

Introduction

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.

In the verse, “And the mixed multitude that was among them lusted a lust,” etc., “crying to their families”:

**בפסוק והאספסוף אשר בקרבו התאוו תאוה וגו',
בכה למשפחתיו**

And Rashi of blessed memory explained: concerning illicit relations, etc.

ו'פירש רש"י ז"ל על העריות וגו'

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.”

ועגנו שהקשה לדבר למה הרעת וגו', ואם ככה את
עשה לי וגו', ואל-אראה ברעתי

And His words: “Six hundred thousand footmen,” etc., “and You said,” etc.

ו'דבריו שש מאות אלף רגלי וגו', ואתה אמרת וגו'

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.

והענין הוא על דרך אמרם ז"ל באבות: בכל יום בת
'קול יוצאת מהר חורב ומכרזת וגו'

Behold, it is known that there are sixty myriads of souls of Israel—

הנה ידוע ששים רבוא נשמות ישראל

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).

כן גם כן אותיות התורה, כידוע שאורייתא וקודשא
ברוך הוא וישראל כלא חד

And Israel—they are the bodies of the Torah.

וישראל הן הן גופי התורה

And it is known that with the Torah the Holy One Blessed is He created the world, which is [through] the letters.

ידוע באורייתא ברא קודשא בריך הוא עלמא, שהן
אותיות

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.

ואין לה דבר בעולם בלתי אותיות המחיות אותו,
שהן מאמרו של הקב"ה

And if the letters are hidden and not perceptible—

ואם האותיות הם כהעלם ואינם נפרים

behold, a person who is speaking—before he speaks anything, the speech and letters are in potential and are not perceptible.

