

# פרשת במדבר

This week's adaptation is dedicated in honor of:  
my dear wife, Devorah.

"וידבר ד' אל משה במדבר סיני" (א,א)

**"And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert."**

The Torah was given through three objects – fire, water and the wilderness. Fire – “All of Har Sinai was smoking because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire.”<sup>1</sup> Water – “the heavens also dripped; also the clouds dripped water.”<sup>2</sup> The wilderness – as seen in our *pasuk*. Why these three articles? To teach us: just as these three, fire, water and desert, are free to all of Earth’s inhabitants – so too, Torah is free to all, as it states, “Oh, all who thirst, go to water.”<sup>3</sup> Water is a reference to Torah – whoever desires it may come and partake.<sup>4</sup>

## כמו המדבר

### Like the Desert

**The Desert is Silent.** Not for lack of what to say – its silence is deafening – a silence that loudly declares Hashem’s presence. A silence that beckons a person to come forward and heed the voice of Hashem, a voice that is heard from one end of the world to the other – but, is heard even more unmistakably in the Desert.

Rebbe Nachman: All things emphatically proclaim Hashem’s glory, for the entire world is filled with His splendor. His magnificence constantly cries out and hints to man to draw near to Him and He draws us near with compassion, love and great affection.<sup>5</sup>

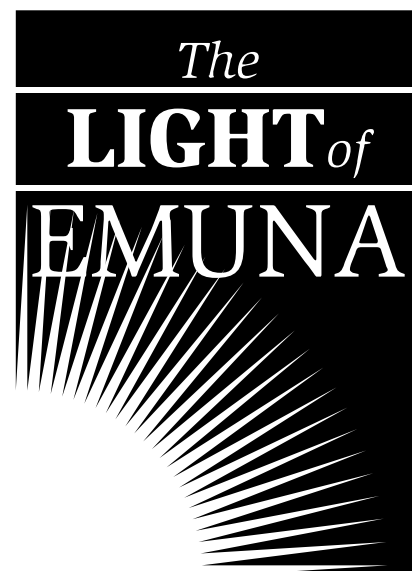
<sup>1</sup> והר סיני עשן כלו מפני אשר ירד עליו ד' (שמות יט, יח)

<sup>2</sup> גם שמים נטפו גם עבים נטפו מים (שופטים ה, ד)

<sup>3</sup> הוי כל צמא לכו למים (ישעיה נה, א)

<sup>4</sup> במדבר רבה א, יז

<sup>5</sup> שיחות הר"ן נב



Based on Harav Menachem Azolai's "Ohr Ha'Emuna"

The Desert contains nothing - yet it contains everything. It contains no water, no vegetation – what remains in that place is just Hashem.

**The Desert is Silent.** Sometimes, silence may thunder more intensely than a thousand words. A story is told about one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the previous generation. One *Yom Tov*, he delivered a lecture. He was speaking of his parents and their greatness and, overwhelmed by emotion his eyes started tearing and his throat constricted to the point that he could not continue his story. Several times he tried to overcome his emotions until he finally continued his lecture without relating what he had wished to tell. His *talmidim* later attested that despite the fact that they had not heard the story that he had wished to convey - they had all clearly received the message of honor and admiration that he held for his parents. They did not glean this from spoken words – but, rather, explicitly, from those left unspoken.

Another example: R' Eliyahu Lopian zt"l once visited Yerushalayim on *Yom Tov* to see the Brisker Rav. Upon entering the Brisker Rav's *Sukkah*, he sat quietly and observed the Rav and the Rav sat silently watching his guest. After several minutes, R' Lopian arose and left in a state of awe. Many years later, the *talmidim* of both *tzaddikim* still retold the story, each one with his own angle. The silence made a greater impression on so many students than anything

that they could have discussed.

**The Desert Conceals Itself.** We long to imitate it – to be reticent, self-effacing, unassuming. There is positive hiding and negative hiding. There is amazing concealing – holy hiding. And, there is hiding that must be avoided, for it hides one's self away from Hashem.

Negative concealment includes things of this world – unimportant matters, sadness, fantasies, all sorts of thoughts about what is due us, things that appear to be failures – this type of suppression must be eradicated. We must escape it for it veils the point of revealed G-dliness in the midst of the misguided human existence of confusion, limitation and narcissism.

At the same time, we must guard our modesty, our inner beauty, the melody of the Jewish soul that emanates from within the concealment and wishes to remain modest, hidden and quiet. In whatever secreted corner we find ourselves – we long and pine until we manage to reveal the inner deepest point in the heart that has not yet been fully bared. To do so, we must sit serenely for extended interludes, modestly – yearn, pray, crave and beseech.

