

פרשת ראה

This adaptation is dedicated
in honor of my wife, Devorah
and the Bar Mitzvah of
Yitzy Marciano - מזל טוב!!!

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

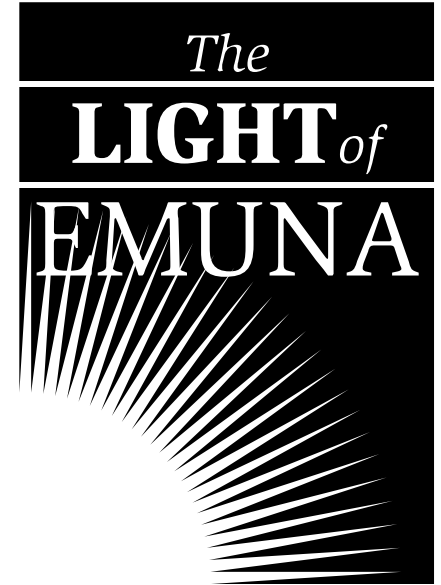
The word "today" teaches us that every day, there is renewed free will. By nature, when a person sins, his free-will departs – but, Hashem, in His compassion, renews Creation continually and furnishes us with renewed free-will, every day – in a way such that we can start over afresh and do good.¹

ברכה וקללה Blessing & Curse

The Creator of the World regularly sends us new invitations. Every day, a person is capable of discarding the negative and embracing the positive. Abandon curse and adopt blessing. Even if we've tried multiple times and failed, we receive a fresh summons each day. At any moment, we can open a new page, completely disregard what has occurred until the present and begin over – as if we were reborn.

This Shabbos we announce the arrival of the month of *Elul*. It affects people; a certain holy trepidation descends and fills the void in the world. There is a spirit of renewal in the air. The heart of every Jew, whoever he may be and whatever he does, feels some inspiration, some desire to erase the stains, to straighten every wrinkle, to dig to the depths and to extract from the vaults of the soul the buried and hidden treasure, to begin again. Where do we start? Where do we invest the bulk of our efforts? It is all found within this week's *parsha*?

¹



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

"ואתו תעבדו ובו תדבקון" (יג, ה)
"And Him shall you serve and to Him
shall you cleave."

Rebbe Nachman taught that we must constantly remember that there is a World to Come. As soon as we arise in the morning, our first thought must be – there is a World to Come. When a person recalls this fact, he lives in this world as he must. He infuses his time with purpose, not inanity. He understands that we do not remain here forever. He maintains the proper perspectives in life.

We wish to correct our characteristics, escape our base urges, to earn *emuna*, to know that everything is orchestrated for the best – for, if everything is Hashem's doing, there is no evil, because Hashem does only good – we wish to deserve to cling to Hashem, to learn how to saturate our lives with His presence, how to preserve our bond perpetually. To accomplish this, we must utilize our time, safeguard our time; focus on the fundamentals, with our eyes on the goal.

A person who has purpose in this world does not have time to talk about others, to listen to negative things about others. Doing so indicates that a person is bored, a fool, suggesting that he has no objectives. If he had things to do, he

"אחרי ד' אלקים תלכו" (יג, ה)
"Hashem, your G-d, you shall follow"

would have no time to gossip - it would not interest him. The concept of "killing time" is inapplicable to one who has ambition - he constantly looks to achieve more. He tries to limit his sleep, setting schedules to occupy his time - extra learning, additional Tehillim - leaving no time to rumormonger. There were people who quarreled and humiliated Rebbe Nossan. When his students inquired as to why he refused to engage them or react, he explained that he simply had no time to retort.²

Time is the most valuable asset in the world. Millions of people sit idly by each day - on airplanes, on trains, in cars. How do they maximize their time? They do nothing. They idle away hour after hour until they arrive at their destinations. Precious time is wasted. Before his death, the burial society asked the Shaagas Aryeh to say *viduy*. He responded that he had no need to do *teshuvah* for he had had no time with which to sin, he had learned uninterruptedly, without pause.

