

Emunah אמונה

Having Faith,
Being Faithful

YAMIM NORAIM 5777

RABBI MOSHE HAUER

Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion
Congregation
Baltimore, Maryland



© Copyright, by Rabbi Moshe Hauer &
Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation, Baltimore, Maryland

כל הזכויות שמורות

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form
whatsoever without prior permission in writing from the author.

Typesetting & page design by

D.Walfish Design: dwalfishdesign@gmail.com

August 2017

Emunah אמונה

Having Faith,
Being Faithful

YAMIM NORAIM 5777

RABBI MOSHE HAUER

Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion
Congregation
Baltimore, Maryland





Dedication

This collection of essays is dedicated
to the memory of my father and teacher,

HaRav Benyamin Hauer ז"ל
אמו"ר הרב בנימין ב"ר משה הכ"מ

who taught our family and countless others
how to live and breathe the words of the Torah.

I hope and pray that הקב"ה will continue
to grant strength and health to our dear mother,

Mrs. Miriam Hauer תלחט"א

to continue עמו"ש to guide and inspire all of us
בדרך עץ החיים, along our path in life.





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	1
 Dreams of a New Year: A Leap of Faith Rosh Hashanah Evening	3
 Emunah: Faith in a Loving G-d First Day of Rosh Hashana	5
 Emunah: From Distant Memory to Constant Presence Second Day of Rosh Hashana	13
 אמת ואמונה Honesty and Faithfulness: From Inspiration to Lasting Change Shabbos Shuva	21
 No Walking on Eggshells Kol Nidrei	35
 ויהי ידיו אמונה Hands of Faith Yom Kippur Yizkor	43
 Afterword: אמונה בכנסת ישראל Belief in Ourselves Neilah	49

Foreword

The period of the month of Elul and the *Yamim Noraim*, known as the High Holiday season, is a great gift, מן הטובות אשר הטיב השי"ת עם בראינו. Each year we are afforded this opportunity to reflect and to reconnect, to spend weeks engaged with G-d and community on a fundamentally deeper level than the usual. Ideally this serves as a basis for the substantive and tangible adjustments to our lives resultant of Teshuva. But even without those measurable changes, we treasure this time as our annual visit back to the source, to the wellspring of our existence, and we draw upon its inspiration – consciously and unconsciously – for the balance of the year.

Over the years at Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion, we have worked to enrich the season and make it more impactful and lasting. A number of years ago we moved to focus our discussions during this season around a single theme, a specific area of growth that would be the backbone of our Teshuva work for that year. More recently we developed an artistic take-home card that encapsulated that theme, and that left room on the back for personal notes and commitments, insights taken from the season that could be referenced throughout the year.

Last year, following the Yamim Noraim of 5776, we attempted to take one further step towards creating a lasting impression of this precious season, by creating a booklet that included some of the central addresses, the Drashos, given during the season. We have repeated this effort this year, recording in this booklet the central addresses given during Yamim Noraim 5777 on the theme of Emunah. These essays are not meant as scholarly presentations, but rather as words of inspiration and guidance to a community of growth-oriented individuals. While the words may have some value for a general audience, their primary intended audience is the membership of our community who heard these speeches during the Yamim Tovim, and who seek to keep the sparks of the season alive.

It is my hope that you will find this of some value, and that each of us and all of us will continue to grow in every way – religiously, inter-personally and individually – to enhance ourselves, our families and our community, and to sanctify Hashem's Name in our world.

With best wishes for a healthy and productive year,

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

Dreams of a New Year: A Leap of Faith

Rosh Hashanah Evening

Rosh Hashana is a time for dreams, for big ideas.

לְדוֹד ד' אֹרִי וישעי. “G-d is our light and our salvation.” Our Sages explained that He is our light on Rosh Hashanah and our salvation on Yom Kippur.

Salvation is needed from a difficult situation within which we find ourselves, based on previous mistakes or missteps. That is the focus of Yom Kippur, where we work to undo mistakes of the past and find our way back from where they have brought us.

On Rosh Hashanah, however, we focus not at all on the past. We do not recite the *Viduy*, as it is not the time to express regrets or confessions. Indeed, a light is not helpful for the past; it is used to guide our path forward. Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the year and looks forward, with heady dreams and aspirations for the coming year.

Sometimes we may write off these dreams, knowing that we may not get around to fulfilling them. We can dismiss the “big ideas” of Rosh Hashanah, knowing that many of them end up as just that – big ideas. But we nevertheless are defined by those ideas. As the Talmud teaches us, מַחֲשַׁבָּה טוֹבָה הַקִּבֵּל מִצְרָפָה לַמַּעֲשֵׂה, G-d rewards us for good intentions. This is only because in a certain sense we are defined by those intentions. **We are what we dream, what we aspire to be and to do.**

You are what you dream, what you strive for.

This is actually one of the meanings of the Shofar of Rosh Hashanah. The Shofar represents the ram that was offered by Avraham in place of Yitzchak. Over the generations, thousands of rams were offered as sacrifices, yet this one is different. This ram was brought in place of Yitzchak, and came loaded with all of the intent and preparation that Avraham had invested in that act. תַּחַת בְּנוֹ. Avraham intended to do something, was ready to do it, but in the end - he couldn't. Yet his grand intentions became reality in that simple ram, because dreams and aspirations count.

It goes even further.

There is a well-known prophesy of Yechezkel (Ch. 37), the vision of the dry bones. Yechezkel encounters these bones and watches them

come to life, symbolizing the renaissance of the Jewish people. The Talmud (TB Sanhedrin 92b) has a discussion about whether this was a vision or a reality, and if it was a reality – whose bones were they? The Talmud cites the opinion of Rav that the bones were very real, and they were the remains of the Bnei Efrayim, a group of people who had attempted to leave Mitzrayim to travel to Israel thirty years before the Exodus, mistakenly believing that the time of redemption was already at hand.

Rabbi Moshe of Trani (1500 – 1580) - known as the מב"ט – in his work *Bais Elokim* (שער היסודות פרק נה), explained that the Bnei Efrayim had a dream, a yearning to leave Egypt and return to the Holy Land. This was not meant to be, as the time was not ripe for the Exodus. But they dreamt a great dream, and G-d would not leave that dream unfulfilled. By reviving those dry bones, these people - who died while trying to fulfill their dreams - would finally be privileged to see their dreams fulfilled.

Emunah. Yes, we are to be faithful, and the faithful make promises that they can keep. But another part of *Emunah* is the leap of faith, the capacity to dream big dreams. The faithful yearn, hope and try for better days and bigger things. Rosh Hashana is the time to dream those dreams, to express those yearnings, and to articulate our hopes for bigger things. And that vision of Rosh Hashana will define us, will raise us up, and will one day be fulfilled.

ד' אורי. G-d is our light. This Rosh Hashanah we pray that He illuminate our path forward with bright and big dreams that will allow us to raise ourselves up, and to ultimately live our dreams.

Emunah: Faith in a Loving G-d

First Day of Rosh Hashana

ואהבת את ד' אלקיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאודך

**You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart,
all your soul, and all that is most dear to you.**

ווד' פקד את שרה כאשר אמר. As we read from the Torah this morning, Hashem remembered Sarah - on this day, on Rosh Hashanah - exactly as He had said, exactly as He had promised. Indeed, Hashem had promised them a child, and He delivered. But there was more to it than the particulars of the promise.

We all remember how when the news was originally conveyed of the coming birth, Sarah laughed. She scoffed. She felt it so remote, that He should be so near, that the great and Almighty G-d should intervene in her "little" life. It was way beyond her expectations of G-d. And to this attitude G-d responded strongly: **היפלא מו' דבר**: Nothing is distant from Him, nothing too small, too remote. "You will yet see that a child will be born, and your distant, cynical laugh will be transformed into the laughter of joy, of realization that G-d is looking out for you, that you are not too far, not too remote, not left to yourself in a big, bad world." G-d loves us enough, He cares for us enough, to notice us and to do for us.

G-d did exactly what He had said. On Rosh Hashanah Sarah's laughter came forth, bursting from the recognition that she was not too small to be noticed. That His promise would be kept.

There is not always a particular promise that we can bank on, a specific outcome we can expect. But the core word of G-d, that nothing - that none of us - is too small, too far away from Him, that remains. As the Chazon Ish wrote in his work on Faith: While *Bitachon* does not assure us of the outcome we may have dreamt of, what it does tell us is that we must not view ourselves as being cast about by the random winds of an unjust world; that everything in life is happening under G-d's guiding hand.

This is a core principle of our faith. G-d watches, G-d listens; He is involved. And more than anything else, He cares. It is that belief, that recognition that G-d loves us that allows us to love Him and to serve Him with love.

Rav Avraham Genachovsky was a great Torah scholar who lived in Bnei Brak and taught in the Tshebiner Yeshiva in Yerushalayim. He was not only an incredible Torah scholar; he was a beautiful person whose interactions with people demonstrated exquisite awareness, sensitivity and care.

Rav Avraham and his wife were blessed with their first child, Yonah. He grew into a lovely young man, bright and capable, with an apparently promising future, until R"l he was struck with cancer. That began an odyssey of medical treatments, both in Israel and in the US, that ultimately did not succeed, and their son, now Refael Yonah, passed away. The bereaved mother, after the mourning period had passed, told her husband that she had one wish, in keeping with her desire not to turn away from the fond memories of her son. She wanted to hang a large picture of her son in their living room. Rav Avraham readily agreed, but he had one request in return. He asked that on the mat that would frame that picture there be inscribed a verse:

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ד' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ

You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart, all your soul, and all that is most dear to you.

Rav Avraham – like his namesake, Avraham Avinu – loved G-d. He understood that we cannot always understand G-d's ways. In fact, he used to explain that the reason we wear a yarmulke is to demonstrate that there are things about G-d and His ways that are simply "over our heads", that we will not be able to comprehend. The loss of their son was one of those things that they would not understand. Yet what he did know and did not want to forget even in the intensity of his grief was that G-d is good and kind; that G-d is worthy not only of our fear and our deference, but even more so of our love. Thus, he and his wife set a clear goal for themselves; they would grieve over the beloved child they had lost, but they would not become embittered. They would continue to love the G-d that had given them the child and then taken him away.

In a sense, they were living the *Akeidah*. Our sages teach us that while Avraham experienced "happy endings", both at the *Akeidah* of his son and at his own, personal *Akeidah* in the fiery furnace of Nimrod, he had gone ahead with both actions not presuming those happy endings. He was ready to do anything for G-d, confident of His love for him.

