedalia Elfenbein taught me that the Vilna Gaon told his *talmidim* that he would be willing to give up all of his *Olam Haba* in order to do the next *mitzvah* that was incumbent upon him. Amazingly, the Gaon was on this level even while he was alive.

[this is] the explanation of the *mishnah*. Even though one moment in *Olam Haba* is worth more than all of *Olam Haze* combined, nevertheless, when you

realize who Hashem really is, you would gladly give up all of your *Olam Haba* for the chance to do the will of Hashem one more time. Such is the importance and infinite value of simply doing the will of Hashem.

After reading what the Chinuch and the Chafetz Chaim and the Pele Yoetz write about *ratzon* Hashem, it turns out the ultimate level a human or even an angel can ever reach is to yearn to have the Will of Hashem fulfilled. This lofty level is how our forefathers and the prophets served Hashem.^{54 55}

We've seen how the Torah demonstrates Hashem's deep love for us by providing us with peaceful, happy lives and the most stirring and uplifting experiences. We saw how the *mitzvos* enable us to make enormous, meaningful contributions to this world and earn incomprehensible glory and pleasure in *Olam Haba*.

But now we have reached the pinnacle of the opportunities that man has been given in this world: the ability to serve Hashem, Infinite and Glorious Creator of Heaven and Earth, for Whom a moment's service is so fabulous that a person would be willing to trade away all his *Olam Haba* for one moment of it!

⁵⁴ Doniel Hool, *Why?* (Mosaica Press, 2024) p. 50.

⁵⁵ With this explanation we can get an inkling of the incomprehensible value of doing *mitzvos*. When the time comes that a person finally comprehends the glory of Hashem, he will surely look back at his life and seek out every 'crumb' of *avodas* Hashem that he ever did. How ecstatic he will be for every second that he spent with wearing *tefillin*, with the name of Hashem firmly planted on his head. And the same is true for every *mitzvah* he did, every word of Torah he learned, and every word he said in *tefillah*. (However, this underscores the importance of *davening* with *kavana*, since words that lack intention are hardly something to take pride in. Similarly, we see how important it is to do all *mitzvos* with *simcha*, for how can one take pride in deeds that were done unhappily?)

After seeing all the astounding opportunities Hashem has granted us in this world, isn't it obvious how much He loves and cares for us? It's only the *yetzer hara* who convinces a person to walk around sulking, thinking that Hashem is angry at him. It's absurd, but also terrifying for what will a person tell himself after he leaves this world, if, heaven forbid, he is forced to face the catastrophic truth—that he wasted his life and gave up on the opportunity of eternity? Even if Hashem forgives him, he'll never forgive himself.

So, let's constantly reinforce our commitment to the Torah and *mitzvos*, which are all for our benefit, and seize our opportunities while we still have them. Then we'll see the words of David HaMelech fulfilled in us, as he said:

*“May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the House of Hashem forever and ever.”*⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Tehillim 23:6.

A Letter to the Reader

Dear Reader,

After reading this chapter and seeing the fantastic opportunities Hashem gave us in this world, we should be inspired to serve Him in the best way.

For example, when an opportunity for chesed comes our way, do we look both ways, swallow hard and then agree? Is this the kind of achievement we'll be proud of in Olam Haba?

We must realize that avodas Hashem and mitzvos are our opportunity for eternal greatness! We shouldn't be doing them reactively! Rather, let's seek out mitzvah opportunities to do with confidence! This kind of achievement will be our success and glory for all of eternity.⁵⁷

Yehuda

⁵⁷ See Sefer Ka'asher Tzivah Hashem by Rabbi Daniel Garfinkel for an explanation of how, with a simple *kavana* (intent) one can fulfill countless Torah *mitzvos* every day. With just some thought, a person can transform each day into a spiritual treasure trove!

CHAPTER FIVE



More Challenges to Emunah

In this chapter we'll discuss other challenges to having emunah and how to deal with them.

In the Darkness

We've discussed some of the main challenges to maintaining *emunah*, including the emotional attacks of the *yetzer hara*, which confuse us and distract us from what we know intellectually. However, there are other challenges as well.

In every person's life there are times when he experiences feelings of contentedness. At those times, life is a pleasure. He feels good and optimistic, finding inspiration and happiness in the lifestyle prescribed by the Torah. Perhaps he even sees and feels Hashem's *hashgacha pratis* (divine guidance) in his life.

These times may be comfortable and enjoyable, but they also serve as a kind of ‘bribe,’ that makes it easier to have *emunah* in Hashem and fulfill His Torah. At times like these, a person *wants* to do the *mitzvos*. He has *emunah* because he is happy. As those in the field of *kiruv* say, “A person doesn’t have questions when his stomach is full.” It’s easy to have faith when you’re happy.

Then there are the other times, when we feel like we’re living in darkness. At those times, a person wishes he had the feelings of security he had when he felt Hashem’s loving care, but instead he feels empty and uncertain. These are known as times of ‘*hester panim*,’ referring to Hashem’s “concealed ‘Face’” and they can be demanding moments for one’s *emunah*. But, in fact, they are *revealing* moments, which display the true strength of one’s *emunah*, his commitment to his knowledge of Hashem. If he continues to stay true to his values, it proves his loyalty to his intellect and to Hashem.

In times like these, a person needs to lean on the staff of his intellect. He needs to be *ma’amin* and make decisions based on what he knows but doesn’t feel. He must rely on his intellect like a blindfolded man relying on another person to guide him to safety.

The following *mashal* can help us understand this concept:

A Yungerman left Kollel to find work. He was determined to become an elementary school rebbi, feeling deeply inspired to teach Torah to the next generation, to help boys develop into talmidei chachamim.

Soon, he landed a great job teaching fifth graders in a well-known yeshiva. He was off to a great start! But after just a few months, he noticed that something wasn’t right. He realized that he was giving a disproportionate amount of attention to the sharp, fun students in the class.

These boys were a pleasure to teach. They were smart

and charming, and showed lots of interest in their studies.

But the boys who fidgeted, spaced out or weren't so bright weren't getting much of his attention at all. Teaching them was not as enjoyable as teaching the gifted boys.

In this *mashal*, it was the challenging students who tested the rebbi's commitment to help his students. These difficult boys didn't provide him with instant gratification, meaning that he'd have to put his efforts into them based purely on his commitment to help boys learn Torah.

The same principle is true in every person's life. Having *emunah* in good times may be easy, but it doesn't reveal the *strength* of our *emunah*. Only the challenging times do so.

With this understanding, we can appreciate the difficult times we sometimes go through as unique opportunities that allow us to demonstrate our commitment to our *emunah* and thereby earn tremendous glory for ourselves.

This idea is embodied by the word '*nisayon*', test which is rooted in the word '*nes*', flag. The difficult tests we pass in life are great banners which we will eventually hoist up high and wave before the world!

Therefore, let's not dread the challenging times in our lives, but rather, recognize that they are the source of our future glory.

Lulled by "Nature"

Another major challenge to our *emunah* is that the world seems to operate in such a natural, predictable way. How can we see Hashem through the heavy mask of nature?

We must realize that this mask is crucial to the entire purpose of creation because it provides man with *bechira* so that he can earn reward for his actions. Since Hashem is the Master of dis-

guise, we can fool ourselves into thinking that He's not here. But when we overcome the test, that's our success! The mask is for our own good. Without it, life has no purpose.

However, there is another point to think about. It's true that the phenomena of the sun, like the sun, the earth, the seasons, and the many laws of physics appear to operate in a natural way. However, these things are only the "props" on the stage of our lives. The props of life may be predictable—but the *show* itself is not. Life is so full of twists and turns! We all know that in this world, the race is often not won by the fastest runner but by the most unexpected one.

There have been so many cases like this, where the most talented person failed and the one who was least likely to succeed became the star. If nature is so predictable, how did that happen? The answer is, nature is predictable, but *life* is not! Whether we attribute it to *tefillos*, *zechusim*, or any other of Hashem's mysterious reasons, He is running the show.

In Chapter 10 we will elaborate more on this amazing aspect of Hashem's *hashgacha*: the surprising and unexpected developments that speak of His presence in the world.

