

Discourse 65

*“Ki Teitzei LaMilchama Al Oyvecha -
When you go out to war over your enemies”*

Shabbat Parshat Ki-Teitzei,
14th of Elul, 5725
By the grace of *HaShem*, blessed is He,

1.

The verse states,¹⁴⁴¹ “When you go out to war over your enemies etc.” The Alter Rebbe explains in Likkutei Torah,¹⁴⁴² (and it also is explained in the Chassidic discourses of the Mittler Rebbe,¹⁴⁴³ and in the Chassidic discourses of the Tzemach Tzedek and in his glosses,¹⁴⁴⁴ as well as in the Chassidic discourses of our Rebbe and Leaders who followed after them),¹⁴⁴⁵ that it states in Zohar,¹⁴⁴⁶ “The time of prayer is a time of battle.” He also brings¹⁴⁴⁷ the verse that states,¹⁴⁴⁸ “That I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow,” which Onkelos translated as, “With my prayer

¹⁴⁴¹ Deuteronomy 21:10

¹⁴⁴² Likkutei Torah, beginning of the first and second discourse entitled “*Ki Teitzei*” (34c, 35c).

¹⁴⁴³ See Maamarei Admor HaEmtza’ee, Ki Teitzei p. 481 and on.

¹⁴⁴⁴ See Ohr HaTorah, Ki Teitzei, p. 870 and on; p. 882.

¹⁴⁴⁵ See Sefer HaMaamarim 5629 p. 282 and on.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Cited to Zohar in Likkutei Torah *ibid.*, and elsewhere. See Zohar III 243a (Ra’aya Mehemna)

¹⁴⁴⁷ See the beginning of the first discourse entitled Ki Teitzei [in Likkutei Torah *ibid.*] (34c).

¹⁴⁴⁸ Genesis 48:22

and with my supplication.” In other words, when the verse states, “When you go out to war against your enemies,” it refers to the war that takes place in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer.

The Alter Rebbe adds and explains the continuation of the verse, “(When you go out to war) over your enemies,”¹⁴⁴⁹ that the meaning of going out to this war, is to overpower the power of the lust (*Ko'ach HaMit'aveh*) in his soul, causing it to become cold [and indifferent] to the pleasures of this physical world, and transforming it to love of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He.

This should be in a way that is “**over** your enemies-*Al Oyvecha*-על אויבך,” meaning the aspect of their root Above, being that “no evil descends from Above,”¹⁴⁵⁰ and their root is good, being it is from the aspect of the Supernal Chariot (*Merkavah*), which is on the side of holiness etc. He thus continues and explains¹⁴⁵¹ that “over your enemies-*Al Oyvecha*-על אויבך” means “**higher** than your enemies,” in which the enemy below has no dominion or hold etc.

2.

Now, we must better understand how the explanation of the Alter Rebbe is aligned to the explanation of Rashi, that “the

¹⁴⁴⁹ Likkutei Torah, Ki Teitzei ibid. 35b

¹⁴⁵⁰ See Midrash Bereishit Rabba 51:3; Ginat Egoz of Rabbi Yosef Gikatilla, translated as *HaShem Is One*, Vol. 1, The Gate of Intrinsic Being (*Shaar HaHavayah*); Shnei Luchot HaBrit 106b, and elsewhere; Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 11.

¹⁴⁵¹ Likkutei Torah, Ki Teitzei ibid. 36a

Torah is speaking of an optional war.”¹⁴⁵² To preface, Rashi’s proof that Torah is speaking of an optional war, is from the fact that it states, “and you will capture his captives,” being that about the war [to conquer] the Land of Israel, it does not say “and you will capture his captives” being that it already stated,¹⁴⁵³ “You shall not allow any person to live.”

However, in regard to the words, “When you go out to war (you then shall be) over your enemies,” we can also explain this according to the simple meaning of the text,¹⁴⁵⁴ that it is not just discussing an optional war, but even an obligatory war. In other words, the verse is coming to explain (not only the law regarding “and you will capture his captives” which is at the end of the verse, but also) that the going out to war must be in a way that is “over your enemies-*Al Oyvecha*-על אויביך,” by which there will be victory in the war.

