

פרשת חיי שרה

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

"ויהיו חיי שרה מאה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים
שני חיי שרה" (כג, א)

"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life."

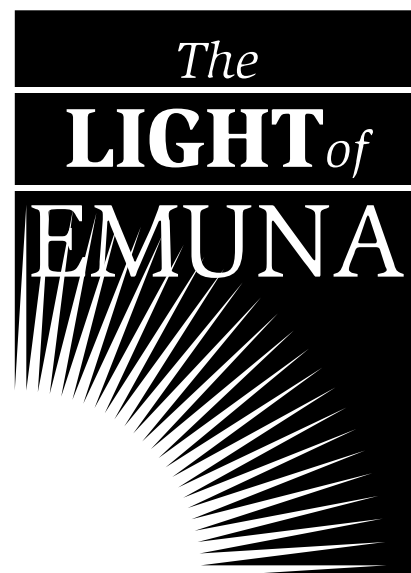
This is the main purpose of life – to view ourselves, when we begin to serve Hashem each time anew, as if we had never before begun to serve Him at all. Even when we reach old age, we see ourselves as complete infants – as if we had never yet lived or served Hashem at all – beginning to live in the service of Hashem afresh. That is the element of a one-hundred year old being like a twenty year old, who, in turn, is like a seven-year old – all of the years of Sarah's life were equally good.¹

סוד החיים הטובים

The Secret of the Good Life

There are more than a few people who carry the burden of their lives with great difficulty. Especially as the years advance and life weighs heavily upon their shoulders – things that we once did with enthusiasm and vitality lose their flavor and become burdens. The same is true for the service of Hashem. There are those who reluctantly accept their *yiddishkeit* as an oppressive load of repetitive obligations. They are capable of learning Torah, *davening*, observing *mitzvos* – but it all lacks any liveliness. By contrast, there are others whose lives are spirited, full of joy and exuberance.

What is the secret? The opening *pasuk* of this week's *parsha* holds the secret – When Sarah



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

was one hundred years old it was as if she was twenty and at twenty she was like a seven year-old. **The secret is renewal!** It is surprising – because Sarah's life was not easy. Most of her years were spent wandering, suffering, hungry – for ninety of them she was barren – she endured Avraham's ten trials right alongside her husband – the last one literally causing her death – yet the Torah tells us that they were all fresh and filled with energy. *Tzaddikim* live their days - with zest filling every moment. They are never satisfied with the status quo. They constantly yearn to become even closer to Hashem. Rebbe Nachman once said, "I am living a life today that I have never before lived! There are many types of life - but today, I am experiencing a good life that I have never before lived."² **The secret to life is constant revitalization!**

What is the gateway to a life of rejuvenation? **Emuna! Emuna can transform our service of Hashem into something vibrant and novel.** Nothing feels repetitive. Everything feels like the first time. We have never before done what we are about to accomplish – it only appears to be the same. *Emuna* that Hashem is with us here and now – in whatever we do. A Jew seeks Hashem, longing his entire life to grow closer to Hashem, introspecting relentlessly for ways to cause Hashem pleasure. When we learn to live with Hashem constantly – everything is new and

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fresh. Even if we've tried and have not been successful in the past or even if we have been successful but subsequently encountered hardships and were weakened – **we are continuously filled with new hopes.**

When a person has true *emuna* that Hashem is good to him, that the challenges that he endures are for the best - he must exhibit this attitude outwardly as well. He should not appear to be troubled. He must walk with a straight posture, with joy on his face. A good example of this attitude was found in R' Yisroel Shlomo Langer zt"l of Toronto, who lived into his nineties but was not survived by any of his children. After World War II he had married for the second time and settled in Toronto. More than 40 years ago, his wife became ill and was unable to run their home. R' Yisroel accepted the burden of managing the home and did so with *emuna* and sacrifice – regularly saying, “This is my assignment and one must complete one's tasks faithfully.” For decades, he supported and cared for his wife and did everything possible to assure that all of her needs were fulfilled. He cooked and cleaned, paying attention to every detail – conducting himself all the while as a prince – a smile always on his face, a witty expression always on his lips. Every time that he prepared a meal he would say, “I am like the *Kohen Gadol* bringing *korbanos* on the *Mizbeach*.” Never was a meal served without a tablecloth - to cover the table before Hashem. Before he sat down to eat, he would place everything that was needed for the meal on the table – every crumb prepared in advance – planned with forethought. Everything was served with honor and deliberation. If one wished to see how a prince ate – one needed only observe R' Yisroel at mealtime. A prince is not subservient to the lust for food – the food serves his needs. This too is serving Hashem and it must be done with self-sacrifice, as all spirituality must be undertaken, no different than learning Torah or *davening*.

