

Introduction

There is something very special that I find with regard to *emunah*: no matter how many times I hear or learn about one of its principles I always want more. Hashem designed us in a way that our souls crave *emunah*. Learning about *emunah* can be so soothing. A lesson learned in *emunah* on one day can have an entirely different effect on the person when learned another day. The reason is that each day we encounter a new set of circumstances and we see things from a different vantage point. *Emunah* speaks to everyone because its concepts can be applied to every age group in every situation in life. Amazingly, the very same lesson can give *chizuk* both to a fourth grader and a great Rosh Yeshivah. *Baruch Hashem*, many people have told me that after reading *Living Emunah* their lives have changed for the better. People have commented that they felt like the lessons were written specifically for them. This is the nature of *emunah*: it speaks to everyone. There is nothing that I enjoy more than seeing other people benefit from *emunah* the way I have. *Emunah* has changed my life for the better and I hope and pray that it does the same for others. One woman emailed me the following: "I can honestly say that my outlook on life and Hashem has changed. I go about my day differently with the belief that everything that happens is from Hashem. Things that used to bother me don't affect me at all now. I don't worry as much and overall I'm just a calmer person. I try to see the hand of Hashem in everything. My *tefillah* is more meaningful and everything I do has more meaning. Now, I wake up in the morning and look forward to praying. My life has definitely changed for the better."

This woman is representative of each and every one of us. If we would take just five minutes out of our day to think of all the good Hashem does for us, our lists would go on and on. One woman said that after reading *Living Emunah* she decided that when she said *Modim* in the *Amidah*, she would thank Hashem and acknowledge His kindness each day for one specific good in her life. It's been nearly a year and a half and she has yet to repeat one *chesed*. If we put our minds to it, we will realize that the good Hashem sends our way is boundless.

This practice, however, is not so easy because of what we are bombarded with on a daily basis. Good news doesn't make headlines, and this past year has been particularly difficult — sometimes on a personal and more often on a communal level. *Klal Yisrael* has endured the massacres in Har Nof and France, the fire that tragically took the lives of seven young precious *neshamos*, the ongoing terrorist attacks in Israel, and the seemingly universal problems such as the *shidduch* crisis, *parnassah*, etc.

Tehillim (92:6) states, מֵהַ גְּדֹלוֹ מֵעֵשִׂיךָ ה' מֵאֵד עֵמְקוֹ מִחִשְׁבֹּתֶיךָ — The depth of Hashem's thoughts and reasoning is beyond our capability to fathom.

In times of challenge such as these a strong foundation of *emunah* in Hashem will enable us to overcome the ongoing tsunami of problems, as we understand and believe deep within ourselves that Hashem is our loving Father and that everything, yes, everything — even the unthinkable — is for our good.

One of the goals of *Living Emunah II* is to provide the reader with more tools to actually be able to incorporate *emunah* into daily life. It's not enough to know *emunah*; we have to be able to practice it. The main goal of this book is to strengthen our bond with Hashem by viewing the way He deals with us with the proper perspective. Hashem is referred to as both our King — ה' מֶלֶךְ, and as our Father — הֵלֵא הוּא אֲבִיךָ קֵן. And thus in our prayers we address Hashem as אֲבִינוּ מַלְכֵנו — “our Father, our King.”

Unfortunately, there are many people who perceive Hashem as a stern, ruthless King Who judges and punishes. They think that Hashem exacts retribution from us for offending His honor much as a human king would.

Most people do not think of Hashem as a loving, compassionate Father Who only helps us and always dispenses kindness, as they have a difficult time perceiving the suffering they experience or witness as expressions of mercy and love. As a result of this misperception, they do not have a close relationship with Hashem. People by nature try to minimize any contact with strict authority figures, and to discharge their responsibilities as minimally as possible just so they could avoid punishment. And thus when it comes to Hashem, too, many people serve Him out of fear, just enough to avoid being punished. But when we serve Hashem this way, our relationship to Him is distant and cold, and we do not feel Him embracing us as a Father embraces a child. The truth is that Hashem is all-merciful. He is אבינו מלכנו — our Father, our King. A king's son does not try to avoid him. He takes pride in the fact that his father is the king.

When Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem to reveal to him His essence and explain the way He deals with His nation, Hashem replied by pronouncing the י"ג מידות של רחמים — His thirteen attributes of mercy (ה' ה' קל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת נוצר) (חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה). He said nothing about harsh judgment; His attributes are all about love, mercy, and compassion. Even when Hashem has to punish someone it's done out of love and concern. I once heard a *mashal* about a boy who received his driver's license and decided to take his father's brand-new car for a joy ride with some friends, without permission. An inexperienced driver, the boy skidded on the slippery road surface and the car spun out of control and slammed into a tree. The car was totaled, and the boy was seriously injured. An ambulance rushed him to the hospital, and he was brought into the operating room. The doctor who was on duty was none other than the boy's father. How would the doctor respond? Would he berate his son for his irresponsible behavior? Of course not. He would say, "My precious son, I love you, and you need my help now more than ever. I will do everything I can to help you." Similarly, when a person sins, Hashem says, as it were, "My poor child is hurting himself so badly, and does not even realize what he is doing. I need to come help him find the right path."

Those who have never learned about Hashem's unlimited mercy and love might attribute their hardships in life to Hashem abandoning them. This is how the Jewish people felt after the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. As the *pasuk* states (*Yeshayah* 49:14), ותאמר ציון עזבני ה' ואדניי שכחני — the people felt that Hashem had abandoned and forgotten about them. But Hashem replied (*ibid.* v. 15), התשכח אשה עולה מרחם בן בטנה — “Would a woman ever forget about the fetus she carries in her womb?” Hashem tells us that His relationship with us is stronger than we think. He does not have to remember us, because we are a part of Him, as it were: like an unborn infant who is part of its mother. But it goes even beyond that. The *pasuk* continues, גם אלה תשכחנה ואנכי לא אשכחך — even if it were possible for an expectant woman to forget about her infant, Hashem would never forget about us. Our connection to Him is even closer — much closer — than that of a fetus to its mother. As hard as it is for us to grasp this concept, קודשא בריך הוא וישראל חד הוא — the Jewish nation and G-d are one. Hashem loves us more than we could imagine. The more we learn about Hashem, the more we will yearn to come closer to Him. There is a story brought down about Rav Saadia Gaon who had the practice of secluding himself in a private room for 20 minutes every day. One of his students was overcome by curiosity, and so one day he hid in a cabinet in the room to observe what the Rabbi did during these periods of seclusion. He saw Rav Saadia lower himself onto the floor, and with a broken voice say, “Hashem, please forgive me. חטאתי עויתי פשעתי לפניך — I have sinned before You.” He performed heartfelt repentance and then left. The student did not understand. Why, he wondered, did his illustrious Rabbi cry for forgiveness each day? What could such a holy person possibly have done to necessitate such intense *teshuvah* on a daily basis? Unable to contain himself, the student approached Rav Saadia and confessed to having observed him in his private room. He asked the Rabbi to explain why he cried and begged Hashem for forgiveness each day. Rav Saadia explained that once he was traveling and stopped off to lodge at the home of a very kindhearted Jew. The host provided generous hospitality, offering the Rabbi his own room and full meals, and regularly

inquiring into what the Rabbi needed. When it came time to leave, Rav Saadia warmly thanked his host and resumed his journey. Shortly thereafter, his host ran after him and cried, "Rabbi, please forgive me!" The man threw himself on the floor in front of the Rabbi and begged for forgiveness. "What are you so concerned about?" Rav Saadia asked. "You provided wonderful hospitality." "Yes," the man replied, "but I did not know that you were the great Rav Saadia Gaon. If I would have known, I would have showed you so much more respect and honor." "From that time on," Rav Saadia told his student, "I started the practice of asking Hashem for forgiveness every day. Every day, I find out something else about Hashem that I did not know beforehand, and I then feel so guilty, thinking that if I would have realized this I would have served Hashem with so much more respect and care. And so each day, I must ask Hashem to forgive me for not treating Him properly."

There are so many things we do not know about Hashem. Every time we discover a new dimension of His love and compassion for us, this should inspire us to work toward coming closer to Him. Every time we learn of how He can't wait for us to speak to Him and pray to Him, this should inspire us to improve our *tefillos*. *B'ezras Hashem* the lessons in this volume will teach us more about Who Hashem really is and inspire us to come closer to Him.

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Relieving Stress

While riding in a taxi, I heard a commercial that went something like this:

“Are you under a lot of stress? Are you having trouble sleeping at night? We have the answer for you!”

The commercial then proceeded to promote a certain pill that is used for reducing stress in over 60 countries. Less than two minutes later, I heard another commercial with virtually the exact same sales pitch:

“Are you having trouble getting through the day with a clear head? Is your stress mounting too high? Do you toss and turn at night? We have the solution!”

