

Emunah Is a Work in Progress

The parsha opens by describing Noah as an “ish tzaddik, tamim” in his generation. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 6a) explains that Noah was a tzaddik in his actions and tamim in his ways, as he was extremely humble. This explanation fits well with the description of Noah at the end of last week’s parsha. The final pasuk of Parshas Bereishis tells us, “וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַדִּיק וְתָמִים” — Noah found chein in the eyes of Hashem. Chein, which does not have an exact English translation, is generally translated as grace. The Ramban explains that Noah found chein in Hashem’s eyes precisely because he was a tzaddik tamim, and all his actions were pleasing in the eyes of Hashem.

In Living Emunah on the Parashah, Rabbi Ashear quotes Bereishis Rabbah (32:6), which teaches that despite Noah’s greatness, he did not enter the teivah immediately when the Mabul began because of a small deficiency in his emunah.

The Be’er Mayim Chaim (Bereishis 7:5:2) asks how Chazal could describe Noah as lacking emunah when the Torah itself calls him a tzaddik tamim. He explains that Noah truly believed that Hashem would have mercy on His world and would not destroy everything. Noah understood Hashem’s command to build the teivah as a means of awakening the people of his generation to do teshuva, which would save them from the decree. This explains why Noah waited until the waters reached his ankles before entering the teivah, when he had no choice but to go inside.

We learn from here that even someone on Noah’s lofty level of a tzaddik tamim can experience a deficiency in emunah. Emunah is an area of avodas Hashem that requires constant effort and growth.

This is an important lesson for us to internalize, especially when facing challenges and nisyonos. It is not always easy to maintain our emunah when difficulties arise. The key is to continue working on it each day. Even if a person does not initially respond to a nisayon with emunah, but later reflects on what happened and recognizes Hashem’s hashgacha, that itself is a great madreiga and a step in the right direction.

May we all be zoche to recognize Hashem’s hashgacha in our lives and continue growing in our emunah until we reach emunah sheleimah!

Chinuch

Rav Berkovits explains that from a very young age, it is important to teach our children to turn to Hashem and ask Him for whatever they need. At the same time, they should understand that just as parents sometimes have to say no, the same applies, lehavdil, to Hashem. We do not always receive what we ask for.

The best way to teach this is by setting an example. When looking for a parking spot, preparing for a test, or even searching for something that was lost, say out loud, “Hashem, please help me.” Encourage your children to do the same. When things work out, remind them to thank Hashem. In this way, turning to Hashem becomes a natural part of their everyday lives.

Believe in Yourself

Rashi (Bereishis 7:7) explains that Noah was מְקַטְנֵי אֱמוּנָה, meaning that he had difficulty fully believing that the Mabul would actually come. How could Noah, who heard directly from Hashem that the Mabul was coming, have lacked faith?

R’ Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev explains that Noah certainly believed in Hashem. What he lacked was belief in himself and the power of his tefillos and actions. He did not fully recognize that he had the ability to influence the situation and perhaps prevent the Mabul through his tefillos.

We must learn from this to believe in ourselves and recognize the impact we can have. Each of us has the ability to make a difference and even change the world, just as Avraham Avinu did. It all begins with believing in what we are capable of accomplishing.

Scenario

You’ve heard many shiurim about the importance of controlling our phone usage. You know that you spend more time on your phone than you should, and you would like to change that. Yet, with so much of your daily life and work depending on your phone, where do you even begin?

Something to Think About

Our lives are busy, and many of us take care of much of our work through our phones. Rav Berkovits explains that we must be honest with ourselves and recognize how excessive phone usage affects our lives and our menuchas hanefesh. Once we acknowledge this, we can begin to work on improving.

A practical way to start is by choosing one tefillah each day when you will leave your phone in the car. Make this a commitment for one week, regardless of how busy your day may be. Initially, you may feel the urge to check your phone, but resist it and focus on your davening. After a few days, you may begin to notice how much easier it is to concentrate without the constant distraction.

Once you have successfully done this for a week, try extending it to two tefillos a day. The key is to start small, remain consistent, and gradually build on your accomplishments. Over time, you will develop greater control over your phone usage and experience more menuchas hanefesh throughout your day.

Story

A Rebbe once called over a bais medrash bochur who had been in his shiur for three years and told him that it was time to move on to another yeshiva.

The bochur was taken aback and asked his Rebbe why he needed to leave.