This is like what is stated in the Torah portion that precedes this,¹⁴⁵⁵ “When you go out to war... and you see horse and chariot – a people more numerous than you – you shall not fear them etc.” In other words, the substance of this verse is the command not to fear them, being that “in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed is He, they all are like a single horse,” as Rashi points out about the statement of the verse, “horse-*Soos*-סוס” and “chariot-*Rechev*-רכב” in the singular.

¹⁴⁵² Also see Likkutei Sichot Vol. 14 p. 84 and on (from this discourse).

¹⁴⁵³ Deuteronomy 20:16

¹⁴⁵⁴ Even though this is not explained thus in Rashi – as in what it is known, that the Rashbam said (at the beginning of the Torah portion of Vayeishev [Genesis 37:2]) in the name of Rashi (his grandfather), that “if he had the opportunity, he would compose additional commentaries on the simple meaning that are newly introduced each day.”

¹⁴⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 20:1

The same can be explained about the words here, “When you go out to war over (*Al-על*) your enemies,” That the commandment is that going out to war should be “over (*Al-על*) your enemies,” meaning, to contemplate the enemy as he exists in his root and source etc., (similar to Rashi’s explanation of “and you see a horse and chariot,” in that this is as they are in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed is He). Through this, fear of [the enemy] is nullified, and it becomes much easier to be victorious over him. It thus is understood that this also applies to an obligatory war, and it follows automatically that this also applies to the spiritual war [that takes place] in the service of *HaShem-יהו"ה*, blessed is He, of prayer.

However, since the conclusion of the verse, “and you capture his captives,” (is unrelated to a war for [the conquest of] the Land of Israel), it also modifies the simple meaning of the [first half of the verse], “**When** (*Ki-כי*) you go out to war,” to mean “**If** (*Ki-כי*) you go out to war,” being that “the verse is discussing an **optional** war. ” It thus is not understood how this fits with the explanation of the Alter Rebbe, that it refers to the war that takes place while serving *HaShem-יהו"ה*, blessed is He, in prayer, being that this war is not optional, but is obligatory.¹⁴⁵⁶ On the contrary, it is the greatest obligation (even greater than the obligation to fulfill the *mitzvo*t).¹⁴⁵⁷

This is also understood from what the Alter Rebbe explains,¹⁴⁵⁸ that the matter of prayer is that each person must

¹⁴⁵⁶ As asked in Ohr HaTorah, Shoftim (p. 864) regarding the war (mentioned in Deuteronomy 20:1) citing the discourse entitled “*Ki Teitzei L’Milchamah*.”

¹⁴⁵⁷ See Likkutei Torah, Balak 70d and on.

¹⁴⁵⁸ See the beginning of the first discourse entitled *Ki Teitzei* [in Likkutei Torah *ibid.*] (34c).

offer his animalistic soul in sacrifice, thus elevating and binding it to its root, which also is of the foundational element of fire, [elevating it] to the source from where it was hewn and its foundation in the holy heights in the Supernal Chariot (*Merkavah*), in the face of the lion and the face of the ox etc.

Except that after its descent, chaining down, and manifestation in the seventy ministering angels, from the waste product of the *Ophanim* angels, there is a drawing down of worldly pleasures and the power of lust (*Ko'ach HaMitaveh*), which also is the aspect of the heat of fire, as well as the evil inclination, which is an alien fire that is kindled. [Therefore] one must elevate his animalistic soul to its root in the aspect of the upper fire etc.

He continues and explains that every day a person's inclination overpowers him, and it [therefore] is necessary to draw down the aspect of the upper fire every day. This is because the verse states,¹⁴⁵⁹ "Though they will be fashioned through many days," in that there is a limited number allotted to the years of one's life, [as the verse states],¹⁴⁶⁰ "The days of our years amongst them are seventy years etc.," which were not given to the Godly soul within him. This is because, in and of itself, the Godly soul requires no repair etc.¹⁴⁶¹

Rather, the number [of days] in a person's life were given in order [for the Godly soul] to manifest in his animalistic soul, and the years are allotted to him according to the number estimated by His wisdom, blessed is He, to be capable of

¹⁴⁵⁹ Psalms 139:16

¹⁴⁶⁰ Psalms 90:10

¹⁴⁶¹ Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, Ch. 37 (48b)

engaging with his soul and elevate the various powers and sparks that fell during the shattering of the vessels (*Shevirat HaKeilim*) etc., (as explained at great length in Chassidic discourses). Based on this, we find that the battle in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer, is a primary matter, such that it is the ultimate purpose for the entire descent of the soul into the body, "from a high peak to a deep pit."¹⁴⁶² This being so, how can it be said that "the Torah is speaking about an optional war?"

