

Hi, this is Rabbi David Fohrman ... Welcome to *Parshat Devarim*. One of the great challenges of any religion is faith.<sup>1</sup>

### What Is the Meaning of Emunah?

Often we think of the central challenge of faith as belief in God, believing that God exists, that He is around—and yet the Torah uses the word אֱמוּנָה (*emunah*) in a way which almost certainly does not mean that. After the splitting of the sea ... —the people had faith in God. Was that the first time they believed that God existed?

In this week's *parsha*, Moshe castigates the people for lack of faith, in the sin of the spies. **Does Moshe seriously mean to say that the Jews did not believe in God? They doubted His existence? They got Manna from heaven, experienced revelation at Sinai, saw the ten plagues, saw the sea split; these guys didn't believe that God was around?**

We might consider faith as the last thing that the Jews of the desert would have struggled with and yet, according to Moshe, this is the people's crime in the wake of the report of the spies.

**The Torah isn't talking about faith in terms of belief that God exists.** The Israelites in the desert knew God existed, and what the Torah is really telling you is that the real journey of faith begins then. **Believing that God exists, that's the little leagues. What happens after you believe that, there is the real journey of faith, that's the big leagues.**

Today, I want to talk to you about that journey, that journey towards something else, after we believe that God exists. What is that something else and whatever it is what are the milestones that we pass in getting there? How do we achieve this thing called faith? Let's try to define the terms.

### What Is the Definition of Emunah in the Bible?

It turns out that the word *emunah* is used not just to describe human feelings, it is actually used to describe something that seems to have very little to do with faith at all. Moshe's arms in the battle against Amalek. The Jews prevailed in that battle only so long as Moshe's arms were raised. His arms were tired, so Aharon and Chur held his arms up ... *and his arms were emunah, they were steadfast until the sunset* (Exo 17:12).

Faith over *emunah*, I think, **is identified with that idea of steadfastness**. When you take it out of the realm of inanimate objects like arms

and you take it in to the realm of human relationships, it's a kind of steadfast quality in my relationship with you, a kind of unflinching willingness to trust you even as I confront my deepest fears. That's the sense in which Moshe uses in this week's *parsha*.

### The Israelites' Struggle with Faith

The Jews were afraid, they were afraid of conquering the land. They looked at the inhabitants of the land and they seemed like giants. Moshe accuses them of a lack of faith at that moment ... *and in this you didn't have faith, you didn't have trust, you weren't steadfast with God* (Gen 1:26-32). You shrunk away from God even as God lovingly was telling you to trust Him.

It is very interesting I think, that when Moshe makes his accusation he doesn't say that you failed to blindly have faith in God, he actually appeals to a kind of rational basis for that faith, to their experience. He says, look at your experience:

The God, your God, who walks before you; He is the one going to fight for you; He is going to do for you just as He did against Egypt before your very eyes. and in this desert you have seen; how God has carried you; like a man will carry his child (Deu 1:30-31).

**He is appealing to their experience.** You have grounds for faith ... *but you in this thing have failed, you haven't had faith in God.*

### The Basis of Faith: The Maharal's<sup>2</sup> Three Pillars of Emunah

In Moshe's worldview, faith doesn't come from nothing, it comes from observing things about your beloved that makes them trustworthy. The Maharal, the famous Rabbi [Judah 4:06] Loew of Prague, identifies three milestones and correlates them with the three times the word *emunah* first appears in the Torah in the story of the exodus.

The Maharal suggests that the people experienced three things that gave them rational grounds for faith:

- 1) The first thing they experienced, the first time the word faith is used in the story of the Exodus. When Moshe came to the elders of Israel and said God came to me and here are the signs that God gave to me ... *the Israelites understood that God saw their suffering* (Neh 9:9). The first thing, the Maharal says, is **I need to know that you care for me**, that you have empathy for me, that you see my suffering. But if all I know is that it is still not rational for me to place my faith in you, I need to know more.

<sup>1</sup> <https://members.alephbeta.org/playlist/emunah-struggling-with-faith>

<sup>2</sup> Judah Loew ben Bezalel, also known as Rabbi Loew, the Maharal of Prague, or simply the Maharal, was an important Talmudic scholar, Jewish mystic, mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher.

