

This week's translation is dedicated in honor of my wife, Devorah, who continuously teaches our children (and me) the true path of *emuna* in everyday life.

פרשת שמיני

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

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי קָרָא מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו וּלְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ט, א)

The eighth day was the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. Why the eighth day? It was preceded by the seven days during each of which Moshe Rabbeinu erected and dismantled it in preparation for the great day on which the *Mishkan* would be inaugurated, *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*. The *gemara* (*Megilla 10b*) tells us that that day was a day of great rejoicing for Hashem, equal to the day of creation, as is indicated by the use of the word *yom* in connection with this day and with the day of creation.

וְהִתְקַדְּשְׁתֶּם וְהֵייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי (יא, מד)

Hashem does not relinquish His insistence on our holiness. He insists that we attain holiness, for without holiness, it is impossible to connect to Hashem. Holiness is the gate by which we are able to reach Hashem. It is our bond to Him.

Holiness means thinking of Hashem at every moment, thinking about our purpose in this world. Thought does not monopolize time or space, one is able to unceasingly think about Hashem, to continuously cling. Aharon Hakohen received everlasting *kehuna* from Hashem. Dovid Hamelech received everlasting royalty from Hashem.

What did we receive?

The Jewish people received everlasting holiness. The holiness of the Jewish people is eternal. We have no staying power absent this holiness. We must cry for holiness, we must fight for holiness. Sometimes a person feels a sudden surge of inspiration to feel Hashem's presence in his life - he wishes to concentrate while *davening*, he wishes to perform good deeds, he wishes to be more forgiving, he wishes to overcome his urge to slander others, he wishes to eat with greater holiness. These are longings of the soul that pine and are eager to be released from the restraints of the body (מיצרי הגוף). That is the essence of each one's individual daily exodus from Egypt (מיצרים). I can no longer stand who I am - "Hashem please help me to change." That is the essence of the *hisbodedus* that we do.

Primarily: Holiness = *Emuna*.

Our entire job in this world is to give gifts to Hashem. A person wonders: why does Hashem exist - is it to give me everything that I want and do my bidding - there are so many things that I need from Him. Hashem says, it does not work that way. I do not only give, I want something from you as well. What can you give me? The person responds, what can I give You, I have nothing of value to You, I have nothing at all, I am poor and destitute, I am not wise, I am not shrewd. You provide man with wisdom, everything is within Your control, I have nothing.

But, there is one thing that we can give Hashem and only we can give it. It is something that Hashem does not have and He desires it from us. *Emuna*. Hashem wants us to have *emuna* in Him, yearn for Him and connect to Him. By giving that to Hashem we create a vessel through which Hashem can give to us. Hashem does not give for free, we must prepare and present Him with a vessel.

There are moments in life when everything is suddenly upended. From the peak of a mountain we fall to lowest depths, G-d forbid. It appears as if the world has darkened at midday, G-d forbid. At these

moments, we need *emuna*. We need *emuna* that this is the course that we must pass through right now, there is no mistake or bad luck. We must have *emuna* that everything is Hashem's doing and we must not blame ourselves or others. We must have *emuna* that great treasures are waiting for us at the end of this difficult path. We must have *emuna* that in the merit of what we are traversing now we will merit true closeness to Hashem. A person suffers, he has complaints and grievances, but he has no idea how much benefit can sprout from his anguish.

The righteous justify any judgment that befalls them. Aharon Hakohen remained silent when his two sons were taken from him. He accepted Hashem's judgment with love. He remained silent to the point that he exhibited no indication of mourning. That is greater than mere silence. Chazal say that Dovid Hamelech reached an even greater level. While Aharon remained silent, upon losing his son, Dovid sang praises. Even in his time of pain, he sang.