The Burning Palace

We've seen that a person can come to a sure knowledge of Hashem by loyally clinging to the conclusions of his intellect, even when the *yetzzer hara* is working overtime to weaken his resolve. We've also seen that a person must always stand firm in his *emunah*, even when he isn't being "bribed" by good times or positive experiences.

However, there is a particular challenge that can severely test a person's *emunah*. Even Avraham Avinu was tested by it. We'll call it the test of the 'burning palace'.

The *midrash* says:

‘R’ Yitzchak said, “A mashal [of Avraham is] to a person who was traveling from place to place and encountered a palace on fire. Could he possibly say that this palace has no one in charge?

The owner of the palace peered out and said, “I am the master of the palace!”⁵⁸

What is the meaning of this enigmatic *midrash*? We’ll explain as follows:

Avraham studied our incredible, beautiful world until he concluded that without a doubt, it is the product of a vast intelligence. This world is like a big, beautiful palace which must have been created by Someone of supreme intelligence and capability. Actually, the world is more complicated than a palace by a factor so big, we don’t even have the means to calculate it. Therefore, Avraham had no doubt, that it was made by an incredibly intelligent and powerful Creator.

However, a problem arose in Avraham’s mind. It seemed to him that the ‘great palace’ was on fire, meaning that Avraham saw many terrible events and tragic disasters occurring in the world. He saw people acting in evil ways to each other—and getting away with it. He saw people getting sick, dying young—so many awful calamities! It seemed as if the world was on fire, with no one coming to put it out. Avraham wondered, “Were my conclusions correct? Does the ‘palace’ really have a Master? If so, why is He allowing it to burn?”

The fire presented a terrible challenge to his *emunah* in

⁵⁸ Bereishis Rabbah 39:1. See Revel in *Emunah – A Deep and Inspiring Journey* through the Rambam’s Thirteen Principles of Faith based on *shiurim* of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt”l by Rabbi Aryeh Feldman (Feldheim Distribution, 2020) p. 23.

Hashem.

However, Avraham refused to let the question shake his *emunah*. “I don’t know why the Master is allowing his palace to burn,” he thought, “but the fact that it’s burning doesn’t mean there’s no Master. The Master is here, and He has reasons for why He is not putting out the fire. I stand by the conclusions of my intellect. *Fire or not, this world has a Master!*”

Avraham thus passed the test. And then the Master of the palace revealed Himself. “You are right,” He said. “I am the Master.”

Explaining the Suffering

Like our forefather Avraham, the suffering we sometimes see poses serious challenges to our *emunah*. We too want to know why Hashem allows a fire to rage in His palace. Of course, we aren’t speaking about the suffering of evil people—they deserve punishment. But many times, we see innocent people, such as young children, or even righteous individuals, undergoing terrible tests of affliction. And we see evil people enjoying success at the expense of good people. How can we prevent these things from impacting our *emunah*?

One explanation is that although to *our* perception, it seems that many injustices are taking place, there is a much bigger picture that we know very little about. For example, the concept of *gilgul*, reincarnation, resolves many questions about Hashem’s guidance of the world. And since we don’t know who’s a *gilgul* of whom, we can’t even attempt to understand why some people have easy lives and others have it hard.

Here is a story about an apparent tragedy that was resolved with the concept of *gilgul*:

There was a couple who lived in France, in an area that

had no mikveh. Being forced to travel many hours for a mikveh, they tried to raise money to build one nearby. When their efforts failed, they decided to turn one of the rooms of their home into a mikveh. However, they didn't have much money, and so they began saving every penny they could. For 5-6 years they lived on bread and water until finally they'd saved enough to complete the project.

But then, just a few weeks after the mikveh was finished, tragedy struck: their young son managed to get into the room, fell in and drowned. Of course, the parents were beside themselves with grief. They could not understand how their holy efforts could have resulted in such a calamity. They spoke to many great Rabbis but found no consolation.

One night, the boy appeared to his father in a dream and said that the father's anguish was causing him pain. The boy explained that he'd lived 900 years earlier, as a Tosfist, and that he was killed al kiddush Hashem by an attack on Jews in France. He had not undergone purification in a mikveh nor had received a proper Jewish burial, and therefore his soul was unable to reach the highest levels of Gan Eden.

For all these years his soul waited for the purist mikveh to be built, one which was made purely for the sake of Heaven. It was this couple's mikveh that was chosen.

"To show you that this is real," the boy told his father, "You are going to have a baby girl within the year in the merit of Mommy's strict observance of the mitzvah of challah."

The next morning, the Rabbi's wife informed him that she'd had a dream about challah. And that year they were

*blessed with a baby girl.*⁵⁹

This is just one example of how inside information can completely change our understanding of events in this world. For this reason, human suffering should not shake our *emunah*.

There is another, perhaps even more important reason why suffering is no contradiction to *emunah*: Suffering humbles us and improves us, and makes us into better people. Therefore, hardships shouldn't pose any questions to our faith. Just the opposite! Seeing that we become better people through them should *increase* our faith.

A third reason for the suffering of the world is that it actually helps us enjoy and appreciate our lives! For example, a sick person will enjoy his life far more when he eventually recovers from his illness.

The following quote, from my book, *Enjoy His World*, explains this idea:

The sefarim write that one of the reasons Hashem created רע — bad — is to make people aware of the good, since we can only truly understand something by contrasting it with its opposite.

For example, one can only truly understand that wealth is good if he contrasts it with poverty. A wealthy person who doesn't understand the suffering of a poor person will not be able to enjoy his wealth properly; he will take it completely for granted. This is true for all good things.^{60 61}

⁵⁹ Adapted from *Living Emunah* (Vol. 1) by Rabbi David Ashear, (Mesorah Publications, LTD 2015) p. 307.

⁶⁰

עין בעל שם טוב מגילות, מגילת קהלת, א.

⁶¹ Rabbi Yehuda Schonfeld, *Enjoy His World – A Guide to Discovering Hashem's Kind-*

We thus see a very positive reason for why people suffer, and therefore it poses no contradiction to our *emunah*.

A fourth, well-known reason, is that suffering cleanses us from our sins. Suffering in this world is a gift of mercy from Hashem because, as our *chachamim* explain, suffering in the next world is far more painful than the trials and tribulations of this world.⁶² It is a kindness from Hashem that He purifies a person in this world, so that he can go straight to *Gan Eden* upon his death.⁶³

Here's a fifth reason for the suffering of this world:

A person's innermost desire is to be honored, and indeed, in *Olam Haba* we will receive honor and glory for all the good things we accomplished in this world.⁶⁴ Of course, the rule is '*lefum tza'ara agra*'—we'll receive glory in accordance with the efforts we put in. Therefore, suffering is no contradiction to *emunah* because *with more suffering comes more glory!* Suffering is thus a gift from Hashem, for it will greatly increase one's reward in *Olam Haba*.⁶⁵

ness Everywhere You Turn (Judaica Press, 2023) p. 155.

⁶² The Ramban writes in his introduction to Sefer Iyov that if Hashem were to take away all a person's pleasure in this world and if the person were to suffer like Iyov for all his life, it would still be better than to suffer the fate of being punished in Gehinnom.

⁶³ Suffering is also often the result of one's own bad choices. It is unfair to blame Hashem for the painful results of our own irresponsible mistakes. See Rabbi Chaim Veshnefsky, *Tell Me the TRUTH* (Israel Bookshop Publications, 2022) p. 123.

⁶⁴ See Chapter 4, *Beyond the Adventure* (p. 61).

⁶⁵ The Gemara in Menachos (29b) brings down from Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav, that Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu that a man named Akiva ben Yosef (the famous Rabbi Akiva) will one day expound heaps and heaps of *halachos* from the crowns of the letters of the Torah. Moshe then asked Hashem to show him what Rabbi Akiva's reward will be, and Hashem showed him Rabbi Akiva's flesh being weighed and sold in the butcher meat market. (After combing Rabbi Akiva's flesh off, the evil Romans disgraced his remains by selling them in the meat market.) This indicates that Rabbi Akiva's re-

For all these reasons, the suffering of this world shouldn't pose any questions to our *emunah* in Hashem.

