

Message 2025-01-04

שלום

החברים והמשפחה שלי

Shalom, khaverim v'mishpokhah sheli.

Shalom, my family and friends.

As I am certain you have noticed, Rabbi Shmuel is out of town today. We have the annual IAMCS Rabbi's Conference starting tomorrow, and Rabbi was able to leave a little early in order to visit family before the conference. So, please keep him in prayer for family time that is both joyful and productive, and keep Amber and myself in prayer for safety and health as we fly down to join him in the morning; Hashem and the snowpocalypse willing.

With Rabbi out today, I am the fortunate one to be blessed to speak with you this Shabbat.

אשרינו

My current state of being (as someone both fortunate and blessed) is actually on topic because what I would like to talk about today is a concept based on the word ashreinu. This word translates 'How blessed are we' or 'how fortunate are we'. If you wanted to say, 'we are happy' in Hebrew, you could say, 'ashreinu' or 'anakhnu smekha' and you would be understood.

Today we are going to learn about ashreinu as more than a Hebrew phrase. It is a framework for life.

I first encountered teaching from the Breslov Chasidim on this subject near the beginning of my Torah walk, and I have been wrestling with it ever since.

Ashreinu is not just some passing feeling of joy or satisfaction that we experience together. The meaning encapsulated in this word is far greater and more profound than that because understanding how

fortunate and blessed we are, regardless of our circumstances, changes everything.

The joy of Adonai is our strength. With it we can handle whatever lies ahead of us. The truth is that when we recognize who Adonai is to us and who we are to Him, and we resolve to walk in that reality, it will fundamentally transform our lives.

אמונה

Transforming our lives through ashreinu begins with another Hebrew word, emunah. Emunah means faith, but you cannot understand emunah as simply believing in something, seen or unseen. In Western thought, Greek thought (the methodology of thought of the bad guys in the Hanukkah story), you can believe in something without ever acting upon it, and that is often sufficient.

Hebrews 11 (New American Standard Bible 1995)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval.

When we read Hebrews 11 through a Western lens, it seems to reinforce this concept that faith is nothing more than mental ascent. However, the community of Messianic Jews to whom this book was written understood emunah. From a Biblical point of view, there is no such thing as belief without action. You can't believe in love and act hatefully and hope to be considered a loving person.

Our actions prove our beliefs and our convictions.

Ya'akov, the brother of Yeshua, plainly lays out this concept.

Ya'akov 2

What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no actions to prove it? Is such "faith" able to save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food, and someone says to him, "Shalom! Keep warm and eat hearty!" without giving him what he needs, what good does it do?

Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead. But someone

will say that you have faith and I have actions. Show me this faith of yours without the actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions!

Our halakha, the way we live our lives, should demonstrate our emunah.

Who is our faith in?

With that understanding of emunah in mind we should ask ourselves who are faith resides in?

Our faith does not lie in our own faith. It is not in our religion or our doctrines or our dogma. It is not naming and claiming what we selfishly want. It is not in our halakha or our righteousness.

Like Avraham Avinu, our emunah should be in Adonai alone. Melech David said it this way.

Psalm 121

*(1) If I raise my eyes to the hills,
from where will my help come?
2 My help comes from Adonai,
the maker of heaven and earth.
3 He will not let your foot slip —
your guardian is not asleep.
4 No, the guardian of Isra'el
never slumbers or sleeps.
5 Adonai is your guardian; at your right hand
Adonai provides you with shade —
6 the sun can't strike you during the day
or even the moon at night.
7 Adonai will guard you against all harm;
he will guard your life.
8 Adonai will guard your coming and going
from now on and forever.*

Adonai, the maker of heaven and earth, is also your helper, your protector, your shelter, your guardian, and he is always active. Our emunah is in Adonai alone.

As followers of Yeshua Hamashiakh we should understand the immenseness of the love of Adonai even more profoundly than most.

