

Parsha Perspectives FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Ki Seitzei for your Shabbos Table by Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

Delivered on Tuesday, 7 Elul, 5784/September 10, 2024

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DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Elul – A Time for Transformation

We are all familiar with the famous allusion to the month of Elul in the *pasuk* in Shir Hashirim (6:3), אני לדודי ודודי לי ("I am for my beloved, and my beloved is for me"), as the first letters of these words spell אלול. But a lesser known aspect of this allusion is that these four words all end with the letter ם, which in *gematria* equals 10. Together, then, these four words are associated with the number 40 (10 X 4), alluding to the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul through Yom Kippur, the days that comprise the season of *teshuva* (repentance).

The number 40 is associated with transformation. *Chazal* conveyed a tradition that a fetus is formed during the forty-day period after conception; this is the amount of time needed for a fertilized egg to become a human being. The flood in Noach's time occurred over the course of 40 days – because this event was the "hard reset" that the world needed, the process whereby the earth was "rebooted" so it could start anew. Moshe received the Torah from God over the course of forty days, because the Torah would transform the world, elevating mankind to a new level.

The forty-day period of Elul and the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* (Ten Days of Repentance) offers us the precious opportunity to transform, to recreate ourselves, to change. This time is especially earmarked for growth, and is when we receive Hashem's special assistance to grow.

We all know that the eastward flight from the U.S. to Israel is shorter than the westward flight from Israel to the U.S. This is because of the tailwinds which push the plane as it travels eastward, enabling it to travel more rapidly, and which make the plane work harder as it flies westward against the winds. During Elul, we have "tailwinds" pushing us in the direction of *teshuva*. This is the time when Hashem lends us a hand, so-to-speak, helping us along our journey of growth. This is a special opportunity which we must seize, a chance to truly transform ourselves and become the people who we want to be and are supposed to be.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

Being Prepared to Fight

כי תצא למלחמה על אויביך ונתנו ה' אלוקיך בידך ושבית שבי.
"When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem

your God delivers them into your hands, and you takes captives from them..."

The Torah here addresses the situation of warfare, and outlines the procedure to be followed when a soldier desires a captive woman. However, many commentators explained that these *pesukim* allude also to the battle that each and every one of us wage, the war that rages within ourselves, every day of our lives. The human being is comprised of two elements, which struggle bitterly against one another. We are, on the one hand, animals, with the same instincts as other mammals. This element of our beings is selfish and egotistical, and seeks to wantonly indulge in physical pleasures. But we also possess a sacred, pristine soul, a חלק ממעל – a "piece" of Hashem Himself. This is the part of us that reaches higher, that seeks spirituality, and desires meaning and purpose in life. This is the component that leads us to follow lofty ideals, and to serve God. These two elements of the human being are in a constant state of war. The precise nature of this war will change with time, and assume different forms at different stages of life, but there is not a day in our lives when this war is not raging within us.

The *Degel Machaneh Efrayim* explains the opening *pasuk* of Parshas Ki-Seitzei as promising that כי תצא למלחמה על אויביך – if we go out to fight this war, then ונתנו ה' אלוקיך בידך – Hashem will guarantee our victory. The condition for earning Hashem's assistance is כי תצא למלחמה – that we are willing to fight. We need to accept that spiritual achievement entails a battle, a real struggle, and we need to be prepared to wage this struggle. We need to tell ourselves with firm determination that we do not accept ourselves the way we are, and we are going to take steps to make ourselves better, even though this will be difficult. If we are brave, courageous, determined and ready to work hard and struggle, then ונתנו ה' אלוקיך בידך – Hashem assures the success of our efforts.

The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabba* 5:2) teaches that Hashem tells each and every one of us:

פתחו לי פתח אחד של תשובה, כחודרה של מחט, ואני פותח לכם פתחים שיהיו עגלות וקרניות נכנסות בו.

Open for Me a single opening of repentance, like the point of a needle, and I will then open for you openings that wagons and carriages can pass through.

If we take the first small step, and commit ourselves to wage

the battle of *teshuva*, then Hashem will help us and grant us success.

Today, we have grown accustomed to shortcuts, to apps and AI programs that can do things for us. But there is no “app,” no shortcuts, to spiritual growth. For the חלק אלוך ממעל within us to triumph over our animal instincts, we need to go out to war and be prepared to wage a valiant fight against our sinful impulses. If we do, then we are guaranteed to win this war.

Fighting Our Own Unique Battles

כי תצא למלחמה על אויבך.

“When you go out to war against your enemies.”

