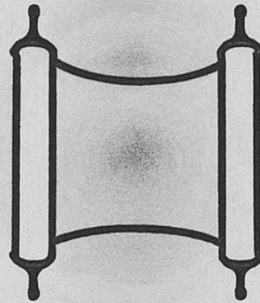


בס"ד

The Maggid of Mezritch

Parshas Massei



Introduction

This discourse by the Maggid of Mezritch (Rabbi Dov Ber, 1704–1772), the primary disciple and successor of the Baal Shem Tov, explores the deeper mystical significance of the verse “וַיִּסְעוּ מִמֶּרֶה” וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילָמָה.” Drawing from Midrashic and Kabbalistic sources, the Maggid weaves together concepts such as Divine Middos, pilgrimage, thought elevation, the interplay of judgment and mercy, and the ultimate Divine unity in all experience. This teaching reveals how even bitterness, brokenness, and confusion hold within them profound sparks of Divine light, waiting to be uplifted through conscious spiritual work.

Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch

Ohr Torah Parshas Massei

Siman #152

And they journeyed from Marah and came to Eilim. This is explained according to the verse, “And they walked three days and did not find water, and they came to Marah, and they could not drink the water from Marah, for it was bitter.”

For behold, it is written: “A land that consumes its inhabitants,” and yet [they said] “Let us surely go up.” By way of parable, it is written in the Tikkunim that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the worlds for the sake of the revelation of the middos.

For example: all of the middos that are to be revealed, such as love and fear and the like, were all initially included in the thought; but love was previously in a sleeping state.

And when the beloved son comes before a person, love is aroused within him—although he already had the attribute of love, it was just not revealed until now.

And in love too, all the middos are included. For we see that because of love a person hates his enemy, and all the middos are [included] as is known. And because of love, one speaks words of love, and even speaks other words to him because of the love—like regarding Shaul, where they spoke extra words to him because of his beauty (alternative version: in order to gaze upon his beauty).

And the final act is first in thought. For example, if I see a person carrying wood from the forest, I understand he wants to build a house.

So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, created all the worlds for the sake of the world of action.

And similarly, a person who wants to build a house first thinks in his thought how to build it. He desires that the house have such-and-such rooms, and hates that it be built with other rooms—thus the house is glorified in his eyes. And he speaks to his servants that they should make this house.

ויסעו ממרה ויבאו אילמה. פירוש על דרך וילכו שלשת ימים ולא מצאו מים ויבאו מרתה ולא יכלו לשתות מים ממרה כי מרים הם.

דהנה כתיב ארץ אכלת יושביה היא, ויאמר כי עלו נעלה. למשל דאיתא בתיקונים שהקדוש ברוך הוא ברא העולמות בשביל התגלות המדות.

למשל (כי כל המדות שיתגלו כמו) אהבה ויראה (וכיוצא) הם כלולים (תחלה) במחשבה, רק שהאהבה היתה מקודם לשנה.

וכשכא (נוסח אחר: כי אנו רואים כשכא) לפני האדם בנו החביב נתעורר בתוכו אהבה, (ומקודם היתה לו גם כן מדת אהבה רק שלא נתגלתה עד עכשו).

ובאהבה (גם כן) כלולים כל המדות, (כי אנו רואים ש) מחמת אהבה אדם שונא את שונאו, וכל המדות כידוע, ומחמת אהבה מדברים דברי אהבה, ואפילו דבורים אחרים מדברים עמו מחמת אהבה, כמו גבי שאול שדברו (דברים יתרים) עמו מכה (יפיו) (נוסח אחר: כדי להסתכל ביופיו).

וסוף מעשה במחשבה תחלה. למשל אם אני רואה שאדם מוליך עצים מן היער אני מבין שרוצה לבנות בית.

כך קל"ו הקדוש ברוך הוא ברא כל העולמות בשביל עולם המעשה.

ולמשל אדם רוצה לבנות בית, מחשב במחשבתו איך לבנות הבית, ואוהב שיהיה בבית כך וכך חדרים, ושונא שיהיה נבנה בחדרים אחרים, שכן מפואר אצלו הבית הזה ומדבר לעבדיו שייעשו (הבית) הנה.

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It follows that in this all the middos are included, and all the middos come from the power of the will—the desire to build the house.

