PARSHAS LECH LECHA

HaRav Yisroel Brog, Shlita | Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivas Tiferes Avigdor

Shiur Presented in 5764

Do You Know Why Emunah is a Mitzvah?

STEIGING IN EMUNAH THROUGH NISYONOS

This parsha takes us through the development of Avraham Avinu. What needs to be known and studied in the subject of Avraham Avinu is: Number one, you have to know about the trials of Avraham. Avraham went through ten trials, like it says in the mishnah. The trials of Avraham is a subject in and of itself. The first trial mentioned in this parshah is the nisayon of lech lecha. You have to know what the nisayon of lech lecha is. Then we have the ra'av ba'aretz, the hunger in the land and Avraham's traveling to Mitzrayim. Then we have the story of Lot and Avraham. This is all part of the development of Avraham. The next subject the Torah discusses in this parshah is the war between the kings - the war of the kings and Avraham's getting sucked into the battle. Then we have the bris bein habesarim, the Covenant Between the Parts. Then you have the story of Sarah and Hagar. Then, at the conclusion of the parshah, you have the bris milah. Those are all the subjects in the parshah. If you know that, you know Parshas Lech Lecha. To really understand Parshas Lech Lecha, you have to know about the nisyonos. But today, we're going to discuss and see something from the Rambam that's actually going on in the background throughout the times when Avraham was having the nisyonos.

Parshas Lech Lecha begins when Avraham is 75 years old. By the time Avraham was 75 years old he had a major kiruv movement. It's interesting to note, where was Avraham at this time? He was in a place called Charan. The Torah refers to the geirim that Avraham brought under the Shechinah's wing, as the nefesh that Avraham made in Charan. Hashem comes to him and says: "Get out of Charan. Leave Charan. You're not going to be matzliach here. The big stuff in store for you is out of Charan." We want to really discuss a little bit about Avraham Avinu and his life and what led to the Charan development, which is the background of what we will learn today.

HOW THE RAMBAM UNDERSTANDS AVARAHAM AVINU

We'll take a look at the Rambam in perek alef in Hilchos Avodah Zarah.[1] This is an important Rambam. The Rambam talks about the development of Avraham Avinu. This is perek alef, in halachos alef, beis and gimmel. Now in the first part, in halachah alef and beis, the Rambam elaborates on the philosophy of the idol worshippers in Avraham Avinu's time, and he explains that the first, initial idol worship came about out of great respect that people had for Hashem. The initial idol worshipers came up with a philosophy that it was a chutzpah gedolah, in the words of the Nefesh Hachaim, to worship Hashem. How dare a little, tiny speck like you and me address Hashem? They thought it wasn't suitable for the kavod of Hashem as the Melech, and they thought that the kavod of a melech is to deal only with the important underlings, the officers that He instituted and He established. They said you have to worship the sun, which Hashem created, the moon which Hashem created. They thought that would be a good way to respect Hashem, the Melech. But that's something to discuss but obviously, we don't hold of that.

Take a look at halachah gimmel. כיון שנגמל איתן זה, when this eisan, this strong one, became weaned from his mother, התחיל לשוטט בדעתו when Avraham Avinu became weaned off his mother, he began to think in his mind. והוא קטן, he was a child, והתחיל לחשב ביום ובלילה, and he began to think by day and by night. והיה תמה, he was amazed, היאך אפשר, how is it possible, שיהיה הגלגל הזה נוהג תמיד, how can this world, this wheel, constantly be running, ולא יהיה לו מנהיג, and it shouldn't have a manhig, ומי יסבב אותו, who keeps it turning?

The Rambam writes already that Avraham Avinu was concerned about the concept of the world having a manhig, כי אי אפשר שיסבב את עצמו, he understood it was impossible that the earth should turn itself. ולא היה לו, he didn't have לא מלמד, he didn't have a rebbi, ולא מודיע דבר, no one to let him know anything, אלא משקע באור כשדים, he was sunk in Ur Kasdim, בין עובדי עבודה זרה הטיפשים, among those ovdei avodah zarah, the tipshim, fools. ואביו ואמו, and his father and his mother, וכל