הנה האדם המדבר קודם שיידבר דבר מה, הרי
הדבור והאותיות הם בפתח ואינם נפרים

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<p>The general principle is: the life-force of every thing is the letters within it.</p>	<p>כָּלֵלָא דְמִלְתָּא שְׁחִיּוֹת כָּל דְּבָר הֵם הָאוֹתִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכֵהוּ.</p>
<p>And if a person sins, G-d forbid, he inserts the letters—which are the life-force—into evil, and gives power to evil—</p>	<p>וְאִם הָאָדָם חוֹטֵא חַס וְשָׁלוֹם, מְכַנִּיס הָאוֹתִיּוֹת שֶׁהֵם הַחַיּוֹת בְּרַע, וְנוֹתֵן כֹּחַ בְּרַע</p>
<p>even though it is not seen with fleshly eyes, the truth is known.</p>	<p>אִף אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאַיְנוּ נִרְאָה בְּעֵינֵי בָּשָׂר, הָאֱמֻנָה יָדוּעַ.</p>
<p>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—</p>	<p>וְלִכֵּן נוֹתֵן וְדוֹי דְּבָרִים בְּאוֹמְרוֹ חֲטָאתִי, בְּמַרְרֵרוֹת לֵב 'מִפְּנֵי יִרְאַת ה' וְשִׂתּוּף אֲהַבַת ה'</p>
<p>thus he removes the letters that give life from the evil, and the evil remains without vitality, and automatically is nullified.</p>	<p>הָרִי מוֹצִיא הָאוֹתִיּוֹת הַמַּחְיִיּוֹת מִן הַרַע, וְנוֹשָׂאֵר הַרַע בְּלִתֵּי חַיּוֹת וּמְמִילָא בְּטַל.</p>
<p>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—</p>	<p>וְהִנֵּה אִם הִיָּה הָאָדָם זוֹכֵר וּמְשַׁגֵּיחַ בְּשִׁעַת לְמוֹד הַתּוֹרָה, אִיךָ הוּא מְדַבֵּר אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבָּהֶן נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם</p>
<p>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—</p>	<p>וְהוּא בְּעֵצְמוֹ הִיָּה מְתַדְבֵּק בְּדַבְרֵי אוֹתִיּוֹתָיו אֶל שְׁרָשָׁם אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁנִּתְּנָה בְּנֵה הָעוֹלָם בְּקוֹלוֹת וּבְרָקִים</p>
<p>so that the awe of Hashem would be upon his face not to sin, as is explained in the parsha—</p>	<p>לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה יִרְאַת ה' עַל פָּנָיו לְבִלְתִּי חֲטֹא כְּמַבּוֹאֵר בַּפָּרָשָׁה</p>
<p>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—</p>	<p>וּמְמִילָא הִתְהַה הִירְאָה וְהַפְחַד נוֹפֵל עָלָיו וּבְקוֹלוֹת וּבְרָקִים עָלָיו יוֹפִיעַ שְׁלֵא יִחְטֵא חַס וְשָׁלוֹם</p>
<p>for how could it be possible, the matter, to sin with these [letters]?</p>	<p>?כִּי אִיךָ הִיא הָאֶפְשָׁרוֹת הָעֲנִיָּן לְחַטּוֹא בְּהִנֵּה</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>וְזֶהוּ עֲנִיָּן בַּת קוֹל שְׁיּוֹצֵא וְגו' הֵם אוֹתִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּכָל אָדָם הוּא מְזַכֵּר וּמְכַרִּיז אוֹתוֹ בְּכָל יוֹם</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>וּמִי שְׁאִינּוּ שׁוֹמְעַת בַּת קוֹל, דְּהִיָּנוּ שְׁאִינּוּ מְכַרִּיז אוֹי לוֹ מְעַלְבוֹנָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה שֶׁבְּתוֹכֵהוּ</p>
<p>And this is: “whoever does not engage in Torah”—meaning, he does not leave an imprint in Torah—is called <i>nazuf</i> (rejected), and this is the concept of <i>rebuke</i> upon a person—that his face changes, the red [color] departs, etc.</p>	<p>וְזֶהוּ כָּל מִי שְׁאִינּוּ עוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה פִּירוּשׁ, שְׁאִינּוּ רוּשָׁם בַּתּוֹרָה נִקְרָא נְזוּף וְהוּא עֲנִיָּן הַנְּזוּפָה בְּאָדָם שֶׁמִּשְׁתַּנָּה פָּנָיו, אֲזַל סוּמְקָא 'וְגו'.</p>
<p>Our Sages of blessed memory said: all the souls of Israel, until Mashiach, all stood at Sinai and received the Torah—</p>	<p>אָמְרוּ רַז"ל שֶׁכָּל נַפְשׁוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד מְשִׁיחַ כָּלָן עָמְדוּ בְּסִינַי וְקִבְּלוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה</p>

