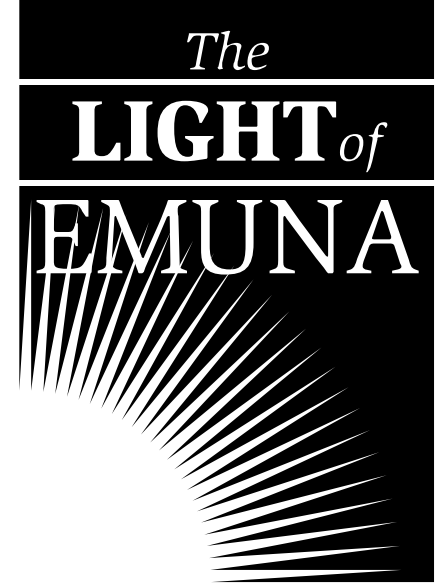


# פרשת ראה – ר"ח אלול

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



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

"ראה אנכי לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה" (יא, כו)  
"Behold, I set before you today a blessing  
and a curse."

*Parshas Re'eh* always falls right before *Elul* and we *bentch* or celebrate *Rosh Chodesh Elul* on this Shabbos. This is hinted to in the word ראה:ראה – אלול הגיע – behold *Elul* has arrived.

## אלול

*Elul* is a precious gift that we receive from Hashem. These are days of grace during which *teshuva* is more readily accepted than the rest of the year.

Every person desires to do *teshuva* all the time but in *Elul* it ascends to a higher place. We desire to return to the source, to be purified, to begin afresh, with a clean slate. A person contemplates *teshuva* – *teshuva* instills in him a clean, pure light and all of the unsavory things that had caused ruin are unable to touch this light – they cannot touch *teshuva* because *teshuva* is above all else.

*Elul* is a month of love, kindness and goodwill. Hashem calls us to draw near to Him, to open the door. "The voice of My beloved is knocking: open for Me, My sister, My beloved, My dove, My perfect one."<sup>1</sup> To increase *hisbodedus*. To raise our heads upwards. To feel Hashem's proximity uniquely during this month - and to say thank You.

*Elul* exclaims that the days of judgment are at

the door. This world is not anarchistic. For every improper act, we will ultimately have to give an accounting before the King of kings - that is an awe-inspiring thought. R' Yisroel Salanter zt"l would faint upon hearing the *chazzan* announce *Rosh Chodesh Elul* during *Rosh Chodesh bentching*. R' Moshe M'Kobrin zt"l recalled that, as a child, he was once playing with his friends during the month of *Elul*. His older sister scolded him and asked him if he really had to play and act frivolously during *Elul* when even the fish in the sea trembled. R' Moshe recounted that when he heard this he had shuddered and that many years later he was still able to vividly recall the fear he had felt at that time.<sup>2</sup>

*Elul* is a call to every Jew to halt the rat-race of life for a moment - to contemplate, to consider where we have come from and where we are headed. Our *parsha* begins with "behold" – to pause and ponder. Do I recognize that I need Hashem at every moment? Do I proceed with Hashem hand-in-hand? Do I live with Hashem? If I am honest with myself I realize that I do not. I am not together with Him. We have our own ideas, our own plans; we suffer our own insults, our own confusion. Even when we *daven*, we talk to Hashem while continuing to ruminate over our own thoughts. There are so many things that constrain us. Anger constrains us. Passion for food constrains us. When a person

<sup>1</sup> קול דודי דופק, פתחי לי אחותי רעייתי יונתי תמתי  
(שיר השירים ה, ב)

<sup>2</sup>

elevates himself, he forgoes more – he gets angry less, he does not feel compelled to eat just to relax himself. To stop and contemplate. Am I connected to true reality? The reality of: “there is nothing other than Hashem?”<sup>3</sup> Every minute that a person fails to remember that there is nothing besides Hashem – he finds himself in distress or caught up in haughtiness. If he is successful – he becomes arrogant. If he is unsuccessful – he falls into despair, worry, anger – completely wrapped up in himself and his own world. Life is a classroom – throughout the course of our lives we must learn that there is nothing besides Hashem. When we are attached to Hashem, we are happy. When we are missing happiness – we must stop and consider when we disconnected. This is our compass that shows us the way.