The Gift of the Exodus

Although we aspire to reach the level of *emunah* where we have no questions or doubts, we must be realistic and recognize that this is often beyond us. What can we do in those times? Here's an idea that can help:

There are many *mitzvos* which remind us of *yetzias Mitzrayim* (the exodus). It's a *mitzvah* to speak about it twice a day (we do it at the end of *Krias Shema*), we mention it when we put on *tefillin*, *bentch*, or make *kiddush* on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. In addition, the three *Yomim Tovim*, with *Pesach* at their forefront, are all dedicated to recalling this great event.

What is so important about *yetzias Mitzrayim* that we continually remind ourselves of it?

We mentioned earlier⁶⁶ that the *mitzvah* of *emunah* is based on the *pasuk*, 'I am Hashem, your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, from a house of slavery.'⁶⁷ The fact that Hashem took *Klal Yisroel* out of Egypt in such a miraculous manner proves that He oversees and controls every aspect of our lives.

Yetzias Mitzrayim was the moment in our history when we saw Hashem's Presence in our lives with unsurpassed clarity. Our nation saw fantastic miracles and *hashgacha pratis*, all of which filled our *emunah* 'tanks' up to the top. When we left *Mitzrayim*,

ward was the very suffering he endured when he was killed al *kiddush* Hashem. (Heard from Rabbi Yehuda Nakdimen). (Even in this world it's Rabbi Akiva's glory that he proclaimed the "Shema Yisroel" while being tortured to death.)

⁶⁶ Chapter 2, *Emunah* (p. 33).

⁶⁷ Shemos 20:2.

we didn't merely believe in Hashem – we *knew* Hashem.

But when we entered Eretz Yisroel, life went mostly back to normal. No longer would we see Hashem's open *hashgacha* in our everyday lives, and this meant that our *emunah* was in danger of becoming weak. Therefore, Hashem made it a *mitzvah* to continually recall *yetzias Mitzrayim*, to *mentally transport ourselves back to the time when we knew Hashem was with us*. This would fortify our *emunah* and help us remain loyal and faithful to Him even in times when His presence would be hidden.

This idea is a pathway to maintaining *emunah* in the face of suffering. It is true that suffering is painful and real, and can bring a person to have doubts in *emunah*. However, Hashem gave us a *mitzvah* which can take us back to a time when we *didn't* have doubts. By thinking about what our nation experienced at *yetzias Mitzrayim*, our *emunah* will be strengthened, and we'll remain on the track of success in *avodas Hashem*.⁶⁸

Here's another idea that can help one maintain *emunah* in difficult times. We mentioned in a previous section that Avraham Avinu observed the world and realized that if a magnificent palace must have a creator, then surely this beautiful world has a Creator. This was so clear to Avraham that even when he encountered situations that he didn't understand, his *emunah* was unshaken. Even when Hashem asked him to do things that were impossible for him to understand, Avraham kept his *emunah*. He simply suspended his judgment and kept going.

This is something that we can do as well. In this book, we'll

⁶⁸ In addition to remembering *yetzias Mitzrayim*, a person should remind himself of other times when Klal Yisroel saw Hashem's hand in history, such as when Eliyahu HaNavi performed the miracle on Har HaCarmel, or by the Purim story. Similarly, a person should record and think about the times when he saw Hashem's guiding Hand in his personal life. Doing this will strengthen his *emunah* greatly.

see so many of Hashem's fingerprints, that our questions will not shake us. Like our forefather Avraham, we'll be able to maintain our *emunah* even when we encounter situations that we don't understand.

In summary

The *mitzvah* of *emunah* means that one must know that there is a God who controls everything in this world. Then, he must stay loyal to this knowledge, even when he's being assaulted by the illogical attacks of the *yetzer hara* or when he doesn't emotionally feel Hashem's presence. By overcoming these tests, he'll be greatly rewarded by Hashem.

When Mashiach comes, we'll no longer be tested in this way. It will be clear to all that Hashem is in total control of the world. At that time, as the *pasuk* says, the knowledge of Hashem will fill the world like water covers the seabed.⁶⁹ However that time is also described as '*yamim asher ain bahem cheifetz*,' undesirable days,⁷⁰ because there will be a much smaller reward for one's achievements.

Although we yearn for the *geula*, we also want to earn reward for having *emunah* when matters are not so clear to us. We do this by staying loyal to the truth even as a tidal wave of confusion, temptations, and emotional darkness threatens to overwhelm us.

⁶⁹ Sefer Yeshaya 11:9.

⁷⁰ Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra Rabbah, Parsha 18, Siman 1, Parshas Metzora, explaining Koheles, 12:1.

CHAPTER SIX



Benefits of Emunah

In this chapter, we'll discuss some of the amazing benefits of having strong emunah. We'll also see just how precious emunah is in the Eyes of Hashem.

Bitachon

Basic *emunah* in Hashem is a fundamental requirement for being part of Klal Yisroel. Without it, a person cannot even reach *Olam Haba*.⁷¹ However, there is no *upper* limit to the level of *emunah* one can attain—and one should strive to attain the highest level possible, for, in addition to fulfilling the *mitzvah* on a higher level, he will also experience other wonderful benefits.

⁷¹ See Rabbi Aryeh Feldman, *Revel in Emunah – A Deep and Inspiring Journey through the Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith based on shiurim of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l* (Feldheim Distribution, 2020) p. 18, for a fascinating explanation of how *emunah* grants a person access to *Olam Haba*.

One of the benefits of strong *emunah* is that it provides a person with inner peace and tranquility, something that is, of course, priceless.

Here is a *meshal* to help us understand the serenity that strong *emunah* can bring to a person's life:

The jet plane was slowly filling up with passengers. Workers and flight attendants busily prepared for the long international flight ahead. Almost everyone was in a good mood, looking forward to their flight and to arriving at their destination.

Two of the passengers, however, were not happy. Chezky and Dovid both had a fear of flying and were terribly anxious. They decided to approach the pilot for reassurance about the safety of the long trip.

They made their way to the front of the plane and presented their request. The kindly pilot emerged from the cockpit. Chezky spoke up. "Sir," he began. "I am sorry to trouble you, but I am an inexperienced flyer. Please tell me, is this a hazardous trip?"

Dovid said, "I would like to know as well." The pilot smiled, "There's nothing to be concerned about!" he said. "I've flown this route many times!"

Chezky felt somewhat reassured. He thanked the pilot and headed back to his seat. But Dovid didn't budge. "I'm sorry sir," he said, "that may have been enough for him, but it wasn't enough for me. Are you absolutely sure we are not in any danger?"

The pilot smiled again. He leaned against the wall and laughed. "Danger!" he said with a twinkle in his eye. "Did you know that I was one of the inventors of this aircraft? I

know where every single screw and wire is! I've flown this exact route, three times a week, for over thirty-five years! I've flown through thunderstorms, blizzards, hurricanes, and even a tornado! I can probably fly while blindfolded and sleeping! Believe me, you don't have a thing to worry about!"

Dovid felt like a giant load had been lifted from his shoulders. He thanked the pilot and went back to his seat.

From his seat near the back of the plane, Chezky watched as Dovid sat down ten rows ahead of him. The plane headed for the runway and took off. Soon, Dovid was fast asleep. He stayed asleep for most of the flight, only waking when the pilot announced their imminent arrival.

But Chezky couldn't sleep a wink. The few words he'd heard from the pilot hadn't really comforted him much. Chezky's stomach remained somewhere near the back of his throat throughout the long flight. He felt every bit of turbulence – every lurch and bump. He kept closing his eyes and wondering if he should say viduy. He regretted ever agreeing to take the trip and tried desperately not to think about his return flight.

In this *mashal*, Chezky received only a bit of reassurance from the pilot. This is like one who was taught only a little about Hashem's presence and guidance over the world. This kind of 'lite' *emunah* will not suffice to reassure a person in his time of distress.

Dovid, on the other hand, had insisted on hearing more about the pilot's abilities and he was rewarded for his tenacity. He'd received a powerful, eye-opening lecture about the pilot's amazing abilities, which gave him a great sense of calm, allowing him to sleep peacefully through the entire trip.

This is like one who has *bitachon* in Hashem. *Bitachon* is a

natural outgrowth of *emunah*, and it's one of the rewards for diligence in the study of *emunah*. The more one studies and learns the topic, the more tranquility he will experience in his life. The ups and downs will flatten out, allowing him to enjoy the beautiful journey of life.

The Everlasting Benefit

As we have seen, a wonderful benefit of strong *emunah* is *bitachon*, tranquility.