There was once a *shiva* house in which there were two tattered shirts on display, one labeled "*Zevachim*" and the other "*Menachos*". The following story was told by way of explanation. After the Holocaust, the deceased had arrived in America with two shirts, one for weekdays and one for Shabbos. He joined a *yeshiva*, and became a *talmid chochom*. As the shirts grew more and more worn, he considered that it might be rime to earn an income. But, he did not want to leave the *yeshiva*. The only time the shirts became a source of embarrassment was during lunch when the other students would remove their jackets. To avoid humiliation, he would leave his jacket on and eat quickly so as to preclude any curiosity. Doing so afforded him an additional fifteen minutes of learning per day. Over the years, in those fifteen minutes, he reviewed Tractates *Zevachim* and *Menachos* over sixty times. In his final will, he asked that the shirts be exhibited with pride to testify that time is the most cherished possession of all.

By proceeding with Hashem, everyone becomes capable of infinite possibilities. Another *tefilla*, another tear from the depths of our hearts, another lifting of our heads, another exclamation of "why should we be rejected," more *emuna*, clear and strong - that there is nothing that can close us off from before the Creator, Who saves us from with all manners of deliverance. The power of motivation is a remarkable one. Someone who truly aspires for something receives it from Hashem. Hashem is all-capable, nothing is too difficult for Him and, through prayer, all is attainable. We need only implore, again and again - until we achieve. We must approach prayer with submissiveness, not as if we are owed anything - viewing our requests as undeserved gifts - requesting repeatedly, never becoming pessimistic, wearing out our lips, until we feel that our *tefillos* are making an impression above and are accepted.

There is no such thing as hopelessness. Hashem can simply, in one moment, utterly transform a person's entire spiritual and material situation - we need only have *emuna*. Even if all of the doctors' prognoses and life's experiences suggest that we face a lost cause, G-d forbid, that redemption is a remote prospect, that we should give up and focus on other things - we are mistaken. Is Hashem unable to arrange a match for a thirty-year old man? A forty-year old? Can Hashem not grant children after twenty years of childlessness? Therefore, what is expected of us, even during a long and arduous challenge, is to strengthen our hearts with *emuna* and *bitachon*, to contemplate Hashem's great and astounding compassion and kindness, arranging events and rescuing, with His marvels, bestowing mankind with redemption that is beyond conception - for, He is omnipotent. Consequently, we will never dare to despair - we will continue to pray and beseech until the appropriate time to be answered arrives.³

² המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום

³ כי אתה עמדי חלק ד'

Moreinu Harav: If a person really wishes to accomplish, he must render himself dust and ashes, which is only possible through *davening* with concentration and self-sacrifice. We must detach ourselves from all other thoughts and confusion – a torturous endeavor. We are bombarded with thoughts about our many obligations. Concentrating takes martyrdom. A person can be selfless in areas of *tzedaka* and *chesed*, but genuine self-sacrifice is in the area of *davening*, slowly and with focus.

Rebbe Nachman instructed us to *daven* as if we were forfeiting our lives *al Kiddush Hashem*. All day, we worry about money, our spouses, our children, what we are doing, where we are going – a million thoughts per second. How do we disconnect? We must sacrifice ourselves *al Kiddush Hashem*. We must be willing to perish. We must acknowledge that Hashem administers the world, He is the King, He performs everything – we must let Him and not try to help Him – He does not require our assistance - just pray. We must *daven* slowly, word for word. Even if we feel unworthy we can sacrifice ourselves – even the worst sinners are prepared to give up their lives *al Kiddush Hashem*. Such *tefilla* opens tremendous light for us.

another's skull just to be perceived as exacting with *mitzvos*.

Rav Kroizer Shlita retold that he had attended a lecture one Friday night and had not realized that the lecturer was going to continue until after nightfall. He had not *davened Mincha* yet. He slowly made his way out of the room, trying not to be too obvious. On Sunday, unsure if he had acted properly, he asked the Chazon Ish. The Chazon Ish responded, "I do not understand the question. Leaving in middle of the lecture would disgrace the lecturer, something not made permissible by the need to *daven*. Of course it was forbidden to depart."

