



Parashat Shoftim 5770

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On the Parashah... "Emunat Chachamim"

[Tal Chermon]

"According to the Torah which they [the Sages] teach you and according to the law which they expound to you, shall you act, you shall not turn from that which they tell you - neither right nor left" (Devarim 17:11). "Even if they tell you that right is left and that left is right! And certainly if they say that right is right and left is left" (Rashi quoting Sanhedrin 89). This is what is meant by "Emunat Chachamim" - faith in the Sages. Some people think that faith must be blind and preclude understanding. This is a very shallow interpretation. It allows skeptics to say: "If faith is not a function of the intellect but rather some vague emotion that I personally do not feel, then there is no reason for me to believe." On the contrary, faith is the greatest exercise of intellect and the greatest achievement of philosophy that exists.

Faith in Sages means trust, communication, and a common point of reference. The Halachah speaks of the honor and reverence due to Torah scholars, but "Emunat Chachamim" is on a higher plane, it is a deep, pervasive, vital feeling of connection. Faith in the Sages is an extension of faith in G-d - an extension of our faith in The One Who gave us the Torah - to faith in those who continue to disseminate Torah. "And they believed in G-d and in His servant Moshe" (Shemot 14:31). "Emunat Chachamim" means faith in the Oral Torah, which has been handed down from one generation of Sages to the next, from the very beginning until this day. The Oral Torah is Divine and eternal and a direct extension of the Written Torah. However, it reaches us indirectly, on a more human plane, through Torah Scholars. It makes no difference if they have gained their Torah knowledge through intellectual analysis refined by years of Torah study until their thought processes parallel those of the Torah, or if they have achieved a "Divine Inspiration;" i.e., not something magical or a sudden prophesy, but an enlightened understanding likewise gained through years of Torah study, as it says in Baba Batra 12: "Prophesy was given to the Sages."

There are differences of opinion among Torah scholars, but all opinions are "G-d's living Torah." These opinions are likened to sparks flying from an anvil, breaking into 70 different rays, each one representing another facet of the "70 faces of Torah." All of these combined constitute one great, all inclusive truth. This should be our approach to Torah: To elevate and include all the "facets" of Torah. There are also, however, approaches which are outside the

bounds of the Torah. It requires hard work to identify, refine and purge them. There are also approaches outside the bounds of Torah, but which have sparks of holiness, requiring more delicate work to refine.

Therefore, no one should make light of his own abilities, treating his own thoughts, feelings, desires and tendencies as worthless. They are a reflection of the Image of G-d in which he was created. Faith in one's Rabbi does not imply subordination or relinquishing the right to think for oneself. It should rather uplift one's inborn tendencies by refining them, certainly not by forcing them into a mold which is foreign to himself. This process of refinement is painful at first, for one must detach himself from parts of his life which are in reality foreign to him, but to which he has become accustomed, and which become difficult and painful to do without.

Faith in the Sages means trusting them. Your connection to your Rabbi depends on your trust, and may be a long drawn-out process. There may be a conflict between the development of your ability to think critically and independently of your Rabbis and teachers, and the deep love and respect you feel for them. These two flames slowly unite into one bright torch.

"Intellectual analysis and a sense of faith and admiration for Men of G-d, the bearers of the great traditions wherein the treasures of the Divine are hidden - [these two approaches] differ psychologically [and subjectively] to a great extent" but "these two forces really complement each other" (Maran Ha-Rav Kook, Orot Ha-Kodesh 1, pp.47-48).

Faith in the Sages should not make one into something he is not, quite the opposite - his faith should help him refine and develop his own unique self tenfold. Sometimes, when one begins a rabbi-student relationship, he relinquishes his own personality as if he was an infant, but this is merely a transitional period until he undergoes a process of self-refinement. He then becomes his own man, able to think critically and freely for himself.

Rav Aviner on... Finding a Match is Hard Work

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Re'eh 5770 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: Singles often find themselves bitter at those people who are able to make matches but who don't even try. They are also bitter at matchmakers who, while trying to make matches, seem not to invest much thought in it, trying to slap together "any Kippah with any skirt." In reality, matchmaking in the Charedi world goes better than in our community. It seems as though one of the main reasons for this is that matchmakers there receive appropriate remuneration for their activities; they therefore perform more seriously and energetically. Why should the Rabbis of the National Religious public not enact a binding ordinance requiring that every matchmaker be given an appropriate sum? Wouldn't many people then try to make matches in a serious, worthy manner?

