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כי־תצא למלחמה על איביך

Ki Seitzei LaMilchamah Al Oyvecha

שבת פרשת כי־תצא, י״ד אלול, ה׳תשכ״ה

A maamar of the Lubavitcher Rebbe · Shabbos Parshas Ki Seitzei, 14 Elul 5725 (1965)

The Zohar calls the hour of prayer the hour of battle, and Onkelos translates Yaakov's "sword and bow" as "prayer and supplication." So the war that opens our parsha is the war a Jew fights every morning at davening — against the pull of appetite, waged from altitude: "upon your enemies," at their root Above, where no evil exists and fear has nothing to hold.

Then the difficulty: Rashi rules this an optional war — yet what war is more obligatory than prayer's? The Alter Rebbe calls it the purpose of the soul's descent, the assignment for which its seventy years were counted out. The Rebbe's resolution opens two paths of refinement: war, and peace — prayer that wrestles from below, and Torah that descends like bread from heaven until the enemy simply is not there.

And both paths meet in Elul's rose: thirteen petals of mercy for the month of prayer, and "do not read shoshanim but shonim" — those who study. A month whose mercy arrives before we earn it, in Torah's own manner — and whose call is disarmingly gentle: add Torah, in ways of peace, until "He redeemed my soul in peace" is complete.

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The War of Prayer — Sword and Bow, Prayer and Supplication

BEFORE WE READ

The parsha opens: "When you go out to war upon your enemies." The Alter Rebbe, in the famous discourses of Likkutei Torah — elaborated by the Mitteler Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, and the Rebbeim who followed — reads the verse inwardly, on the strength of two sources: the Zohar's declaration that "the hour of prayer is the hour of battle," and Onkelos's rendering of Yaakov's "with my sword and with my bow" as "with my prayer and with my supplication." The war of the verse is the war fought every morning at davening — the battle to conquer the soul's faculty of desire. And the verse's next word is the strategy: fight "upon" your enemies — from above them — for at their root, in the supernal chariot of holiness, no evil exists at all.

"When you go out to war upon your enemies..." *— the opening words of our parsha, and on their face a law of the battlefield: rules for conscription, captives, and conduct on campaign.* **And the Alter Rebbe explains in Likkutei Torah** *— in the two discourses that both open with this verse —* **(and it is explained further in the discourses of the Mitteler Rebbe, and in the discourses and glosses of the Tzemach Tzedek, and in the discourses of our Rebbeim, our Nesi'im, who followed)** *— the chain of citation is itself part of the argument: this is not one Rebbe's homiletic flourish but a reading carried and elaborated through five generations, which is why the Rebbe can treat it as settled ground and move straight to the difficulty*: **it is stated in the Zohar that "the hour of prayer is the hour of battle" (shaas tzlosa shaas krava)** *— not that prayer resembles war, but that the time of prayer is a time of war: the moment a Jew stands up to daven, a campaign opens*; **and he cites also the verse, "which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow"** *— Yaakov's deathbed words to Yosef, bequeathing him Shechem, and by their plain sense a claim of conquest by arms* **— and Onkelos rendered: "with my prayer and with my supplication" (bitzlosi u'v'va'usi).** *The Targum does not soften the verse; it identifies the weapons. Yaakov's sword was tefillah and his bow was tachanunim, and the land he won was won with them.*

That is: the verse "when you go out to war..." refers to the war within the avodah of prayer. *Two independent witnesses — the Zohar on the hour, Onkelos on the weapons — converge, and the verse is transposed from Israel's borders to the inside of a person at shacharis.* **And the Alter Rebbe adds an**

בס"ד. שבת פרשת כי־תצא, י"ד אלול, ה'תשכ"ה

כי־תצא למלחמה על איביך וגו', ומבאר רבנו הזקן ב'לקוטי תורה' (ונתבאר גם בדרושי אדמו"ר האמצעי, ובדרושי ה'צמח צדק' והגהותיו, ובדרושי רבותינו נשיאינו שלאחרי־זה), דאיתא בזהר שעת צלותא שעת קרבא, ומביא גם מה שכתוב אשר לקחתי מיד האמרי בחרבי ובקשתי, ותרגם אונקלוס: בצלותי ובבעותי, והינו, שמה שכתוב "כי־תצא למלחמה" גו' קאי על המלחמה שבעבודת התפלה. ומוסיף רבנו הזקן לפרש גם את המשך הכתוב ("כי־תצא למלחמה על איביך",

interpretation of the continuation of the verse — "(when you go out to war) upon your enemies": *having established which war, he now reads the verse's next word as the battle plan — and it turns out that a single preposition carries the whole strategy.*

KEY POINT

Sword and Bow = Prayer and Supplication

Onkelos renders Yaakov's "with my sword and my bow" as "with my prayer and my supplication" — and the Zohar names the hour of prayer "the hour of battle." Davening is the war; the siddur is the armory.

פירוש: כי־תצא למלחמה זו לנצח כח המתאוה שבנפשו לקררה בתענוגי עולם הזה הגשמיים ולאתהפכא לאהבת ה', תהיה בבחינת "על איביך", דהינו בבחינת שרשם למעלה, כי אין רע יורד מלמעלה, ושרשם הוא טוב שהוא מבחינת מרכבה עליונה שבקדושה כו'. ומוסיף לבאר, ש"על איביך" הינו 'למעלה מאיביך', שאין לאויב שלמטה שליטה ואחיזה שם כו'.