And in the will, the differentiation of the middos is not recognizable, and even the reason is not revealed in the will—for when he desires to build the house, he does not yet know why and for what purpose. Only afterward does he reflect: Why will I build this house? In order that I should dwell within it.

And all of this applies to the will of the Holy One, blessed be He: He contracted Himself (so to speak) into the middos, and all of it is for the sake of the world of action.

“Yisrael arose in thought,” meaning: The glory (or pride) rose before Him in thought so that His glory would be revealed before human beings.

And when a person serves the Holy One, blessed be He, the worlds experience a great elevation—like a servant who serves the king, and when he is promoted, the servant too is elevated, for he becomes important in the king’s eyes.

And this is the meaning of “The roads seek their purpose”—that the roads desire that people, pilgrims, travel upon them.

Like the parable of a beloved son who behaves childishly—the father derives pleasure from him just as if he were doing something of intellect. For if he did nothing at all, the father would derive no pleasure.

So too, the Blessed One takes delight from the power of their pilgrimage. It follows that the pleasure comes from the journey itself.

And this is the meaning of “a land that consumes its inhabitants” (Bamidbar 13:32)—that in everything there are the middos, or in another version: the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He.

And this is the meaning of “all of Torah is delight” (Mishlei 8:30, Zohar III:53b)—[or in another version: the names] of the Holy One, blessed be He—even the narrative sections are speaking from some specific middah, whether love or fear.

נמצא שכל המדות, וכל המדות באים
מכח הרצון שרוצה לבנות הבית

והרצון אינו נפר התחלקות המדות, ואפילו הטעם
לא נתגלה ברצון. כי פשרוץ לבנות הבית אינו
יודע בשביל מה ומאיזה טעם, רק אחר כך מיישב
את עצמו מפני מה אבנה בית זה כדי שאדור
בתוכו.

וכל זה ברצון הקדוש ברוך הוא, וצמצם את עצמו
(בבכח) במדות, והכל בשביל עולם המעשה.

ישראל עלה במחשבה, (רצון לומר) (התפארת)
[התפארות] עלתה לפניו: תברך במחשבה כדי
שתתגלה (תפארתו) [התפארותו] לפני בני אדם.

וכשהאדם עובד את הקדוש ברוך הוא יש לעולמות
עליה [גדולה], כמו משל שר שעובד את המלך,
וכשעולה לגדולה גם העבד עולה לגדולה, כי נעשה
חשוב למלך.

וזהו פירוש דרכים מבקשים תפקידם, שהדרכים
רוצים שילכו בהם בני אדם עולי רגל.

כמשל בן החביב שעושה מעשה נעורות יש לאב
תענוג כמו אם היה עושה דבר של שכל. ואם לא
היה עושה כלום לא היה לאב תענוג כלום.

כך הוא יתברך מתענג מכח עלייתם לרגל, נמצא
התענוג הוא מכח הדרך.

וזהו פירוש ארץ אכלת יושביה, שבכל דבר ודבר
יש הנה מדות (נוסח אחר: יש מדותיו של השם
(יתברך).

וזהו כל התורה שעשה (נוסח אחר: שמותיו של
הקדוש ברוך הוא), אפילו המעשיות מדברים מאיזו
מדה, מאהבה או מיראה.

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And this too is the Holy One, blessed be He, clothing Himself in them. But a person must be careful with every thought—that he should elevate it, whether it is from the attribute of love if it is a matter of love, or the attribute of fear, and with all the service he does.

But he should not dwell in them permanently without deveikus (cleaving to God), for this is great folly. Like the parable of a person who travels to a city for business but settles there and abandons his household—is there any greater foolishness than this?

So too, the Holy One, blessed be He, sends a person into the thought in order to elevate it—and if he remains in it without returning it to God (in another version: the thought was in order to elevate all the sparks, and if he does not elevate and return it to God), is there any greater foolishness?

greater folly than this? And this is [the meaning of] “land”—earthiness; “consumes”—destroys the one who dwells in it permanently.

But Caleb said: “Let us surely go up” (Bamidbar 13:30)—for these middos are unified with Him, blessed be He, and He, blessed be He, shall ascend, and certainly we too shall ascend (in another version: and through their ascent, we too shall rise).

And this is the meaning of “And they journeyed from Marah and came to Eilim, and they could not drink the water from Marah for it was bitter” (Shemos 15:23). The bitter water refers to the intellect at the lower levels—the “lower waters weep” (Bereishis Rabbah 5:4): “We want to be before the King.”

