

פרשת במדבר

This adaptation is dedicated in honor
of my dear wife, Devorah,
and my dear daughter, Tehilla.

"וידבר ד' אל משה במדבר סיני" (א,א)

**"Hashem spoke to Moshe in the
Wilderness/Desert of Sinai"**

Why was the Torah given in the wilderness? To teach us that if a person does not make himself like a desert - he cannot know Torah and *mitzvos*.¹

כמו המדבר

Like a Desert

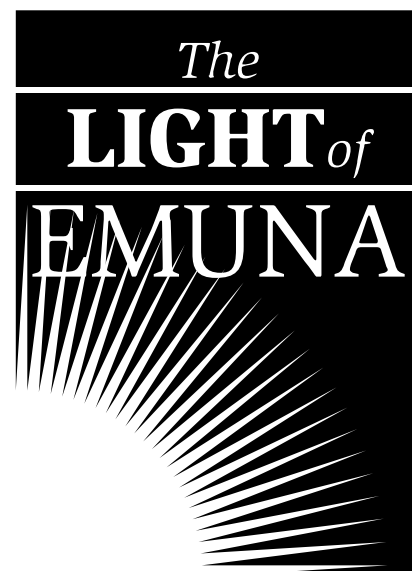
Humility and modesty, submissiveness and yielding are true living. Everything that we endure in life reminds us to lower our heads a bit. Why was the Torah given on Har Sinai? To instruct us to humble ourselves and to be modest in our own eyes - as Hashem taught us by rejecting the tall mountains and choosing Har Sinai, the smallest of them all."² **How beautiful is a life of humility and modesty - how charming and enchanting is a Jew who is suffused with them.** Chazal say that there is nothing more appealing than modesty.

A person who pursues honor attains no gratification or pleasure in this world - all of his days are teeming with anger and grief.

If a person is subjected to humiliation and remains silent - he will be showered with such gifts. The author of the Sdei Chemed reported that, in his youth, he was not distinguished in his talents - but the wellsprings of wisdom were opened for him because of the following story: "When I was a young married man, I learned in a

¹ במדבר רבה א, ז

² נועם אלימלך



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

Kollel. One of the other young men disliked me and decided to libel me. He bribed the Arab cleaning woman to spread rumors about me - that I had seduced her into immodest activities. She did so and I was publicly disgraced and cursed. I was forced to run away out of humiliation. But the *Rosh Kollel* did not believe the cleaning woman and fired her. After the bribe money had been depleted, the woman approached me and begged me to forgive her for the terrible injustice that she had inflicted upon me. She promised that she would publicize the truth and testify that it was all false. I was faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, I was overjoyed at the opportunity to clear my name of this horrible accusation. On the other hand, the desecration of Hashem's name was already done - if the true story were to come out now, there would be an additional desecration due to the actions of that other *Kollel* man. I decided that it was better to suffer my degradation in silence. At the very moment that I made that difficult choice, that jeopardized my entire future in the world of Torah, I felt the wellsprings of wisdom open within me. In place of the damage that I expected as a result of my resolution - I merited unusual Divine Assistance that has brought me to my current station."

We are owed nothing - for if something is due us, we can be offended or upset. We are no better than anyone else, we are no more important than anyone else, we are not owed

any special treatment, we are not due any honor. A person must incessantly pause and contemplate - to identify thoughts of grandeur, to acknowledge them and dismiss them. When a person overcomes his negative attributes – he experiences such unbelievable joy.

The great R' Tzadka Chutzin, aside from his wisdom and righteousness, was a distinguished, veteran and experienced *mohel*, who had initiated thousands of Jewish boys into the covenant of Avraham Avinu without receiving any payment for his troubles. When he was living in Yerushalayim, someone invited him to his home on the upcoming Shabbos to circumcise his son. The man lived in the Yemin Moshe neighborhood, quite a distance from the Rav's home. It was an imposition, but because of his great love of the *mitzvah*, he agreed. The elderly Rav left his home early because his pace was slow and arduous. Leaning on his assistant, he finally made his way to the *shul* where the *bris* was to take place. When he arrived, the father of the child barely acknowledged his presence and the crowd continued to wait. R' Tzadka inquired as to what they were waiting for. The father sheepishly explained that he had found a "better" *mohel* and they were waiting for him to arrive – would R' Tzadka forego the honor? R' Tzadka responded that the father should use whomever he preferred. After a little longer, the other *mohel* arrived and yet they still waited. R' Tzadka again inquired as to the holdup and the father explained that the "better" *mohel* forgot his bag of implements – would R' Tzadka mind if the other *mohel* used his tools? R' Tzadka happily agreed. After the *bris*, R' Tzadka set out on the strenuous journey home with his assistant. On the walk, he remarked, "I have merited bringing thousands of boys into the *bris* of Avraham Avinu – but I have never before merited performing the *mitzvah* in such a complete manner as I did it today ... who is as happy as me ..."

