קונטרס

The Ways of My Heart

נתיבות לבי

Adapted from the shiurim of

R' Dovid Steiman shlit"a

The Formula of Emunah

Parshas Chayei Sarah

נתיבות לבי — The Ways of My Heart

A WEEKLY MAAMAR · ADAPTED FROM THE SHIURIM OF R' DOVID STEIMAN SHLIT"A

ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

Nesivos Libi — The Ways of My Heart is a weekly maamar on emunah, bitachon, and avodas Hashem, adapted from the shiurim of R' Dovid Steiman shlit"a in the derech of the *Nesivos Shalom*.

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The Formula of Emunah

Why the Torah wants us to know that Sarah Imeinu was as beautiful at a hundred and twenty-seven as at seven — and how a person's face tells of his trust in Hashem

In Parshas Chayei Sarah there is an amazing Rashi. Right at the beginning the pasuk says: *Vayihyu chayei Sarah meah shanah v'esrim shanah v'sheva shanim, shnei chayei Sarah* — the life of Sarah was a hundred years and twenty years and seven years; the years of the life of Sarah. [1]

Rashi asks why the pasuk does not simply say a hundred and twenty-seven. Because each part is its own lesson: at a hundred she was like at twenty for sin — just as a girl of twenty is not yet punished, so at a hundred she was without sin — and at twenty she was like at seven for beauty. *Shnei chayei Sarah* — all of them were equally good: she fulfilled her purpose in life. [2]

If you think into it, the bottom line of this Rashi is that at a hundred and twenty-seven, an old woman, Sarah Imeinu was still as beautiful as at seven. I understand why I need to know that she was without sin, that she guarded herself and fought the yetzer hara. But why do I need to know that she was beautiful at age of 127?

The letters bring down the chassadim

I saw an interesting explanation in the Kedushas Levi, in the Kedushos of Chanukah. He brings from the Arizal on what we say at the Seder: *v'chol hamarbeh l'saper b'yetzias Mitzrayim harei zeh meshubach* — whoever speaks at length about yetzias Mitzrayim is praiseworthy.

Why is he praiseworthy? Says the Arizal: *meshubach* in chassadim — because he is speaking about the chassadim of the Ribbono shel Olam. And every letter he says about the chassadim that Hashem

did for us makes an awakening in Shamayim, and that awakening is sent back down to us as chassadim. In other words, just by talking about the chassadim of Hashem, a person brings chassadim upon himself.

The face is an ois

Now, the face of a person is also a kind of *ois*. Not a letter that talks — but the face of a person speaks.

On the day of his histalkus, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai revealed the secrets of the face: how to read a face, because every face has a meaning. The eyebrows, the nose, the eyes — every person is different, because the face reflects the neshamah, and what damage there is in the neshamah. A real tzaddik can see everything on the face — maybe today we don't have such tzaddikim, but you never know. There were tzaddikim in every generation who could read a person's face and know what was going on in him.

We see it by Yaakov Avinu. When Pharaoh saw him for the first time, the first thing he asked was: *Kamah yemei shnei chayecha* — how old are you? [3]

And Yaakov answered that his years had been few and bad: *me'at v'ra'im hayu yemei shnei chayai*. [4]

The meforshim explain that Yaakov lost a year for every word — thirty-three words — and that is why he lived a hundred and forty-seven years and not a hundred and eighty like his father Yitzchak. [5] But the count includes Pharaoh's question too. Why should Yaakov lose years for Pharaoh's question? Because Pharaoh asked only since Yaakov looked so bad.

We have no understanding of what kind of life Yaakov Avinu had, of what he answered, or of what this whole thing means. But one thing is for sure: it was about his face. The face is an *ois*. It shows where a person is standing, what he is doing, and where his neshamah is holding.

Sarah's emunah was on her face

And now we understand the Rashi about Sarah Imeinu. A person usually loses his beauty through worry, through yissurim, through the difficult situations

in his life. He is not so lively anymore, not so excited. He is not the same person, because he feels broken.

But here is Sarah Imeinu, a hundred and twenty-seven years old, and still beautiful. That tells us she had amazing emunah and bitachon. She relied on the Ribbono shel Olam so strongly that it did not change her face. Even if you are trying to hide, but inside it's all broken. Sarah Imeinu was not broken even inside.

