

This week's translation is dedicated in honor of my new nephew, Eliyahu, who was brought to his bris yesterday, by his proud parents, my dear brother, Michael, and my dear sister(-in-law), Mirie. Mazal Tov. **כשם שנכס לברית כן יכנס לתורה לחופה ולמעשים טובים**

## פרשת ויקרא

Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's  
"Ohr Ha'Emunah"

**"וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר. (א,א)**

The *Zohar* teaches us that at the time of the creation of the world, all of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet requested that Hashem create the world with them. The letter **א** stood off to the side and remained quiet. Hashem asked the **א** why it remained silent. It responded that it was too insignificant to speak up because, as opposed to the other letters whose numerical values were multiples, it was only worth one. Hashem responded that it should not worry, "you **א** are the leader of all of them, like a king, and through you I will ultimately give the Torah to the Jewish people. The *aseres hadibros* begin with "**א**נוכי ה' אלוּקיד" - the word "אנוכי" is the head of the *aseres hadibros* and the letter **א** is the head of all of the letters. The letter **א** itself suggests the trait of humility. It stood to the side submissively, just as Moshe Rabbeinu stood humbly waiting and did not enter the *Mishkan* until Hashem called him. Just like the **א**, Moshe Rabbeinu too earned to have the *Torah* given through him and he too became the head of the Jewish people, as the **א** became the head of all of the letters.

**"וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה (א,א)**

A great and awe inspiring divine call emanated from the *Ohel Moed* to Moshe Rabbeinu. In essence, this call invites every Jew to awaken and enter the inner sanctum, into the service of Hashem. The only advice for a peaceful life is to live with the Creator. Life is happiness. Without joy, life is not called life and nothing gives a person more joy than proximity to Hashem. Dovid Hamelech tells us in *Tehillim* - "ואני קירבת אלוקים לי טוב" - "but for me, Hashem's closeness is my good." In reality, what in this world can cause joy? Even man's successes in this world are bitter, filled with pain and anguish, fears and anxieties.

What is real life? Living with G-d. Advice, hope, consolation, salvation are all possible only with Hashem.

Only when we raise ourselves up and look at reality from a different perspective do we see the truth (just as there is a difference between taking a picture from the ground and taking an aerial photograph from a helicopter - a higher perspective gives us a better understanding). Truth lights up the path. Everything else, our anger, our vulnerability, our difficulties, our pain, the things that affect us, are not truth. All those give us a limited, one sided perspective. They show us only our own limited view, within the darkness. If we lift ourselves up a bit, rise up a bit, there we have light, there we can see.

The soul longs for Hashem. The soul is a part of Hashem. The soul craves the light of G-d. The soul

yearns to feel Hashem's presence. A Jew must, at all times, feel a passion towards Hashem. A type of thirst, like a person who has not had anything to drink for an entire day who thirsts for cold water. At a minimum, once an hour a Jew must raise his head upwards, towards Hashem.

We must also sanctify the permissible. Most people respond to this with: "leave me alone, let me live, it's enough that the *Torah* includes so many prohibitions, you really want to add?" Are they really living? Is it really good for them? Closeness to Hashem is the only key to the good life, a happy life. Life is all about the struggle, continuous struggling .... and more struggling. But we are not alone in this struggle.

When we are alone we are constantly persecuted, tormented, confused. We are never sure which way to go, when to be stubborn and when to concede, when to teach the other a lesson and when to forgive him (and if to forgive, how to do so wholeheartedly). **We must reach the point where we can laugh at all the nonsense of this world, all the lies of life.** Whatever happens to me is nothing more than cause for laughter, because nothing remains, except the cry: "Hashem is G-d" - only the moments in which we understood that everything is from Hashem remain.

To reveal or discover the true infinite greatness of life, we must close our eyes to anything that is finite. Rebbe Nachman said that he heard that the Baal Shem Tov was apt to say, "Oy vey, the world is full of lights and wonderful, awesome secrets, but the little hand blocks the eyes from seeing the great lights."

We can connect to Hashem through everything and anything. Within every single element of existence there is tremendous spirituality. The word טבע (nature) comes from the word מוטבעת (embedded) because nature has G-dliness embedded within it. We merely must learn to see and recognize it as that is what brings us close to Hashem. As we draw closer to Hashem, we become complete, without Hashem we are incomplete.

