

Four Dimensions of Faith: The Key to Spiritual Health

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Emunah: Strength, Faith, Nurturing and Creativity

The force of Emunah, "faith" or "belief" plays an essential role in determining one's psychological well-being. In fact, when properly considered, it serves as a background against which all psychic striving can be understood. Just as the physical body returns to the earth from which it was formed, so too does the soul proceed toward ultimately reuniting with the Divine source from which it was conceived. At any particular time, one's psychological state can be seen as a reflection of how that process is progressing.

In the Sefer Hashorashim of the Radak, a classic work on Biblical Hebrew grammar, the root of the word emunah is described as possessing four distinct, yet inter-related, meanings:

1. "Strength", as in Isaiah 25:1: 'Hashem, You are my Lord; I will exalt You, I will acknowledge Your Name; for You have wrought wonders - ancient counsels of exceeding strength'. The 'strength' referred to in this verse is meant to express God's steadfast faithfulness in carrying out His promises of old.

2. "Faith", as in Devarim 32:20: 'children who are unpossessed of faith'. Rashi expounds upon the verse thusly: 'The effort I invested in raising them is not recognizable' - indicating that faith should be a consequence of proper nurturing.

3. "Nurturing", as in Megillat Esther 2:7: 'And behold he (Mordechai) cared for and raised Haddasah'. The role of nurturer is predicated upon the use of one's own faith as a basis for providing consistent and reliable support for another.

4. "Creativity", as in Shir HaShirim 7:2: 'the handiwork of an artist.' The quality of one's creative output can be seen as an indication of one's state of emunah. This implies the usefulness of creative activity as a tool for the rehabilitation of damaged faith.

This last dimension of faith, the creative aspect deduced from the verse "the handiwork of an artist" can help us understand the connection between emunah and the achievement of health.

Health, Faith And Creativity

The root of the Hebrew word for health – "b'riut" - is b'ro, meaning "to create". Health is best achieved through creative endeavor. The product of that endeavor expresses the



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quality of faith that underlies it. Creation, the "handiwork of an artist" of the Holy One, demonstrates faith in the interdependence and root compatibility of the physical and spiritual realms: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' - thereby expressing His faith in the harmony that can be achieved between the soul (the "heavens") and the body (the "earth").

The Ramban, in his commentary on the Torah, interprets the term bara as specifically expressive of creation ex-nihilo, the generation of created being out of total nothingness - thus denying the doctrine of eternal matter. Kabbalistic sources, while accepting the principle of creation-ex-nihilo, challenge its identification with the verb baro by suggesting that the act of creation depicted in the first verse of the Torah describes what is in actuality the second stage of Creation: the introduction of the realm of rectification.

According to the Kabbalah, Creation necessitated the articulation of two distinct and antithetical realms. The first, which was truly created ex-nihilo is referred to as the - the un-rectified 'realm of chaos'. Synonymous with the universal "formlessness and void" described in the second verse of the Torah, the realm of chaos was intended as a prelude to the elaboration of an additional realm - the 'realm of rectification' - which is responsible for the meaningfulness and order which we discern throughout the universe.

At the moment that the realm of rectification was introduced into Creation, the universe was far from being a "blank slate". If anything, it was a slate which had been written upon illegibly and which was awaiting the hand which would inscribe upon it a more meaningful formulation. The collateral realm of rectification emerged for that purpose: in order to impose order upon the amorphous and chaotic reality which preceded it. Consequently, the term bara used at the beginning of the Torah to describe the appearance of the realm of rectification cannot be said to deal, as the Ramban suggests, in ex-nihilo realities alone.

The identification of b'riah with rectification results in Creation taking on the character of a therapeutic intervention. As a mechanism aimed at restoring order to a prior realm of chaos and fragmentation, b'riah explicitly serves as a vehicle for rehabilitating and advancing the b'riut, health, of the universe.

Somewhere beyond even the primordial realm of chaos which emerged ex-nihilo, there exists an immutable yet hidden design for the universe which dictated that chaos precede rectification in the unfolding of the cosmos. Harbored in this design is the consummate image of Creation which, from the very inception of being and for all time thereafter, serves as the model toward which the realm of rectification aspires.

This design, the Divine creative Will, can only be affirmed through one's faith. By cultivating faith, the deep unconscious root of one's soul can access this uncorrupted core of Divine Wisdom and draw from it the inspiration needed to overcome the chaos and despair which oftentime pervade one's inner world.

