

פרשת שופטים

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

"שפטים ושטרים תתן לך בכל שעריך" (טז, יח)
"Judges and officers you shall appoint
in all your cities"

One who wishes to be a true servant of Hashem must always examine his actions – not merely avoid negative actions. "Appointing judges and officers" means thoroughly inspecting even our good deeds, our *tefillos* and learning, with the requisite awe and reverence, to assure that they are clear and pure, absent any invalidating thoughts or motives, to verify if they are entirely done for Heaven's sake (and if we do, G-d forbid, discover any hint of ulterior purpose - we castigate ourselves).¹

"תמים תהיה עם ד' אלקיך" (יח, יג)
"You shall be wholehearted with
Hashem, your G-d."

Whatever relates to simplicity and wholeheartedness finds special favor in Hashem's eyes.

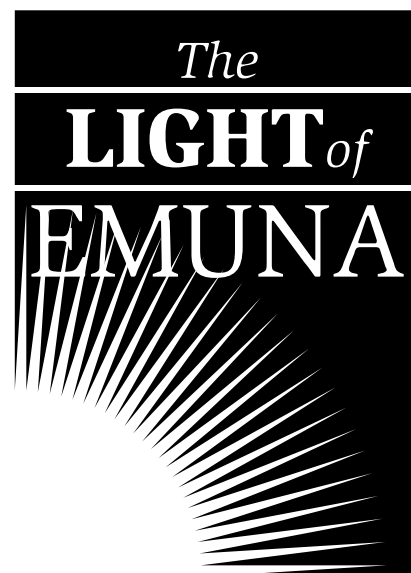
A simple Jew who sets time apart for Torah and *tefilla*, who toils to purify his actions and attributes, who turns to Hashem with straightforward words, with innocence and sincerity, who accepts life's challenges with love and *emuna* – he is the pearl that Hashem enjoys, he is the decoration that they adorn with above. Like that elderly man who goes to the pharmacy to fill a prescription and has his prescription returned by the pharmacist because his medicine is unavailable – and, after calling around, discovers that none of the local pharmacies have it in stock – yet, he accepts the situation calmly,

1

מאור ושמח

2

מסוד שיח חסידים, עמוד סה



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

with the reaction "everything is for the best." A guileless person is never answered empty-handed by Heaven – since he has complete and simple *emuna* and does not insist or demand explanations, never feeling as if he is owed anything because he begged and pleaded - but since he does, his requests are fulfilled.²

Rebbe Nachman taught that crucial element of *yiddishkeit* is proceeding with wholeheartedness and simplicity, without any craftiness.

The father of the holy Tanna R' Eliezer Ben Hurkanos had many workers tasked with plowing his fields. They plowed the plains and R' Eliezer plowed the hills. One day, his father found him crying and told him that he could switch and plow the plains. The next day, he found him crying again. He asked him why he was crying, had he rethought the matter and concluded that the hills were the better chore. He responded that he was crying because he wanted to learn Torah, not plow. His father retorted that it was too late, R' Eliezer was already twenty-eight years old and, at that point, he should marry and have children who would merit to learn Torah. R' Eliezer decided that it was unacceptable to continue living as an ignoramus and so he completely stopped eating and drinking. After some time, Eliyahu Hanavi appeared to him and asked him why he was

crying and fasting. Eliyahu told him that if he wished to learn Torah, he should travel to Yerushalayim and learn from R' Yochanan Ben Zakkai. So, he did and sat near R' Yochanan and cried again. R' Yochanan asked him why he was crying and again he responded that he wished to learn Torah. So, he taught him *Shema, Shemona Esrei, Bentching* – yet he continued to cry. He refused to eat for eight days until Shabbos. Eventually, he became the great Tanna who sat and lectured to the greatest minds of the generation and R' Yochanan Ben Zakkai kissed him on the head and exclaimed, "Fortunate are you, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov that this person has descended from you."³

That is the power of Jewish tears, of Jewish desire. A mature youngster who has a great thirst and longing to learn Torah, to the point that he sits weeping and crying, suffering for days and weeks over the one thing that he wants – Torah - when we have such will, Hashem opens all of the gates to us.

"You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d." If you are wholehearted – you earn being with Hashem, your G-d. What is wholeheartedness? It is integrity, and integrity is *emuna*. *Emuna* that there is nothing aside from Hashem, that everything is from Hashem and for the very best. Without Hashem, a person is nothing, for we cannot overcome our evil inclinations without Hashem. Even when things do not proceed smoothly, we continue to long for Hashem, we do not get upset or dejected.

