

You shall place the two stones on the shoulder straps of the Eiphod, remembrance stones for Bnei Yisrael; and Aharon shall carry their names before Hashem on both his shoulders as a remembrance. (28:12)

Twice remembrance. The remembrance is for Hashem – not Aharon *HaKohen*. *Chazal* say (*Midrash Rabbah* 38:8) that the names of the *Shevatim*, tribes, which are engraved upon the stones of the Eiphod, cannot be the subject of the remembrance. (They probably are not being remembered.) Remembrance is a term that applies to a subject that either is not here or is not presently visible. Since the names of the tribes are visible, the term remembrance is not applicable to them (in this context); rather, by seeing the names of the tribes, Hashem acknowledges their *tzidkus*, righteousness. What is their righteousness?

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, cites a passage from the *Talmud* 56a, “Yaakov *Avinu* called together his sons, because he wished to reveal to them the *Keitz ha’Yamin*, the end of the withdrawal of Hashem’s Right Hand from battle against the enemies of the Jewish People. [This means that when the enemy destroyed the *Bais Hamikdash* and sent our nation into exile,

Hashem’s Right Hand (so to speak) was drawn behind His back, in a state of withdrawal. In the Messianic era, He will return His right hand – which means, metaphorically, that He will destroy our enemies and return us from exile.] The Divine Presence departed from him, causing the Patriarch to be concerned. His first thought was that perhaps, like his ancestors, he could have a blemish in his family. (Avraham *Avinu* begot Yishmael, and Yitzchak *Avinu* fathered Eisav.) Sensing his concern, his sons immediately declared, “*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad*. Just as there is only One deity in your heart, so, too, is there only One in our hearts. Yaakov responded, *Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuso L’olam Va’ed, Ein Od Milvado*, “There is no one besides Him.”

Yichud Hashem, the unity of Hashem, means believing with total conviction that, besides Hashem, no other power exists. The tribes all declared unanimously that their belief in Hashem as *Echad*, the One and only, was undeviating from the belief of their forebears. Yaakov had nothing to worry about. The *emunah* in Hashem that he imparted to his sons had achieved its purpose. This was their *tzidkus*, achieving a belief in the unity of Hashem on the same level as Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Eid Od Milvado applies to every aspect, decision, and situation in our life. It applies, not only: during war, when the situation appears to be overwhelming; or when the doctor’s prognosis is far from encouraging; or when the principal, *shadchan*, broker, looks at us with downcast eyes. On the contrary, we always maintain our conviction in only Hashem, because, after all is said and done, only Hashem can solve our problems. *Eid Od Milvado*: We do not ascribe to Him any form of “assistant.” Yet, it goes even further. *Emunah* is a *metzius*, an entity, a self-contained existence.

The following incident (quoted by *Rav Karlinstein*), which took place a number of years ago, gives us an idea of the *madreigah*, plateau, of *emunah* inherent in one who understands the depth of conviction lived by our Torah giants. To them, *emunah* meant much more than faith. It was a *metzius*.

An observant Jew was a member of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society. His “day” job was his occupation as a barber. While he owned a barber shop on Bnei Brak’s main street, he would do “house calls” for certain venerable Torah giants. One of those was *Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl*, son-in-law of the *Alter, zl*, of Slabodka, and successor as its *Rosh Yeshivah*. Since the barber had the merit to cut the hair of such a sage, he would often ask him *halachic* questions concerning the laws pertaining to *Chevra Kaddisha*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* was impressed with this man’s attitude to Torah study and his meticulous adherence to *Halachah*. They became very close, with the *Rosh Yeshivah* holding his barber in great esteem. One day, *Rav Aizik* said to the barber, “When the time comes for me to be called to my eternal rest, I want you to prepare my body for burial.” This was the unique relationship the *Rosh Yeshivah* had with this man.

One day, the barber, who was an intelligent man who had studied in the *yeshivos* that graced the Hungarian spiritual landscape, asked if he could attend the *Rosh Yeshivah’s shmuessen*, ethical discourses. *Rav Aizik* replied in the affirmative. He then asked if his friends, themselves also Hungarian immigrants who had all studied in *yeshivah*, could also attend the *shmuessen*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* agreed in principle, but he added one stipulation, “I would like them to come here, so that I can first meet them.”

These men came the next day to the *Rosh Yeshivah’s* house. “Welcome!” the *Rosh Yeshivah* began. “Forgive me for asking such a question of such a group of outstanding, observant Jews, but, since I do not know you, I must ask, “Do you have *emunah* in Hashem?”

The men were incredulous. Is this the type of question one asks of an observant Jew? “What is the question?” they asked. “Certainly! We have *emunah*.” Then *Rav Aizik* turned to a member of the group and asked, “Where do you work?” “In Tel Aviv.” Bnei Brak was just a small town at the time. It was a far cry from the bustling metropolis that it is today. *Rav Aizik* asked each one of the men where he worked, and the response was the same: “Tel Aviv.” “How do you get to work each day?” he asked. “By bus” was their immediate response. “Is the bus driver a Torah observant Jew?” *Rav Aizik* asked. “No. He is not,” they replied. “Do you mean that he drives on *Shabbos*?” Once again, they replied that he was a full-fledged non-observant Jew.

We must take into consideration that a *mechallel Shabbos*, *Shabbos* desecrator, in those days was quite different than it is today. Today’s *mechallel Shabbos*, for the most part, is a *tinok she’nishbah*, child that was taken captive. (This means that he neither had an opportunity to study, nor did his parents provide him with a Torah observant environment and education. Thus, his lack of observance cannot be held against him.) Then, the *mechallel Shabbos* was a Jew who knew better, but for various reasons (such as spiritual freedom, economics, social acceptance), turned

his back on the religion of his forebears and rejected his Jewish heritage.

Hearing this, the *Rosh Yeshivah* looked at them and asked, “Forgive me for asking, but are you not afraid to travel by bus with a driver who is dead? He is dead! How can you risk your lives in such a manner?”

The men looked at one another, thinking that the *Rosh Yeshivah* had lost it and suddenly become unhinged. What was he saying? How could he make such a statement – claiming that their driver was dead?

Rav Aizik continued, “You claim that you believe in Hashem; yet, you ignore the fact that *Chazal* say that one who is a *rasha*, wicked (because he knowingly, willfully, desecrates the Torah), is considered to be dead. When *Chazal* make a statement, it is a reality. If they say a *rasha* is dead – he is dead! You travel every day with a dead driver. I am not instructing you how to live, but be aware that when *Chazal* make a statement, it is *Kodesh Kodoshim*, Holy of Holies. *Emunah* is a *metzius*. [To believe in Hashem is a reality. Not to accept this entity, is not to believe in Hashem.]

This is why the *Kohen Gadol* wore the stones with the names of the *Shevatim* on his shoulders as a remembrance of their righteousness. Their belief in the unity of Hashem was real.