He would *bentch* slowly and clearly, every word read from a *siddur*. His relatives testified that they never witnessed him recite *bentching* or even *al hamichya* without a *siddur*. Then, he

would clean up, washing every utensil and returning it to its place. Exactly as the *Kohen Gadol*, who would stand and clean the *Menorah* for the candles in the *Beis Hamikdash*. **That was his task at that given moment and he was required to do it wholeheartedly.**

Even after his wife died, twenty years before he did, he did not alter his daily routine. Even alone, he would take care to set a meal for himself on Shabbos. One Friday night, when he was close to 90 years old, one of his students walked him home on and watched through the window to observe what kind of Shabbos this elderly Jew could enjoy alone in the world. He later recounted that, based on the noise coming from the house, one would have thought there was an extended family with children and grandchildren around the table. He sang *Shalom Aleichem*, *Eishes Chayil* and many *zmiros* – it was if he was sitting at his Rebbe's table. He served himself each course like a person attached to Hashem, recognizing that everything derived from Hashem's mercy – Hashem was the one who caused his suffering all of these years – and so, **he was never alone.**³

The gate of renewal is always open if we manage to look at others with benevolent eyes. We must believe in the good in others, to see the light in every Jew. Dovid Hamelech had “beautiful eyes and a positive appearance (or outlook)”⁴ – **his outlook was such that he only noticed the good features in every Jew** – the holy sparks within each one. He was the opposite of Ephron (עפרון) of this week's *parsha*, whose name has the numerical value of 400 – the equivalent of רע עין (an evil eye). Ephron perceived nothing positive in the Ma'aras Hamachpelah – merely a cave filled with darkness and gloom.

Moreinu Harav: A person tends to see his own light and not that of others – whether with his friends or at home. At times, a person detects light in his wife, but she does not see any in him or vice-versa. In reality, we must always

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perceive light in each other – for we are forbidden from noting deficiencies or flaws in others. The primary form of the evil eye is the inability to tolerate that someone else has it better than we do – our eyes are pained by the elevation of others – even if it is that he learns or *davens* better than we do. Why should it bother us that he does it better? By nature, we are disturbed by another’s success. **If we were prepared to recognize the superiority of others – we would live forever – we would be able to fix the entire world.** A benevolent eye requires foregoing, loving, enjoying another’s successes. Within every one of us there are great treasures – we must merely remove the grime that covers them – we must escape the husks of Ephron, the evil eye. Every Jewish soul contains unlimited riches – burning passionately for Hashem – every Jewish soul desires to do *teshuva*! Every Jewish heart blazes for Hashem – every Jew is aflame – a permanent fire on the *Mizbeach* that is never extinguished. Every single Jew is capable of returning the entire world in *teshuva*, even the worst *rasha* can return – for the more evil he is, the more power he possesses – he has a greater soul.

The gate of good life is sealed so long as a person remains confined to his own four cubits and does not acknowledge anyone else. The more we can escape self-love and think about a second party, to worry about others – the more joy in life we will attain – **and nothing draws us closer to Hashem than the love between Jews.**

A story is told of a certain wealthy man who married off two children. The night before each of the weddings he had had a dream that he was at the wedding and his father (who had been deceased for several years) arrived dressed as a mourner and refused to dance or partake in the wedding celebration. Both times, the wedding was plagued with mishaps. On the eve of his third child’s wedding, he once again had the same dream. In the morning, he consulted with *tzaddikim* and they figured out that his father had always conducted a “wedding for the poor” on the night before each of his children’s weddings. Seeing how this revelation was

discovered on the day of the wedding and it was too late to conduct the “wedding for the poor” on the night before, they conducted it during the actual wedding. There were no mishaps at this wedding because the joy was not reserved for him alone – he had shared it with the depressed and brokenhearted, who suddenly exhibited light on their faces.⁵ Hashem declares, “If you gladden mine, I will gladden yours.”