However, there is another benefit that is even more valuable than *bitachon*.

We are all taught from a young age that every moment in Olam Hazeh is unfathomably precious because it is another opportunity to earn eternal reward—for every word of Torah learned and every *mitzvah* fulfilled. Of course, the *yetzer hara* works overtime to entice us away from doing *mitzvos*, and instead, run after the fleeting pleasures of this world. Our job is to resist those temptations and continue gathering *mitzvos* and merits which will provide us with eternal pleasure in the next world.

It stands to reason then, that a person with strong *emunah* will be far more able to resist the *yetzer hara* and maintain the proper perspective on what is important in this world. By doing this, he will be able to maximize his time here and earn for himself *colossal* reward in the next world. *Emunah* is thus the *ultimate* investment because it pushes a person to use every precious moment of life to earn eternal reward in the next world – and what is more valuable than that?

Emunah Can't be Disproved by Difficult Events

Our *emunah* is firmly based on what we see in front of us and what has already taken place in the past. Therefore, no event that may occur in the future, no matter how shocking, scary, or tragic, can break our faith. Not the horrors of the holocaust, not even a nuclear war, *lo aleinu*.

We must realize that Hashem has a lot of time to work with. After all, He created time! He is also extremely patient. When tragedy strikes, we must be patient as well, and often, we'll see everything work out for the good. Even if we don't see it, we must trust that it will be good in the end.

About four and a half thousand years ago, Hashem sent a great flood upon the earth which wiped out the entire living world except for a single human family and animals representing each species. It was the worst destruction that ever occurred in world history. The Torah itself describes how Hashem warned Noach about the impending destruction and instructed him to save his family and a remnant of the animal kingdom.

Can we fathom how Noach must have felt when he left the *teivah* and saw that his entire civilization had been wiped off the face of the earth? But, as we know, the world recovered. The waters receded and the world was rebuilt anew. All the great civilizations we ever heard of came after the flood. And in the many events which followed, we can clearly discern Hashem's plan, oversight, and kindness to us.

This teaches us that no disaster, no matter how big, should shake our belief in a benevolent Creator. Although He wiped out humanity long ago, He rebuilt the world anew. Similarly, if some tragedy befalls us in the future (though we hope and pray it won't), we must be patient and know that in the end, everything will be good.

The Greatest Test

There's no denying it: steadfast *emunah* is very difficult to achieve.

In Ohr Avigdor on Mesilas Yescharim, Rav Avigdor Miller describes it as the most difficult test in life. He writes:

‘...the greatest of all the tests that man has to undergo in this world [is] the great test of recognizing the presence of Hashem despite the fact that He is invisible. As we have said, 'מלא כל הארץ כבודו' – “His glory fills the whole world.” He is everywhere, and not only is He everywhere, but He created the world in such a way that everything testifies to the great Designer Who made it. However, the fact that Hashem is in hiding—יֵשֵׁב בַּסֵּתֶר—He dwells in secrecy,”⁷² misleads mankind and they forget about Him. Even the good people find it very difficult to feel that they’re standing in the presence of Hashem. Even when standing in tefillah, it’s very difficult to feel that He is hearing your words unless you work on it—and you must work on that concept.’⁷³

As we see, it can be extremely challenging to have strong *emunah*. However, because it is so difficult, *emunah* is immensely treasured by Hashem, and is therefore worth obtaining at any price.

⁷² Tehillim 91:1.

⁷³ Ohr Avigdor Mesillas Yescharim, Vol. 4 (Simchas Hachaim Publishers) p. 137.

Emunah is Precious

How much does Hashem value a person's *emunah*? More than you can imagine.

Rav Elya Lopian once gave the following *mashal*:

One day a homeless beggar was walking down the sidewalk when suddenly, something on the floor caught his eye. He picked it up and his face lit up with a smile and he gently placed it in his pocket. A bystander saw what happened but didn't attach any significance to the find. "He probably found a shiny bottle-cap, or maybe a small coin," the man thought.

A month later, there was a royal parade in the big city. Foot-soldiers, cavalry and marching bands trooped through streets bedecked in fluttering banners. At the center of it all, under a velvet canopy, surrounded by his royal entourage, walked the king himself. Suddenly, the king stopped the parade. Everyone came to a halt. The king bent down, picked something up from the floor, examined it and then his face lit up. Carefully, he tucked it into his robes. Everyone looked at each other in wonder. Curiosity burned inside them. "What could the king have possibly found?" they asked each other, again and again. The entire city buzzed for days afterwards. Everyone was sure the king had found something incredibly rare and precious.

Here is the explanation:

Every day we say in *davening*:

'It is You, who are Hashem, Who alone created the Heav-

ens, the Heavens above the Heavens and all the hosts of the Heavens, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that are in them, and it is You Who gives life to all of them, and the hosts of Heaven bow to You.

*It is You, Who is Hashem our G-d, Who chose Avram, took him from Ur Kasdim and named him 'Avraham'. And You **found** his heart ne'eman (faithful) before You.*⁷⁴

This *tefillah* describes Hashem in the most glorious terms imaginable: Master, Creator of the hosts of heaven and the earthly creatures; a King infinitely greater than the greatest emperor who ever lived. Then we go on to say that Hashem found something. Something caught the interest of G-d Himself! What could the Creator of heaven and earth possibly find that would interest Him?!

It was a person with *emunah*: Avraham Avinu.

This teaches us about the unbelievable value of *emunah*—something so difficult to attain but so precious that Hashem Himself cherishes the person who has it.⁷⁵

It is to the benefit of every person to develop, nurture, and constantly strengthen his *emunah*, hard as it may be. Then we too will catch the interest of Hashem, who will 'bend down,' 'pick us up,' and place us gently near Himself.

⁷⁴ *Pesukei d'zimra.*

⁷⁵ Adapted from Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon, *With Hearts Full of Faith*, (Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2002.) P. 17.

PART TWO

Part two of this book is about the many fingerprints of Hashem found in the world around us. They're in our neshamos, in the mysteries of the world, in the archeological record and in Hashem's providence in history.

Each fingerprint can reinforce our emunah deeply.

Many of the fingerprints can be the subject of an entire book! The reader is therefore advised to further research each one, to continue deepening and strengthening his emunah.

לע"נ נחום בן ר' יחיאל צבי שלום יבל"ח



CHAPTER SEVEN



In the Image of G-d

In this chapter we'll discover the incredible fingerprints of Hashem that mark the human soul.

Kayla Wakes Up

Boom! Boom, BOOM!
R' Yosef sat up in bed and glanced at his alarm clock. It was 1:30 AM and someone was pounding on his front door! Quickly, he jumped up, threw his robe on, and rushed to the door, flipping on light switches as he ran.

"Yosef, Yosef," a man shouted from behind the door.
"Open up, quick!"

Yosef recognized the voice. It was R' Meir, his best friend. Quickly, he slid the bolt back. The door burst open, and Meir barreled into the hallway, grabbed Yosef in a gi-

ant bear hug and lifted him off his feet.

“Meir, what!” spluttered Yosef, who was still half asleep. “Put me down! What’s going on?”

“It’s Kayla! Baruch Hashem, she’s up! Yosef, she’s up! She spoke to me!” Meir put Yosef down and tears began rolling down his cheeks. “You saved her, Yosef, you saved her!”

Yosef’s breath caught. Kayla!

Nine-year-old Kayla was Meir’s only child. Only four months ago, she had been diagnosed with an acute form of cancer. She had deteriorated rapidly. Two months later she slipped into a coma. One by one, the doctors gave up. Meir and his wife sat helplessly by her bed, reciting Tehillim day and night. A month passed and then one night Meir called Yosef and poured out his heart, describing his fears and his pain.

Yosef listened quietly, his heart breaking. By the time he’d hung up the phone, he had decided to help. The very next day, he put his entire business on hold, rolled up his sleeves and began to work. For a week and a half, he spent every waking minute calling any contact of his who might have medical expertise and then calling their contacts. He researched, investigated, and davened. And finally, he hit paydirt. A doctor in Houston, Texas had remarkable expertise in the field of cancer treatments. And by a stroke of divine fortune, he was scheduled to travel to New York for a medical conference.

