

פרשת דברים

This adaptation is dedicated
in honor of my wife, Devorah.

"אלה הדברים אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל" (א,א)
"These are the words that Moshe spoke
to all Israel"

The term for "words" (דברים) is related to the term for "bee" (דבורה). Just as a bee's honey is sweet but its sting is painful – so are the words of Torah – whoever violates them receives a judgment of punishment like the sting of a bee, as it says, "its desecrators shall be put to death"¹ – and whoever fulfills them merits life sweet as a bee's honey, as it says, "so that your days will be lengthened."^{2 3}

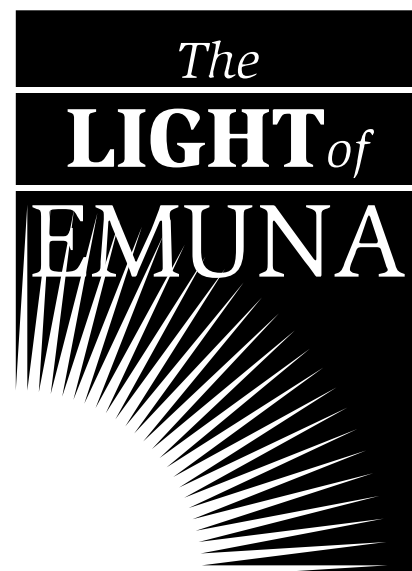
אייכה

Where are You?

Where are You Father? It is so difficult for us without You! It is so difficult when we do not experience You! We wish to be connected to You 24 hours per day – for if not, we are connected to other things.

We are currently in the three weeks ("between the straits" – בין המצרים). Our bodies themselves are terrible straits. We are at war - every moment is a hurdle, every moment presents a challenge, a hardship – but we recognize that all of these are vessels to draw close to Hashem, receptacles for attaining G-dliness. There are levels that are unreachable - except by way of complications. A person suddenly experiences Hashem's closeness, he feels Hashem's hand grasping his own, Hashem does not forsake him.

¹ מחלליה מות יומת (שמות לא, יד)
² למען יארכון ימיה (שם כ, יב)
³ דברים רבה א



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

It is so difficult but Hashem is with us through the troubles, Hashem loves us within the struggles, Hashem is always with us.

"Where are You" is not a contradiction – it is a search. It is the everlasting outcry of a Jew who desires intimacy with Hashem, who wishes to experience Hashem, who wants the taste of the pleasure of holiness to give him strength to overcome everything else that pulls him and distances him from the source of joy and life – from Hashem.

In the midst of suffering and contraction – we reveal Hashem's compassion. We reveal the kindness within strict judgment. If there was only kindness, we would attribute it to nature, as if we were owed it, for there would be nothing else. But, when we uncover it within difficulties, we begin to feel Hashem's Presence and we become much closer to Him. We recognize how great Hashem is and what fantastic miracles He performs for us.

If everything proceeded smoothly, there would be very few *tefillos* offered, we would feel very successful and would ascribe the accomplishments to ourselves. But, when there are snags, when we cannot accomplish on our own, when we are faced with persistent adversities, when we are literally at war - we are left with no choice but to run to Hashem, increase our *davening*, which itself forms a bond

with Hashem. And, essentially, that is our success in life, when we manage to form that bond. Success = connecting to Hashem, understanding that whatever we have is all from Hashem. When we pray for every single matter, when nothing results automatically, when whatever we attain is only through *tefilla* – we merit humility, we do not consider ourselves superior to others, and we recognize that everything is from Hashem – that is the greatest success a person can achieve.

The mourning of the three weeks climax with destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* on *Tisha B'Av*, a day that funnels to us all of the pain and hurt that the Jewish people have endured for thousands of years. It is not a mourning of gloom or despair, bitterness or disappointment, G-d forbid. It is a weeping of hope, of *emuna*, of longing and yearning. We hear the bells of *Moshiach* ringing in our ears. We constantly await redemption. This crying is something amazing, just as all the ways of Hashem are wondrous. We cry for the *Beis Hamikdash* that stands no more – because, when it stood, a Jew was able to enter it and receive remarkable counsel, offer a sacrifice and immediately feel so close to Hashem – that is what we cry for. The most difficult strait is routine. Performing acts without heart, without feeling or enthusiasm, quickly. It is a cry over the great light of the *tzaddikim* that is no longer present, hidden from us. “When one desires his own honor, he is unable to draw near to or benefit from the *tzaddik's* light at all. At times he will even contest it, especially nowadays, in these generations, when the point of truth is despised so much.”⁴