In Rebbe Nachman story of the simple shoemaker, the shoemaker was always happy, even when he did not succeed. He linked everything to Hashem, with *emuna* that whatever occurred was from Hashem. He grabbed hold of the inner point of connectedness to Hashem and could not be budged from it. That inner point means no complaining, always satisfied – to feel otherwise is to not believe in Hashem's justice. He used the G-dly light found within himself, the sweetness of his soul, to cloak

reality and thereby illuminate it. The shoes that he produced were not impressive, but to him they were honey and sugar. Everything was sweet to him. Rebbe Nosson explained this by saying, "a person can merit having his life be exactly as he wishes it to be – by simply wishing for his life to be exactly as it is."⁴

Perfection/completion/wholehearted/integrity is *emuna* – knowing that everything is dependent on Hashem, having *emuna* in the power of prayer - prayer from the depths of the heart, never-ending *tefilla*. Prayer can transform a simple student into a Torah scholar, one who is diligent and toils in Torah. Prayer can convert a quiet house that does not know the sound of a baby's cry into one filled with children. When a person proceeds with pure devotion, his prayers are answered almost as fully as the prayers of *tzaddikim* of earlier generations.

A story is related of a family of farmers in Moshav Talmei Eliyahu in southern Eretz Yisroel by one of the adult family members. "Four years ago, we sat down one Shabbos to a meal. The country's drought was at its fiercest and our entire family was broken-hearted. The sadness was so pervasive that it threatened to overpower the entire meal and mar the joy of Shabbos. Father shook himself out of it and declared, 'We have a compassionate Father in Heaven who knows and sees how hard we have worked in order to plant and sow all of our crops. He also knows the secrets of our hearts and how much *bitachon* we have in Him and his kindness. Let us not allow despair and sadness to overtake our Shabbos table. On Shabbos, we must be cheerful! On Shabbos, we are to visualize as if all of our work is done. Therefore, we must feel as if the rain already fell and all of the flowers have already blossomed.' The rest of the family heard his words and we were immediately filled with joy. We began to sing a festive Shabbos melody, 'The nation that sanctifies the Seventh – they will all be satisfied and delighted from Your

⁴ The beauty of this prose is lost in translation:

אדם יכול לזכות שחייו יהיו כמו שהוא רוצה, על ידי שירצה את חייו כמו שהם (שיח שרפי קודש ח"ב תקט"ז)

³

פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק א'

goodness.” Such enthusiasm ... we danced around the table ... and, spectacularly, Hashem opened the Heavens that very night and heavy rainfall soaked the entire Moshav. All of the fields were fully saturated.

We woke all of the children in the middle of the night, without a care, running from room to room, screaming, “Children, Hashem heard our prayers, Hashem saw our dance – it’s raining outside!” At first, the children were confused; but, pretty soon, they started jumping for joy and throwing pillows in the air. “It’s raining! It’s raining!” We opened the candy cabinet and gave each child a big candy bag, in middle of the night, to gladden them. Then, we told them to give thanks to Hashem for the amazing gift that he bestowed upon us! The children made the proper blessing on the candy with excitement and truly enjoyed their treats.

In the morning, the elation subsided and the children fell asleep again. On the way to *shul*, at seven-thirty in the morning, all of the streets of the Moshav were happily flowing with water. We had to tread cautiously so as not to step in beautifully deep puddles. It seemed as if it was a holiday and - indeed it was. *Shachris* that morning in *shul* was conducted with enthusiasm, joy and cheerful hearts.

It was one of the most powerful lessons in *emuna* we could ever give the children; we etched it in their bones. Four years later, the children still remind us of that night, ‘Daddy, do you remember how we danced, do you remember how we were so happy and how you gave out the candy, and, most importantly, how Hashem heard us – us, the kids of Moshav Talmei Eliyahu?!’ ‘I’m so happy,’ said Father, ‘that this was engraved in your souls. Always remember that as soon as you have any kind of problem or you need anything in the slightest - do what we did - we trusted Hashem, we prayed, and we had *emuna* in Him and it all worked out for the best.’”⁵

Personal prayer, in simple terminology, with sincerity, from the depths of the heart – creates a natural, true, simple and healthy connection with the Master of the World. We must partner with Hashem in all of our endeavors, seek His counsel, relate all of our considerations, talk it out with Him. True, Hashem already knows all of the particulars, but we choose to live with Him in every situation – we need His listening ear, His understanding and His proximity. Completion in our lives requires Hashem’s Presence - without Him we are sorely lacking. When a person feels suddenly inspired to talk to Hashem, he should not postpone it for a “better” time or a “better” place – for it is liable to evade us. We must grab hold of the inspiration – it is possible that precisely those simple words that come to us at that very moment from the depths of our hearts can initiate the very salvation that we seek.

