

פרשת יתרו

This adaptation is dedicated in honor
of my wife, Devorah.

ולרפואה שלימה ל' זעלדע ברכה בת חוה לאה רחל

"וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חתן משה את כל אשר
עשה אלקים" (יח, א)

**"And Yisro, the minister of Midian, the
father-in-law of Moshe, heard
everything that Hashem did."**

What did Yisro hear? He heard about the splitting of the Yam Suf and the war with Amalek. He heard, he abandoned his family and all manners of idolatry that he had engaged in, he converted and came under the shelter of the *Shechina*. This is the explanation of the expression, "The ear hears the words of Torah and the entire body receives vitality." As the *pasuk* states, "Incline your ear and come to Me, hearken and your soul shall live."¹ **Via listening to the words of Torah – the entire soul is resuscitated.**²

"תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש" (יט, ו)
**"You shall be to Me a kingdom of
ministers and a holy nation"**

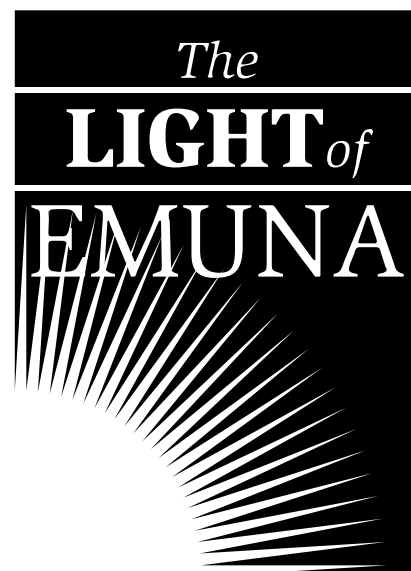
How can holiness and pious people be relevant to a simple person like me? They are such distant concepts from my current station!

This is precisely what HKB"H wants of us – that we add a little more holiness and, then, even a little more holiness in our lives. "You shall be holy, for I am holy."³ Hashem proclaims that since He is holy, He wants us to emulate Him. Hashem does not give up on us or settle. We evolve directly from Hashem and if He is holy, we too must become sanctified. **Every minor**

¹ הטו אזנכם ולכו אלי שמעו ותחי נפשכם (ישעיהו נה, ג)

² שמות רבה כז, ט

³ קדשים תהיו כי קדוש אני (ויקרא יט, ב)



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

motion that a Jew makes in the direction of sacredness creates a tremendous commotion in Heaven – and is such a source of pleasure to Hashem. If we are inspired to concentrate while praying, to engross ourselves a little less in gluttony, to guard our eyes, to learn to forego, to perform some kindness – that is the proper route! There is no other course. It is life or death.

This world is liable to mislead us to entirely neglect the true goal for which we are here. It distracts our outlook and prevents us from staying focused on our objective – towards the greatness of the Creator and all of the boundless kindness that Hashem showers upon us. **We become enchanted by the inanity of this world and we forget what is important, what can truly gladden us and fill our souls.**

Aharon Hakohen received eternal *kahuna*. Dovid Hamelech was awarded perpetual royalty. And we, the Jewish people, received everlasting holiness. The sanctity of the Jewish nation is eternal. It is our attachment to Hashem. There is absolutely no physical pleasure that is even close to comparable to the spiritual bliss of the soul that clings to its Creator.

We must begin to consecrate ourselves – otherwise we fall to the Golden Calf, G-d forbid. Each of us have our own Golden Calf. Even if it is so difficult – we must begin. If we wish Hashem

to be patient with us, we must exhibit patience towards ourselves and those around us. We cannot accomplish everything all at once and realizing that fact can cause terrible depression. We must not become disheartened by what we have not yet achieved – but we must also not absolve ourselves of the obligation. “It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it.”⁴ We must know that we are capable. **“Every single Jew contains a precious soul that has the great power to withstand the yetzer hora and its minions. We need only acknowledge the strength of the soul.”**⁵

Holiness is *dveykus* (clinging) to Hashem – constantly yearning and pining for more closeness. All of our *hisbodedus* is longing for our Father.

Our entire mission in life is to build a sanctuary in our hearts for the *Shechina* to reside in. **At those moments in which we merit having Hashem situated in our hearts – our souls burst with vitality, wonderful pleasantness and we realize that the world was created for this very purpose.** This is from where we draw the strength and might to toil and labor in the service of Hashem. This is from where we draw the strength to withstand the base urges and negative inclinations - the dispiritedness and the fatigue.