We all do our regular *avoda* - we work on our *middos*, we perform the requisite *mitzvos* - but Hashem tells us, "call Me, ask Me and I'll make it easier. Even when you are in such a low place, on such a low level, with all of your silliness - ask Me." When a person acknowledges each day that he wants Hashem, all of the coverings, all of the partitions, all of the screens shrink away. These dividers fall in the merit of people crying for the redemption, seeking Hashem, recognizing that they cannot go on without Him. Of course, if we want redemption because we want some improvement in our physical life, then we are not focused on Hashem. Hashem, we truly want redemption because we want no more concealment, we want to see You face to face, we want to feel our *tefillos*, we want to feel true love towards each other, we want a truly "good eye," we want a truly "good heart," we want happy hearts, we want closeness to You (that is what is really my good), we want to be truly close to You, to feel Your presence, without anything separating us, to see all of your miracles, so our souls are in their proper places.

The greatest level that a Jew can reach is to say, "we are content with Your G-dliness." For Your sake we await to reach that state. We want nothing else. It is sufficient for us to have You. If we have You, we have everything, we are missing nothing.

## "וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה" (א, א)

The small *aleph* suggests humility.

The Rebbe Reb Bunim of Peshischa once gave a parable. If a small bird ascends to the top of a big building, it does not transform into a 20 story bird, it is merely a small bird on top of a big building. Moshe Rabbeinu was the same way. The *Torah* elevated him to great heights, Hashem Himself called to him, but, in his own eyes, he remained a lowly subject.

This *pasuk* tells us that Hashem called to Moshe. Why was that necessary? Why couldn't Moshe enter the *Mishkan* on his own accord? After all, he built it. The *gemara* tells us that the *Torah* was telling us of Moshe's great humility. It is customary for a king's trusted advisor to come and go throughout the palace at will. He is familiar with the king and knows that the king won't mind. Moshe Rabbeinu did not feel this way. Even though he spoke to Hashem, face to face, he awaited Hashem's invitation as if he had never spoken to Hashem before.

Humility is the secret to life. A person who humbles himself will have a good, pleasant, happy and fulfilled life. A person who lives with humility clearly has *emuna*. He understands that he has weaknesses, limitations, that he cannot accomplish on his own. He sees his own shortcomings, he recognizes the dangers that he faces, both physically and spiritually, and he turns to Hashem. He doesn't just take time out to talk to Hashem, rather he prefaces everything with a prayer and request. He is never alone. A Jew who has *emuna* is never alone. When we learn to live with Hashem, to do everything with Hashem, life is calm and relaxed. A person who has *emuna* understand that everything that happens to him happens through divine providence and he recognizes that there are no mistakes or accidents.

We came to this world to work on our *emuna*, to recognize that the world has a master, that He arranges everything and whatever a person achieves, Hashem gives him the strength to do so. Our purpose is to pray, to turn to Hashem. If we live like that, life becomes a paradise. When a person chases honor, he has no life, no enthusiasm, his soul and his inner light leave him. The more humility a person attains, the more vitality he has, the more vivacity he has, the more energy and vigor he has. All liveliness and happiness stem from humility.

Rebbe Nachman taught that humility is the simplest thing in the world. How can a person, knowing all of his own shortcomings, ever look down on someone else? One of the fundamental traits a person needs to acquire is humility. He must view himself as inferior to others and then he will be happy, he will feel a delight and the light of Hashem will shine on him. True humility must be acquired with every limb, every sinew, every sense, every feeling. It must be complete nullification. Why should I care if someone else is better than me, that others have achieved more than me? Why should that bother me? Humility brings real happiness because as soon as something goes awry in the life of a haughty person, he gives up, he is paralyzed, he can't deal with it. By contrast, nothing bothers the truly humble person - everything is from Hashem and all the humble servant wants is to please Hashem.

In the eyes of the humble Jew, every Jew is amazing, every Jew is righteous. His joy comes not from that fact that he better than the other, it comes from the fact that he is a Jew. He feels lucky to be a Jew because he doesn't feel like anything is owed to him, that he deserves anything. He is amazed by every little favor that Hashem does for him. With this attitude, he becomes a vessel of light.

All holiness finds its source in humility. All good character traits find their source in humility. The icon of humility, the letter *yud*, because it is so small, is everything. It is the first letter of Hashem's name, it is the number 10, which stands for completion, it shares the Hebrew term for "Jew" (a *yehudi* or a *yid*). It teaches a Jew that Hashem still loves him even if he is not successful. Hashem just wants him to give that little bit extra effort (as we discussed last week). That is the hint in the small *aleph*.

