

לפנים ולחוץ

Lifnim V'Lachutz

Bringing Lifnai Vlifnim Conversations to Families and Communities | Pesach 5785

Symposium on Teaching Emunah



Rav Dov Singer (RDS) is Rosh Yeshiva of Mosdot Makor Chaim and the visionary thinker and leader behind Lifnai Vlifnim's approach.



Rav Jay Goldmintz (RJG) is a veteran educator and faculty member at Maayanot High School. He is the author of the Koren V'Ani Tefillah Siddur and a Soul of Parenting, a series on religious parenting available on the OU's website.



Rabbanit Shani Taragin (RST) is the YU in Israel's Rosh Beit Midrash for Women, Educational Director of World Mizrahi and Matan Eshkolot Teachers Fellowship.

Can emunah be taught? How?

RDS: Emunah includes specific tochen (content) but is also a techunah (trait or ability). A ma'amin, believer, is someone who possesses the ability to have faith. Just like there are people with different types of intelligence and abilities, people possess different levels of emunah. This expresses itself in one's ability to believe in themselves and others, to live with a presumption of trust for those around them and openness to whatever may come their way. Others have a harder time with this – perhaps due to their upbringing, specific experiences they encountered or simply their personality. It's important to recognize that we must invest in developing this core trait of emunah even before teaching its content.

How can we develop this trait of emunah? Often, it is a function of one's personal experiences. The more that someone feels that they are trusted by others– parents, teachers, friends or their community– they, in turn, learn to have great trust and faith in those around them. This is very relevant in schools and homes, where we must ask: How much is there an assumption of trust? Is there a sense that we can and do believe in our children?

Al HaPetach: At the Doorway

As we gather on Pesach to commemorate Yetziat Mitzrayim, we celebrate not just our liberation, but the birth of Am Yisrael's unbreakable faith in Hashem. The Seder night is more than just vortlech and pre-filled Haggadot—it is an opportunity to spark deep and meaningful conversations with our families about emunah.

But how do we bring this to life at our Seder tables? While many of us feel comfortable sharing divrei Torah, we may hesitate when it comes to discussing our personal relationship with Hashem or inviting others to share theirs. At Lifnai V'Lifnim we seek to empower parents and teachers with the tools to cultivate these vital conversations.

Time and again, we have been moved by children's eagerness to express their thoughts, experiences and beliefs, often just waiting for a caring adult to ask the right question. In the symposium (pg. 1–2, 12–15) we share insights from leading educators. Two avodot pnimit (pg. 3–7) open conversation around key sources and components of the seder experience. We provide additional opportunity to “get into” the experience of yetziat mitzrayim through different games and role playing activities (pg. 8–9). And, finally, in our parnasut section (pg. 10–11), we highlight the powerful reflections on their personal emunah of students from across our network of schools.

This Pesach, let's go beyond tradition and create moments of true connection—conversations that deepen our faith, strengthen our families, and inspire the next generation.

Chag Kasher V'Sameach,
Yehuda Chanalel and Yishai Singer
Directors, Lifnai Vlifnim Olami

Once someone has the foundational capacity to be a ma'amin (to trust, believe in others) then the specific content of what to believe can grow on top of it. For example, I can learn about hashgacha pratit (Hashem's guidance of my individual life) as a concept but learning the skill of emunah enables me to apply this concept to experiences in my life. I can learn to feel that my life is not random, that it has purpose and direction, that I am loved. Even when experiencing something not good, I can identify the potential good that's hidden within the situation. If I trust the One who is in charge then I am able to believe that He has my best interest in mind.

RJG: Emunah is at least as much feeling and emotion as it is cognition and so it cannot be taught only through courses on Jewish philosophy and thought. Indeed, I recall Rav Soloveitchik zt"l lamenting his inability to convey to us what the Yom Kippur or the Pesach Seder of his youth were really like. And yet, anyone who listened to the Rav talk about those things could not help but be moved spiritually by hearing someone speak so passionately about the transcendent. And so I would suggest that if we cannot explicitly teach it, we can certainly talk about our own emunah in a way that conveys its contents and signposts so that children can recognize them when they experience it on their own. I, therefore, contend that we don't speak enough to young people about HaKadosh Baruch Hu as a real living entity in our lives (rather than as a belief). If we talk more regularly about G-d, we will encourage kids to do so as well.

RST: Emunah may certainly be taught and edified through teaching, as it is not just a concept, it is a lifestyle practice, a trade; and as any trade or practice (umanut) must be taught and exercised (imun) to be strengthened, so too the "muscle" of faith (emunah).