Answer: It's true. You really do have to invest much thought before you suggest a match, because inappropriate suggestions breed aggravation and frustration. Moreover, the couple should be accompanied after they meet in order to help them in their decision making, one way or the other. Often the couple is deterred by all sorts of extraneous details. They forget that man is not an angel, that he should be judged based on how he mostly is, as Rambam wrote in Hilchot Teshuvah: "If he is mostly meritorious, he is righteous." For someone to be considered righteous, that is enough. It's not rare for couples to decide to break up, but following long talks with the matchmakers, to agree to meet again, and in the end they wed and produce a steadfast, Jewish home.

Matchmakers, whether professionals or not, need nerves of steel and have to be ready to suffer criticism. Very often the couple has other problems apart from mutual compatibility,

and they find a ready ear in the matchmaker, pouring out their distress and seeking good advice and support. It involves a lot of effort to convince the couple to view matters in proportion and not to examine the prospective candidate's minor shortcomings with a magnifying glass. Here is an example of a negligible shortcoming: A man came to the Talmudic sage Rav and asked regarding himself: "If a non-Jewish slave cohabits with a Jewish woman, what is the status of the resulting son?" The Rabbi answered, "He's a legitimate Jew." That person then said, "If you hold that way, give me your daughter as a wife." The Rabbi replied, "I won't do it." Rav Shimi bar Chiye questioned Rav's response by way of a folk saying: 'The Rabbi says, theoretically, that a person is a legitimate Jew, but in actual practice refuses to give him his daughter when it comes to the test of reality.' Rav responded, "Even if the man was as great as Yehoshua Bin Nun, I wouldn't give him my daughter, and it's my business as to the reason." Rabbi Shimi bar Chiye said, "If that person was as great as Yehoshua Bin Nun, he would find a match easily. Here, however, it is Rav who rules that he is legitimate, and if he does not wish to give him his daughter, who will do it?" Rav still refused. When a similar question arose before Rav Yehuda, he gave the following advice: "Go hide." In other words, he advised him to conceal his identity or to wed a woman born of a similar background. Likewise, the Talmudic sage Rava advised, "Flee to a place where no one knows you" (elaborated-upon translation of Yevamot 45a).

The question is asked: How is it permissible to trick people and to hide such a severe blemish? Does this not halachically constitute forbidden deception? Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, author of the "Kehilot Yaakov" answered this question: Regarding people who are as hard to match up as to split the sea, when people agree to wed, their joy is great, and they will not agree to wed just anybody, but only the person they themselves have chosen, whom they find pleasing. At that point, they will not be willing to end the match over normal shortcomings, but only over terrible shortcomings that one would never agree to" (Kehilot Yaakov, Yevamot, Siman 38).

It follows that a non-Jewish father would not be considered a terrible shortcoming, and it should not be taken into consideration. It is clear to us, however, how much work a matchmaker would have to put in to convince the prospective suitor that such is the case. It is therefore clear that the matchmaker must be paid, whether he is a professional or an amateur; such is the Charedi practice, whether the matchmaker was approached, or whether he himself initiated the match. Several hundred shekalim should be paid in advance to cover phone calls and investment of time, and if the efforts succeed, thousands of shekalim should be paid, and one should not feel sorry about it. All these are negligible sums compared to the expenses of the wedding, and certainly as compared with the great joy of the marriage.

At this time, I would like to announce that two matchmakers' sites have been opened on the Internet. The candidate does not sign up, but goes through the matchmaker who lists the candidate's details anonymously. Afterwards, he looks through the listings on the site, identifies those suitable for his candidate, and he calls that suitable person's matchmaker, and the two, together, work towards the match's success. Here are the sites:

www.shoshvinim.org

www.kulanu4you.org

The sites also provide much guidance for matchmakers.

Mazel tov!

Stories about Leaving the Land of Israel - #10

Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was deeply disturbed that there were people in the Religious-Zionist and Charedi communities who leave Israel for reasons not permitted by Halachic authorities. He said that he does not see any permission to act in this manner. When he was invited to his grandson's Bar Mitzvah outside of Eretz Yisrael in the year 5731, he wrote that he does not see sufficient permission for doing so (and he added that even if he

teaches a lot of Torah and perhaps there is permission to leave to teach Torah, the large amount of teaching will cause a reduction in Torah learning). Regarding Cohanim, he ruled that one should be concerned for the position of the authorities who rule it is forbidden to leave Eretz Yisrael (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 372), since the land outside of Israel is considered impure (Halchos Shlomo – Tefillah vol. 1 p. 277 note #16).