And this is like the mei sotah (Sotah 14a), which was taken from the floor of the Mishkan, which had been mortgaged through the shattering (of vessels); and if he is not defiled (or: if his thought is not impure), then the foreign thought turns into seed, and from it he is strengthened in his service of the Blessed One, as is known that in every bad thing there is good.

וְזֶהוּ (נוסח אחר: זֶהוּ גַם כֵּן) הַתְּלַבְּשׁוֹת הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בָּהֶם. רַק הָאֲדָם צָרִיךְ לְהִנָּהֵר בְּכָל מַחֲשָׁבָה וּמַחֲשָׁבָה שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה אוֹתָהּ, הֵן לְמַדַּת אֱהָבָה אִם הוּא דְּבַר שֶׁל אֱהָבָה, אוֹ לְמַדַּת יִרְאָה, [וְכָל הַעֲבוּדוֹת שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה].

אָבֵל לֹא יֵשֵׁב (בְּתוֹכָהּ) [בָּהֶם] בְּקִבְעָה [בְּלֹא דְבִקּוּת], כִּי זֶהוּ שְׁטוּת גְּדוֹל, כְּמִשָּׁל אָדָם שֶׁנוֹסֵעַ לְעִיר לְסַחֲוֶרָה וְיֵשֵׁב שָׁם וְעֹזֵב אֶת בְּנֵי בֵּיתוֹ, וְכִי יֵשׁ שְׁטוּת גְּדוֹל מִזֶּה.

כִּף הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁלַח אֶת הָאָדָם לְמַחֲשָׁבָה שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה אוֹתָהּ, וְאִם יֵשֵׁב בָּהּ וְלֹא יֵשִׁיב אוֹתָהּ לֵה' (נוסח אחר: כִּף הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁלַח אֶת הָאָדָם, וְהַמַּחֲשָׁבָה הִיטָה שֶׁיַּעֲלֶה אֶת כָּל הַנִּיצוּצוֹת, וְאִם יֵשֵׁב בָּהּ וְלֹא יַעֲלֶה אוֹתָם וְלֹא יֵשִׁיב לֵה' יִתְבָּרֵךְ), הִנֵּשׁ

שְׁטוּת גְּדוֹל מִזֶּה. וְזֶהוּ אֶרֶץ – אֶרֶצִּיּוּת, אוֹכֵלֶת – מַכֵּלָה אֶת הַיּוֹשֵׁב בָּהּ בְּקִבְעָה.

אָבֵל כָּלֵב אָמַר כִּי עָלוּ נַעֲלָה, כִּי הִלָּא הַמַּדּוֹת הָאֵלֶּה הֵם אֲחָדוֹת עִמּוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ, וְהוּא יִתְבָּרֵךְ יַעֲלֶה, בְּוַדָּא גַם אֲנַחְנוּ נַעֲלָה (נוסח אחר: אֲחָדוֹת עִמּוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ, וְעַל־יְדֵי עֲלִיתָם נַעֲלָה גַם כֵּן).

וְזֶהוּ וַיִּסְעוּ מִמֶּרֶה וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילָמָה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת מִיָּם מִמֶּרֶה כִּי מָרִים הֵם. מִיָּם הַמָּרִים נִקְרָא הַשִּׁכָּל שֶׁבְּמַדְרָגוֹת הַתַּחְתּוֹנוֹת. מִיָּם תַּחְתּוֹנִים בָּכִים – אֲנִן בְּעֵינֵינוּ לְמַהְיֵי קָדָם מִלְכָּא.

וְזֶהוּ כְּמוֹ כְּמִי סוּטָה שֶׁנִּלְקַח מִקְרָקַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן שֶׁנִּתְמַשְׁכָּן בְּשִׁבְיָהּ, וְאִם לֹא טִמָּא הוּא (נוסח אחר: וְאִם לֹא נִטְמָא מִחֲשָׁבָתוֹ) נִהְפָּךְ הַמַּחֲשָׁבָה הַזֶּה אֶצְלוֹ לְזֶרַע, שֶׁמִּכְתָּה נִתְחַזַּק לְעֲבוּדָתוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ, כִּידוּעַ שֶׁבְּכָל דְּבָרִים רָעִים יֵשׁ דְּבַר טוֹב.