Avraham was given a clear, happy ending, both times. Through Avra-

ham, Hashem showed us that He wanted us to live, not die. Yes, the *Akeidah* was Avraham's chance to show that he would do anything in the world for G-d. But it was also G-d's chance to show Avraham, and to show us, that as much as we want to do for Him, He wants to do more for us.

The Torah instructs us how we must avoid learning the practice of religion from the idol-worshippers of Canaan, "as they do something as extreme as offering their sons and daughters to their gods!" This is so hard to understand, as after all Avraham did just that, offering his son to G-d at G-d's behest. We consider that his great achievement, so much so that we recall it every Rosh Hashanah, in our prayers and via the Shofar!

Clearly we admire the dedication, the commitment, of one who would be willing to give up their precious child if their G-d asked them to. And that is the merit of Avraham. But, ultimately, our religiosity, our faith and how we serve G-d is not just about our commitment to G-d but about how G-d views us. The nations continue to worship a god who they imagine is pleased by the blood of their children. We worship the G-d who set the record straight, who clarified to Avraham that He wanted his son to live, not to die. That ram, the easy replacement, the provider of our original Shofar, is there to tell us – and every year once again to remind us – that G-d is the *מלך חפץ בחיים*, the King Who desires life, Who is not interested in the death even of the guilty, but in their being restored to goodness and to life.

G-d loves us. Does that sound a bit hokey? Sorry. For some reason, it seems we would rather picture G-d as laughing at our failures and disappointments. Somewhere – I am not sure where – we adopted this horrible expression and attitude that "*A mentsch tracht un G-tt lacht*", "Man plans and G-d laughs". But in truth our tradition does not believe that for a second. The Talmud says quite the opposite: G-d never laughs at the troubles or the disappointments of people. Quite the opposite. "When a person suffers, G-d says – 'My head hurts, My arm hurts.'" Yes, man plans and G-d **decides**. *רבות מחשבות בלב איש ועצת ד' היא תקום*. *גומל חסדים טובים*. But He does **not** laugh at us; he loves us. **That** is the foundation of the faith Avraham bequeathed to us. And boy do we need to know it.

This is the basis of our faith, the faith of the Jewish people, the faith of Avraham. Avraham loved G-d. There were others around him who believed in G-d, even in the One G-d. Chanoch, Mesushelach, Noach,

Shem and Ever. All of these were believers, individuals who held onto the belief in and knowledge of G-d that they had inherited from Adam, the man who had experienced G-d. But they all remained individual believers. None started a movement, and while all of them are part of our lineage, we speak of none of them as our father or grandfather. Only Avraham has that distinction. We are the children of Avraham, and we are heirs to his faith. And that is the faith built on love of G-d. Avraham was referred to by G-d as אברהם אהבי, Avraham who loved Me. Avraham serves as the quintessential example of the person who does not simply obey G-d, or revere Him, but who adored Him.

That is of course why Avraham started a movement of *Emunah*. He loved G-d, so he was passionate about G-d. Passion and excitement are contagious. Knowledge, deference and fear are not.

And the basis of *Emunah*, of a belief that includes a secure trust and reliance, is really a confidence in the love and care that G-d has for us.

Perhaps the classic work on faith is the section on *Bitachon* in the *Chovos Halevavos*, the classic “Duties of the Heart”. There the author writes what should be obvious. Yes, to have faith and trust in G-d one has to believe that He is Almighty. But beyond that he also has to believe, first and last, that G-d is good. Because you cannot have faith in someone that does not care for you. And so, wrote the author (*Rabbenu Bachye ibn Pekuda*):

When he knows that the other has mercy and compassion for him, he trusts and relies upon him whatever he burdens him with.... (All the more so) when he knows that the one upon whom he is relying is consummately generous and kind, to those who deserve it and to those who do not, and that his generosity is constant and his kindness consistent, unending and uninterrupted.

To have faith and trust in G-d requires confidence and security in His love for us. Thus, before we declare our belief in G-d and our love for him, we declare that He is אהב עמו ישראל, בוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה.

And this is something we need to figure out how to grow within ourselves.

One of the great blessings in my life – for which I am eternally grateful – is that I was privileged to have someone in my life who was determined to convey this value to those around him. רבי ומו"ר Rav Yaakov Weinberg z"l taught his students many core values, but this one was at the top. G-d is good; G-d is better to us than anything we could ever

imagine. And when it came from him it was not hokey; it was strong, it was clear and it was powerful. He would effectively help people feel G-d's love in the moments of their greatest pain. I am not sure how, but he did it. And it is a gift that is a precious part of his legacy, and that each of us should strive to make part of ours. To serve a G-d Who wants us to thrive.

עדרו בבקרת רועה. Our image that we draw during the *Unesaneh Tokef* can help us today in forming this picture. G-d is described as judging each of us, deciding our fate, but not as a judge with a line-up, but as a shepherd tending to his flock. The shepherd that our Sages taught us every leader of the Jewish people needs to be in order to cultivate the quality of empathy and individual concern, lest the Jewish people be left *לדם רועה* alone, like sheep without a caring shepherd. A shepherd/leader who is an *איש אשר רוח בו*, someone who understands and is able to bear the individual needs and sensitivities of each and every individual member of his community, of his flock. G-d is that same tender shepherd.

I heard from Rabbi Paysach Krohn about a day school teacher who gathered her students around her, pulled out her cellphone and dialed the White House, asking to speak to the President. The operator politely informed her that the President was not available to take her call. The teacher explained, "I am a teacher sitting here with twenty-five students, twenty-five citizens of this country. We would like to speak to the President." The operator again patiently explained that the President was a busy man and would not be available to speak to them. The teacher asked if they could write him a letter, to which the operator responded that they certainly could, but that the President receives thousands of letters daily, only a handful of which end up on his desk. The teacher thanked the operator and hung up.

She then turned to her students and said, "The President of the 350,000,000 residents of the United States cannot speak with you, cannot even read your letter. But now we will turn to the King of the Universe, and He will be listening to each and every one of you, hear what you say and feel what you cannot even bring yourself to say."

Each time we pray, we refer to G-d as the One who through His granting of the greatest kindness created the world, *גומל חסדים טובים וקונה הכל*. Each time we say the Shema, we introduce it by speaking of G-d's love for us, *בוחר בעמו ישראל באהבה*, *אודה עמו ישראל*. And we thus are those who say *באהבה שמע*, those who do not simply make philosophical or

theological pronouncements, but passionate declarations of faith and commitment, with a love that we carry everywhere, when we go to sleep and when we awaken, in our homes and on the road.

Hokey? You can decide. But you cannot trust someone who does not love you and care for you. So, if we are to imagine *Emunah*, if we are to live *Emunah*, we need to realize and to recognize Hashem's love for us, for His people.

It shouldn't be too hard for us. We are the generation that sees the incredible love of the restoration of the Jewish people after utter destruction. We see that G-d keeps his word, וְד' פָּקֵד כְּאִשֶּׁר אָמַר. We should know and sense His love.

On May 13, 1948, one day before the termination of the British mandate of Palestine, as the last British column was leaving the Old city, it stopped and veered up an alleyway to No. 3 Rechov Ohr Hachaim. Inside sat Rabbi Mordechai Weingarten, senior resident and *mukhtar* of the Jewish Quarter, surrounded by his books, engrossed in his studies. His family had lived in that courtyard for five generations. His wife's family arrived in the city from Lithuania in 1740, and were the first Ashkenazi Jews to settle in the Jewish Quarter. Weingarten's own family moved to the Old City in 1813.

When Rabbi Weingarten heard a knock at the door, he rose, and seeing that it was a British officer, he put on his vest, jacket and hat and stepped out into the courtyard.

I will quote to you (mostly) from the account in the classic book, *O Jerusalem* (p XVI):

There before Weingarten stood a middle aged British major wearing the yellow and red insignia of the Suffolk Regiment. From his right hand, dangled a bar of rusted iron almost a foot long. With a solemn gesture, he offered it to the elderly rabbi. It was a key, the key to the Zion Gate, one of the seven gates to the Old City of Jerusalem.

"From the year 70 AD until today", he said, "a key to the gates of Jerusalem has never been in Jewish hands. This is the first time in eighteen centuries that your people have been so privileged."

Weingarten extended a trembling hand to accept the key. (The Midrash – Avos d'Rabbi Nathan 4:5) tells that on the night that the Roman Emperor Titus destroyed the Temple, its despairing

priests had climbed to the roof of the Temple and thrown the keys of Jerusalem to the heavens, crying out, "G-d, these keys that you gave us, we did not guard them well. Please take back your keys." A hand came from the heavens and took the keys. And now, eighteen centuries later, G-d had sent this agent to give us back the keys.

And G-d remembered us, באשר אמר, just as he said he would. He loves us, alright.

Emunah: From Distant Memory to Constant Presence

Second Day of Rosh Hashana

רב אדם יקרא איש חסדו ואיש אמונים מי ימצא (משלי כ')

There are many who do kindness with others, but it is rare to find an איש אמונים, someone truly reliable.

There are any number of people here who I can tell stories about, stories that would inspire and instruct us as to how real people bridge the gap of faithfulness, day in and day out, in the lives of their parents, spouses and children. I will choose one story that will be the safest, as it is the story of a very dear member of our community who has not been around much for the past few months, and who is not here today to be embarrassed by it. Many of you know him and love him. For the past couple of years his wife had hardly been around. Many of you know her and love her. And many of you know and love their children.

I am speaking about Benjamin and Bonnie Ziman, and their children Rochel, Chaim and Devorah. Bonnie has dealt with a number of medical conditions over the years, always supported by her dedicated husband Benjamin. It was never easy for her, nor for him. But they have always been there for each other.

Many of us know and love Benjamin. He is בלע"ה full of life and energy. In shul, he is the first to jump up to greet someone, to fix something, to make sure the davening and the trains run on time. He is always ready to break out in song or dance. It is exceptionally challenging for a person like that, someone who thrives on social stimulation and energy, to cope with the chronic and serious illness of a family member. But he has and he does.

