

Pulse OF Emunah

ANI
MAAMIN
Foundation

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life

LESSONS



gem

OF THE WEEK

THE FIRE WITHIN

Rabbi Moshe Schwartz took his class on a camping trip in a state park. There are many rules governing such campsites, strictly enforced by park rangers. The class had been there for five minutes when a middle-aged woman in uniform arrived. "Hi there!" she said. "Are you a rabbi?"

Preoccupied with his class, Rabbi Schwartz answered briefly and listened as she listed the rules. When she left, he regretted the missed opportunity. Luckily, at about 9:30 that night, when the *bachurim* were having a *kumzitz* around the campfire, the park ranger reappeared. "Erev tov," she greeted the class.

"Are you Jewish?" Rabbi Schwartz asked.

"Oh yes," the ranger replied. "In fact, I used to be religious. I get lonely out here and I don't see many Jews. I recognized all the songs you were singing. They brought back such fond memories. I'm not bitter, I had no quarrels with my ex-husband, I just needed to find myself."

"We are from a Jewish community only 45 minutes away," Rabbi Schwartz told her. "If you want to visit, I would be pleased to have you as a Shabbos guest."

"I would enjoy that very much," the park ranger said. Eventually, she informed the rabbi that the height of their fire was above the permitted limit. He promised to lower it, and she drove off again.

Even in the forest, Rabbi Schwartz never lost focus. When an opportunity arrived, his eyes were wide open. We must constantly be on the lookout for opportunities to create *kiddush Hashem*, for we can never know when they will come our way. 

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THE BASIS OF JUDAISM

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

Hashem's first words at Matan Torah, "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*," use an unusual first-person pronoun. The word *Anochi* reveals the speaker as someone intimately close to the listener. Amid an upheaval of nature, the foundations of the earth quaking, Hashem proclaiming Himself as the sole, absolute *Anochi* of the universe through Whom all other beings exist, He turns to each individual Jew and says: "I am *your Anochi*." This is not a declaration, but a *mitzvah*. It does not mean "I, Hashem, am your G-d," but "I, Hashem, *shall be* your G-d." This is the basis of our entire relationship with G-d, the duty Chazal call *kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim*.

What philosophers call "belief in G-d" is different from this foundational verse. The fundamental truth of Jewish life is not belief in G-d's existence or that Hashem is One. It is that He is *my* G-d. He made me what I am, gave me my duty, guides me throughout life. I am not a coincidental product of a universe that He caused many years ago. Rather, every breath and moment of existence is His gift. My duty is to devote every moment to His service. The essential thing is not to know that Hashem exists, but to acknowledge

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powerful
PRAYER  

VA'AVADETEM MEHEIRA:
A PROMISE FULFILLED

Everything that the Torah warns us about has come true. Although we lived in Eretz Yisrael for 850 years, eventually we were forced into exile because we did not obey the Torah. In other *parshiyos*, we are warned that part of the punishment of galus will be to be scattered all over the globe. This, too, has come true—today there are Jewish communities with origins around the entire world.

Only when we do teshuvah and return to Hashem and His Torah will all of the promises of blessing come true as well. 

Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom

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A TIMELY MESSAGE

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

It is said in the name of both the Baal Shem Tov and Rav Elchanan Wasserman that in the period preceding the coming of Mashiach, *emunah* will be as difficult as if, in the time of Eliyahu Hanavi, fire would have descended on the altar of the Baal rather than that of Hashem. How difficult it would have been to bow and call out “Hashem Hu HaElokim!”

In 2009, Rav Shlomo Miller *shlit”a* wrote that there are *yeshivah bachurim* and Bais Yaakov students who harbor doubts about the truth of the *ikarei emunah*. Rav Avraham Chaim Levin *zt”l* said that all *yeshivos* should offer special courses in *emunah*. Rav Reuven Feinstein *shlit”a* wrote that there has been a *yeridah nora* in *emunah* in our time, especially among the youth.

The problem was predicted long ago: a lack of solid *emunah* and conviction in the truth of our Torah and *mesorah*. It was for these reasons that the Ani Maamin Foundation was created, seventeen years ago. When I asked Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky *shlit”a* if the youth should have a forum to ask their questions and get solid answers, he responded, “Absolutely.”

I do not consider it an exaggeration to say that over the course of these less than two decades, tens of thousands have had their *emunah* strengthened through the Ani Maamin Foundation.

Hence, I humbly request that all who have benefited from this newsletter, whether in my own *chashuve* community or elsewhere, take part in our efforts to continue an initiative that has yielded such extraordinary results.

A special Ani Maamin Parlour Meeting will *iy”H* take place on Wednesday night, February 11, at 8:45 PM, at the Kuhnreich residence, 36 Stormont Avenue, Toronto. The evening will offer an opportunity to hear firsthand about the vital work of the Ani Maamin Foundation, its impact on strengthening *emunah* in our generation, and its plans for the future. All who care deeply about the *mesorah* we pass on to our children and *talmidim* are encouraged to attend and lend their support to this critical endeavour. 🕯

that He is my G-d, that my fate is in His hands, and that He alone brings my efforts success.

And what is the basis for these truths? The Torah refers to *yetzias Mitzrayim*, a fundamental event we saw with our own eyes. More than any other nation, we owe Hashem everything. All *Mitzrayim* took from us was returned by Hashem Himself: our individuality, the right to own property, the possessions themselves. Therefore, He alone rules over our lives and property, and we belong only to Him.

On this condition, we were freed and granted independence. Only subservience to Hashem frees us from servitude to man. We left *avdus Pharaoh*, and entered *avdus Hashem*. In Hallel, our national anthem, we sing “*Ani avdecha ben amasecha, pitachta l’moseira*” —I am Your servant from birth, for You opened my chains.

Therefore, Hashem says, *v’heyisem li segulah mikol ha’amim, ki li kol ha’aretz, va’atem tihyu li mamleches kohanim v’goy kadosh*. A *segulah* is something that has no relationship to anyone but its owner. In our relationship with Hashem, it says that we are completely and exclusively His, in every part of our nature and aspirations. Our existence depends on Him alone. He, and no other force, shapes our way of life.

Why? *Ki li kol ha’aretz*. Our relationship should not be exceptional, it should exist for everyone on earth. All mankind is Mine; all nations are Mine. I educate them to become Mine.

And so you must become My *mamleches kohanim* and *goy kadosh*. Each of you is to be a *kohen*, by allowing Me to regulate your actions, by accepting *ol malchus shamayim* and living up to it. You must be a people that does not seek its own glory, but the establishment of Hashem’s kingdom on earth. 🕯

Based on the commentary of Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch *zt”l* on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.



wonder WORLD

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS



Can a mountain shake and thunder?

In Parshas Yisro, Bnei Yisrael stand at Har Sinai as Hashem gives the Torah. The mountain is covered in smoke, fire, thunder, lightning, and even trembles. Outside of tremendous occasions like Matan Torah, can a mountain really do all that? Yes—some mountains are volcanoes. Deep underground, there is red-hot melted rock called magma. When pressure builds, that magma rises and erupts as lava, sending out smoke, ash, fire, and rumbling sounds. The ground can shake from the force, just like an earthquake. Matan Torah was so much more than a natural event. But just like the world shook at Har Sinai, sometimes Hashem uses the power of creation to wake us up and remind us that something big is happening. 🕯

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