

פרשת בחוקתי

This adaptation is dedicated in honor
of my dear wife, Devorah,
and my dear daughter, Chaviva.

"אם בחוקתי תלכו ואת מצותי תשמרו" (כו, ג)
"If you will follow My decrees and
observe My commandments"

The Gemara¹ teaches that whoever engages in Torah study for its own sake, protects the entire world. If the world would be completely devoid of Torah for even one moment, G-d forbid – all worlds would immediately be destroyed. Thus, **every single Jew has the astounding power to preserve all worlds and all of Creation by occupying himself with and meditating on the holy Torah.** We must always consider the possibility that there is no one else engrossed in Torah at the present moment, G-d forbid – and, if we were to refrain from learning - everything would be annihilated.²

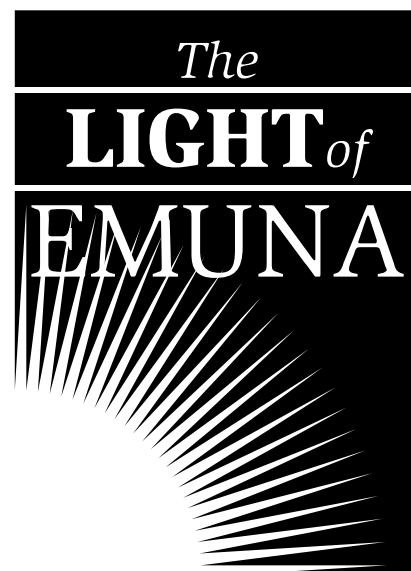
"אם בחוקתי תלכו" (כו, ג)
"If you will follow My decrees"

It is not enough to learn Torah – we must proceed with it, live with it, glean the way of life from it. That is true striving in Torah. That is why Rashi interprets this *pasuk* to mean, "You must **toil** in Torah."

A Jew is bound to Torah. There is no such thing as a Jew who is entirely detached from Torah. **Within the heart of every Jew there pulsates a Divine soul that is pure and clear and filled with love for Hashem and His Torah.** We must connect to this innermost point. A Jew who learns Torah is like a fish in water – only there does he have vigor, only there is it good for him. If it leaves the water – it dies, G-d forbid. There are three people for Whom HKB"H cries

¹ סנהדרין צט:

² הגאון ר' חיים וולז'ין זצ"ל



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

every day, the first is one who is capable of engaging in Torah but does not do so.³ Torah is our life and the length of our days - a guidebook to living a good life. Everyone seeks quality of life, peace of mind and zest for life – all of which are found within Torah. Living with Torah is living with the unlimited wisdom of the Creator of the World. It is absolutely different – why live deceitfully if we can live faithfully?

When a person engages in Torah, he polishes his soul - cleaning it, scraping away the filth. Only via Torah can a person truly escape negative traits and improve himself. **Our purpose is to toil and labor in Torah. HKB"H repays us according to our hard work** – the more effort, the more reward. No matter his situation, man was born to work. If he is worthy, his work will be in Torah – if not, it will be under the yokes of the materialistic world. We must evaluate what is valuable to us - empty and fleeting pleasures that are filled with bitterness and sadness vs. **the sweet labor of the holy Torah that brings blessing and joy - and illuminates the world.**

A person proceeds through this world on a quest for physical satisfaction of all sorts of urges and false spiritual gratification. He thinks that, through them, he will attain serenity and build a legacy. But, the soul is not content. As the Ramchal teaches in *Mesilas Yesharim*, it is

³ חגיגה ה:

comparable to a villager who marries a princess. When he brings her everything the world has to offer – it is all meaningless to her because she is the daughter of the King's. Such is the soul of a Jew – all of the delicacies of this world are insignificant to it. It is from someplace so much higher – no passion of the physical world can satisfy the soul of the weary and unsettled Jew. Rebbe Nachman explained that the *yetzer hora* wanders the world with clenched fists, offering every person what he has in his hands. Each person is convinced that the elusive answer that he has been pursuing his entire life is contained within those clasped hands. They all follow him until, at the end of their lives, he opens his hands and reveals that there is nothing in them. **They ran after nothing.**

Man is fashioned of matter - but there is a spirit contained within. The body and the soul work simultaneously. The body pulls towards the depths of the Earth, while the soul spreads its wings. Since it was decreed that they coexist, life is an obscure and unending struggle between them. **It is impossible to have it both ways – to acquire the pleasures of this world while also earning the sweetness of serving Hashem – it is one or the other.**

Observing the Torah requires exertion – we only believe one who says that he has achieved, if he also exerted. R' Akiva left home for *yeshiva* for twelve years. When he heard his wife say she would be agreeable to his staying another twelve years, he returned immediately - without even entering the house. **A person must be willing to sacrifice - otherwise he cannot learn or observe Torah, he cannot accept the yoke of Torah.** The yoke of Torah demands diligence: to awaken early, to limit our indulgence in sleep, to minimize our consumption of luxuries, to distance ourselves from bodily pleasures and to maximize our time - dedicating it to Torah and holiness.