Teaching emunah in both formal and informal educational settings requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential aspects of faith development. The most powerful teaching method is modeling emunah yourself. Students acutely observe how parents integrate emunah in their speech, decision-making, response to challenges, and expression of gratitude (i.e. not just saying "Baruch HaShem", but how one says it). In the sacred task of chinuch, we must first

architect environments where emunah can take root and flourish—spaces where faith feels not only possible but natural. This journey begins with the meticulous layering of foundational trust, imbuing our children with a profound sense of security and self-assurance both within the home and classroom. In such environments students feel safe expressing doubts with courage, asking questions with confidence, sharing their own "faith journeys" and learning from one another.

Intellectual instruction in the development of emunah is founded on teaching Torah texts and connecting them to contemporary life showing how relevant the messages are to modern challenges. Teachers must be trained and prepared to welcome questions, demonstrating that Judaism is "strong enough" to withstand intellectual inquiry. Students should also be exposed to various approaches to emunah across the spectrum of Jewish thought (e.g. Rationalist, Chassidic, Kabbalistic, etc.) so they may find pathways that resonate with them at different ages and stages

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“ We don't speak enough to young people about HaKadosh Baruch Hu as a real living entity in our lives.

– Rav Jay Goldmintz (RJG)



מה נשתנה: Cultivating Curiosity

ברכה ראשונה

A **Bracha Rishonah** helps us break from the constant rush and busyness of our daily lives. It helps us slow down to focus on who we are with and what is happening here and now. A Bracha Rishonah prepares us to listen, learn and communicate b'chol levavcha uv'chol nafshecha—with our full heart and soul.

Choose either set of questions or both:

- What are some routines you have as part of your typical day or week (you do it without needing to think about the fact that you're doing it)? When do your routines get disrupted? What happens if they do?
- When are you most likely to ask a question?
- What might lead you to hold back and not ask even if there's a question you have?

לימוד ועבודה פנימית

Limmud and Avodah Pnimit ask us to engage in Torah study in a manner that opens our eyes to the essential meaning of the text, thus enabling us to engage in profound, introspective work. A Limmud typically ends with questions that ask us to connect with the people and ideas in more personal ways, bridging the world of the text with our own. We accomplish this by exploring the text on three levels (What's it saying? What's it really saying? What's it saying to me?), as demonstrated in the examples that follow.

משנה פסחים קטז

The mishna lists the questions: Why is this night different from all other nights?

As on all other nights we eat leavened bread and matza as preferred; on this night all our bread is matza.

As on all other nights we eat other vegetables; on this night we eat bitter herbs.

(When the Temple was standing one would ask:) As on all other nights we eat either roasted, stewed, or cooked meat, but on this night all the meat is the roasted meat of the Paschal lamb.

As on all other nights we dip the vegetables in a liquid during the meal only once; however, on this night we dip twice

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות.
שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין חמץ ומצה,
הלילה הזה – כולו מצה.
שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין שאר ירקות,
הלילה הזה – מרור.
שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלין בשר צלי שלוק
ומבושל, הלילה הזה – כולו צלי.
שבכל הלילות אנו מטבילין פעם אחת,
הלילה הזה – שתי פעמים.

- What do you notice about the questions?
- What do they have in common? What makes each of them distinct?

The Gemara asks: Why does one remove the table?

The school of Rabbi Yannai say: So that the children will notice that something is unusual and they will ask

The Gemara relates: Abaye was sitting before Rabba when he was still a child. He saw that they were removing the table from before him, and he said to those removing it: We have not yet eaten, and you are taking the table away from us?

Rabba said to him: You have exempted us from reciting the questions of: Why is this night different [ma nishtana], as you have already asked what is special about the seder night.

למה עוקרין את השולחן?

אמרי דבי רבי ינאי: כדי שיכירו תינוקות וישאלו.

אביי הוה יתיב קמיה דרבה, חזא דקא מדלי תכא מקמיה, אמר להו: עדיון לא קא אכלינן, אתו קא מעקרי תכא מיקמנו!?

אמר ליה רבה: פטריתן מלומר "מה נשתנה"

- What does the gemara suggest might exempt someone from reciting Mah Nishtana?
- Why would that be true? What seems to be our real goal?
- Why would it be so important to us that children (or anyone) ask questions at the seder? What impact might that have on the person asking the questions? Others listening to it?

Application Activity

Look around and ask four additional questions based on what you notice here, right now. (They don't have to be related to food or even directly related to the seder.)

On all other nights _____, tonight _____

On all other nights _____, tonight _____

On all other nights _____, tonight _____

On all other nights _____, tonight _____

Deeper Personal Reflection Questions

- When is it easier or harder for you to be curious about things happening around you? About yourself and your decisions?
- What happens when you are curious- when you start asking questions? What does that curiosity add to your experience? What happens when you're not curious?
- What are the advantages of being curious? When is it a disadvantage?
- What could help you be more genuinely curious this Pesach? What could you pay attention to or what questions could you ask that might help? How would this impact your Pesach in a positive way?
- What could help you be more curious or pay more careful attention to your Judaism or relationship with Hashem in general? What impact would this have on you?