The main components of *yiddishkeit* are simplicity and wholeheartedness, absent jest. When a person acts with cleverness and cunning, with mockery - he has no vitality and no connection.

The simple shoemaker in Rebbe Nachman’s story did not know much. But, he knew one thing – that he did not need to pay attention to what other people said about him. It did not bother him. He merely requested his needs, with sincerity. Mockery is the opposite of wholeheartedness – it is a symbol of falsehood. The class of jesters will not merit seeing the *Shechina*. Mockery is not just a feeling of superiority, but includes the goal of turning everything in life into a joke. The damage caused is indescribable.⁶

Often, when youngsters express the desire to become tzaddikim, when they crave greatness at an early age – instead of encouraging them and urging them on – many mock them. Rabbeinu Yonah labels those who mock those who yearn for greatness and self-improvement as “haters/enemies of Hashem.” They seem determined to dissuade others from giving

5

מרוה לצמא כסלו מש"ע

6

באור פני מלך חיים

Hashem delight. If we truly love Hashem, we would seek to increase the glory of Heaven – whether through our own actions or those of other people.

Wholeheartedness is acting for Heaven's sake. This is difficult for most people and requires the guidance of *tzaddikim*. As we approach Rosh Hashanah we must set aside our own honor and aspirations and focus entirely on the glory of the King of all Kings.

Human nature demands honor – anyone who says that he can live without honor is deluding himself. When we are humiliated, we suffer pains of death. We can overcome humiliation by concentrating on true honor, Hashem's honor –

not our own personal successes, money, careers, homes, etc. Consequently, when we are degraded we recognize that our honor is not really affected because those things are not real honor. A letter was discovered, written by a victim of Auschwitz on his way to his death. He wrote, "I know Hashem, You took my wife and my children and I continued to have *bitachon*. Now they take me out to die and I know that You, Hashem, think that I will deny Your existence – but You have failed. I still love You." Despite everything, his last words expressed his love for Hashem.

Ridicule and scorn can destroy a person's soul. Only love cures it.

תפילה

Master of the World, Grant me *Emuna*... that everything that I entreat of You, You are capable of providing me with – even things that seem completely unrealistic. At times, when I pray and make requests, for big things, I do not truly believe that You can really give them to me; I do not truly believe that these things can actually happen.

Master of the World, Grant me *Emuna*... that my *tefillos* have power. At times I request small things (i.e. to help me find my keys or my glasses, to open my eyes) – but, I do not really believe that my prayers will work – instead, I run back and forth in a panic. If I genuinely believed in the power of prayer, I would be much calmer.

Master of the World, Grant me *Emuna*... that there will really be Resurrection of the Dead and that everyone will rise from their graves and return to live here with us, if it happens in our days, and, if not, then we too will rise – for this seems like a fantasy to me, not very authentic.

Master of the World, Grant me *Emuna*... that even if we are far from our destination and the route is one long traffic jam whose end we cannot see – that if we *daven* (specifically reciting **אנא בכוח** which is a *segula* for opening a path), sing, raise our hands and shout, "There is nothing besides Hashem" and we invoke the merit of *tzaddikim* – that in the merit of all this, the road will clear and we will arrive in a timely manner and we will witness miracles, as we have seen in the past but have forgotten and given up too quickly.

Master of the World, Grant me *Emuna*... that even if years have passed and we have not been rescued, that salvation can arrive in an instant because for You, Father, anything is possible, in the blink of an eye. It is merely that the passing years have injected doubts into our minds.

Master of the World, Grant me *Emuna*... wholehearted, pure, simple, certain, supernatural – that you orchestrate everything and everything depends on You.

Master of the World, Grant me *Emuna*!

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

דוֹב

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.

©Dov Elias 5773.

To receive this adaptation by weekly email, email me at LightofEmuna@doveliass.com