[1] כֵּיוָן שֶׁנִּגְמַל אִיתָן זֶה הִתְחִיל לְשׁוֹטֵט בְּדַעְתּוֹ וְהוּא קָטָן וְהָיָה תָּמֵהַּ הֵיאַךְ אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיִּהְיֶה הַגַּלְגַּל הַזֶּה נוֹהֵג תָּמִיד וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ מַנְהִיג וּמִי יְסַבֵּב אוֹתוֹ. כִּי אִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁיְּסַבֵּב אֶת עַצְמוֹ. וְלֹא הָיָה לוֹ מְלַמֵּד וְלֹא מוֹדִיעַ דָּבָר אֶלָּא מֻשְׁקָע בְּאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים בֵּין עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים הַטִּפְּשִׁים וְאָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְכָל הָעָם עוֹבְדֵי כּוֹכָבִים וְהוּא עוֹבֵד עִמָּהֶם וְלִבּוֹ מְשׁוֹטֵט וּמֵבִין עַד שֶׁהִשִּׂיג דֶּרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת וְהֵבִין קַו הַצֶּדֶק מִתְּבוּנָתוֹ הַנְּכוֹנָה. וְיָדַע שֶׁיֵּשׁ שָׁם אֱלוֹהַּ אֶחָד וְהוּא בָּרָא הַכֹּל וְאֵין בְּכָל הַנִּמְצָא אֱלוֹהַּ חוץ מִמֶּנּוּ. וְיָדַע שֶׁכָּל הָעוֹלָם טוֹעִים וְדָבָר שֶׁגָּרַם לָהֶם לִטְעוֹת זֶה שֶׁעוֹבְדִים אֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים וְאֶת הַצּוּרוֹת עַד שֶׁאָבַד הָאֱמֶת מִדַּעְתָּם. וּבֶן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה הִכִּיר אַבְרָהָם אֶת בּוֹרְאוֹ. כֵּיוָן שֶׁהִכִּיר וְיָדַע הִתְחִיל לְהָשִׁיב תְּשׁוּבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי אוּר כַּשְׂדִּים וְלַעֲרֹךְ דִּין עִמָּהֶם וְלוֹמַר שֶׁאֵין זוֹ דֶּרֶךָ הָאֱמֶת שֶׁאַתֶּם הוֹלְכִים בָּהּ וְשִׁבֵּר הַצְּלָמִים וְהִתְחִיל לְהוֹדִיעַ לָעָם שֶׁאֵין רָאוּי לַעֲבֹד אֶלָּא לֵאלֹהַּ הָעוֹלָם וְלוֹ רָאוּי לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת וּלְהַקְרִיב כְּדֵי שֶׁיַּכִּירוּהוּ כָּל הַבְּרוּאִים הַבָּאִים. וְרָאוּי לְאַבֵּד כָּל הַצּוּרוֹת כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִטְעוּ בָּהֶן כָּל הָעָם כְּמוֹ אֵלּוּ שֶׁהֵם מְדַמִּים שֶׁאֵין שָׁם אֱלוֹהַּ אֶלָּא אֵלּוּ. כֵּיוָן שֶׁגָּבַר עֲלֵיהֶם בְּרְאָיוֹתָיו בִּקֵּשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהָרְגוֹ וְנַעֲשָׂה לוֹ נֵס וְיָצָא לְחָרָן. וְהִתְחִיל לַעֲמֹד וְלִקְרֹא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל לְכָל הָעוֹלָם וּלְהוֹדִיעָם שֶׁיֵּשׁ שָׁם אֱלוֹהַּ אֶחָד לְכָל הָעוֹלָם וְלוֹ רָאוּי לַעֲבֹד. וְהָיָה מְהַלֵּךְ וְקוֹרֵא וּמְקַבֵּץ הָעָם מֵעִיר לְעִיר וּמִמַּמְלָכָה לְמַמְלָכָה עַד שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן וְהוּא קוֹרֵא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית כא לג) "וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם בְּשֵׁם ה' אֵל עוֹלָם". וְכֵיוָן שֶׁהָיוּ הָעָם מִתְקַבְּצִין אֵלָיו וְשׁוֹאֲלִין לוֹ עַל דְּבָרָיו הָיָה מוֹדִיעַ לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד כְּפִי דַּעְתּוֹ עַד שֶׁיַּחְזִירֵהוּ לְדֶרֶךְ הָאֱמֶת עַד שֶׁנִּתְקַבְּצוּ אֵלָיו אֲלָפִים וּרְבָבוֹת וְהֵם אַנְשֵׁי בֵּית אַבְרָהָם וְשָׁתַל בְּלִבָּם הָעִקָּר הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה וְחִבֵּר בּוֹ סְפָרִים וְהוֹדִיעוֹ לְיִצְחָק בְּנוֹ. וְיָשַׁב יִצְחָק מְלַמֵּד וּמַזְהִיר. וְיִצְחָק הוֹדִיעַ לְיַעֲקֹב וּמִנָּהוּ לְלַמֵּד וְיָשַׁב מְלַמֵּד וּמַחֲזִיק כָּל הַנִּלְוִים אֵלָיו. וְיַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ לִמֵּד בָּנָיו כֻּלָּם וְהִבְדִּיל לֵוִי וּמִנָּהוּ רֹאשׁ וְהוֹשִׁיבוֹ בְּיִשִׁיבָה לְלַמֵּד דֶּרֶךְ הַשֵּׁם וְלִשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹת אַבְרָהָם. וְצִוָּה אֶת בָּנָיו שֶׁלֹּא יַפְסִיקוּ מִבְּנֵי לֵוִי מְמֻנֶּה אַחַר מְמֻנֶּה כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא תִּשְׁכַּח הַלִּמּוּד. וְהָיָה הַדָּבָר הוֹלֵךְ וּמִתְגַּבֵּר בִּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וּבַנְּלְוִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְנַעֲשִׂית בְּעוֹלָם אֻמָּה שֶׁהִיא יוֹדַעַת אֶת ה'. עַד שֶׁאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם וְחָזְרוּ לִלְמֹד מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן וְלַעֲבֹד כּוֹכָבִים כְּמוֹתָן חוּץ מִשֵּׁבֶט לֵוִי שֶׁעָמַד בְּמִצְוֹת אֲבוֹת. וּמֵעוֹלָם לֹא עָבַד שֵׁבֶט לֵוִי עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים. וְכִמְעַט קָט הָיָה הָעִקָּר שֶׁשָּׁתַל אַבְרָהָם נָעֳקָר וְחוֹזְרִין בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב לְטָעוּת הָעוֹלָם וְתֵעוּתָן. וּמֵאַהֲבַת ה' אוֹתָנוּ וּמִשְׁמְרוֹ אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעָה לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ רַבָּן שֶׁל כָּל הַנְּבִיאִים וּשְׁלָחוֹ. כֵּיוָן שֶׁנִּתְנַבֵּא מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ וּבָחַר ה' יִשְׂרָאֵל לְנַחֲלָה הִכְתִּירָן בְּמִצְוֹת וְהוֹדִיעָם דֶּרֶךְ עֲבוֹדָתוֹ וּמָה יִהְיֶה מִשְׁפָּט עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים וְכָל הַטּוֹעִים אַחֲרֶיהָ (משנה תורה, הלכות עבודה זרה וחוקות הגויים א׳)

