

## Part 1 - Instilling Emunah in Children

- The first and foremost spiritual obligation<sup>1</sup> of a parent to his child is to instill in him true *emunah* in *Hashem*<sup>2</sup>.
- The greatest gift a parent can give to a child is to help him develop *emunah*.
- *Emunah*, besides being a secure anchor in a turbulent world, is the bedrock<sup>3</sup> of a future passionate connection to *Torah* and *mitzvos*<sup>4</sup>.
- The educational system usually assumes that every child already internalized the basics of *emunah* at home<sup>5</sup>.
- Children<sup>6</sup> intuitively accept the notion of a Creator. The role of parents<sup>7</sup> is to confirm, stimulate, and guide that inborn knowledge<sup>8</sup>.
- The two primary levels of *emunah* are *emunah b'seichel* and *emunah b'lev*.
- *Emunah b'seichel* is the cerebral knowledge and acceptance (at least on an intellectual level) of the reality that there exists a Creator of the world who controls everything inside of it.
- *Emunah b'lev* is the deep felt awareness that there exists a Creator of the world who controls everything inside of it<sup>9</sup>.
- The distinction between *emunah b'seichel* and *emunah b'lev* is comparable to the distinction between the fire safety awareness of a child who heard once

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1. *Igros Moshe* (YD 3:76). The *Rambam* (*Pirush haMishnah Bikurim perek 1*) states that the reason Avroham is referred to as "father of the nations" (*av hamon goyim*) is because he taught those nations *emunah*.

2. As Hashem said of Avroham - בראשית יח, יט) כי ידעתי למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אתריו ושמרו דרכי ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט.

3. For an elaboration on how one's feelings towards *Hashem* in his youth can influence his future connection to *Hashem*, see *Steipler Gaon* in *Birchas Peretz* (*Vayeira*).

4. ז"ל החו"א ז"ל (קובץ אגרות ח"ג א'), "רצוני היה לקבוע הדיבור בקירוב הלב ליסודי האמונה, כי זה כל האדם. והרפיון בבחינת המושגים של עיקרי האמונה, הוא שרש המחלה שנתנה למחשבות שליליות והרהורי דברים בטלים להכנס לחדרי הלב" עכ"ל.

5. For the simple reason that up until recently that in fact was the case, however now many prominent educators have noticed that this is not the case anymore.

6. Adults and teenagers who were exposed on a daily basis (via the media, academia, and general society) to belief systems where the idea of a G-d is causally dismissed and rejected often develop difficulty with *emunah* issues and need detailed arguments and explanations to sustain their *emunah*. Children who are unexposed and untainted will naturally accept *emunah b'Hashem* and don't need great philosophical proofs (see *Miselas Chaim B'Chinuch* (p. 127) who asserts that for this reason *emunah* is best taught to children early on).

7. Without parental vindication and cultivation, those natural feelings will atrophy and ultimately fall to the wayside.

8. The idea that *emunah* is an inherent component of the psyche sometimes buried deep below the surface is expressed by the *Chazon Ish* (*Emunah V'Bitachon perek 1*), *Lev Eliyahu* (vol. 3 page 292), *Ba'al haTanya*, *Tzidkas HaTzadik* (227), *Meshech Chachmah* (*Devarim 30:11*) and many others. This deep *emunah* is not obtained by the psyche through any external source, rather it stems from the subtle influence of the soul on the psyche. See *Medrash Ne'elam* (*Parshas Lech Lecha*) and *Vilna Gaon Sefer Yetsira* (1:1 ofen 3).

9. (דברים ד, ל"ט) וידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך כי ה' הוא האלקים בשמים ממעל ועל הארץ מתחת אין עוד.

from his father that fire can be dangerous and a child who himself was once badly burnt<sup>10</sup>.

- *Emunah b'seichel* is conveyed to children intellectually through discussions with them on their level.
- *Emunah b'lev* is implanted<sup>11</sup> in young children through observing their parent's *emunah* in action<sup>12</sup>.



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10. Rav Avigdor Miller Z"l (דעת תורה עמ' נ') ; לב אביגדור (שער הבחינה אות כ"ב) ; see also הגה"צ רבי ירוחם ממיר ז"ל (דעת תורה עמ' נ') who elaborates on the different levels of *emunah* possible for a person to possess; see also (מכתב מאליהו (ח"א עמ' 79)).