We must escape the repression caused by sadness, by daydreams, by feeling deprived, by the feeling that we are unsuccessful, that things do not proceed well for us, that our lives are difficult, that luck frowns upon us – to flee this mindset and attain a different type of hiding. We seek a holy hiding, a hiddenness that exposes the fact that there is only Hashem in the world.<sup>6</sup>

Master of the World, help me find my own special corner, where I can shut my eyes, close my ears and be only with You – to desire only You. Modesty and simplicity are the foundation of the Jewish home. Living a simple life, unpretentiously – absent flash - voluntarily and contentedly accepting the minimum – shattering foreign idols – not participating in the rat race for excessive comforts – the luxuries of food,

clothing, furnishings, - *yiddishkeit* continually pushes these things to the side. They must not occupy our minds. How beautiful is the simple, modest life – how charming and graceful.

The Torah was given on Har Sinai. The Midrash tells us that when Hashem descended to give the Torah, all of the mountains vied for the privilege. Hashem specifically chose Har Sinai because it was the humblest. The person summoned to receive the Torah – Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest of all men. Humility and modesty are the secrets of life. A person who minimizes himself in this world will be great in the next world.

**The Desert Has The Charm of Humility.** It bows its head, it is not arrogant, it is not self-important.

Humility is the key to serving Hashem.

Our *parsha* opens with counting the Jewish people, their division into tribes and groups with individual flags. What is the significance of the flags that the Torah spends so much time discussing them? A flag symbolizes subjugation to a king – to the King of the World. Even if we are tired, we arise. Even if we are hungry, we toughen ourselves. We do not do whatever we feel like doing, we are bannermen; we are subjects of the King. When a leader visits, there are parades, ceremonies, flags waving. That stems from holiness – from the flags for the honor of the King of All Kings.

Our days are filled with flags. Anything that we do for Hashem's honor is a flag. Even when we rest to replenish our strength to serve Hashem – it is a flag. We are vassals of the King, we do His will, we subjugate ourselves. Just like the Desert.

**Moreinu Harav:** If a person wishes to alter nature, to perform miracles – he must *daven* with submissiveness – to know that he is but a small person, less than any other Jew – then, he can accomplish anything with his *tefillos*. This is the explanation of the name that Yoseph gave his eldest son - “Menasha”. “For Hashem has made

<sup>6</sup>

באור פני מלך חיים

me forget all my hardship and my father's entire household.”<sup>7</sup> It seems to mean that he forgot his father, his mother and his brothers. Is that likely? Rebbe Nachman explained that Yoseph merited an aspect of “Menasha” (מנישה) – oblivion (נשייה), forgetfulness – which is really submission and nullification. He ignored his pedigree and all of the hard work (עמלי) that he had done is serving Hashem. Yoseph Hatzaddik said, “I serve Hashem! I do not rely on the fact that I have an important father, a notable mother, a prominent grandfather – my strength comes from the fact that Hashem created me - that Hashem exists in the world, that He is alive and well – and so I serve Him.” He relied not on his lineage or prior successes – he drew strength from Hashem alone and he thereby attained so many great heights.

Master of the World, help me avoid thinking that I am owed anything – help me not to believe that because I have sacrificed for Your honor I am entitled to receive what I request. Remind me, Father, that I am owed nothing. Remind me of what I could have accomplished but did not. Remind me that I am not so righteous and that whatever I have accomplished I did mostly for my own honor. Remind me, Father, that I must *daven* to you obediently, by pleading and never complaining. Remind me not to misattribute successes to myself – recognizing that whatever I do merit receiving is entirely the result of Your compassion, they are unearned gifts.<sup>8</sup>

**The Desert Has The Charm of Truth.** It is absent color and its landscape is natural and without adornment. The Desert holds wholesomeness and integrity. It does not attempt to portray itself as more than it truly is.

Truth – the entire world rests on truth. It is the foundation of everything. It is what guides us. It is the concept to which all of Creation yields. We all desire truth, we do not wish to live lies.