3.

However, the explanation is that even according to the Alter Rebbe, that when it states, "When (*Ki*-כי) you go out to war," it refers to the war that takes place during serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer, it [still] can be explained as in Rashi's explanation, that [the word "*Ki*-כי"] means "if-*Eem*-אם," meaning that it is optional. This is because when it is stated that service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer, is an obligatory battle for every Jew, this only is at the beginning of one's service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He. However, after this, there are two possible ways of serving Him, through [the study of] Torah or through prayer.

That is, it is explained in various places¹⁴⁶³ that there are two ways to refine the evil inclination, by a way of war or by

¹⁴⁶² See Talmud Bavli, Chagigaah 5b

¹⁴⁶³ Torah Ohr, Bereishit 5d and on; Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar 3d and on, and elsewhere.

way of peace. In general,¹⁴⁶⁴ this is the difference¹⁴⁶⁵ between serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer, which is “a time of war,” and serving Him through the study of Torah, [about which the verse states],¹⁴⁶⁶ “Its ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all its pathways are peace.”

In other words, service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer, is the matter of refining the evil inclination from below to Above, through the one affecting the refinement (the Godly soul) manifesting within the one being refined (the animal soul). It therefore is in a way of battle and toil. In contrast, the refinement brought about through [the study of] Torah is from Above to below and is automatic (as known that Torah is called “bread from heaven”).¹⁴⁶⁷ That is, through the study of Torah a person draws down and reveals Godliness in his soul, and the evil inclination thereby becomes nullified (and refined) automatically.

Based on this, it is understood that the refinement of the evil inclination through war (this being the matter of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer), is called an optional

¹⁴⁶⁴ More specifically – within Torah there also is the Tree of Life and the Tree of good and evil (see Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 26) or the Talmud Yerushalmi and the Talmud Bavli (Shaarei Orah [of the Mittler Rebbe] 24a); Also see Taamei HaMitzvot of the Arizal, Va'etchanan, and Shaar HaMitzvot Va'etchanan, regarding the Arizal's way of studying *Halachah* in order to break the external husk (*Kelipah*) etc. and this likewise is so in prayer, that there are the prayers of the mundane days of the week and the prayers of Shabbat, [about which it states (Isaiah 58:13)], “You shall call Shabbat a delight.” (See Torah Ohr, Beshalach 65c).

¹⁴⁶⁵ See at length in the discourse entitled “*Tanu Rabbanan Ner Chanukah*” 5659 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5659 p. 160 and on); “*Vayomer Moshe*” 5704 (Sefer HaMaamarim 5704 p. 105 and on).

¹⁴⁶⁶ Proverbs 3:17

¹⁴⁶⁷ Shnei Luchot HaBrit, Mesechet Pesachim 165b

war. For, there is also a way of refinement in tranquility, by serving Him through the study of Torah.

This is also the meaning of the statement at the conclusion of the Torah portion,¹⁴⁶⁸ “It shall be that when *HaShem*-יהו"ה your God gives you rest from all your enemies etc.,” in which case there is no need for the matter of war, as the verse states,¹⁴⁶⁹ “He redeemed my soul **in peace** from battles against me etc.,” and it is written,¹⁴⁷⁰ “A sword will not cross your land,” including a sword of peace.¹⁴⁷¹ It is then that service of Him is in a way of tranquility, this being the matter of serving Him through the study of Torah.