Yosef called the doctor, and begged, cajoled, bribed, and badgered him until finally, he agreed to help. He reviewed Kayla’s file, visited her in the hospital and met with her doctors. Then he gave his recommendations and went back to Texas.

Now, a week later, Kayla had woken up!

“The doctors say they never saw this happen!” Meir was saying. “She’s recovering, Yosef, you saved her, you saved her!”

Yosef suddenly absorbed what Meir was saying.

He’d done it. He’d found the doctor who’d saved Kayla’s life. He, Yosef, had helped save the life of his best friend’s only child!

The realization shocked him, and he suddenly felt light-headed. Quickly, he sat down on the bench in the hallway and put his head in his arms.

“Yosef, are you ok?” Meir asked, but Yosef barely heard him, because something was happening to him. Warm rays of happiness were radiating into every crevice of his soul. It was a pleasure that he had never felt in his entire life. He’d helped save Kayla!

He began to laugh.

“I’m fine, amazing, perfect!” He jumped up and grabbed Meir’s hands, and they began to sing and dance, barely noticing as Yosef’s wife and children sleepily gathered to watch the impromptu midnight celebration.

It Feels Good to Do Good

Doesn’t it feel amazingly good to help others? Saving a child’s life is an extreme example, but any time we give of ourselves to help another person, it fills us up with a wonderful, satisfying feeling. For example, if one gives his meal to a poor, hungry person, he’ll experience a wonderful feeling inside—even though he just lost his meal!

Anything we do to help others, whether giving someone

a present or being there for a friend in his moment of pain, will make us feel good. Even when one gives up his own desires for the sake of others, he will experience a satisfying feeling inside.

Why is this? Why do we feel so good even when sacrificing our own personal pleasures? Does this make sense?

The only explanation is that Hashem, Who created this world, wants us to do good, and designed us to feel pleasure when we do. Only when we bring Him into the equation does it make perfect sense that doing good for others makes us feel good.

These feelings are not a natural occurrence or biological mechanism. There is no logical explanation for them, except that they emanate from a divine soul. They're sensory proof that a person's *neshama* is his true essence.

The good feeling that comes from doing good is a 'fingerprint of Hashem'—powerful evidence of our Creator. Let's notice and think about this, and it will develop in us a strong, everlasting, *emunah*.^{76 77}

⁷⁶ Rav Mattisyahu Salomon *zt"l* taught that parents should tell their children about the pleasure that comes from doing *mitzvos*, a deep, wonderful feeling of satisfaction, an internal happiness that far surpasses the fleeting pleasures of the material world. See Rabbi Mattisyahu Salomon, *With Hearts Full of Love* (Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2009), p. 131. See also Sefer HaBris, *chelek* 2, *malamer* 13, *perek* 4.

⁷⁷ When a person is engaged in doing good, he also gets energized with an exciting sense of purpose and inspiration. And, as he journeys up the spiritual ladder, growing in Torah and *middos*, he'll find himself decreasingly interested in material matters like clothing and appearances. Like a child outgrowing his toys, his interests will become replaced with loftier pursuits and significant matters, until he literally feels himself soaring high above the rest of society. This idea is found in the Torah, in *parshas Re'eh*, where Moshe Rabbeinu says, "See I present before you today a blessing and a curse." The Malbim explains that these aren't future blessings and curses. Rather, one can see with his own eyes that people who keep the Torah feel accomplished and fulfilled—a tremendous blessing that is fulfilled immediately!

Aveiros Are Painful

It feels good to do good—and it feels bad to do bad. When people sin, guilty feelings usually follow. Of course, it's that way by design, to redirect us when we veer off the right path.

It's not fun to experience guilt but it can bring us closer to Hashem. When we feel it—and everyone does, at times, it should remind us of Hashem, Who created us with those feelings. If a person utilizes guilt to bring him closer to Hashem, it will surely be counted towards his atonement.

Serenity of Living with Emunah

The following *mashal* can teach us a wonderful lesson in *emunah*:

On a sunny day somewhere in South America, a group of natives ventured out of the Amazon rainforest only to make an exciting discovery: two cars sitting in an empty parking lot. They quickly set out to examine their find, which consisted of one race car and one jeep.

The natives knew that the cars were for travel and transportation, but they didn't know the difference between the two types. Which unique purpose did each one serve? Fortunately, the keys were in the ignitions, so they hopped in and began to drive.

It didn't take long for them to discover what each car was meant to do. The race car performed horribly in the jungle but could attain incredible speeds on smooth asphalt. The jeep, on the other hand, couldn't move too fast on the street—but could handle the jungle terrain with ease.

This *mashal* demonstrates that one can discover the purpose of a machine by testing where it performs best.

This same exact test can be performed on the machine called the ‘human.’ And just a bit of basic research will reveal that a human performs his absolute best when he lives with *emunah* and *bitachon*! With *emunah*, a person is calmer, healthier, happier, and more successful in every area. *Emunah* enhances and enriches one’s entire life, and this proves that we were designed to have *emunah*.

This is an incredibly bright fingerprint of Hashem; powerful proof that a Creator designed us to function best when we rely on Him.

The Effects of Torah

One of the most magnificent fingerprints of Hashem is the effect of Torah on those who learn it and observe its laws.⁷⁸

Just think about the kindness of people raised with a Torah *chinuch*. A *frum* Yid is bursting with *chesed*, so much so, that we don’t even realize what it’s like on the ‘other side.’ The following true story is an example of a non-Torah based attitude towards charity:

Many years ago, my mother, may she live and be well, worked as a tax preparer, helping clients file their income taxes. One day, she was working with a couple, and, as part of her efforts to get them the biggest deduction possible, she asked, “Did you give any charity this past year?”

⁷⁸ This is called ‘judging a root by its fruit.’ When we analyze the “fruit” of the Torah—meaning the Jewish people in general and the righteous *tzadikim* in particular, we see how perfect the Torah is.

“Like what do you mean?” asked the husband.

“Well, did you perhaps donate \$100 to charity over the course of the year?”

“A hundred dollars!” The man exclaimed. “The IRS will never believe that!”

Wow! This man couldn't even *imagine* donating a hundred dollars over the course of an entire year. What a stark contrast to what the Torah teaches us: that giving ten percent is a minimum!

Rav Shlomo Hoffman *zt”l*, a *talmid* of Rav Isaac Sher made this same point:

“We do not notice how easy it is for us to be giving and sharing. When a charity collector knocks on the door of a Jewish home, a three-year-old will run to give him charity. This is a result of a Torah education, passed down through many generations. People without this upbringing find it much harder to give.”⁷⁹

But *tzedakah* is only one beautiful aspect of a Torah life. Torah Jews have so many amazing *middos* and *hanhagos*, such as compassion, *chesed*, restraint from words of gossip, attention to only speaking the truth, gentleness, humility, self-discipline—especially in forbidden sights, restraint from anger and grudges, haste to forgive those who hurt us, and an appreciation for all the good Hashem does for us, as well as for the kindness that others show us.

Which other society in the world successfully cultivates all these qualities? None.

We must recognize just how amazing it is to be *frum*. The To-

⁷⁹ Secrets of the Soul: Conversations with Rav Shlomo Hoffman, *talmid* of Rav Isaac Sher and confidant of *Gedolei Yisrael*, Vol. 1 (Feldheim Publishers, 2020), p. 328.

rah has engineered the most perfect lifestyle, a fact that makes a powerful case for having *emunah* in Hashem.⁸⁰

The Saintliness of Torah Scholars

If observing the “regular” people in our communities can strengthen one’s *emunah*, studying the saintliness and brilliance of our *tzadikim* and *gedolim* can surely do so. Reading the amazing stories of their love and kindness for others causes us to recognize that, without a doubt, the Torah is divine.

Here’s just one beautiful story which illustrates this idea.

A man once came to Reb Moshe Feinstein, seeking some badly needed chizuk. He was raising his children alone and was having a difficult time of it. He came, hoping that Reb Moshe would give him a bracha and words of encouragement.

Upon arriving at the apartment, he found that Reb Moshe was in a meeting regarding an important communal matter. However, Reb Moshe paused the meeting long enough to go out to the man, listen to his story and give him a heartfelt bracha.

The next day, there was a snowstorm. The man was at home, struggling to put his young children to bed, when suddenly the doorbell rang. Standing at the door was Reb Moshe, who had come by car to offer chizuk and visit the children.