The meaning: "when you go out to this war" — to conquer the desiring faculty in one's soul *(the koach hamis'aveh: not a particular craving but the appetitive power itself, the engine underneath every craving)***, to cool it from the pleasures of this physical world** *— note the verb: not to kill the faculty but to cool it, lower its temperature so it stops burning in one direction* **and to transform it into love of Hashem** *— and then to re-light it in another. The heat itself is not the enemy; its address is. This is why the war ends in a transformation rather than a corpse*: **"it shall be in the mode of 'upon your enemies'": that is, at the level of their root Above.** *"Upon" — al — is read not as against but as from atop: engage them from the altitude at which they originate.* **For no evil descends from Above,** *a principle taken here in its full strength — whatever is genuinely coming down from Above is good, without exception, so nothing you are fighting is evil at its source* **and their root is good — for it derives from the supernal chariot of holiness, etc.** *The animal soul's ferocity is not foreign matter lodged in a person; it is merkavah-energy that has traveled a long way down. The "face of the lion" and "face of the ox" of Yechezkel's vision are the holy roots of everything animal below, this person's appetites included.*

And he adds further, that "upon your enemies" means "above your enemies" — for There, the enemy of below has no dominion and no hold at all. *So the one preposition yields two instructions that are really one. Fight the enemy at its root, where it is not an enemy but raw material; and fight from above it, from the vantage where it has no grip on you. Both are the same counsel: gain altitude, and the thing that terrified you at*

eye level turns out to be a fallen prince you have been sent to escort home.

KEY POINT

Fight from Altitude

"Upon your enemies" — at their root, no evil exists; the animal soul stems from the holy chariot itself. See the enemy as Heaven sees it and the fear dissolves; what remains is not a monster to destroy but a fallen prince to escort home.

SUMMARY · אות א

The Zohar calls the hour of prayer the hour of battle; Onkelos converts Yaakov's sword and bow into prayer and supplication. So "when you go out to war" is the daily war of davening — against the desiring faculty — and "upon your enemies" is its strategy: engage them at their root Above, where no evil exists and the enemy has no hold.

Rashi's Optional War — and the Question That Sharpens

BEFORE WE READ

Now the difficulty. Rashi rules that our verse speaks of milchemes horshus — an optional war — proven from its ending: "and you shall take its captives" cannot apply to the obligatory war for Eretz Yisroel, where "you shall not keep any soul alive." The maamar first shows that the verse's opening lesson — go out "upon" your enemies, in triumphant altitude — holds for every war, obligatory ones included, just as "you shall not fear them, for they are all as one horse" in last week's parsha. But the ending drags the plain sense with it: "ki" must mean "if," and "if" means optional. The question then lands with full weight: how can the war of prayer be optional? It is obligatory — more obligatory, the Alter Rebbe teaches, than mitzvos themselves; it is the very purpose for which the soul descended "from a high roof to a deep pit": to elevate the animal soul, whose allotted seventy years exist precisely for this refinement.

Now, one must understand how the Alter Rebbe's interpretation accords with Rashi's interpretation that "the verse speaks of an optional war (milchemes horshus)." *Here is the collision. Halachah sorts wars into two categories: milchemes mitzvah/chovah, obligatory — the conquest of the Land, a defensive war, Amalek — and milchemes horshus, discretionary, a campaign a king may undertake but need not. Rashi files our verse under the second. But the Alter Rebbe has just told us the verse is about davening. Prayer is not optional.* **By way of introduction: Rashi's proof that "the verse speaks of an optional war" is from the phrase "and you shall take its captives"** *— the clause at the end of our verse* **— for of the war for Eretz Yisroel one cannot say "you shall take its captives," since it is already stated, "you shall not keep any soul alive."** *The proof is airtight on its own terms: a war in which no one may be left alive cannot produce captives, so a verse legislating captives must be describing some other kind of war. The category is fixed by the verse's last clause.* **But the phrase "when you go out to war, (then it shall be) upon your enemies" may be interpreted, even in the plain sense of Scripture,** *— and this is the move: peshat is not a single flat meaning but a level at which more than one true reading can live. The footnote reaches for Rashi's own remark, preserved by the Rashbam, that had he the leisure he would write fresh peshat commentaries "according to the plain meanings that are renewed every day."*

ב) **וצריך** להבין, איך יתאים פרוש רבנו הזקן עם פרוש רש"י ש"במלחמת הרשות, הכתוב מדבר". ובהקדים, שההוכחה של רש"י ש"במלחמת הרשות, הכתוב מדבר" היא ממה שכתוב "ושבית שביו", כי במלחמת ארץ ישראל אין לומר "ושבית שביו", שהרי כבר נאמר לא תחיה כל נשמה. אבל מה שכתוב "כי־תצא למלחמה (אזי תהיה) על איביך", יש לפרש גם בפשוטו של מקרא לא

KEY POINT

Seventy Years, Issued for the Battle

The lifespan is not for the G-dly soul — it needs no repair. The years are sized by divine wisdom to the exact tonnage of sparks this person can raise from his animal soul. Life is a calibrated salvage contract; the daily war of prayer is its deliverable.