The Therapeutic Effect of Belief in Creation Ex-Nihilo

The foundational work of Chabad Chassidut - the Tanya - has been described as a 'book of suggestions for remedying maladies of the soul'. In the section entitled Igeret Hakodesh Chapter 11, its author - the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi - addresses the effect of inadequate or misplaced emunah, faith, on one's psychological state of being. Specifically concerned with he who invests excessive faith in material security and well-being, and as a result despairs when he cannot achieve it, the Tanya opines:

"This matter can only be remedied by true faith in He who formed the beginning of all things; through the belief that creation ex-nihilo...takes place at every interval and at every moment, that all created things come into being ex-nihilo out of His blessed Wisdom which enlivens all. And when man contemplates with the depth of his understanding, and sketches in his mind, the idea of his own being emerging out of nothingness at each and every moment - how can he entertain the thought that his life is baneful or beset with affliction (be it with regard to children, health, livelihood or any other area)?

Behold, the realm of Nothingness - synonymous with His blessed Wisdom - is the source of life, goodness, and delight; it is the Eden that exists beyond even the World to Come. Only because [this realm] cannot be comprehended, does it appear to one that there is evil and affliction. In truth, however, evil does not descend from Above; everything is really goodness - only it is not conceived as such due to the enormity and grandness of His beneficence.

This is the essence of faith for which man was created - to believe that there is no place empty of Him, that we all dwell in the aura of the King's countenance, and that fortitude and rapture come in His wake since He is only goodness all the day.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that man be happy and rejoice at every interval and hour, and that he truly live with faith in God who enlivens him and bestows him with goodness at every moment. And he who brings himself to sadness and grief, showing himself to be possessed of misery and affliction and lacking in some quality of goodness, behold he is likened to a heretic, God forbid, and that is why the trait of melancholy is so reviled in the esoteric tradition.

The believer, however, will not despair at the apparent affliction in the world; all matters of this world - good and bad - are received by him with absolute equanimity. He who does not possess such equanimity shows himself to be of the "mixed multitude" who worship only themselves...and it would be better for him had he not been born.

For man's creation in this world is essentially for the purpose of testing him with these ordeals, and to discover that which is in his heart: if it turns toward other gods, i.e. cravings of the body that derive from the "other side", or if his true will and desire is to live the authentic life that derives from the "living God"...

And if he believes that he genuinely lives by these Divine forces, and that all his needs and affairs do truly emanate in all their detail - not from the "other side" - but from "the Lord who plans man's every step"; if so - it follows that everything is essentially for the good, albeit not always apprehended that way.

And by virtue of this faith, everything indeed does achieve goodness - even outwardly; for by acknowledging that apparent evil derives its existence entirely from the Supreme Good that is His blessed and unfathomable Wisdom - the Eden above the World to Come - behold, through such faith, the apparent evil does truly become elevated and subsumed within the hidden Supreme Good."

In short, the Tanya suggests that the emunah achievable through contemplation of creation ex-nihilo attaches man to his source in "Divine Nothingness." Prior to attaining this level of emunah, man dwells in the shadow of the cosmic "shattering" of reality that resulted in our attributing autonomy to the material realm and to the forces of evil which are often associated with it. By perfecting his emunah, however, man can begin to see the blind tyranny of evil and suffering as a distortion of consciousness produced when one is insufficiently infused with faith in the Divine origins of physical existence.

Eemunah leads one to the realization that the Divine Nothingness existing beyond our fractured reality represents the ultimate source of all things in absolute goodness. This universal point- of-origin, also known as the 'source of all delight', is what the Ba'al HaTanya refers to as the "Eden above the World-to-Come". So beyond our present reality is this dimension, that the only way it can be conceptually described is as "Nothingness". When experienced, however, the Divine Nothingness reflects the existence of a wholly unqualified standard of virtue in the universe - an essential and absolute quality of goodness at the core of all being.

The Hidden Interface Between Being and Nothingness

In chapter 2, we attributed to the Ramban what is generally accepted as the simple meaning of creation ex-nihilo: a rejection of the notion that the universe is eternal together with the affirmation that it possesses a Divine point of origin. This formula still leaves undetermined, however, the issue as to whether creation was a solitary fixed event that set the conditions of the universe for all time or merely the initiation of an ongoing process of renewal and rebirth that takes place at each and every moment. The contribution of Kabbalah and Chassidut to the understanding of Creation ex-nihilo is to affirm this latter contention.

As man contemplates, in the words of the Tanya, "the idea of his own being emerging out of nothingness at each and every moment", it becomes clear that all things are perpetually being re-created anew out of the Divine Nothingness grounding reality. At its root, life is a continuous present-moment, undetermined by that which precedes it and unconcerned with that which follows.