A couple of years ago Bonnie's health deteriorated to a point where she could only be properly cared for in a dedicated nursing facility. She moved there, and her family was always there with her, with regular visits and more. A few months ago, she deteriorated further as a result of a number of complications from necessary medical procedures. Her life hung by a thread. Throughout, her husband and children have been by her side. Benjamin's dedication is incredible, and he and Rochel have literally mobilized the troops, with the help of the Jewish Caring Network and others, such that someone – a family

member, friend, or community member - is amazingly always at Bonnie's bedside in the hospital.

Benjamin is an **איש אמונים**, someone to rely upon. On Bonnie's bed is a printed photo pillowcase, adorned with pictures of a handsome young couple starting off their life together with beautiful, radiant smiles. This was likely not what they had in mind as they were posing for those pictures. They did not expect those pictures to decorate a room in Sinai's ICU for weeks on end, weeks when it was near impossible for one of them to smile and for the other not to cry.

But that makes no difference to the **איש אמונים**, to the faithful and reliable husband. The commitment is there, even if it is painfully difficult. "We married each other and we are going to be there for each other." Whereas Hagar, in yesterday's reading, cast aside her child when it became too painful to watch him die, the **איש אמונים** stays there, faithful and present, not allowing their loved one to face either life or death alone. They follow the model of today's reading, **וילכו שניהם יחדיו**, the two stayed together, until the very end.

Yes, there is a real thing called "caregiver fatigue", or - Heaven forbid - "burnout". Caregiving is not always easy, and the public smile cannot always be matched in the privacy of the heart or the home. The sheer exhaustion of constant caregiving; the challenge of unreciprocated love; the stress of balancing care for the loved one with the rest of life's demands; all of these combine to create an enormous challenge that simply cannot be met with perfect balance and happiness. Nevertheless, the challenge is accepted and undertaken, and met day after day by the **איש אמונים**.

This is one story of many. There are many in this room about whom such stories could be told, each story with its own twists and turns. How many wives who put everything aside to tend to a husband - and husbands who put everything aside to tend to a wife - who is not well or not particularly easy, earlier or later in life? How many sons and daughters expressing an iron-clad commitment to be there for their parents? How many of these spouses, sons and daughters do we see when we visit the hospitals and - especially - nursing facilities, where we find people filled with life, energy and potential who have turned for a time, sometimes for years at a time, to be at the side of their very ill, often unresponsive, loved one, almost never leaving them alone? And how many parents unfailingly being there for their children, whether the children deliver boatloads of *Nachas* or handfuls of chal-

lenges? And how many men and women who have committed themselves unfailingly to someone who was once a stranger, whose family somehow failed them, or could not be there for them, and who they have now made part of their family? Each and every story is worth telling, each and every life worth learning from.

How valuable, how critical, that we have – and that we are – that איש אמונים, that stalwart, trustworthy ally.

A good and moving illustration of this is the story of Derek Redmond and his father. Derek was a world class athlete, a sprinter who took home gold medals in international championships. In the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona he was running his race very well when he heard a frightening pop. He had torn a ligament in the midst of the highlight event of his career. Derek had trained intensively for this race for years, with the support of his parents, and now – at the moment when it mattered most - he fell to the ground in a heap. He collected himself. While there was no way he would win the race, he pulled himself up to try and complete the lap. He was barely hobbling along when, with a bit of a commotion from the sidelines, his father appeared by his side. He had jumped out of the stands, pushed his way past the police and security guards, blown past the referees and officials, to prop up his son and help him complete the lap. His father's personal disappointment – which must have been overwhelming – was not even a factor. He did not bury his head in his hands, thinking about all the practices he had driven his son to, all the hours and expenses **he** had invested in bringing his son to this day – of failure. He just needed to be there near his son, for his son, as his son was experiencing this crushing disappointment. He was THERE; he was PRESENT.

Rabbi Zecharya Wallerstein tells of a time he was lecturing in Florida, speaking about one of his favorite topics, this topic: the need for parents to stand by their children, unconditionally and always. After the lecture, an extremely wealthy member of the community asked him for a few minutes of his time. He told Rabbi Wallerstein that his parents had married after the Holocaust, during which his mother had lost a husband and many children. His mother had been a good mother, but she had never been able to be expressively warm, never able to say “I love you”, or anything close to that. He understood that for someone like her, who had lost all that she loved, forming new bonds was a challenge. Yet he yearned for it. As she lay dying, frail of body but with a clear mind, she called her son to her and said she wanted to

say to him something that she had never said to him before. He waited anxiously, hoping to hear those magic three words. Yet all she could say was, “My son, I am proud of you.”

The man, tears streaming down his face, said to Rabbi Wallerstein: “I am a very wealthy man. One day not long ago I made a deal on a number of properties I own that netted me one hundred million dollars. Do you know the power that made me feel? The confidence, the respect? But I can tell you without a doubt that when my mother said to me on that day that she was proud of me, it made me feel so much stronger than that. And so, I ask you, keep teaching this, keep telling people – they need to understand what it means to be there for their children, to stand by them. It means everything.”

Halacha teaches that the marriage bond is created by a gift of money or something else of value, *האשה נקנית בכסף*. Yet none of us has witnessed a wedding where the bride was presented with five, five hundred or five thousand dollars. Instead we give a ring. Money is put away, in a bank, a wallet or a drawer, while a ring – explained the *Sefer HaChinuch* – is worn on the finger, seen and played with all the time, a constant reminder of the special connection and relationship that it had forged. The bond is to be with us always and everywhere; *איש אמונים*. This is fundamental to creating and maintaining the marriage relationship that nurtures, that strengthens, its members. The gift of having someone who is and will be there for you, someone for whom you will be their highest and dearest priority.

This bond is exemplified by Yitzchak, offered by his father. Today, Rosh Hashanah, is known as *Yom HaZikaron*, the Day of Remembrance. In this instance, remembrance is not necessarily “our friend”. After all Remembrance is used here as a term for judgment, as memory brings back everything in our past, a past that during these days we wish to erase, through Teshuva. Yet we have a tool to help us in the battle with those negative memories, the Shofar, representing the ram offered in place of Yitzchak. Because – and this is the secret of the Shofar – **through the Shofar remembrance is transcended by presence.**

This secret is alluded to in the blessing we will say soon as part of the central blessing of Mussaf, the *Bracha* of *Zichronos*, of remembrance. There we cite the following verse:

וזכרתי את בריתי יעקב ואף את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכור.

Rashi there (Vayikra 26:42) notes the comment of the Sages that in this

verse only Avraham and Yaakov are associated with remembrance, but not Yitzchak. Here – apparently - is the key to transcending the trap of remembrance, the trap of judgment. As the Sages explained, Yitzchak does not require **remembrance** as his ashes lie in a pile in G-d's **presence**.

Memory is needed when we need to conjure up something from the past. Memory is not required for that which is present. And the accomplishment of the *Akeidah* – even as it was not quite fulfilled – is that it created in Yitzchak a constant awareness of Hashem's presence. When Yitzchak lay there on the altar, in the terms of Midrash, he saw up to the Heavens, and that image became seared into his mind such that he could never again view the world in the same way, without seeing G-d's presence in it. And as a result of this Yitzchak became the *Olah Temima* – the perfect offering - who could never leave the Holy Land, who could never leave G-d's presence. From that moment and on G-d was in Yitzchak's presence and Yitzchak was in G-d's presence. Memory was transcended by active presence.

And similarly, the Shofar, representing this powerful and immediate presence of G-d with us in the here and now, **באשר הוא שם**, takes us into His presence, **בלפנים**, thus that the memories of the past no longer haunt us. If someone is not present, the only way to recall them is by considering their past, their history, warts and all. But when they are here – all that we need to see is the present.

Look at it this way. You are looking for a job, or for a *shidduch*. You send in a resume, but you know that someone looking at this collection of facts, of details of your life, will find you lacking this bit of experience or that particular quality. But you know with confidence that if they would only look up from the piece of paper, if they would only meet YOU, the person, they would see things completely differently. That is precisely what we do with the Shofar. We go from having G-d read the book of remembrances, our resume, to meeting US, who we are, where we are.

שויתי ד' לפני תמיד. "I place G-d before me always." Isn't that the ultimate expression of *Emunah*? *Emunah* meaning not simply philosophical faith, a belief system that we subscribe to and resort to in order to explain either our fate or our decisions. Rather we strive for an *Emunah* that is constant, that is the divine version of the **איש אמונים**, a constant and completely reliable presence in our lives.

This is true *Emunah*, a source of strength and standing, a way to view

the world and to live life feeling Hashem's presence. As the loved one stands by the bedside, day in and day out, *על יד ימינך*, G-d stands in our shadow, watching over us every step of the way.

To feel that constant presence is a fundamentally different life experience. Instead of living a regular life, visiting with G-d on occasion, perhaps weekly, perhaps daily, perhaps a few times a day, the Yitzchak-type literally lives in His presence. He is not the man of kindness but the stalwart, the one to rely on, the *איש אמונים*.

How do we make this our reality? What is the "ring" in our relationship with our G-d, with our faith? Yitzchak came to it via a singular, searing event. What about us, living simpler lives, outside of Israel and His visible presence?

Perhaps we need the Shofar of Yosef (תקעו בחודש שופר ... עדות ביהוסף שמו) (בצאתו על ארץ מצרים). Yosef did not reside in proximity to Hashem's visible presence. He was in the opposite environment, in Egypt, away from G-d, away from family, away from community. Yet Yosef's masters saw that G-d was with him, *וירא אדוני כי ד' אתו*. They saw this in Yosef because G-d's name was always on Yosef's lips, *שם שמים שגור בפיו*. He had left Eretz Yisrael, he had left his religious environment, he had left his family, but he constantly referenced G-d's presence and transformed it from a theoretical memory, from an idea, into a presence, a reality. And he did the same thing with his family, where his father's image stood before his eyes, *דמות דיוקנו של אביו*.

There is an interesting feature of language worth noting. *אמונה* is related to the word *אומן* or *אומנות*, a craft or expertise. There is a rule that has been established by research, that true expertise, true excellence in any field, is never an accident of birth or circumstance. While people may be born with a specific gift, they will not become outstanding without dedicating immense effort and time, repeated practice and exercises, to refine the skill. They call it the "ten-thousand-hour rule." It is true for athletes and musicians, for surgeons and for computer scientists. Anything of value we have from Mozart is from his later compositions, when he had been at it for years, day after day, hour upon hour. The same for Bill Gates and for Wayne Gretzky.