Parshas Re'eh recounts many interpersonal *mitzvos* – tithes, listening, extending a hand, giving and generosity.⁴ True beauty is when we give rather than receive. This is most difficult when dealing with someone who has harmed us, when the proclivity for revenge rages within us – yet we must be benevolent, loving and beneficent even to those who have mistreated us. Our true test is whether we act for our own benefit or Hashem's.⁵

"פתח תפתח את ירך לו" (טו, ה)
"You shall open your hand to him"

Nothing brings us closer to Hashem than the *mitzvos* governing interpersonal relationships. We gauge our connection to Hashem via our social interactions. Our path to Hashem is through recognizing the attributes of every Jew. We cannot connect to Hashem at the expense of others. R' Shalom Shwadron told of one Shabbos *Zachor* when a young man ascended the *bimah* to *layn*. A certain self-righteous older man erupted over the fact that such a young person would dare to read the only Biblically mandated Torah portion. The young man slunk away, humiliated. R' Shalom remarked that this "*frummie*" posed as one who was stringent and meticulous, but in reality was corrupt and harsh, willing to trample

"ושמחת, לפני ד' אלקיך" (יב, יח)
"And you shall rejoice, before Hashem, your G-d"

Our joy derives from remembering that Hashem is with us. When we acknowledge Hashem in all circumstances and unremittingly – our lives become "Paradise on Earth."

Our greatest joy stems from the knowledge that we are children of the King of Kings. Our *yiddishkeit* is the source of our happiness. Our delight in being Jewish is indubitable, for it is entirely from Hashem, whereas satisfaction from our own actions is always subject to scrutiny and imperfection.⁶

⁴ עשור תעשיר, שמוע תשמע, פתוח תפתח, נתן נתן, העניק תעניק
⁵ הרמ"ק ב"תומר דבורה"
⁶ סוף סיפורי מעשיות

The path to Hashem is traversed by seeking, yearning and longing – with numerous ups and downs and fresh starts – so long as we never despair, continually coveting eager and desirous. When we search for a lost object, the important moment is the one during which we find it. Spirituality is different. The search itself is the discovery.

Our souls crave something from above, beyond our current situation, that lifts us up, that, if we attain it, changes everything. What does this higher reality consist of? Holiness, attachment, *tzaddikim*, Hashem, Torah, *tefilla*, etc. They are all elevated above us – our task is to grab onto a portion of them, to feel them, to thirst for them, to draw strength from them. The soul is not

satisfied by the destination but by the journey - the journey towards those matters above us. Accomplishment is not the goal, the desire is the objective. What we have achieved does not give us vigor, what is slightly beyond us does. By reaching and striving - we acquire powerful and incredible things.⁷

During *Elul*, the King visits us in the field and we can draw close to Him and request of Him all that our hearts' desires. At this time of the year, Hashem opens all of the gates for us and illuminates us with great light - we must merely approach Him. Loving each other, *chesed* and *tzedaka* are the greatest stimuli for Hashem's love towards us. We must choose positively, choose blessing.

תפילה

Master of the World! Grant me moments of spiritual exaltedness, of elevation of the soul, of excitement, of tears of joy, of philanthropy and love towards my fellow man – for only these give me the strength to overcome the lure of the pleasures of this world, for only these can help me constantly perceive the truth before my eyes. The flavor of holiness is the only true tang – all else is false.

Help me, Father, for without these moments of elevation, I have no hope of withstanding the evil inclination that attempts to seduce me towards the poison of physical pleasures and convince me that they are real pleasures.

Master of the World! Help me associate with true *tzaddikim* and receive boundless longings and yearnings for You. Let me merit dreaming about holiness, sweetness – like those dreams that are not easily forgotten and, when things get difficult, to remember them and obtain such joy and satisfaction.

Master of the World! Allow our teachers to continue writing inspirational prose that immediately connects us to You and brings tears to our eyes.

Master of the World! Help me foster ever more sanctity in my life for that is the best protective wall against all of the dangers of this world - additional guarding of my eyes, guarding of my tongue, judging favorable, foregoing, prayer with concentration, acts of charity and kindness, and more of all of the good and amazing deeds that exist in the service of Hashem.

Master of the World! Grant me many moments like these throughout the day for they pull me higher, remind me of my purpose, provide me strength to refrain, connect me to You - which is really all they I request.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

Do

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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