Especially during difficult times, a person must strengthen his *emuna* and *bitachon*. Rather than think, "how could such a thing happen, Hashem must not love me Hashem must not want a relationship with me" - a person must think good things, ideas that instill *emuna* and *bitachon* in the heart, "everything is for the best, it will be good, the day will brighten, I am secure Father that You will not abandon me." *Emuna* and *bitachon* bring peace of mind. The one who has faith and trust in Hashem is the one who knows wholeheartedly that everything is conducted by Hashem's hand and, consequently, everything is for his very best at every moment. he knows that he is in the Creator's hands always. He does not know that things will work out the way he would like them to, but he trusts Hashem that whatever He does and will do is the best thing for him and this calms him. (*Chovos Halvovos*)

Emuna is the gateway to holiness. A person cannot begin to sanctify himself without *emuna*, just as a person cannot begin to learn without knowing how to read or write. Rebbe Nossan taught that it is impossible to come close or enter any level of holiness, any level of perception or any level of knowledge from Hashem by any method other than via holy *emuna*. All of the struggles and challenges that a person has in his *avodas* Hashem are impossible to overcome without *emuna*.

Holiness = Happiness.

Holiness is attachment to Hashem and there is no physical pleasure that compares to the spiritual pleasure of the soul that is attached to its Creator. The story is told of the Rebbe of Nadvorna zt"l who saw his father playing the violin with eyes shut tightly, clearly clinging to Hashem. He asked his father what his great *kavonos* were at that moment and his father responded, "to be happy!" Our heavenly Father is happy when His children are happy, just as any human father is happy when his children are happy. We must ponder the thousands of kindnesses and good that we receive from Hashem at every moment. Our eyes can see, our ears can hear, our mouths can speak, we have souls, we can think, Hashem provides us with a living, a house, children, books, everything. If a person would contemplate, for just fifteen minutes, the quantity of the gifts that he receives from Hashem, the volume of light that Hashem injects into his life - he would arise from his place alert, full of vibrancy, happiness and an elevated spirit and he would begin to dance and to thank and praise the One Who provides him with all of this wonderful abundance, the One Who truly loves him. He would understand that he owes Hashem, Hashem does not owe him. As a result, he would be unable to bear any grievances in his heart, e.g. "how can it be that I prayed and was not answered." When a person receives a gift from a friend, the very first opportunity he has to return the favor is to accept the gift with a bright countenance, to show that he is gladdened by the gift. Similarly, when we proceed through life with eyes lit like the sun and the moon, with a face lit with happiness and bliss - it is our way of saying *yasher koach* to Hashem and it is the greatest praise that we can give Hashem. Rashi, on the *pasuk* (דברים ב', ז') "For the Hashem, your G-d, has blessed you," says, "therefore, you should not be ungrateful for His goodness [to you] by acting as though you were poor. Rather, show yourselves as rich people."

Holiness is a Lifelong Pursuit.

We must have patience, take things slowly. Just as Hashem loves us so much and is slow to anger with us, we must be patient and slow to anger with our children, with our spouse, with our neighbors, with ourselves, with everything that happens to us, with our failures, with our heart that turned suddenly to stone and is incapable of feeling - we must be patient. If we want Hashem to be patient with us, we must have patience with ourselves and with those around us.

We cannot attain all our desired advance instantly. If we take on too much light at an inappropriate level we will end up depressed. I cannot blame myself for what I have not yet attained, but I also do not absolve myself of it. "It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it." (*Pirkei Avos 2, 16*) A person must elevate himself one level at a time, not to try to jump to levels that he is unready for. When one grasps for stratum for which he is yet unprepared for and does not proceed with the proper steps he risks a terrible fall (the greater the jump, the greater the fall). Rather than climbing too quickly and crashing, G-d forbid, ascend slowly and steadily. And if you fall anyway? Stand up and start again.

For seven days the *Mishkan* was erected and dismantled each day - to teach us that the *Mishkan*, that was to contain Hashem's presence, had to be built on one fundamental - new beginnings. Rebbe Nachman taught that we must seek one thing throughout our lives - how to, here and now, start afresh.

Holiness is Lessening Selfishness.

A Jew who has attained some sanctity can no longer think only of himself. The light of the *tzaddik* is the light of *ahavas yisrael*. For us, it is often different. Each person lives his life, struggles with his life, physically and spiritually. Even when he serves Hashem, he approaches from his own perspective, not from the perspective of *Klal Yisrael*. Even if he pays lip service to being part of the nation when he prepares to do a *mitzva* or asks for health amongst the "ill of Israel," when it comes right down to it - he thinks primarily of himself. His individual struggles are his life.