In a sense *Emunah* is also a craft. We are neither born believers nor born-agains. *Emunah* is a craft, a skill, to be mastered by faithful and consistent awareness building. We need to see Hashem regularly and always. We daven every single day, multiple times, whether we are inspired and excited or not, because we need to repeat the exercise,

reminding ourselves again and yet again of His presence in our lives. And our Sages had us say one hundred Brachos each day, acknowledging G-d and His blessings over and over, until we live with it, see it everywhere, and ultimately really believe it. Until instead of remembering Him, we are seeing Him, in our presence always.

And we need to do the same for each other. To be faithful. To see the image of those who rely on us before our eyes, always. To not simply be people of kindness but people of loyalty, of trust, people who can be relied upon completely and totally.

When Yitzchak and Rivkah were experiencing the painful struggle of infertility, the verse says that Yitzchak prayed לניכח אשתו, opposite his wife. The classic commentary רד"ק explained that to really pray for her, he needed to look at her. He could not simply recall her anguish; he had to stare at it, see it with his eyes, see it in her eyes, and then he could pray. There is nothing quite as exhausting as that, as sitting and watching with open eyes the pain of someone dear to you. It is hard. But it is everything.

But don't wait until they are crying out in pain. Don't wait until they are lying someplace helpless. Look at them now and always, keep them in front of your eyes, think of them and see them in everything that you do. Build a truly faithful relationship.

Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky was an immensely compassionate woman whose door was open to streams of people who came to her for help. A man came to see her from Haifa. His wife had passed away, and his young son had interviewed very poorly in his admission exams for yeshiva. He had no place to go. The father asked the Rebbetzin's help.

For the next week, she made efforts high and low, identifying people who knew people, people who could put in a good word to get him into the most fitting school. Finally, something clicked and the father was informed that his son was accepted. As soon as he could, he got on a bus and traveled to Bnei Brak from Haifa, arriving at 11:30 pm. The Rebbetzin was already in bed, but Rav Chaim was still receiving visitors.

The man waited in line and when it was his turn reported to Rav Chaim that he had asked the Rebbetzin's help on the matter of his son, and that he wanted her to know that his son had gotten in to the school. Rav Chaim was excited by the news and told the father he would im-

mediately tell the Rebbetzin. He got up, went to her room, told her, and returned to tell the father how happy she was.

Later, the Rav's son-in-law asked Rav Chaim why he had chosen to wake her up instead of waiting until morning. Rav Chaim explained that his wife had not really slept for a week. "She was constantly waking up, crying and praying for the boy, the orphan from Haifa who needs a school. I didn't really wake her up. Now that she knows he got into a school, she can finally sleep."

That is the posture of an **איש (אשת) אמונים**, of a person who is not simply kind but present and truly reliable.

We will now sound the Shofar and then we will pray, with all our hearts. Let the shofar recall the magic of presence, of our seeing G-d in front of us, and of G-d seeing us before Him. And let it move us to take those individuals about whom we care deeply, the family and community that we hold so dear, the world and the haunting eyes of all those who are suffering within it, and let us see them before our eyes. Let us picture them in our mind's eye, gaze at them and feel their needs and their anguish. Let us commit to keep them before us always, faithfully, and to keep G-d before us always, with perfect faith. We will then be able to daven like we never have before.

אמת ואמונה

Honesty and Faithfulness: From Inspiration to Lasting Change

Shabbos Shuva

From Inspiration to Lasting Change: Deliberate Practice

Late on Saturday night, September 24, 2016, Jose Fernandez, star pitcher for the Miami Marlins and one of the leading pitchers in the game, was killed in a boating accident. The team was devastated, as Jose was the life of the team, a joyous person who was genuinely beloved by his teammates. Sunday's game was cancelled, and on Monday the game began after numerous memorials to Jose. The first batter, Dee Gordon, started his at-bat as a lefty, in memory of Jose. He then switched, and on the third pitch drilled a home run. It was September 26th and it was his first home run of the season. He broke down sobbing, as did his entire team. That home run was for Jose. The team went on to beat the Mets 7-3, playing great ball, driven by his memory. Amazing.

Then they lost four of the remaining five games of the season.

The Marlins were inspired that day, inspired by a tragedy. It carried them for a bit. For one game. But inspiration alone did not do it; it never does. When they interview athletes and coaches after a game and they point to this or that source of inspiration or energy that lifted the team that day, yes, those things helped. But what they do not tell you about, and what ultimately really carried them – that day and every day – are the hours and hours, day after day, of practice and drills. They won the game because they knew how to play well, and they knew how to play well because they kept working at. The inspiration helps, but inspiration does not do it alone.

Welcome to the Shabbos Shuva Drasha. We have spent a nice part of the Yom Tov season together, and bez"v we have more to come. There have been and there will be many more speeches. Those speeches are for everyone, and they are meant to be long on inspiration and a bit short on concrete specifics. That is the way we do it, as that appears to be what the atmosphere and the moment – speeches given during a prayer service - really require.

Shabbos Shuva is when we separate the men from the boys, and the women from the girls; when we get specific. Shabbos Shuva is when we try to get into the subject, the area of our focus, in a real and goal-oriented way. Shabbos Shuva is when we ask ourselves what we can do or how we can change in a way that will have a lasting, positive impact.

Now, please do not get me wrong. Inspiration – even if fleeting – is valuable. The Yamim Noraim – even where they do not produce concrete, lasting change, nevertheless have the invaluable impact of re-kindling our souls, reigniting some of our passion. That helps us; it keeps our spirit alive. It is invaluable. But it does not mean that we should not strive for more. So that is our goal today, to get specific about how we can achieve more.

That is especially so for the area that we have focused on this year, which is the area of *Emunah*. As we mentioned on Rosh Hashanah, that term implies both faith and a craft, an *אומנות*, or *אומן*, as the Navi Yeshayahu said. And a craft requires diligent training. We have mentioned the “ten-thousand-hour rule” that has been established by research, that true expertise, true excellence in any field, is never an accident of birth or circumstance. While people may be born with a specific gift, they will not become outstanding without dedicating immense effort and time, repeated practice and exercises, to refine the skill.

But repetition alone does not really do it. A good practice does not just do the same thing over and over again. What is required is something called “deliberate practice”. In “deliberate practice” the person repeats an activity over and over again but it is one that is a strain, mentally, physically or emotionally. It stretches him in the direction he is trying to reach. It is aimed at addressing a specific weak point. And it is neither easy nor fun.

For example, the “practice” of reciting a hundred daily Brachos and of repeatedly invoking Hashem’s name in casual conversation is not a bad thing. This is our fulfillment of the value of *שם שמים שגור בפיו*, making Hashem a fixture of our vocabulary and worldview. But the practice can be externalized, becoming – in the words of the Chazon Ish (*Emunah uBitachon* 2;2) – a tongue trained to chirp, “*Bitachon, Bitachon*”, while that faith has not found a place in the heart.

How do we make *Emunah* real? We need deliberate practice, something that calls upon us to invoke *Emunah* when it is not the easiest

thing in the world. We need to invoke *Emunah* when it actually makes us do something differently, solely as a result of that *Emunah*.

And the same is true when it comes to the interpersonal aspect of *Emunah*, faithfulness in relationships, being what Shlomo HaMelech called an אִישׁ אֱמוּנָה. There too we have to find a way to strengthen that sense of trust and connection, to find the elements of “deliberate practice”, the things that we will do or resist doing, repeatedly, because of that faithfulness in relationship.

Emunah: Faithfulness to G-d and Man, Part I: Parents and Children

Before we define practical steps, let us further explore the concept of *Emunah*, of faith and faithfulness. To begin with, we must again emphasize that faith is not a particularly religious function, nor an interpersonal one. It crosses all lines.

Our bedrock of trust is strengthened or weakened by our experience as children. Our parents are the sources of our existence and support that we see, that we live with. If they are there for us, we will tend to be more secure and trusting people, in both G-d and man; if not, it will be a challenge for us to learn to trust, both G-d and man.

While the two *Luchos*, the tablets that Moshe brought down from G-d at Sinai, were divided between the religious and interpersonal *Mitzvos*, honoring parents came out on the religious side. As *Chazal* pointed out, the Torah mandates similar treatment of parents as of G-d; we need to respect both, honor both, and more. They are the partners in our creation and the attitude towards one will necessarily impact the attitude towards the other.

The Ramban (Devarim 4:9-10) wrote that the direct Jewish experience of prophecy at Sinai positioned us to reject any competing claims by other prophets, as it says, וגם בך יאמינו לעולם. And, continued the Ramban, when we communicate the experience of Sinai to our children, they too will know it as the truth, essentially as if they had seen it themselves, כי לא נעיד שקר לבנינו ולא ננחיל אותם הבל ואין בם מוֹעִיל וזהם, לא יסתפקו כלל בעדותינו שהעיד להם. Our children will be absolutely certain that we did not testify falsely to them, that we would not bequeath to them something meaningless and valueless. They will have absolute confidence in their parents, trusting their account of Sinai so completely that it would be just as if they had seen the events with their own eyes.

Are you confident that your children feel that way about you? I hope so. Do you think everyone feels that way about their parents? Absolutely not. But if that is the case, why would G-d build the faith of the generations on the word of our parents, if that is something so uncertain, fragile and subjective?

Perhaps it is because G-d recognized that if we were not able to trust our parents, no verification or proof from any other source would enable us to grow our trust in Him either. Trust in G-d is so deeply intertwined in the trust we have for our parents that it is fitting for our faith in G-d to be built upon parental trust.

Yes, it is certainly possible for a person to develop faith in G-d despite the failures of trust at home. In the words of King David, **כִּי אָבִי וְאִמִּי יָאֲסֹפְנִי**, “Even as my parents abandon me, G-d will take me in.” Yet that faith will need to be found through creative discovery, following a path similar to the path of Avraham Avinu. The routine and standard pathway, however, is the development of faith in G-d built on faith in the people in our lives, first and foremost our parents.

There is a fascinating insight into a famous story used by the Talmud to illustrate the extent to which one should honor a parent. The Talmud (Kiddushin 31a) references a non-Jew from Ashkelon named *Dama ben Nesina*. The trustees of the *Bais HaMikdash* approached him seeking to purchase gemstones for the tunic of the *Kohein Gadol*, but he would not serve them immediately as his father was sleeping on the keys to the vault. The trustees went elsewhere and he lost the deal, but was eventually richly rewarded for honoring his father in this way.