ברכה אחרונה

A **Bracha Acharonah** encourages us to capture the essence of our personal learning through a concise reflection on what we've learned and how we can take those ideas with us.

- Open: Based on what you've learned, what's one thing you'd like to ask Hashem for?
- Focused: What is one thing you can try between now and the end of Pesach to increase your curiosity?

Notes & Suggestions

The questions that are part of what we typically call Mah Nishtana don't really get to the core of the evening– the story of shibud and yetziat mitzrayim, our slavery in and redemption from Egypt. They are very focused on the concrete ways the meal of the seder is different from our routine the rest of the year. The second gemara highlights the ease with which we are willing to 'exempt' the need to recite these specific questions. This may highlight that our primary goal is to elicit a stance of curiosity and wonder around the table. Focusing on the concrete, lived experience and what's happening in the moment can more easily shift us and our children to genuine curiosity, moving beyond the assumptions and conclusions we feel we 'already know'. This, in turn, can lead to more genuine and authentic discussions about the messages behind our actions.



Who are You Eating With?

ברכה ראשונה

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- If you could invite anyone to your Pesach seder (alive or from history), who would you invite?
- What are things I prefer doing on my own? ...with my family? ...with my friends?

לימוד ועבודה פנימית

Limmud and Avodah Pnimit ask us to engage in Torah study in a manner that opens our eyes to the essential meaning of the text, thus enabling us to engage in profound, introspective work. A Limmud typically ends with questions that ask us to connect with the people and ideas in more personal ways, bridging the world of the text with our own. We accomplish this by exploring the text on three levels (What's it saying? What's it really saying? What's it saying to me?), as demonstrated in the examples that follow.

שמות פרק יב

3. Speak to the entire community of Israel, saying, "On the tenth of this month, let each one take a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for each household.

4. But if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor who is nearest to his house shall take [one] according to the number of people, each one according to one's ability to eat, shall you be counted for the lamb.

ג דברו, אל-כל-עַדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר, בְּעֶשֶׂר,
לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה: וְיִקְחוּ לָהֶם, אִישׁ שֶׁהָ לְבֵית-
אָבִתּוֹ--שֶׁהָ לְבֵית.

ד וְאִם-יִמְעַט הַבַּיִת, מִהְיוֹת מִשֶּׁה--וְלָקַח
הוּא וּשְׁכֵנוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ, בְּמִקְצֵת נַפְשוֹ:
אִישׁ לְפִי אֹכְלוֹ, תִּכְסּוּ עַל-הַשֶּׁה.

מה בו - What does it say?

- What are בני ישראל being told to do here?
- What words stand out to you?

- If you were one of the Jewish people listening to Moshe, how would you respond? What questions might you ask?
- If you had to invite someone else to join you to eat the Korban Pesach, what would you say to them? Consider turning to someone else and acting out the conversation.

מה ליבו – What is it really saying? What's the essence of the source?

- Why do you think the Korban Pesach was ideally eaten by family? (as opposed to individually or as open to anyone you want to eat with)
- Why would families be required to come together if they can't finish the Korban Pesach on their own? What do you imagine would be the impact of this requirement?

מה לי בו – What is it saying to me?

- "שה לבית אבות שה לבית" – "a lamb for each household" – What makes my family (or group of friends) special? Why would I choose to do something with them as opposed to anyone else? What do we gain from being with each other?
- "ולקח הוא ושכנו הקרוב אל ביתו" – then he and his neighbor who is nearest to his house – When is it helpful for me to have guests over? To spend time with people besides my closest family or friends? What do we gain from including them?
- "דברו על כל עדת בני ישראל" – "Speak to the entire community of Israel" – How does it feel to do something that "all of the Jewish people" are doing? When have you had experiences that were like that? How does that affect you?

ברכה אחרונה

A **Bracha Acharonah** encourages us to capture the essence of our personal learning through a concise reflection on what we've learned and how we can take those ideas with us.

- What can you do to show others how much you appreciate them?
- How can you integrate what you have learned into your experience this Pesach?

Notes & Suggestions

The halachot of korban pesach emphasize the unique role of the family unit in memorializing the experience of redemption. The family unit gives a framework in which values can be shared in the company of those I feel closest and most connected to. When I experience something with my family, that shared experience becomes a part of our daily lives together. At the same time, a family may benefit from inviting others to join them, creating the need to articulate and share the implicit values of the family with the new company. A fresh set of eyes and individuals with a new set of experiences may enhance and broaden my experience. Finally, seeing our own rituals and values as part of the broader practices of "kol adat bnei Yisrael", helps me feel a part of something even larger and recognizing how what I receive from my family is ultimately also connected to being a part of the greater Jewish nation.



