

# פרשת עקב

This adaptation is dedicated  
in honor of my wife, Devorah.

"והיה עקב תשמעון את המשפטים" (ז, יב)

**"And it will be because you will  
hearken to these ordinances ..."**

The word "עקב" ("because" or "heel") hints at a person who walks with humility and without pretentiousness – he will become wise enough for Torah study. An additional hint can be derived from the "ך" (numerically: fifty) of the word "תשמעון" – that via said humility, one may attain the fifty gates of understanding.<sup>1</sup>

"והיה עקב" (ז, יב)

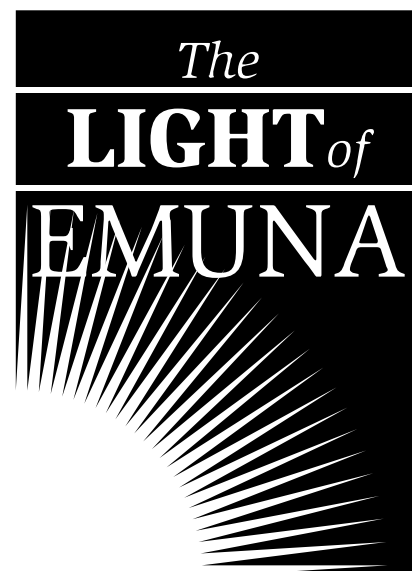
**"And it will be because ..."**

There are times when nothing progresses agreeably – with our livelihood, with educating our children, with peace in the home – everything is trying. Or, there are times during which a person struggles with himself – he has difficulty concentrating on his prayers, it is tough to remain upbeat, he endures humiliation, failure, disappointment – he is in darkness. He does not experience Hashem's Presence. It is like a black-hole. Like the darkness that Hashem created to restrict His unlimited light - the same exists in our lives – empty space, concealment, the inability to see or feel Hashem.

Sometimes the transitions are sharp and fast. A person can achieve such an elevated state, such proximity to Hashem – and, in one moment - everything is gone and dark – complete concealment. Such is our mode of serving Hashem - A massive advancement followed by a terrible defeat. A Jewish soul is a melody and melodies are not composed of high parts alone.

<sup>1</sup>

אור החיים הקדוש



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

A Jew soars, transcends with holy feelings, feels so close to Hashem and suddenly finds himself so depleted.

One minute our *emuna* is sturdy - we learn, everything is amazing, everything is fabulous and running well. Suddenly, it is all gone, darkness, nothingness. We must hold strong through these concealments. Being a Jew means fighting for a connection with Hashem from the midst of the darkness and emptiness – from amongst the matters that are not advancing well, that occur contrary to what we requested and prayed for.

Hashem wants us to coronate Him in this world – Hashem's sovereignty cannot remain in Heaven – it reaches all parts of reality and descends to the minutest details and the gloomiest places. Hashem wants us to descend to this dark world, with all of its suffering and confusion, with whatever we must withstand, with whatever our children must undergo – and, even then, call out to Him and reveal the light. Whenever we cling to Him, we are struggling with the black-hole that divides us from Hashem. Despite everything, we attempt to elevate ourselves a little, feel something, and connect. Whenever we are unsuccessful, we cannot feel – we must remind ourselves that it is Hashem's will – to even perform things without feeling. We must remember that everything is from Hashem, Who knows precisely what we need to bear to draw

near to Him. If it is too difficult and we can no longer tolerate it – we must turn to our Creator, speak to Him, beg of Him. Whatever it is, our situation is of Hashem’s making and we must have complete *emuna* that it is for our very best and that salvation will materialize from it. There is no alternate route – only through adversity. There is no one for whom everything proceeds smoothly, either spiritually or materialistically. We are confronted from all sides; there is no rest for the soul. But, when we strengthen our *emuna* that Hashem orchestrates everything, He triggers all of the causes – then, we do not blame ourselves or others and, even when we fail, we have cause for joy, for we begin to recognize that we are incapable on our own. We need Hashem; He is our address for whatever is lacking and whatever occurs. We were created so that we are dependent upon Him at every stage of life. In every downfall, He helps us rise.

*Emuna* is the foundation of Creation. One who has *emuna* and does not complain, acknowledging that everything is for his own good – has a mindset that is transcendent even over the World to come.