The *Meshech Chochmah* (Shemos 28:9; Devarim 5:16) cites a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud (Peah 1:1) that explained that the stone they were missing was the *Yashpeh* stone that represents the tribe of Binyamin on the breast plate. Binyamin was the one son of Yaakov who did not participate in the sale of Yosef, and thus he was the only one who had a clear record of honoring his father. As such the search for his stone served to highlight – generations later, in this Talmudic story – the extent of the mandate to honor parents.

But how did the precious stone get lost in the first place?

The *Meshech Chochmah* notes that this story took place in the time of the Second Temple, when the great struggle for the soul of the Jewish people was with the movement of the *Tziddukim*, the Sadducees.

These people lacked trust in the *Mesorah*, in the Oral Tradition of our people. This weakness revealed a glaring shortcoming in the way the Jewish people viewed their parents. In a community where parental honor and trust were strong, such a massive failure of trust in tradition could not occur. As such the strength of the movement itself demonstrated a failure in this area of parent-child relations, that was symbolized in turn by the disappearance of Binyamin's stone.

A movement that weakened the Jewish faith was apparently rooted in the weakening of the Jewish family, of the bond of trust between parents and children.

***Emunah*: Faithfulness to G-d and Man, Part II: Siblings and Community**

But trust is not just about parents and children.

Three weeks ago, we read in the Torah the section known as *Parshas Zachor*, referencing *Amalek*. We know *Amalek* as the original and chronic antagonist of our people. But we see them not only as a physical enemy. We understand their belief in *Mikreh*, in a world governed by happenstance, *וְלֹא יִרָא אֱלֹקִים*, without fear of G-d. Yet our Sages taught us, as quoted by Rashi, that *Amalek* is apparently brought on not by a religious weakness but by our use of false weights and measures, by an interpersonal failure, by our cheating in business. What is the connection? Why should our dishonesty invite the aggression of *Amalek*?

One way to view this is religious. As the *Maharal* explained, one who cheats in business is clearly not trusting that G-d is looking out for him, but rather feels that he has to fend for himself. That in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, removing G-d's protection and making us vulnerable to *Amalek*, the promoter of belief in a world that is a free-for-all.

There is another possible explanation. *Amalek* is the descendant of *Eisav*, who carries on the enmity of his grandfather to his brother Yaakov. That relationship was entirely lacking love and trust, and was characterized by deception, the necessary deceptions perpetrated by Yaakov for his physical and spiritual survival.

But we were meant to save those tactics for the enemy, for *Eisav* and *Amalek*, who was to remain forever outside our world. When, however, by the use of false weights and measures we introduce deception

into our relationships with our brothers, then we are inviting *Eisav* and *Amalek* back into our own lives. We are destroying our faithful community and replacing it with a faithless one.

Perhaps that is why Yosef is seen as the ultimate flame to destroy the straw of *Eisav*. Yosef was able to overcome the strong seeds of distrust planted by his brothers in their relationship, and to nevertheless treat them kindly, recognizing that all was in the hands of G-d. Yosef's attitude – that we are there to serve each other rather than to threaten each other, and that G-d ultimately leads the way – liberates us from the threat of another brother, of *Eisav*.

Emunah: Faithfulness to G-d and Man, Part III: Husbands and Wives

But trust is not just about siblings and community.

The Talmud (Taanis 8a) speaks about how great trust is, כמא גדולים, בעלי אמנה. They derive it from a story of חולדה ובור, a weasel and a hole. This is a fascinating story of commitment between man and woman, recounted in abbreviated form by *Rashi* and *Tosfos* there. It is worth reviewing the full story, as told in the ספר הערוך ערך חלד.

There was once a lovely young woman, dressed beautifully with lovely jewelry, who was traveling home. She became lost along the way, and was wandering in the wilderness for the entire morning. By midday she was very thirsty and had no water with her. She came upon a well with a rope for a pail, but with no pail at the end of it. She grabbed the rope and slithered down into the well to quench her thirst. But then she found herself stuck, as she could not climb back up the rope. She began to weep, and to cry out for help.

A man came by, heard her cries, and peered down into the well, but was unable to see her clearly. "Who are you?", he asked. "Are you a human or a spirit?" He asked her to swear to him that she was indeed human, which she did. He then asked her why she was at the bottom of the well, and she told him the whole story. "If I get you out of the well, will you marry me?" She assured him that she would, and he indeed saved her from the well. As soon as she was out, he suggested that they immediately be together intimately, whereupon she asked him, "What nation are you from?"

"I am a Jew", he said, "from such-and-such a town, and I am a Kohein." "Well," she said, "I too am from a distinguished and well-known family. Should someone from a holy people such as yourself – chosen by G-d and granted even greater holiness than other Jews – seek to act like an animal by being with a woman without betrothal and without commitment to a Kesubah? I will be going home. Please – in due time – follow me to my father's house and there I will marry you properly." They gave each other their word, but sought witnesses to memorialize their commitment. There was a weasel passing by, and the young woman said, "The Heavens, the weasel and the well from which you rescued me shall be the witnesses that we will not betray each other."

Each of them went on their way. The young woman remained faithful to her word, and turned away the many potential suitors that approached her as she awaited the arrival of her future husband. When these suitors would not take "no" for an answer, she acted as if she was mentally ill, tearing her clothes and the clothes of anyone who touched her. Eventually, people stopped showing interest in her, and she was able to comfortably keep her word to be faithful to the man who had saved her.

Meanwhile, as soon as that man had left the young woman, he promptly forgot about her. Driven by his own desires, he returned to his work and married another woman, who became pregnant and bore him a son. When the child was three months old, tragedy struck and the child was killed by a weasel. She became pregnant again and bore him another son, and this time the child fell into a well and died.

His wife turned to him and said: "If my children had died normally, I would accept my fate and move on. But they have died under such strange circumstances! There must be a reason for this. Tell me everything about yourself." When he shared the story about the young woman in the well, she immediately understood the significance of the weasel and the well that had taken her children from her. She asked him to divorce her and instructed him to go and be with the one G-d had intended for him.

The man travelled to the town of the young woman he had saved, and went looking for her, but was told that she was insane and attacked anyone who approached her. The man approached her father and told him the entire story, and committed in the pres-

ence of witnesses to take her as a wife, whatever her handicaps. When he finally approached her, she began to act insane as was her custom, but he quickly began to recount their story, and what had happened to him in his first marriage. She immediately recognized him, calmed down and said, "I have maintained my commitment to you all this time." They married and were blessed with children and prosperity. Regarding them, the verse says, "My eye is on the faithful of the land."

It is a fascinating and intricate story, with its dramatic and miraculous twists and turns. But there is a turning point in the story that is not at all miraculous. At that moment that she is pulled from the well, he wanted to be with her right away, but she insisted that their relationship take place within the framework of a commitment, *קידושין וכתובה*. That exchange characterized his ultimate failure. He did not understand that one does not have "relations" without a "relationship", and that the bedrock of the marital relationship is commitment.

These are the components that build a faithful society; a society built on commitment in marriage, on honesty and brotherhood, on the trust created between parents and children, and ultimately of course on *Emunah*, faith in G-d.

The State of the Union Part I: Parents and Children

I am afraid we are struggling in all these areas, experiencing a true trust deficit.

Too many kids grow up without engaged and focused parents, without knowing that there are people whose primary and dedicated focus in their lives is – them!

Anne Marie Slaughter is a profoundly accomplished woman, a Princeton professor, top level policy planner in the State Department, and much, much more. Four years ago, she wrote an article in *The Atlantic* entitled "Why Women Still Can't Have It All". It had more than five million hits – and it is a long article, not a YouTube video! She wrote about the challenges of being both a top-notch professional and a parent. Her husband followed up with an article of his own, explaining that the only way she was able to do all that she did was because he had been willing to put aside some of his own aspirations and assume the job of "lead parent". As he makes clear, every family needs a lead parent, someone who ultimately puts everything second to the kids,

and will put everything aside for them.

For decades, observers have expressed concern about the impact on children of women in the workplace. Often, even as she maintains the role of lead parent, there is still too little left of the mother to properly focus on her children. Today, the situation is of yet greater concern. But not because of women's growing presence in the workplace, but because of what both mothers and fathers do at home. Parents, both mothers and fathers, are so connected to the outside – whether to a job that travels with them, a “Mommy’s group” social network, a phone glued to an ear, or a newsfeed – that they are deeply distracted at home, and it is hard for a child to feel cared for and focused on by either parent.

One of the gifts that we need to give to our children is the gift that is the basis of *Emunah*. We need to show them that for someone – for you – they are everything. We need to show them what it can mean, בשבילי נברא העולם, that for us, they are the center of the world. We need to demonstrate this clearly, that this is what they mean to us, their parents, and then they will have a chance to believe it about G-d.

But we are not doing that. The expression used more and more is, *In Loco Parentis*. Someone always seems to need to stand in for parents who have abdicated their role. And thus we lose the opportunity to plant the seeds of lifelong trust, between parents and children, and between G-d and man.

The State of the Union Part II: Siblings and Community

And how are we doing in the realm of honesty and brotherhood? I am afraid that we need to be honest with ourselves and realize - that we are not honest. We are *shtik-machers*. We find ways to justify immoral and dishonest behavior.

I recently read a book by Dan Ariely, “The Honest Truth About Dishonesty”. Through compelling studies and research, he fascinatingly illustrates the factors that move us to act dishonestly. One such factor is creativity. We do not like to be blatant liars or thieves, so we find clever ways to explain why we really are not. The more creative we are, the more likely we are to lie and steal.

Evidently, our brilliant Talmudic reasoning skills have a downside. And this dishonesty produces a society of distrust, where we – as

brothers and sisters – cannot readily and completely trust one another. That *Emunah* – that interpersonal trust that is the core strength of a family and community – is undermined.

And what does this behavior say about our *Emunah* in G-d?

I recently heard a talk by Avi Schick, given at a seminar on honesty sponsored by Agudath Israel in Brooklyn. He described how his relatively new private practice has become dominated by clients who are from people accused of crime and fraud.

Recently, he was in conference with a frum client along with some of his associates. As they were discussing the case and strategizing possible future developments, the client repeatedly said, “*Der Eibershter zoll helfen*,” “G-d will help.” Finally, after many repetitions of this refrain, one of his colleagues – a non-Jewish woman – turned to the client and said, “Tell me, if you are so sure that G-d will always help, why did you feel the need to help Him by doing all these crooked things?!” Ouch.