Master of the World, help me be like those *tzaddikim*, the true shepherds of the Jewish people, who sacrifice themselves for us – who pray incessantly for the nullification of difficult decrees – who love every Jew as if each one were their only child – who toil their entire lives to attain the trait of humility and prop up other Jews, sincerely believing that every other Jew is superior to them.

Humility and modesty are central gates in the entrance to a good life. Everyone knows why the angels asked Avraham where Sarah was – so that he would respond that she was in the tent, that she was modest. They did not complement her for her tasty food, or her Divine Inspiration – only for her modesty, for that is the beauty and the splendor of Jewish women. Humble people are certain that all are more righteous than they, holier than they, smarter than they – in their view, every Jew is amazing. Their joy does not derive from a feeling of superiority – it stems from the fact that they are Jews.

A life of humility and modesty is so amazing. A humble person recognizes that he is utterly incapable of anything, but for Hashem. He would never succeed without Hashem. When a person lives with this truth – he is always happy because he is connected to Hashem. Nothing conceals Hashem’s light more than arrogance. A person who flees ego and acts only for Hashem’s glory lives a much better life in this world, and certainly in the World to Come.

A haughty person feels as if everything is owed to him and when he does not get what he thinks

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he deserves – he is hurt and upset. We must fight these thoughts. When we receive a bit of honor, we forget who we are. Avraham's servant, Eliezer, did not forget. He was perpetually mindful of the fact that he was Avraham's servant. He was up front about it with Rivka's family to avoid undue honor. He is repeatedly referred to as "the servant" for that is how he wanted to be known – he was not interested in any other designation.

The greatest level is gratitude. Sarah Imeinu, despite all of her hardships, never lost her bond with Hashem – she accepted everything with love, never complaining – always thanking and acknowledging that everything was for the best.

We are happiest when we feel Hashem's Presence. We build a *Mishkan* for Hashem in our

hearts. Joy is connection. When we merit those moments in which we experience Hashem's Presence – we feel amazing and any negative occurrence seems so inconsequential. We strengthen ourselves, we are happy, we have *emuna*, we are hopeful. But, when we don't feel like Hashem is residing in our internal *Mishkan* – every small inconvenience, every slight wind can hurl us far away – can cause real damage.

We long for Hashem to return to the *Beis Hamikdash* and to the *Mishkan* that we build for Him in our hearts.⁶

In every blessing that we say, in every *tefilla* that we pray, in every battle with our thoughts, in every thank you that we express, in every challenge that we face – we are building a *Mishkan* in our hearts.

תפילה

Master of the World! Grant me heart – that I may love You and desire You as much as possible. Help me, Father, that I not want anything (even those things that seem so sweet and constantly pull me) – because the uniquely sweetest thing that I want is You, Father.

Master of the World! Grant me heart – to feel You continuously, to be enthusiastic about every matter of holiness – to always feel, at every moment, that You are with me.

Help me never to do anything "again" – that I may perpetually feel like everything is the first time - like *Shacharis* that I am going to *daven* now – let me feel as if it is something that I have never done before.

Master of the World! Grant me heart – to love every Jew, to be impressed by every Jew, to never let it bother me if someone else is greater than me or more advanced.

Help me, Father, to be happy for the success of others and not become dejected as I often do.

Help me, Father, to cease thinking of myself as finer and more successful. Protect me, Father, especially when they honor me a bit, to not forget who I truly am - as only You and I really know.

Master of the World! If I suddenly don't feel You in my heart, if I feel dried up, if I have no joy or vitality – teach me, Father, how to return to You, as quickly as possible – how to return You to my heart, as it were. It is impossible to live without You, Father.

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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