העם , and all the nation, עובדי עבודה זרה והוא היה עובד עמהם, were worshipping idols and he used to worship with them. He was a nice boy, so he did what his father did. ולבו משוטט ומבין, and his heart constantly was awake and figuring out, עד, until finally, שהשיג דרך אמת, he finally fathomed the emese derech, והבין קו הצדק, and he understood the righteous path, מדעתו הנכונה, from his good mind. וידע, and he knew, שיש שם אלוק אחד, there's one G-d, והוא מנהיג הגלגל, He is the director of this ball, הוא ברא הכל, He created everything, ואין בכל הנמצא אלוק חוץ ממנו, and there isn't in everything that's found, any G-d beside Him. וידע, and he knew, שכל העולם טועים, everybody is making a mistake, ודבר שגרם להם לטעות, and the thing he realized that caused them to make a mistake, זה שעובדים את הכוכבים, that they worshiped the stars, ואת הצורות, other forms, עד שאבד האמת מדעתם. ובן ארבעים שנה הכיר אברהם את בוראו, and Avraham was 40 years old when he recognized his Creator.

Now, the Rambam started off the halachah by saying that when Avraham was weaned off his mother he began to think. And it says when he was 40 years old, that's when Avraham got the message. The Ra'avid comes along and says that there's a medrash that says that Avraham got the message by the time he was three years old. Obviously, the Rambam holds that there was something that went on, if Avraham's process of recognizing the Creator began at the age of three but it concluded at the age of 40.

