

# The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל  
ד"ה לא תחרוש בשור ובחמור ה'תשכ"ז בלתי מוגה

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## OXEN AND DONKEYS IN SPIRITUAL TERMS

**T**HE SEDRA INCLUDES THE LAW THAT ONE SHOULD NOT PLOW WITH AN OX AND A DONKEY harnessed together<sup>2</sup>. This is part of a list of forbidden mixtures: not to wear clothes which include wool and linen (Shatnez), nor to sow mixed seeds, such as wheat in a vineyard. But every word of Torah has further levels of meaning.

A Maamar of the MahaRaSh<sup>3</sup>, said in 1867, quotes the following from the Midrash<sup>4</sup>. When Shechem the son of Hamor seduced Jacob's daughter Dinah<sup>5</sup>, his father Hamor (which means 'donkey') had a discussion with Jacob. 'Your grandfather Abraham was a Nasi, Prince, and I am a Nasi' he said, meaning that the match between his son and Dina is appropriate. But Jacob responded: my grandfather Abraham was not called a Nasi, but he was called an Ox, as it says 'and Abraham ran to the oxen'<sup>6</sup>, and 'there is much produce in the power of an ox'<sup>7</sup>. He is an ox, and you are a hamor, donkey, and it says (in our Sedra) 'do not plough with an ox and a donkey together'.

The MahaRaSh explains that here the Ox represents holiness, Chesed, Love<sup>8</sup>, while the Donkey (Hamor) represents the impure refuse of Chesed<sup>9</sup>, which seeks to

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<sup>1</sup> Maamar *Lo Tachrosh Beshor Uvachamor, Ki Teitzei 5727* (1967), published in *Dvar Malchus Ki Teitzei 5774*. The Hebrew text was not edited by the Rebbe.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 22:10.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn (1884-1832), 4<sup>th</sup> Lubavitcher Rebbe. See his *Sefer HaMaamarim 5627*, p.398 ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Tanchuma Vayishlach 7*.

<sup>5</sup> See Gen.ch.34 for the full account of this incident.

<sup>6</sup> Gen.18:7.

<sup>7</sup> Prov.14:4.

<sup>8</sup> The discourse mentions that the Ox actually represents Chesed of Gevurah, the attribute Love in the attribute Severity (for each divine attribute includes all the others). As we see below, the Ox is on the left side in Ezekiel's vision of the Merkavah, ie it signifies Severity.

<sup>9</sup> Sacred Love, as in marriage, is aped by the false 'love' expressed in immoral behaviour.

cleave to sacred Chesed, represented by Dinah. The sons of Jacob told Hamor and his people that they must be circumcised, which would remove the husk of impure Chesed. Hamor thought this would permit his son to marry Dinah, but in fact he was being tricked by the children of Jacob (for the transformation of the impure realm takes place through trickery). The spiritual effect of the circumcision was not to prepare him to bond with holiness, but rather to separate him entirely from holiness so that he would no longer seek to draw energy from sacred Chesed. The effect of this would be that his son would not desire Dinah any more<sup>10</sup>.

Another way of understanding the Ox and the Donkey, says the MahaRash, is that both are from the impure realm. The Ox expresses impure Severity and the Donkey expresses impure Kindness or Love, and one may not blend these two forces together. Hence the law prohibits harnessing the two animals together. If one does, in spiritual terms a Dog emerges from their union, as is expressed through the numerical value (gematria) of these words<sup>11</sup>. Again, the idea of Hamor and his people being circumcised, is to remove this dimension of impurity.

What does all this mean in the personal service of the individual? The Talmud tells us of a Sage who always referred to his Ox as his ‘field’<sup>12</sup>. The Ox/Field represents the Animal Soul – hence it is represented by the ‘Face of the Ox on the Left’ in the vision of the Merkavah<sup>13</sup>. The sacred Divine Soul is ‘sown’ into the field of the Animal Soul, like a seed which will then flourish<sup>14</sup>.

