

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
פרשת כי תצא תשכ"ה ד"ה כי תצא בלתי מוגה  
Published for Shabbat Sedra Ki Tetze  
9 Elul 5783, 26 August 2023<sup>1</sup>

## SPIRITUAL WAR AND PEACE

**T**HE SEDRA BEGINS WITH RULES CONCERNING A BATTLE:  
“WHEN YOU GO OUT TO WAR against (lit. ‘over’ or ‘above’) your  
enemies, and you take a captive...”<sup>2</sup>. Rabbi Shneur Zalman in  
Likkutei Torah cites from the Zohar the idea that ‘a time of prayer is a  
time of battle’<sup>3</sup> and interprets this verse as concerning the spiritual battle  
which takes place in prayer.

The battle is with one's own inner power of desire, which inherently seeks physical or material outlets, and the individual in prayer tries to cool its focus on physical pleasure and divert it to focus on love of the Divine. Rabbi Shneur Zalman points out that in this struggle one should be ‘over’ one's antagonist, namely the power of physical desire, which means recognising that this power of desire has a spiritual root above, in the sacred Chariot<sup>4</sup>. There it is good and pure. Through this recognition of the sacred source of the power of Desire it can be diverted to a powerful love of the Divine.

Viewed in this way, this is a very important battle, with great spiritual effect. [The fulfilment of each individual Mitzva has a certain positive transformative effect. But as described here the battle in prayer has general holistic effect, transforming the root power of inappropriate lust<sup>5</sup>.] But if this is the case, the Maamar asks: how does this relate to Rashi's explanation of this verse? Rashi explains the verse in literal and practical terms, it is about the Jewish people

<sup>1</sup> Maamar Ki Tetze 5725 (1965). Printed in Dvar Malchut of Ki Tetze 5776. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Deut.21:10

<sup>3</sup> See Zohar III 243a (Raya Mehemna).

<sup>4</sup> The ‘Animal’ aspect of the Angels in Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot (Ezek. ch.1) is the source of the individual's Animal Soul

<sup>5</sup> See Likkutei Torah Balak 70d ff.

going to war. The Sages define the wars in ancient Israel as either ‘Compulsory’ or ‘Optional’. In a compulsory war, such as the war of conquest of the Land of Israel, captives could not be taken<sup>6</sup>. Since the verse speaks of taking a captive, this must be an optional war. In fact, one should really translate the verse “If you go out to war...” rather than “when you go out”, because it is optional.

But how can the battle of prayer be considered optional? The process which Rabbi Shneur Zalman describes in Likkutei Torah is that during prayer one connects one’s Animal Soul, with its power of intense love originating in the spiritual element Fire, with its source in the [face of the Lion] in the Sacred Chariot<sup>7</sup>. The Evil Inclination is also a flaming fire, so what is taking place during prayer is the attempt to dissolve the impure fire of one’s desire in the sacred fire of Love from the supernal Chariot.

This happens daily, because every day a person’s Evil Inclination tries to take power over him, but the service of prayer neutralises this attempt and connects the Animal Soul to its sacred source. Through this process one’s Animal Soul is gradually transformed, which is really the goal of one’s existence in this world.

Clearly this is something very significant. So how can it be described as ‘optional’?

The Discourse explains that at the beginning of one’s spiritual service, indeed this is not optional. One has to strive to direct the passion of one’s Animal Soul to G-d. But when has made some progress in this direction, there is a further possibility.

For there are two ways to purify one’s Evil Inclination: by means of war, or by means of peace.

The service of prayer is the method of ‘war’, as described above, and the service of Torah study is that of peace: for of Torah it says, ‘her ways are pleasant and all her paths are peace’<sup>8</sup>. While in prayer one is reaching upwards in order to connect one’s soul with the Divine, in Torah study one is drawing G-dliness downwards into one’s soul, which is thereby transformed without effort.

For this reason the battle is ‘optional’, as Rashi says. Indeed the two kinds of service connect together: the study of Torah after one has prayed in a meaningful way is enhanced because of the prayer, and also study of Torah

---

<sup>6</sup> Ideally the opponents would accept the Seven Noachide Laws and the rule of the Jewish people, otherwise they would be killed. But captives could not be taken.

<sup>7</sup> This is the vision of the Chariot described in Ezekiel ch.1, an important topic in Jewish mystical thought.

<sup>8</sup> Prov.3:17.

before prayer [such as Chassidic teachings] has a positive effect on one's prayer, enabling one to reach a higher spiritual level...

This links with the service of the month of Elul, which relates to the verse<sup>9</sup> 'I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me' which in Hebrew אני לדודי ודודי לי has the initial letters of Elul אלול. The verse continues 'who is standing among the lilies (*shoshanim*).'

There are two ways of interpreting this. The Lily is described as a flower with thirteen petals, representing the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy<sup>10</sup>, revealed in the month of Elul. This aspect particularly relates to prayer. But another way of interpreting this word is as *sheshonim*, 'who study [Torah]'<sup>11</sup>. This is the second path, of Torah study.

Hence Elul provides a profound spiritual opportunity to feel an intense closeness to the Divine, not only in terms of prayer, but also in terms of Torah study, a service which is in a manner of peace. Especially through studying the inner dimension of Torah, and spreading its wellsprings in a way of peace, which leads to being redeemed in peace<sup>12</sup> in the ultimate redemption, when the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea...<sup>13</sup>

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

---

<sup>9</sup> Song of Songs 6:3

<sup>10</sup> See Zohar I 1a.

<sup>11</sup> Shabbat 30b, Zohar II 274a

<sup>12</sup> See Ps. 55:19

<sup>13</sup> Is.11:9