

Menachem Mendel of Horodak
Pri Ha'Eretz
Parshas Behaaloscha

Introduction	
<p>This discourse presents a profound meditation on the relationship between the Divine letters of Torah, the soul of a Jew, and the source of spiritual vitality. Delivered by Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok, a leading disciple of the Maggid of Mezeritch and pioneer of Hasidic settlement in the Holy Land, the teaching explores how the letters of Torah are the very building blocks of creation and the inner life of every soul. Using the episode of the complainers and the manna as a framework, the discourse reveals the existential danger of severing the life-force of Torah from its Divine source and the elevation achieved by those whose spiritual sustenance comes purely from Divine speech.</p>	
In the verse, “And the mixed multitude that was among them lusted a lust,” etc., “crying to their families”:	בפסוק וְהֶאֱסָפוּ אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבוֹ הִתְאוּוּ תַאֲוָה וְגו', בְּכָה לְמִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ
And Rashi of blessed memory explained: concerning illicit relations, etc.	וּפְיִרְשׁ רַש"י ז"ל עַל הָעֲרִיּוֹת וְגו'
And the matter, that he complained saying: Why have You done evil, etc., “And if this is how You deal with me,” etc., “then let me not see my evil.”	וְעָנָן שֶׁהִקְשָׁה לְדַבֵּר לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּ וְגו', וְאִם כָּכָה אַתָּה עוֹשֶׂה לִּי וְגו', וְאֵל-אֲרָאָה בְּרַעְתִּי
And His words: “Six hundred thousand footmen,” etc., “and You said,” etc.	וְדַבְּרֵי שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלֵי וְגו', וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ וְגו'
And the matter is along the lines of what our Sages of blessed memory said in Avos: Every day a heavenly voice goes out from Mount Chorev and proclaims, etc.	וְהֶעֱנָן הוּא עַל דֶּרֶךְ אֲמָרָם ז"ל בְּאֲבוֹת: בְּכֹל יוֹם בַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹצֵאת מִהָר חוֹרֵב וּמְקַרְזֵת וְגו'
Behold, it is known that there are sixty myriads of souls of Israel—	— הִנֵּה יְדוּעַ שְׁשִׁים רַבּוּא נְשָׁמוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל
so too are the letters of the Torah, as is known that “the Torah, the Holy One Blessed is He, and Israel are all one” (Zohar III:73a).	כֵּן גַּם בֵּן אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, כִּיְדוּעַ שְׁאוּרֵי־תֵא וְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא וְיִשְׂרָאֵל כֻּלָּא חֵד
And Israel—they are the bodies of the Torah.	וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הֵן הֵן גּוּפֵי הַתּוֹרָה
And it is known that with the Torah the Holy One Blessed is He created the world, which is [through] the letters.	וְיְדוּעַ בְּאוּרֵי־תֵא בְּרָא קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא עֲלֵמָא, שֶׁהֵן אוֹתִיּוֹת
And there is nothing in the world except for letters which give it life, for they are the utterance of the Holy One Blessed is He.	וְאִין לֹד דְּבַר בְּעוֹלָם בְּלִתי אוֹתִיּוֹת הַמְחִיּוֹת אוֹתוֹ, שֶׁהֵן מֵאֲמָרוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּב"ה
And if the letters are hidden and not perceptible—	— וְאִם הָאוֹתִיּוֹת הֵם בְּהַעֲלָם וְאִינָם נִפְרִים