11. Based on Rav Shlomo Volbe Z"l in *Zireya U'Binyan BaChinuch* (p. 37).

12. This is the way *emunah* was transmitted to children in all generations.

## Part 2 - Emunah B'Seichel

The following are examples of statements and conversations that can be used to convey *emunah b'seichel* to young children<sup>13</sup>:

- Inform the child from an early age<sup>14</sup> that *Hashem* is the creator of the world and everything inside of it, including you and I. Tell them it is *Hashem* who gives us the strength to walk, talk, and live, and that He is the source of all the good in our lives<sup>15</sup>.
- Illustrate this reality by asking them<sup>16</sup>: “Who causes it to rain<sup>17</sup> and snow? Who makes children grow tall? How do seeds turn into plants? Who makes us breath?” Have them verbalize<sup>18</sup> that the answer is *Hashem*.
- Demonstrate the greatness<sup>19</sup> of *Hashem* by pointing out the vastness of the sky, the immenseness of the sun, moon, and stars, the magnificence of all the trees, flowers and plant life, and remind them that *Hashem* created it all<sup>20</sup>.
- Call<sup>21</sup> attention to the intangible existence of a Life Force and proclaim that it can only be created by *Hashem*<sup>22</sup>.
- Tell them that that even in today’s technologically advanced era, even if all the scientists in the world pooled their individual knowledge, they still would not be able to make a dead insect come alive again, let alone create a living creature from the beginning.<sup>23</sup>

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13. It is important to remember that instilling *emunah* in children’s hearts and minds is an accumulative process that lasts throughout the childhood years.

14. See *Igros Moshe* (Y.D. 3:76) who states that as soon as children are old enough to be cognizant of their unique relationship with their parents, which can even be prior to their ability to speak, they should be informed that *Hashem* is the Creator and Sustainer of the world and all its inhabitants.

15. See *Igros Moshe* (Y.D. 3:76) at length on how vital it is that children from an early age should perceive *Hashem* as the epitome of benevolence, because children who are cognizant of *Hashem* in such a way will be more enthusiastic about heeding and fulfilling *Hashem*’s will when they grow up.

16. Based on Rav Shlomo Volbe Z”L (*Zireya U’Binyan B’Chinuch* p. 39).

17. Rav Yaakov Kamanetsky Z”L would point to the unpredictability of rainfall as a means to discern *Hashem*’s authority over nature.

18. Articulation helps solidify a concept in a child’s mind. *Dovid HaMelech* expressed this concept saying “*He’emanti Ki Adaber*” (*Tehillim* 116:10). See also *Yesod Havodah* (Letter 17) and Chachmoh uMussar (vol. 2 p. 250).

19. It is extremely important for parents to constantly point out to their children the wonders of nature and connect it to *Hashem*. The book *Designer World* by R’ Avroham Katz of Gateshead can be a very useful resource on this topic. A good time to discuss *niflos haboreh* with children may be at the *Shabbos seudah*.

20. *Yeshaya HaNavi* used this method as it says – שָׂאוּ מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם וְרֵאוּ מִי בָרָא אֱלֹהִים (ישעיה מ,כו). See also Rabeinu *Yonah* (end of 4th perek of *Berachos*) who elaborates on the idea that *Hashem*’s presence is revealed in this world via the wonders of nature.

21. This may be more appropriate for older children.

22. *Tzemach Tzedek* (*Derech Mitsvosecha, Yisro, Hamanas Elykus*) posits that the very existence of a Life Force is indicative of *Hashem*’s being.

23. This assertion was made by the *Medrash* (*Beraishis Rabbah* 39). These words of the *Medrash* were true then in the ancient world, and are still true thousands of years later in our advanced modern era.

- Point out the purpose and design inherent in all facets of nature<sup>24</sup>.
- When a child asks where *Hashem* can be found, answer He is everywhere<sup>25</sup> but we can't see, hear, or feel Him<sup>26</sup>.
- When a child ponders about the nature of *Hashem*, always focus on explaining what *Hashem* is not - He is not a person, He does not have any type of body, He is not a *malach*, He cannot be seen or touched, etc.
- Remark that *Hashem* is so great that He does not need eyes to see and ears to hear<sup>27</sup>.
- Regarding the exact nature of *Hashem*, explain to the child that no one, even *malachim*, truly know and understand what *Hashem* is<sup>28</sup>, and that all we do know is that He exists, He loves us, and He is in charge of the entire world<sup>29</sup>.
- When a child questions if tragedies and hardships are also the work of *Hashem*, explain that everything *Hashem* does is ultimately for our good even if we don't understand how and why<sup>30</sup>. Elaborate that *Hashem* has secret reasons for everything he does and even adults are not always smart enough to understand his ways<sup>31</sup>.
- Always encourage and validate questions on this topic. In the event you don't know the answers never be afraid to say "I don't know"<sup>32</sup>.
- A great time to convey *emunah* to young children is when they are lying in bed before they go to sleep. At that time, children are calm and receptive, and are even open to sensitive conversations.



24. The writings and books of Rav Avigdor Miller Z"l are a precious resource on this topic. See also *Chayei Olam (by the Steipler Gaon Z"l)* who details at length the intricate design and precision evident in the various parts of the human body.

25. See (Zireya U'Binyan BaChinuch p. 39) that in today's day and age that humans have gone to the skies and we know and relate to it as a purely physical entity, it is not a good idea to say Hashem is to be found in the sky. He also advises not to say 'Hashem is in with us in the room' for this can frighten a child when he is alone.

26. When a child questions why *Hashem* can't be seen, explain that seeing *Hashem* would simply be too overwhelming.

27. Rav Shimshon Pinkus (*Shaarei Emunah*) explains that otherwise the child will perceive the fact that he has no eyes and ears as a lack on *Hashem's* part. The same is true regarding all human faculties in contrast to *Hashem*.