- 2) The next time the word faith appears in the Exodus story is at the splitting of the sea. *The people believed in God and Moshe His servant, what did they see then? They saw an incredible display of the power of the Master of the Universe.* In order to really have faith in you, it's not enough for you to have empathy, **you also have to have the power to help me.**
- 3) But even if I know that you have the power to help me and even if I know that you care and you have empathy, I still need to know one more thing and that brings us to the third instance of faith recorded in the Torah. It happens at Sinai. God said, *I will come to you Moshe and I will speak to you in a way that the people would be able to hear Me speaking to you ...* so that they should have faith in you and in the communication between Me and you forever. If I know that you have power and I know that you care for me but I do not know that you understand me. If I suspect that perhaps that you are so wrapped up in your own world that you cannot really get what it is that I need, I still cannot place myself in your hands. When the Jewish people saw God who was so different from them—a being that you cannot touch, that you cannot feel, that you cannot see—**actually successfully communicate with Moshe, they became convinced that God understood Moshe and Moshe understood God.** Then **the final ingredient for faith existed.**

If I know that you love me, that you feel empathy towards me, **if I know that you have the power to help and I know that you really get what it is that I need, then I can trust you.** There are grounds for me to place my faith in you and then, the real challenge occurs. My faith at that moment is still a product of an act of will, of sheer power on my part, to confront my fears and to take that leap.

### What Is Struggling to Maintain Faith in God?

**Trust is** always hard, **to steadfastly place yourself in the arms of your beloved, even as your beloved reassures you that they will take care of you through the darkest night, through the greatest terrors,** it is a tough thing.

**When you steadfastly place your fate in the hands of someone who loves you, when you abandon yourself to them, you achieve a dizzying kind of intimacy with them. That intimacy as rewarding as it is, is also scary.** It is a kind of leaving yourself behind, a kind of merging unabashedly with another. There is no more hiding, what of my sense of self, am I losing it all to you?

Loss of control involves a loss of self and loss of self is always scary and if you are the entire Israelite people, it is scary with God. It is easier

to just shrink back and say, 'God, I am just not going to do this. I'd rather go back to Egypt and it is here that you get to the great consequences of failing to have faith.

Because listen carefully to the bone chilling words that the people say when they shrink away from God in the sin of the spies. They don't just say we couldn't do this, they say ... *it was in God's hatred of us that He took us out of Egypt.* It sounds like insanity, how could you say that? That is what lack of faith will do to you.

### Breaking the Pillars of Faith in God

If I have grounds to place my faith in you, if I know that you love me, I know that you have the power to help me, I know you understand me and I balk at my willingness to cede control to you, I have to explain that failure to myself. What will I tell myself? Will I be honest if I just didn't have the courage to place myself in your hands? Or will I lie to myself and to you and compromise one of those three pillars?

In the case of the Jews, **the pillar they compromised was love.** They found a way to look back on their experience and say, our experience teaches us that God doesn't love us, He hates us. As crazy as it is, it is the only way that they could come to rationalize their unwillingness to place their faith in God.

This is why the challenge of faith is such a challenge because when faith is warranted, when our experience gives us reasons to extend ourselves and trust, but we fail to take that leap—that leap which has an element of blindness, the willingness to just let go and let our beloved lead us through our darkest fears—once we reach that point our relationship will never be the same.

### Building a Basis of Faith and Intimacy

If we do it successfully, we will have achieved the most dizzying kind of intimacy with our beloved but if we fail, everything can come crumbling down—**when we tell ourselves that really there was never any love there at all and we are not to blame.**

May we rise to this challenge when it is asked of us in all of our relationships; with God, with our wives, with our husbands, with our children, with our parents. It is a supreme test, one we dare not fail.