⁸⁰ When one realizes how much he benefitted from growing up as a *frum* Jew, he should become motivated to show appreciation to his parents, who sacrificed to be *mechanech* him in the way of the Torah.

Reb Moshe came into the home, took the children upstairs, tucked each one into bed and sat for a bit, warming up their hearts as only he could.

Then Reb Moshe spoke to the father, encouraging him and blessing him that his children should grow to become true bnei Torah, a blessing that was fulfilled.⁸¹

This is just one of thousands of beautiful stories told about Reb Moshe Feinstein. If we multiply that number by the thousands of *tzadikim* and *tzidkaniyos* who have inspired our nation throughout the ages, we'll see that Klal Yisroel's *tzadikim* comprise an exceptionally magnificent fingerprint of Hashem, reminding us that we merely need to see the effects of the Torah to know that it's the truth.⁸²

Perfect Lifestyle

The exquisite Torah lifestyle is a clear testimony to its divine origins. There is no other lifestyle on earth that is so rich with meaning and perfectly tailored to our needs.

An example of this is the yearly cycle of *yamim tovim*. Each Yom Tov allows a person to feel and express a different emotion. Together, the yearly cycle creates a beautiful tapestry of emotions.

⁸¹ Adapted from *Reb Moshe—the Life and Ideals of Hagaon Rabbi Moshe Feinstein* by Rabbi Shimon Finkelman (Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2011), p. 369.

⁸² The same is true in reverse. The world abounds with various cultures, religions, and ways of life, each claiming to be the ideal and most ethical one. But words are cheap. We must not merely listen to what these people say but rather, look closely at who they are. Do they have refined character traits? Do they care for others? Do they live up to their stated values? If one combs throughout the entire world, he won't find another culture or religion whose adherents are as wise, refined, and wonderful as the *tzadikim* in our very own Torah communities.

In addition, these wonderful days create so many special moments for us to experience. Together, the emotions and experiences form a constellation of memories to cherish forever.

And there are so many other beautiful aspects of a Torah lifestyle, such as the safety and support of *frum* communities, the many *chesed* organizations that are available to help, the camaraderie and friendship in our circles, our rich heritage of history, story, and song, and even the *shiva* process, which supports us in our most painful moments. All these are just some of the benefits of living a Torah lifestyle.⁸³

One of the most wonderful features of the Torah lifestyle is the holy day of Shabbos. Sadly, a person can sometimes lose his appreciation for this special day. The following story, which happened to Rabbi Yakov Bender, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Darchei Torah, gives us a ‘glimpse in the mirror,’ reminding us of how wonderful Shabbos is, and how fortunate we are to have it:

On a trip back from the west coast on yeshiva business, Rabbi Bender sat down next to a distinguished looking gentleman. Rabbi Bender politely introduced himself to the man as a rabbi of a school on the East Coast and the man told him that he was from Topeka, Kansas, and that he was a Roman Catholic. They chatted for a few moments after which Rabbi Bender took out his Chumash and began learning shnayim mikra.

After some time had passed, the man turned to Rabbi Bender and asked, “Rabbi, what are you doing?” Rabbi Bender explained to him about studying the weekly portion of the Torah, and the man returned to his book. After

⁸³ See Enjoy His World, by this author, chapter 8: Enjoying Torah in Olam Hazeh for a comprehensive discussion of this topic.

a few moments, he once again turned and asked, “Rabbi, do you have Shabbat?”

Wondering how this non-Jew from middle America knew about Shabbat, Rabbi Bender responded that he does, in fact, have Shabbat. “Do you mean that you have the Shabbat where the lady of the home, dressed in her finest clothing, stands around the shining candles, with her little children standing next to her, recites her blessings, and the house is filled with an extraordinary special glow of beauty?” Rabbi Bender acknowledged that he does have that Shabbat.

“And when the husband comes home, he blesses his children, all sit down to a beautifully set shabbat table with silver and crystal glasses, and the family sings beautiful songs about Shabbat? And the mom prepares a lavish meal, the children repeat special things they learned in school, and the grandparents add their own special ingredients that only they can?”

Listening to the man describe the special ruach of Shabbos, Rabbi Bender felt as if he’d just received one of the most amazing shmuessen he’d ever heard about kedushas Shabbos, and this from a non-Jew from Kansas!

“Where,” Rabbi Bender asked, “did you learn about Shabbat?” The man explained that he lives nearby to some Orthodox Jewish families, one of whom invited him to join them for a Friday night meal. Sitting with them at that one seudah showed him the beauty of Shabbos.

Rabbi Bender commented afterward that while he doesn’t know if the man ever converted, he does know that this wonderful gentleman with his special sensitivity opened up his eyes to the wonderful, glorious world of

*Shabbos.*⁸⁴

Some years ago, a non-Jewish magazine did a survey of celebrities, asking them what their ideal gift would be. There were various responses, but surprisingly, many of them answered, “A day without my phone.”

Incredible! A day without a phone is something that rich, famous people can only dream of, yet we have it every week! Do we realize how fortunate we are?

Whenever one benefits from any of the thousands of advantages that come from keeping the Torah, he should remember that Hashem gave us this Torah life, the best life,⁸⁵ the envy of the nations. Thinking about all the benefits the Torah provides us with will surely build up an enormous, lasting, edifice of *emunah* inside oneself.

To Live with Meaning

Life these days is expensive. It takes a lot of money to pay for a home, a car, clothing, food, and medical. And so, we must go to work to afford all these things.

And how does one find a good job? Why, by opening the local circular and reading the recruitment ads. Since a job will help pay for all the physical necessities of life, we’d expect the ads to focus on the salary or job benefits being offered. What a surprise then, to see many ads that say, “Start a new satisfying career!” or “are you looking for a meaningful job?” or “Learn a new fulfilling profession today!”

⁸⁴ Adapted from Rabbi Yaakov Bender, *Chinuch with Chesed – A veteran mechanech answers pressing questions*, (Mesorah Publications Ltd., 2024) pp. 40 - 42.

⁸⁵ See Chapter 3, section Ancient Jealousy (p. 47).

Hmmm... what's going on here? As far as we know, meaning and fulfillment don't cost any money, so why would I get a job for them? Why are these ads focusing on spiritual concepts?

But of course, the companies know exactly what they're doing. They know that meaning is just as important as paying the bills. In fact, the insatiable quest for meaning is one of the most noticeable fingerprints of Hashem in this world. Take the meaning out of a person's life and his entire existence becomes empty, with depression and sickness close behind. A life of pure materialism is miserable no matter how much one has. But with meaning, life is rich and satisfying.

Every person yearns to live meaningfully, and this creates serious problems for atheists, who believe that the world is just an accident. An accident is inherently meaningless, making their own desire for meaning a total contradiction to their beliefs. And a contradictory life is a fragmented life—not enjoyable at all.⁸⁶ But one who believes in Hashem has inner peace. His desire for meaning doesn't contradict his beliefs. Just the opposite, he finds meaning in his beliefs, as he strives to forge a relationship with his Creator.

The atheists would be well served to ask themselves why people want meaning. Why do we function best when we're doing and accomplishing? Animals aren't like this. Cows aren't any happier when they're accomplishing. They're as content when eating hay as they are when plowing a field. Only humans want something more than the material world can provide. Clearly, people were designed to have a thirst for meaning and spiritual satisfaction—and it's one of the grandest fingerprints of Hashem.

If we think about the drive for meaning and its effects on our lives, we will thrive in our *emunah* because it couldn't be more

⁸⁶ Heard from Rabbi Ahron Feldman, *shlit"a*.

obvious that Hashem created and designed us to be this way.^{87 88}

Seeking Approval

The next fingerprint of Hashem is man's craving for *kavod*. We'll begin with an introduction:

It's well-known that a child craves his father's approval. Did you ever wonder why? Why should a person care what his father thinks of him any more than he cares what someone else thinks of him? The answer is that the father brought the child into the world. A created being craves to know that its creator is satisfied with it. Only then will it feel that its existence is justified.