This commercial was also advertising a certain medication to help relieve stress.

It appears as though people in today’s world are stressed out and worried all the time, and have come to terms with the fact that they need medication to alleviate their stress.

They used to try methods of diverting people’s attention to other things, but that has proven to be unsuccessful.

The story is told of a man who went to the doctor and complained that he felt overwhelmed by anxiety. He had many worries in life, and he felt so depressed because of them. He begged the doctor to help him.

“I have the perfect remedy,” the doctor proudly said. “Go to the town jester and watch him perform. He will laugh you out of your depression, and then we’ll work from there.”

“Doctor,” the man protested, “I am the town jester. I can tell you that jokes don’t work.”

The way to relieve stress is through *emunah*, the knowledge that every problem we experience has been sent to us by

Hashem, our loving Father, for our ultimate benefit. One day we will see how every difficult issue we encountered was really a blessing in disguise. Someone who knows this can get through any difficult situation with a smile.

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A man once came to the Maggid of Mezeritch and poured out his heart, going through all the many difficult problems he was facing in life. “How,” the man asked the Rabbi, “can I possibly feel that Hashem is doing all this to me for my own benefit?”

The Rabbi advised him to go to Reb Zushe of Anapoli to get an answer. And so the man traveled to Reb Zushe, and when he arrived he saw that Reb Zushe lived in abject poverty and was tending to a seriously ill child. Reb Zushe nevertheless greeted the visitor with warmth and smiles, looking as happy as a man could look.

“I was told to come here to learn how a person beset by troubles can feel that Hashem is doing what is best for him,” the man said. “I was hoping you could help me.”

Reb Zushe thought for a moment and then said, “I am very sorry, but I can’t help you. I’ve never had any problems in my life. Hashem has always been so good to me. I don’t know what it’s like to have problems!”

People with genuine *emunah* say to themselves, *Why should I feel stressed and uptight? Everything is good!*

A man told me that a few years ago he was unemployed for an extended period of time and was struggling with his finances. Then, a businessman came along with an attractive job offer. It was exactly the offer he had been waiting for, and his life seemed to be changing. Finally, he had hope. Before he could even sign the contract, an adversary from his past bad-mouthed him to the businessman, and he was rejected. The man was stunned. The accusations were entirely false. He pleaded his case with the businessman, but to no avail. At that moment, he felt as though his world was coming crash-

ing down on him. He went into his car and cried like a baby for a half-hour.

After a half-hour, he said to himself, *What am I doing? Why am I crying? This is from Hashem. It must be for the best. I am not going to let this break me. I will just move on and do the best I can.* The next six months were extremely difficult, as he struggled to get by financially. Then came the *ישועת ה' כהרף עין* — “Hashem’s salvation arriving in the blink of an eye.” Someone else approached him with a job opportunity, he signed, and is now doing well. Meanwhile, the office of the man who had offered him the job a half-year earlier was raided by the police, and the entire staff was arrested on fraud charges. All the employees are in trouble with the law.

“I was crying in the car,” the man reflected, “for something that ended up saving my life. I don’t know what I did to deserve such kindness. What I thought was my biggest problem was actually my biggest blessing. It’s so clear now.”

If we could feel even during times of hardship that Hashem is really helping, then we could eliminate all our stress and enjoy peaceful, relaxing lives under all circumstances.



Break Free From the Chains

When a person begins to discover what *emunah* is all about, his life becomes filled with happiness. The *Shomer Emunim* (1) writes that the Torah is filled with precious diamonds and pearls of wisdom that are far more precious than any material asset, but *emunah* is its prize possession. It's in a league of its own.

The *Shomer Emunim* adds that Hashem Himself has given us this priceless gift of *emunah*. It's the first of the Ten Commandments — אנכי ה' אלקיך — “I am Hashem, your G-d” — and because our souls heard this commandment directly from Hashem, we have *emunah* within us; all we need to do is reveal it. The day this happens is the day we are liberated from the shackles of life without *emunah* by which so many of us are bound. We become freed from the perspective that views the world as controlled by nature, rather than by Hashem. Imagine a prisoner who is bound in chains, kicking and turning, trying to free himself. He doesn't realize that the key to unlock the chains is sitting right in front of him. This is the situation of so many people who don't realize that *emunah* is the key to a happy life, and it's easily accessible.

