

The  
**CHASSIDUS**  
**PERSPECTIVE**  
 with Reb Yoel Kahn



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## GOLUS, AND HOW TO LEAVE IT

During the seven weeks from Tisha B'Av until Rosh Hashanah we read the *shiva d'nechemta*, the seven *haftaros* of consolation.

The Shaloh explains that the *parshiyos* of the Torah contain allusions to the time of year when they are read. The same applies in our case: In addition to the *haftaros*, there are allusions in these seven *parshiyos* themselves to the concept of consolation.

### CONSOLATION OF EIKEV

What allusion can we find in Parshas Eikev?

The consolation of these weeks consists of Hashem's promise that although we are now in *golus*, He will soon take us out of *golus* and bring us to Eretz Yisroel with Moshiach.

In Parshas Eikev, *Perek Ches* begins by saying that we should fulfill all of the *mitzvos* "so that you will come and inherit the land that Hashem swore to your forefathers." The *perek* then continues to praise the beauty of Eretz Yisroel.

Initially, the Jews were supposed to enter Eretz Yisroel immediately; however, due to their sins, they were forced to traverse a harsh desert for forty years. At the end of this time, they were promised that they would soon enter the delightful land of Eretz Yisroel.

This alludes to our present state. Although we are in *golus*, Hashem consoles us and promises us that *golus* is coming to an end, and we will soon be back in Eretz Yisroel.

The *perek* goes on to describe the desert the Jews had crossed: "The One who brought you through a vast, fearsome desert, with snakes, fiery serpents, and scorpions, and thirst without water."

Why is it important to know this? This, too, is part of the consolation: In order to leave *golus* sooner, we must recognize what makes the "desert" of *golus* so terrible. When a person is ill, knowledge of the illness is half the cure. Someone who does not know he is sick is in a sorry state indeed; knowing that he is unwell will spur him to do whatever he can to achieve a cure. Similarly, the better we understand what it is that makes *golus* so bad, the more we'll be able to work on leaving it.

### THE DESERT WITHIN

The first word the Torah uses to describe the desert is "vast."

What is the deeper meaning of a desert? A desert is a land uninhabited

by humans (*lo yashav adam sham*). The term *adam* refers particularly to Jews. As the Shaloh explains, *adam* is related to the word *domeh*—similar, and *adam* means *edameh l'elyon*—similar to Hashem. This refers to Jews; we have a *neshamah*, and even our bodies are holy, so it can appropriately be said of us that we are "similar" to Hashem.

A desert thus represents a "land" that is devoid of Yiddishkeit.

More specifically, there is a "desert" within each Jew. The *possuk* says in Koheles, "The spirit of a human ascends higher, while the spirit of an animal descends lower." There are times of the day when his *adam* comes to the fore, such as when he davens, learns, and performs *mitzvos*. During the parts of the day when he strives for higher, he is a "human," while when he is involved in fulfilling his material needs, he is like an "animal."

### "VAST..."

Now, this desert is "vast." When comparing the Jews to the gentile nations, the Jews are a small minority. Similarly, the time a Jew devotes to spiritual pursuits is much less than the time he devotes to physical pursuits.

In truth, however, it is the spiritual parts of the day that are truly vast. Although in time they might be less, in quality they are far greater, since they represent who we really are.

A human is compared to a tree. Although the trunk, branches, and leaves comprise far more bulk, it is the tree's fruits that are of primary significance. Similarly, although business and other material matters occupy most of a person's day, they are not the day's most important parts. The few minutes he sets aside to daven, to follow his daily learning schedule, or to do a *mitzvah*—they are what is truly significant.

However, the *yetzer hara* comes along and tries to portray the desert as being vast. He tries to get us to place our primary focus on our physical activities. This is the beginning of the descent into *golus*, when we begin to view the desert—the parts of us that are not "inhabited" by "humans"—as being more important.

### "...AND FEARSOME"

The *possuk* continues to describe the desert as being "fearsome."

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In order to leave *golus* sooner, we must recognize what makes it so terrible.

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A person can view another as being greater than him, but he feels that he is also something. Then there is a situation where he is *afraid* of that person.

The first step into *golus* is when one views the desert as being “vast.” He feels that the surrounding society is important and must be reckoned with, and he gives it more significance than *kedushah*. However, during the bit of time devoted to learning, he learns.

But then there is a lower level, where he is *afraid* of the surrounding society. Even when involved in Torah and *mitzvos*, he is concerned how his actions will be viewed by those around him, and whether his conduct is on a par with theirs. The desert is not only vast, but “fearsome.”

## UNQUENCHED THIRST

The next step is “snakes, fiery serpents, and scorpions.”

*Sefarim* explain that a snake’s poison is hot, while a scorpion’s poison is cold. “Snakes” represents a situation where instead of being passionate about Torah and *mitzvos*, a person is enthusiastic about worldly matters. Moreover, his passion consumes him (“fiery serpents”).

This leads to “scorpions,” that he adopts a cold and indifferent attitude to matters of *kedushah*.

The *possuk* continues with the next stage in the ongoing descent of *golus*: “thirst without water.”

Chazal tell us that there are certain heavenly voices that call out each day. What is the point of these announcements if we don’t hear them? The Baal Shem Tov explains that in truth we *do* hear them. It happens that a person is aroused with a thirst and desire to change his ways. This arousal stems from these heavenly voices.

However, it’s possible for a person to be on such a low level that even when he is aroused with a thirst, the thirst is expressed in physicality. Instead of being drawn to “water”—Torah, he is drawn to other things.

(It is related that when the Baal Shem Tov would daven, everyone

in his vicinity would become aroused. If he was a Jew, he would be inspired to improve his davening, learning, and *mitzvah* observance. The nearby non-Jews, however, would be stimulated for *narishkeiten*, as they weren’t *keilim* for the spirituality of the Baal Shem Tov’s davening.)

## OUT OF GOLUS!

The *possuk* thus describes the process in which it is possible to fall lower and lower. How does it all start? When a person views the “desert” as “vast,” and begins to give value to the ideas of the world around him.

Why is it important for the Torah to tell us this? First of all, through knowing the “sickness,” we can work on getting healed. True significance must only be given to Torah and *mitzvos*; everything else has no inherent value.

Second, the *possuk* begins by saying, “The One who brought you through a vast, fearsome desert.” Even a person who is on the lowest level is being led by Hashem. He does not forsake him, and He will ensure that ultimately every Jew will return.

Furthermore:

This *possuk* was written during the Jews’ fortieth and final year in the desert. We are similarly at the end of *golus* (as hinted to in the name of the *parshah*—Eikev, which alludes to the “heel” and end of *golus*).

The Rambam says that the Torah promised us that at the end of *golus*, we will ultimately do *teshuvah* and be redeemed. Although we


are in a terrible *golus*, there is no doubt that Hashem is with us. Every Jew will be aroused with a strong desire to return, and we will all leave the “desert” of *golus* and go to Eretz Yisroel.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 2, pp. 371ff.

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