This should impact and affect every aspect of our lives. As we walk in emunah, we should interpret what we see and hear and experience differently because Adonai, the creator of the universe, is with us. We should be able to shout, 'Ashreinu!', because we understand who we are and who holds us in His hand. We understand that our existence transcends this life, this reality, and that our destiny lies with Adonai in the world to come.

Rav Shalom Arush taught this way, "Every single event in our lives is intended to help us get to know Hashem. Hashem knows each of us and knows fully well the exact conditions that facilitate our getting to know Him."

The enemy of Ashreinu?

What prevents us from living in ashreinu?

We could blame this on the accuser or on the evil inclination, and those are valid targets for our blame. However ha satan and the yetzer hara have only the power of influence. We have the power to choose how we react and act in this world. When we do not live in ashreinu, the blame falls squarely on our shoulders.

The devil is not making you do it.

What do we deserve? What are we entitled to? How should things work? What is fair? What is just?

Our expectations of how things should be are more likely to lead to negativity than reality. We deserve better. We should be paid better, treated better, etc.

These unrealized expectations trap us in a living prison. They result in depression, dissatisfaction, discontentment...

It all comes from misplaced emunah. We place our faith in our own strength and wisdom and experience. We place our faith in our

government or businesses or communities. We place our faith in our friends and our family. However, all of these things can and often DO fail us.

Only Adonai will not fail us, but when you are sad or depressed or ungrateful, it is impossible to be grateful to Hashem.

Acting with emunah vs acting without emunah

Do we just blindly ignore our troubles or hardships? No.

We choose to trust in Hashem rather than our limited understanding of our immediate circumstances.

If we exist at the center of our universe then we believe that the world is ours. The world owes us everything. It is about us and not about Hashem. At the very least we should reap what we have sown, right? However, oftentimes our experience have nothing to do with us. This is not our story. It is Hashem's, and we need to seek to understand how we can best achieve His goals. He is the director and producer of the story.

We often focus on the trouble we experience without faith. Seek Adonai's understanding of your situation. Perhaps this trouble is saving us from greater harm. Perhaps there is a purpose to what we are going through. Perhaps we are not even the focus of Adonai's purpose in the situation that is effecting us.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praised be God, Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, compassionate Father, God of all encouragement and comfort; who encourages us in all our trials, so that we can encourage others in whatever trials they may be undergoing with the encouragement we ourselves have received from God.

People of emunah live for His purpose. When we have emunah, we can focus on the reality that he is in control of all things; the good things and the bad.

Is this just positive thinking?

No, because you are placing your faith in Hashem. This is not just about ignoring reality. You are embracing your reality honestly and in balance, and you are taking all of this to Adonai. All of the positives and negatives are being brought before the creator of the universe. You are asking Him to intervene in your situation

Your faith, which is expressed in *ashreinu*, is freedom. You don't need to understand or know everything. You just need to know that everything Hashem does is for the very best. You can strive for understanding and wisdom, but it is nothing without *emunah*. True understanding and true wisdom come from Hashem.

Proverbs 3

*5 Trust in Adonai with all your heart;
do not rely on your own understanding.
6 In all your ways acknowledge him;
then he will level your paths.*

An Example From Our Parshah

In our parshah reading for this week Yosef is finally revealed and reconnected to his brothers.

Think back on the life of Yosef up until this point. He is a fairly consistent character. He is honest and demonstrates wisdom and insight, and he is rewarded with punishment after punishment. He had every right to be bitter against his brothers who had wanted to kill him, sold him as a slave, and abandoned him. He could have gloated over them because finally he was proven right, and they were wrong all along. They were bowing down to him at last.

Instead Yosef sees God's provision in all of this.

Genesis 45:7-8 (CJB)

God sent me ahead of you to ensure that you will have descendants on earth and to save your lives in a great deliverance. So it was not you who sent me here, but God;

Yosef had many years to become bitter about his situation, but he

evidently chose instead to live in the emunah that Adonai was in control of his life.

How do you combat the enemy of emunah and live in ashreinu?

EMUNAH

The first point is to walk in emunah. We have talked about that at length.