Making Learning Personal: Role Play Activities

חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים

"A person must see themselves as if they came out of Egypt."

"K'ilu" – "as if" is a wonderful invitation to every one of us to feel that we have come out of Egypt. Through the power of imagination, we have the ability to transport ourselves to the experience of our ancestors thousands of years ago– to appreciate the transformative impact of yetziat mitzrayim for them. At the same time, this story is alive and continuing today! Every year, we can bring the emotions and experiences of the past into our personal lives. So let's immerse ourselves in the experience of leaving Egypt, bringing ourselves into the story so that we too can "come out from there". Below are a few suggestions for ways we can more deeply appreciate the events, what they mean for us and hopefully have fun as well!

Guessing Game: "Who Am I?"

Choose one of the characters from the hagadah, and say something that you would imagine they might say. You may build off of the statements below or create your own. Allow other participants to guess who you are. Highly recommended to use facial expressions that fit what your character is saying!



Sample sentences:

- "Our time has come– tonight at midnight, the moment we have all been waiting for will arrive and... " (Moshe)
- "Before we leave the house tonight, I must remember to bring my drum with me and also.....so that....." (Miriam)
- "What should we pack in our bags for the journey? We should bring... but we should leave here...?" (Jewish boy or girl)
- "I hope everyone sees that I am going into the deep water; to be the first one and lead the way... " (Nachshon)

Getting into Character – Monologues

- Participants choose to take on characters or objects from the story of yetziyat mitzraim:
- Example: Moshe, Aharon, Dad, Mom, Paroh, an Egyptian neighbor, children, a Jewish teacher in school in Egypt, a frog, a staff that turned into a snake.
- Each character, at his/her turn...
 - takes a cup and turns it into a microphone
 - addresses the family and starts to say a few sentences beginning with: Before you leave here (mitzrayim), it's important that you remember..."



Role-Playing Game

The scene

- It is the last family meal before midnight of our last night in Egypt. Everyone is sitting around the table together.
- Assign roles to each person sitting at your table. You may choose to add props like a hat or relevant clothing. (Adults may choose to play children and children play adults to add an element of fun and creativity!)

The leader/director announces

"Welcome to our last meal in Egypt; soon we will need to leave here quietly. I want to hear the following from each one of you: What should we take on the journey? What will you miss? What do we hope will happen once we leave?"

Each participant responds

At the end, the leader/director announces:

"The time for us to leave has finally arrived; let's sing the song that will take us through the entire journey." The group begins to sing...



Interview with Characters Immediately After Crossing the Yam Suf

Roles: Interviewer, Jewish people who crossed the sea.

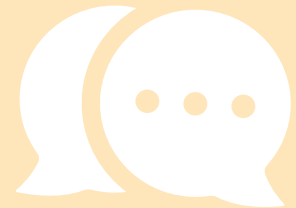
The interviewer turns to one of the characters and talks with them.

Interviewer: Tell us who you are and a little about yourself...

Character: I am...

Other questions to choose from: Please describe what you saw when you were there in the sea

- Did you get wet at all?
- Was it what you expected?
- Did you hear the Egyptians?
- What surprised you?
- What important message do you want to share with those who did not experience it?



The Family Exodus

Ask the oldest person at the seder to tell the story of your family's "yetziat Mitzrayim" moments and ask them questions about the message that needs to be passed from generation to generation in the family.

Eliyahu HaNavi

Eliyahu is coming to your Seder!

What questions will you ask him?



פּרנאסות Students Discuss their Personal Emunah

When engaged in Lifnai Vlifnim Torah learning, we listen carefully and learn to bring our inner world to the Torah we learn and mitzvot we perform. **Parnasut** gives us the opportunity to do the same with other people in our life, allowing us to simultaneously 'support' and 'be supported' by them.



Zev Roth, Manhattan Day School, 8th grade, New York, NY

The fact that I wake up breathing, walking, talking, smelling, hearing, and many other things inspires my emunah in Hashem every day. My family, friends, and teachers help strengthen my emunah by giving me advice and strength in this area and pushing me to grow.

Tehilla Pachter, Maayanot High School, 12th grade, Bergenfield, NJ

I think what challenges my Emunah is when I feel stuck. I think there are just some hard times that I just feel like I'm never going to get out of. In the back of my head I know that Hashem is allowing something to hurt me for a reason but in the heat of the moment I sometimes just don't feel it. When there are so many noises in my head telling me different things it's hard to hear my neshama calling out to me saying this is essential for your growth.