רק במלחמת הרשות אלא גם במלחמת חובה, והינו, שכתוב זה בא לבאר (לא רק הדין ד"ושבית שביו" שבסיום הכתוב, אלא גם) שהיציאה למלחמה צריכה להיות באופן ד"על איביך", שעל־ידי־זה יהיה הנצחון במלחמה. ועל־דרך מה שכתוב בפרשה שלפני־זה "כי־

— as referring not only to an optional war but also to an obligatory war. *One verse, two jurisdictions. The captive-clause fixes the verse's legal address as the discretionary war; the opening clause teaches something that holds in every war whatsoever.* **That is: this verse comes to teach (not only the law of "you shall take its captives" at its end, but also) that the going-out to war must be in the mode of "upon your enemies" — through which the victory in battle will come.** *Read that way, "al oyvecha" is not a description of circumstances but an instruction, and an instruction with a promise attached: the altitude is what produces the victory. Which means the verse contains a law and a morale-order, and the morale-order is not restricted to optional campaigns.*

תצא למלחמה גו' וראית סוס ורכב עם רב ממך לא תירא מהם גו', הינו, שתוכן הכתוב הוא הציווי "לא תירא מהם", כיון שבעיני הקב"ה כולם כסוס אחד, כפי שמדיק רש"י מה שכתוב "סוס ורכב" לשון יחיד. ועל־דרך־זה יש לפרש מה שכתוב כאן "כי־תצא למלחמה על איביך", שהציווי הוא שהיציאה למלחמה תהיה "על איביך", הינו, להתבונן במהותו של האויב כפי שהוא בשרשו ומקורו כו' (על־דרך פרוש רש"י בפסוק "וראית סוס ורכב" גו', שזהו כפי שהם בעיני הקב"ה), שעל־ידי־זה תתבטל היראה ממנו, ויהיה קל יותר לנצחו. ומובן, שכל זה

And this is along the lines of what is written in the preceding parsha: "When you go out to war... and you see horse and chariot, a people more numerous than you — you shall not fear them...". *Shoftim's war passage, read last week, supplies the precedent — and note that it too opens "ki seitzei lamilchamah," the identical phrase.* **The content of that verse is the command "you shall not fear them"** *— that is, the verse's actual mitzvah is not tactical but internal: it legislates a state of mind* **— since in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed be He, they are all as one horse, as Rashi deduces from the singular "horse and chariot."** *A grammatical oddity carrying the whole comfort: Scripture describes a massed army in the singular, and Rashi hears Heaven's own accounting in it — "in My eyes they are all as one horse." The numbers that terrify you are an artifact of standing where you stand.*

And in the same way one may interpret our verse, "when you go out to war upon your enemies": the command is that the going-out to war be "upon your enemies" — that is, to contemplate the essence of the enemy as it is in its root and source *— l'hisbonen, to meditate: this is avodah, not attitude. One deliberately holds the enemy's origin in mind until it becomes the way one sees him* **(along the lines of Rashi on "and you see horse and chariot" — as they are in the eyes**

of the Holy One), whereby the fear of it dissolves, and it becomes easier to defeat it. *The sequence is exact and worth keeping: contemplation → the fear dissolves → the victory comes more easily. Fear is not merely unpleasant; it is the enemy's actual foothold, and accurate vision is what removes it.*

שיך גם במלחמת חובה, ובמילא גם במלחמה הרוחנית שבעבודת התפלה. אמנם, מצד סיום הכתוב "ושבית שביו" (שאינו שיך במלחמת ארץ ישראל), משתנה גם פשוטו של מקרא במה שכתוב "כי־תצא למלחמה", שאין פרושו 'כאשר' תצא למלחמה, אלא אם תצא למלחמה, כיון ש"במלחמת הרשות, הכתוב מדבר". ועל־פי־זה אינו מובן, איך יתאים זה עם פרוש רבנו הזקן שקאי על המלחמה שבעבודת התפלה, הרי מלחמה זו אינה רשות אלא חובה, ואדרבה, חובה היותר גדולה (עוד

And it is understood that all this applies also to an obligatory war — and hence also to the spiritual war within the avodah of prayer. *The altitude-instruction transfers cleanly: it was never dependent on the war's category, only on the combatant's vantage point.* **However: because of the verse's ending, "and you shall take its captives" (which does not apply to the war for Eretz Yisroel), the plain sense of "when you go out to war" itself shifts — its meaning is not "when (kaasher) you go out" but "if (im) you go out to war," since "the verse speaks of an optional war."** *This is the sharpest turn in the section. The word ki is elastic — the Gemara counts four senses, and "when" and "if" are both available. But the captive-clause has already fixed the verse as discretionary, and a discretionary war cannot be introduced by "when," which assumes it happens. So the ending reaches back and re-vowels the opening: if you go out.* **And according to this, it is not understood how this accords with the Alter Rebbe's interpretation that the verse refers to the war of the avodah of prayer — for that war is not optional but obligatory,**

יותר מהחיוב דקיום המצות), וכמובן ממה שמבאר רבנו הזקן שענין התפלה הוא שיקריב כל אחד את נפשו הבהמית, להעלותה ולקשרה בשרשה שהיא גם־כן מיסוד האש, ומקור חוצבה ויסודתה בהררי קדש, מרכבה העליונה, פני אריה פני שור כו', אלא שלאחר ירידת והשתלשלות והתלבשות בשבעים שרים, שמרי האופנים, נמשך תענוגי עולם הזה והכח המתאוה שהוא גם־כן בחינת חמימות האש, וגם היצר הרע הוא אש זר דולק, וצריך להעלות את הנפש הבהמית לשרשה בחינת אש שלמעלה כו'. וממשיך לבאר, ש"בכל יום יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו", וצריך בכל יום להמשיך

and on the contrary — an obligation greater still (greater even than the obligation of fulfilling the mitzvos). *A striking ranking, and the footnote sends us to Likkutei Torah on Balak for it: prayer is not one mitzvah among many but the avodah in which a person is remade, and therefore prior to the rest.* **As is understood from the Alter Rebbe's explanation that the matter of prayer is that each person offer up his animal soul** *— yakriv, the verb of the Temple service: prayer is not recitation but an offering, and the animal on the altar is one's own animal soul* **— to elevate it and bind it to its root; for it too is from the element of fire** *(the "it too" is the hinge: the animal soul is not made of coarser stuff than the divine soul, it is made of fire as well — the same element, at a different address)***, and the source from which it was hewn, and its foundation, is in the mountains of holiness: the supernal merkavah, the face of the lion, the face of the ox, etc.** *Those*

are the two beastly faces of Yechezkel's chariot — precisely the holy origin of every lion-like and ox-like force in a human being: ferocity and stubborn strength, both with a seat in the throne-world.