A BRIGHT PALACE - AVRAHAM HAS NEVUAH

Now, there is a famous medrash (Beresihis Rabbah 39:1) that is part of the basics. Everybody should know this medrash. But today we're going to give you an explanation, hopefully a Brisker explanation of this medrash. The medrash says that Abraham's awareness of Hashem can be explained by a parable, a mashal. משל לאחד, there's a mashal about one person. This medrash is right at the beginning of Lech Lecha as follows: שהיה עובר ממקום למקום, a person was going from place to place, וראה, and he saw, בירה אחת דולקת, he saw a big palace that was lit up. אמר, he said, תאמר, can you say, שהבירה הזו בלא מנהיג, can you say that this building has nobody in control of this building? הציץ עליו בעל הבירה, while he's standing there pondering, the owner of the building comes out and says, "Shalom aleichem. אני הוא בעל הבירה, I'm the owner of this house." כך, so too, לפי שהיה אבינו אברהם אומר, since Avraham Avinu was saying, תאמר שהעולם הזה בלא מנהיג, "Can you say the world has no manhig?" הציץ עליו בעל הבירה, Hakadosh Baruch Hu showed up to him (i.e. in a nevuah), ואמר לו, and He said to him, אני הוא בעל העולם, "I am the ba'al of this world."

This is the medrash, a famous medrash. That's the background of this Rambam. This medrash is something that you have to be familiar with. Now the shaylah is only, what is the meaning of this medrash?

WHAT DID AVRAHAM GAIN FROM THE NEVUAH?

The Brisker Rav asked the following question on this very medrash. It's a fundamental question. Seemingly, the two things - the mashal and the nimshal - are not comparable! Why not? If I'm standing in front of a building, I know there is an owner but I don't know who the owner is. I don't recognize him. I don't know what he looks like. I don't know how he talks. I know nothing about him. A guy comes out. "Shalom aleichem!" and I see who the person is. How tall he is. If he has a dark complexion, a white complexion. If he is a hairy guy, not a hairy guy. If he is a thin guy, a fat guy. Now I know everything about him. But with Avraham Avinu, what was neschadesh to him? He didn't see Hashem, but He already knew before that there was a Hashem. Avraham had already discovered Hashem. He had come to the awareness that there can't be a world without a boss. So when Hashem gave him a nevuah and He spoke to him, what extra knowledge was added to Avraham's understanding of Hashem? When Hashem speaks to somebody, it's not a face-to-face meeting. You don't see Hashem. You don't get a message in an email. You have a dream. If when you're asleep, you get a message to get going, lech lecha, that doesn't give you any tosefes in the hakarah, in your awareness!

Let's say a guy is standing in front of a building and he says, "Oh boy, this building surely has an owner!" and somebody calls out from the inside and says, "Of course." Is that a chiddush? That's not a chiddush at all. But if the owner actually comes out and he gives you a shalom aleichem, so it comes out there is an increase in the recognition and acknowledgement. Now you know the owner. But when Hashem comes to you in a nevuah and says, "I am the owner," and that's all Hashem says, I say, "I knew that already. I figured that out already." What was nischadesh to me more than was here before? Usually you give a mashal as an analogy to help us understand the concept better. But the mashal has got to be analogous to the situation being described. Here, it is not analogous! In the mashal, an owner is actually coming out of the building. It is mosif; it adds something. Now you know who the owner is. But what does a nevuah mosif? Hashem doesn't have a face. He doesn't have a voice. He doesn't have clothes. He doesn't have a guf. He doesn't have any dimyon of a guf. A person who has a nevuah gets nothing material or physical. It's a thought, nothing more.

Before Hashem came, i.e. before the nevuah of lech lecha, Avraham knew there was Hashem. The proof is that Avraham was already running a whole kiruv movement. He was making geirim already. So what was mechadesh? That is the question...what's the shaychus?

This is the question of the Brisker Rav.

HE KNOWS THAT HE DOESN'T KNOW!

