

פרשת אחרי מות – שבת הגדול

This adaptation is dedicated in honor
of my dear wife, Devorah,
and my dear son, Moishe.

פסח

"My dear son, may the joy of the holy festival that is approaching for good be sweet, and may you merit complete renewal – escaping servitude for everlasting freedom - from *chometz* to *matzo* – may your mind not leaven anymore, G-d forbid, with foreign thoughts – and certainly with base urges or improper notions. May you abandon death for life – from sadness to rejoicing and jubilation."

- The words of your father, who petitions for your well-being with love, Nosson of Breslov.¹

"את שאהבה נפשי ראיתם" (שיר השירים ג, ג)

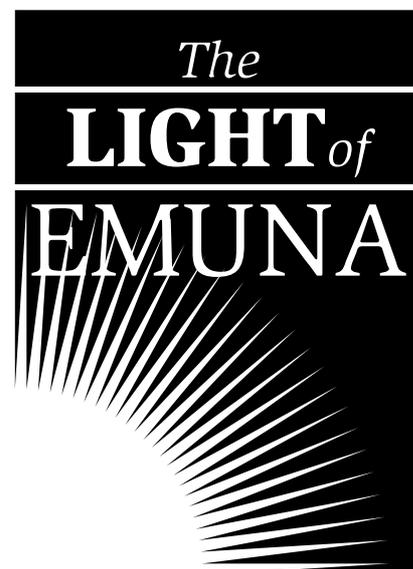
"Have you seen him whom my soul loves?"

The bond between the Jewish nation and HKB"H is a bond of love. Hashem loves us with an eternal love. It starts with You, Hashem. You chose us from amongst the nations; You loved us and desired us.²

All of *yiddishkeit* is love. Love is a power that nothing can withstand. It is the power of our bond with HKB"H. The amazing melody that pervades the world during the holy days of *Pesach* reveals Hashem's love to every Jewish soul. Hashem calls us His firstborn son – we are his beloved children. In that merit, Hashem extricated us from Egypt, from the house of slavery. Had he not removed us - we, our children and our grandchildren would still be slaves to this very day. The greatest miracle that we experienced is that we are not slaves to human beings – we are servants of HKB"H.

¹ עלים לתרופה, מד

² אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים, אהבת אותנו ורצית בנו (תפילת יו"ט)



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

Freedom is not doing whatever we feel like doing. Freedom is independence from urges and negative attributes so that we may perform *mitzvos* with joy, so that we may toil in Torah and the service of Hashem. True freedom is the sweetness of Torah, the pleasantness of prayer – we would be prepared to spend all of our days as such, give ourselves over entirely to the yoke of Heaven – only that can be called freedom. **There is no free man other than one who is engaged in Torah.** Hashem liberated us from all of the servitudes of the soul and gave us true self-determination as a gift, an everlasting independence – to fulfill His will and to serve Him wholeheartedly. Therefore, the first of the Ten Commandments is "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery." And therefore, every year, on the night of the *Seder*, we recite *Hallel*, even at night – to express gratitude for this incredibly great miracle.

Hashem's love is a two-way street – He is our beloved and we are His. Within every Jewish heart there pulsates a G-dly soul that is clear and pure, filled with love for Hashem and His Torah. "Without You, Father, we have no life. You are our joy, our peace of mind, our comfort. 'One thing I asked of Hashem, that shall I seek.'³ We have only one request, Father, to be with You, to cling to You. We constantly strive to be

³ אחת שאלתי מאת ד' אותה אבקש (תהילים כז, ד)

close to You, raising our heads to You, we await Your gaze, for when You return our gaze, it is the most wonderful feeling that we know. If we feel You, we need nothing else – it is all good.”

People think they have various problems – their only real problem is that Hashem is not found within their hearts. The Rebbe Reb Zushya was wretchedly poor and yet he could not fathom the concept of “bad” – because he sensed Hashem’s presence.

The love for Hashem that every Jew possesses is what connects us to each other. The differences between Jews and groups of Jews are all superficial. At the depths of our essence, we are united and whole – we are all children of the King of all Kings, HKB”H.