1. *The Torah isn't talking about faith in terms of belief that God exists. The Israelites in the desert knew God existed ... **Believing that God exists, that's the little leagues.** What happens after you believe that, there is the real journey of faith, that's the big leagues ... In the case of the Jews, **the pillar they compromised was love.** They found a way to look back on their experience and say, our experience teaches us that God*

doesn't love us, He hates us. As crazy as it is, it is the only way that they could come to rationalize their unwillingness to place their faith in God.

a. James 2:18-26

<sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup>You believe that there is one God. Good! **Even the demons believe that—and shudder.** <sup>20</sup>You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup>Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (Gen 22:9) <sup>22</sup>You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup>And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6), and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup>You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup>In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? (Gen 2:1, 15; 6:17; Heb 11:31) **As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.**

1) πίστις (*pistis*)—**conviction of the truth of anything**, belief.

πιστεύω (*pisteuo* [*pist-yoo'-o*])—**to think to be true**, to be persuaded of, to have a strong conviction about.

2) Sadly, *pistis* is often what drives irrational behavior and inaccurate views of critically important events—like those who believe the earth is flat, or that the moon landing was faked, or that the *magi* were in Bethlehem when Yeshua was born and shared gifts with his parents while he was a baby, wrapped in “swaddling” clothes and lying in a manger.

Or, in “conspiracy theories” that have legitimized violence, impaired public health, and undermined democratic governance.<sup>3</sup>

3) אמונה (*emunah*)—**firmness, steadfastness, fidelity, trust.**

In Hebrew, “faith” is not just about what one “believes” intellectually—it is about what one DOES with his life, motivated by a “moving” of the heart. **“Faith in God” is about walking in His ways BECAUSE you love Him, seeking His will, not your own—a “will” revealed in the Torah.**

4) Just as the “spirit” animates the “body” (i.e., gives it life), so do “deeds” animate (i.e., give life to) “faith.”

a) You are NOT a body that has a spirit/soul—you ARE a spirit/soul that has a body!

2. *The Maharal suggests that the people experienced three things that gave them rational grounds for faith ...*

a. God's care:

Deuteronomy 31:7-8

<sup>7</sup>Be strong and courageous ... The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; **he will never leave you nor forsake you.** <sup>8</sup>Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

Psalms 23:1-4, 6

<sup>1</sup>The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup>he refreshes my soul. <sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, **for you are with me**; your rod and your staff, they comfort me ... <sup>6</sup>Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life ...'

Micah 7:7

<sup>7</sup>But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.

Romans 15:13

<sup>13</sup>**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him**, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 5:7

<sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

b. God's ability to help:

Psalms 121:1-5

<sup>1</sup>A song of ascents. I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? <sup>2</sup>**My help comes from the LORD**, the Maker of heaven and earth ... <sup>4</sup>indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. <sup>5</sup>The LORD watches over you ...

2 Chronicles 14:9-13

<sup>9</sup>Zerah the Cushite marched out against (Judah) with a (great) army ... <sup>10</sup>Asa went out to meet him ... <sup>11</sup>Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, **"LORD, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, LORD our God, for we rely on you**, and in your name we have come against this vast army. LORD, you are our God; **do not let mere mortals prevail against you.**"

<sup>12</sup>The LORD struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled, <sup>13</sup>and Asa and his army pursued them ... such a great number of Cushites fell that they could not recover ...

<sup>3</sup> <https://current.withgoogle.com/the-current/conspiracy-theories/>

Phillipians 4:12-13

<sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>**I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**

Hebrews 4:16

<sup>16</sup>Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy **and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

c. Intimacy with God:

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

<sup>6</sup>For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. <sup>7</sup>The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup>**But it was because the LORD loved you** and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to ... those who love him and keep his commandments.

Psalms 63:1-3

<sup>1</sup>A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah. You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; **I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you**, in a dry and parched land where there is no water. <sup>2</sup>I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. <sup>3</sup>Because **your love is better than life**, my lips will glorify you.

Ephesians 2:4-5 (CJB)

<sup>4</sup>But **God is so rich in mercy and loves us with such intense love** <sup>5</sup>that, even when we were dead because of our acts of disobedience, he brought us to life along with the Messiah—it is by grace that you have been delivered.