The Brisker Rav answered that prior to this moment in time, Avraham's knowledge of Hashem was only al pi seichel. That the world had a boss was something that Avraham's seichel led him to believe and realize. Before that, prior to this, his seichel was mechayev him to realize there is a Hashem. But you know what the problem is? A person's seichel is not able to get any comprehension of Hashem. I could only know by seichel that there is a Hashem. But I have no way of knowing anything about Hashem.

But when Hashem gives you a nevuah, then you gain an awareness that you had no concept of prior to that - that Hashem is beyond human conception. It means: If I look at this world, I can deduce that Hashem is very strong. Hashem is an architect. Hashem is rachamim. Hashem is chessed. Hashem is this. Hashem is that. I can only grasp what my seichel allows me to understand. But I can't get an appreciation of what the metzius, the reality of Hashem is, meaning that Hashem is entirely above and beyond human understanding. When Hashem came to Avraham and He said, "אני הוא בעל הבירה," it means to say, "What you thought was the ba'al habirah, I'm nothing like what you thought because I am much, much more than that."

Participant: Couldn't Avraham deduce how great Hashem is by merely looking at the world?

You could only deduce from whatever you see. If I look at a house, what do I know about the owner of the house? I can tell you a lot about the owner of the house. I could look at a house and tell you that the owner of the house is not eight feet tall. You know why? Because he couldn't live in the house if he's eight feet tall. The ceiling is only seven feet high. I can tell you the guy is not fat as a horse because a horse couldn't get through one of the doors. I can tell you that. I can look at the size of his bathroom and get an idea. If it's a real small one, I can get an idea that it's a small guy. If it's a real huge one, or if the guy has extra wide doors, I can tell you the house is wheelchair accessible because the guy is in a wheelchair. There are a lot of things you can tell about a person by looking at his house.

When you look at the world, you can only deduce that Hashem is as big as the world. But you have no concept of the infinite greatness of Hashem. The nevuah that Hashem gave Avraham was to give him a concept of what Hakadosh Baruch Hu was. That means to say, Avraham became aware that Hashem was way above and beyond anything that he imagined. Hashem was not constrained by time, even though the world runs on time. Hashem wasn't limited to space, even though everything in this world is limited in space. He is mufka from any atzmius, essence. All this world was, was the creation of Hashem but whatever Avraham saw could not adequately express what Hashem is. That's what He showed Avraham, that this world was the creation of Hashem, but Hashem Himself? Avaraham had no idea what He was. That's the difference.

Let's say I make a home for my dolls. I could figure out from the dollhouse there definitely is someone who made this dollhouse. But what can I tell you? Maybe he's this tall? He's a miniature guy. He's a dwarf. I could tell you a lot of things about him. If I look at the world, I can only deduce that Hashem is as big as the world. The emes is, Hashem is bigger than the world. The world is just a creation of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as Rav Chaim Volozhiner explains. The essence of Hashem—we don't even relate to the essence of Hashem. We don't know how to relate to Hashem. Hashem has no guf. Hashem has no dimyon haguf. Hashem is beyond emotion—yet Hashem creates emotion. Hashem is not an emotion. It's not like me. I don't create emotion. I am emotion: passionate, compassionate. I'm angry. I'm mean. Whatever emotion, it's me. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't have emotion. Therefore, saying that Hashem has emotion is limiting. Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes: Chalilah vechalilah to ascribe anything to Hashem because we have no idea what the atzmius of Hashem is. It's beyond our understanding. It's unlimited. It's nothing we can fathom.

RAV SHACH'S QUESTION: WHY IS IT CALLED EMUNAH?

Now, I want to tell you a question on this subject, a very fundamental question that Rav Leizer Shach, Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, zt"l (1898-2001), asked the Brisker Rav. The first mitzvah in the Torah is emunah, and the question he asked is: Why is the mitzvah called "emunah"? He said, b'pashtus having emunah is the most basic thing that an intelligent person can understand. Why is there a mitzvah of emunah? Emunah means to believe there is a G-d. It's impossible that the world should not have a Creator. Dovid Hamelech said, "מבשרי אחזה אלוק, I look at myself and I see there is a Creator. I know there's a G-d." The chachmah, the amazing chachmah that exists in every aspect of creation declares the existence of a Creator. So he says, if it's not shayach that the world should be without a manhig, so why is it called emunah - belief? It should be called yediah - knowledge, a fact.