A person must be happy with the little bit that he can do. All or nothing thinking comes from the side of impurity. Haman destroyed his own life because one Jew refused to bow down to him. If he couldn't have everything, nothing was worth anything to him. That caused his downfall. A Jew thinks differently. We start with small acts, giving someone the benefit of the doubt, a good thought, overcoming an angry impulse. We make a small start down here and it causes a huge commotion in heaven.

Rebbe Nachman said, a person who thinks that he is so very far from Hashem and that he is rebelling against Hashem every moment - should know that for such a person, who is so materialistic, every small act that he takes to cut himself away, bit by bit, from materialism and draws himself closer to Hashem is so great and precious to Hashem and, with these small acts, he travels many many miles in the upper worlds.

The main thing is not to throw up one's hands, not to say that today just isn't my day, today I am exempt.

A person who feels like today just isn't his day, like he just cannot accomplish anything today, must tell himself, "I am not exempt, I know that there is a Hashem, I know that there exists holiness, I know that I must sanctify myself. Therefore, even if I can't manage to accomplish anything, not through action and not through words, I am still able to feel, able to desire, able to wish, able to love." If you can't do big things, do small things. Pray that tomorrow you will be able to do bigger things. Today I may be too tired, too weak, I must sleep, but tomorrow I will awake renewed, face the new day, I will smile, I will speak positively, I will do what I can, and most importantly, if possible, I will do so joyously - because joy is the essence of redemption.

It is better for a person to perform a *mitzvah* as best as he can under the circumstances rather than discard it completely. (ספר המידות, תשובה, סג)

A certain Jew who converted to another religion once visited the home of the great Vilna Gaon. He knocked on the door and asked one of the residents for a glass of water, he was thirsty. The Gaon overheard from the next room and quickly instructed his family not to give the man water unless he agreed to make a *bracha* on the water. The apostate heard this and started to laugh. He said to the Gaon, "with all due respect Rebbe, blessings are the least of my issues, I've completely turned my back on Judaism, I've accepted another religion, what difference will one *bracha* make?" The Gaon responded, "you are making a grave mistake. You think that in the heavens you are judged by a different standard than the rest of us, but you are not, you are still a Jew just like every other Jew. Nothing has changed by your 'conversion.' You will have to give an account for every glass of water that you drank without a proper blessing. I'm worrying about this glass right now. Other things have their time and place." This understanding of what it means to be a Jew brought this "convert" back to *Yiddishkeit*.

Thankfully, we are not apostates. Yet, we still share this viewpoint. A person believes that because he

lost his temper at home, flew into a rage, or succumbed to some other temptation, he is no longer obligated to *daven mincha* with a *minyan* or to attend a *Torah* lecture. We are never exempt. We remain the same Jews that we were before we sinned. For the sins of losing one's temper or slandering others, we have to do *teshuva*. In the meantime, we are Jews like every other Jew. A person who has a strong desire to be a holy pure person, a great *Torah* scholar, but finds that he is not successful, instead of strengthening himself and re-doubling his efforts, he gives up. That is not the correct path.

The holy Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev testified about himself that he never entered the *shul* until he was sure that he was the most inferior member of the assemblage. One time a certain Jew, who had just committed a very serious offense, entered the *shul*. The holy Berdichever thought to himself, I have never committed anything like this, so how can I be inferior to this Jew. He refused to *daven*, he left the *shul*, secluded himself and pondered this question for a while. Finally he realized that if he, the hold Berdichever, had, G-d forbid, committed this horrible *aveirah*, he would never have come to *shul* afterwards and face Hashem, yet this Jew did come. Therefore, concluded the Berdichever, this Jew must indeed be superior to me. The Berdichever's conclusion was correct, not in his assessment of his own value, but in the way a Jew must think. Even if a person transgresses, he will have to do *teshuva*, but he should not add to his sin. He sinned because he has an evil inclination that he could not overcome for whatever reason, but now that he has calmed down, he must come to *shul* and honor Hashem.

We see this all the time. People fall, dropping levels in their Judaism, losing their fear of Heaven, cool off, they talk during *davening*, they talk during the reading of the *Torah*. Where did this cooling off take hold? It starts with wanting a lot, which is a great desire if, and only if, it is accompanied with a feeling of joy for whatever is actually accomplished and thanking Hashem for those accomplishments, even if they are smaller than what was originally hoped for. A person often fails to achieve all of his grand desires and longings and he becomes dejected, weakened, discouraged, he is not happy with what he does have. He does not appreciate that he has the good fortune of wearing *tzitzis* and a *yarmalka*, that he has the opportunity to learn some *Torah*, to *daven* a bit. He doesn't appreciate these things and that's where he really fails.