28. See *Rambam (Yesodei HaTorah 2:8)*.

29. When children question who made *Hashem*, reply that "*Hashem* always was".

30. As it says - הַצֹּדֵק תָּמִים פְּעָלוֹ כִּי כֹל דַּרְכָיו מִשְׁפָּט (דברים לב, ד).

31. As it says - כִּי גִבְהוּ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ בֶּן גְּבוּהוֹ דַּרְכֵי מַדְרֵיכֶם וּמַחְשְׁבוֹתַי מִמַּחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם (ישעיה נה, ט).

32. Rav Akiva Eiger Z"l (*Gilyon HaShas on Berachos 25b*) compiled a list of tens of times that *Rashi* in his commentary states simply - "I don't know".

## Part 3 - Emunah B'Lev

Children who observe their parent's *emunah* in action will absorb and internalize that *emunah* by osmosis. The following<sup>33</sup> are methods and opportunities for parents to allow their children to witness their *emunah b'lev*, thereby transmitting their personal conviction and passion about *Hashem*.

- Parents should let their children overhear<sup>34</sup> them talking about *Hashem* and detailing how He is so kind to their family.
- *Hashgacha pratis* should be highlighted at every opportunity<sup>35</sup>. The concept should become an often used household term<sup>36</sup>.
- Parents should articulate their *berachos*<sup>37</sup> over food in front of their children in a slow focused manner as if they are addressing another person<sup>38</sup>.
- Make the existence of *Hashem* relevant and personal by vividly detailing how much *Hashem* loves and cares about them<sup>39</sup>.
- When children experience the simple pleasures of life, such as ample food, a warm home in the winter, and a cool home in the summer, parents should always link such pleasures to the benevolence of *Hashem*<sup>40</sup>.
- Constantly reiterate how thankful<sup>41</sup> they should be to *Hashem* for possessing healthy functioning bodies.
- Describe how *Hashem* likes to hear the *tefilos* of all *Yidden*, even from small children.
- At nighttime, when children express their natural fears and anxieties regarding darkness and bad dreams, parents should include in their

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33. It is self understood that the suggestions contained herein will only be effective if the parents themselves truly believe in what they are saying and doing. In the event that the parent's conversations on this topic are insincere, it is wiser for them not to discuss Emunah at all, since hollow words on such an important topic can be more damaging to the children's long term Emunah then refraining from discussing it at all.

34. This can be far more effective then overtly telling it to them.

35. Parents that have experienced incidents themselves of *hashgacha pratis* should make a point of sharing them with their children.

36. Using *hashgacha pratis* as a way of sowing the seeds of *emunah* in the hearts and minds of children was highly recommended by the *Chazon Ish Z"L* (Maaseh Ish).

37. If it is not possible to recite all the *berachos* in that manner, one should at least try to do so with one or two *berachos* per day.

38. When children see this conduct they will inevitably start pondering "who is my parent talking to", and that will cause them to internalize that *Hashem* is a reality and a Being one can openly address. This dynamic was strongly advocated by Rav Volbe Z"L (*Zireya U'Binyan BaChinuch p. 37*).

39. This method is mentioned by Rav Akiva Aiger (*Al Hatorah, Veschanan, on the pasuk Vahavta*).

40. Parents should train their children to associate all goodness with *Hashem*. Besides concretizing the existence of *Hashem* in their eyes, it will also reinforce their perception of *Hashem* as a *rachum v'chanun* who is always concerned for their wellbeing. (I have personally heard Rav Shmuel Berenbaum Z"L lament the fact that so many people today don't truly perceive *Hashem* as an *Av HaRachamon*).

41. Habituating children not to take for granted any aspect of healthy living is a strong investment in their future sense of contentment and happiness.

words of calm and comfort the security of the reality that *Hashem* watches over them even at night<sup>42</sup>.

- When a child is extremely afraid in the middle of the night, parents can suggest they repeat the bedtime *Krias Shema* and explain to them that talking to *Hashem* in this way can be a *shmirah* from potential dangers<sup>43</sup>.
- Regale them with stories<sup>44</sup> from our glorious past, when even small children would absolutely refuse to bow down to idols and images<sup>45</sup> and would willingly give up their lives for *Hashem*.
- After reciting *Krias Shema al hamitah* with your child, have him say the following: “*Hashem* loves me, and I love Him, and He always watches over me”<sup>46</sup>.



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42. As it says – (תהילים קכא, ד) הַגָּדָה לֵאמֹר יְיָ שׁוֹמֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל –

43. See *Berachos (5a)*. This was also recommended by the *Chazon Ish Z"l (Maaseh Ish vol.6 p.96)*.

44. The medium of storytelling is an extremely powerful tool to reach our children's hearts and souls.

45. For example Chana and her seven sons. See an amazing version of the story in *Medrash Rabbah (Eicha 1:50)*.

46. Advice of Rav Avigdor Miller Z"l. Experience has shown that reciting this as a nightly ritual can have a powerful effect on a child.