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But if he is impure—meaning, his thought is not refined—then it is bad for him. This is the meaning of “they came to Marah,” that they fell into something evil, and could not drink, for the love within gevurah was not revealed to them—for “they were bitter,” meaning the people were not good.

For had they been good, then on the contrary, from there would have come extra goodness, for in every judgment there is embedded kindness—and if they had broken through the judgment, they would have accessed the good.

And this is “and they journeyed from Marah and came to Eilim”—for *Eilim* is the same letters as *Elokim*, just rearranged as “Eli Mah”—meaning something that is unknowable. And the chesed within din is unknowable (or: the chesed within it is not graspable).

And “Eli” refers to *El* (God), the chesed that flows from chochmah (the letter hei). And this is the meaning of “Give us help from distress” (Tehillim 60:13)—that the help should come from within the distress itself.

[NOTE Summary

The discourse begins by interpreting the phrase “the roads seek their purpose” as a metaphor: the very paths of life and Divine service long to be used for holy journeys, such as the pilgrimage to the Temple. Even when a person acts childishly, if done with sincerity, it brings delight to God—because spiritual pleasure comes from *movement* and *intention*, not necessarily from intellectual achievement. God delights in our striving.

This leads to a mystical explanation of the phrase “אֶרֶץ אֹכֶלֶת יוֹשְׁבֶיהָ” (“a land that consumes its inhabitants”). The Maggid reveals that every worldly thing is made up of Divine Middos (attributes), and all Torah—even its stories—is a manifestation of these attributes. Even seemingly mundane actions or thoughts can be holy garments for the Divine, if they are elevated intentionally.

However, one must not get stuck or “dwell” permanently in any particular middah (such as love or fear) or worldly thought—even if it’s spiritual—for that becomes a form of spiritual folly. The Maggid compares it to a man who travels to a city for business but stays there permanently, forgetting his true home and purpose.

This is the inner meaning of falling into “Marah”—bitterness. The people were unable to “drink” the bitter waters because they didn’t have the proper spiritual orientation. They could not extract the hidden

אֶבֶל אִם הוּא טָמֵא, רָצוֹן לוֹמַר שֶׁמִּחֲשַׁבְתּוּ אֵינָהּ זָכָה, חָס וְשָׁלוֹם – אֲזִי רַע לוֹ. וְזֶהוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ מֵרָחָק, שֶׁנִּפְּלוּ לְדִבְרֵי רַע, וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשִׁתּוֹת, שֶׁהָאֱהָבָה שֶׁבְּגִבּוּרָה לֹא נִתְגַּלְתָּה לָהֶם, כִּי מְרִים הֵם, פִּירוּשׁ – הָעָם לֹא הָיוּ טוֹבִים.

שָׂאֵם הָיוּ טוֹבִים, הִנֵּה אֲדַרְבָּא מִשָּׁם בָּא לָהֶם טוֹבָה יִתִּירָה, שֶׁבְּכָל דִּין גַּשׁ בְּתוֹכוֹ חֶסֶד, וְאֵם הָיוּ שׁוֹבְרִים הַדִּין הָיוּ בָּאִים לְטוֹב.

וְזֶהוּ וַיִּסְעוּ מֵמֵרָחָק וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵילִמָּה, כִּי אֵילִמָּה הוּא אוֹתִיּוֹת אֱלֹהִים, רַק הַצִּרוּף הוּא כָּךְ: אֵלִי מָה – נִקְרָא דְּבָר שְׂאֵינוּ מוֹשֵׁג, וְהַחֶסֶד שֶׁבְּדִין אֵינוּ מוֹשֵׁג (נוֹסח אַחֵר: נִקְרָא דְּבָר שֶׁהַחֶסֶד שָׁבוּ אֵינוּ מוֹשֵׁג).

וְאֵלִי לְשׁוֹן אֵל (נוֹסח אַחֵר: אֵל י"ו), הַחֶסֶד הַנִּמְשָׁךְ מֵהַחֲכָמָה [ה"א]. וְזֶהוּ פִירוּשׁ הֵבָה לָנוּ עֲזָרַת מִצָּר, שֶׁתִּהְיֶה הָעֲזָרָה בָּאָה מִכֵּן הַצָּרָה.

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sweetness—the love within *gevurah* (judgment)—because their inner state wasn't purified. But had they approached it properly, the very bitterness could have been a source of upliftment and sweetness.