In a universe where every instant in time is perceived as completely self-actualizing, concepts that imply extension - such as "process" or "relationship" - really appear to have little relevance. The problem with such a contention is that it flies in the face of human intuition. After all, every man is endowed with the sense of possessing a "past", a progression over time of thoughts, sensations and experience which contribute to an integrated and enduring image of who he is. The "punctuated" view of reality proposed above would appear to shatter the premise of causality that serves as one of our most basic assumptions of experience. Furthermore, how can the depiction of Creation as a process of rectification be reconciled with a view of existence that presumes each moment to be newly generated and altogether disconnected from that which came before?

These difficulties can be resolved through an appreciation of how the opposing views of Creation considered above actually complement each other. While it is true that human experience argues in favor of viewing the created realm as a fixed and self-sustaining entity, our belief in rectification necessitates acknowledging the possibility of an altogether new life-force being introduced into that homeostatic system. Without the energy of the Divine Nothingness being made available anew at every moment, how can one hope to redeem oneself, if not the universe, from the imperfections which are native to creation? Whereas the work of rectification takes place within the fractured reality accessible to consciousness, its inspiration comes from the Divine Wisdom of the Divine Nothingness filling the invisible synapses of time. Through the superconscious grasp of one's emunah, it becomes possible to draw from that reservoir the energy one needs to restore health to Creation. Immersing oneself in the timeless dimension of the Divine Nothingness brings relief and restitution to a world ravaged by an unforgiving sense of its own temporality.

The delicate and hidden interface between Being and Nothingness, expressed through the concept of Creation ex-nihilo underscores the artistry of Creation. The "artistic handiwork" of the Almighty is predicated upon the principle of a continually regenerating universe. By virtue of one's faith in the constant potential for rectification in Creation, one is given the opportunity to collaborate with God in restoring the true Divine image of reality.

The Three Souls of Man

In the first chapter of Tanya, R. Shneur Zalman expounds upon two forces which create the spiritual dynamic at work in every Jew: the Divine Soul, that portion of God's Essence resident within us which impels the Jew to transcend his physical nature, and the Animal Soul, the force behind man's creaturely emotions and instincts that binds him to the material realm.) The Animal Soul is alternatively called the "Vital Soul" or the "Natural Soul"). Intimated in Tanya as well, though more explicitly elaborated in later writings of Chassidut, is the existence of an intermediate force called the Intelligent Soul

which seeks to edify and elevate the Animal Soul by filtering natural experience through the prism of human reason. (Whereas the Divine Soul is an exclusive inheritance of the Jewish people, the other two souls are universal in nature - defining psychic parameters for all mankind. Nevertheless, subtle but significant differences do exist in the way the Intelligent Soul is manifested by the Jew.) According to Chassidic doctrine, Abraham began his journey of faith by refining the emunah inherent within his Animal Soul and Intelligent Soul. Once perfected, he acquired a whole new complex of spiritual powers known as the Divine Soul. So completely did he incorporate these powers into his being, that the Divine Soul immediately became a genetic characteristic that he was able to bequeath to succeeding generations of Jews after him.

These three varieties of soul, though unique and often disparate in their individual characters, nevertheless possess a common internal structure. This reflects a general principle of Chassidut (paraphrased from Kohelet 7:14): God has acted so as that differing dimensions of reality actually reflect each other. As such, the Animal Soul can be assumed to possess a level of emunah parallel to that found in the Divine Soul- as is the case as well with the Intelligent Soul.

Once one attains the true emunah of the Divine Soul, all lesser forms of faith appear nothing more than mere superstition. Nevertheless, even a deficient level of faith can preside over an ensemble of related spiritual forces. Consequently, the levels of emunah native to the Animal Soul and the Intelligent Soul must be seen as possessing an integrity of their own, as they serve to advance the soul toward the true emunah of the Divine Soul.

The following might serve as an outline of this evolution in faith:

The Animal Soul produces emunah in the power of the Self.

This is the level of emunah which must be cultivated during the formative stages of man's exploring his native capacities of self. If missing, severe disturbances of identity result, leaving the individual with a marked sense of his own impotence and egowekness.

In isolation of higher emunah, faith in Self can lead to the paradigmatic conceit portrayed Biblically by the self-promoting proclamation "my strength and the might of my hand produced for me this success" (Deuteronomy 8:17). When accompanied, however, by faith in the Divine derivation of one's soul, confidence in Self need no longer supplant one's trust in God. In fact, it can provide a legitimate, if not essential, basis for realizing spiritual growth - as evident from the verse's continuation: "and remember God your L-d, that He is the One who grants you the power to prosper". The achievements are still yours, as are the powers that produced them; simply acknowledge the Source that invested you with those powers. [This idea is evident from the words of King David: 'Render unto Him that which is His, for both you and yours come from Him'; also, he said: 'for everything derives from You, and from Your own hand comes that which we now give You'(Chronicles I 29:14).]

The Intelligent Soul produces emunah in the power of the intellect.