If I tell you, "I believe this table was built by a human being," that's not belief. That's knowledge. I know it was built by a human being. I can't tell you what the human being who built it was like, but that's knowledge. Rav Leizer Shach says: How could you say, "Believe there's a Hashem?" Lechorah that's a yediah. It says in the passuk, he said, וידעת היום. Read the words of Aleinu. It says: וידעת היום, you should know today, והשבות אל לבבך, and internalize it, כי ה' הוא האלקים, that Hashem is the Creator of the world. So why does the Torah call the mitzvah "emunah"?

Rav Shach asked this shaylah to the Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik, zt"l (1886-1959). The Brisker Rav told him that he had the same shaylah, and he presented this shaylah to his father, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, zt"l (1853-1918).

Now, I saw this question many years ago and this question basically made me feel as stupid as possible. I'll tell you why. Because when I studied this question, I realized, I was trying to think, would I consider this a great question? No. If the Brisker Rav told me that he asked this question to his father, and that his father didn't throw him out the window, I would also be surprised. So you have to know this is a bomb question. If Rav Shach asked it to the Brisker Rav and the Brisker Rav asked it to Rav Chaim, this is what a good question is. Therefore, you have to think about this question.

I gave this question a lot of thought because I realized this is an insight into what is a good question. The question is: Why is the mitzvah called emunah? Emunah is the opposite of yediah. Knowledge and belief are opposite things.

EMUNAH MEANS EMES, ABSOLUTE TRUTH

The difficulty with the question is that, (my grandfather, Rav Avigdor Miller, always used to say over and over): What is the definition of the word emunah? What does emunah mean in lashon hakodesh? It means "emes." It means absolute certainty. That's why we say "Amen." When you hear a brachah and answer Amen, you are saying, אמת ונכון הדבר. He brings many sources that it means emes. If the mitzvah of emunah means emes, the question must be re-examined. The question was: How could there be a mitzvah of emunah, belief in Hashem, since it's a yediah, a fact?

The answer is: The whole premise of the question is wrong. Emunah doesn't mean "to believe." Emunah means "emes." The premise of this question seems to have been that emunah means belief - and it's not belief. Emunah means emes. Why can't it be that emunah means emes? Hashem says: It should be nesames (true, validated) to you. Hashem wants it to be absolute emes, barur. It should be emes gamur, complete, unshakable emes that there is a Hashem. That's what it should be. That's what real knowledge is. Real knowledge is something that I have clear, with unshakable clarity. There are different levels of knowledge.

The way the ba'alei mussar answered this question is that there is something called yediah chushis and there's yediah sichlis. There's something that's called sensory knowledge and something that's called intellectual knowledge. When a child develops, he learns that five and five is ten. He believes his teacher. When he develops his mind more, he then knows that five and five is ten. The first time he hears that five and five is ten, he's not sure why. If you ask a child, "Why isn't it nine?" he says, "The teacher said it's ten." In the beginning they know just the concept. Afterwards they understand, "What do you mean? How can it be nine? It's five and five. It's a fact." In the beginning, that fact, they don't have. That's called sensory knowledge. And there's intellectual knowledge. Emunah chushis and there's emunah sichlis.

The question is no question because the mitzvah of emunah is that a person should internalize, and יתבאר ויתאמת אצל האדם emunah with unshakable emes this fact, that Hashem is running the world. The fact that the Brisker Rav thought it was a kasha and the fact that Rav Chaim Soloveitchik thought it was a kasha means it is a good question! The answer seems to be too simple so you have to go more deeply into it. They should understand that it is a great question.

So therefore the fellow had this question and he wasn't sure what to do. Eventually, he said, he went to his rebbi, Rav Dovid Soloveitchik, and he spoke to his rebbi. No, No. First he went to different talmidim in Brisk, who heard this piece over. He first went to the talmidim of Rav Berel, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik (1820-1892), and he got from them kesavim of how they wrote over the piece from Rav Chaim and the Brisker Rav with additions - and he writes them all over in his sefer, and he refined what he discovered and reached the following conclusion:

There's no shaylah that the mitzvah of emunah means emes v'yatziv, an absolute yediah. But the mitzvah of emunah is much bigger than yediah. The mitzvah of emunah is believing in something beyond what you know and understand. It is a whole new level of emes. Really emunah means emes. It means emes to the degree that there's no safek. There's not even 1% safek of what is true. Emunah means emes. Mitzad that emes and emunah are one thing, but still in all, there is a specific level of emunah that does not have shaychus to emes. On that level, the mitzvah of emunah is: Emunah that's not shayach to emes. You know how? I'll explain it. Anything that the human mind can fathom, the human mind could digest. I could come to the absolute emes - to the degree that the human mind can fathom something, I could come to emes. But what if there is something that's beyond human comprehension? In that, all I could have is emunah-not-with-emes.