Our two hands are like two wings with which we can awaken and lift ourselves. That is why people move their hands when they pray or speak – like birds of flight who are elevated by the flapping of their wings - attaining amazing heights. With the toil of our hands, with fortification, with awesome and deep inner effort, with overcoming challenges, with clarifying confusions and disrupting them – each person, in each generation, at each time and place, each with his own challenges – must reveal G-dliness. **And when the light is**

⁴ לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה (אבות ב, טז)

⁵ ליקו"ת ז

revealed from amidst all of these constrictions – the result is such magnificent enjoyment. That is the principal manifestation of Hashem’s compassion – that He envelopes us in this ecstasy, in this powerful embrace. **Hashem created the world for this very bliss.** Yearning and longing are the skills of the soul and the heart – the most powerful attributes. **With these capacities, we can achieve astonishing things.** We may be lacking in accomplishments or talents – but we can always yearn for them.⁶

What is the definition of a holy man? A holy man is one who is not interested in being great, important or famous – he does not aspire to be seen or heard. **A holy person is one who is entirely refined, self-nullified and submissive.** He does not mingle where he does not belong, he does not need to hear the sound of his own voice when it is not appropriate – he constantly focuses on the goal – constantly clinging to Hashem.

R’ Zalman, the brother of R’ Chaim of Volozhin, was known as an expert in all of Torah, both written and oral. He never spoke unnecessarily. When he wished to eat, he would begin discussing the *Halachos* of eating and his family would understand that he was hungry. When he was ready to go to sleep, he would talk about the laws of *Krias Shema*. His entire life was completely holy. **This is an example of why the tefillos of the tzaddikim and their blessings are readily received and they can bestow abundances of good and success upon others** – because they have holy mouths – mouths that do not speak superfluous words.

“Sing praises to the Lord, O you righteous; for the upright (straight), praise is fitting.”⁷ Those who look straight ahead - deserve honor. Once we look to the sides, we are finished – we become confused. **It is not called davening Shemona Esrei unless we close our eyes or look directly into the siddur.** If we look around, we are not

⁶ באור פני מלך חיים
⁷ רננו צדיקים ב', לישירים נאווה תהילה (תהילים לג, א)

really davening, we are not truly speaking to Hashem - it is not called *Shemona Esrei*.

Being holy requires a bit of separation – not only from those things that are prohibited – but also from those things that are technically permissible but are unnecessary. The Rambam writes: “Even though these things are not sins, they still count as a desecration of God's Name. Such things include ... being excessively merry, or eating and drinking a lot amongst ignoramuses ... one should speak to others in a reposed manner and receive them with a pleasant expression ... and respect even those who have cursed him, conduct business with *emuna*, give and forgive others, keep his word, never causing stress to others, to be amongst the persecuted and not the persecutors, the insulted and not the insolent.”⁸

A truly holy person sees nothing in front of his eyes aside from Hashem.

We must acknowledge that there is nothing aside from Hashem. A person can reach a level where he sees nothing else. He only sees Hashem and does not even notice insults. Once we begin the process, Heaven speeds us along the way.

We are not there yet. We may learn Torah and perform *mitzvos* but Hashem is mostly concealed from us. **This world works to obscure Hashem from our lives and our primary task is to remove the partition between us and HKB”H.**

Life is meant to be used to increase holiness and thereby connect to Hashem. Holiness means to be slightly above “reality.” We must be like the ladder of Yaakov's dream – standing on earth, heads in the Heavens. We must close our eyes as much as possible – not merely to avoid forbidden sights – but from all sorts of distractions. At ninety years of age, the Chofetz Chaim zt”l used to still *daven* for Divine Assistance in guarding his eyes.

The Vilna Gaon used to say that a person comes

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הלכות יסודי התורה

to this world only to triumph in one thing that we say each day in *Krias Shema*: “and you will not turn aside after your hearts and after your eyes” – not only to avoid forbidden sights, but also to avoid disconnecting from Hashem. **When we close our eyes we do not see all of the things that divert us.** Open eyes cause us to be easily sidetracked – jumping from thought to thought.