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behold, a person who is speaking—before he speaks anything, the speech and letters are in potential and are not perceptible.	הִנֵּה הָאָדָם הַמְדַבֵּר קוֹדֵם שֶׁיִּדְבַר דְּבַר מֵהָ, הָרִי הַדְּבוּר וְהָאוֹתִיּוֹת הֵם בְּפִתּוֹ וְאֵינָם נִכְרָיִם.
The general principle is: the life-force of every thing is the letters within it.	כָּלֵלָא דְמִלְתָּא – שְׁחִיּוֹת כָּל דְּבַר הֵם הָאוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁבְּתוֹכּוֹ.
And if a person sins, G-d forbid, he inserts the letters—which are the life-force—into evil, and gives power to evil—	וְאִם הָאָדָם חוֹטֵא חַס וְשְׁלוֹם, מְכַנֵּס הָאוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁהֵם – הַחִיּוֹת בְּרַע, וְנוֹתֵן כֹּחַ בְּרַע
even though it is not seen with fleshly eyes, the truth is known.	אֲףִי שְׂאֵינּוּ נִרְאָה בְּעֵינֵי בָּשָׂר, הָאֲמִתּוּת יָדוּעַ.
Therefore one must confess verbally, saying “I have sinned,” with bitterness of heart due to awe of G-d and joined with love of G-d—	וְלִכְּוֹן נוֹתֵן וְדוּי דְּבָרִים בְּאוֹמְרוֹ חֲטָאתִי, בְּמִרְרוֹת לֵב – מִפְּנֵי יִרְאַת ה' וְשִׂתּוּף אֲהַבַת ה'
thus he removes the letters that give life from the evil, and the evil remains without vitality, and automatically is nullified.	הָרִי מוֹצִיא הָאוֹתִיּוֹת הַמְחִיּוֹת מִן הַרַע, וְנִשְׁאַר הַרַע בְּלִתֵּי חִיּוֹת וּמְמִילָא בְּטֵל.
And behold, if a person would remember and pay attention at the time of learning Torah, how he is speaking the letters of Torah—through which the world was created—	וְהִנֵּה אִם הִקֵּה הָאָדָם זִכְרוֹ וּמִשְׁגִּיחַ בְּשִׁעַת לְמוּד הַתּוֹרָה, – אֵיךְ הוּא מְדַבֵּר אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבָּהֶן נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם
and he himself would be cleaving through the words of His letters to their root, the letters of Torah that were given in this world with voices and thunder—	וְהוּא בְּעֵצְמוֹ הִקֵּה מִתְדַבֵּק בְּדַבְרֵי אוֹתִיּוֹתָיו אֶל שְׂרָשְׁמָם – אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁנִּתְּנָה בְּיַד הָעוֹלָם בְּקוֹלוֹת וּבְרָקִים
so that the awe of Hashem would be upon his face not to sin, as is explained in the parsha—	לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה יִרְאַת ה' עַל פָּנָיו לְבִלְתִּי יִחַטֵּא כְּמִבּוֹאֵר – בַּפָּרָשָׁה
then automatically awe and fear would fall upon him, and through the voices and thunder would shine upon him so that he not sin, G-d forbid—	וּמְמִילָא הִקֵּה הִרְאָה וְהִפְחִד נוֹפֵל עָלָיו וּבְקוֹלוֹת – וּבְרָקִים עָלָיו יוֹפִיעַ שְׂלֵא יִחַטֵּא חַס וְשְׁלוֹם
for how could it be possible, the matter, to sin with these [letters]?	?כִּי אֵיךְ הִיא הָאֲפָשְׁרוֹת הָעֵנָן לְחַטֹּא בְּהִנֵּה
And this is the matter of the heavenly voice that goes out, etc.—they are the letters of Torah that within every person he is reminded and proclaimed through them each day.	וְזֶהוּ עֵנָן בַּת קוֹל שִׁוְצָא וְגו' – הֵם אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָל אָדָם הוּא מְזַכֵּר וּמְכַרִּיז אוֹתוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם
And one who does not hear the heavenly voice—that is, he does not proclaim—woe to him from the insult of the Torah that is within him.	וְמִי שְׂאֵינּוּ שׁוֹמֵעַ בַּת קוֹל, דֵּהִינּוּ שְׂאֵינּוּ מְכַרִּיז – אוֹי לוֹ מֵעֲלִבּוֹנָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּתוֹכּוֹ
And this is: “whoever does not engage in Torah”—meaning, he does not leave an imprint in Torah—is called <i>nazuf</i> (rejected),	וְזֶהוּ כָּל מִי שְׂאֵינּוּ עוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה – פִּירוּשׁ, שְׂאֵינּוּ רוֹשֵׁם – בַּתּוֹרָה – נִקְרָא נְזוּף