Tzaddikim shed many tears over each *mitzvah*. The *Kloizenberger Rebbe* cried bitterly so as not to lose any opportunity to do a *mitzvah* in the concentration camps! He shed rivers of tears not

to be forced to violate Shabbos, not to be forced to eat non-kosher food. Once, he was taken to a camp that was sparsely populated – of its once six thousand residents, only two thousand remained. As soon as he arrived, mealtime was announced. The Rebbe refused to partake and instead went to a corner to cry bitterly, “I do not want to become repulsive via their food.” Suddenly, a man appeared and told him that someone was looking for him. He assumed it was the capo who wanted to kill him - refusing a meal was cause for a death sentence. Instead, it was an elderly Jew offering the Rebbe a loaf of bread and a plate of jam. The Rebbe later attested, “At that moment, I recognized the miracle – I understood that Hashem was watching me, that Hashem was with me.”

To be immersed in Torah requires an iron will and many *tefillos* to be able not only to learn but also to fulfill what we learn in areas of holiness, *emuna* and interpersonal relationships.

Toiling in Torah continues until our final moment. In his final moments, when it was too difficult for him to write or even to speak too much, Rebbe Nossan still managed to teach his students new ideas about Shabbos candles. He died within the hour of teaching his final lesson.⁴

ל"ג בעומר

There is such joy, such excitement, such vitality, such singing and dancing – that it is difficult to describe what occurs in *Meron*, at the great *hilula* of R' Shimon bar Yochai. R' Shimon bar Yochai is the secrets of Torah – we do not understand, but we feel.

“Inside, near the holy grave, already days before Lag B'Omer, there is great and boundless inspiration. The structure is filled with people engaging in *davening*, *hisbodedus* and *teshuva*. Especially on Erev Lag B'Omer, one cannot describe the enormity of the enthusiasm of everyone who enters. At the moment that they

⁴ ליקו"ה סוף הלכות ר"ח

bring the *Sefer Torah*, there is nothing like it – the sense of shame that people experience for being so distant from Hashem and the outpouring of love and repentance – tears flowing on their own accord. It surpasses even the emotions of *Kol Nidrei* and *Neilah* on Yom Kippur. One who has not witnessed this - has never beheld real inspiration. No royal wedding has ever compared.”⁵

There was a famous dispute in Yavneh in which the Sages of Israel contended that Torah would someday be lost to Israel. R’ Shimon vehemently disagreed and said it would never happen.⁶ How was R’ Shimon so sure? Didn’t R’ Shimon know that there would be generations, like ours, of ostentation, superficiality, promiscuity and outrageous immorality? How could he be confident that Torah would not be lost? R’ Shimon knew about these generations - but he also knew the secrets of Torah – **that no matter how dark and distant things might become, when we seek Hashem, when we cry out from the heart to Hashem: “Where are You, I do not feel Your Presence, I am so distant” – Hashem will returns us to our higher purpose.**⁷

In the depths of his heart, a Jew seeks Hashem constantly. On one hand, our generation is ensconced in forgetfulness – on the other hand, it is entirely filled with yearning and longing. Moshe Rabbeinu gave us the revealed portion of Torah. **R’ Shimon brought down the concealed part, the innerness of Torah, the delight of being connected to Hashem – the gratification of loving Hashem and Hashem loving us.**

People have difficulty performing *mitzvos* because they only see the superficiality of the *mitzvah*. When they do not connect in a deep way - they take shortcuts, they skip. We must connect and never be become dejected by failure. We do *teshuva* and remain happy. Our souls are always righteous, pure and holy – sin cannot

touch them. **We sin because we are not happy. The very fact that we continue to fight the yetzer hora is a tremendous source of joy. Depth means being ecstatic with even a little.** Even if every one of our prayers is a zero, all we need is one to be a “1” and Hashem will place it in front of all of those zeroes – transforming it into an exorbitant figure.⁸

Depth is *emuna* and *bitachon* in Hashem. We receive amazing gifts in the merit of trusting Hashem. The Gemara⁹ tells a story of someone who was very poor, yet would borrow funds with which to honor Shabbos. He relied on HKB”H to repay the loans. “Astrologers told a wealthy idolater that Yosef ‘Who Cherishes Shabbos’ will consume all of his wealth. To protect himself, the idolater sold all of his possessions and bought a gem; he made a setting for it in his hat and put it there. While crossing a bridge; a wind blew his hat into the river and a fish ate the gem. The fish was caught on Erev Shabbos; Yosef bought it, found the gem inside and sold it for gold coins that filled 13 attics.”