Yet this is a painful question and perspective we must all bear in mind. We are believers, or we strive to be. Does it make sense for one who believes in G-d, who believes that on these days of the year G-d decides our fate, including *מזונותי של אדם*, our *Parnassah* (livelihood), and that He looks out for us and is the ultimate decisor on the success of our endeavors; does it make sense for us to make efforts for that *Parnassah* that would not please Him? Do we really think that such efforts are a meaningful *Hishtadlus* to get ahead? Or are we those people that *שם שמים שגור בפיו*, who live with Hashem on our lips but not in our hands, whose tongues – to again invoke the words of the Chazon Ish – are trained to chirp, “*Bitachon, Bitachon*”, while that faith has not found a place in our hearts?

The State of the Union Part III: Husbands and Wives

And marriage, commitment. How is that doing?

Let us focus on just one aspect of this relationship, one very delicate and sensitive aspect, and that is our faithfulness in marriage. I know this is not a comfortable topic, but it is a real and present issue so we must not avoid it.

The basic issues of faithfulness and fidelity – which, to our great shame and chagrin are not non-issues in our community – do not re-

quire great elaboration. But there are behaviors that we – both men and women – have normalized that plant the seeds of infidelity. It is these that we must more specifically address.

The physical component of the marriage relationship is a blessing and a gift that G-d granted us, a joy that we – husbands and wives – are to find in each other, with each other. It is to be the ultimate expression of connectedness and relationship between man and wife, something that brings us together, **והיו לבשר אחד**, as we become like one.

Yet our world, our society, promotes – very successfully – a different perspective on this precious dimension of our married lives, one that does real damage to our relationships and plants those seeds of infidelity that - even if they are never to fully blossom - deeply undermine our relationships.

To make this simple to remember, let us frame this issue using two terms, two euphemisms used in English that very accurately convey the genuine values that are profoundly at risk: **Relations and Intimacy**.

Relations: The physical act in marriage is euphemistically referred to as “marital relations”, an accurate euphemism that actually reflects the core values our Sages taught us. The Talmud (TB Nedarim 20b), under the rubric of **בני תשע מדות**, describes circumstances under which husbands and wives should not be together, separate and apart from the known limitations provided by the rules of *Taharas HaMishpacha*, the laws of family purity.

Thus, for example, the Talmud discourages the husband and wife from being together when they feel hatred towards each other, when they are in the midst of a dispute, or if either one of them plans to leave the marriage. Likewise, one should not be with his or her spouse if he or she is not mentally present at the moment due to intoxication, or if his or her mind is “picturing” someone else.

Clearly, this is a list of circumstances when the act would not be an expression of relationship and connection between the two people involved. The list is reminiscent of the words of rebuke that the “damsel in distress” we had mentioned earlier (**מעשה חולדה ובור**) had shared with her savior, as she explained to him that we Jews do not simply get together without first establishing a relationship consecrated by *Kiddushin* and *Kesubah*, by commitment both personal and financial. Lacking the context of lasting relationship, the act is left as a purely self-focused and self-indulgent physical experience. Our Sages dis-

couraged this, as they knew that once sexuality is used in this way, it is difficult to restore it as the consummate act of bonding and relationship. This type of sexuality relegates the woman to the role of an object, rather than a cherished and loved partner.

This sensitive perspective on sexuality as an expression of relationship is constantly challenged by the constant, ubiquitous and effective lure of sexually suggestive material and outright pornography. In this alternative universe, sexuality is experienced without relationship. The Talmud (TB Niddah 13b) even describes the one who stimulates themselves out of the context of relationship as *בִּידּוּ בְּגִנָּאף*, as “committing adultery with themselves,” a basic form of narcissism and a poisoning agent for healthy marriage.

This is a huge challenge – especially, though not exclusively, for men - in today’s world, and one we cannot afford to ignore. It is a challenge that pops up on our phones and screens every time we grab a news update or check a fact online. And while it is a challenge posed to us in complete privacy, it does not end as a personal moral failure or success. It redraws relationships and profoundly impacts marital health.

Intimacy: The other euphemistic English term is “intimacy”, a term that properly calls to mind the sacred privacy and exclusivity of the physical relationship between man and wife.

All of us are familiar with the term “*Tzenius*”, meaning modesty or privacy. *Tzenius* has gotten a bad rap, as it is associated with all kinds of rules and regulations that prescribe and limit dress codes for women and girls. *Tzenius* is often perceived as being anti-beauty, when it is absolutely not. The Torah sang the praises of the beauty of our *Imahos* (matriarchs), even as it valued their *Tzenius*, their modesty and privacy.

We do ourselves and our daughters a disservice by understanding *Tzenius* as **restriction**. The true role of *Tzenius* is not restriction but **reservation**. The practice of modesty reserves something very special for one person and one person only, the person with whom we will establish - or have established - a profound, lasting, loving and respectful relationship.

We all know the story of Ruth. We know how Boaz could not help but notice how she carried herself with such modesty as she gathered the gleanings from his fields, avoiding the casual company of the male

farm-workers and carefully choosing how to bend and reach for the items she was collecting. Yet, astonishingly, Boaz next encounters that same Ruth lying by his feet in the middle of the night as they are alone in the field! What happened to her celebrated *Tzenius*?!

Clearly the *Tzenius* of Ruth was not about restriction, but reservation. And it was her very *Tzenius*, the modesty with which she carried herself relative to others, that made her appearance at Boaz's feet so powerful. Appearing here she was clearly saying to Boaz: "All the modesty I have practiced, all the privacy I have maintained, was because I was "saving it" for you. I am yours and you are mine, and my privacy and dignity has been there to make this moment and this relationship powerfully strong and exclusive."

Here again, society is doing a number on us, and challenging women profoundly. Society is treating women as objects, and encouraging them – via current standards and styles of dress – to remove the mystery and privacy, to reserve so much less of themselves for the person with whom they establish real relationship. And this ultimately weakens that relationship.

Conclusion: Deliberate Practice to Build our Honesty and Faithfulness

I think we can all agree on the challenges. We can also agree that if we are to move forward, we must undertake Deliberate Practice to build our faithfulness in the different realms that we have discussed. These elements of Deliberate Practice will require us to stretch ourselves – in a way that is not easy or natural – in the direction we are trying to move.

As parents – we need to restore focus on our children, to help them feel genuinely secure that they are the most important people in our world. We need to be physically and mentally present for them, shutting down and shutting out the other things that distract us when we are supposed to be with them.

We know we need to do this. We just need to take the step.

As siblings and community members – we need to interact with each other not with "shtick" but rather in a way that deserves and builds trust. Before we engage in such "shtick", we must stop ourselves and ask if we are following the path of Yaakov with Eisav or alternatively of Yosef with his brothers. We need to ask our-

selves – as people of faith: Is this an effort with which G-d would be pleased, that He would crown with success?

We know we need to do this. We just need to take the step.

As husbands and wives – we need to remember that sexuality is an expression of deep relationship, and we must resist the lures that are everywhere that would draw us into experiencing it instead as an exercise in self-indulgence. We must restore the sense of intimacy between us, building a sense of modesty and privacy that reserves ourselves for our beloved in a rich and meaningful way. When men decide what to look at; when women decide how to present themselves; we must ask ourselves if what we are doing will strengthen or weaken that precious intimate relationship with our spouse.

We know we need to do this. We just need to take the step.

Each of us can and must give this thought. Each of us can and must take the deliberate – albeit difficult – steps that will strengthen our faithfulness to our children, to our siblings and community, to our spouses and to G-d.

We know we need to do this. We just need to take the step.

No Walking on Eggshells

Kol Nidrei

On a Yom Kippur night in the late 40's, the Tshebiner Rav, Rav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, was observed by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach sitting at a table with a number of older Jews, talking and singing *Niggunim*. Rav Shlomo Zalman was a bit puzzled that a man of his greatness in Torah study and piety would find this a suitable activity for the night of the *Yom Hakodosh*, the Holy Day. After the fast, when they met to discuss a Halachic matter, Rav Shlomo Zalman asked him about the unusual gathering of the previous evening. The Rav explained to him that this was a group of brokenhearted Holocaust survivors who had lost their families in the war, and since coming to Israel he had rarely seen even a trace of a smile cross their lips. "When I was walking home from Davening, I saw them sitting together and trying to recall and revive the tunes of their youth from the Chasidic communities of Poland, and bring back a bit of that spirit. I said to myself, is there any more suitable time than the night of Yom Kippur to restore to these broken people a bit of spirit and soul?! And so, we sat together and recalled and sang the songs of their youth, of better times, reconnecting to their past and to their G-d."

Yom Kippur is the perfect time for that, the time to help us understand that the spirit and the connection that we have with G-d is indeed never, ever broken. Whatever we experience, whatever we have gone through, the connection lives on. Yom Kippur and its institution of Divine forgiveness, assured and expected, is there to provide that assurance that our connection with G-d is meant to last; that we must not live with the fear that our relationship is fragile and breakable; that we must recognize that forgiveness is built in.

Simply put: Yom Kippur is about not walking on eggshells.

You know what it means to walk on eggshells. We all have experienced it at one time or another. It means to be in a relationship where you do not know what the next moment will bring, where you have to be *soooo* careful because one false move can bring outburst, collapse, distance. Sometimes it varies quickly, as the Mishnah in Avos (5:11) describes, "quick to anger and quick to forgive". And sometimes it is "quick to anger and slow to forgive", a sort of preference for distance. G-d, on the other hand, is not only slow to anger, but He also builds in

Yom Kippur's consistent and regular forgiveness, ומעביר אשמותינו בכל, "slow to anger and quick to forgive", קשה לזעום ונוח לרצות, שנה ושנה. He is the *Chasid* of the Mishnah, who clearly wants the connection and is committed to it, and committed to creating the environment where that sense of security is felt.

Eggshells. There is another fast day, the Ninth of Av, where our last meal before the fast features a boiled egg. That feature is so significant that we also partake of that egg on a different Yom Tov, months earlier, Pesach. Our custom is to eat an egg at the *Seder*, noting that on the same night of the week that we sit at the glorious *Seder* table, we will be sitting months later on the ground, eating a mourner's egg. We celebrate redemption and its frailty. Redeemed in the spring, exiled in the summer.

