

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

THE GREAT DESERT

Thirsty

By: Tzipah Wertheimer

In this week's parsha Moshe describes the desert in a series of stages (Devarim 8:15):

הַמּוֹלִיכְךָ בַּמִּדְבָּר הַגָּדֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא
נָחֵשׁ שָׂרָף וְעֶקְרָב וְצִמָּאון אֲשֶׁר
אֵין-מַיִם הַמוֹצִיא לְךָ מִיָּם מִצּוֹר
הַחֲלָמִישׁ

"The great and awesome desert, [in which there were] snakes, vipers and scorpions, and thirst, but there is no water."

The analogy of the desert represents golus - exile. By understanding the golus, we can begin to free ourselves from it. A proper diagnosis (understanding of a malady) is considered 50% of the cure.

The first stage is our attitude. By referring to the desert as the "Great Desert" (Hamidbar Hagadol) one places a tremendous amount of importance and value on the world around. It is healthier to focus on our immediate surroundings and not get intimidated or excited by perceived importance of the secular world.

As Jews we are a minority of a minority of the population. It can be very easy to feel small. The key to staying on course is knowing our unique value and not worrying about anyone or anything else.

As the verse continues, there is a hint to a progressive descent into the depth of the G-dlessness of the desert. It breaks down as follows:



הַגָּדֹל – The great desert: One is overly impressed by the secular world, attributing much value to temporal material successes.

הַנּוֹרָא – Awesome: One brings their excitement about the secular world into the privacy of the Bais Medresh and shul. (It's no longer simply an issue in the workplace).

נָחֵשׁ – Snake: The warm venom of a snake hints to being excited by physical desires, movies, food & etc. (in addition to Torah)

שָׂרָף – Viper: The hot venom of the viper hints to a further descent, an obsession with inappropriate things to the exclusion of Torah (such as living for sports, food, actors, fashion etc.)

וְעֶקְרָב – and the scorpion: The cold venom of a scorpion is like apathy. Coldness is worse than an obsession with impure things because it is a lack of feeling. While inappropriate lust can be redirected, coldness is much deeper and more difficult.

וְצִמָּאון אֲשֶׁר אֵין-מַיִם – Thirst but there is no water: In the final stage a person is G-d forbid totally far gone into golus. There is a vague notion that something is lacking, but no clear path to follow out of the woods. The only reason to discuss the golus is to find a method of repair that will guide us towards geulah. ☯

Snakes & Scorpions

If a snake crawls over your feet when saying Shema you should continue, but if a scorpion comes you can stop (Berachos 30:2).

Warmth (snake's venom) can be redirected, but coldness (scorpion's venom) must be eradicated. This difference is seen in the above halacha.

One can continue davening with a snake by redirecting their distracted thoughts to G-dliness. One must stop what they are doing and make a change in the presence of apathy (the scorpion).

If a person is feeling apathetic they must stop what they are doing and make a full turn around which comes through learning and living p'nimius HaTorah. ☯

Just שו"ת Me A Question

Q: Do I recite a bracha if I'm drinking water to help me swallow a pill?

A: No.

However, if you're drinking more water (to quench your thirst), or if you are drinking juice or another beverage, you do recite a bracha even if only to help swallow a pill.

Source: Shulchan Aruch O.C. 204:7

What's The Rush

Haste Makes Waste

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

"Take care lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods and bow down to them. For then Hashem's wrath will flare up against you, and He will close the heavens so that there will be no rain and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will perish swiftly from the good land which the Hashem gives you."

These verses are from the Shema, which appears in this week's parsha, Eikev (Deut.7:12 - 11:25).

The words rendered as "perish swiftly," **ואבדתם מהרה**, can be read with something of a twist, as well. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, allowing himself some grammatical license, reads it as instruction to destroy ("perish") the "swiftness" in our lives.

Often times, to truly enjoy our lives, we need to attempt to "perish" the "swiftness" - to stop and smell the flowers, so to speak.

If this is true in our lives in general, how much more so with regards to our spiritual lives of Torah study and prayer.

In today's high-tech, on-demand world, it can sometimes be hard to take a step back to create a space of appreciation.



I have found that those moments -- be they with friends, family or a moment of reflective Torah study -- are the most pleasurable when I am able to destroy the swiftness, so to speak, and cherish the moment. (Based on Igros Kodesh vol.9, p.289)

P'NINIM ON MEZUZAH

Eikev discusses the mitzvah to affix a Mezuzah to your door post. Spelled **מְזוּזָה**, the Rebbe's father Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (yahrzeit 20 Av) taught the following:

נ - numerical value 40. Forty days before a baby is born a voice from Heaven calls out;

יז - This one (masculine tense) is meant for;

יה - This one (feminine tense).

HAYOM YOM

21 Menachem Av

Activism on behalf of the ways of Chassidus means that even when a chassid is in the marketplace, deeply involved in his business, he still thinks about what he can do for chassidic concerns and the welfare of chassidim. When he encounters a business acquaintance among the market people he should seek to persuade him to attend the shiurim (public study sessions) in Chassidus, or to attend a farbrengen.

Activism on behalf of the ways of Chassidus is a personal obligation, regardless whether one is great or limited in knowledge of Chassidus.

Chassidic Story

Reb Meir of Premishlan lived in the 1700's and was known for many miracles that he performed. A title, "the master of the miracle" **בַּעַל הַמִּסְתָּוִת** was also added to his name.

He loved teachings and miracles based on linguistic cleverness. While drinking his tea—he explained that tea (**תֵּי**), pronounced *taiy* in Hebrew is like the word "May it be" (**תֵּי הָא**) pronounced *tehaiy*. Thus, while drinking tea is a good time for "May it be that this hour be a time of mercy."

Reb Meir endured many freezing icy Russian winters. It so happened that the town of Premishlan had a mikveh at the foot of a steep mountain.

During the slippery weather the people of the town took a long circuitous road that wrapped around the mountain and brought them safely to the mikveh. Even as an old man, Reb Meir used a steep, direct path to the mikveh without ever taking a fall.

Two young men, watching Reb Meir, decided that if an old rabbi could make it up the mountain with ease, they could certainly as well. Just a few steps into their adventure they stumbled, and fell.

Eventually one of the young men healed and had the courage to approach Reb Meir and ask just how he was able to walk straight up the mountain on such a hazardous route.

Replied Reb Meir: **"If a man is bound up on High, he doesn't fall down below.** Meir'l is bound up on High, and that is why he can go up and down, even on a slippery hill!"

א גוט שבת

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