The Gemara says that one who overlooks one who wrongs him is saved from death and

merits long life.³

The Creator of the World remembers, more than anything else, those moments in which we sacrificed for others. "Hashem remembered Rochel."⁴ What memory did He conjure? He recalled the amazing detriment that she underwent in favor of her sister. In the merit of that great sacrifice – she was rewarded with children after so many years. **With this formula we can protect peace in the home, resolve conflicts with neighbors – it is a powerful and wondrous weapon of immense magnitude that creates, wherever it is utilized, an aura of pleasantness and happiness.** That is what the Creator wants of us – that we smile at others even when we have no smiles to give; that we refrain even when we feel compelled to comment; to conceal our good deeds even when we are bursting with the desire for everyone to know. We forego our own desire in favor of Hashem's. What does Hashem desire of us – what is most significant to Him? Wholesome interpersonal relationships – letting go, generosity and love.

When a person waives what he is entitled to in favor of another, he opens an entrance for the light of Hashem to penetrate within him and consequently, he is filled with joy, he is successful. When a person is stubborn – everything is sealed before him. When he is yielding, the doors are swung open and holiness is added. **If we forego our time, money, honor – we will never lose – we immediately receive other amazing and enormous things.**

The desert bows its head, it is silent, it is quiet – and precisely in this stillness one can feel Hashem's Presence so powerfully. There is nothing in it, yet it contains everything. For a place where one experiences Hashem's Presence is lacking nothing.

To be like the desert a Jew must be quiet, submissive, out of the public eye. This week's

³ ראש השנה עז.

⁴ ויזכר אלקים את רחל (בראשית ל, כב)

parsha opens with the counting of the Children of Israel and their division into tribes and groups of tribes, each with its own flag. What is the significance of these flags that the Torah describes? A flag is submission to a king – to the King of the Universe. If I am under a banner, I am bowing to the king – I do not do what pleases me. I want to do Hashem’s will. What is Hashem’s strongest desire? That all of the beautiful characteristics of the desert: humility, letting go, forgiveness – be applied in our dealings with others. Loving each other: what we hate, not doing to others. We received Torah and *mitzvos* so as to purify ourselves, refine, subjugate and nullify the evil within us. It is so easy to lower another person’s stature and damage his honor. Sometimes, an offhand remark meant only to exhibit our own wit and acumen can hurt someone else so severely. Sometimes, the mere mention of some past error of another is sufficient to give him a sense of being a complete failure.

HKB”H wants the opposite. He wants us to be good-hearted, soft-spoken, to see the beauty in others and speak words that give strength, not weaken. Why are our relationships so important to Hashem? Why do Chazal tell us that it is the sum of all of Torah? The purpose of Torah and *mitzvos* is to bring us to the recognition and knowledge of Hashem – to have *emuna* in Hashem. Only with these challenges of social interactions can we reach the goal.

Our interactions are the measure of our *emuna*. If we would have *emuna* and know that everything is from Hashem and everything is for our best – we would not get angry, jealous or hate anyone. The job of correcting attributes forces us to fortify our *emuna* and thereby fulfill the purpose for which we are here: to recognize Hashem, draw close to Hashem, know Hashem.