Only that after the descent and the chain of hishtalshelus, and the investiture in the seventy [heavenly] ministers — the dregs of the Ofanim *— the long institutional descent: world after world, and then a clothing in the seventy supernal princes appointed over the seventy nations, drawing their sustenance from what a higher rung discards* **— there issue the pleasures of this world and the desiring faculty, which is likewise a mode of the heat of fire; and the evil inclination too is "a burning foreign fire" (eish zar).** *The diagnosis is exact and oddly hopeful: the yetzer is not cold, and it is not other — it is fire, and its only defect is being zar, foreign, burning at the wrong altar.* **And one must elevate the animal soul to its root, the fire that is Above, etc. And he continues: "every day a person's inclination overpowers him," and every day one must draw down the fire from Above.** *Hence the war is daily by design, not by failure. Yesterday's victory does not carry over, because the task was never a single conquest but a daily re-addressing of a fire that reignites each morning.*

For it is written, "days were formed" — a person's years of life have a number and an allotment: "the days of our years, in them seventy years..." *Two verses from Tehillim read as one accounting: days are formed, that is, issued deliberately, and they come to a reckoned sum.* **And these were not given for the sake of his G-dly soul within him — for the neshamah needs no repair for itself** *— Tanya's blunt formulation: the divine soul descends "not to perfect itself but to perfect the body and the vital soul." Nothing in the seventy years is for the neshamah's own benefit; it arrived whole* **— rather, the count of a person's life was given so that his animal soul be clothed within him; and his years are allotted to him in the number that His blessed wisdom estimated he can bear** *— she'shi'arah chochmaso yisbarech: the lifespan is a measured quantity, sized by divine wisdom to this particular person's carrying capacity, no more and no less*, **to raise up from [the animal soul] all the powers and sparks that fell there in the shattering of the vessels (as this is explained in very many discourses of Chassidus).** *So a human life reads as a calibrated salvage contract: sparks fell into this animal soul when*

בחינת אש שלמעלה. כי הנה כתיב "ימים יוצרו", שיש מספר וקצבה לשני חיי האדם, ימי שנותינו בהם שבעים שנה גו', ולא נתנו לנפשו האלקית שבקרבו, כי הנשמה אינה צריכה תקון לעצמה כו', אלא מספר חיי האדם נתן להתלבש בו נפשו הבהמית, ושניו קצובים לו במספר ששערה חכמתו יתברך שיוכל לשאת בנפשו להעלות ממנה כל־כך כחות ונצוצים שנפלו שמה בשבירת הכלים כו' (כמבאר ענין זה ברבוי מאמרי חסידות). ועל־פי־זה נמצא שהמלחמה שבעבודת התפלה הוא ענין עקרי, ועד שזוהי תכלית כל ענין ירידת הנשמה בגוף, מאיגרא רמה לבירא עמקתא. ואיך אפשר לומר על זה "במלחמת הרשות, הכתוב מדבר".

the vessels of Tohu broke, and seventy years is the estimate of how long it takes this person to lift them out.

Accordingly, the war within the avodah of prayer is a principal matter — to the point that it is the purpose of the soul's entire descent into the body, "from a high roof to a deep pit." *The Gemara's image for a catastrophic fall, applied to the soul's journey from standing before the Throne to being lodged in a body. A fall that steep needs a justification, and this is the only one on offer: the daily war of davening is what the descent was for.* **How, then, can one say of this: "the verse speaks of an optional war"?** *Now the question has its full weight. Not a technical mismatch between two commentators, but this: Rashi has apparently called optional the one thing for which a soul left Heaven.*

SUMMARY · אות ב

Rashi: the verse's ending ("take its captives") proves an optional war, and pulls even "ki" to mean "if." Yet the verse's opening lesson — fight from above, where all enemies are "one horse" — applies to every war, including prayer's. And prayer's war is emphatically obligatory: greater than mitzvos, the very purpose of the soul's descent, the assignment for which seventy years were allotted — to raise the sparks from the animal soul. How can Scripture call it optional?

Two Ways to Refine — War, and Peace

BEFORE WE READ

The resolution. Prayer's war is obligatory — but only at the beginning of a person's avodah. Afterward, two paths open: Torah, or tefillah. For there are two modes of refining the evil inclination: the way of war and the way of peace. Prayer refines from below upward — the G-dly soul enters the animal soul and wrestles it, hence "the hour of battle," hence toil. Torah refines from above downward — "bread from heaven" — drawing G-dliness into the soul until the yetzer is nullified of itself, no combat required: "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." Because a peaceful alternative exists, the war-path may truly be called "optional." And the parsha's own ending says so: "when Hashem your G-d gives you rest from all your enemies" — "redeemed my soul in peace"; "no sword shall pass through your land," even a sword of peace. Final turn: even when war is required, Torah transforms the war — just as Torah after prayer is higher, prayer joined to Torah is prayer of another order entirely.