Psalms 1

*How blessed are those
who reject the advice of the wicked,
don't stand on the way of sinners
or sit where scoffers sit!
2 Their delight
is in Adonai's Torah;
on his Torah they meditate
day and night.*

This first line of Psalms is

אַשְׁרֵי הָאִישׁ

Happy is the man. We should be able to shout, 'Ashreinu!', because we understand who we are and who holds us in His hand.

The torah reveals what God has to say to us. The life of Yeshua reveals what God has to say to us. Dig into the word of God. Meditate on it. Trust in Adonai with your whole being. He will work this out. Your job is to walk in emunah.

PRAYER

I am far more interested in what God has to say to me than what I have to say to God. ~Dennis Prager

Prayer clarifies the content of our hearts and minds. Hashem knows what is in our hearts, but, through prayer, we reveal what is inside; not least of all to ourselves.

Ask hashem to reveal his plans in your situation. Ask Him what you can learn; how you can grow. Ask Him to teach you. Ask Him to direct your

words and your steps. Seek His deliverance, His comfort, His wisdom, His understanding.

When the talmidim Yeshua, the disciples of Yeshua, asked to be taught how to pray, Yeshua taught them this prayer.

Our Father Prayer

אָבִינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים יִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֶךָ
תְּבוֹא מַלְכוּתְךָ יַעֲשֶׂה רְצוֹנְךָ כְּבִשְׁמִים כֵּן בָּאָרֶץ
אֶת לֶחֶם חֲקֵנוּ תֵּן לָנוּ הַיּוֹם
וּסְלַח לָנוּ עַל חַטָּאוֹנוּ כְּפִי שְׁסוּלָּחִים
גַּם אֲנַחְנוּ לַחֲטָאִים לָנוּ
וְאַל תְּבִיאֵנוּ לַיְדֵי נִסְיוֹן
כִּי אִם חַלְצֵנוּ מִן הָרָע

Matthew 6:9-13 (CJB)

Our Father in heaven! May your Name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us the food we need today.
Forgive us what we have done wrong,
as we too have forgiven those who have wronged us.
And do not lead us into hard testing,
but keep us safe from the Evil One.

Our belief in the World to Come is the foundation of genuine emuna.
Life's riddles take on an entirely different meaning when we understand
that our lives in the material world are only a small portion of a person's
total Life, which begins way before birth and ends long after death.
(Shalom Arush)

We should be able to shout, 'Ashreinu!', because Adonai hears our cries
and he cares for us and he comforts us and he provides for us.

We should be able to shout, 'Ashreinu!', because we are forgiven and
Adonai provides for us and protects us.

GRATITUDE

Be grateful for what we have. Choose to see and focus on the things we have. Friendships, life, opportunity... the daily bread.

Thank Hashem for every little thing because we don't deserve a thing. We are not entitled to a thing. Everything is a blessing.

Express your gratitude praise and prayer. Express your gratitude with the way you talk and the way you walk. Express your gratitude with singing and dancing.

I would like to teach you a song to help you live in Ashrei. This comes, essentially, from the traditional morning prayers. I first heard this sung over 20 years ago, and it has been in and out of my head ever since. I arranged it and put it to music because I am who I am.

אֲשֶׁר־יְנֻכָּה טוֹב חֶלְקֵנוּ וְיָמָה נְעִים גּוֹרְלֵנוּ וְיָמָה יִפָּה יְרֻשָּׁתֵנוּ.

How blessed are we!

How good is our portion!

How pleasant is our destiny!

How beautiful is our inheritance!

Fortunate are we, people of Israel
That Hashem is our - King
Fortunate are we, people of Israel
We thank Him for every little thing
How very lucky, my heart is soaring
My feet are dancing, my heart is pouring
Pouring out the praises of Hashem
We thank you so much Hashem

I would like to leave you with the words of Sha'ul.

1 Thessalonians 5

Always be joyful. Pray regularly. In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua.

As the band plays us out, I would like to take a few minutes for prayer.