Before the planting, there has to be ploughing, which is like the battle of the Good Desire against the Evil Desire, breaking down the resistance of the Animal Soul. This is the ‘left hand, which pushes away’ [after which the right hand draws near]<sup>15</sup>. The power of the left hand itself comes from the left side, Gevurah (Severity), the source of the Ox. Thus one ‘ploughs’ the field of one’s physicality and one’s animal soul, breaking the hard clods into smaller pieces, which can feel humility before G-d.

Or, considering a further explanation by the MahaRaSh<sup>16</sup>, one can consider the ‘field’ as pertaining to the Divine Soul, in which one seeks to promote the quality of selflessness, *bitul*, to a level which is even higher than its natural thirst for G-dliness<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The discourse does not discuss the fact that the Children of Jacob then put to death the men of the city of Shechem, while they were weak after their circumcision. One could say that whether or not Hamor’s son Shechem continued to desire Dinah, an act of inappropriate seduction or rape had taken place, without any protest by the other inhabitants of the city. Hence they were put to death by Dinah’s brothers.

<sup>11</sup> The two middle letters of Hamor חמור and the middle letter of Shor (Ox) שׁוֹר, add up to 52, which is the gematria of dog, כלב. The initial letters of Hamor, Shor, Kelev spell חשך, darkness.

<sup>12</sup> Shabbat 118b.

<sup>13</sup> See Ezekiel ch.1.

<sup>14</sup> See the discourse ‘Those who came [the Jewish people entering Egypt] were planted as Jacob, and then flourished as Israel’, Torah Or, Shemot, 53c.

<sup>15</sup> Song of Songs 2:6

<sup>16</sup> Sefer HaMaamarim 5627 p. 401 ff.

<sup>17</sup> The Divine Soul can seek to promote its own satisfaction by experiencing the Divine, or it can aspire on a higher level to fulfil the Divine Will and purpose, beyond its own spiritual cravings. See Tanya I Ch.10.

Both these aspects relate to the Ox. Then comes the Donkey, which unlike the Ox, is an impure (non-kosher) animal, which, according to the Sages, by nature is cold<sup>18</sup>, while an ox is full of vigour. Which implies that the person has to work against this impure coldness in his or her self.

Both these explanations follow the first interpretation by the MahaRaSh of the Ox and Donkey, based on the Midrash. Now let us consider his second interpretation, that both the Ox and the Donkey are impure. How does this apply to the service of the individual?

In this case, the Ox is the 'violent ox'<sup>19</sup> (Shor ha-Muad) which causes damage for no purpose and without gain. While a Jew by nature should not have this quality, he might G-d forbid accustom himself to behave in this way. Such a person must endeavour to transform and purify these qualities of his or her inner being.

Thus indeed, Abraham is called 'Ox', for he achieves the service of the Ox of holiness, and also transforms to holiness the negative Ox and even the Donkey of impurity. Abraham attained this power of transformation through his being circumcised. At the same time his name was changed from Avram to Avraham, and this new name has the gematria 248, which is the same as the letters of Hamor (without the Vav). This leads to Jacob being able to say to Esau 'I have oxen and donkeys'<sup>20</sup>, which have all been transformed to holiness.

This relates to the service in the month of Elul: the Ox, on the left, Severity, relates to the atmosphere of Awe in the month of Elul, and especially from Rosh Hashana till Yom Kippur. This also relates to the concept of circumcision, for one of the acronyms of the word Elul is included in the verse<sup>21</sup> ומל ה' אלקיך את

לבבך ואת לבב זרעך 'G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of your children', which is a higher form of circumcision, coming from above, after the individual has tried his or her best to circumcise their own heart. This circumcision in the month of Elul is the revelation of the Divine, transforming the impure 'donkey' within, and helping and empowering each person to come closer to G-d.

This is expressed in the verse<sup>22</sup> 'I am to my Beloved', and 'my Beloved is to me' a verse which ends with 4 letters Yud, each having the numerical value 10, making 40, the 40 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul till Yom Kippur, and this revelation and empowerment includes all the positive flow of energy from the Divine for the entire year, in all aspects of life.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

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<sup>18</sup> 'Even in the Summer a donkey is cold' (Shab.53a).

<sup>19</sup> See Ex.21:29.

<sup>20</sup> Gen.32:5.

<sup>21</sup> Deut. 30:6

<sup>22</sup> Song of Songs 6:3