

“And he trusted in Hashem, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (15:6)

Avraham Avinu exemplified *emunah*, faith, in Hashem. Many people believe in Hashem, but, how many actually live with *emunah*? To say that one's faith and conviction in the Almighty is integral to one's life is truly a strong statement. There are people, however, to whom this idea applies. Hashem tests us all of the time. As believing Jews, these *nisyonos*, tests/trials, are an evaluation of our degree of *emunah*. Ostensibly, the greater one's *emunah*, the more difficult is the test.

A while ago, I read in one of the Jewish periodicals about the reaction of secular Jews in *Eretz Yisrael* to a mother's response to the tragic deaths of her two young children.

The writer was in a small grocery store in a totally secular environment. It was the morning of *Hoshanah Rabbah*. There were a few people in the store who, while shopping, were listening to the radio blare out its raucous music. Suddenly, the announcer related a terrible tragedy that had occurred that night. Two children had been killed in a fire that broke out in their *succah*. Everyone in the store stopped what they were doing to listen to the chilling report of the horrific tragedy. The announcer continued to report the reaction of the devastated mother: “*Hashem nosan, Hashem lokach; y'hi Shem Hashem mevorach*”, “Hashem gave, and Hashem has taken; may the Name of Hashem be blessed.” The mother's voice resounded throughout the room, as she said, “My children went up to Heaven in a fiery storm.

They are now near to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. I accept His decree with love and faith. This tragedy is an atonement for the entire generation. My children were holy and pure and died *Al Kiddush Hashem*. We now have a greater obligation to do *mitzvos*.”

Everyone in the grocery store stood still in shocked silence when they heard these words from the mouth of a broken-hearted, but courageous, mother. They all looked at the observant writer, who was no less left speechless by her awesome words. One person broke the silence and said, “I am jealous of how you people are able to manage. In situations such as these only a believer can survive the emotional turmoil, the devastating shock of confronting tragedy. Yes, only you people, the *chareidim*, can handle this.”

It is true. Only a *maamim*, believer, can accept the challenges that life brings. Only through faith can we grow spiritually, as our *emunah* is tempered through *nisayon*. Every person must gauge his own personal level of *emunah*. Our true level of faith becomes apparent through moments of challenge. For some, it is *parnassah*, earning a livelihood; for others, it is a *shidduch*, finding the correct partner in life; for yet others, it is issues of health – physical and emotional; for some, it is *tzaar gidul banim*, raising children to be responsible, observant Jews; and then there are those whose *emunah* is incredible, who are living testaments to faith in Hashem – such as the young

mother who tragically lost two of her children, or the so many other Jews who have suffered and suffered, but endured with faith.

We are a special people, descendants of the great *maamin*, Avraham Avinu. We strive to be the heirs to his gift of *emunah*, so that we are truly worthy of the appellation, “*maaminim bnei maaminim*.”

For some, *emunah* is the result of intellectual contemplation, seeking to rationalize and understand the significance of belief, while attempting to justify and accept Hashem’s decree. They, of course, realize that with their limited abilities, they can understand just so much. At this point, their true *emunah* is manifest. Then there is the Jew who has *emunah peshutah*, simple, unembellished belief. He asks no questions, seeks no answers, just believes wholeheartedly in the Almighty. This is a very unique and exalted spiritual plateau. For some, it is the consequence of transcending the questions that abound, arriving at the conclusion that only through simple belief can we “understand” Hashem’s ways. For others, it is the result of innocence and genuineness, a simplicity of faith born of sincerity.

The simple – and often unschooled – Jew, whose devotion to the Almighty was steadfast and unwavering, exemplified this ideal. *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, tells the story of a very devout, but innocent, Jew who heard his *rebbe* emphasize the importance of offering the *Lechem HaPanim*, Showbread. In his naiveté, he did not realize that this applied only in the *Bais HaMikdash*. He proceeded to leave two freshly-baked breads in the *shul*, on the side of the *Aron Ha’kodesh* every night as “his” offering. Unbeknownst to this trusting soul, the *shul’s shamesh*, sexton, would secretly remove these breads to feed his family. This would go on every night. The believing Jew thought that Hashem accepted his offering and that it gave forth a *reiach nichoach*, pleasing aroma, in Heaven.

This continued for quite awhile. Everyone was pleased. The Jew would bring the bread, trusting in its spiritual acceptance, and the caretaker’s family had fresh bread daily. One day, the *rav* heard about the daily “bread-offering” that was taking place in his *shul*. He went over to the Jew and admonished him to halt his offering, explaining that since there was no *Bais HaMikdash*, it was no longer appropriate to offer the two loaves. That night, it was revealed to the *rav* in a dream that he should instruct his family concerning his last will and testament. It had been decreed that he would soon leave this world, because he had prevented the Jew from offering his daily breads.

Indeed, since the destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash*, Hashem *Yisborach* had not derived a greater *nachas-ruach*, satisfaction, than He did from the sincere offering of the Jew. His simple *emunah*, his heartfelt offering, was carried up directly to Hashem. While the *rav* was certainly correct as far as the *halachah* was concerned, this Jew’s sincere faith went beyond the letter of the law. Needless to say, the *rav* recanted his words and encouraged the Jew to continue with his offering.