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and this is the concept of <i>rebuke</i> upon a person—that his face changes, the red [color] departs, etc.	והוא ענינו הנזיפה באדם – שמשתנה פניו, אזל סומקא וגו'.
Our Sages of blessed memory said: all the souls of Israel, until Mashiach, all stood at Sinai and received the Torah—	אמרו רז"ל שכל נפשות ישראל עד משיח בלן עמדו – בסיני וקבלו את התורה
they are the letters, to their root, that call them back to “compare Me to you.”	שהם האותיות אל שרשם – המזכירים אותם אל דמו לכם.
And behold, it is known that Moshe was the <i>daas</i> (consciousness) of all Israel, who are sixty myriads of souls.	והנה ידוע כי משה הנה הדעת של כל ישראל – שהם ששים רבוא נשמות
And behold, the manna was in the merit of Moshe, to give life to Israel with bread from the heavens—	והנה המן הנה בזכות משה – להחיות את ישראל בלקחם – מן השמים
which is spiritual, taste alone—whatever they desired to taste—	– שהוא רוחני, טעם לבד, כל מה שירצו לטעום
which is the vitality alone without any physicality,	– שהוא החיות לבד בלי שום גשמיות
because Moshe was separated from the woman, which is the physical; so too was the nourishment given to all Israel.	מפני שמה היה פרוש מן האשה – שהיא הגשמיות – כן היתה השפעת מזונו לכל ישראל
And this is: the Torah was not given except to eaters of the manna—	– וזהו – לא נתנה תורה אלא לאוכלי המן
which is the vitality, which are the letters—	– שהוא החיות – שהם האותיות
not like eating physical food, which is “a complainer separates from the master.”	מה שאין כן באכילה גשמיות – שהיא נרגן מפריד אלוף.
Like the warning not to eat the heart of an animal, for the animal soul is dependent in it.	כמו שהזהיר שלא לאכול לב של בהמה – מפני שהנפש של בהמה תלוי בו
And behold, Israel who ate the manna—	– והנה ישראל שאכלו את המן
their impurity ceased, and they were not aroused or connected to any desire or physical love except to Hashem alone.	פסקה זיהמתם – ולא נתהוו ונתקשרו לשים תאנה. ואהבה גשמיות בלתי לה' לבדו
But the <i>asafsuf</i> (mixed multitude) who were not from the Children of Israel—	– אבל האספסוף אשר לא מבני ישראל המה
although they were refined through eating the manna not to lust after anything, nevertheless they lusted a lust—	הגם שגודפו באכילת המן שלא להתאוות לשים דבר, אף על פי כן התאוו תאנה
meaning, they lusted that they should have physical love—	– פירוש שהתאוו שיהיה להם אהבה גשמיות

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because they were not from the Children of Israel, and it is impossible for them that all their vitality be from <i>daas</i> (knowledge/consciousness).	כי לא מבני ישראל המה, ואי אפשר להם להיות כל חיותם מן הדעת.
Therefore they requested food—meat for them—	— וְלָכֵן בִּקְשׂוּ אוֹכֵל לְמוֹ בֶּשֶׂר
and this is “for free”—without commandments.	וְנָהוּ חִנָּם – בְּלֹא מִצְוֹת
Also, with this is resolved “[crying] to their families”—concerning matters of illicit relations.	גַּם בְּזֶה נִיחָא לְמִשְׁפַּחְתֵּיהוּ – עַל עֶסְקֵי עֲרִיּוֹת
Therefore it was very bad in the eyes of Moshe—who is the <i>daas</i> —	— לָכֵן רַע בְּעֵינֵי מֹשֶׁה מְאֹד – שֶׁהוּא הַדַּעַת
and all sixty myriads of souls were a generation of <i>daas</i> ,	— וְכָל שְׁשִׁים רְבּוּא נְשָׁמוֹת הָיוּ דוֹר דָּעָה
who are branches that had not all yet attached to the souls,	— שֶׁהֵם עֲנָפִים שְׁלֵא הִתְקַשְּׂרוּ כְּלָם בְּנְשָׁמוֹת
and they would insert the <i>daas</i> —which are the letters and the vitality—into evil, G-d forbid.	וַיִּכְנִסוּ הַדַּעַת שֶׁהֵם הָאוֹתִיּוֹת וְהַחַיּוֹת – בְּרַע חַס וְשָׁלוֹם
And this is “[that I not] see my evil”—	— וְזֶהוּ וְאֵל אֲרָאָה בְּרַעַתִּי
and this is “[the] six hundred thousand footmen of the people”—	— וְזֶהוּ שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אֶלֶף רַגְלֵי הָעָם
meaning, they are the sixty myriads—the roots of Israel—the Torah, which is the <i>daas</i> —	פִּירוּשׁ, שֶׁהֵם שְׁשִׁים רְבּוּא שְׁרָשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל – הַתּוֹרָה – שֶׁהִיא הַדַּעַת
and You said, “meat I will give them”—and what will be in the end?	וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ בֶּשֶׂר אֶתֶן לָהֶם – וַיְהִי בְּסוֹפָהּ
And this is “kill me, please kill”—	— וְזֶהוּ הֲרַגְנִי נָא הַרוּג
for he and they are all one, and a descent in level is called death and killing,	— כִּי הוּא וְהֵן הַכֹּל אֶחָד, וְנִחַת דְּרָגָא קְרוּי מִיתָה וְהַרְיָגָה
as explained in the Zohar.	כַּמְבוּאָר בְּזִהָר
Therefore, may He grant us <i>daas</i> and understanding, so may it be His will.	עַל כֵּן יְחַנְּנוּ דָּעָה וְהַשְׁכֵּל אִכִּי"ר