The matter, however, is this: even according to the Alter Rebbe's interpretation that "when you go out to war" refers to the war within the avodah of prayer, one may interpret "ki seitzei" as Rashi does — in the sense of "if," a matter of option. *The resolution will not overturn either reading. Both stand: it is the war of prayer, and it is introduced by "if."* **For that the avodah of prayer is an obligatory war for each and every Jew — this is only at the beginning of his avodah** *— the whole answer turns on a stage. Obligatory at the outset; the obligation is real, and it is also not permanent*; **but afterward, two modes of avodah become possible: Torah, or tefillah.** *Once the beginning has been done, a fork appears — and where there are two roads, taking either one is by definition discretionary. That is precisely the grammar of im.* **The meaning: it is explained in several places**

ג) **אך** הענין הוא, שגם לפי פרוש רבנו הזקן שמה שכתוב "כי־תצא למלחמה" קאי על המלחמה שבעבודת התפלה, אפשר לפרש "כי־תצא למלחמה" כמו לפי פרוש רש"י, מלשון 'אם', שזהו ענין של רשות, כי מה שעבודת התפלה היא מלחמת חובה אצל כל אחד ואחד מישראל, הרי זה רק בתחלת עבודתו, אבל לאחרי־זה אפשריים שני אופני עבודה, תורה או תפלה. והענין בזה, דהנה מבאר בכמה מקומות שיש שני אופנים בברור

KEY POINT

War and Peace — Two Refinements

Prayer refines from below up: the G-dly soul enters the animal soul and wrestles — hence toil. Torah refines from above down — "bread from heaven": G-dliness revealed, and the yetzer dissolves of itself. Because the peace-path exists, Scripture may call the war-path "optional.

that there are two modes in the refinement (birur) of the evil inclination: by way of war, and by way of peace. *Birur is the work of separating and elevating what is lodged in the animal soul — and Chassidus insists there are two protocols for it, not one method with two intensities.* **And in general terms this is the distinction between the avodah of prayer — "the**

היצר הרע, בדרך מלחמה, ובדרך שלום. ובכללות הרי זה החלוק בין עבודת התפלה, "שעת קרבא" - לעבודת התורה, ש"דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום". והינו, שעבודת התפלה הוא ענין ברור היצר הרע מלמטה למעלה, על־ידי התלבשות המברר (נפש האלקית) במתברר (נפש הבהמית), ולכן זה בא על־ידי מלחמה ויגיעה. אבל

הברור שעל־ידי תורה הוא מלמעלה למטה (כידוע שהתורה נקראת "לחם מן השמים"), בדרך ממילא, שעל־ידי לימוד התורה האדם ממשיך ומגלה אלקות בנפשו, ועל־ידי־זה מתבטל (ומתברר) היצר הרע מאליו. ועל־פי־זה מובן

hour of battle" — and the avodah of Torah, whose "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." *Mishlei's verse about Torah is now heard as a technical description of Torah's method: not that Torah is a pleasant experience, but that it refines by peace rather than by combat.* **Namely: the avodah of prayer is the refinement of the evil inclination from below upward, through the investiture of the refiner (the G-dly soul) within the one-being-refined (the animal soul)** *— the divine soul must clothe itself inside the animal soul and work within its faculties, meditating in its language until its fire turns* **— and therefore it comes through war and toil.** *Of course it does: entering occupied territory means fighting on the occupant's ground. The toil is not incidental to this method; it is what this method is.*

But the refinement effected by Torah is from above downward (as is known, that the Torah is called "bread from heaven") *— bread that arrives ready, descending rather than being wrestled out of the earth* **— in a manner of "automatically" (b'derech mimeila): through the study of Torah a person draws down and reveals G-dliness in his soul, and thereby the evil inclination is nullified (and refined) of itself.** *Note what is absent: no encounter, no grappling, no opponent. The yetzer is not defeated; it is outshone, the way darkness in a room is not fought but simply ceases when the light comes on. One method descends into the mine with a pick; the other floods it with light.*

KEY POINT

Even a Sword of Peace

The parsha ends: "when Hashem your G-d gives you rest from all your enemies." The Gemara's blessing goes further — no sword shall cross the land, even a sword of peace: nothing that so much as resembles war. That is Torah's register — and a preview of the Redemption.

מה שברור היצר הרע על־ידי מלחמה (שהוא ענין עבודת התפלה) נקרא "מלחמת הרשות", כי ישנו ברור באופן של מנוחה, על־ידי עבודה של תורה. וזהו גם מה שכתוב בסיום הפרשה והיה בהניח הוי' אלקיך לך מכל איביך גו', שאז אין צורך בענין של מלחמה, וכמו שכתוב פדה בשלום נפשי מקרב לי גו', וכתיב וחרב לא־תעבר בארצכם, אפילו חרב של שלום, ואז העבודה היא בדרך מנוחה, שזהו אופן העבודה שעל־ידי לימוד התורה. ועוד זאת, שגם כאשר נמצאים במעמד ומצב

And according to this it is understood why the refinement of the evil inclination through war (which is the avodah of prayer) is called "the optional war" — because there exists a refinement in the mode of rest, through the avodah of Torah. *And there is the resolution, in one line. The war is not called optional because it is unimportant, but because it is not the only road. Rashi's im is a statement about the existence of an alternative.* **And this is also the meaning of the verse at the close of our parsha, "And it shall be, when Hashem**

your G-d gives you rest from all your enemies..." — for then there is no need for war at all *— the parsha that opened with going out to war closes with rest from all enemies, and the Rebbe reads that arc as deliberate: the same sidra names both protocols, combat at its start and rest at its end*; **as it is written, "He redeemed my soul in peace from the battle against me,"** *— Dovid's line, and the emphasis falls on b'shalom: he was in a battle, and he was redeemed out of it in peace, without having to win it* **and it is written, "and a sword shall not pass through your land" — even a sword of peace — and then the avodah is in the way of rest, which is the mode of avodah effected through the study of Torah.** *The Gemara's addition is the fine point: not merely no war, but not even a friendly army crossing the territory — no weapons in the landscape at all. That is the register Torah's refinement belongs to, and a preview of the era the parsha's ending describes.*