*Elul* is a chapter in the war. It is forbidden to waste time – we must salvage every possible moment. We must accept resolutions upon ourselves that will stand us in good stead on the day of judgment. It is a time for self-sacrifice. A Jew must be prepared to do a bit more than he seems capable of. Another chapter of *Tehillim*, another smile, another honor to bestow on his wife even when he doesn't feel like it, another kind word to a friend or a neighbor, prolonging *davening* a little longer even when he has a lot to do. These little extras, beyond one's capabilities - with that extra effort, with an extra ounce of strength – bring a person to perceptions that are immeasurable. When a person sacrifices and battles the distractions during *davening*, he fights and tries to concentrate, to think about the meaning of the words that he is uttering – we cannot appraise the pleasure that this *tefilla* causes Hashem. We cannot forego any point of *yiddishkeit*. We need holiness, we require Torah, and we must feel unconditional love of every other Jew. We must work on all of it, incessantly demand of ourselves. Even if we do not feel it, we must go through the motions until we slowly transform them into a part of ourselves. Self-sacrifice is a notion that inspires honor and holy fear – it is a most elevated level in *yiddishkeit* – it

sweetens judgments in an amazing way. We so desperately need to sacrifice throughout the holy days of *Elul*.

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"ראה אנכי לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה" (יא, כו)

**“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.”**

Life includes a side of blessing, but it also includes another side - one of curses, G-d forbid. A life of blessing is a life that is connected to its roots.

One who lives in an enchanted and wonderful world, warm and friendly, with zest and purpose – feels as if his hand is being held perpetually, he is being escorted at every moment and he is being sheltered in the shade of the Shechina. This is the world of connection and constant attachment to G-dly light. By contrast, there is a world of alienation and cold, treacherous and cruel, connected to emptiness and chaos – whose occupants promote their own interests and become addicted to their own base urges – it is the world of separation. The world of separation is a world of lies, distancing a person from his true self, the source of life. It is a world of confusion – misleading and distorting with its charms. By contrast, the world of connection draws a person closer to the root of his vitality and provides the aroma of authentic life, the source of constant pleasure, the highest everlasting pleasantness.<sup>4</sup>

The body and the soul – matter and spirit. Real life begins with the soul's dominion over the body, spirit over matter. This is a life of blessing, a life of clinging, of joy in *mitzvos*, of the sweetness of serving one's Creator. When the body rules, it is a life of curses, a life of serving passions and inclinations, an ongoing pursuit of honor and false praise. In essence, this is quite simple. We are blessed if we follow Hashem's commandments and we are cursed if we do not. One, who chooses the path of Torah, sees

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אין עוד מלבדו

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blessing in his life. Why live corruptly if we can live uprightly? A Jew who lives devoted to Hashem will have an amazing life. He will never be alone. He has a Father who loves him, Who wants to help him, for Whom nothing is too difficult, Who can do anything. "You are children of Hashem, your G-d."<sup>5</sup>

To be genuinely close to our Father we must operate with an attitude of self-nullification. We must suppress our egos – the mindset that something is owed us, with complaints and criticism. In its place, we must sanctify ourselves. The more we sanctify ourselves, the more genuine light illuminates us and the less sleep we require, the less food and drink we need. When a person enlarges his outlook to appreciate that there is no existence apart from Hashem – he illuminates the true course – food, sleep, money and honor all become less significant – they are no longer his entire life. He eats to have strength so that he may continue serving Hashem. He sleeps reluctantly – so that tomorrow he may learn ... this is blessing ... this is truth. There is no other truth, everything else is false. Sleep is fake, honor is phony, personal interest is a sham.

A life of blessing is a life of giving. Interpersonal relationships are of utmost importance - above all else. A person can never fully know the level of his attachment to Hashem – except via the *mitzvos* that he performs between himself and his fellow Jew. The path to Hashem must pass through the recognition of the virtue of every Jew. We do not have the option of not loving another Jew. If we have difficulty loving a certain person, we must invest all efforts to find a way to love him. Nothing brings us closer to Hashem more than loving each other. We must love others as they are [with whatever perceived flaws we discern], we must identify the unique virtue of each person, the very reason they are in this world, the thing that only they can elevate to Hashem [and no other person in all of history could have or can accomplish].