A few days after we left Egypt, we stood on the banks of the *Yam Suf* with the Egyptians bearing down on us. We cried out to Hashem, desperate, and He responded, "Why are you praying to me?! Tell the Jewish people to go already!" This is highly unusual; when do we ever find G-d telling us not to pray? It seems however, that in this case G-d did not want us to pray in our desperate frame of mind. We were feeling then that while G-d had given us a miracle of freedom, it was fleeting, not meant to last. We felt unsure and uncertain about the future. In that context G-d urged us to simply go, to jump in, to allow ourselves to see that G-d was not forsaking us. Then we would know that the Exodus was not a one-shot deal but an everlasting commitment. Then we could stand before G-d and pray to Him with a foundational appreciation of the strength and durability of our relationship with Him.

Indeed, while we could not pray before the splitting of the sea, ever since that day we have been told to preface our prayer by remembering that day, by being גאולה לתפילה, *גאולה*, by referencing the Song of the Sea immediately before praying. Thus, we pray with security, not with desperation.

And fascinatingly, while the first night of *Pesach* is aligned with *Tisha B'Av*, the seventh night is aligned with *Tu B'Av*, the night when we mark the consolation from the destruction of *Tisha B'Av*, when we stop walking on eggshells.

Standing here tonight, on Yom Kippur, is really standing with that confidence, without those eggshells. It is cute to note for this theme that on Erev Yom Kippur we are told by Halacha to avoid eating eggs. But it is much more than that. Much more.

Tonight, is the anniversary of the conclusion of the forty days Moshe spent on *Har Sinai*. It was not his first time there for forty days; it was his third. The first time started with *Shavuot*, with the revelation of the Ten Commandments, and ended with the gifting of the first set of *Luchos*. But then we created and worshipped the Golden Calf and those tablets were smashed to pieces, as was our relationship with the G-d Who gave them to us. That happened on the day we still commemorate as the 17th of *Tammuz*. The next day Moshe went back up for another forty days on the mountain, forty days of pleading to G-d to restore the Jewish people to His good graces, to restore our relationship with Him. After forty days, G-d agreed and told Moshe to go down, and to bring back up to the mountain two new tablets. Moshe returned to the mountain on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* and stayed with G-d again for forty days, rebuilding the relationship, until Yom Kippur, when we were restored to our earlier relationship and given the newly engraved second *Luchos*.

Isn't it striking that the forty days of *Elul* and *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*, the days that comprise the entire High Holiday season, do not correspond to the forty days when Moshe was praying for our very existence, our very relationship with G-d? Those days of desperation are the dog days of summer, the days that include the Three Weeks. Our time of prayer – our High Holiday period - corresponds to a different period, to the last period of forty days, when we already knew that there would be a happy ending. Our season comes after a few weeks of consolation and comfort, when we were already assured that G-d would keep us, but just needed forty days with Moshe to make the relationship get back up to speed.

This is Yom Kippur. Security. Don't worry. You are My people and that will never change. And that is why I have this day of forgiveness. Because relationships that last are built on forgiveness, not on anger. Because relationships that last are built on confidence, and security, and the understanding that sometimes you need to work and invest time – forty days and forty nights; forty minutes, forty weeks or forty months – to make things as strong as they need to be. But we rest assured that we will get there. We will start and end the process with confidence. And we will infuse it with understanding and forgiveness.

There is a story that I regularly repeat at our family *Pesach Seder*. It is hard for me to repeat it without crying.

The Ponevezher Rav's family and community were slaughtered in the

Holocaust. He was both devastated by the past and committed to the future. He was once speaking at an event in Israel during the war and stopped himself in the middle of his speech, recalling that this was the day of his son's Bar Mitzvah. His son back in Lithuania; his son whose fate he did not know at the time; his son who had actually already been slaughtered by the Nazis. But he ploughed on, dreamed with his eyes open, and committed himself to do his part to rebuild the Jewish world.

He was once traveling in Europe after the war, and arrived in Rome. It was a rainy, cold night, but the Ponevezher Rav called his host, insisting that he had to go out on that very night of his arrival in Rome. His host agreed, and the Rav asked him to take him to the Arch of Titus, the two-thousand-year-old monument to the Roman conquest of *Yerushalayim*. The Rav arrived there, got out of the car, in the rain, straightened his hat and coat, drew himself to his full height, and declared: "Titus! Titus! We, *Am Yisrael*, we are here! We are alive! We are continuing, building! Where are you?"

We do not walk on eggshells. We are completely confident in our relationship with G-d. He is committed to us. נֶצַח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקַר.

This is how G-d wants us to see our connection with Him. That is the message of Yom Kippur, between G-d and us. And that is why this day is refreshing and strengthening of our relationship with G-d. That is the oxygen of *Emunah*, of a confident and secure connection.

And what about our relationship with man?

We are in a position to provide each other with that kind of strength, that kind of security, that kind of sense of confidence. We provide it when we make those around us feel secure with us. When we free them from walking on eggshells. When we are slow to anger and quick to forgive. When life and relationship is steady and predictable, when forgiveness and reconnection is a fixed part of our calendar, and anger is not. When our relationships and our word are secure and lasting.

I was reading the current issue of Jewish Action, the magazine of the Orthodox Union. It featured an article about family estrangement. About siblings that cut each other out of their lives, or children that cut their parents out of their lives. It was very painful to even read, especially as it is not an unfamiliar matter. Yes, sometimes it may be needed. But it shakes forever our sense of wholeness, our ability to experience connection and relationship as a fundamental part of our

lives. After all, it seems like any relationship can simply dissolve.

In our world, where this happens all the time, it is our duty – our obligation – to give those around us the opposite sense, the feeling that we are there for them “for keeps”. We must cleanse our relationships of anger and unpredictability; we must be reliable, as calm and forgiving as we possibly can.

It seems to me that this is why *Rachel Imenu’s* pleas on behalf of the Jewish people reached G-d so effectively. She showed G-d how in her life she did not reject the relationship with her sister, and remained committed to her. Whatever her reasons to resent Leah for stepping in on her relationship with her beloved Yaakov, she did not and could not shame her. Relationships are for keeps. When she demonstrated that, G-d Himself turned and said that He too will treat His relationship with the Jewish people, with Rachel’s children, as “for keeps”.

There is an interesting Halachic construct called a “*Mi Shepara*”. Everyone knows what a “*Mi Shebeirach*” is, where we wish the blessings of our forefathers upon those whom we wish well. Well the “*Mi Shepara*” is its opposite. Here we wish negatively on someone, specifically when that someone breaks their word. We declare, “He who punished the generation of the Flood and the generation of Dispersion should punish he who does not keep his word.” What a unique formulation!

What is striking is that when G-d punished the generation of the Flood, when He had finished destroying His world, the first thing He said was, “Never again!” People could not live with the specter of looming destruction. G-d gave His word that we can rely on the world not being destroyed again. Then once again in the generation of Dispersion, G-d had to choose one of the newly divided nations as His own, and reject the rest. Immediately after doing that, G-d established a covenant with Avraham, an unbreakable bond, such that he and his offspring would not need to worry that they too would be rejected.

G-d gave those punishments but then permanently retired them, knowing that He needed to build in people a sense of security; security in their existence, security in their relationships. He thus gave His word that He would not punish that way ever again. But for the one who makes and breaks his commitments – that person plays fast and loose with the security of others. For him, all bets are off. For him G-d feels no need to assure his security.

There is no greater gift that G-d gave us – and that we give each other –

than the security of relationship.

As *Ramban* explained (Devarim 7:6), G-d said he loved us because of this steadfastness, because of His knowledge that a Jew's mantra is *או ידודי או צלוב*, "I will die as a Jew". There is nothing more important in relationship than loyalty.

The last Yom Kippur that my father-in-law spent in shul, I shared the following story before *Ne'ilah*. The story moved him very much, as he – as a child – had seen his father forced to scrub the streets of Vienna after the *Anschluss*, an experience from which he never really recovered. That experience had made him sad and heavy, serving as a bit of a barrier to the joy with which we would all love to serve our Creator. He took special pleasure in seeing a new generation serve G-d with joy, unencumbered by the weight of those memories. In that vein, he especially appreciated this story, that some of you will certainly remember.

In August of 1929 riots spread through Eretz Yisrael, with *Chevron* the hardest hit. On one Friday night, over sixty Jews were slaughtered by Arab mobs, including many students of the *Chevron* yeshiva. The shattered remnants of the yeshiva transferred to *Yerushalayim*, where they hoped to start again.

On the first night of Rosh Hashanah, less than six weeks after the massacre, the young men were studying in their small *Bais HaMedrash*, and the hour for *Maariv* was approaching. One of the heads of the faculty, Rav Leib Chasman, arose and approached a young man, a *bachur*, Betzalel Shikovitsky, and asked him to lead the *Maariv* prayer. The young man was shocked, as someone of his age and stage would not normally be asked to lead the service on the *Yamim Noraim*. Rav Leib insisted, and Betzalel proceeded to the *Amud*. The prayers began, carefully and painfully, the wounds of the past year still open and fresh. When they reached the second paragraph of the davening, Betzalel started, *ואהבתך אל תסיר ממנו לעולמים*, "Your love shall never leave us", and he paused and then repeated it again with the same mournful tune. *ואהבתך אל תסיר ממנו לעולמים*, "Your love shall never leave us". Over and over he and the yeshiva repeated this refrain, many times. Lost in tears and found in the security, the joy, that despite it all, they were still loved. A participant said that it was clear to him that it was at that moment that the Yeshiva of *Chevron* was reborn. That was the moment when hope replaced despair, as love was recognized; eternal love, *אהבת עולם*.

It is a beautiful story, a beautiful refrain. We will say it in a few minutes. But think about it, think about saying it yourself. Think about saying it to those around you, those in your life. Tell them: No more eggshells. Say it to your child or your parent, to your spouse or your sister, or to your dear friend. ואהבתך אל תסיר ממנו לעולמים, “Your love shall never leave me.”

We will thus give each other that gift of true security. And there is no greater joy.

ויהי ידיו אמונה

Hands of Faith

Yom Kippur Yizkor

Yizkor – especially on Yom Kippur - is a time we remember and recall the relationship of parents and children.

It is also a time to speak about something that we really need to speak about, that we have perhaps surprisingly not spoken about this season. Two things actually.