This level of emunah comprises the source of man's faith in Science and Reason. It represents the belief that the mind, in its ever-evolving capacity to grasp the complexity of existence, ultimately enables one to contend with life's most vexing challenges.

There is an element of humility and selflessness in the genuine pursuit of truth and knowledge which renders this variety of faith a more refined and valued one than that associated with the Animal Soul. Its attendant negation of irrational belief can even serve to enhance one's comprehension of matters Divine - as in the rationalist faith advocated by the Rambam. Nevertheless, it can never supplant the emunah of the Divine Soul which alone enables the soul to positively confirm its own supra-conscious descent from the realm of Divine Essence.

The Divine Soul produces true emunah in One God.

This is the level of emunah which can only be reached by way of experiencing the naked solitude of one's being. Whereas the cultivation of emunah in Self and Reason focuses on traits of character and intelligence which are common to all men, nurturing emunah in God leads one to the mysterious root of his singular and unique soul. From that root, emunah in one's Divine origins proceeds to enhance the lesser forms of faith that attach to human experience.

The Interinclusion of Emunah

Chassidut teaches us that, given any conceptual hierarchy, one can find in each element a basis for identifying with all others. This is called the principle of "inter-inclusion". It implies that there are aspects of one's emunah in Self, Reason and God which all reflect each other.

Let us explore the full spectrum of emunah that derives from the acceptance of this principle:

The emunah of the Animal Soul:

1. Primary expression: belief in the Self's ability to physically and emotionally endure the hardships of life and even succeed in prospering.
2. As it reflects the Intelligent Soul: confidence in the reality-assessing powers of one's ego. Faith-in-reason is manifested at this level as the validation of each individual's particular interpretation of his own immediate experience.
3. As it reflects the Divine Soul: belief in the transcendent powers of Self - those inner resources that clearly derive from a place beyond intellect and emotion and which express the influence of one's Divine Soul upon the outer layers of self-hood. The capacity for self-sacrifice is perhaps the most significant expression of this dimension of faith.

The emunah of the Intelligent Soul:

1. Primary expression: faith in human reason and the power of one's intellect to evaluate reality and determine truth.

2. As it reflects the Animal Soul: belief in the axioms of civilized life promulgated within one's social milieu. These derive from the cumulative experience and wisdom of one's native culture.

3. As it reflects the Divine Soul: belief in the hidden Divine intellect that conceived Nature and all of created reality. This aspect of emunah can be likened to the belief in God as Elokim, a designation that evokes God's mastery over Nature. [Even Pharaoh was able to attain this level of emunah, as is evident from his response (Numbers 5:2) to Moses' plea that the children of "God, the L-d of Israel" be released from bondage: "I know not God" - we infer from this that Pharaoh was only denying his knowledge of God as Hashem but not as Elokim, the power behind Nature.]

This dimension of emunah affirms that there exist Divinely inspired laws of nature to which man is oblivious, laws which are responsible for the very way our minds process reality. Consciousness, with its source in a universal and inscrutable Divine intellect is itself a phenomenon whose reality can only be affirmed through faith. [Some interpretations of modern physics also suggest that the underlying laws of consciousness are, by their very nature, inaccessible to the reach of human reason and perhaps grounded in some Higher Reality.]

The emunah of the Divine Soul:

1. Primary expression: belief in the one God, out of whose Essence the Jewish soul is hewn.

2. As it reflects the Animal Soul: belief in the Divine character of the Jewish people who collectively bear the mark of Divinity upon their souls. 'Faith in Israel' expresses itself chiefly as a persistent belief in the innate purity and goodness of the Jewish soul.

3. As it reflects the Intelligent Soul: belief in the Torah, vehicle of Divine Intellect - as stated by the Zohar: 'the Torah emerges out of God's Wisdom'. Much like one's faith in the power of human reason, this belief is also predicated upon an appreciation of the unlimited and ever-evolving breadth reflected in Torah wisdom. Each generation's community of sages reveals, through their unique perspective in Torah understanding, an unexplored dimension of Divine wisdom waiting to be unveiled - as hinted by the standard Midrashic preface: "Opened Rabbi so-and-so". (The three faces of emunah manifested through the Divine Soul reflect the contention of the Zohar that 'Israel, the Torah, and God are all One'.)

In summary, every one of the three souls possessed by the Jew is crowned with a halo of emunah. Each soul's emunah harbors elements inspired by the other two. All together, there are nine dimensions that constitute the full complex of a Jew's faith:

the animal soul	the intelligent soul	the Divine soul
has faith in	has faith in	faith in
the transcendent powers of self	the Divine wisdom of nature	God
one's capacity to assess reality	human reason	Torah
one's physical and emotional capabilities	social mores	Israel