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"Indeed, You are a Hidden God"

To begin, we will present an introduction. In every new endeavor, especially when it relates to clarifying the ways for a person to serve his Creator, one must strive to do it for the sake of Heaven, so that one's intent will be sincere and acceptable to Hashem.

Therefore, we present a tefillah (prayer) to Hashem that our words and deeds will be acceptable, and the presentation of the matter, in its entirety, will be in accordance with His will. Because if Hashem does not desire it, it will not help at all.

The things we will say are apparently obvious. They are obvious to someone who doesn't really understand them, because they mistakenly seem that way to him, due to their simplicity. But the truth is that Chazal (our Sages) have said (Rosh HaShanah 26b), "The simpler one's mind is, the better." A person's main avodah is to attain simplicity; in fact, the most simple point.

There is a known parable from the Dubna Maggid on the pasuk (Yeshayahu 43:22), "You have not called Me, Yaakov, for you have tired Me, Yisrael." We will not elaborate on the parable, but only mention the main point. When it seems to a person that avodas Hashem requires tremendous effort, because it is a huge mountain that is very difficult to climb so as to reach true levels - when he senses he is in a state of "you have tired me, Yisrael," that is a sign that "You have not called Me, Yaakov." He is not serving Hashem properly.

The matters we will present here are "in your mouth and heart to fulfill it" (Devarim 30:14) - clear matters, that are organized and very understandable.

The world is called olam, based on the word he'elem (hiddenness), because it hides the truth of Hashem's existence. Before creation, He was one and His name was one, but when the world was created, there was also a creation of the hiddenness, and Hashem became a "hidden God." A person's task throughout life, both in this world and in the next, is to reveal the presence of Hashem.

However, there is another aspect of hiddenness, which is the most difficult of all. A person begins to serve Hashem in various ways - learning Torah, focusing on the tefillah (prayers) and such, and he meets with difficulty. The yetzer hara (Evil Inclination) sees to it that the true way to serve Hashem is hidden from him. After a few times when he meets with difficulties, the yetzer hara plants in his mind this thought: "All of this is correct and true, but it is so difficult! I personally cannot deal with this;

maybe one day I will..."

However, when one has the merit to see the truth, he uncovers a completely different perspective. Of course, avodas Hashem (service of God) doesn't happen by itself, with great ease, but it is also not as difficult as the yetzer hara portrays it to be.

The approach the yetzer hara takes in order to distance a person from avodas Hashem is such: He places him in a state of confusion, showing him that there are so many things to do, such as learning Torah, observing the mitzvos, praying, doing acts of chessed (kindness), and so on. From the onset, he portrays the Torah as "broader than the length of the earth" (Iyov 11:9) and if so, it is very difficult to attain. And such, even from the onset, one's lofty desires weaken, because it seems to him that what he must achieve is very far away.

But when a person understands that all these thoughts are untrue, and are actually the fruits of the advice of the yetzer hara, he is already able to begin entering into avodas Hashem.

The true path for serving Hashem is hidden from practically everyone. Why? Because that is the way of the world. It is called olam based on the word he'elem, as we said. For one, this is because Hashem is a hidden God. But what is more difficult is that a person does not know the true path so serving his Creator. If one does not have a path, he will read one book of mussar, and then another, hear inspirational talks about various subjects, and all of it is true, but there is no order to it all. Where does the avodah start, what comes next, and so on? In this way, it is very difficult to succeed, and one falls again and again, until he is liable to fall into despair, and G-d forbid, flee from avodas Hashem.

The main point is that even before you start, you must know what the foundation is, the first area one must work on when beginning to serve his Creator. Is the first thing to accept to learn Torah 12 hours each day? Is it proper intent during tefillah or birkas hamazon (grace after meals)? Or is there a more basic point that comes before all of this?

Eemunah- The Work of Life

The gemara says (Makkos 24a), "Chavakuk came and placed [the mitzvos] on one foundation, as it says (Chavakuk 2:4), "and the righteous one lives by his emunah (faith)."

If one has not entered into the inner depths of the world of avodah, he might believe that emunah need only be explained to those who are not yet part of the community that keeps Torah and mitzvos. But I (he thinks), who do observe Torah and mitzvos, and know the thirteen principles of faith, and such, basically possess clear and strong faith.

This is an error! Everything needs strengthening! Most likely, the first error that pulls with it all the falls and failure in avodas Hashem is the lack of awareness that the emunah one received as a child is not sufficient. One imagines that he needs to work for only half a year or a year in order to settle the emunah in himself. This thought derives from a lack of understanding as to the nature of emunah.