We are living in a world filled with uncertainty. Events, both global and local, jump out at us from the headlines daily, one more unsettling and shocking than the next. We experience the insecurity of living in a world where global terror seeks victims everywhere; where civil war and upheaval envelopes multiple countries surrounding our precious *Eretz Yisrael*, leading in turn to a global refugee crisis whose consequences have transformed Europe and may soon transform our own country. We feel the anxiety generated by lone wolves and known wolves; by online predators, gender identity and identity theft. We are experiencing a crazy political season where the leading candidates are trusted and respected by hardly anyone, as they run to head a government filled with elected officials that nobody seems to have faith in. There is a lot to worry about.

We have not spoken about this, because these days are precious days of 'שבת בבית ד', of dwelling and being at home in Hashem's home. Gaining that inner strength, making ourselves a holier and more wholesome people, is our best defense. For this we need a bit of a bubble.

But in seven hours this holy day will be over. The bubble will burst and we will head outside. We cannot ignore that reality.

That is one thing.

The other is something that is pretty important when exploring the theme of *Emunah*, and that is the ultimate expression of *Emunah*: *Tefillah*, prayer. Our ultimate weapon.

The first time the word *Emunah* is used in the Torah is ויהי ידיו אמונה, when Moshe stood on the mountain overlooking the battlefield where Yehoshua was waging war against *Amalek* (*Shemos* 17:12). His hands were raised to the heavens, and they remained there, faithful, stead-

fast, until the sun set.

The term *Emunah* there is a double entendre. His hands were steady and faithful, a basic meaning of *Emunah*. But they were also expressing faith, his hands were performing an act of faith, spread up towards the heavens, in prayer. As the *Targum* translates, *והוא ידוהי פריסן בצלו*, and as *Rashi* wrote: *וידו משה ידיו באמונה פרושות השמים בתפילה נאמנה ונכונה*.

These are the *ידו יעקב*, the “hands of Jacob”. The hand of Jacob is equal to the voice of Jacob. We wage a war of words, the words of prayer. As we said in the *Selichos* on Monday:

“שלמך לא בטחו בחרב וסברו בחנית, משענם צום ושק ומבטחם תפילה ותענית”
“Your faithful did not rely on the sword and the spear; their support came from assembly and sackcloth, and their security from prayer and fasting.”

This theme is repeated all over the Torah, and throughout our history. We wage war through prayer, *ונצק אל ד' וישמע קולינו*.

In the Torah, the *Halachos* of what is acceptable in a place of prayer are learnt from what is acceptable in the army camp. *ולא יראה בכ ערות דבר*. Because the war zone was a prayer zone.

The *Halachos* of fast days, days of prayer of the greatest intensity, little Yom Kippurs, are generated by war, *וכי תבואו למלחמה בארצכם... והרעותם*.

Taanis Esther – on the day that precedes Purim – is according to many meant to recall the fasting that took place on that very day, the day of the battle. Because that is how Jews waged war – on an empty stomach and a full heart, on prayer. *אשר לקחתי מיד האמורי בחרבי ובקשתי – בצלותי ובבעותי*.

As people of faith, we understand that prayer is our ultimate weapon. G-d truly runs the world. We must never let that escape either our mind or our heart. Prayer is our ultimate tool, and we must treat it as such.

Friends of ours were facing a challenge with their children, specifically a challenge of *Shidduchim*. This challenge is especially difficult and confusing as one is always thinking of another idea, another networking opportunity, another *Shadchan* to try. When visiting *Eretz Yisrael*, the husband asked Harav Chaim Kanievsky how they should conduct themselves. His response was straightforward: “The *עיקר השתדלות* – the main effort – is *Tefillah*.” Profound, simple.

But the prayer Moshe offered here on the battlefield was not just for general or national success. Central to Moshe’s prayer was a very par-

ticular request for a particular person leading the battle, for his dear student Yehoshua.

In this way, Moshe was establishing the tradition that our Sages taught us, that when we go to battle we should have *אֵלַי לַמָּטָה אֵלַי לַמָּטָה*, two concurrent forces, one thousand soldiers on the battlefield and one thousand praying men backing them up back home, each soldier with a partner, someone praying specifically and personally for them and for their safety and success.

When Moshe stood there with his hands spread to the heavens, we see that as the classic pose of prayer. Many have explained that the symbolism of hands raised in prayer is in its recalling hands raised as the sign of surrender. We raise our hands to heaven to indicating that we are not using our hands, that we recognize that G-d is fighting the fight.

But the hands spread out also imply something else. In fact, the Ramban there alludes to the spreading of the hands of the Kohanim when blessing the people. There the connotation is not simply hands raised in prayer but hands extended in blessing. The hands of the Kohanim blessing the nation, as Yaakov spread his hands over the heads of his children when he blessed them, and as we do when we bless ours. We are praying for G-d's intervention in the great war, and we are praying for our children in the battle.

It was in this battle that Moshe prayed for Yehoshua to be victorious. Later we will find his name changed to Yehoshua, reflecting Moshe's prayer for his success as he set out on the mission of the spies. But Yehoshua's name already carried that meaning. Here, the first time we meet Yehoshua, Moshe is already praying for him, his hands extended towards him, rooting for him. And that became a part of Yehoshua's name, of his identity, as he went forth in life knowing that his Rebbe prayed for him.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner arrived as a young man to the Slabodka yeshiva. On Yom Kippur before Mussaf – right around now – the great Alter of Slabodka sent one of his senior students, the author of the *דברי יחזקאל*, to ask him his name and his mother's name, so that he could pray for him. Rav Hutner did not send the message back with the student. He went himself to give his name to the Alter. To – so to speak – feel his hands on his head, to know firsthand that he would go forward with the Alter's prayers moving him forward.

וידוי ידי אמונה. Hands of faith. Pray for your children. Place your hands on their heads every Friday night. Pray for them – by name – every time you daven. Realize that you stand here today because your parents prayed for you.

Prayer for the big world, for our battles and wars, and prayer for the little worlds, the individuals.

I want to conclude with two stories from the Chafetz Chaim, and one from a dear member of our own community.

Late in his life, he was speaking to his students towards the end of Shabbos, as was his custom. This time he spoke about how when we were redeemed from Egypt it was through prayer – ותעל שועתם. As he discussed this, the Chafetz Chaim became very animated. “We must daven for the Geulah! How can we sit and do nothing!” He became driven to do something about it, as was his way. He waited impatiently for Shabbos to end and wanted to travel immediately to Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky to strategize – how can we move the Jewish people to pray with all their hearts and all their souls for Geulah? Indeed, how can we.... (See *Tnuas HaMussar* IV p 57).

At a different time, someone was packing up the Chafetz Chaim’s parents’ home many years after his mother’s passing, and came across the Chafetz Chaim’s mother’s Tehillim. He brought it to the Chafetz Chaim, who broke down when he saw it, kissing it and crying. “Do you have any idea how many tears my mother shed over this Sefer Tehillim?! Every morning she prayed from it and cried that her son should be a good, faithful Jew.”

Do we have a Tehillim book like that?

This past Friday, we buried a cherished member of our shul, Mrs. Bryna Leah Kitay. Mrs. Kitay was a visible presence here, always here for every event. But she did not only serve G-d publicly. She had a serious and devoted inner life of prayer. Her son Paul spoke of a discovery he made in her apartment, of her Sefer Tehillim. It had many scraps of paper in it, including many lists of names of people for whom she prayed. But specifically, there were scraps that listed the names of each of her children and their children, and their grandchildren. Each with their full name and their birthday. Each day she would say a Psalm for each descendant, the Psalm numbered with their age. Each day a Psalm for each one. ייה ישיעך. They could go on in life armed with prayer, armed with a prayer extended to G-d but for them, of arms extended both to

Heaven and to them.

Prayer for redemption, for victory in battle, for calm in a crazy world. And prayer for children, for each other. Hands raised to Heaven in helpless surrender, begging G-d for His intervention. And hands spread out to the people, to place gently on the heads of each who need our blessing. The “hands of Yaakov”, of faith and of warmth. May we use them, may G-d see them, and may those dear to us feel them.

אמונה בכנסת ישראל

Belief in Ourselves

Neilah

Rav Soloveitchik in his work *Al HaTeshuva* (P 96) presents a magnificent formulation that is not only beautiful, not only elegant, but resoundingly true. He cites the Rambam who wrote that while our ultimate redemption depends on our Teshuva, the Torah has promised that we as a People will do Teshuva to merit that redemption.

As such, posited Rav Soloveitchik, when we express our fervent belief, *Ani Maamin*, in the coming of the Moshiach, we are really expressing our *Emunah* in *Knesses Yisrael*, in the Jewish people and its innate ability to find its way home. If we believe in Moshiach it is because we believe that every Jew has within him the readiness and the inclination to reconnect to Hashem.

Rav Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog, then Chief Rabbi of Israel (Palestine), visited the DP camps after the war. He spent an unforgettable Shavuot in the Farenwald camp, and described the experience as follows:

Here was revealed to me the eternal faith of the Jewish people that is embedded within it from generation to generation, a faith that bubbled up and arose from the hearts of each and every resident of that camp....

I had the opportunity to spend meaningful time with many individual Jews, to bandage the wounds of their embittered souls. I visited each organization and group; I prayed with every Minyan; I gave sixteen public addresses over the two days of the festival.

Until my last day, I will never forget the lofty and indescribable sight of thousands of the stateless Jews, survivors from Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc., each one of whom represented through his personal tragedy and through the look in his eyes the loneliness and tragedy of our nation; I will never, ever forget how these thousands gathered around and danced for four straight hours while singing "Ani Maamin".

I felt at that moment as if here had come together the faith of the generations from Avraham and until our day, a faith that had

been purified in the furnace of our history of suffering; a faith that represents the essential truth of the eternity of man created in G-d's image, and that ignites in his heart the Divine spark.

Yes, witnessing something like that – even hearing about it – stirs our faith in the Jewish people.

But one need not be there. One can be right here. One can look around this room, this community; it is hard to understand how you all got here. You come from the four corners of Jewish life, people who grew up closer or farther from tradition. And yet you are here, we are here, fasting together, standing together, praying our hearts out together.

We need to have faith in the Jewish people. It is not blind faith. We are its proof. We must allow ourselves to see this and to follow the inherent and permanent connection that brought us here to this day, and that will flourish in the days and years to come.

אני מאמין באמונה שלימה
How will I strengthen my Emunah?

נשאת ונתת באמונה
How will I strengthen my relationships?

ימים נוראים תשע"ז



בני יעקב שערי ציון