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they are the letters, to their root, that call them back to “compare Me to you.”	שְׁהֵם הָאוֹתִיּוֹת אֶל שְׁרָשָׁם הַמְזַכְּרִים אוֹתָם אֶל דְּמוּ לָכֶם.
And behold, it is known that Moshe was the <i>daas</i> (consciousness) of all Israel, who are sixty myriads of souls.	וַהֲגִיחַ יָדוּעַ כִּי מֹשֶׁה הָיָה הַדַּעַת שֶׁל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁהֵם וְשֵׁשִׁים רַבּוּא גְשָׁמוֹת.
And behold, the manna was in the merit of Moshe, to give life to Israel with bread from the heavens—	וַהֲגִיחַ הַמָּן הָיָה בְּזָכוֹת מֹשֶׁה לְהַחְיֹת אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּלֶחֶם מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם
which is spiritual, taste alone—whatever they desired to taste—	שֶׁהוּא רוּחָנִי, טַעַם לְבַד, כָּל מִה שִׁירְצוּ לְטַעוֹם
which is the vitality alone without any physicality,	שֶׁהוּא הַחַיּוּת לְבַד בְּלִי שׁוּם גְּשָׁמִיּוֹת
because Moshe was separated from the woman, which is the physical; so too was the nourishment given to all Israel.	מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמֹּשֶׁה הָיָה פְּרוּשׁ מִן הָאִשָּׁה שֶׁהִיא הַגְּשָׁמִיּוֹת כֵּן הָיְתָה הַשִּׁפְעַת מְזוֹנוֹ לְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל.
And this is: the Torah was not given except to eaters of the manna—	וְזֶהוּ לֹא נִתְּנָה תּוֹרָה אֶלָּא לְאוֹכְלֵי הַמָּן
which is the vitality, which are the letters—	שֶׁהוּא הַחַיּוּת שְׁהֵם הָאוֹתִיּוֹת
not like eating physical food, which is “a complainer separates from the master.”	מִה שֶׁאֵינִן כֹּן בְּאֹכִילָה גְּשָׁמִיּוֹת שֶׁהוּא נִרְגָּן מִפְּרִיד אֱלוֹף.
Like the warning not to eat the heart of an animal, for the animal soul is dependent in it.	כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִזְהִיר שֶׁלֹּא לְאָכּוֹל לֵב שֶׁל בְּהֵמָה מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַגִּפְשׁ שֶׁל בְּהֵמָה תְּלוּי בּוֹ
And behold, Israel who ate the manna—	וַהֲגִיחַ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁאָכְלוּ אֶת הַמָּן
their impurity ceased, and they were not aroused or connected to any desire or physical love except to Hashem alone.	פְּסָקָה זוֹהֲמָתָם וְלֹא נִתְּהוּוּ וְנִתְקַשְּׁרוּ לְשׁוּם תַּאֲוָה וְאִהְבָּה גְּשָׁמִיּוֹת בְּלִתִּי לֵה' לְבַדוֹ
But the <i>asafsuf</i> (mixed multitude) who were not from the Children of Israel—	אֲבָל הָאֶסְפָּסוּף אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה
although they were refined through eating the manna not to lust after anything, nevertheless they lusted a lust—	הֵגַם שֶׁנִּזְדַּכּוּ בְּאֹכִילַת הַמָּן שֶׁלֹּא לְהִתְאוֹת לְשׁוּם דְּבָר, אַף עַל פִּי כֵן הִתְאוּוּ תַּאֲוָה
meaning, they lusted that they should have physical love—	פִּירוּשׁ שֶׁהִתְאוּוּ שִׁיחָה לָהֶם אִהְבָּה גְּשָׁמִיּוֹת
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).	כִּי לֹא מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה, וְאֵי אֶפְשָׁר לָהֶם לְהִיּוֹת כָּל חַיּוּתָם מִן הַדַּעַת
Therefore they requested food—meat for them—	וְלָכֵן בִּקְשׂוּ אוֹכֵל לְמוֹ בֶּשֶׂר
and this is “for free”—without commandments.	וְזֶהוּ חִנָּם בְּלֹא מִצְוֹת
Also, with this is resolved “[crying] to their families”—concerning matters of illicit relations.	גַּם בְּזֶה נִיחָא לְמִשְׁפַּחְתֵּיּוֹ עַל עַסְקֵי עֲרִיּוֹת

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Therefore it was very bad in the eyes of Moshe—who is the <i>daas</i> —	לכן רע בעיני משה מאד שהוא הדעת
and all sixty myriads of souls were a generation of <i>daas</i> ,	וכל נשמים רבוא נשמות היו דור דעה
who are branches that had not all yet attached to the souls,	שהם ענפים שלא התקשרו כלם בנשמות
and they would insert the <i>daas</i> —which are the letters and the vitality—into evil, G-d forbid.	ויכניסו הדעת שהם האותיות והחיות ברע חס ושלום.
And this is “[that I not] see my evil”—	ונהו ואל אראה ברעתי
and this is “[the] six hundred thousand footmen of the people”—	ונהו שש מאות אלף רגלי העם
meaning, they are the sixty myriads—the roots of Israel—the Torah, which is the <i>daas</i> —	פירוש, שהם נשמים רבוא שרשי ישראל התורה שהיא הדעת
and You said, “meat I will give them”—and what will be in the end?	ואתה אמרת בשר אתן להם ומה יהיה בסופה
And this is “kill me, please kill”—	ונהו הרגני נא הרוג
for he and they are all one, and a descent in level is called death and killing,	כי הוא והן הכל אחד, ונחת דרגא קרוי מיתה והריגה
as explained in the Zohar.	כמבואר בזוהר
Therefore, may He grant us <i>daas</i> and understanding, so may it be His will.	על כן תקנו דעה והשכל אפי"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 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

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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.”

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.”

END NOTE]