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—————”

The *Sefer HaMiddos* (page 46) comments that *emunah* brings a person peace of mind. Sometimes we look for something new, such as a new job or a new home, and after searching high and low we finally realize that we already have everything we have been seeking. The only difference is that now we see it in a new light. We don't need to find anything new or go somewhere new; we have what we're looking for right in front of us. This is the story of *emunah*. We spend

our lives running around trying to get an edge, trying to make connections, and during that time it is possible that we were put down, slighted, or rejected. When that happens, we begin to feel lonely and abandoned. If a person has *emunah*, he understands that this is all a mirage. He knows the One in charge — and He is the One Who both hits and heals, Who makes people poor and makes people wealthy, Who takes life and gives life. He realizes that there is no sense in focusing on the puppets, on the cast, when he can go straight to the Director. He realizes that the Director doesn't only know him; He loves him more than anything and can't wait for him to come forward with his requests.

Imagine a person who grew up without a father, and finds himself struggling through life. His friend, meanwhile, has a father who is a billionaire and who gives his son anything he ever needs. He never has to worry about paying rent, tuition, or credit card bills; his father takes care of it all, and is happy to do it. One day, someone comes over to this struggling fellow and says, "You know your friend's father, the billionaire? He's your father, too! You were lost shortly after your birth, and ever since he's been looking for you. He loves you and yearns to have a relationship with you. All he wants is to take good care of you." This fellow would experience a great sense of relief, knowing that he has someone to care for him. We all have such a father. In fact, our Father is so much greater than any billionaire. He has everything we can ever want, and He yearns to be close to us.

Once a king was passing by with his procession, flanked by officers dressed in their finest formal attire. Suddenly, a simple young peasant approached one of the officers and said, "I am also a servant of the king, and I want to be one of his officers."

"You can't just come here and decide you want to be an officer," the officer said, pushing the peasant back.

"I'm not just any servant," the young man said. "I'm the king's son. I'm part of his household. So let me in!"

David HaMelech states (*Tehillim* 116:16), *אני עבדך בן אמתך* — "I am Your servant, son of Your maidservant." He tells Hashem,

"I'm not just any servant — I am part of Your household, part of Your family! I am Your son!" And then he adds, פתחת למוסרי — "You have released my bonds." This realization released him from his "chains."

When we know we are connected to and loved by the One Who controls everything, we are freed from the chains of worry and are able to truly enjoy life.



Quick Response

Acquiring true *emunah* is a lifelong endeavor. There are many different levels of *emunah*, and we must continue working and striving to reach the highest level.

One's level of *emunah* is determined by how quickly he recognizes Hashem's loving Hand in all aspects of his life. Sometimes a person suffers some kind of loss, or endures some hardship, and he feels bitter for several months until he finally is able to relax and realize that Hashem always does what is best.

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If he is asked why he did not react this way initially, he would probably say that the pain was too fresh to allow him to accept Hashem's decision. Another person on a higher level of *emunah* might feel upset for a couple of weeks before recognizing that the loss was brought by Hashem for his benefit. A person on the highest level of *emunah* is able to recognize the hand of Hashem immediately, without any delay. This is true both during times of hardship and in times of success. A person might make a well-devised, lucrative business deal and then feel good about himself and proud of the wise decisions he made before thanking Hashem for His

help. A person who has reached the highest levels of *emunah* will immediately thank Hashem and recognize that he had no part whatsoever in the success. It was Hashem Who put the right ideas in his mind, Who led him to meet the right people and make the right connections, and Who ensured that everything worked out.

This applies at every second of the day and to every area of life. A person with *emunah* sees Hashem in everything that happens, even when it appears that the events were caused by people. If he receives some benefit from another person, he immediately thanks Hashem for sending him a messenger. If his request is denied, he right away accepts the fact that Hashem does not want the request to be granted. He understands that the person who said “no” is just a messenger. If a person loses a court case and is fined by the judge, he does not feel resentful toward the clerk who comes to collect the money. This is how a person with *emunah* feels about all people. Everything that happens was ordained by Hashem, and the people involved are merely His messengers. We have to train ourselves to view all events in our lives from this perspective.

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Lugassi tells that he was once standing near someone who was hammering a nail into the wall, and suddenly the man loudly shouted some very distasteful words. The Rabbi asked him what happened, and the man explained that he accidentally banged the hammer onto his finger.