The night of Pesach is the greatest night of the year. All of the numerous preparations are transformed into amazing vessels to absorb the great light. The light is great, powerful and wondrous, it is Hashem’s light itself – “I, and not a *Seraph*, I, and not an angel.”⁴ The very G-dly illumination that was revealed to our ancestors on that first *Pesach*, the *Pesach* of the exodus from Egypt, returns to us each and every year with the sanctification of the festival. It is a Divine enlightenment that turns night into day. **On the Seder night, the gates of freedom of the soul are opened. We are no longer slaves to our urges, our negative traits, to sadness.** *Seder* night is the time of freedom. It elevates us a bit and we merit receiving true knowledge – that there is only Hashem and nothing else. Who knows One? We know One! On *Pesach* the light of freedom and the light of redemption pierce all corners of the heart. In one instant, we are converted from a nation of slaves to a kingdom of priests – a holy nation. We are hoisted a *tefach* off of the ground, detached from the materialism and rote of secular days, sensing Hashem’s proximity like at no other time of the year. This light descends only once a year, we must grab it and be ecstatic. True ecstasy, boundless joy, constant happiness that derive

from the understanding that “even when I walk in the valley of darkness, I will fear no evil - for You are with me.”⁵ It is delight in the essence of *emuna* in Hashem and His salvation - just like the joy that we experienced at the shore of the Sea, at that most stressful moment of terror, when we had nothing else on which to rely, except Hashem alone. **Joy is the world of freedom because via bliss we escape from all of the confusions and are rendered free people - we attain tranquility.**

We must never allow ourselves to fall into sadness. That is exactly what the *yetzer hora* wants us to do. **We destroy the *chometz* within us – but only with joy and encouragement.** If a Jew transgresses, G-d forbid – he gets right back up, does *teshuvah* and begins anew. If he, G-d forbid, falls into depression - he is likely to commit so many sins.

“Today you are going out, in the month of spring.”⁶ Spring is the opposite of despair. **Spring is a fresh start, a new song, renewed vitality.** We begin again in the month that is the leader of all months of the year and on the holiday that is first of all holidays.

Pesach is the beginning of *yiddishkeit*. On *Pesach* a Jew begins to be a Jew – the entire year anew. Jew (יהודי) is from the term for gratitude (הודיה) - he increasingly thanks.

The approaching holiday is one of song and gratitude to Hashem for all of the favors and wonders that He does regularly. The entire purpose of Creation is for man to appreciate and praise Hashem for all of the miracles that He does in every generation, generally, and for each person, particularly. There is no end to the kindnesses that Hashem does for us and we must sing and thank Him for every single favor, *chesed* and display of compassion.

On *Pesach*, the mouth speaks (פה סח) – it tells of the wonders of Hashem. The more one

⁴ אני ולא שרף אני ולא מלאך (ההגדה של פסח)

⁵ גם כי אלך בגיא צלמות לא אירא רע כי אתה עמדי (תהילים כג, ד)
⁶ היום אתם יצאים בחדש האביב (שמות יג, ד)

expounds – the more praiseworthy he is. **Talking to Hashem is the source of unlimited joy and vitality.** When a person learns to appreciate everything, he understands that everything is from Hashem and he develops humility. When he manages to be thankful even for the difficulties that he endures - that is total submission to the administration of the Creator – accepting all of His orchestrations with love. As is told of R' Menachem Mendel Lemberger, the Rav of Makova in Yerushalayim, who died on Rosh Chodesh Nissan 5771 after having suffered much agony: Once, he was rushed to the hospital in Tel Hashomer with a gangrenous leg. The doctors said that there was no hope, it was life-threatening and he required an immediate amputation. R' Lemberger cried and begged them not to remove his leg and argued with a thousand and one reasons why it could wait until alternatives were considered. He requested second and third opinions, but they all concurred that he had no choice. Finally, he called for his family and told them the following: "Until now, we asked for mercy, we shed tears, we tried, we cried, we begged, we did everything incumbent upon Jews to do in such a situation. Now that the Heavenly decree has been issued and finalized ... from this moment on, we have no right to question it, from this moment on, we are not allowed to shed more tears - no more crying, no more pity. From now on we realize that Hashem wants it otherwise - we must accept it graciously, with great love, because we are in the loving and capable hands of the Creator. From this moment on, we only thank the Creator for giving us the ability to with stand challenges."

It is forbidden for a person to think that if some misery has occurred, it is clear that Hashem was not with him. One is forbidden to think that way. A person must understand that the world was not created according to his plan, but according to a much higher design, way above our comprehension. One who recognizes that everything is for our best, one who has *emuna* and does not complain, has already managed to hear the melody of the Next World. Hashem, in His infinite mercy, bestows boundless kindnesses upon us – while we, when even one

little thing does not go our way, exactly as we wanted it to – we become dissatisfied and we protest. **We must recall all of the favors that Hashem did and continues to do every day, every minute:** He draws us near to Him; He enables us to do so many *mitzvos*. Ingratitude is a terrible attribute and we must fight it by remembering all of the miracles and wonders that Hashem does for us and we must say, "Thank You, Father, You are so good to us, You give us so many precious and amazing gifts."

