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Learning Emunah

The *Shomer Emunim* writes¹ that in the future, a person will rise to the highest levels in the merit of his *emunah*, levels to which the other mitzvos cannot elevate him. He quotes *Yeshayah* 26:2, פתחו שַׁעֲרִים וְיָבֵא גֹי צְדִיק שֹׁמֵר אֱמוּנָה, *open the gates, so the righteous nation, keeper of the faith, may enter*. The Midrash explains this to mean that according to the level of a person's *emunah* the different gates in *Shamayim* will be opened for him. *Emunah* can elevate all the other mitzvos. Just as the heart gives the life of all the other limbs, so does *emunah* give the life of all the other *mitzvos*. The stronger a person's *emunah*, the better he will perform every mitzvah.

Acquiring *emunah* the right way takes work. It entails learning about it daily and asking Hashem for help with it in our *tefillos*. If a person is a *mevakesh emunah*—one who seeks *emunah*—then Hashem will help him. Nothing can compare to constantly learning and speaking about it. Many have nightly phone conferences during which they read a lesson on *emunah* and discuss it afterward. Some read a lesson a day with their families. Learning more about any subject, especially *emunah*, will automatically bring improvement in that area.

We need to infuse our children with *emunah* from a young age. It is the foundation of everything. Those who seek *emunah* and want *emunah* for their family and students have seen *siyata d'Shmaya* in many ways.

Kalman* learns with each of his children

“Many have nightly phone conferences during which they read a lesson on *emunah* and discuss it afterward. Some read a lesson a day with their families.”

1. *Derush HaEmunah*, perek 5.

individually at least once a week. As he sat down to learn with eight-year-old Mordechai* one evening, the boy asked him to read from the *emunah* book his father himself reads each night. "Please include a story about the Holocaust," Mordechai added.

Kalman replied, "I'll gladly read to you from my *emunah* book, but I can't guarantee that it'll have something about the Holocaust." He opened the book to the page where his bookmark was inserted and began to read. Incredibly, the story in that lesson was on the Holocaust!

How remarkable that Hashem set the stage for his eight-year-old to request a lesson in *emunah* on a specific topic, and the story was right there, ready and waiting!

"This is the biggest *emunah* lesson we could have learned tonight!" he told Mordechai.



Rabbi Maimon,* an eighth-grade *rebbe*, reads a lesson a day to his class from an *emunah* book. He had just completed the first volume and wanted to immediately begin the second, but did not have a chance to pick up the book at the local Judaica store.

That night was Rabbi Maimon's birthday, and his family gave him gifts. He opened one from his fifteen-year-old son—it was Volume 2 of the *emunah* series he was reading to his class! His son had no idea that he needed that book by the next morning.

The next day, as he prepared to present the *emunah* lesson, he told his class, "Hashem loves your learning of *emunah* so much that He didn't want you to miss even one day!"

Emunah connects us to Hashem like no other mitzvah. The rewards for *emunah* cannot be imagined. The more we learn about it and teach others about it, the more it will become ingrained in us.

Hearing many *hashgachah pratit* stories of how Hashem helped people in their time of need when it seemed there was no way for them to be helped strengthens a person's *emunah* that Hashem is in control of everything that happens in this world. *Emunah* enables a person to pray harder when he has a need. It also allows a person to feel a little more at ease when matters are not going as he would wish.

However, there is something more that needs to happen for a person's *emunah* to be complete. The *pasuk* says (*Tehillim* 34:11), *בְּפִי יָרִים קוֹל וְרָעֵבוּ וְהִשְׁיִיחַ לֹא יִחְסֹר כֹּל טוֹב, Young lions may want and hunger, but those who seek Hashem will not lack any good.* From this *pasuk* it appears that lions are being contrasted to those who seek Hashem and therefore are not considered among those who seek Him out. Yet another *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 104:21) states, *הַקִּיָּיִם שֹׁאֵגִים לְפָנָיו וְיִבְקָשׁוּ מִקַּל אֲכָלִים, The young lions roar after their prey and to seek their food from G-d,* which implies that they are seeking Hashem and praying to Him for their sustenance. How do we reconcile this contradiction?

One answer I saw is that while it is true that the lions call out to Hashem for sustenance, it does not mean they are *dorshel Hashem*. They do not seek Him out. They believe He is in charge of their food and therefore they come to Him for help, but they have no interest in Hashem Himself. They do not care to have a relationship with Him; they do not care what is His will.

It is possible for a person to believe in Hashem and pray to Him, yet not really be interested in Him. Knowing that Hashem runs the world does not mean a person is truly a *baal emunah*. Someone who fully believes in Hashem does not turn to Him only to get his own desires fulfilled. He is a person who is a *doresh Hashem*—one who wants to be close to Hashem, who

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wants a relationship with Him and seeks to please Him. Our knowledge of Hashem should bring us to stand in awe of Him and, in turn, to want to know more about Him and draw closer to Him. It is not what we are getting by doing a mitzvah; it is more that we are doing Hashem's will. It is true that Hashem's will is to reward us for our efforts, but that should not be our primary motivation. It is possible for a person to pray three times a day and beg Hashem for all his needs, but not really be interested in Hashem. Such a person does not fit the description of a *doresh Hashem*. It is our task to use our *emunah* to feel Hashem's presence and want to get closer to Him.

We can tell if we are *dorshel Hashem* when our will is not being fulfilled. Someone who is interested only in his own needs may complain or even stop praying, but a *doresh Hashem* will continue his *avodah* with joy. He will continue doing what he is supposed to be doing with the same fervor and say to himself, *I am happy to serve Hashem the way He wants me to, and I will continue for as long as He wants me to do it like this*. Such *emunah* requires more work than merely believing in Hashem's control. It is within our ability to achieve this level.

May Hashem help us reach all the great levels in *emunah*, and may we establish the closest relationship we possibly could have with Him in this world.