“You should know,” the Rabbi said, “that the Gemara (*Chullin 7b*) says that no person hurts his finger in this world unless it had first been decreed in the heavens. Do you know many things had to happen in the heavens before you were able to hurt your finger? There was a team of angels prosecuting against you and giving reasons why you should get hurt. And there was another team of angels advocating on your behalf, explaining why you shouldn’t. The case was brought before G-d, and after evaluating both sides of the argument, He decided that the best thing would be for you to bang the hammer on your finger. Only after all that

happened was it possible for the hammer to strike your finger. Don't be angry. The Judge is righteous and always knows what is best for you."

This is true of everything in life. Nothing happens here in this world until Hashem made the decision in the heavens that it should happen. He carefully weighs every angle and then decides what is best. Nothing happens randomly. Every dent in the car, every leak in the roof, every spilled cup of coffee, every stain on a garment — it is all carefully thought out and planned by Hashem, and it is all decided with our best interests in mind.

Hashem wants us to recognize His involvement in our lives and to know with absolute certainty that אין עוד מלבדו — there is nothing in the world besides Him (*Devarim* 4:35). The faster we are able to connect our experiences in life to Hashem, the more *emunah* we have. And, as the *pasuk* says (*Chabakkuk* 2:4), וצדיק באמונתו יחיה — the more *emunah* we have, the greater *tzaddikim* we are.



There Is Far More Good

Many *pesukim* speak of Hashem's kindness, such as עולם חסד יבנה — "the world is built with kindness" (*Tehillim* 89:3); חסד קל כל היום — "The kindness of G-d is all day long" (*Tehillim* 52:3); and כי חפץ חסד הוא — "for He desires kindness" (*Michah* 7:18). This point — that Hashem is kind — cannot be stressed enough, because our natural tendency is to think otherwise.

Rabbi Fishel Schachter drew a comparison to a wealthy businessman who after an intense corporate meeting

went to the rooftop of the building to get some fresh air. As he stepped onto the roof, the door slammed shut behind him and locked. There was no one on the top floor who could hear him, and the building was too tall for anyone down on the street to hear him or take notice of him. Realizing he was stuck, he decided he would throw something down to the street to catch someone's attention. He had some very expensive coins in his pocket, and so he took one and threw it down. The coin hit a man on the head and then bounced onto the floor. The man picked it up, looked at it and said, "Wow, today is my lucky day!" He put the coin in his pocket and continued along his way. The man then dropped a second coin, which ricocheted off the side of the building and fell right in front of a different man. The man bent down to pick it up, realized it was worth a lot, smiled, and put it in his pocket. Neither of these two men bothered to look up to see where the coin came from. Frustrated, the man took a small rock and dropped it from the rooftop. It hit a man's foot, and that man immediately looked up and started shouting at the man who dropped the rock on him.

When good things happen, we don't bother to look up to see where it's coming from. When something negative occurs, however, we all start pointing fingers, seeking whom to blame. This is true with regard to Hashem, as well. When life is going well, we don't bother to look up and say, "Hashem, You're so kind, thank You." On those days, when things happen that we are not happy with, we say things like, "Hashem, how could You do this?" "It's not fair!" Nonetheless, we generally wake up in the morning with all our body parts working properly, we get out of bed on our own, we get dressed on our own, we kiss our children and send them off knowing they will have an enjoyable day, we drive to the synagogue to pray to Hashem, we learn Torah, and we go to work to earn some money. This routine goes on for days, months, and years without us appreciating this great *chesed* that Hashem grants us. Despite this, when

things go wrong, we want to know why Hashem isn't helping, why Hashem isn't kind.

Sometimes we hear of a couple who cannot have children, and we think to ourselves, *Why isn't Hashem helping them? Where is His chesed?* However, we don't think of the 360,000 births that take place every single day — 250 miracles a minute.

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Negative news is more interesting than good news, and for this reason news reporters tell us only of the bad things that are happening. Therefore, this is what our brains are used to hearing.

True, on one hand, there are people still looking for a *shidduch*, and we all hope and pray that they will soon be happily married. On the other hand, there are nights when we have two or even three weddings to attend. This is Hashem's kindness, and this is the norm. There are so many weddings, so many babies born, and lots of healthy people. We need to focus on

what is good and appreciate Hashem's kindness. The more we realize how kind Hashem really is, the easier it will be to handle those situations when His *chesed* is not apparent, and the easier it will be to turn to Him for help during those periods, knowing that Hashem wants us to be happy.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that עולם חסד יבנה, חסד קל כל היום, and כי חפץ חסד הוא — that Hashem is kind and only wants to help.