And more than this: even when one stands in a condition in which the war of the avodah of prayer is needed *— that is, even for the person who has not outgrown the battle, and must still fight it tomorrow morning* **— through the study of Torah, which is the avodah in the way of rest, the avodah of prayer itself becomes of another manner entirely.** *The two roads were never sealed lanes. Torah does not only offer an alternative to the war; it changes the war for whoever is still in it.* **That is: just as the excellence of Torah engaged in after prayer is higher than Torah before prayer** *— the familiar order, and the reason for it: davening refines the vessel, and the same page of Gemara lands differently in a mind whose animal soul has already been quieted that morning* **— this being the effect that prayer works upon Torah — so likewise there is the effect of Torah study upon the avodah of prayer, that it becomes elevated to a higher manner.** *The influence runs both ways. A person who comes to the morning's battle out of a life of Torah fights a different battle: the enemy is already half-dissolved by the light he brings in with him, and his "hour of battle" is conducted in the temper of "ways of pleasantness." The warrior prays better for being a student, and studies better for having prayed.*

שיש צורך בענין המלחמה שבעבודת התפלה, הנה על־ידי לימוד התורה, שזוהי העבודה שבדרך מנוחה, נעשית גם עבודת התפלה באופן אחר לגמרי. והינו, דכשם שמעלת העסק בתורה שאחר התפלה הוא גבוה יותר מתורה שקודם התפלה, שזהו מה שהתפלה פועלת על התורה, הנה כמו־כן ישנה גם הפעולה דלימוד התורה על עבודת התפלה שנעשית באופן נעלה יותר.

TWO PATHS OF BIRUR — AND THEIR MEETING IN ELUL

מלחמה

WAR · PRAYER

from below upward — the G-dly soul enters the animal soul and wrestles

"the hour of prayer is the hour of battle" — toil; obligatory at the start of avodah

שלום

PEACE · TORAH

from above downward — "bread from heaven"; G-dliness revealed in the soul

"ways of pleasantness, all its paths peace" — the yetzer nullified of itself

אלול

ELUL — THE ROSE AND THE STUDENTS

13 petals = 13 Attributes of Mercy (prayer) · "do not read shoshanim but shonim" (Torah) — mercy that precedes and awakens

Each path elevates the other: Torah after prayer is higher; prayer joined to Torah is a war of another order — until "He redeemed my soul in peace."

SUMMARY · אות ג

Prayer's war is obligatory only at the start of one's avodah; then two paths open. War: prayer refines from below up — the G-dly soul enters the animal soul and wrestles. Peace: Torah refines from above down — bread from heaven; the yetzer is nullified of itself. Because the peace-path exists, Scripture may call the war-path "optional" — and the parsha ends in that key: rest from all enemies, "redeemed my soul in peace," no sword — even of peace — in the land. And even when war is called for, Torah remakes the war: as prayer elevates the Torah after it, Torah elevates the prayer fought with it.

Elul — the Rose and the Students

BEFORE WE READ

The final section binds the two paths to the month in which the maamar was spoken. Elul's verse — "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine," whose initials spell Elul — continues: "who grazes among the shoshanim." Two readings: the rose of thirteen petals, the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy that shine all Elul — the register of prayer; and "do not read shoshanim but shonim" — those who repeat and study Torah. The Rebbe then sharpens the first reading: Elul's Thirteen Attributes differ from Yom Kippur's. On Yom Kippur, "my Beloved is mine" crowns the finished work of "I am my Beloved's." In Elul, "my Beloved is mine" comes first — an arousal from Above that awakens our arousal from below, exactly the profile of Torah, bread from heaven, from above downward. So even Elul's gift of prayer arrives Torah-flavored — and prayer itself stands higher for it. Hence Elul's practical call: add in Torah, the avodah of rest and peace — above all pnimiyus haTorah, where there is no question and no dispute — and spread the wellsprings outward in ways of peace, until "He redeemed my soul in peace" is complete in the true and final Redemption.

Now, one may connect the foregoing — the two modes of avodah, prayer and Torah — with the theme of the month of Elul *— the turn every one of the Rebbe's maamarim makes: from the mechanics of the sugya to the calendar of the room it is being said in*; **particularly since, as is known, in the Chassidic discourses of Likkutei Torah the topics of Elul are treated already in Parshas Re'eh — how much more so in Parshas Ki Seitzei.** *A quiet argument from the arrangement of the sefer: if the Alter Rebbe was already discussing Elul back in Re'eh, then a parsha read deeper into the month has all the more claim to be read as Elul material.* **The meaning: it is written, "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine" — the initial letters of Elul — "who grazes among the shoshanim."** *The verse whose acronym names the month; and the Rebbe now takes up not the famous opening but the clause that follows it, which is where the two-paths teaching turns out to be hiding.* **And it is known that there are two interpretations of "who grazes among the shoshanim." One interpretation: the rose (shoshanah) has thirteen petals, corresponding to the thirteen measures of mercy — that is, in the month of Elul the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy shine; and this matter belongs, in general, to the avodah of prayer.** *Mercy, pleading, the King approachable in the field — that is prayer's register, and it is the first face of the verse.* **And the second interpretation: do not read "ba-shoshanim" but "ba-shonim" — among those who repeat [and study] Torah.** *One word, re-pointed, and the same verse now says that G-d*