[NOTE Summary:

The discourse begins by exploring the nature of Torah study—not just as intellectual engagement but as a mystical act of speaking the very letters through which G-d created the world. Every word of Torah that one learns or speaks is a reactivation of those original Divine creative forces. When one learns Torah with proper awareness and awe, it reconnects him to those same primal letters that were uttered at Sinai with thunder and lightning. This generates yirah (awe) and prevents sin.

Each person contains within them these letters, and each soul is rooted in the 600,000 root souls of Israel, which parallel the letters of Torah. When one sins, he draws those holy letters into the

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realm of evil. Through vidui (verbal confession), one extracts those letters back out, leaving evil lifeless.

Moshe Rabbeinu, as the embodiment of daas (Divine knowledge), was pained when the *asafsuf* (the mixed multitude) lusted for meat. Though they had eaten the manna and become spiritually refined, they were not rooted in the same daas as Israel and therefore craved physicality. The true Israelites, by contrast, were nourished solely by manna—a spiritual food that did not stimulate base desires. Only those who ate manna, and thus lived from pure Divine vitality, could receive the Torah.

The request for meat symbolized a desire for disconnection from the daas and mitzvos that unite the soul with G-d. Moshe's cry, "Kill me now," was not despair but a declaration that descent from this level of Divine connection is spiritual death—since Torah, Israel, and Hashem are one. Thus, the plea concludes with a request: "May He grant us daas and understanding."

Practical Takeaway

- **Learning Torah is an act of creation**—not metaphorically, but literally. Your words of Torah carry the same Divine force as those that brought the world into being. Approach learning with awe and mindfulness.
- **Confession and Teshuvah are cosmic repairs.** When one sins, he doesn't just violate a law—he misplaces Divine energy. Vidui is the act of retrieving those letters and nullifying the evil.
- **Seek spiritual nourishment.** Just as the generation of the wilderness received manna, we too must strive to "eat" from the soul of Torah, not just its surface. When Torah becomes our inner food, it purifies us and aligns our desires with the Divine.
- **Not all spiritual refinement is equal.** One can be externally "refined" yet crave detachment from holiness. True refinement means one's will and vitality come from Torah itself.

Chassidic Story

When Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok lived in Tiberias, he would often pray at sunrise with intense focus and ecstasy. Once, during a period of famine, a disciple came to him in anguish: "Rebbe, our people have no bread!"

The Rebbe answered calmly, "Bread? But the Torah is bread. The letters are nourishment. Teach them to say words of Torah—even just a verse—and you will see that their souls will be sustained, and Heaven will open channels."

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That day, the disciples gathered the townspeople, old and young, and taught them to say daily verses from Torah and Tehillim aloud, with simple sincerity. Miraculously, within days, a supply caravan from the Galilee arrived unexpectedly with food for the city.

The Rebbe explained: “It is not that the verses caused the food to come—it is that they became vessels to receive it. The soul that eats Torah draws sustenance into the world.”

Source: Based on oral tradition from Chassidim in Tiberias, preserved in *Toldot Kedoshim* and expanded by later generations. **END NOTE]**