“Where are You” is a shriek of yearning and searching for a distant loved one. The pain within testifies to the depth of the eternal bond that never ceases between us and our Father in Heaven, a pain that originates from the depth of love. Even if the separation is so long, our longings do not weaken, they continue and increase in intensity. In *Megillas Eichah* it states,

“All her pursuers overtook her in narrow straits.”⁵ The holy *Baal Shem Tov* explains this to mean that all those who pursue Hashem will reach Him during the Three Weeks – specifically in these difficult times.

Love of Fellow Jews

There are some Jews whose love for every Jew is boundless. They always know how to judge others favorably. Their patience for everyone and the way they honor everyone is a *Kiddush Hashem*.

A story is told of R' Chaim Palagi zt”l whose daily routine was out of the ordinary. Before he would arrive home there would already be a mass of people waiting for him to adjudicate disputes, arbitrate arguments, advise, answer *Halachic* questions – and he would receive all of them patiently, with a benevolent expression – he listened and considered, decided and counseled, taught and blessed. Only after the last person departed, would he eat. Often, as he sat down to eat, the door would open and someone would enter. The Rav would ask for the plate to be removed, as if he had just finished eating. The visitor would ask his question, receive an answer and leave and the plate would be returned to the table. The plate was regularly brought and taken away, served and cleared. Until finally quiet would prevail, no one arrived and the Rav would finish his meal that already became cold and stale. One time, the Rav was surprised that no one had interrupted his meal and inquired about it. His son explained that a certain woman had indeed arrived and wished to ask a question but he had told her that the Rav was eating and she should come back. “Who was the woman,” the Rav asked agitatedly. “So-and-so from the outskirts of the city, it was a minor question about *kashrus*.” Immediately, the Rav jumped up and grabbed his jacket. “Let’s go!” “Where to,” asked the son. Rav Palagi answered, “To the woman’s home ... you, to apologize to her ... and me, to answer her question.”⁶

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אוצר היראה, בין המצרים ב

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כל רדפיה השיגוה בין המצרים (איכה א, ג)

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מעין השבועה

The Three Weeks is a time to reinforce our observance - primarily of those *mitzvos* between man and his fellow man. The second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed for the sin of baseless hatred. Unconditional love is the antidote - it will effect the redemption. No one ever loses by giving unconditional love. One of the best forms of unconditional love is bringing other Jews close to Hashem. Our entire lives must be a *kiruv* campaign - no one is absolved of this task. "Over these I weep."⁷ Over so many Jewish souls that are so distant from His light, they do not live the life of Torah, experience the sweetness of the light of *emuna*, they pursue the silliness of this world, they chase fulfillment of the basest urges.

Moreinu Harav: We must engage Jews who are not yet religious. Many people are inspired by coming into contact with sincere and smiling observant Jews. We must be available and approachable to those who may be interested in *yiddishkeit* but do not know where to begin. We must exude positivity and a bright countenance so that Torah and *yiddishkeit* are perceived as they truly are - beautiful. If people they regularly encounter wear sour expressions, appear despondent and they meet religious Jews who are excited and happy - imagine how much *teshuvah* can be inspired.

There are no wicked people in *Klal Yisroel*. Even if we observe a completely wicked person - we must know that we are merely witnessing external husks. The Arizal explains that these many husks that envelop the wicked are only possible because of the tremendous light that is latent within them - even the insolent, the most brazen of the generation - the husks are only a millimeter deep ... nay, a millionth of a millimeter deep - that, in one moment, can be shed and their inner light can be revealed. Because their light is so great, the husks battle with them and cling to them so much more - in order to conceal their great illumination.

Moshe Rabbeinu addressed his words "to all

Israel." He knew the truth: there is no such thing as a Jew who does not want Hashem - the soul of every Jew desires Hashem.