We must accept obstacles with love. A story is told of a man who suffered terribly. He experienced all sorts of health issues, as did many members of his family. He could not earn a living. His troubles weighed heavily on him. He decided to travel to see R’ Shalom Sharabi to learn how to accept his lot and relate to Hashem properly. While waiting to see R’ Shalom, he fell asleep and dreamt that he was being judged before the Heavenly tribunal. White and black angels representing all of his *mitzvos* and sins were displayed. The white angels were placed on one side of a scale and the black ones on the other. Much to his chagrin, the side of sin far outweighed the other. But, before closing his case, his suffering was offered in his defense and each pain caused the removal of some of the black angels until, slowly, the two sides were level. Realizing that there was nothing more to tip the scales in his favor, he started screaming, “Give me more suffering.” His own screaming woke him and drew attention from the Rav’s

family, who told him that it was his turn to see the Rav. He replied that it was no longer necessary – he had received his answer already.

This week, we read *Parshas Eikev*. *Eikev* can mean the heel – the lowest part of the human body. Its skin is tough, almost completely absent feeling. Such is our generation, referred to as the “עקבתא דמשיחה” (the footsteps of *Moshiach*). It is difficult for us to feel, to find joy – our hearts are closed. We have reached rock bottom – the heel – but, from there, there is only one way to go – up. From there, it is most possible to reveal the hidden and elevated light. In the darkest depths, the greatest light is discovered.

On the Shabbos *Nachamu* before his passing, Rebbe Nachman found his faculties to be impaired, stating that all of his perception and knowledge had abandoned him. He said, “I know nothing now, literally nothing.” But precisely then he declared his everlasting pronouncement that still reverberates today, “there is no despair in the world at all!”<sup>2</sup> There, at the bottom of the pit, from the black-hole, he chose to teach us never to despair – showing us that even in such seemingly hopeless situations – there is no despair. There is no place in which Hashem cannot be found, in which we are alone. It does not exist. Even in the blackest darkness, where we do not feel Him at all – Hashem is with us. We need only seek Him out and find a path to reconnect with Him anew.

**Moreinu Harav:** If a person experiences defeats, he can use them to return the entire world in *teshuva*. He can relate to people and tell them that he too faced what they are going through, “I was where you are, in the exact same circumstances – yet I did *teshuva* – you can too.” All of our setbacks are designed to help us teach. We can show others how we overcame. We learn to be divers who descend to the depths of the ocean to save others from drowning. Our task is to connect amidst the disappointments – to show the world that there is G-dliness there too. There were some who managed this even in

<sup>2</sup>

אין יאוש בעולם כלל!

the Holocaust, even in Auschwitz. There were Jews who donned *tefillin* on their ways to the crematoriums. When the Nazis caught them, they had nothing left to say. To see such *emuna* - on their way to a horrible death, all they wanted was to do another *mitzvah*. That is instilling *emuna* in the abyss. The Belzer Rebbe said that those who survived Auschwitz and retained their *emuna* are greater than all of the Rebbes in the world.

We must inject *emuna* into the most demanding situations. We must never despair. We must recognize Hashem in every condition and every moment. We must always be cognizant of the fact that we are Hashem's beloved children. The very One who reduced us to our current devastated state is the very One who promises to lift us back up. He creates the cure before inflicting the wound.

We must regularly remind ourselves that Hashem seeks only to benefit us, even if it seems otherwise at the moment. "The one that He loves, Hashem chastens."<sup>3</sup> If a person reacts as if he has been wronged, he merely amplifies strict judgment upon himself, G-d forbid. Each person has their own unique path, with many corrections and challenges. We must remain mindful of one thing: even when we are experiencing desolation, Hashem is guiding events, He never forsakes us. If from within all of our confusion, difficulties and challenges we remember to put everything aside and turn to Hashem - we provide much delight in Heaven.

This world is one of deprivation. We must never think, "I am unsuccessful, this doesn't go well for me, nothing goes right for me." Those thoughts are erroneous, they are untrue. There is no "bad luck." Everyone has a unique path. All of life is designed to bring us closer to Hashem. Light cannot be revealed if all proceeds smoothly. Problems help us pray, purify us, draw us close to Hashem. We seek light constantly, but we know that when we are ensconced in darkness, there is even greater opportunity.

