

# Mussar HaTorah

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Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Yom Kippur

“WAS I A DESERT TO ISRAEL OR A LAND OF THICK DARKNESS?”

(YIRMIYAHU 2:31)

**Yirmiyahu showed B'nei Yisrael the jar of manna that Moshe had preserved**

RASHI (quoting the Midrash Tanchuma, Bamidbar 2) explains that after being exiled, *B'nei Yisrael* despaired of ever regaining the special closeness that existed between them and Hashem. They felt that the closeness to Hashem they had achieved in the land of Israel could never be replicated again in exile. What was Hashem's response? Rashi explains that Yirmiyahu showed *B'nei Yisrael* the jar of manna that Moshe had preserved. He told them that Hashem was astounded that they could think that the original closeness is no longer attainable. The manna represented the miracles Hashem performed in the desert. After all these miracles, Hashem “wonders” in amazement that *B'nei Yisrael* could think such thoughts. In the natural order of events, when a relationship is broken, it can never be mended completely; there is some trace of the damage that remains. Hashem was replying to *B'nei Yisrael* that our relationship with Him is different – it goes above and beyond nature. The manna that we ate in the desert manifested that Hashem was willing to treat us in a wholly miraculous fashion. Upon seeing this proof of Hashem's love from for us, *B'nei Yisrael* should have realized that the relationship can always be completely restored.

The Jews knew about the manna and understood that the generation of the desert lived on a miraculous plane of existence. What proof is a jar of manna from the wondrous years of the desert when looking towards the future of the generations living in exile? How could focusing on the *chesed* done to our ancestors a millennium earlier help *B'nei Yisrael* – while suffering through the tortuous Babylonian exile – to feel that Hashem will always love them just as He did in the desert? How does focusing on the manna help us feel Hashem's love after seeing our Temple destroyed and after being sold into slavery?

**It is a love that can be totally renewed even after being torn asunder**

When we focus on the *chesed* Hashem has shown us throughout the ages – even the miracles of hundreds or thousands of years ago – we are catapulted to a new, higher-level understanding of our relationship with Hashem. We realize that Hashem's love for us transcends the laws of nature. It is a love that can be totally renewed even after being torn asunder, defying the natural order. When we see the amazing miracles that took place in the desert, or even the miracle of survival through 2,000 years of exile and persecution, we see a landscape of love and caring for us that overshadows the pain and suffering.

**Let us take advantage of the unique opportunity of this day**

As we stand before Hashem on Yom Kippur, we become painfully aware of our shortcomings and misdeeds, which have damaged our relationship with Hashem. We start to wonder if we can ever repair the damage and restore His love for us as in the past. If, however, we focus on the kindness He has showered upon us throughout history and even throughout our own lives, we will realize that His love is always there waiting for us. If we turn to Him in sincere *teshuva*, we can renew our relationship and restore it to the same closeness that existed before our sins separated us from Him. Let us take advantage of the unique opportunity of this day, when Hashem reaches out to us and begs us to come back to Him, to sincerely and realistically improve ourselves. May we appreciate His love for us – eternal, and above the laws of nature – and with our *teshuva* may we merit to bring about the final redemption, and the complete restoration of our relationship in our homeland with the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*.