ד) **ויש** לקשר האמור לעיל בענין שני אופני העבודה דתפלה ותורה, עם ענינו של חדש אלול. ובפרט על־פי הידוע שבדרושי החסידות שב'לקוטי תורה', הנה כבר בפרשת "ראה" מדובר אודות עניני חדש אלול, ועל־ אחת־כמה־וכמה בפרשת "כי־תצא". והענין בזה, דהנה כתיב "אני לדודי ודודי לי" (ראשי־תיבות אלול) הרועה בשושנים". וידוע שיש שני פרושים בענין "הרועה בשושנים". פרוש אחד, ששושנה יש בה תליסר עלין כנגד י"ג מכילין דרחמי, והינו, שבחדש אלול מאירות י"ג מדות הרחמים, וענין זה שיך בכללות לעבודת התפלה. ופרוש שני, אל תקרי שושנים אלא ששונים, באותם ששונים בתורה. ויש להוסיף, שבענין התגלות י"ג

pastures among the students. Prayer and Torah, the two protocols of section III, are both written into Elul's own verse.

KEY POINT

Elul: the Rose and the Students

One verse, two readings: the thirteen-petaled rose — the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy shining all Elul (prayer); and "do not read shoshanim but shonim" — those who study (Torah). Elul's mercy comes before our work, to awaken it — mercy in Torah's own signature. Hence Elul's call: add in Torah, especially its inner dimension, where there is no dispute.

And one may add: regarding the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy themselves (the first interpretation of "who grazes among the shoshanim"), there is a great difference between the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes in the month of Elul and their revelation on Yom Kippur. *The same Thirteen shine twice in the season — and the Rebbe's point is that they arrive in opposite directions.* **One of the distinctions: the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes on Yom Kippur is the essence of "my Beloved is mine" that comes after the avodah of "I am my Beloved's"** *— revelation as response: forty days of teshuvah are spent, and then the mercy comes, earned, the second half of the verse answering the first*; **whereas the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes in Elul is a "my Beloved is mine" whose purpose is to awaken the avodah of "I am my Beloved's"** *— revelation as initiative: it comes first, before anything has been done, and its whole function is to start us moving* **— that is, an arousal-from-Above that arouses the arousal-from-below, which is akin to the manner of Torah, which is from above downward, like bread from heaven (as above).** *And with that the sections lock together. Descending unasked, ready-made, producing its effect without being wrestled for — that is precisely the profile of Torah's refinement. Elul's mercy is prayer's substance delivered in Torah's manner: the King comes to the field, and He comes carrying bread.* **It emerges that even the revelation of the Thirteen Attributes of Elul, which belongs to prayer, is in a manner that belongs also to Torah — and therefore prayer itself is thereby of a higher manner (as above, section III).** *The conclusion of §III applied to the month: since Torah elevates the prayer of whoever is still fighting, and Elul's own gift arrives in*

מדות הרחמים (הפרוש הראשון ב"הרועה בשושנים") יש הפרש גדול בין התגלות י"ג מדות הרחמים שבחדש אלול להתגלות י"ג מדות הרחמים שביום הכפורים, ואחד החלוקים הוא, שהתגלות י"ג מדות הרחמים שביום הכפורים הוא עקר ענין "דודי לי" שבא לאחרי העבודה ד"אני לדודי", ואלו התגלות י"ג מדות הרחמים שבחדש אלול הוא ענין "דודי לי" שענינו לעורר את העבודה ד"אני לדודי", דהינו, בחינת אתערותא־דלעי׳לא שמעוררת את האתערותא־דלתתא, שזהו על־ דרך ענין התורה שהיא מלמעלה למטה, כמו לחם מן השמים (כנ"ל). ונמצא, שגם ענין התגלות י"ג מדות הרחמים שבחדש אלול ששיך לענין התפלה, הוא באופן ששיך גם לענין התורה, שלכן הנה גם ענין התפלה הוא באופן נעלה יותר (כנ"ל סעיף ג).

Torah's mode, the davening of this month is davening of another order.

וזהו היתרון דחדש אלול על כל השנה כולה, שמעלתו היא לא רק בענין התפלה (הפרוש הראשון ד"הרועה בשושנים"), אלא גם בענין התורה (הפרוש השני ד"הרועה בשושנים"), שלכן צריך להוסיף יותר בלימוד התורה, שזוהי העבודה שבדרך מנוחה ושלום דוקא, ובפרט על־ידי לימוד פנימיות התורה, רזין ורזין דרזין שבתורה, דלית תמן לא קושיא כו' ולא מחלוקת כו', כולל גם הפצת המעינות חוצה בדרכי שלום, ועל־ידי־זה פועלים אמתית ושלמות הענין ד"פדה בשלום" גו', בגאולה האמתית והשלמה על־ידי משיח צדקנו, שאו יקום היעוד מלאה הארץ דעה את הוי' כמים לים מכסים.