Think of the black-hole in which our forefathers resided! Yoseph was severed from his family, Avraham was forced to banish his son from his home, and Sarah was barren for so many years and was compelled to let Avraham marry her maid. Who can describe such pain? Rivka had to exile Yaakov so that Eisav would not kill him ... yet they all endured. We understand nothing, but we persist. That is Hashem's greatest pleasure, from the service that we perform in this world, struggling with the void. We feel emptiness, but we know that Hashem is with us. Hashem created the world for us to recognize Him. We cannot do so with the intellect alone, we need *emuna*. When things are not going well, when everything seems to be broken, ruined, when we feel nothing and dry - we are left with - *EMUNA!* *Emuna* is the foundation of all of Creation. In the future, we will see how the emptiness was actually Hashem. When it was most difficult, terrifying - Hashem was with us. We will grasp that all those struggles were really Hashem holding our hands. *Emuna* is our test in life. Without it, there is no one to talk to, no way to live. When issues arise, we react by worrying and agonizing over our situation and possible resolutions. We must pause and remember Hashem, connect to Him - and then we will uncover hope, joy, guidance and a solution to our troubles."<sup>4</sup>

The less we understand, the more we need *emuna*. The more things go contrary to the way we wish them to - the more we must fortify our *emuna*. Everything is preordained. Nothing happens that is not critically necessary. The more we appreciate that there is nothing aside from Hashem, the less we suffer. The worse the circumstances from which we search for and reveal Hashem - the greater the reward. When we see no light but continue to don *tefillin*, persist in prayer - we are exalted. When we experience a "no" from Hashem and remain connected - it is far greater than any time we receive a "yes."

Our error is that we forget - we seek solutions

<sup>3</sup> את אשר יאהב ד' יוכיח (משלי ג, יב)

<sup>4</sup> באור פני מלך חיים

elsewhere – in food, sleep, anger – we forget that we have Hashem and only He brings salvation, comfort and success. “You shall remember Hashem, your G-d: that it is He Who gives you strength.”<sup>5</sup>

Life is one long perseverance. Hashem never gives up on us and He provides us with endless reminders to turn to Him. He prefers to benefit us, encourage us, support us, minimize suffering and cheer us. Ultimately, we will understand that the challenges were not punishments, but reminders designed to bring us close.

When a heart is broken, the light of Hashem can penetrate it. An unbroken heart is closed and allows nothing inside. Self-nullification is a tool

to allow the light into the darkness. With it, we acknowledge that it is all unearned gifts, undeserved, only from Hashem’s kindness and compassion. The heel represents humility – the lowest part of the body, yet the weight of the entire body rests upon it. Humility is the source of all positive attributes upon which all others rest. “What does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you?”<sup>6</sup> Hashem asks for the “what” – “what am I” – humility. The arrogant cannot connect with Hashem – “and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem.”<sup>7</sup>

We must alter our perspective and view things that used to upset us with a smile. There is no despair – we connect to Hashem through everything.

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### תפילה

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**Master of the World!** Help me remember that after all of my efforts, telephone calls, stress, impositions on other – help me remember that *tefilla* is above all else – that is the primary effort.

When something that appears to be negative occurs, such as encountering traffic on the way to the airport that threatens to make me miss my flight – help me, during these critical moments, to have *emuna* that it is from You, Father, and it is for the best, despite the fact that it feels like the most awful scenario.

Help me connect to You in middle of the stress, tension, worry and beseech You in those moments to calm me down, encourage me – and to perform a miracle and get me there on time.

**Master of the World!** When I am broken, when my heart is stopped up, when there is no moisture in my heart, help me, Father, to open my mouth anyway. And, if I am unable even to murmur, then help me do so without sound – just movement of my lips. Slowly, as I begin to connect to You - to the point of dancing excitedly, clapping and feeling that You are always with me. You will never abandon me. From the depths, I can arise and cling to You anew.

**Master of the World!** When I *daven* and receive exactly what I did not want, when my *tefillas* do not help and the answer is negative, help me, Father not to harbor any complaint in my heart. Help me never be angry with You, no matter what. Help me pierce to the depths of my mind and heart – if this is the answer to my hours of prayer – it is certainly the best thing for me, even if my comprehension is lacking.

**Master of the World!** I aspire to learn to live with You twenty-four hours each day, without interruption. Help me.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

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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 - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*. Thank you Mordi Blass for your help with some of the Hebrew expressions.

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To receive this adaptation by weekly email, email me at [LightofEmuna@doveliass.com](mailto:LightofEmuna@doveliass.com)

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<sup>5</sup> זוכרת את ד' אלקיך כי הוא הנתן לך כח (ח, י')

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<sup>6</sup> מה ד' אלקיך שואל מעמך (י, יב)  
<sup>7</sup> ורם לבבך ושכחת את ד' אלקיך (ח, יד)