If this is true with a human father, how much more so for Hashem, our true Creator. We *surely* want Him to be happy that He created us! In fact, we are desperate to earn His approval.⁸⁹

Now, the way to earn Hashem's approval is by fulfilling His will. When we do this, He approves of us. However, it's not a simple matter to gain His approval for two reasons: First of all, we don't

⁸⁷ One expression of man's desire for meaning is his persistent craving to travel to distant destinations. Rav Avigdor Miller explained that this desire is really a manifestation of man's yearning to return to Hashem, a desire which will only be satisfied in the Next World. But people don't understand this, and they continue to travel around the world wasting their time and money in a fruitless attempt to appease the craving (Rabbi Avigdor Miller, *Sing You Righteous* 8). The inexplicable and unsatiable yearning to travel is thus a glowing fingerprint of Hashem.

⁸⁸ See Chapter 8, p. 121 for more on this idea.

⁸⁹ Chazal said, '*retzoneinu la'asos retzonecha*', our will is to perform Your Will (Brachos 17a). As noted above, the *sefer* Sfas Emes (*parshas* Noach, pg. 80) says that a person's *avodah* in the world is to find favor in the Eyes of Hashem. See footnote 44). See also above, p. 63, where Rav Miller is quoted saying, "The main *kavod*... is in the World to Come, where Hashem will smile approvingly on those who accomplished something with their lives. That smile of approval is the greatest *kavod* that could be."

naturally know how He wants us to behave!

But there's a relatively simple solution to this: we can learn His Torah, which teaches us exactly how to behave.⁹⁰

The second problem is more difficult. Because although a person's *neshama* craves to gain Hashem's approval, the *yetzer hara* does not. It doesn't care about that at all. In fact, it pushes us to behave in ugly, selfish ways that are the exact opposite of what Hashem wants. If the *yetzer hara* is left unchecked, a person would engage in horrible behavior that would earn Hashem's disapproval, rather than His approval.

This describes the fierce war that every person is embroiled in from the day he's born until the day he leaves this world: The *neshama* wants to follow in Hashem's glorious, beautiful ways and gain His approval, while the powerful *yetzer hara* pushes us to behave in ways that Hashem detests.

There's only one way for the *neshama* to win: by gaining control over the *yetzer hara*. Only then will it be free to emulate Hashem's attributes. This self-control is the golden key that will allow one to attain the grand prize of the universe: the glorious approval of Hashem Himself!⁹¹

⁹⁰ There are two parts to finding favor in Hashem's Eyes: When we do His *mitzvos*, we are acting as He wants us to act, but when we learn His Torah, we are becoming like Him, (through aligning our *da'as* with His *Da'as*.) The second level is higher, as the *pasuk* says (Mishlei 6:23) that a *mitzvah* is like a candle while the Torah is compared to a light.

⁹¹ Here's another way to explain this concept: A person comes from Hashem, so he wants to go back to Hashem. Now, we are always "*physically*" close to Hashem because Hashem is everywhere. However, this isn't enough. We want to be mentally and emotionally close to Him as well. We want our *goals and aspirations* to be aligned with His. Think about a husband and wife who are on the brink of divorce. They might be living in the same house, but they're miles from each other in the ways that really matter. Similarly, we are always physically close to Hashem, but unfortunately, we aren't always

Avoiding the Yetzer Hara

A famous *mishna* says, ‘*Ein lach ben chorin ela mi she’osek baTorah*, there is no freedom except through delving into Torah.’⁹² But isn’t the Torah quite restrictive? The answer is yes, the Torah *is* restrictive—to the *yetzer hara*! And this is good, because by restricting the *yetzer hara*, the *neshama* becomes free to follow in the ways of Hashem and earn His approval.

This explains why the best way to deal with the *yetzer hara* is to avoid it,⁹³ which sounds surprising. After all, isn’t life about overpowering the *yetzer hara*? Shouldn’t a person purposely try to engage the *yetzer hara* and attempt to defeat him? No. We are told, “Don’t look for trouble,” because we are *not* here in this world to

close to Him in the ways that matter most.

How does one mentally draw close to Hashem? By becoming *similar* to Him. By caring about what He cares about. This means that what He finds important, we should find important. Our attitudes, character attributes and behaviors should resemble His. As *Chazal* teach us, just as Hashem is merciful, so should we be merciful, just as He is gracious, so should we be gracious, and so on. Doing this aligns a person with Hashem in the true sense of the word. And this kind of closeness is what a person’s *neshama* (i.e., intellect) desperately wants.

However, this isn’t easy to achieve, because the desires of the body and ego (i.e., the *yetzer hara*) interfere. Only when one is in control of his physical desires, is his *neshama* free to behave in the special ways that resemble Hashem’s glorious attributes. When a person’s attributes (character and behavior) resemble Hashem’s, then he has achieved closeness to Hashem! And closeness to Hashem produces a wonderful, blissful feeling.

⁹² Avos 6:2.

⁹³ See *Sefer Birchas Peretz* by the Steipler Gaon (*Parshas Beshalach*), who learns this idea from the fact that when Hashem led *Bnei Yisroel* into the desert, He took us away from the *Pelishtim* so we wouldn’t face a *nisayon* (spiritual test). (There is a well-known story in which the Vilna Gaon, told the Dubno Maggid that he is content to stay in his attic and remain holy rather than go out into the world and try to pass *nisyonos*. See following note.

‘take on’ *yetzer hara*! We are here to emulate Hashem, and the best way to do that is by *avoiding* the *yetzer hara*.⁹⁴

This idea was taught by Rav Avigdor Miller who said in a *shiur* on Sefer Mesilas Yescharim:

The Mishnah in Avos states ובורח מן העברה . . . and run away from a sin.⁹⁵ You have to run away from sin like someone running from a wild animal, because the danger is very severe. There is no disaster greater than a sin. However, another Mishnah states מִשְׁפַּט רְשָׁעִים בְּגֵיהֶנָם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֳדָשׁ—The judgment in Gehinnom lasts twelve months.⁹⁶ The punishment for a sin only lasts up to twelve months. Even if a person finally leaves this world but goes to Gehinnom, eventually he comes out and goes to the Next World, where he is rewarded for his mitzvos forever and ever.⁹⁷

The reward for fulfilling even the smallest mitzvah is infinite. So, losing out on a mitzvah is the biggest loss there could be: an eternal loss of infinite reward.

We can conclude that man’s primary purpose in this world is not to avoid sin, but rather to acquire sheleimus

⁹⁴ In line with this idea, the *sefer Imrei Chei”n* (*parshas Vayeilech* pg. 437) and *sefer B’Ikvei HaTzon* (*parshas Shelach*) both explain that there are two *yetzer haras*: an external one (i.e., the temptations that come from exposure to the secular society) and an internal one (i.e., desires that arise from within oneself). Of the two, the external *yetzer hara* is far stronger. (This means that we can almost win the battle for *kedusha* by simply shielding ourselves from negative social influences. These *seforim* both write that it’s impossible to overcome the external *yetzer hara*, and one has no option other than to run away from it.)

⁹⁵ Pirkei Avos 4:2.

⁹⁶ *Maseches Eduyos* 2:10.

⁹⁷ Ohr Avigdor Mesillas Yescharim, Vol. 2, §7.2.

[ed—self-perfection], as the Mesillas Yescharim explained above.⁹⁸ ***Sheleimus can only be achieved by means of performing positive actions, not through sitting idly and refraining from activity. This is like someone who is taking a trip to a certain destination. Do we say that the primary purpose of his journey is to avoid accidents? Certainly, it's extremely important for him to be careful and avoid accidents! But ultimately, the purpose of his journey is to reach the destination. Man doesn't come to this world for the purpose of avoiding sin; his main purpose in this life is to attain sheleimus.***^{99 100 101}

Kavod, Kavod, Kavod.

Although we all crave Hashem's approval, we also have a great desire for approval from *people*. Why do we care about what oth-

⁹⁸ Ohr Avigdor Mesillas Yescharim, Vol. 1, §1.21.

⁹⁹ Emphases added.

¹⁰⁰ Ohr Avigdor Mesillas Yescharim, Vol. 2, §7.2.

¹⁰¹ On another occasion, Rav Miller gave a *mashal* of a truck driver who was hired to bring cargo from L.A. to New York. Upon arriving back in L.A., the driver proudly told his boss that he didn't get a single driving ticket! "That's really great!" the boss said, "But did you deliver the goods?" The driver turned beet red. "Boss," he confessed, "I totally forgot to!"