Kasriel Levine, Fuchs Mizrachi, 11th grade, Cleveland, Ohio

When I face something that challenges my emunah, I try to first reflect on HaShem's power before I get angry, upset, or frustrated. While I can't always do this, I try to realize how small I am compared to Hashem and how small I am compared to the world and time. I try and see how even though something may not seem to be good, I ultimately can't see the full picture. A term that I love and try to use often is "gam zu litovah," which means "this too is for the best." So I'd say the key to combating challenges in emunah is to remember HaShem is our Father who only wants and does what's best for us and always remember "gam zu litovah."

Shirley Haber, Netivot Hatorah, 6th grade, Toronto, Ontario

When something challenges my emunah I always remember that everything happens for a reason. Let's say my team did not win 1st place at my basketball game, I know Hashem did that for a reason. For example, maybe one person on the other team was struggling with something so Hashem wanted to bring them happiness.



Ortal Kaufman, Leibler Yavneh College, 12th grade, Melbourne, Australia

One very clear thing that inspires my emunah in Hashem is seeing the miracles He has performed in my own life. While not being a Torah miracle of splitting the sea, seeing my family and friends be healthy, happy, and God-fearing gives me more love for Hashem than anything.

My Jewish studies teachers inspire my faith in Hashem each day as I see them putting in incredible time, passion, and effort into teaching us Tanach and Gemara and other related aspects of Judaism such as Chagim, Minhagim, Kaballah, and Megillot (which are my favourite, especially Megillat Esther!)

When something challenges my emunah, rather than being angry at it or dismissing it, I reason with myself or that person or post online and try to understand perspectives and different ideas. I truly believe that one who questions their emunah has the most passion for Hashem, as they are the most keen to look into Judaism and understand the deeper meaning behind the things we do and why we do them.

From around the world, students from Lifnai Vlifnim's network schools inspire us by talking about their personal faith and connection with Hashem. We asked them to respond to any of the following 3 questions:

1

"While we can't witness the miracles of yetziat mitzrayim, what experiences inspire your emunah in Hashem?"

2

"What do you do when something challenges your emunah?"

3

"How do your friends, family or teachers help strengthen your emunah?"

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Sylvie Weiss, Ramaz, 8th grade, New York, NY

My friends, family and teachers help strengthen my emunah in different ways. My friends help by inspiring me. Whenever I see them praying it makes me want to pray and believe and trust in Hashem. My parents help guide me toward Judaism and Hashem. My teachers help me by not only teaching me but making sure that I understand that Hashem is my God. Because of all these people in my life my emunah in Hashem is real and strong.

Victor Arazi, Yeshiva of Flatbush, 9th grade, Brooklyn, NY

When something is challenging my emunah, I pray to Hashem. I also like to make a list of positives in my life to see how much I have. One last thing I do is I go to shul and sit with no phone and learn Gemara.

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Ruvi Gurvich, Hillel Torah, 8th grade, Chicago, IL

When something challenges my emunah I usually ask for help, sometimes from those around me but also from Hashem. He isn't just someone who is our king, he is also our father. I may not understand everything Hashem does but I can appreciate everything he does for me through my tefillah and looking to him for assistance in anything and everything.

Mia Teller, Liebler Yavneh College, 8th grade, Melbourne, Australia

The thing that inspires my emunah in Hashem is my teachers, friends and family teaching me about the incredible miracles Hashem made to help the Jewish people in the time of the Beit Hamikdash.

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Elliott Betesh, Yeshiva of Flatbush, 9th grade, Brooklyn, NY

When I see all of my classmates sitting around in a circle and learning about Hashem and ourselves and relationships in general, that shows me that Hashem is watching over us and wants us to learn what it means to be holy. When I learn from my rabbis about the Tanach, the miracles Hashem did for us are just amazing! Also in biology, learning about the human body really proves to me there is a creator.

Aidan Korish, Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School, 12th grade, Livingston, NJ

As I grow into a young adult, I find that life is replete with unprecedented challenges that can often cause me to naturally question my emunah. However, regardless of my spiritual or mental state, I regroup to daven Shacharit everyday, ensuring that I will always feel Hashem's presence, even during times when I might not have had the strength or clarity to reach out on my own. There is a vital necessity to daven even if we feel unable to fulfill it with proper kavanah. By creating this consistent habit, we ensure that in the times that we need tefillah most it will always be there for us to connect to Hashem- in both our darkest and brightest moments.

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Lily Brody, Ramaz, 8th grade, New York, NY

My friends play an important role in strengthening my emunah since we share similar experiences and help each other grow. Whenever I have questions about my emunah, I trust my teachers to provide meaningful answers. They help deepen my emunah by teaching me ways to improve my prayers, offering valuable lessons on how to become a better Jew, and teaching me Torah and the importance of mitzvot. They inspire me to grow spiritually.