The small *aleph* is really just a small dot. A small point. But a point is not just something insignificant, it also represents focus, it can be very powerful. The *even shesiya*, the stone from which the world was created, was also a small dot, but a small dot from which everything developed.

Our entire connection to Hashem begins from a point - a timeless point that is hidden deep within the depths of every Jewish soul, the point of us being from the offspring of the Jewish people.

With Hashem, the truth is a point. This whole world stands on one small point, the width of a hair's breadth. There is a hair's breadth of a difference between holiness and impurity, between *chametz* and *matzah*, between exile and redemption. A person can be very far from *Torah* and *mitzvos*, but by doing *teshuva*, he sanctifies Hashem's name and has a place in the next world prepared for him. We find a small point of good in the next person and he is already not so evil. We find a small point of good in ourselves and we find ourselves suddenly upbeat. One small act of kindness can sweeten thousands of sins.

A small good point is a piece of G-dliness. Holiness is not impressed by quantity or size. Something true and small is worth far more than a large thing that is not entirely true. How elated we must feel for a small point of good.

### Story

How I wanted to make him happy! How I wanted to bring him - just once - a report of "almost good" instead of the constant stream of "barely passing" - but I could not.

One *Shabbos*, when only my father and I were at home, I was perhaps in the fifth or sixth grade, I decided to talk to him about it, to tell him how sorry I was that I did not bring him the same *nachas* that my sister brought him. He listened to me, looking at me lovingly and then, contrary to his nature (he was never a talkative person), he taught me the most beautiful lesson I have ever learned.

"Gadi," he said, "A father does not love his children because they bring home good grades. A father loves his children because he cannot do otherwise. They are in his blood. They are his soul. He must love them. Even if they do bad things, he still loves them. But you, Gadi, you have never done anything wrong."

"I started to cut him off, 'but, Daddy ...'"

He stopped me and said, "Sh ..., Gadi, listen! Hashem created this world, whether to our delight or our chagrin. He decided to create an interesting world, not a perfect world. It is made up of people of all shapes, all appearances, and of varying talents. To each one He gives different tools. On receives beauty, another is very handy, others are given musical talents while still others have a knack for mathematics. We do not know why Hashem does what he does. We cannot blame someone because Hashem did not give him certain abilities. We can only blame people who do not use the talents that Hashem gave them.

"Therefore, Gadi, I want to tell you one thing and explain a second thing to you. What I want to tell you is: never complain about the talents and abilities that Hashem gave you or did not give you. The second thing, that I want to explain to you, is : sometimes it takes us some time to discover the talents that Hashem gave us, because they are sometimes hidden within us. Gadi, be patient and one day you will discover that you have great talents."

How I loved him, my father, that *Shabbos*! I wanted to hug, or even kiss him, but I was embarrassed. Keep in mind that this lecture that my father, this simple, good and wise man, gave me was over 30 years ago, before anyone knew about such things as dyslexia or learning disabilities.

About a year or two later, I was sitting in class one day, I cannot remember which class. Our teacher was sick, so we had a substitute teacher. He was talking and my mind was wandering. Suddenly, I realized that this substitute teacher was standing over me. Before I could say anything he grabbed the piece of paper that I was doodling on. He asked me what I was doing and I nervously responded, "nothing, I was just scribbling." He pressed me about what I was drawing and, embarrassed and afraid I was in trouble, I said, "nothing, I was just sketching you standing by the blackboard." He took the paper and put it in his bag. I was sure I was in going to be disciplined. I hadn't been paying attention, I had been drawing the teacher, maybe he thought my drawing was mocking him.

Well, as it turned out, the substitute teacher's father was a world-renowned painter and the teacher thought I had talent. Within days the teacher's father came to our house to look at more of my drawings. He immediately advised my parents to do everything they could to promote my artistic

talent.

What can I say? From that day on my father did everything in his power to make sure that I could study with the greatest artists here in Israel and abroad.

Today, I am 42 years old, and last month I opened my 28th exhibit, this time in the New York Museum of Jewish Art. How does my father, now retired, react to my success? He says, "Why is everyone making such a fuss - the child found his talents and put them to use."

Have an awesome and uplifting Shabbos,

Dov

NOTICE: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the parsha sheet disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and should not necessarily be viewed as an exact translation of the sheet or even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented. The sheet is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material and is not even aware of its existence. Any inaccuracies, omissions, or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy it.

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