Rav Miller explained that obviously the boss's main concern is that his product should get to its destination. He could deal with a couple of driving tickets, if only the shipment had been delivered! The same is true regarding one's task in life. *Mitzvos* are the "merchandise" of life, while *aveiros* are like tickets. Although *aveiros* are terrible, and are dealt with severely in *Gehinnom*, the punishment for them eventually ends, after which the person is taken to *Olam Haba*. There, he'll enjoy the reward for his *mitzvos* forever—if he did *mitzvos*. If he didn't, he completely failed in his mission and there's no way to restore the loss.

er people think? Perhaps it's because every person has a *tzelem elokim*, an image of G-d within him.¹⁰² A human can reflect the greatness of Hashem and therefore, approval from a person feels very good.

Alternatively, perhaps the reason is because it can be hard to sense the approval of Hashem, who we cannot see. So instead, we seek it from people, who we can see with our own eyes.

Whatever the reason, the desire for approval from people is real, intense, and so powerful that it practically powers all of civilization! We know this desire as the *ta'avah* for *kavod*—the craving for honor, respect, admiration, recognition—all are ways of saying 'approval from other people'.

Rav Avigdor Miller once said:

"The most intense craving that people have is for appreciation, or whatever else can be called kavod. Even those who will disclaim such desire, in actuality, they want as much honor as they can get. Each one tries to get it in his own way. Some will run after glory, and some will seek honor by

¹⁰² Rav Avigdor Miller taught: "The *Midrash Rabbah* states regarding the *pasuk*, "You shall be holy," (Vayikra 19:2.): "One might think [a Jew's holiness is] like My [Hashem's] holiness, therefore the [*pasuk*] teaches, 'For I am holy' — My [Hashem's] holiness is greater than their holiness." (Vayikra 24:9.) We see that there was a possibility of thinking that the holiness of a Jew is, so to speak, as great as Hashem's holiness, to the extent that it was necessary to discount this possibility by means of a [*pasuk*] which teaches that Hashem's holiness is greater! We see that the holiness of a Jew is so incredibly great that we cannot even comprehend assessing it! And every Jew is more important than an angel in the eyes of Hashem. (Rabbi Yaakov Hamburger, ed., *Sha'arei Orah, B'tzedek Tishpot Amisecha, Va'ad* 3, pg. 128).

saying that they don't want any glory."¹⁰³

It's amazing how almost every move a person makes in the view of others is calculated to bring him as much honor/approval as possible. The world economy revolves around this desire, with houses, cars, clothes, vacations, *simchas*, etc., obtained and displayed to gain approval from family, friends, or strangers. Even the way a person behaves and talks—his accents, lingo, and jokes, are all calculated to garner as much *kavod* as possible.^{104 105}

Of course, good looks or nice things don't make one worthy of true praise. Even if a person gets lots praise for these things, he knows inside that it's just fake *kavod*, and it leaves him feeling empty inside. That's why so many celebrities commit suicide though they receive heaps of adulation from their fans. They know inside that they aren't worthy at all. But real *kavod* is when you *truly* are good. In *Olam Haba*, and even in this world to an extent, when a person truly is good, it feels wonderful.

In any event, the desire for *kavod* is universal, powerful, and a colossal fingerprint of Hashem. It shouts out at us from every corner of our world. We literally cannot make a move without being confronted by it! If we pay attention, we'll hear it proclaiming

¹⁰³ Ohr Avigdor Mesillas Yescharim, Vol. 1 (Simchas Hachaim Publishers), P. 274. See Bava Basra, 75a. 275. See Bava Basra, 75a.

¹⁰⁴ Even very young children crave *kavod*. Children constantly strive for the attention and approval of their parents and peers. This is not a personality defect or a contrivance of the *yetzer hara*. The *pasuk* in *Kohes* (7:29) says that Hashem created a person 'yashar' (straight), and Rav Avigdor Miller taught that the inborn desire for honor is part of this straightness. Hashem desires that a person should work hard in this world to gain great *kavod* in *Olam Haba*.

¹⁰⁵ Much of our private behavior, as well, is for *kavod*, because acting righteously preserves our self-esteem, which is 'self-*kavod*'.

that although we desire *kavod* from people, what we're really after is approval from Hashem. Thinking about this will strengthen our *emunah*, bring us closer to Him—and truly earn His approval.

Obsessed with Morality

If there's a word that sums up all of Hashem's attributes, it's 'Good'. As we know, Hashem is purely good, and so He is called: '*kulo tov*', totally good.¹⁰⁶ As we've mentioned above, every person wants to emulate Hashem, and since Hashem is good, we all have a powerful yearning to be good too, so that He will approve of us.

This explains a very strange phenomenon about people: we're *obsessed* with morality, meaning with what's right versus what's wrong. it's such a prevalent feature of life that we don't even pay attention to it, but it's *everywhere*: in day-to-day conversation, office chit-chat, coffee room 'hock', and on the news, right vs. wrong is the theme that swirls around us constantly. Everyone wants to prove that he is right, that his 'take' is the correct one. Why is this? Can't we just live and let live? No. Day after day, it's conservative vs. liberal, Christian vs. Muslim, pro-life vs. pro-choice, vegetarian vs. meat-eater... And that's just in the secular world. In the Jewish world it's *halacha*, *kiruv*, *mussar*, *teshuva*...what's going on?!

The answer is, every person is desperate to be good, and appear good in the eyes of others, and it's all part of our desire for Hashem's approval.

This explains another very peculiar aspect of human behavior. We find that even the most terrible people insist that they really are good. They desperately try to cast themselves in a good light by justifying their evil behavior and blaming others for their own

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חכמה ומוסר חלק ב סימן קלא
הודו לה' כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו". אחרי שהוא כולו טוב, ע"כ לעולם חסדו, אפילו העונש חסד הוא.

wrongs. Why is this? Can't evil people simply accept that they're evil? No, they *can't*! They need to feel that they're good, because like all people, they crave approval in the eyes of their Good Creator.

The obsession with morality is a wonderful fingerprint from Hashem. Practically every conversation has Hashem's stamp on it! If we don't think about it, we won't notice it. But when we start paying attention, we'll see it! Every dispute over who's morally correct and every ethical issue debated is like a giant flag waving in our faces, reminding us that Hashem is right here. He invested us with the yearning for goodness, and that's why we're obsessed with it.

Summary

In this chapter we saw many aspects of human nature, all of them clearly stamped by the fingerprint of Hashem. They were:

- The good feeling that comes from doing good.
- The great elevation that comes from keeping the Torah faithfully.
- The guilty feelings that come from sinning.
- That people function best when they live with *emunah*.
- The beautiful *middos* of those who keep the Torah.
- The benefits that come from keeping the Torah.
- The saintliness of Torah scholars.
- The perfect lifestyle of the Torah.
- The human craving for meaning.
- The overwhelming human desire for *kavod*.
- Our obsession with morality.

All these themes constantly swirl around us, calling out to us with a message of *emunah*. If we think about them, our *emunah* will grow stronger and stronger, every single day.

P.S. One More Fingerprint: The Stamp of Truth

Have you ever watched a young child tell a lie? I'm not referring to a toddler, who cannot distinguish between truth and imagination. I'm referring to a five or six-year-old who knows he's lying. It's not easy for him to do it. His face gets distorted, and he can't look you in the eye. Parents know exactly what I mean.

Why does this happen? Why should it matter to a kid if he's telling the truth or a lie?

The answer is that a person is made in the image of Hashem—and, as *Chazal* teach us, the stamp of Hashem is *emes*, truth.¹⁰⁷ A falsehood is a distortion of reality – and it makes the child feel uncomfortable inside. This affects his behavior and appears on his face as a grimace. As a child, he is unable to mask these symptoms—unlike many adults, who can. Nevertheless, there are tests which can detect even a criminal's lies!

This fascinating aspect of human nature is an astounding fingerprint of Hashem. It shows us clearly that people were designed to tell the truth, to mirror reality, because truth is a G-dly value! If we pay attention to the role that honesty plays in our lives, it will surely help us connect to Hashem Whose very stamp is the truth.

Now, *be'ezras* Hashem, we will go on to explore Hashem's fingerprints in the amazing world He gave us.

¹⁰⁷ Shabbos 55a: "חותמו של הקדוש ברוך הוא אמת".