Levana Sarfaty, Netivot Hatorah 6th grade, Toronto, Ontario

My emunah in Hashem was inspired when, a while ago, rockets were fired towards Israel, but they did not do any damage to people. I was amazed, and my emunah was strengthened because it was a clear miracle, caused by Hashem. My parents helped power my emunah in this way by showing me the news when the rockets were fired, and a video of the rockets.



10th grade students, Barkai High School, Brooklyn, NY

When I try to see HaShem, science helps me believe it or not. When I think and learn about the wonders of space and of the ocean and all the systems of the human body and about how our DNA gets translated into traits that we all have. Learning about these processes makes me think it is impossible for HaShem not to exist.

Whenever I feel a lack of emunah, I think about how the Torah mentions the phrase "Do not be afraid" 365 times, just like there are 365 days in the year. This indicates that we should be fearless everyday and believe in HaShem.

Suri Sepowitz, Maayanot High School, 11th grade, Teaneck, NJ

I have experienced moments that have brought passion back to my avodat Hashem. These sparks of inspiration can come from anywhere. Sometimes, I am fortunate to hear a miraculous story where Hashem can be easily seen if you look for Him, take part in a moving kabbalat shabbat, or sing in a heartfelt kumzitz. In these types of environments, it is much easier for me to feel closer to Hashem. On the other hand, oftentimes it isn't the big or crazy moments that strengthen my emunah in Hashem. Rather, it is the beauty within the consistency. For instance, when I show up every day to daven, a lot of days will feel mundane and sometimes it even feels like a chore. However, on the one day when I really feel connected or when I see that Hashem answers yes to my tefillot, it is as if I can feel Him holding my hand and it gives me momentum to carry on with renewed passion.

Another aspect of my life that strengthens my emunah is the incredible people I am surrounded by. While I am only seventeen and know I have a lot to learn and grow, I am so fortunate to have amazing role models dedicated to their avodat Hashem. Their excitement is palpable and contagious! More importantly, seeing the commitment and unique love for Torah that my friends and mentors exemplify in their own ways is a source of reassurance for me that even if I may face doubts or challenges in my emunah there are people I look up to who are firm in their beliefs.



Once someone has the foundational capacity to be a ma'amin (to trust, believe in others) then the specific content of what to believe can grow on top of it. For example, I can learn about hashgacha pratit (Hashem's guidance of my individual life) as a concept but learning the skill of emunah enables me to apply this concept to experiences in my life. I can learn to feel that my life is not random, that it has purpose and direction, that I am loved. Even when experiencing something not good, I can identify the potential good that's hidden within the situation. If I trust the One who is in charge then I am able to believe that He has my best interest in mind.

RJG: Emunah is at least as much feeling and emotion as it is cognition and so it cannot

“ The deepest aspects of faith ultimately emerge through a personal relationship with Hashem that each child must develop in their own time and way.

– Rabbanit Shani Taragin (RST)

be taught only through courses on Jewish philosophy and thought. Indeed, I recall Rav Soloveitchik zt”l lamenting his inability to convey to us what the Yom Kippur or the Pesach Seder of his youth were really like. And yet, anyone who listened to the Rav talk about those things could not help but be moved spiritually by hearing someone speak so passionately about the transcendent. And so I would suggest that if we cannot explicitly teach it, we can certainly talk about our own emunah in a way that conveys its contents and signposts so that children can recognize them when they experience it on their own. I, therefore, contend that we don't speak enough to young people about HaKadosh Baruch Hu as a real living entity in our lives (rather than as a belief). If we talk more regularly about G-d, we will encourage kids to do so as well.

RST: Emunah may certainly be taught and edified through teaching, as it is not just a concept, it is a lifestyle practice, a trade; and as any trade or practice (umanut) must be taught and exercised (imun) to be strengthened, so too the “muscle” of faith (emunah).

Teaching emunah in both formal and informal educational settings requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses the intellectual, emotional, and experiential aspects of faith development. The most powerful teaching method is modeling emunah yourself. Students acutely observe how parents integrate emunah in their speech, decision-making, response to challenges, and expression of gratitude (i.e. not just saying “Baruch HaShem”, but how one says it). In the sacred task of chinuch, we must first architect environments where emunah can take root and flourish—spaces where faith feels not only possible but natural. This journey begins with the meticulous layering of foundational trust, imbuing our children with a profound sense of security and self-assurance both within the home and classroom. In such environments students feel safe expressing doubts with courage, asking questions with confidence, sharing their own “faith journeys” and learning from one another.

