

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 אחרי מות - קדושים

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

קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: (יט, ב)
"Sanctify yourselves, for I, Hashem, your G-d, am holy."

Does Hashem's holiness depend on our holiness? Rather the *pasuk* teaches us that if we sanctify ourselves, Hashem will consider it as if we sanctified Him. By contrast, if we do not sanctify our own lives, Hashem considers it as if we failed to sanctify Him. Regardless of whether we sanctify Hashem or not, Hashem remains holy "for I, Hashem, your G-d, am holy." (*Toras Kohanim*)

אחרי מות - קדושים

When can a person be holy? Only after a death of sorts - after he destroys everything that is not bound to his attachment to Hashem.

What are the firstborn (**בכורים**) of the Jewish people? They choose/prefer (**שמבכרים**) Hashem over all of the nonsense that this world has to offer. What are the firstborn of the Egyptians? They choose the nonsense. Whoever chooses the silliness of the world is considered a "firstborn" of Egypt and he must be smitten as the firstborn Egyptians were. Smiting of the firstborn means to kill and destroy every desire other than the desire to choose Hashem. It is very difficult for a material person to yearn for an attachment to Hashem, who is so elevated. It is indeed very difficult. There are many competing desires in the world. People seek fun, which is often the pursuit of gods of gold and silver (e.g. pursuit of money). If we use fun to further connect to Hashem, by taking a breather, by relaxing a bit so that we are reenergized in our service of Hashem - it is more than acceptable. Then, we

are using it to further our cause, connecting to the goal. Taking a trip, *shmoozing* a little, eating something enjoyable are all okay if they are part of connecting. If we suddenly forget Hashem and focus on other things, then we violate the prohibition of making gods of gold and gods of silver. (*Beor Pnei Melech Chaim*)

We spend so much time chasing the emptiness of this world. The time has come to pursue the real thing - a relationship with Hashem. The *pasuk* (ה, יח) says: **וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת מִשְׁפָּטַי** - "You shall keep My statutes and My laws which if a man obeys he shall live through them; I am Hashem." Only one thing is called life - living with Hashem.

We must consider how we connect, how we are inspired, how we guard our relationship, how we constantly remember Hashem. Our nature is to forget. When we forget Hashem we are able to use terms like: "did to me," "hurt me," "owes me," "my honor," "my rights." Hashem asks one thing of us and then He will give us millions. He only asks that we remember Him. A person requests of Hashem that He help him succeed. He fails to recognize that primary success is remembering Hashem.

We have so many limitations. Anger limits us. Gastronomical desires limit us. We must surmount, look upward, change perspective. When a person ascends, he views things differently. Even when a person falls to the lowest depths, Hashem is still with him. Hashem gives up on no Jew. Hashem wants each and every one of us, He awaits each Jew's return. Hashem wants all four sons, even the evil son.

The evil inclination, the “other side,” weakens a person’s mind and instills in his heart the idea that Hashem has forsaken him and that Hashem is very distant, to the point that it is impossible to return. In reality, the exact opposite is true - Hashem’s reign is over everything, even in the filthiest places. The *pasuk* (טז, טז) says: **הַשֵּׁכֵן אִתְּכֶם בְּתוֹךְ טְמֵאתֵם** - “**who dwells with them in the midst of their impurity.**” We must always know that Hashem is always with us, every single one of us, even the worst sinner in existence. As long as a person reviews this in his mind and infuses it into his hear, there will always be great hope throughout his life to merit the true path of *teshuva*. (*Likutey Moharan*)

We are on a mission. We are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Hashem brings us into his home, *Eretz Yisroel* , just as a bridegroom brings his bride into his home. We belong to G-d and we have no choice in the matter. Even in the most unrefined places there are special rules and laws and even there a Jew remains connected to Hashem.

We must constantly strengthen our *emuna*. Everything is planned from the beginning, inscribed at the start. Everything is purposeful, there is no bad luck, nothing happens that was not necessary. Everything is from Hashem and for the best. A Jew must take great care never to second guess Hashem’s ways - he must know and believe, unceasingly, that Hashem is righteous and his ways are honest.