The climax of the discourse is the interpretation of “אֵלֶיךָ לְמָה,” rearranged as “אֵלֶיךָ לְמָה”—meaning a Divine presence that cannot be comprehended. The hidden *chesed* (kindness) embedded in *din* (severity) is something beyond grasp—yet it is this unknowable kindness that flows from Divine wisdom and is revealed when one serves God even from within distress. This is the deeper meaning of the verse “Give us help from the narrow place”—redemption arises not *despite* suffering, but *through* it.

Practical Takeaway

Don't fear difficult thoughts, emotional blocks, or spiritual bitterness. Every experience—love, fear, confusion, pain—can be elevated if you approach it with awareness and intention. Don't get spiritually stuck; keep moving toward the Divine. Even the most constricting situations may hold within them the greatest hidden kindness. Seek to transform bitterness into sweetness by reconnecting your thoughts and experiences to God.

Chassidic Story

The Maggid of Mezritch once received a visitor—a scholar who had fallen into spiritual despair. The man confessed that he was overwhelmed by sinful thoughts during prayer and couldn't concentrate. Instead of reprimanding him, the Maggid gently asked, “And what do you do with those thoughts?” The man admitted he tried to banish them but failed. The Maggid replied, “You think they are enemies, but they are messengers. They weren't sent to distract you—they were sent to be *elevated* by you.”

He explained: “Every thought has a root. Even the darkest ones come from a place of Divine potential. When they arise, don't panic—ask, ‘Where are you from?’ Lift the spark within them by returning them to God, and they will turn from poison to perfume.”

Source: *Sippurei Chassidim*, Reb Shlomo Shapiro, and *Ohr HaMaggid* collections.

TPX (Therapeutic-Psychological Integration)

This profound discourse by the Maggid of Mezritch offers a remarkably therapeutic framework for understanding human experience, emotional cycles, and healing. At its heart lies a mystical psychology of movement: the soul must never remain stuck—not in pleasure, not in pain, not even in spiritual insight. Everything is meant to be a *pathway* back to the Divine. From a therapeutic lens, the Maggid teaches us how to reinterpret distress, internal conflict, and even intrusive thoughts as invitations to return—not disruptions, but doorways.

The concept that “the roads seek their purpose” is striking. It suggests that our psychological and emotional processes—our patterns, habits, longings, even our traumas—are not obstacles but roads that *want* to be traveled consciously. Just as the father finds joy even in the childishness of his beloved son, so too the Divine

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(and the healthy psyche) finds value not just in perfection but in authentic engagement. Growth does not require brilliance, just sincerity.

One of the most powerful therapeutic insights here is the warning against *spiritual bypassing*—settling into a single emotion, mindset, or role without movement. The Maggid compares this to a person who travels to a city for business but forgets to return home. In trauma work, this is like getting stuck in protective states—hypervigilance, avoidance, dissociation—mistaking them for identity. The Maggid says: *those states are not your home*. You were sent into them to elevate them, to redeem the spark, not to live there.

His interpretation of “Marah” as bitterness—the undrinkable waters—is deeply resonant. Many of us encounter moments, thoughts, or memories that feel toxic or “undrinkable.” The Maggid teaches that if our inner “people” (our internal selves) are in a good state—anchored in trust and love—then even those bitter waters can become sweet. There is *chesed* (lovingkindness) hidden in every *din* (severity). From a therapeutic perspective, this affirms the core of trauma healing: even our most painful memories contain within them the seed of integration and wholeness, if approached with compassion and courage.

Finally, the Maggid’s mystical insight into “Eilim” as “Eli Mah”—the unknowable Divine kindness—mirrors a key psychological truth: not everything needs to be understood to be healed. Sometimes the deepest healing emerges not from insight but from surrender. The help we seek may come *from within* the very distress we are trying to escape.

Story

In 2015, a woman named Amanda, a survivor of childhood trauma, began writing letters to her younger self as part of her therapy. One day, she wrote: “You were never broken. You were a road. And I—I am just now learning how to walk you with love.” That letter became the turning point in her recovery.

Later, she told her therapist, “I used to think I needed to get rid of all the bad thoughts and memories. But now I realize—they aren’t blocks. They’re bridges. They’re asking to be walked back home.”

Amanda eventually became a therapist herself. She now helps others learn how to walk their own “roads”—not by escaping their pain, but by elevating it.

END NOTE]