On Lag B’Omer we light torches and fires. **Fire is excitement, clinging to Hashem, constantly leaping upward.** When a person is filled with fervor, things start to get better. *Tzaddikim* ignite us with the fire of love for Hashem. They connect us to elevated places, inspire us, warm us and give us hope. For these reasons, people are drawn to R’ Shimon from all over the world.

Moreinu Harav: On R’ Shimon’s *yahrzeit* all of the mountains are lit aflame, just as his mouth emitted sparks when he spoke words of Torah. Lag B’Omer is like *Kol Nidrei*: all is forgiven, erased. **All abundance, blessing, tefilla, Torah, sanctity and whatever else we need - can be readily acquired.**

R’ Shimon represents love of fellow Jews. He corrected the element of love that was lacking amongst R’ Akiva’s first 24,000 students. R’ Shimon understood that love of others and

⁵ ימי שמואל פרק נו

⁶ שבת קלח:

⁷ ליקו"ה גביית חוב מיתומים ג, יט

⁸ פנינים: "1"0000000000000000.....

⁹ שבת קיט.

generosity are above all else. After being sequestered in a cave with his son for twelve years, he noticed people involved in mundane activity. He could not tolerate their preference for temporal success over the eternal. Whatever and whoever he gazed upon were immediately burnt. A Heavenly Voice instructed him to return to the cave – “did you emerge to destroy my world.” Twelve months later, his son’s gaze continued to destroy, but his now cured. His perspective changed - he recognized that although one should ideally focus on clinging to Hashem, not everyone has been able to achieve that level yet - we must always judge them favorably. Even sinners still have hope. Every *mitzvah* that any Jew performs gives Hashem pleasure, even if they are not otherwise perfect. Indeed, on the Friday after they rejoined society, they saw an elderly Jew running with two myrtle

branches. They inquired as to the significance and he explained that one was for “*Zachor*” and one was for “*Shamor*.” R’ Shimon remarked, “See how precious *mitzvos* are to Jews.” Only then did they realize **the ultimate keys to truth: generosity and seeing the good in all.**

R’ Shimon taught us that Hashem never gives up on any Jew. If so, how can we allow ourselves to give up on another Jew? If they are children of Hashem, how can we try to avoid them or not be concerned about them? If we cannot tolerate other Jews – we have a troublesome problem.¹⁰

When there is light in our lives, we do not feel compelled to look at everyone else. When we experience darkness, we become obsessed with what others say and do – if there is light, there is only love.

תפילה

Master of the World! You have such amazing children – all they want is holiness and purity - to be holy. They cry like babies over every flaw and sin. They beg You for the miracle of Purim, the miracle of the Exodus, the miracle of Chanukah – so long as You extract them from the filth, the base urges, the negative attributes – so long as they only seek good from now on, only the pure and clear. How is it possible, Father, that I get angry at others, avoid them, disqualify them, refuse to tolerate them, fail to remember what righteous children You have, Father, who have such an ominous *yetzer hora* from You, yet they refuse to concede – they fight, they endeavor to improve. Do not allow me to forget this, Father.

Master of the World! Grant me the strength to never despair - even if I’ve previously entreated a million times, over many years, and I still have not been rescued. Help me, Father, to truly believe that salvation can really arrive in the “blink of an eye.” All of the time that has passed has weakened me a bit, it has become more difficult for me to believe that I will achieve. Protect me from all types of questions like: “how can it be that Hashem observes my patience and still does not save me” or “how can so many prayers and so much effort not help.” Master of the World, help me understand that it is impossible to fathom You and that everything that You do is only for my best - precisely what I need to come close to You and my ultimate purpose.

Master of the World! Help me look beyond myself and do for others. At times there are requests of the public to help and I always come up with excuses to exempt myself. After all, I am involved in other important things – those who are able to and have time should help. I am so impressed by those who dedicate hours on end to helping others. Where do they get the strength to put aside their own ambitions and do for others? How often do I pretend that I do not see the elderly man who puts out his hand to ask for a ride? After all, I am busy, people are waiting for me. Am I a taxi driver? When I do manage to stop and take him even beyond where he expected – I experience such sweetness in my soul. Help me, Father, to look beyond myself, to do a bit more for others – for doing so makes me experience You so strongly.

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 Mordi Blass for your help with some of the Hebrew expressions.

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¹⁰ באור פני מלך