True, there is a *mitzvah* to rebuke/correct one who acts improperly. The *Gemara* tells us that one of the reasons for the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* was the failure to rebuke each other.⁸ For, if we truly love each other, if we really care about each other - how can we allow each other to stumble?! But, it is very dangerous. Usually, when we rebuke others we do so out of a sense of superiority. Often, if we contemplate our motivations honestly, we find that we are happy that we "caught him." Under these circumstances, it impossible to reprimand. It will not elevate the other person, it will only sink us. We must first love others before we can admonish them.

After *Maariv* one Friday night, R' Aryeh Levin zt"l was approached by a non-religious man who was smoking a cigarette and wanted to know how to find a certain address. Despite the fact that the man appeared to be deliberately trying to antagonize R' Levin with the lit cigarette, R' Aryeh answered him graciously; "I will escort you to your destination." After a fifteen minute walk they arrived and the man said, "You should know that I have a very hard heart, no one has ever been able to penetrate it - until today, because, despite my impertinence, you did not get upset. Therefore, I promise you, knowing now that people like you exist, I will never smoke on Shabbos again."

Moshe Rabbeinu recounts all the places in which the Jewish people angered Hashem. Yet, this was not a piercing reproach - it was conveyed with care and refinement, indirectly, by hinting, so as not to insult them. "He alluded to the matters and reminded them with clues, for the honor of the Jewish people."⁹ Of critical importance is not embarrassing others, protecting their honor. What did Moshe reprimand them regarding? Lack of gratitude. Hashem provided so much

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על אלה אני בוכיה (איכה א, טז)

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⁹

שבת קי"ט:
רש"י דברים א, א

kindness, but they regularly complained. Hashem did not owe them anything. Hashem did not have to smooth the way, kill the snakes and scorpions, plant trees and fruits at *Yam Suf*, instill a variety of flavors in the *Manna*. Hashem did everything to benefit them. And they responded with complaints, grievances, ingratitude. They merited witnessing so many miracles and wonders from the moment they left Egypt – and yet they sinned with the Golden Calf, with the sin of the spies, with Korach, etc.

We live with forgetfulness. We forget all of the favors, all of the miracles and wonders that Hashem does for us at every moment. Every Jew has had thousands of acts of kindness done for him over the months and years – but, we forget, we do not pay attention to them, as if it all happens naturally, on its own. It is rare to find people who say the morning blessings with true

feelings of thankfulness and gratitude. Hashem draws us near, He enables us to perform so many *mitzvos*, every simple Jew - spiritual affluence awaits us after 120 years. We have a Father who owns everything, who inscribes a will of billions for each of us – and we are indifferent. How can we remember to thank Hashem? We must first learn to thank each other. We begin there. When members of a household thank each other regularly – Hashem resides in the home. A child who thanks without being reminded is well raised. We must accustom ourselves to thank others for every small act and then we will remember to thank Hashem. Ingratitude is the root of evil. Some people act as if everyone owes them and everything is owed to them. Gratitude gladdens all. We must guard this feeling – we must always remember all of the good that people and Hashem have done for us.

תפילה

Master of the World! Help me feel our unity, our partnership, our sense of communal responsibility. When I am told that the sins of other people are my problem as well because You, Father, await everyone's return, I still do not feel it – I feel like his sins are his problem alone. At least, allow me to feel the pain of the *Shechina*, Your pain, Father, when You look down from above and see what is going on our streets.

Master of the World! Help me believe that every Jew, in the inner portions of his soul, wishes to be close to You, even those who seem so distant. Sometimes, I see this on their faces, they have a look of longing or suddenly they use phrases like “be well” or “good things” instead of “good-bye.” But, sometimes I notice people looking at me like I am from a different planet, laughing at me and I feel like there is an infinite chasm between us. Help me, Father, not to feel too much, to seek some bridge despite everything. Help me believe that there is no one who cannot come close, just as there is no one who is unworthy of returning to You.

Master of the World! Help me be a little less self-absorbed. It should hurt me when I observe Jews who are so far from Torah and *mitzvos*. Help me dare to say something to them that is capable of luring them and not be afraid of their reaction. To, at least, pray for them. Even when I see religious Jews who put in so much effort and forget that *tefilla* is the most important ingredient – to try to engage them, out of love, not for the sake of criticizing. This too is *kiruv*. Is it not, Father? And may I myself merit coming close to You, Father – for only You and I know how far I really am.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

ד"ר

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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