3. *Loss of control involves a loss of self and loss of self is always scary and if you are the entire Israelite people, it is scary with God. It is easier to just shrink back and say, 'God, I am just not going to do this. I'd rather go back to Egypt and it is here that you get to the great consequences of failing to have faith.*

a. Hebrews 10:32-39 (CJB)

<sup>32</sup>But remember the earlier days, when, after you had received the light, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings. <sup>33</sup>Sometimes you were

publicly disgraced and persecuted, while at other times you stood loyally by those who were treated this way ... <sup>34</sup>Also when your possessions were seized, you accepted it gladly; since you knew that what you possessed was better and would last forever. <sup>35</sup>So **don't throw away that courage of yours**, which carries with it such a great reward. <sup>36</sup>For you need to hold out; so that, **by having done what God wills, you may receive what he has promised.** <sup>37</sup>For "There is so, so little time! The One coming will indeed come, he will not delay. <sup>38</sup>But **the person who is righteous will live his life by trusting, and if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him**" (Hab 2:3-4).

<sup>39</sup>However, **we are not the kind who shrink back** and are destroyed; on the contrary, **we keep trusting** and thus preserve our lives!

b. 1 John 2:26-29 (CJB)

<sup>27</sup>the Messianic anointing you received **from the FATHER** remains in you ... **HIS** Messianic anointing continues to teach you about all things, and is true, not a counterfeit, so, just as **HE** taught you, remain united with **HIM**. <sup>28</sup>And now, children, remain united with **HIM**; so that when **HE** appears, we may have confidence **and not shrink back from HIM** in shame at his coming. <sup>29</sup>If you know that **HE** is righteous, you should also know that he is the Father of everyone **who does what is right.**

1) Who is the "**HIS**" in v. 27, the "**HE**" in vv. 27, 28 & 29 and the "**HIM**" in v. 27 & 28? Is it the **FATHER** in v. 27? **If so, then is it the "coming" of the "Father" we are waiting for in v. 28?**

a) 1 John 3:2

<sup>2</sup>Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But **we know that when Mesisah appears**, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

b) Isaiah 43:11, 25

<sup>11</sup>I, even I, am **the LORD**, and **apart from me there is no savior ...** <sup>25</sup>"I, even I, **am he who blots out your transgressions**, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

c) Isaiah 44:6

<sup>6</sup>This is what **the LORD says**—Israel's **King and Redeemer**, the LORD Almighty: **I am the first and I am the last**; apart from me there is no God.

Revelation 1:7-8

<sup>7</sup>"Look, **he is coming with the clouds**," and "**every eye will see him**" (Dan 7:13), even those who pierced him"; and all

peoples on earth "will mourn because of him" (Zech 12:10).  
So shall it be! Amen.

<sup>8</sup>"I am the Alpha (Heb; 'first') and the Omega (Heb; 'last')," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, **and who is to come, the Almighty**" (Isa 44:6).

4. *In the case of the Jews, the pillar they compromised was love. They found a way to look back on their experience and say, our experience teaches us that God doesn't love us, He hates us. As crazy as it is, it is the only way that they could come to rationalize their unwillingness to place their faith in God.*
  - a. Anger at God is a result of an inability or unwillingness to trust God even when we do not understand what He is doing. **Anger at God is essentially telling God that He has done something wrong**, which He never does. Does God understand when we are angry, frustrated, or disappointed with Him? Absolutely. He knows our hearts and He knows how difficult, [frustrating], and painful life in this world can be. Does that make it right to be angry with God? No. Instead of being angry with God, we should pour out our hearts to God in prayer and then trust that He is in control ... " (Houdmann). Holding on to our anger will only allow bitterness and resentment to spring up in our hearts—therefore we must confess it to the Lord, and then by His gracious forgiveness, release those feelings to Him. Since God knows our hearts, it is pointless to try to hide our feelings; so talking to Him about it is the best way to handle our frustrating circumstances. We must often go before the Lord in prayer in our grief, anger, and pain. If we do so humbly, pouring out our hearts to Him, God will do His work in us ... <sup>4</sup>
    - 1) Psalm 4:5 (CJB)  
<sup>5</sup>**You can be angry, but do not sin!** Think about this as you lie in bed, and calm down. *Selah*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thetransformedsoul.com/additional-studies/spiritual-life-studies/dealing-with-anger-toward-god#:~:text=Anger%20at%20God%20is%20a,Absolutely.>