

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Inspiration to forgive during the next nine days

Out of love of Hashem and mourning for what we lost in the first temple, perhaps we can during the nine days truly forgiving something or someone, to lighten the darkness we are carrying within that may be perpetuating the exile.

Before we go further, it is important to approach this challenge with the understanding that to do is virtually to go across an ocean from one land to another. It is no less a chasm than crossing an ocean to accomplish what we are setting out to do, and therefore it is because Torah tells us that we can do it that we know the capability is there, despite the work ahead of us.

So someone has hurt us. The range of wrongs is limitless, but the main thing is that they were in the wrong and we have or are continuing to suffer and we are hurt. Just to make the ocean that faces us come clearly into focus, we know from Torah that if it were we who had committed such a wrongdoing, it would be for us to follow the Torah, to regret the deed, do teshuva, come up with a plan for the future, confess the deed to the person and make restitution where necessary. Should we do so, we would have removed the damaging beings that we created and be forgiven in Hashem's eyes and hopefully in the heart of the person we wronged. That is the recipe for teshuva. It is an excellent recipe.

Now let's look. Here we stand, the wronged party. Surely if the offending party comes and offers their sincere teshuva, we will forgive them. That is al pi halacha, and it makes sense and under those circumstances there is no ocean to cross. A sorry party will do very nicely. But absent that, why do I need to forgive them? Doesn't Torah stand there offering me solace that they should be crawling to me for forgiveness before the High Holidays? And wrapped in that we stuff a piece of our soul, placed in a kreplach, pinched shut and stored in the freezer awaiting the action of some scoundrel, hoping they do teshuva, and we are in the dark freezer.

The hechsher on that kreplach is not good. How do we know? We feel bitter. It is against the Torah for us to hold a negative charge against another Jew. When we feel bitter, it is because we have placed a part of ourselves in the hands of something external to us, and everything external to us comes under the supervision of the yetzer hara. Thus we feel bitter and thus what we have done in cooking this kreplach, wrapping a piece of our soul in the pastry dough of expecting a sorry party, cannot be kosher.

And here we are, on the shore of the ocean, feeling bitter, and nowhere to go but into the sea. What could be more bitter to us than the thought of forgiving the very person who has done so much damage to us? It flies in the face of being human. There is literally a war going on inside of us, a part of us that is silently stabbing the other person out of self defense, a part of us that is in terrible conflict and sadness, stewing. The word for war is milchama. The root of milchama has the same letters as the word for salt, melach. Salt is something that in high doses is very bitter and yet in small doses brings out the flavor of the food. Too much salt is bitter. Lot's wife, who argued when asked to give salt to the guests, was turned into a pillar of salt..

In the story of the bitter waters of Mara, the Jewish people complained to Moshe. Moshe davens to Hashem and Hashem shows Moshe an oleander tree, a tree that is poisonous to animals, that has thorns, and that is the bitterest of trees! Moshe writes one of Hashem's names on the tree and throws it into the water, turning the water sweet. Had the Jewish people come to Moshe and said Moshe the water is bitter please daven to Hashem to make it sweet, we would not have been punished with an attack from Amalek. But instead, the Jews complained, bitterly. Do we begin to see a possibility that there is a purposeful Divine recipe for removing bitterness? Turn to Hashem and ask Hashem to remove the bitterness. As bitter as it seems to our nature, we can turn our eyes upward to Hashem with love in our hearts and ask Hashem to please take the bitterness out of this matter that we are opening the love in our hearts for Hashem and for the unification of His Name, please absorb this bitterness, the hurt, the anger, the parts of us trapped in the kreplach we stored away and instead help us to forgive the matter and sanctify Hashem's name by being able to move forward in life without this bitterness.

Any good cook wants to know the ingredients of a recipe, so let's put our toe into the ocean.

The same letters of salt, malach, and milchama are used for lechem, bread, nourishment. Bread is a recipe from the Torah. Had Torah not instructed us on how to take a grain of wheat and turn it into bread, there are so many steps involved that it is not clear that we would ever have discovered how to make bread.

People are made in the image of Hashem. We are made b'tzelem elokim. Hashem's attributes of mercy include forgiving. When we are forgiving we are emulating Hashem's attributes of mercy and bringing that attribute into the world. We tell Hashem that we are moichel, for the unification of His Name, we see that the bitter feelings are there for-giving back to Hashem, emulating Him in the process. We wish to serve Hashem and we are moichel.

The ocean has been crossed.

Each one of us has a piece that we can contribute to the dough of the bread of redemption. All it will cost us is our bitterness. Let us not be stopped by the bitter resistance we have to being moichel. We see that there is a recipe involved and the results can be very sweet.

So let's use the prayer we say at bedtime and let's mean it, and may we truly let go of some bitterness and bring instead Hashem's attribute of forgiveness into the world.