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #5

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

The Birkot Ha-Torah end saying Hashem is the One "Who gives the Torah." The Taz and others note that this is in the present tense. It's not only that Hashem gave us the Torah back at Har Sinai. He gives it to us every day. He gives it to us when we learn it. He gives it to us when we apply it to our own lives. He gives it to us when we teach it to others. And so we bless Him for this great gift, and then say some selections from the Torah itself.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

I Failed

I whispered to my wife under the Chupah: "I will never fight with you. And if we do fight, I will always say to you: You are right." Looking back, I have not lived up to that promise even once. We have fought a lot, and I always claim that I am right. But I am not sorry: not for the promise and not for my failure. I am happy that I promised since I set the ideal and the aspiration. When one knows the truth, there is hope. I am not sorry that I failed, since I learned from every failure and I improved. I learned from each experience and I or, more accurately, we improved. We thought that marriage was complete stability, and we now understand that it is a joint journey, and we travel along together.

Text Message Responsa

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Date with a Person who has a Problematic Parent

Q: Is it permissible to go on a date for the purpose of marriage with a young man whose father is in jail?

A: I cannot answer since I am biased. I have one grandfather who married the daughter of a thief and another grandfather who married the daughter of a murderer. This is not Lashon Ha-Ra since everyone knows them: The first is Yitzchak Avinu and the second is Yaakov Avinu. What fault does the young man bear and what is his sin? One must be judged on his own merit (see Kehilot Yaakov, Yevamot #38).

Mitzvot on the Moon

Q: How should an astronaut determine the proper times to daven on the moon?

A: Based on the location from which he departed (see "Adam Al Ha-Yare'ach" by Ha-Rav M.M. Kasher).

Gush Katif Museum

Q: Should one visit the Gush Katif Museum?

A: Yes, making sure to guard his Ahavat Yisrael (love of every Jew).

Birthday

Q: It is my birthday today. What mission should I take upon myself for the coming year?

A: Torah – finish learning a book. Kindness – for someone or other people.

Failure to Pay Taxes

Q: On account of cheaper competitor who do not pay taxes, my clients are leaving and I cannot manage to make a living. What should I do?

A: Inform your clients that it is forbidden to avoid paying taxes. If this does not help, tell the authorities what the businesses are doing.

Aliens

Q: I heard that it is written in the Gemara that there are three stars which have aliens living on them. What is the source?

A: There is no such Gemara and no other source.

Fasting on Wedding Day

Q: Does a bride need to fast on her wedding day?

A: An Ashkenazi bride, unless she is weak (Aruch Ha-Shulchan, Even Ha-Ezer 61:21).

Tachanun

Q: Is a father on the day of his son's birth exempt from Tachanun?

A: No.

Aiding a Shabbat Desecrator

Q: Is it permissible for me to arrange an urgent doctor's appointment for someone who needs a doctor's clearance to participate in a sporting competition on Shabbat?

A: It is forbidden to aid someone desecrating Shabbat.

Swimming on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to enter the water on Shabbat without swimming?

A: No, the decree includes this as well (Shut Igrot Moshe, Even Ha-Ezer 2:13).

Solider on a Bus

Q: Is it permissible for a soldier to ride the bus in his uniform when he is on a break from the army, since he can ride for free?

A: On condition that he has a military document which gives him this privilege (see Shut She'eilat Shlomo 4:29).

Honoring Parents

Q: My family wanted me to participate in a Bar-B-Q and I want to learn Torah.

A: In this matter, learning Torah is greater than honoring father and mother. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 240:25.

The Zohar

Q: In my yeshiva, they began classes in learning the Zohar. Should I participate?

A: Absolutely not, the Zohar is for unique individuals – great Torah scholars (Shach, Yoreh Deah 240:6).

Socks

Q: Is it permissible to wear sandals without socks?

A: It is permissible but it is preferable to wear socks (Shut She'eilat Shlomo 3:322-323).

Unconscious Husband

Q: My husband is unconscious in the hospital resulting from a car accident. Is it permissible for me to rub cream on him or perform other treatments when I am in Niddah, since if I do not, the family will say that I am neglecting him?

A: It is forbidden since it is not a life-saving treatment, unless you take pills which indefinitely postpone your period.

Painting the Mechitza in Shul

Q: Is it permissible to paint the Mechitza in Shul or must we do so outside?

A: It is permissible since it is for the Shul itself.

A Lecture by a Woman

Q: I have to attend a lecture by a woman. How should I act?

A: Do not look at her, but listen and take notes.

Internet

Q: It is worthwhile to get the internet to listen to Torah classes? We don't have any children at home.

A: One's gain is offset by his loss. It is full of filth and nonsense.

Rabbi's Picture

Q: Does one need to place a Rabbi's picture in the Geniza? Is it permissible to use a newspaper which contains a Rabbi's picture for cleaning purposes?

A: There is no obligation to place it in a Geniza. It is permissible to use it to clean but not for disgusting cleaning.

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