It is noteworthy that this *pasuk* is written in the singular form, implying that it addresses each person individually. The Torah here is indicating that we must each wage our personal battles, and not other people’s battles. Each of us is struggling with something else. Things that come easily to us are a challenge for our fellow, and things which we find challenging come easily to him. No two people are precisely alike, and no two people have the same moral and religious struggles. In order to achieve victory in the battle within ourselves, we need to focus on our individual weaknesses and challenges, instead of waging other people’s battles. Our journey is not going to be identical to anyone else’s journey, and so we cannot just copy other people. We need to focus our attention on our own struggles, and wage the unique battles that we each need to wage.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

Not Forbidden, But Impermissible

Parshas Ki-Seitzei begins with laws relevant to warfare, and Rashi comments, במלחמת הרשות הכתוב מדבר – the Torah here addresses the situation of a מלחמת הרשות, an “optional war,” a war which the nation is allowed to wage, but is not obligatory.

The Rachmastivka Rebbe, in *Amaros Tehoros*, writes that if, indeed, this section speaks of a מלחמת הרשות, then it alludes also to the מלחמת הרשות which we all wage – meaning, our struggles within the realm of רשות, the realm of technically permissible behavior.

The Ramban famously explains the imperative of קדושים תהיו (“You shall be sacred” – Vayikra 19:2) as commanding us to refrain from what the Ramban calls נבל ברשות התורה – acting wrongly with the Torah’s permission. A person can violate this command, acting in an entirely unholy manner, despite not technically transgressing any halachic principles. A modern-day example might be a person who spends his entire Sunday watching football. He does not open a *sefer*, he does not spend time with his family, and doesn’t do anything constructive, but simply sits on the couch watching the pregame, the game, the postgame, and then the next pregame, game and postgame. For some eight or ten hours, he is on the couch in front of the television, eating chips and drinking beer.

This fellow did not transgress any particular Torah prohibition. All the food and beverages were certified kosher by the most renowned kashrus agencies. He recited *berachos* properly before and after he ate and drank. Nothing that showed up on the television screen

was forbidden to be viewed. But he is considered נבל ברשות – sinning within the boundaries of that which the Torah allows. Nothing he did was forbidden, but such behavior is entirely impermissible. We are not given days off from work to spend them this way. Certainly, we are entitled to spend time relaxing and enjoying. However, this does not allow us to waste an entire day, or to wantonly indulge, even in kosher food products. We are to conduct ourselves with a level of *kedusha*, with dignity and self-respect, as befitting Hashem’s treasured nation.

This is the מלחמת הרשות of which the Torah speaks. We are to struggle not only to refrain from illicit behavior, from conduct that violates specific Torah prohibitions, but also from unbecoming, gluttonous, wasteful and undignified behavior, that undermines the pursuit of holiness and Godliness that ought to characterize the life of a Jew.

We See Things for a Reason

לא תראה את שור אחיך או את שיו נדחים והתעלמת מהם.

“Do not see your brother’s ox or sheep wandering lost and ignore them” (22:1).

The Torah commands us not to ignore a lost object – such as an animal – belonging to our fellow, and to instead go through the trouble of taking it and bringing it to its owner, a *mitzva* famously known as השבת אבידה.

The *Ba’al Shem Tov* observes that the Torah formulates this command by focusing on the element of seeing – לא תראה. The Torah here tells us that we may not ignore that which we see. If we see somebody’s lost object, then we have an obligation to return it to him, and to not just move on as though nothing happened.

The *Ba’al Shem Tov* explained that every time we see something, there is a reason why Hashem had us see it. When we see somebody in distress, this was shown to us for a purpose, so that we do what we can to lend assistance. When we see a situation where there is a need, this is because we are expected to intervene, to get involved, to make a difference. As the Torah commands here in this context, 22:3 (לא תוכל להתעלם) – we do not have the right to just ignore what we see.

The *Ba’al Shem Tov* applied this concept also to situations where we see people acting wrongly. Our instinct when observing people’s failings is to look at them condescendingly, to wag our finger, to feel superior and proud. But the *Ba’al Shem Tov* taught that if Hashem had us see somebody committing a sin, this is for the purpose of introspecting, so that we examine if perhaps we ourselves are guilty of some similar wrongdoing. If we hear people speaking *lashon ha’ra*, this is an opportunity to check whether we are as careful as we should be with the way we talk. When we see *chilul Shabbos*, we are to respond by thinking about our own Shabbos observance, whether or not we conduct ourselves as we should on this special day and take full advantage of the *kedusha* it offers us. Rather than criticize and complain about other people, we should direct our attention inward, to our own behavior – because it is for this reason that Hashem had us see what we saw.