

## Shloshim for Ilana Hefter Feuerstein

Israel-US Commemoration Arranged by Jonathan and Sheera

August 27, 2024; 23 Menachem Av 5784

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The Torah, in Parshas Eikev (10:12), famously crafts a mission statement for the life of a Jew:

וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁאַל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אִם-לִירְאָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֵלְכֶת בְּכָל-דַּרְכָיו וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וְלַעֲבֹד אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ: לְשֹׂמֵר אֶת-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה וְאֶת-חֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֵנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לְטוֹב לָךְ:

“And now, Israel, what does HaShem, your Elokim, ask of you? Only that you are always in awe of God, to walk in God’s ways, and to love God, and to serve God with all your heart and soul, keeping God’s commands and laws that God commands you this day, for your good.”

In thinking about these two pesukim, one is struck by the comprehensiveness of God’s ask. To be in awe of God. To follow all of God’s instructions. To love God. To keep God’s rules. Isn’t this set of statements the purpose of the life of every Jew? Why does God ask all these things of us?

Comes R. Hanina in the Gemara in Berachos (33b) and explains:

וְאָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינָא: הַכֹּל בְּיַדֵּי שָׁמַיִם, חוּץ מִירְאַת שָׁמַיִם. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: “וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁאַל מֵעַמְּךָ כִּי אִם לִירְאָה.”

R. Chanina stated: Everything is controlled by God except being in awe of God. This means that every human being has bechira chofshis – free choice – of whether to serve God or not. How do we know this? He continues – from the pasuk of “And now Israel, what does HaShem ask of you other than to be in awe of HaShem your God etc. Why does HaShem have to ask his creations, us, to walk in God’s ways, to love God, to serve God, and keep all of God’s commandments? Because, at the end of the day, the choice for all of these is in the hands of each person.

We each are given free choice of how to live our lives. While we are nourished in our early years by our parents, siblings, and extended family in how to serve HaShem, as we age, we expand our sphere of connectedness by meeting peers in school, at camp, at shul, at birthday parties, at college, and later in our professional lives. If we are fortunate, we meet another person with whom we decide to share our adult life and we continue the cycle of Pru u’revu and bring another generation literally to life.

All our decisions, at each step in our journey, are the result of making choices. The Torah framework, in its understanding of human growth and development, ensured that every day, in the recitation of Shma, we would be reminded of our responsibility to make positive and constructive choices that demonstrate our loyalty to the aims of the Torah.

So, what does HaShem ask of us? God asks us to constantly be in a state of growth, in a state of awareness, in a state of joy when we know that we carry ourselves through our life with a recognition of the “why” of our lives. Why are we doing what we do? What drives us?

Our Ilana, a”h, demonstrated from her earliest years, a capacity to strive to make the most of her talents and strengths. Ilana understood that acting “leshaym shamayim” was not a slogan but an

article of faith translated into action. As she moved from the nuclear family in her youth into school followed by college, and then graduate school, she maintained a steady gaze on the “why” of her life. Her focus on Torah and Tefillah inspired those around her. Her dedication to helping and caring for people from all walks of life as a medical student, intern, and then resident was well-known. And finally, her love and caring for her life-partner, Joseph, and for all her children was deep and focused.

Ilana shared her approach to a Judaism of “awe in front of HaShem” to her children and her family. Her service to others in her medical life and to her family in private life was exemplary. Her laser focus on developing her children as “Bnay Torah” was evident to all in her orbit. Her many ways of explaining, teaching, and demonstrating her love for a life informed by Torah and Yahadus were abundant.

Finally, Ilana believed in living each day to the fullest, from early in the day to late at night. The pasuk with which we began ends with “that I command you HAYOM” this very day. Ilana took this word to mean EVERY day. She was indefatigable in stretching her time to the limit to serve others as a reflection of her Avodas HaShem – her service to the Almighty. She played a wonderful role in her life amongst us, and we miss her terribly. Perhaps her efforts at meeting her obligations as a proud Jewish person in a myriad of different ways during her lifetime can be a model for those of us that now exist in a world without her presence. In this way, may our memories of her embolden us to deepen our connection to HaShem and all the rest of the beautiful people around us.

Yehi Zichra Baruch