How do we begin? With *tzedaka*. "If there will be among you a needy person, from one of your brothers in one of your cities ... you shall not harden your heart ... rather, you shall open your hand to him ..." <sup>6</sup> Later, it says, "You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him ..." <sup>7</sup> Then, it says, "You shall surely provide him." <sup>8</sup> A Jew wishes to start something new and it is very difficult for him – it feels as if all avenues are blocked and sealed off to him. Rebbe Nachman gives amazing advice: give *tzedaka*. Open up and give. All beginnings are difficult but *tzedaka* opens the door and widens it. By giving *tzedaka* we break the attribute of stinginess that is inherent in us and, as we overcome our nature, they have mercy on us in Heaven and cast away accusations and sweeten judgments. <sup>9</sup>

The Rambam says that a person must give *tzedaka* generously, from the nicest and best that he owns. There was a *sofer* in Yerushalayim named R' Moshe Pshevorsk zt"l who was a holy *tzaddik* who wrote *tefillin* with great sanctity and purity and followed every stringency possible. Many of the great *gedolim* commissioned *tefillin* from him, including the Gerer Rebbe. Due to the special holiness of these *tefillin*, the Rebbe only donned them once a year, on Erev Yom Kippur. Once, a young man came to the Rebbe and told of the pain he suffered for the fact that he could not afford to buy *tefillin*. The Rebbe, without hesitation, gave the young man these special *tefillin* that he cherished so. His children inquired as to why he gave these *tefillin* to the boy and not a different pair that were not as dear to him. The Rebbe explained that while he understood their surprise, he was merely following the *halacha* that required one to give his most prized possessions as *tzedaka*.

A life of blessing is a life of *emuna*. Nothing is happenstance. There is no such thing as bad luck. The Creator is constantly occupied with

<sup>6</sup> כי יהיה ברך אביון מאחד אחיך באחד שעריך ... לא תאמץ את לבבך ... כי פתוח תפתח את ירך לו ... (טו, ז-ח)  
<sup>7</sup> נתון תתן לו ולא ירע לבבך בתתך לו ... (טו, י)  
<sup>8</sup> הענק תעניק (טו, יד)  
<sup>9</sup> ליקו"מ ח"ב תורה ד

<sup>5</sup> בנים אתם לד' אלוקים (יד, א)

corrections – even when He must destroy, even when there is pain – it is in order to build. I cannot blame myself and think that had I done things differently, the outcome would have been better. Nor can I blame another person who treated me poorly and believe that he caused me some harm. Whatever happens is from Hashem and I can only turn to Him - for only he can help. With Hashem, nothing is ever lost. If I merit this kind of closeness to and reliance on Hashem – my life is transformed into one of calm and happiness, filled with hope.

This blessing comes only with constant reinforcement. A Jew can begin countless times - even if he falls each time, even if the falls are serious descents into sin –there is always some

impression left by each attempt. Every attempt strengthens us for the next one. Each one survives forever. Rebbe Nachman taught that if a person strengthens himself time after time, throughout his life, to start anew each time – no matter what happens to him, all of these corrections join together to help him, to strengthen him, to support him in truly returning to Hashem. He will eventually see what was accomplished by all of his hard work – nothing is ever lost.<sup>10</sup> Every positive desire, every small act, every new beginning – leaves an everlasting imprint. The time will come when they will unite and bring the complete salvation.

It is never too late – we can always do *teshuva* and start all over, even at the end.

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## תפילה

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**Master of the World!** Give me the strength to not stray by pursuing the passions and emptiness of this world. Help me not to become confused. Help me always remember that the taste of attachment to You is the true flavor of life and no chocolate cake, full of calories, can ever be a substitute. So too with all appetites.

My problem, Father, is that when I am engrossed in the cake, I forget. I become confused. I cannot focus on any other flavor. It appears to me as if I will never successfully return to the true essence, G-d forbid. Help me, Father, precisely at those moments, to remember the sweet pleasantness of connecting to You.

Give me advice. Give me some ploy to reconnect to You and return to You – like some button that if I were to press it, I would immediately cling to You. Some concept, some idea, some inspiration, some memory – that if I could conjure – Your pleasantness would spread throughout my entire body and glow with warmth and sweetness that would be impossible to ignore.

Help me, Father, in all those moments and circumstances during which I do not feel Your presence – show me how I can instantly reconnect. It is such a shame for all those wasted moments. It is so good when I am with You.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

ד"ר

Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai Shlita and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* 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 and it provides some *chizuk*.

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