And this is the advantage of the month of Elul over the entire year: its excellence is not only in the matter of prayer (the first interpretation of "who grazes among the shoshanim") but also in the matter of Torah (the second interpretation) *— most of the year Elul is spoken of as the season of teshuvah and supplication; the Rebbe's addition is that its distinction is double, and the second half is usually left unclaimed* **— and therefore one must add more in the study of Torah, which is the avodah in the way of rest and peace precisely** *— and here the whole maamar becomes a practical instruction for the weeks before Rosh Hashanah: add learning. Not instead of the pleading, but as the month's other and quieter lane*; **and particularly through the study of the inner dimension of Torah — the secrets, and the secrets of secrets, of the Torah, where "there is no question... and no dispute"** *— the Raya Mehemna's description of pnimiyus haTorah, and the reason it belongs here: the revealed Torah advances by objection and dispute, which is a form of combat, while the inner Torah is studied by reception. If the point is refinement by peace, the peace-pole of Torah itself is where to stand.* **— including also the spreading of the wellsprings outward in ways of peace.** *Even the outward work carries the same signature: b'darchei shalom, not contention.* **And through this we effect the truth and completeness of "He redeemed my soul in peace..." — in the true and complete Redemption through Moshiach Tzidkeinu, when the promise will be fulfilled: "the earth will be full of the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea."** *The closing image is chosen for its method as much as its content: water covering a seabed does not conquer it. It fills it, completely and without struggle — refinement by peace, at the scale of a world.*

SUMMARY · אות ד

Elul's verse ends "who grazes among the shoshanim": the thirteen-petaled rose = the Thirteen Attributes shining all month (prayer); "do not read shoshanim but shonim" = those who study Torah. And Elul's Thirteen differ from Yom Kippur's: there, revelation follows the work; in Elul it precedes and awakens it — arousal from Above, the very mode of Torah, bread from heaven. So Elul is the month of both paths, its prayer elevated by Torah's manner — hence: add in Torah, especially pnimiyus haTorah where there is no dispute, spread the wellsprings in peace, and complete "He redeemed my soul in peace" in the true and final Redemption — "the earth full of the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea.

Dvar Torah · The Optional War

Here is a strange thing to tell a soldier: your war is optional.

Stranger still when you know which war it is. The Rebbe, following the Alter Rebbe, reads "when you go out to war upon your enemies" as the war every Jew fights at davening — the daily campaign against the pull of appetite, waged with a siddur, since Onkelos long ago translated Yaakov's "sword and bow" as "prayer and supplication." Is there a more obligatory war than that one? The Alter Rebbe says this battle is the purpose the soul came down for — "from a high roof to a deep pit" — and that our seventy years are allotted, to the year, for exactly the sparks we are assigned to raise. And yet Rashi rules, from the verse's own ending, that the Torah here "speaks of an optional war."

The Rebbe's resolution turns the ruling into the deepest encouragement in the maamar. The war is real — but it is not the only way to win. There are two modes of refining the inclination: war, and peace. Prayer is war: the G-dly soul goes down into the animal soul and grapples with it on its own ground. Torah is peace: "bread from heaven," light descending from above until the darkness simply is not there anymore — "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." The battle is called optional because a Jew always has a second front that is not a front at all.

And this, the Rebbe concludes, is the open secret of Elul. The month's verse ends "who grazes among the shoshanim," and the tradition reads it twice: the rose of thirteen petals — the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy shining all month, the register of prayer; and "do not read shoshanim but shonim" — those who study. Elul's mercy arrives before we have earned it, from Above — which is precisely the Torah-mode. The King is in the field, and He has brought bread.

So the practical word for these weeks before Rosh Hashanah is almost disarmingly gentle: add Torah. Learn more — especially the inner Torah, "where there is no question and no dispute" — and share it in ways of peace. Fight your morning war, yes; but fight it as a student of peace, and it becomes a different war. Until the promise of the parsha's last verse and of Dovid's psalm is complete — "He redeemed my soul in peace" — in the true and complete Redemption, when the earth is full of the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea.

The Maamar in Summary

I. The parsha's opening war is the war of prayer: the Zohar calls the hour of prayer the hour of battle, and Onkelos renders Yaakov's "sword and bow" as "prayer and supplication." Its strategy is in the next words — "upon your enemies": engage the enemy at its root Above, where no evil exists (the animal soul stems from the holy chariot — the lion's face, the ox's face) and where it has no hold.

II. Rashi rules this an optional war — "and you shall take its captives" cannot apply to the obligatory war for the Land — and the ending even bends "ki" to mean "if." Yet the altitude-command holds for every war ("they are all as one horse"), and prayer's war is emphatically obligatory: greater than mitzvos, the purpose of the soul's descent from a high roof to a deep pit, the assignment for which its seventy years were precisely allotted — to raise the sparks fallen into the animal soul at the shattering of the vessels. How then "optional"?

III. Because there are two refinements. War: prayer works from below upward — the G-dly soul invests itself in the animal soul and wrestles; hence toil. Peace: Torah works from above downward — "bread from heaven"; G-dliness revealed in the soul, and the yetzer is nullified of itself, "ways of pleasantness, all its paths peace." The war-path is "optional" because the peace-path exists — as the parsha itself ends: "when Hashem your G-d gives you rest from all your enemies"; "He redeemed my soul in peace"; "no sword shall pass through your land — even a sword of peace." And the paths ennoble each other: Torah after prayer is higher, and prayer joined to Torah is a war of another order.

IV. Elul carries both. "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine — who grazes among the shoshanim": the thirteen-petaled rose is the Thirteen Attributes shining all month (prayer); "do not read shoshanim but shonim" — those who study (Torah). And Elul's Thirteen differ from Yom Kippur's: there they crown finished work; in Elul they come first, arousal from Above awakening our arousal from below — the very mode of Torah, bread from heaven. Hence the month's call: add in Torah, especially pnimiyus haTorah where there is no dispute; spread the wellsprings in ways of peace — and complete "He redeemed my soul in peace" in the true and complete Redemption, "the earth full of the knowledge of Hashem as the waters cover the sea."

RESHIMU

TORAH · DEPTH · CRAFT

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