The correct perspective of *emuna* can be learned from Rav Huna (ברכות ה.). Rav Huna owned 400 barrels of wine, a large net worth, and they were all suddenly ruined, turned to vinegar. He suffered great damage. His friends came to visit and they did not discuss the possible causes of this terrible misfortune. Rather, they advised Rav Huna to assess his soul. Rav Huna asked them if he was suspect in their eyes and they responded by asking whether Hashem was suspect in his eyes (by doing something that was not justified). So Rav

Huna asked them what he had done wrong and they told him that he had not paid his sharecropper a salary. Rav Huna explained that the sharecropper received his compensation from the vines and even took more than his fair share. Nevertheless, Rav Huna accepted upon himself to pay the sharecropper again and a miracle occurred - some say that the vinegar returned to wine and others say that the price of vinegar skyrocketed and he was able to sell it for the price of wine. Such is Chazal’s approach to problems, by way of *emuna*. A person does some soul searching, he discovers that he is guilty. The loss is not due to the temperature or the weather or because his inventory was left outdoors or any alternate explanation.

A person must reach this type of connection with Hashem, so that he feels that he needs Hashem’s presence so strongly that he is ashamed to even think that he is allowed to do anything that is not precisely Hashem’s will. And if he somehow commits some such act, he immediately corrects it, he does *teshuva*, he cannot remain calm knowing that he did something so obviously against Hashem’s will. When he reaches an even higher level where he wants to do even more than Hashem asks of him, Hashem loves him even more so.

וְהֵייתֶם לִי קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאַבְדַּל אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָעַמִּים לְהֵיוֹת לִי: (ב, כו)

“You shall be holy to Me, for I, Hashem, am holy and I have distinguished you from the [other] nations to be Mine.”

What is the most significant aspect of our Judaism? What makes us different than other nations? Our *emuna*. A Jew is constantly bolstering his *emuna*. Every challenge in life adds another bit of *emuna*. We have *emuna* that everything is Hashem’s doing, and it is all for the best because no evil can emerge from Hashem.

In this world, it is not easy to comprehend that

all misery is actually for the best. Such is only possible at the elevated level of the very righteous. We cannot. We, ordinary people, find this too difficult. What can help us? We must carefully consider the tens of thousands of blessings and good that Hashem showers upon us at each moment, the billions of particles in our bodies and the bodies of our children, and that one small disruption of just one of those particles can alter our lives radically. Yet, Hashem, in his infinite mercy guides us via Divine Providence at every moment, hour by hour, and is concerned that everything function according to plan in its own amazing and unique order, without any compensation on our part. He continuously gives, provides, affects and influences for days, weeks months and years. After such contemplation, can there be any doubt as to Hashem's goodness - even if a person faces difficulties, even if he has faced two, three or four years with an adult son, a good boy, who sits and learns, but cannot find a *shidduch* or he struggles for years, a daily struggle, for a minimal livelihood despite his begging Hashem and crying endlessly and yet the refrigerator remains almost empty?

When we ponder Hashem's infinite mercy at each moment, we realize that the true and simple answer to all difficulties that arise (an answer that is crucial in the life of every Jew) is that everything is for the best. Whatever Hashem does is for the absolute best. Each person knows the shortcomings in his *avodas Hashem*, he knows the true effort of his Torah learning and his prayers, the not so positive way he views his neighbors and his children - and yet Hashem continues to shower us with abundance without limit or measure - life, health, cures, Torah, raising our children, peace in the home, a place to live, ovens, washing machines - everything works because of Hashem's incredible kindness. There is no other cause. Therefore, if something is missing, if something is obstructed, if something causes us pain, the only valid meaningful explanation is that that is what is best for us. It is all good, even when we do not understand the good in

something, even when a pipe suddenly bursts at home, even when we accidentally sit on our glasses and break them. For the moment, we are not on the level to truly understand and genuinely feel that it is for the best and for that to cause within us the overwhelming desire to thank and praise Hashem. We will reach that level in the next world. Here, only the greatest *tzadikim* of the generation can see that everything is truly good. What can we do? We can have *emuna* and to constantly repeat that everything is for the best until slowly the idea penetrates our minds and reinforces the *emuna* that absolutely everything is for the best.