“We are placed in various situations – we must remember to begin with *emuna* - Hashem wishes it so. As soon as we start to blame ourselves, blame others, blame bad luck, blame an evil eye – it no longer matters what we think, if we do not

recognize that it is Hashem, we are not beginning with *emuna*. Our holy forefathers lived with complete *emuna* that whatever happens is entirely Hashem. Even when they needed the most basic things such as a glass of water, they would pray: Master of the World, give me a glass of water! **That did not possess even a hint of a sense of self-determination. They lived with complete *emuna* that only the Creator could provide anything.**

When a person endures a difficulty with his peace at home, with one of his children or some other challenge – he need only clutch on to *emuna* and he will witness what sprouts from the suffering – just stand firm in *emuna*.”⁵

Humility is one of the great secrets of life – knowing when to forego, to bend our heads, to remember that everything is from Hashem and for the best. “I know Father that everything is exactly as You want, not as I do. I endeavor to humbly accept those things that go exactly opposite of the way I had wanted and what I prayed for.” Every time a person gets angry, is broken, is dejected – it is as if he is angry at HKB”H, G-d forbid. It is as if we are saying to Him: You are not conducting the world properly.

Every mishap is there to remind us that we still think that we are in charge, we are still arrogant. Hashem has mercy on us. He is constantly signaling us: let go of your haughtiness, stop proceeding so smugly as if the world is yours, as if you accomplish on our own. **Whatever we have is a kindness and benevolence of the Creator.** If we are fortunate enough to be intelligent – it is from Hashem – it is a gift from Hashem. The same is true for any and every talent.

Even humility and submissiveness is impossible alone – we need Hashem’s help. We know what perils we face at every moment, both physically and spiritually – we can never stop *davening* and begging Hashem: protect me, save me from tribulations - for I am so weak. **When a person**

⁵ המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום

seeks vitality from his own arrogance, from the illusion that he is someone – he is always disappointed. True vitality is derived from humility, from our connection with Hashem. When the Tcehbiner Rav zt”l travelled to Eretz Yisroel, he visited the Brisker Rav zt”l on Chol Hamoed. Not knowing who he was, the family asked him to wait in the hallway until the Rav was available. When the Brisker Rav came in and saw his guest, he excitedly invited him in with great honor. Later, he expressed his anguish that his family had made the Tcehbiner Rav wait. But, he was even more upset at the person who brought him to visit – “I understand my family, they didn’t know who they made wait, but you, why did you agree to *schlep* the Rav to me – I would have gone to visit him...” In fact, several days later, he paid a visit to the Tcehbiner Rav at his hotel.

Moreinu Harav: The principal impediment to the Redemption is ego - the illusion that we are

more important than others, more valuable, smarter. **If everyone would acknowledge that we are no more significant than others – Moshiach would arrive immediately.**

We must hold no grievances against others – why didn’t he give me that, why does he not treat me better, etc. **The more humble we are the more joy we experience.** Arrogance leads to depression when we are not treated as we believe we deserve. A humble person is unstoppable; he only seeks to provide delight to Hashem.

Our greatest source of joy: we are Jews, umbilically attached to the eternal covenant that HKB”H forged with the Jewish nation at Har Sinai. Our love for Hashem is boundless and vice-versa. If Hashem allowed His love for us to be felt in this world – we would cease to exist from the overwhelming pleasure. **That is who we are – it is our inner essence.**

תפילה

Master of the World! Help me remember that all of my successes in life are from You, not my own doing. When I succeed, I forget You, Father. Of course I say “*Baruch Hashem*” when someone acknowledges my achievement, but inside I am so pleased with myself, so sure that it is due to my own talents – I completely forget that everything that I have is from You, Father – how can I possibly be conceited and boastful about something that is not mine?! **Help me, Father, to feel and live this truth at every moment: everything is Yours, everything is from You, everything is You.**

Master of the World! Help me assess every word that I utter towards another to see whether it will hurt him, G-d forbid, or give him strength. Help me be like that friend of mine who constantly bolsters others with his words. Even when he is compelled to criticize or allude to their weaknesses, he does it in such a way that they still draw strength from his words. Whether adult or child, his words are followed by a smile on their lips. It is so emotional to see and **I suddenly understand how essential it is to support others – for we too need to hear positive words and draw strength from them.**

Master of the World! Protect me so that I do not judge anyone in the world. Help me learn from those who instead of judging others for their negative deeds, turn to You and beg: “Master of the World, may I never face their challenges.” We never really know how we would act in another’s situation. We can never be confident that we would have done things any differently. We never know what still awaits us.

Master of the World; help me attain that amazing level in which a person truly feels less worthy than anyone else. Humility and modesty bring us close to You and fill our hearts with love towards You.

Have an awesome, uplifting and wonderful Shabbos,

Dov Elias

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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