Half a million shekel

I read a story about a man who became very rich. Every investment he made blew out of proportion. He bought cars, a villa, boats; he had all the pleasures of this world.

One day his partner asked him to put money into a certain investment, and for some reason he agreed without even checking. I guess he trusted him one hundred percent, and he gave him half a million shekel.

Then one day the bank called. *Mr. So-and-so, what is going on with your balance?* He looked, and it showed minus half a million shekel. He called the company. *I gave you the money. Why are you pulling more from my account?*

Your partner took your half a million, they told him, *and gave us his own check. The check bounced.*

His partner had used the money for himself; he was simply a thief. In today's generation, who knows where such a partner would be found the next day. But something held him back. At the end of the day he was a *ma'amin b'emunah shleimah* — the Ribbono shel Olam is the One in charge. Slowly but surely he sold everything he had and paid everybody back. *The Ribbono shel Olam is in charge,* he said. *I cannot tell Him what to do.*

Isn't that a beautiful story? But if we were in the same situation, what would we do? I don't know — because the Ribbono shel Olam doesn't give us such a test. We are trying to rely on Him.

Everyone has a different test

Because every person has a different test. It is easy for us to say we had a test because the lunch in yeshivah was not good. Everyone's level in emunah is different. So we cannot just say to someone: trust Hashem, be strong, don't give up. It is a very good chizuk — but you are not in his shoes. You do not understand his situation. Each person has to measure his emunah according to where he is standing.

As one of the gedolim said: we have ideas — let's buy a lottery ticket, win a few million dollars, and that's it. What's the problem with that? Very simple. The problem is that you are trying to become the *baal habayis*. You have the money, so you can tell the Ribbono shel Olam what to do. But the Ribbono shel Olam does not want that. He wants us to have a connection with Him — to rely on Him.

Let go

Now back to Sarah Imeinu. Think for a moment about her emunah and bitachon. What formula gives a person this emunah and bitachon?

There is no one formula for everybody. Everyone's test is different. But the main instruction in emunah and bitachon is the same: keep strong.

I have told this story a few times. A man was falling off a cliff and grabbed hold of a bush, holding on for his life. *G-d,* he called, *if You are there, save me!* And a voice answered: *Let go. Show Me that you rely on Me.*

The man said: *Is there anyone else here?*

That is how the test goes. When things are hard we want to find the solution ourselves, and we are told: let go. How can I let go? Who will take care of it? It is true that we have to do what we have to do — keep on trying, keep on doing our *hishtadlus*. But somewhere inside us we have to find that place where we say: *I am letting go, because You are in charge.*

A lock inside a person

The Nesivos Shalom writes that emunah is like a lock inside a person: it holds in all the kedushah, everything that is important. That is why the tests in emunah and bitachon are the hardest of all — and especially now, close to the coming of Mashiach, the main test of our generation is in emunah.

A person keeps his standards; he wants to be strong. And then the yetzer hara comes crashing down on him: *You are not so strong. Don't make yourself a big macher. Look how these people are enjoying their lives with no connection to Yiddishkeit at all.*

We live in such a dark time, and emunah is the key to everything. In the darkness we are unsure how to decide, unsure how to move forward. When the body is sick, it is hard. When the *ruchniyus* is in darkness, it is much worse, because then there is no simchah. And the only advice is to make our emunah stronger.

The formula

So what is the formula of emunah?

Everyone has it inside himself. The Ribbono shel Olam did not create us without emunah. The darkness is a moment. And when we bring out that inner emunah — that in the end the Ribbono shel Olam will give us the brachos, that He will solve the problem, that He will take care of me — that is the formula. It has to start from somewhere: without a vessel, where would all the brachos fall?

And a person needs to remember that the Ribbono shel Olam loves us. He really loves us and wants the best for us. The trust we put in Him when we say, *Ribbono shel Olam, You are going to give us all the brachos* — that is the trust He is expecting from us, to see that we really believe it.

May the Ribbono shel Olam help us to have it, *b'karov*.

MEKOROS

1. Bereishis 23:1 **2.** Rashi, Bereishis 23:1 **3.** Bereishis 47:8 **4.** Bereishis 47:9 **5.** Daas Zekenim, Bereishis 47:8