"I once visited a *talmid chochom* who suffered from a rare disease and was hospitalized in quarantine. This *talmid chochom*, a disseminator of Torah, having given a *shiur* to dozens of students for many years, was now lying there, still as a stone. The day that I visited him was a particularly difficult day for him, he writhed in pain. When he saw me, he beckoned me closer, smiled and said, 'Hashem gave me everything, a house, good children who learn Torah, he gave me decades of life in which I was able to sit and learn peacefully and restfully, he enabled me to spread Torah, to toil in Torah.' In this manner he continued to list all of Hashem's kindnesses towards him. Then he concluded, 'So what is the big deal if now I have to suffer?' This conversation took place several days before he died. How precious is this son to Hashem. (*Aleinu Lshabeach*)

Similarly, it is told about R' Moshe Dweck zt"l that in his final illness in 2005, when he was seriously ill and hospitalized, a close friend came to visit. The friend said, "R' Moshe you don't belong here, you should be teaching Torah." R' Moshe replied calmly, "Right now I belong right here. The proof being that Hashem put me here.!" When his son came to visit him and he was wracked with terrible back pains and was connected to oxygen tanks, he asked his son, "Do you love me?" "Of course, Abba, definitely," came the reply, not understanding what his father was getting at. R' Moshe

continued, "if you could remove all of my pain and suffering, would you do it?" Visibly upset, his son countered that of course he would. R' Moshe explained, "Hashem loves me many times more than you love me, there is no limit to His compassion. Moreover, Hashem can easily alleviate all of my suffering. So why doesn't He? Not only does Hashem not remove the suffering, He is the one who afflicted me with it. Why?" The questions echoed in the room until R' Moshe concluded, "Precisely because Hashem loves me, specifically because His compassion is unlimited did He inflict this upon me. He doesn't make me suffer despite His compassion, He makes me suffer because of His compassion." (Zichron Moshe)

Similarly, on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5771*, R' Menachem Mendel Lemberger, Av Beis Din of Makoveh Yerushalayim died after enduring many difficult agonies. At one point he was rushed to the hospital with a gangrenous leg. The doctors said that there was no choice, the leg had to be amputated or his life was in danger. He pleaded and begged the doctors for an alternate solution, he *davened* with great passion and crying, he asked for second and third opinions but finally realized that there was no other option. He called for his family and made the following statement: "Until now we asked for mercy, we shed tears, we tried, we cried, we begged, we did everything that a Jew is supposed to do in situations like these. Now we have been made aware that this is the decree from Heaven ... from here on out we

have no right to question, no one may shed another tear, no one may cry, no one may feel any regret. From here on out we see that Hashem wants things otherwise and we accept it with great love for we are in the loving and capable hands of our Creator. From this moment on we thank Hashem that we can withstand tribulations."

Anything that has happened in the past came from Hashem's compassion and we must accept everything with love. With regards to the future, we must have *emuna* that everything can change in an instant, so we must beseech Hashem and *daven* and beg that from now on He repair those things that needs repair in way of visible and manifest goodness, in a sweet and revealed way.

A person may never give up, yield to his circumstances or stop *davening* or shedding tears. But, the moment after his he prays and realizes that Hashem's concealment continues, it is a sign that this is the best thing for him at the moment. Therefore, he must continue at ease, relaxed and happy and thank Hashem that he is in the hands of the Creator of all worlds, Master of all souls. Rebbe Nachman taught us that Hashem created the world because of His compassion, He wanted to reveal His benevolence and had He not created the world, who would have witnessed His mercy, so He created the world to reveal His compassion. Everything is Hashem's mercy. All pleasure that we have in life, is Hashem's compassion.

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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