Intellectual instruction in the development of emunah is founded on teaching Torah texts and connecting them to contemporary life showing how relevant the messages are to modern challenges. Teachers must be trained and prepared to welcome questions, demonstrating



that Judaism is “strong enough” to withstand intellectual inquiry. Students should also be exposed to various approaches to emunah across the spectrum of Jewish thought (e.g. Rationalist, Chassidic, Kabbalistic, etc.) so they may find pathways that resonate with them at different ages and stages of life.

Emunah should also be taught in an experiential manner, i.e. teaching halacha with meaning, not just the “how” but the “why” of Jewish practices, helping students connect ritual to relationship with Hashem. Teachers can and should create meaningful class community experiences together such as tefillah, mishmar activities, arvei shira, Shabbat, tiyulim, halacha “laboratories”, guided meditation, seminar retreats, and chessed projects, all of which sensitize students to Hashem’s presence in their lives and help transform introspection to inspiration.

The most effective parents and educators recognize that while they can create conditions conducive to emunah development, the deepest aspects of faith ultimately emerge through a personal relationship with Hashem that each child must develop in their own time and way.

What inspires or strengthens your personal emunah?

RDS: Because I see emunah as a skill or ability, it’s something that I still work on all the time and continue to practice each day. To have faith in people or in what you encounter in life is a choice– it’s not something you either have or you don’t have. With this perspective, I am always looking for opportunities to find the good, to look for opportunities to believe in and rely on those around me. This doesn’t mean that you have to believe that everything is always good. Sometimes bad things happen and having emunah does not mean pretending that they aren’t bad. Part of having emunah is leaning into the reality of what is happening, and not attempting to avoid it or contextualize it as part of some theory or framework. It’s the ability to recognize that what is happening is actually happening, and that if it’s happening I trust that I can deal with it. Similarly, it’s important not to be overprotective of our children because this communicates that we don’t trust their ability to handle difficult situations. Part of our emunah, our

trust, in them is the belief that they can deal with whatever challenges they encounter.

RJG: All I have to do is read the newspaper daily with its distortions, cynicism and seemingly skewed values, and I am reminded of the truth of Torah. On a more positive note, my students’ faith provides me with regular doses of inspiration. As much as they may live in a more sophisticated world, they are still young, filled with the depth and confidence of their emunah that has a pristine quality about it that often provides me with a shot in the arm that inoculates me a little more to cynicism and inspires me to try to deepen my own connection.

RST: Personally, I am most inspired and strengthened in emunah by learning and teaching Tanach. As I study, prepare, and teach pesukim of Torah, I truly feel as Prof. Nechama Leibowitz z”l would say, “that I am reading a love letter from Hashem,” words of depth from God’s “mouth” to my head and heart. As I learn Neviim, I am constantly mesmerized by the poignant rhetoric, multiple literary devices, and timeless personal and national messages provided by personalities spanning over 800 years of Jewish history, still unfolding before our eyes. The love, poetry, philosophy, history, humor, lament, torment, and the scope of human emotion and epistemology expressed through the Ketuvim inspire and invigorate me to live my life in faith with Hashem holding my hand and lifting me up. The role models of Tanach strengthen my emunah as I recognize that Yocheved and Miriam also got out of bed to messages of ‘hutar l’pirsum’ of hundreds of baby boys thrown to the Nile, and Devorah courageously joined Barak in battle, and Naomi, bereft of husband and sons rebuilt her life and legacy with Rut by her side. How can one not be inspired learning and singing the Tehillim of David HaMelech?! I can go on and on...

What factors do you think present the biggest challenge to children’s emunah today? In what ways, if any, do you think this differs from 5,10 or 20 years ago?

RDS: The greatest challenge in teaching emunah today is the fact that the world is so cynical. We find it hard to rely on our leaders and the media exposes us to all kinds of things that are essentially anti-emunah, eroding a sense of trust and belief in others. Negative things are reported far more than positive ones. All of this

contributes to a general trend within our culture that teaches us not to trust. As if to say, “don’t rely on anyone else; you can only rely on yourself,” or “no one will do for you what you don’t do for yourself” and other such sayings. These cultural ideas are essentially built on kfirah (heresy, rejection), on a lack of trust between people. So, of course, it’s extremely difficult to teach emunah in such a culture.

RJG: I wouldn’t be “with it” if I didn’t mention technology. But that is as much a symptom as cause. I often joke with my students that when they see the message “looking for a connection” when I turn on the Smart Board, that’s no less true of all of us. More than in previous generations, I think students are looking for meaning, for things to touch them, to believe in and to comfort them. For many, halakha or the words of the Siddur are barriers to connection rather than signposts that can point the way to something spiritual. We need to better articulate and teach in what way these are not just mechanical parts of an unexamined lifestyle, but rather are the animating spirit which gives meaning and direction to a contemporary prayerful life lived fully.