We must acknowledge everything. Nothing is owed to us. We breathe oxygen of kindness that flows to us from the Creator's benevolence. And, **the greatest expression of G-dly compassion is the Torah itself that we have received – the Torah of Life, which teaches us how to live.**

HKB"H wants us to thank Him, to praise and glorify His name. But, not for His sake – no praise could "pay Him back" for all of His *chesed*. **It is for our sake, so that we can attain closeness, so that our hearts will fill with love and gratitude to the One who provides so much – so that we have Whom to thank and to express what is in our hearts.**

"אחרי מות שני בני אהרן בקרבנתם לפני ד' וימתו"
"After the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died." (ויקרא טז, א)

Why did they die? They attained such elevated *dveykus* (clinging) that their souls departed due to the overwhelming sweetness and pleasantness. But, the Torah forbids this. This week's *parsha* commands us to "live by them⁷ - and not die by them. We must be cautious of too much light. We must live with our heads in the Heaven but our feet firmly planted on the ground. We have obligations that we must fulfill (e.g. to our families). There are downfalls and we must continue to serve through them. Even when we don't feel anything, even when life is

⁷ וחי בהם (יח, ה)

difficult – we must persist.

We cannot always be elevated – life is full of ups and downs. We were with Hashem while *davening* and then we deal with anger, worry, arrogance, negative events. We must run to Hashem and slowly come close. A person cannot say “there is nothing aside from Hashem” and therefore he need not deal with others – we must gladden others, smile, worry about them. If we do so for Heaven’s sake – it is included in the “there is nothing aside from Hashem.”

Jewish firstborns (בכורים) prioritize (מבכרים) HKB”H over inanity, while the Egyptians choose silliness. The smiting of the firstborn means eliminating any desire other than for Hashem. This is most difficult. We must consider everything in light of the goal. **Vacations, schmoozing, enjoying good food are all fine if they are intended to refresh us to serve Hashem. If not, they are a form of idolatry.**⁸

Feet on the ground – but we must not forget to lift our heads to Heaven. We must seek ways to connect, be inspired, maintain the bond, constantly remember Hashem. The essence of human beings is forgetfulness. We tend to revert back to “he did to me, hurt me, I deserve, my honor, my merits” – that is all forgetfulness. We constantly ask for things, we need so much. Hashem wants us to give Him one thing and he will give us millions in return – He wants us to remember Him, to remember that anything that happens is a mere challenge – will we see it as Hashem’s doing or will we get upset and blame it on others or ourselves. **When things are good – it is Hashem. When things are difficult – it is Hashem.**

It is *Shabbos Hagadol*, the Shabbos before *Pesach*. We can only leave Egypt via Shabbos. On Shabbos Hashem’s name is great. “For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name’s sake.”⁹ Hashem is great – He performed the miracle of the Exodus and He performs all miracles.

תפילה

Master of the World! Have mercy on me and extricate me from all of my various enslavements – leaving me only one – my servitude to You, Father. Help me and free me from my subjugation to food, especially sweets. How much longer will food be the center of my life, Father? Was I created for that – to fill my stomach? To constantly think about what is in my bag, my fridge, my pantry, how long since I’ve eaten, what I’ll eat soon?

Master of the World! The years pass and rather than things getting easier, they get harder. What will become of me? Once, with many days of *tefilla*, I was able to stop. Now, those stops don’t last more than a day or two. Help me Father. Take it away from me. **Help that my happiness in restraining myself be greater than the joy that I get from eating.** Help me to finally learn to eat so that I may continue serving You and not because I crave the flavors.

Master of the World! You know that there are so many more urges and negative characteristics, like the awful trait of jealousy, and only You can save me. In an instant, You can disentangle me from it all. Help me that my joy originate in You, Father, from holiness, Torah and *mitzvos*. Help me triumph – that I may desire You more than anything else, that I crave only holiness, that my soul prevail over my body. When we manage to feel our souls – it is so pleasurable that we cannot fathom how we ever wanted anything else. Alas, what can we do if the body is so much stronger and generally rules over us?

Master of the World! Sound the great *Shofar* of our liberation, take us out to freedom, and transform us into the freest, most satisfied, happiest slaves in the world – Your servants, servants of Hashem.

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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For previous issues and/or to receive this adaptation by weekly email, visit www.tloe.us or email me at LightofEmuna@dovelas.com

⁸ באור פני מלך

⁹ כי לא יטש ד' את עמו בעבור שמו הגדול (שמואל א וב, כב)