

FOREWORD

Rav Daniel Belsky, Rosh Yeshivas Oholei Yaakov, Jerusalem

Having been asked to present the public with a foreword to this translation, I have accepted due to a number of compelling considerations. These considerations in essence are the basis of this foreword.

The means for acquisition of Torah are enumerated by the Sages. Most basic to this concept—acquisition or *kinyan*—is what we know as the reverence for the Torah. Such reverence in large measure is reflected in our relationship with those who give over the Torah to the generations, i.e. our regard for the chain of tradition. In this respect we need be aware of the stature of the author of this work—the Dubner Maggid of sainted memory. He was a giant in a generation of giants. No less a personality as the Gaon of Vilna chose this author as his personal guide in service to Hashem—as his conscience (*mochiach*). It is painful to contemplate how far we have come, that the name of the author has ceased to be familiar to us.

This brings us to the second point. The English speaking/reading public owes a great debt of gratitude to Reb Dovid for his efforts in bringing this work to fruition. He has opened up a most wondrous treasure to a greater public. The lives of countless individuals will be enriched by having available to them the sweet waters of the author's magnificent work.

This brings us to the book itself. By translating the commentary on Eichah, Reb Dovid has made a major contribution just by opening up the Dubner Maggid but even more so by opening thereby the megillah itself. We are a generation that has experienced the aftermath of a destruction the likes of which the world has never before experienced. We are no longer privy to the directives of our heavenly Father —prophecy has been taken. But the twenty-four books of prophecy were all recorded for eternity. All destruction will be explained in the Book of Destruction, so to speak.

Destruction is an English word: we do not use it. We use the word *churban*. This has connotations of continuity. We have been through a number of *churbonos* over the generations. The *Navi* linked the *churban* of the first *Beis HaMikdash* to the diminishing of the First Man. He also linked the first *churban* to all the ensuing *churbonos*: the second *Beis HaMikdash*, the expulsion from Spain, and so on, up through the major *churban* of our age—the *churban* of Europe. In effect, the *Navi*, as recorded for generations, left us with the key to understanding the darkness that preceded our epoch.

But to hear what has been recorded for us we need to have the book opened and read to us. The Maggid dealt with this book as no one else. He has made the book a guide to our own troubled times. But unfortunately it has no longer the ability to reach us, for we have forgotten our language in the course of this last short exile.

Here I stand and offer Reb Dovid a resounding ovation for his efforts on our part. One can not fail to be moved by the book as rendered into our vernacular, and by making this possible Reb Dovid has earned a place in the chain of tradition. This is no mean feat. We know that he who repeats the words of another in the name of the author brings redemption to the world. How fitting that the redemption should be brought closer by our dearly beloved Reb Dovid through the book that was written expressly to bring a sense of

Voice of Weepers
Dubner Maggid's Commentary on the Book of Lamentations

redemption out of the experiences of darkness and destruction. May the giver of Torah bestow upon Reb Dovid all the blessings reserved for the teachers and disseminators of Torah and may he merit that his work find favor in the eyes of the learners and lovers of our most sacred writings. Amen.

17 Teves 5764, the Maggid's 199th Yahrzeit (Revised 21 Shevat 5764)

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

"The voice is the voice of Jacob" (Genesis 27:22)

"Hence my lyre has turned to mourning, and my flute into the voice of weepers." (Job 30:31)

One morning a couple of years ago, as I entered the Beis Midrash to learn, Providence arranged for me to come across a copy of the book *Kol Yaacov*—Voice of Jacob. This incident caused a profound change in my life, and triggered the chain of events leading to the work now before you.

Kol Yaacov is a collection of the Dubner Maggid's commentaries on the Five Megillos. The present work is an English translation of the Maggid's commentary on the Book of Lamentations, entitled *Kol Bochim*—Voice of Weepers.

I begin my remarks about this translation with some personal reflections on the Maggid's work in general and on *Kol Bochim* in particular. I then make some remarks about the translation itself. I conclude with a series of acknowledgements.

Reflections on the Maggid's Work and on the Commentary to Lamentations

I offer the following reflections with some degree of trepidation, for I am not really qualified to formally address the topics I am about to discuss. Nonetheless I shall proceed, because I believe it is important to call attention to the great treasure of wisdom that the Maggid has left us.

When I first came across the book *Kol Yaacov*, I had heard of the Dubner Maggid but had never studied his works in depth. I was aware that the Maggid was a major Torah figure, known for his parables. As I began reading the book, I was immediately struck by the Maggid's engaging style of interpretation, and I decided that I wished to delve further into the Maggid's writings. I hence promptly bought myself a set of volumes containing the bulk of the Maggid's work. I have been basking in the light of the Maggid's wisdom ever since.

As I studied the Maggid's works, I realized that there was much more to the Maggid's discourses than I had previously known. I had seen some of the Maggid's ideas presented before, but only in a highly simplified format: essentially just a parable followed by a brief moral. But the Maggid's original work, as redacted after his death by his son and other scholars, constitutes a different world entirely. The parables, incisive as they are, represent but a fraction of the Maggid's wisdom. The original work displays a breathtakingly intricate tapestry of Biblical verses, Rabbinic sayings (particularly from the Midrash), Jewish philosophy, penetrating analysis, sharp wit, and keen psychological insight.