RST: Some of the primary factors challenging childrens’ emunah today include first and foremost the modern “Digital Immersion” which did not exist years ago. Children now inhabit a world where constant digital stimulation competes for their attention and shapes their worldview. The immediate gratification of technology contests directly with the patient, subtle, non-linear progress of spiritual development. This is also compounded by the contemporary focus on materialistic culture which emphasizes individual achievement and material success over communal values and spiritual growth.

Additionally, even young students today have unprecedented access to diverse perspectives, including those critical of religious belief. Without guidance to process this information, it can lead to confusion or premature skepticism. With increased mobility and family members living farther apart one from the other, children no longer have the same access to family mentors to personally guide them. Fewer children today experience multigenerational religious communities that traditionally reinforced emunah.

Lastly, nurturing emunah requires quiet reflection, question and introspection, challenged by today’s busy and noisy modern lifestyles.

These challenges differ from five years ago primarily in the acceleration of these trends, particularly the ubiquity of social media and smartphones even among younger children. From ten years ago – we’ve seen a significant shift from primarily consuming digital content to children being immersed in interactive, algorithm-driven environments that respond to and shape their interests, while distancing them from religiously minded thinking. The fundamental change in the past twenty years is the movement from an information-scarce to an information-abundant environment. When my older children were young, every time they had a question about faith, they knew to ask us, their Rabbanim and teachers; now children ask “Rabbi Google or GBT” and have exposure to countless competing narratives.

What questions would you ask your children to encourage conversations about emunah?

RDS: Speaking with them about what’s happening around them, discussing and analyzing events within the context of emunah. Asking: “What do you think this means? What does it reflect?” For example, it has been incredible seeing people come out of the tunnels [in Gaza] who suddenly uncovered astounding reservoirs of faith. I’m not only referring to Agam Berger, who wrote “b’derech emunah bacharti” (“I have chosen the path of Emunah”) in the helicopter, on her way home [from captivity in Gaza]. Many other hostages have also spoken about how they said tehillim or began praying there. We see that when the external layers of cultural influence are peeled away, the foundational inclination towards emunah that is hidden inside becomes awakened. Paradoxically, in the very worst of situations emunah is stirred because we understand that “we have no one to rely upon other than our Father in Heaven.”

We can help our children uncover this reality by asking questions like:

- On what or on whom can you rely?
- How do you express your reliance on someone? Your trust in them?
- What awakens a sense of hope in you?
- How do you find points of hope and strengthen

your belief that the world is progressing in good and positive ways?

Every day after shacharit we say: “Ani maamin—I believe with complete faith— in the arrival of Mashiach.” Essentially, what we are saying is that “I believe that at the end of the day this story will have a good ending.”

RJG:

- Where did you see Hashem this week? Let me tell you where I did...
- Where can you see Hashem’s influence in this room?
- Where do you see Hashem’s presence in our Seder/family gathering? Let me tell you what I see.
- Name a moment/sight that you would classify as kadosh. Why? Let me tell you...
- What is something we can think of when we say modim today? Let me tell you what I think of.
- If Hashem was looking at current events this week, what do you think He would say?
- Tell me your favorite tefillah and I will tell you mine and why I chose it.

RST:

- When do you feel closest to Hashem?” (This invites reflection on personal spiritual experience) When something difficult happens we spontaneously turn to Hashem in pain and anguish...When something good happens to you, do you think Hashem had a part in it? (Explores providence and divine relationship)
- If you could ask Hashem any question, what would you want to know?” (Opens space for expressing doubts or curiosities)
- Have you ever had a religious “crisis”? (Invites sharing of personal challenges, questioning, and sharing of reflective processes for strengthening emunah)
- What’s a time when you felt you were in “conversation” with Hashem and your tefillah was really heard? (Explores prayer experience and challenges)
- When people / holocaust survivors/ chayalim/ hostages, faced hard times but kept their emunah, what do you think helped them?” (Explores resilience in faith)
- How have the events of Simchat Torah 5784 stirred, shifted, challenged, and/or strengthened your emunah? (elicits multiple responses, offers opportunities for reflection and understanding



“ When the external layers of cultural influence are peeled away, the foundational inclination towards emunah that is hidden inside becomes awakened .

– Rav Dov Singer (RDS)

multiple perspectives)

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong is your “emunah muscle” TODAY? (opens discussion, creates self-awareness and goals)

These questions work best in natural moments rather than formal “emunah discussions,” and when asked with genuine curiosity rather than with expected “right answers” in mind. As a parent and teacher it helps me to understand each student’s unique personality, learning style, and spiritual inclinations, enabling me to tailor approaches accordingly. These questions also inspire me to revisit and rethink my own relationship with self and with Hashem, acknowledging that developing emunah is a lifelong journey with ups and downs, not a linear progression.

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