Before we describe the nature of emunah, we must make the point very clear. "The righteous one lives by his faith." This means that the greatest tzaddik, even Moshe Rabbeinu, the choice of mankind, primarily worked his entire life on the element of emunah!

There is a deep level of emunah, but it is not philosophy. With Hashem's help, we will try to clarify the nature of such emunah. First of all, we must understand that the true point, the root of all of avodas Hashem, for each person on any level - from a person in the lowest depths to the one who merits being attached to Hashem, like Moshe, the choice of all the creations - is emunah! When one

has the main thing, he can progress further.

Our teacher, the mashgiach (the spiritual guide in yeshivah), HaRav Yechezkel Levinstein, zt"l, once stood at the bimah in Ponevezh yeshivah, and proclaimed: "Rabosai (Gentlemen)! I have been young and become old (he was nearly ninety at the time), and I have been speaking for decades about emunah, and yet, I feel that if I forget about emunah for a few minutes, I fall from my level!"

When we hear such words from a man who was known as one of the "giants," who testifies that he needed to work on his emunah every moment, we learn from him the true foundation of life: The avodah of each moment, the basis of all inner growth, is emunah. Certainly, this doesn't just mean the basic faith that there is a Creator. But at first, it must be very clear what the main avodah of a person in this world is.

The mashgiach zt"l spoke about many topics over the years, but the one topic he kept returning to was the matter of emunah. When he came to Radin, to the yeshivah of the Chafetz Chaim, he heard his first discourse from R' Yerucham zt"l, who was the mashgiach there at that time. This discourse dealt with emunah. From then on, the matter of emunah never left him.

The more a person understands that one's avodah is to work on his emunah, and that his Torah and mitzvos must be built upon that emunah, so does he live with the truth. But if he thinks: "I already believe, I was raised as a religious person and I already know the principles of faith," he is very far from the truth of life.

The yetzer hara regularly tries to deceive a person to think that his main avodah must be in other areas. One person might call it mussar, another will discuss character improvement, and in truth, there are many areas to work on.

We, however, wish to establish the most basic issue, the matter we saw and heard about from the tzaddikim that are with us, and from those that have passed on. The matter that sustained them each moment, which was the most important thing in life for them, was emunah. It would be worthwhile for a person to spend his entire fortune just in order to know this fact!

If a person never hears this from his teachers, he could try throughout his life to work on one issue or another, choosing various stringencies and acts of kindness, and yet, be lacking solid ground on which to stand.

This is the true "hiddenness" of this world: the notion that people have already attained emunah, and that it is already in their pocket.

The Beginning of Avodah - Palpable Emunah

We will try to explain the nature of the simple faith that every child feels, and what is the faith that a person must cultivate throughout his life.

In general, a person possesses information about some things, and an inherent awareness of some things. We will describe this in a simple way. For example, a person knows that five plus eight equals thirteen. When very young, he didn't know that. He was later taught it, and now, thank G-d, he knows it.

In contrast, a person has a hand and a foot. Does he know that he has a hand? Yes, he certainly knows! But the mental knowledge that he has a hand is besides his inherent awareness of it. First of all, he has a hand, and that is a fact, and he senses the fact. Besides that, if he has a hand, he intellectually knows about it, and if he doesn't, G-d forbid, he certainly knows that.

There are two aspects to this. First of all, a person senses the reality, and in addition, there is the intellectual knowledge of this reality.

Thank G-d, each one of us has the merit to know that the world has a Creator. Let us now ponder the example we mentioned, and see which category of knowledge applies to our knowledge of the Creator. Is this like the knowledge that five and eight are thirteen, or is it like the inherent knowledge that one possesses a hand and foot?

The Alter of Novardok zt"l wrote a book called *Madregas HaAdam*. Therein, he explains at length that there is the knowledge of a thing and the experience of the thing, and they are worlds apart. Intellectual knowledge is wonderful, important, and most precious, but there is a huge difference between that and the actual sense of a thing's existence. A person does not forget that he possesses hands and feet, or that he sees and hears. These are things that he senses each moment.

This is the true definition of *emunah*. Hashem is the truest being that exists, and everything else is only a creation. Only Hashem is the First Being, He was, is, and will be, but we are all His creations. Hence, the true absolute existence is Hashem, while our existence is secondary and new. If we consider ourselves to be existing, all the more so that we must consider Hashem as existing, because His existence is prior and more real than ours.