It thus was natural for me, when I decided to strengthen my bond with Torah through a writing project, to undertake an English translation of one of the Maggid's works. I chose to work on *Kol Bochim*—the commentary on the Book of Lamentations. I had read this commentary in its entirety previously, and had found it to provide a very moving portrayal and analysis of the shifting tides of Jewish destiny. I felt that it would be of significant benefit to make this soul-stirring work accessible to the English-speaking

public. It is particularly opportune that this book is appearing during the 200th year since the Maggid's passing: the 200th Yahrzeit will occur on 17 Teves 5765 (29 December 2004).

As I worked on the translation, I was struck all the more by the great insight reflected in the commentary. Time and again, I was amazed by the uncanny accuracy with which the Maggid's commentaries depict the state of the Jewish People in our own day. Anyone who reads the commentary and has any familiarity with the current plight of the Jewish People, particularly in the Land of Israel, will know immediately what I mean.

The subject matter of this work—Megillas Eichah, The Book of Lamentations—is difficult to grapple with. The annual Three Week period of mourning over the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, climaxing in the starkly somber Tishah B'Av fast, presents a challenge for many people, myself certainly included. The *Beis HaMikdash* is so far removed from our daily consciousness that it is a struggle to relate to the mourning practices of this time of the year. It is hard to suppress the thought that mourning is an unappealing chore that one would rather avoid. It is hard to rise above the daily routine of life and reflect upon the loss of the *Beis HaMikdash*. It is hard to develop a real feeling—in the heart—for what the *Beis HaMikdash* was and how bereft we are without it. In short, it is hard to focus on the message that we are supposed to internalize during this period of the Jewish year. Hence the Book of Lamentations tends to be given short shrift.

The Dubner Maggid's commentary on Lamentations provides us with a powerful way to penetrate through our mental barriers and begin to absorb the message of this most tragic of all Biblical books. The Maggid's special style, with his engaging parables and stunning insights, grips the mind and stirs the heart, so that the message becomes engraved within the soul.

At the same time, this work is much more than a commentary on a Biblical book that is read in the synagogue once a year. It is a far-ranging exposition of the Jewish outlook on life, a classic collection of Jewish moral discourses (*mussar*). In this work, the Maggid teaches us what we should really focus on in life as Jews. Hence its relevance transcends the Three Week mourning period. I can say personally that this book has influenced my outlook, and my approach to prayer, to a significant degree. Accordingly, this work may be profitably studied at any time of the Jewish Year.

That this is so is no surprise. The Dubner Maggid dedicated his life to teaching his fellow Jews how to be better Jews. His works are a veritable fountain of wisdom touching on all areas of Jewish life. It is thus a great pity that they seem to have been largely relegated to the backwaters of Jewish literature.

The present work, then, opens a window to two different areas of Torah that appear to have been unduly neglected: the Book of Lamentations on the one hand, and the wisdom of the Dubner Maggid on the other. I feel that I have personally benefited enormously from studying *Kol Bochim*. I believe that others will as well. This belief, in essence, provided the motivation for undertaking this translation.

The Translation

The translation presented here is a full translation of the original Hebrew text into idiomatic English prose. It is neither an abbreviated digest nor a strictly literal translation.

A deliberate decision was made to leave intact the basic structure of the original Hebrew text, and to firmly avoid substantive deletions or additions. Headings and subheadings were added as an aid to the reader. Because the commentary on Chapter 1 of Lamentations is particularly lengthy—it alone accounts for about half the entire commentary—I have divided it into two parts. Similarly, because the commentary on Chapter 4 is short, I have combined Chapters 4 and 5.

The basic intent in preparing this translation was to produce a high-quality, readable working English version of the original Hebrew text. I did not take it upon myself to produce a comprehensively annotated “scholarly” edition. However, an effort was made to provide citations for the Biblical and Rabbinic sources referred to in the text. In addition, the text is actually annotated to a certain degree. Some of the footnotes contain material that was part of the main text in the original Hebrew version, but was of a nature that would interrupt the flow of the presentation in an English translation. Others call attention to certain editorial changes I made that I felt were significant enough to be worth pointing out. Many of the footnotes contain explanatory or supplementary comments that I felt would be of interest to the reader. These comments do not represent an attempt at systematic annotation. A number of these comments call attention to Biblical phrases that were woven into the prose. However, it was not practicable to point out all such Biblical allusions, since the original Hebrew text is laced with them, and not all of them were preserved in the English version.

The text contains a large number of references to Biblical verses and Rabbinic statements, particularly Midrashim. The translation of these passages is my own. I was guided here by the classical commentaries and by extant English translations, especially for Biblical verses. In many cases where the original Hebrew text quotes just a fragment of a Biblical or Rabbinic passage, the English version includes the full passage for the benefit of the reader. In a number of cases where such a passage is quoted more than once in the same section of the commentary, the repeated quotation is omitted or shortened in the English translation. In quotations from *Midrash Rabbah*, the new Wagschal edition of *Midrash Rabbah* generally is followed. In citations to *Yalkut Shimoni*, the form of citation is either I:xxx or II:xxx, where I and II refer to Part A (Torah) and Part B (Prophets and Writings) respectively, and xxx is the paragraph number.