When a person attains holiness, when he becomes closer to Hashem, two important changes affect him: (1) he becomes less self-centered, and (2) he becomes less focused on physicality. He realizes that the spiritual element is the primary part of his life. It is the root of all things and if he accepts the primacy of doing Hashem's will, keeping the *mitzvos*, following G-d's path, giving satisfaction to Hashem, loving His creations, he will automatically receive bounty in the physical realm as well. Our primary exercise of free will is in the spiritual realm. We do not have much free will in physical dimension. Health is not, for the most part, within our control. Livelihood is also not within our dominion. Neither are *shidduchim*, success in raising our children, *nachas*, etc. We must take measures, we must exert effort in these areas, but the results are not in our hands. The only thing we can control is our service of G-d, our spiritual labors, our connection with Hashem.

Holiness, only through Strength.

To attain holiness we must expend much effort in strengthening ourselves. The righteous only reach their completion through understanding the concept of never giving up, never despairing. Regardless of what has occurred to them, they strengthen themselves and accomplish what they accomplish. There is nothing in existence that does not contain some good. Even when we serve Hashem by rote, it is a good thing. A thing need not be perfect to be good. Every regular Jew is filled with good points. A Jew once came to Rebbe Nachman to complain about his own horrible actions. He felt utterly dejected and could not find any encouragement from anything in his life. Rebbe Nachman listened and told the man that he agreed, there was nothing to discuss, the man was indeed completely bad. The man, taken aback, started to argue and tell Rebbe Nachman of the good things he had done. With his own words

he felt revived.

Any Jew who lives a Torah life is filled with *mitzvos* like the seeds of a pomegranate. He is always performing *mitzvos*. Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya taught us that Hashem wished to provide merits for the Jewish people; therefore He gave them a Torah and *mitzvos* in abundance. This applies not only to one who is successful in learning Torah and can *daven* with great attachment and concentration. Every simple Jew who lives according to the Torah and has a connection to *yiddishkeit* is connected to the service of Hashem. We receive reward for everything, even routine *mitzvos*, those too are part of serving Hashem. Our problem is that the evil inclination tries to trip us up: "you committed that sin and now you want to bless G-d? Are you a hypocrite?" We are supposed to make blessings and acquire another *mitzvah* even after we've fallen in this very area many times. We can *do teshuva*. We can repeatedly do *teshuva* and Hashem will repeatedly accept it. For the very areas of weakness we must cry to Hashem. For that which we can overcome, we must do our best. We must strengthen our fear of heaven even if we've committed sins in those areas. We *do teshuva*, we beg Hashem to give us the strength to vanquish the evil inclination next time. But, G-d forbid, we do not let our errors make us weak or concede. We do not disregard what we are capable of because of the things that are momentarily beyond us and we most definitely to not despair entirely, G-d forbid.

We must never give ourselves over to sin because we have stumbled so often already. What is done is done - do *teshuva*, plead, beg Hashem and Hashem will receive us.

Take strength from the fact that you have the desire. Even if you have not yet rectified some character flaw or overcome some lust - your desire for Hashem is a mighty power. If a person's essence and all of his desires are to go towards holiness, he will ultimately prevail. Desire (רצון) makes one run (מריצה), it is greater than all else, it is unlimited, it has no boundaries. Rebbe Nosson taught that of paramount importance are our desires. Upon strengthening ourselves and accustoming ourselves to have strong desires of holiness and closeness to Hashem and *tzaddikim* and not relaxing those desires, we will definitely overcome all obstacles.

Hashem is always with us, at all times and in all places. The light of His kindness shines upon us at every moment. We merely need to seek Him out, to ask for Him and that is the greatest *chizuk* of all. Hashem is always with you, you need merely raise your head and open your mouth. Even if you have been waiting a while and have been constantly *davening* never forget that the greatest salvation during these times is your closeness to Hashem. When you merit building a warm personal relationship with Hashem, you have everything, nothing is missing. One who is tied to Hashem, attached to Hashem sees all of the gifts and never ceases whispering his thanks to Hashem - "Hashem thank You, You are so good to me." When he encounters difficulties, he is never alone. he has to whom to turn, he has on whom to rely, he has on whom to lean, he has in whom to trust, he has Hashem.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful 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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