Rav Shach's kasha was like this. Rav Shach asked his question regarding something that's beyond human comprehension. In other words, the absolute emes in my mind is limited to the madreigah of my seichel. However, you know it's possible that you can know something "more-emes" than I can know. You know how? If your mental capabilities are stronger than mine. Take a child, for example, who knows that five and five is ten. He can't fathom at that level the fact that five and five is ten. He'll know it. He'll say it. He'll believe it. But it's not "emes" to him. It's only a level of emunah. It's only as emes-dik as his mind is capable of grasping. But a mathematician can fathom and understand why five and five is ten and on his level of understanding it is more emes than it is for the child.

EMUNAH ON A SLIDING SCALE

Rav Shach asked a bomb kasha. The Brisker Rav had a bomb kasha. He said, of course emes means emunah. But he said the fact that you call the mitzvah of emunah "emunah," and you don't call it emes, implies that there is some makom, a place where the ultimate level of emunah is dependent upon belief. He said: What's the place of belief? That

is the level of absolute emes. וידעת היום. It says וידעת, you know it. Knowing Hashem is emes. That's not emunah at all. Again, with something in my life that's fathomable by a man, the ultimate level of emunah is when you reach emes. And the emes depends for each person on his level (i.e. his capabilities in avodas Hashem). If Hashem gave me a mitzvah l'ha'amin, to believe in the metzius of Hashem, that means to say it's a variable belief. He asks a gevaldige kasha. What do you mean? וידעת היום, it's fact. A pashute zach. Everybody knows that Hashem created the world. That's a gevaldige kasha. So Rav Shach came to the Brisker Rav, who told him, in the mitzvah of emunah, the yediah has to be mitzad the emunah - and not mitzad the seichel. What did Rav Chaim Soloveitchik answer? Rav Chaim answered him that the mitzvah of emunah begins where yediah ends. That's where the mitzvah of emunah begins.

To the extent of comprehension that I have and that I could figure out there exists a Creator with my mind - that's not called emunah at all. That is yediah.

Emunah begins when I reach the point of believing that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is above and beyond my faculty of comprehension. That Hashem is not limited to time. Hashem is not limited to place. Hashem has no gevul and no limitation and no anything. But knowing there is Hashem, that's not a mitzvah of emunah. That's taka yediah. Therefore, that was a gevaldige kasha. Rav Shach wanted to know ein hachi nami, in any case emes means emunah. The mitzvah is not called "emes." The mitzvah is called emunah. Why don't you call it "yediah"? Call it yediah. You don't use the term emunah only on something that's a fluid situation. But even that Rav Shach says: Okay, it's fluid. Your emunah is not my emunah. I have stronger emunah than you. You have stronger emunah. He has stronger emunah. But that's not called emunah. Your yediah is a bit bigger, just like a child who knows five and five, an adult knows five and five. It's not pshat he has more emunah than a child. This guy has a higher yediah level. So the kasha was, it's a yediah level.

LIMITED UNTIL HE HAD NEVUAH

Participant: You're saying Avraham Avinu was not mekayem the mitzvah of emunah until Hashem revealed Himself to him through nevuah?

The Brisker Rav explains that Avraham Avinu was only capable of coming to a madreigah of emunah that he could reach al pi his seichel. He couldn't come to any emunah on the ultimate level. He could only come to yediah. Avraham Avinu was able to arrive at yediah based on looking at and studying this world. His seichel was mugbal. It was limited. It was hagshamah pashut (limiting something in terms of physicality). That's called pashut, being magbil, you're making Hashem "m'gusham." You can't do that. You're making Hashem megusham. You're making Hashem a metzius. You can't give Hashem a metzius. That's only a seicheldike zach. So Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham and told him, "Nein, that's mere yediah taka."