The Rebbe explained, “You have already gained what you can from my shiur, and I believe you are capable of accomplishing much more. That is why I want you to move on.”

The bochur accepted his Rebbe’s advice and went to another yeshiva. Even many years later, the bochur continued to draw strength from his Rebbe’s confidence in him. Knowing that his Rebbe believed in his abilities gave him the encouragement to keep growing and accomplishing more throughout his life.

Sometimes, the greatest encouragement we can give someone is simply letting them know how much we believe in them.

This Week's Review of Pele Yoetz | Days 125-130

יִתְרוֹן – Escaping the Competition

It is a bad middah to desire to have more than others. A person who constantly measures himself against others can never be truly happy. Their money, honor, or success pains him, while his own accomplishments never satisfy him.

This can be even worse in spiritual matters. If a person wants to surpass others in Torah and mitzvos because he wants them to accomplish less, he is opposing Hashem's desire. Hashem wants his friend's Torah and mitzvos! He may even feel pain when others are praised and satisfaction when they are put down.

The jealousy praised by Chazal is entirely different. It means being inspired by another's greatness to grow like him, not wishing that he should become smaller. A person should aspire to the highest levels, not for honor or reward, but to bring nachas to Hashem.

One who truly desires Hashem's honor rejoices when others grow in their avodas Hashem. He escapes imaginary competition, loves others, and rejoices in their success. Fortunate is such a person in this world and the next!



Stop and Ponder

When someone else succeeds, do I want to grow like him or wish that he had accomplished less?

יְרִידָה – The Path of Humility

It is better to lower oneself and be asked to ascend than to place oneself too high and be asked to descend. A person should honestly recognize his place and position himself slightly below it. One should seek the company of those greater than himself to learn from them, rather than those beneath him so he can feel superior. As Chazal teach: It is better to be the tail of lions than the head of foxes. Humility enables a person to acquire Torah. He should learn from every person, honor the poor, gladden the downtrodden, pursue peace, love people and bring them closer to Torah, and greet everyone pleasantly. He should never feel too distinguished for such behavior. True honor is honoring Hashem through beautiful conduct. Regarding marriage, one should generally seek a wife slightly below his social standing. However, one who needs financial support to devote himself to Torah need not fear marrying into a more prestigious family.



Stop and Ponder

Do I look for honor and prestige or do I act with humility?

יְאוּשׁ – Hope in Every Situation

One should not assume that because life is presently going smoothly, difficulties cannot come. Remembering that circumstances can change prepares a person to accept whatever Hashem sends in the future, and as well, strengthens his sense of yiras Shamayim.

Likewise, one should remember that life can end unexpectedly. He should keep his affairs and records in order, instruct his family, and, most importantly, use his time in this world wisely.

Certainly, when it comes to hoping for good, there is no room for despair. Even if a sword rests upon a person's neck, he should not despair of Hashem's compassion (Berachos 10b). "One who trusts in Hashem is surrounded by kindness" (Tehillim 32:10). Certainly, we must continue anticipating the geulah.



Stop and Ponder

Am I mentally, emotionally, and practically prepared for whatever Hashem will send my way?

יְגִיעָה – Created to Work

Chazal teach: "I toiled and did not succeed" — do not believe him; "I did not toil and succeeded" — do not believe him. Achievement in Torah requires effort. Man was created to work, and the greater his effort, the greater the nachas he brings Hashem and the greater his reward.

A person was not created to enjoy physical pleasures, but to serve Hashem faithfully with thought, speech, and action. The more ability he has, the more is expected of him.

A Jew should live simply according to his needs and devote his strength to Torah and mitzvos. The physical world belongs to Eisav, not Yaakov. Even after all his great effort, he should consider whether he could accomplish more. This world is the place for labor; the next world is the place for rest and enjoying the fruits of that labor.



Stop and Ponder

Am I using the abilities the Hashem gave me to their fullest?

יִין – Drinking with Boundaries

Shlomo Hamelech warns, "Do not look upon wine when it is red" (Mishlei 23:31). Wine can lead a person to serious aveiros when misused.

Although wine can be used properly, limitations are necessary. Yonadav ben Reichav instructed his descendants to abstain entirely. While complete abstinence may not always be practical, a person should establish sensible limits for himself and teach his children restraint. A guideline of no more than two cups of wine per meal is recommended, although circumstances differ. Above all, even drinking should be l'shem Shamayim.



Stop and Ponder

Have I established proper boundaries so that my drinking remains under my control?