When *emunah* is not only in the mind, and not only an emotional feeling in the heart, but becomes part of one's sense of self, he may know that he is then progressing on the proper path in *avodas Hashem*, and he will receive an entirely new perspective on his *avodas Hashem*.

The difficulties one will encounter in his *avodah* will not be the same difficulties as encountered earlier. It will be an entirely different world. The root of the difficulties, the root of our distance from the true *avodah* of becoming close to Hashem, stems from the fact that the *emunah* we recognize from our youth is only one of intellectual knowledge. It is not a heartfelt *emunah*, through which one feels and recognizes that Hashem is absolutely real (but clearly, an entirely unique kind of Reality).

Anyone with an inner recognition of these matters knows that this is nothing new. As we said, these are the words of the Alter of Novardok, who referred to this as *emunah* of the senses. He elaborated on this topic, in order to bring people close to it. Whether in the school of Kelm (a great school of *mussar*) or in the Chassidic courts, the matter of *emunah* was the focal point of *avodas Hashem*.

Repetition of the Simple Point

If upon hearing these ideas, they seem novel, the *yetzer hara* certainly has succeeded in tricking you and concealing from your eyes a very simple point. The *Ramchal* has already written in the introduction to *Mesillas Yesharim* that when it comes to these matters, "as public as these matters are, and as revealed their truth is to all, so is their neglect prevalent, and the forgetfulness of them common."

In this book, we will speak of the simplest point, with which a person must live. This is like the simple and initial stage of "one who comes to convert." Each day, we must be newly penitent, as our Sages said (*Chagigah* 15a), "Each day, a heavenly voice goes forth from Mount Sinai and proclaims, 'Repent, wayward children.'"

How are we to repent? Should we change our actions? Should we correct our hearts or our thoughts? Should we improve what we allow our eyes to see? This is all correct, and all these need fixing. But the initial repentance is to clear the ground, to prepare solid ground for building a solid structure.

We will provide a simple explanation of this, starting with the simplest point that exists. But just as it is simple, so is it very fundamental; in fact, the foundation of everything! When the foundation is weak, chas veshalom, the building placed over it is liable to be weak.

First of all, a person must instill in his mind, and achieve as a way of thinking, that the central point of life is emunah. It's not enough to just say, "I heard it! I know! That's a good point!" Rather, just as one understands that if they block his mouth and nose so that he cannot breathe, he will immediately die, chas veshalom, so must he understand (at least intellectually) that emunah is the very breath of life for a Jew. It is the root of all. This is really how each person must live.

First of all, one must fulfill (Devarim 4:39), "And you shall know today." A person's thought process must be as follows: "What do I seek? What do I want? What is my purpose right now in this world? What is the most fundamental aspect of my purpose throughout life? It is emunah!"

So that this knowledge will be fixed in the soul of man, he must live with the thought for a long time. He cannot just hear the concept and say, "Good, I know..." There is one kind of knowledge (yedia'ah) which is only information (yeda), but there is another kind of knowledge which is a connection to the thing, as it says (Bereishis 4:1), "And Adam knew (yada) Chavah his wife." Having the information is like being informed that in Israel there is a city called Jerusalem. Once one hears about this, he knows it. Here, though, we refer to the other kind of knowledge, through which a person is attached to the matter with all his soul and being.

This achievement demands a long process, which we will try to explain, but first of all, a person must think again and again: "Why am I here? To be a Jew with emunah! This was the way of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and all the tzaddikim. What was their work in this world? Emunah! What is required of me in this world? Emunah! What must I think about during my life? About emunah! One must consider and know that the essence of life is emunah!

There is no way for a person to totally change his way of thinking by merely hearing this one time. Even if he is intellectually one hundred percent convinced (which in itself is no simple feat), it will not become his natural thought process unless he accustoms himself to think as follows: "I have heard the idea. Is it true or not?" After he accepts it as true, he must start contemplating it. When he goes to sleep, he must ask himself, "What did I hear today?" If it was true, it must be considered.

True, the person does not yet understand what true emunah is, and why it needs so much effort, but he has faith in the great rabbis who taught this basic concept (Makkos 24a): "The prophet Chavakuk came and determined that there is one foundation for the mitzvos-'the righteous man lives by his faith.'" This is his avodah and his entire mission throughout life. The details are numerous, but the foundation and the root of all is emunah!

May Hashem help that the ideas presented here be accepted by you, because they are words of truth. May we all merit coming close to Hashem with truth and perfection.

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