"EMUNAH UNLIMITED" BY AVRAHAM AVINU

So if the mitzvah of emunah was to believe, kefi (according) to the amount that the seichel was mechayev you, and kefi our yediah, then your mitzvah of emunah and my mitzvah of emunah will be two different mitzvos. Then we wouldn't even need a mitzvah, taka. We wouldn't need emunah to be a mitzvah. It would all be yediah. Each guy would be obligated to try to know the most possible. There would never be such a mitzvah of emunah then. We should just say there's a mitzvah of yediah.

But the emes is it's not the pshat. We have no yediah sichlis. The mitzvah of emunah has nothing to do with intellectual yediah about Hashem, because Hashem is bilti mugbal. Hashem is not limited, not in zman and not in makom. The metzius, according to the seichel ha'adam, always puts a limitation in Hashem and a person cannot be makir, it's not shayach for a person to have any concept of something that's not mugbal. It's pigul, and it's asur to have that thought. If a person arrives at belief in Hashem based only on what he perceives in This World that's very limited and that's going to be a thought of pigul. If a person has emunah because of his seichel it's going to be asur.

Avraham Avinu needed the nevuah. Even though he came to hasagah of תאמר עולם בלא מנהיג, Hashem said, "Actually, you don't have anything. Avraham was already making geirim. He was making geirim to Hashem before he had emunah in Hashem. He didn't know that he hadn't yet acquired the highest levels of emunah. He only knew what his seichel was mechayev him and he proceeded based on what he had acquired so far.

The Brisker Rav explained a gevaldige zach. He said what's the pshat in the passuk when it says וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך כי ה' הוא האלקים אין עוד מלבדו? You know what it means to say? It means that a person could strengthen his emunah in Hashem. That has to be to the highest possible level. It is a process: First I must know what the mitzvah of emunah is: to try to strengthen that emunah and make it as strong as possible, then, והשבות אל לבבך, I internalize it. That means the yediah has to come mitzad the emunah. Let me explain.

REACHING YEDIAH THROUGH EMUNAH, NOT THROUGH SEICHEL

Let's say I can have a yediah of something from my seichel, or I can have yediah from a belief. For example, my father tells me something. I don't know if it's true. You know what I say? "I know this and this happened yesterday." Somebody says, "How do you know? You were there?" "No, but I know for certain it happened." "How do you know?" "Because I heard." "You heard? Maybe you heard it from a liar! So...who did you hear it from? Some guy on the street?"

He says, “No. I heard it from my father.” “Oh, you heard it from your father. So you can trust him.” But what if taka, you heard it from a guy in the street? Then would you have that same level of emunah? No. Would you say you know? No. In that case, you would say, “I heard that yesterday this and this happened.” When your father or your grandfather or your uncles say it, now you say, “I know for sure.”

Hashem told us in the Torah what the mitzvah of emunah is. Hashem revealed to Avraham what the mitzvah of emunah is. My yediah has to come mitzad the emunah. I have to relate to Hashem and say: If this is the mitzvah, if Hashem tells me this is what He is, I know. Not this is what I believe. This is what I heard.

One guy goes to a class and comes home and tells his wife, “You know, I just heard an interesting thing about Hashem.” She says, “Who did you hear it from? Some guy in the bar?” “I heard it from a rabbi.” She says, “Nu memeilah.” Another guy comes and says, “I heard it from a big rabbi.” Another guy says, “I heard it from the gadol hador.” Now, that’s a fact. That’s not “I believe, I heard.” It’s “I know.” We have to have that; knowledge of Hashem has to be “knowledge” to me because of my emunah.

This is a brilliant Brisker fundamental shtickel in the mitzvah of emunah.

In Summary

At the start of Avraham’s recognition of Hashem he grasped Hashem’s greatness in a limited manner - as much as his seichel made blatantly clear to him. To help Avraham reach his fuller potential, Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham in a nevuah - that was when Avraham could grasp that the existence of Hashem was far beyond anything his seichel could fathom. As Avraham Avinu passed nisayon after nisayon set by Hashem, he developed in his emunah. Avraham went from grasping Hashem’s greatness through his seichel and a basic yediah, to eventually reaching emes and emunah on a higher level that was an unlimited yediah of Hashem’s existence and His qualities. This week I will do exercises on turning emunah into yediah; I will think about emunah as a spiritual escalator and how a challenge in life could exist to help me reach a higher level of emunah and closeness to Hashem.