The Power of Speech. We speak so much *loshon hora* – we derive so much energy from talking about the deficiencies of others – and when we do so, we feel so good about and proud of ourselves. We often lower ourselves and adopt the language of the streets (street slang), forgetting that we are here to represent something else. Why should we use the word “bye” in place of the word “Shalom” – which is also one of Hashem's names? Doing so denies who we are and what we are here for.

And Falsehood. Falsehood is not merely the opposite of truth. Dishonesty includes slight exaggerations, cutting corners. Rebbe Nachman taught that one who wishes to cling to Hashem should take caution not to lie, even inadvertently. In just one day – how many answers do we give imprecisely? How many deviations, how many avoidances? And how often do we just outright mislead? If that is in a day – how many in a week?

A student of the Chofetz Chaim noted that his Rebbe still had perfect teeth in his mid-eighties. The Chofetz Chaim explained, “I guarded the mouth that HKB”H gave me – so Hashem protected my mouth for me.”

It is so beneficial to remain quiet at times. So often we feel obligated to speak, to tell others, to not give in – we feel we must respond. Instead, we should forego, remain silent – and take note of how everything works out better and faster.

More and more holiness. Our entire response must be to add holiness – otherwise we are completely misguided – we are devoted to ourselves instead of to Hashem. **An arrogant**

man has no sanctity – he wants everything for himself, he consecrates only for himself.

We attain devoutness with unlimited prayers.

In Heaven they will not ask us why we had a *yetzer hora*, why we did not vanquish the *yetzer hora* or why we had base urges. In Heaven, they know the composition of man. They will only ask, “Why did you not *daven*? You repeatedly beheld that you had a *yetzer hora* that you could not defeat on your own – so, why did you not *daven* all day, from the depths of your heart? Not just a few words – at least half an hour a day - that Hashem help you guard your eyes, that He enable you to prevail over your evil inclination!”⁹

To renounce the pleasures of this world, we must have an alternative. **The sweet flavor of holiness is the substitute.** How is it that every Jew does not dance day and night?

Simultaneously, how does that same Jew not cry from longing day and night? **How do we, children of Hashem, lose sight for even one minute of He Who fills the Heaven and the Earth and sets aside everything, above and below, and desires only us?** How are we able to so easily give up on all of the greatness and unlimited secrets that await us every moment? How are we led astray by an insignificant and frivolous world that disappoints at every step and leaves nothing of us in the end?

When a person becomes sacred, he can no longer think only of himself. The light of a *tzaddik* is the light of the love for fellow Jews. **When a Jew is purified – he worries about others.** He is careful not to do anything that may hurt anyone else. He does everything to bring joy to others. He sees the beauty of others, each one’s special uniqueness, **especially at home.**

תפילה

Master of the World! Help me be like these holy *tzaddikim*, who are completely attached to you. This can be observed within every motion and step of theirs. Yet, when someone turns to them, when someone needs them, even if they are in the middle of something else, in middle of learning, in middle of *davening* – they immediately abandon everything – **they are utterly committed to others.** They give the person in need the feeling that there is nothing more important than them. Help me, Father, to be like them, to place myself off to the side a bit and others in the center.

Master of the World! Help me pursue *chesed* - to grab opportunities, like one who seeks great treasure - even if it is not easy, even if it does not suit me. Like these holy *tzaddikim*, who, whenever there is a family from out of town who have nowhere to eat or sleep for Shabbos – they act with such goodwill, with such self-sacrifice – they pay no attention to their own discomfort or what might be disagreeable to most - because they know that it is Your will, Father – thus, they have all of the strength in the world. **Help us to also be like them.**

Master of the World! Help me that I desire that people not pay me any heed, that they not see or hear me – that I should even be overjoyed at being overlooked. **Help me, Father, that my ego not swell from my successes, that I ultimately have *emuna* that I cannot move a finger without You.** Today, I merely pay lip service to this notion, but I do not truly feel it. When I succeed at something, rather than feel pride in how successful I am - to think about how compassionate You are, Father, that You help me succeed.

Help me Father that I accustom myself to remain silent, to shut my eyes, not to listen to what is irrelevant to me – and to increasingly think about You, to speak to You, to remember You – at every single moment.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

Dov Elias

Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha’Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai *Shlita* and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha’Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha’Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*. Thank you Mordy Blass for your help with some of the Hebrew expressions.

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