There is but one truth: we have been placed in this world to become close to Hashem, to gain knowledge of Hashem and to acknowledge Him. Whatever occurs in our lives is all from Hashem and for the best because it is designed to bring us closer to Hashem and to our purpose. “All of the pleasures of this world are blended with bitterness, anger, sorrow and pain. No one who pursues this world has gratification or satisfaction from it. There is no benefit greater than constantly chasing our true purpose, our everlasting mission of serving Hashem by avoiding evil and doing good, for that is the true and everlasting good.” Therefore, we received the Torah in the Desert, an ownerless place, to demonstrate that without Torah, we are aimless. “There is no meaninglessness more than one who does not contemplate his obligations and objectives and what will become of him in the next world. There is no worse emptiness than one who follows his base urges and forsakes everlasting life and real profit in favor of the fleeting pleasures of this world.”<sup>9</sup>

We seek truth – we wish to know exactly what Hashem desires of us at every moment. Each of us has our own unique truth. We must be true to our own paths, not to those of others. “When the spies angered Hashem, Moshe said, ‘Master of the World, proceed with Your approach, Your technique, as all the righteous do – Avraham with *bris milah*, Yitzchak with *tefilla*, Yaakov with truth, Yoseph with *chassidus*, Moshe with humility, Aharon with peace, Pinchas with zealotness – You too, Hashem – your approach is compassion and mercy.”<sup>10</sup> A person must continuously analyze whether he is on his own correct path or that of someone else. A person who always looks to what others are doing and seeks their approval will be miserable. Avraham Avinu acted as if he were alone in the world, not worrying about the fact that everyone else was engaged in idolatry. A person who is true to himself will merit great joy, abundant Divine Assistance - Hashem cherishes genuineness.

<sup>7</sup> כי נשני אלוקים את כל עמלי ואת כל בית אבי (בראשית מא, נא)

<sup>8</sup> If we make ourselves like the Desert, we will receive amazing gifts - "ממדבר מתנה"

<sup>9</sup> ליקו"ה, הפקר ונכסי הגר, ג, א  
<sup>10</sup> ילקוט שמעוני, איוב יז

**The Desert Has the Spirit of Longing.** It yearns for water, for shade, for greenery. Hashem chose the Desert above holier places with specificity. When a person wishes to elevate himself and for Torah to illuminate within his heart and for holiness to reside within his soul – he must traverse remote locales and remain steadfast in beseeching and longing. There is no other way.

Those who wish to cling to Hashem are at war – a war against urges and negative attributes – a war against self-aggrandizement and arrogance. There are many battles – but, precisely within the ones that are most difficult for us is where our corrections lie. We must constantly beg. The Torah elaborates on the complaints of the Jewish

people in the Desert to teach us that we must never despair. The most desperate situations can be transformed into wondrous miracles – so long as we do not lose hope. This is also the lesson of *Sefiras Haomer* – we begin to yearn, we count and yet we fall - even during these days of longing. Negative thoughts, negative desires – they do not allow us tranquility. We get the impression that people like us cannot possibly return to Hashem. We must never give up – no action is ever wasted. Every bit of desire builds worlds. We must cross the Desert to reach Hashem, to receive the Torah.

**The Desert is Silent** – often thundering louder than a thousand words.

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## תפילה

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**Master of the World!** Help me be victorious in the war of life because alone I cannot prevail - without You, I stand no chance.

Help me, Father, to flee the seductions of this world, for they pull me incessantly and leave me with a bitter taste. They never satisfy my soul, they always separate me from You. What do I need them for?

Provide me, Father, with counsel and guidance in avoiding confusion, in protecting myself. Remind me of the bitter aftertaste of sin before I act. Give me the strength to abstain from eating this piece of cake for it will be my third slice and there must be limits. Grant me the power to lower my head and not gaze upon what I do not need to see.

Help me, Father, to crave only You. Help me overcome all that separates me from You. I am at war, Father, and I want to win. Help me. I need a breakthrough for I often feel like I am running in place, despite knowing that no act is lost and that every prayer and every word is recorded Above.

I want to be holy, Father. Grant me additional desires and yearnings. Help me extend my *davening* with enthusiasm.

Help me feel that every day is like *Chol Hamoed* – that even during the week should feel like *Yom Tov*.

**Master of the World!** Help me be triumphant in the war of life and to cling to You forever.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

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Notice: The foregoing is based on my limited understanding of the Parsha Sheet, *Ohr Ha'Emuna*, disseminated by Harav Menachem Azolai *Shlita* and is not a complete or exact adaptation of *Ohr Ha'Emuna* and is not necessarily even a reliable interpretation of the ideas presented therein. *Ohr Ha'Emuna* is published in Hebrew; in translation, accuracy is always compromised. Rav Azolai has not reviewed this material - any inaccuracies, omissions or confusion should be attributed exclusively to me. I still hope you enjoy and it provides some *chizuk*. Thank you Mordi Blass for your help with some of the Hebrew expressions.

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