Moreover, even when we are in a state and standing that war in serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה in prayer is necessary, nonetheless, through studying Torah, which is service in a way of tranquility, serving Him in prayer is also affected to be entirely different. That is, just as Torah study after prayer is superior to Torah study before prayer,¹⁴⁷² which is the effect that prayer has on the [study of] Torah, the same is so that the study of Torah has an effect on prayer, in that it comes to be in a much higher way.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Deuteronomy 25:19

¹⁴⁶⁹ Psalms 55:19

¹⁴⁷⁰ Leviticus 26:6

¹⁴⁷¹ Talmud Bavli, Taanit 22b; See Sefer HaMaamarim 5659 p. 152 and on; 5704 p. 83; p. 106 and on.

¹⁴⁷² Likkutei Torah, Zot HaBrachah 96b

Now, what we stated above about the two ways of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, through prayer and through Torah study, can be connected to the matter of the month of Elul. This is especially so considering what is known about the teachings of Chassidus in Likkutei Torah, that in the Torah portion of Re'eh [the Alter Rebbe] already [begins] discussing matters of the month of Elul, and how much more so in the Torah portion of Ki Teitzei.

The explanation of this is that the verse states,¹⁴⁷³ "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine-*Ani LeDodi v'Dodi Lee*-אני לדודי ודודי לי-*Lee*" (which forms the acronym "Elul-אלול"),¹⁴⁷⁴ He grazes amongst the roses." As known, there are two explanations of, "He grazes amongst the roses-*HaRo'eh BaShoshanim*-הרועה בשושנים."¹⁴⁷⁵

The first is that a rose has thirteen petals, corresponding to the thirteen attributes of mercy.¹⁴⁷⁶ That is, during the month of Elul there is an illumination of the thirteen attributes of mercy,¹⁴⁷⁷ this matter being related to the general service of *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, in prayer. The second explanation is, "Do not only read it as 'roses-*Shoshanim*-שושנים,' but read it

¹⁴⁷³ Song of Songs 6:3

¹⁴⁷⁴ See Abudraham, Seder Rosh HaShanah uPirusha, Ch. 1; Reishit Chochmah, Shaar HaTeshuvah Ch. 4 (115b); Pri Etz Chayim, Shaar Rosh HaShanah, Ch. 1; Shaar HaPesukim to Song of Songs 6:3; Ba"Ch to Tur, Orach Chayim, 681 (section beginning "v'He'everoo"); Likkutei Sichot Vol. 29 p. 272 and on.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Brought in the discourse "*Ani LeDodi*" in Likkutei Torah, Re'eh (32d and on).

¹⁴⁷⁶ See Zohar I 1a

¹⁴⁷⁷ Likkutei Torah ibid. 32a

as ‘They study-*Sheshonim*-ששונים’,¹⁴⁷⁸ meaning amongst those who study Torah.¹⁴⁷⁹

Now, we should add that in regard to the revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy (the first explanation of “He grazes amongst the roses”) there is a big difference between the revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy during the month of Elul, and the revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy on Yom HaKippurim.¹⁴⁸⁰

One of the differences is that the revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy on Yom HaKippurim is primarily in the matter of “My Beloved is to me (*Dodi Lee*-לִי דוּדִי)” which comes after serving Him in a way of “I am my Beloved’s (*Ani LeDodi*-אֲנִי לְדוּדִי-).” In contrast, the revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy during the month of Elul is the matter of “My Beloved is to me (*Dodi Lee*-לִי דוּדִי)” the matter of which is to awaken service of Him in a way of “I am my Beloved’s (*Ani LeDodi*-אֲנִי לְדוּדִי-).” That is, the arousal from Above awakens the arousal from below. This is like the matter of Torah, which is from Above to below, like “bread from heaven” (as mentioned above).

We thus find that even in the revelation of the thirteen attributes of mercy that takes place in the month of Elul, which relates to prayer, it is in a way that also relates to Torah, which is why even the matter of prayer is in a higher and more elevated way (as explained in chapter three).

¹⁴⁷⁸ Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 30b; Zohar II 274a

¹⁴⁷⁹ Zohar II ibid. 20b

¹⁴⁸⁰ See Likkutei Torah ibid. 34b; Ohr HaTorah, Shir HaShirim, Vol. 3, p. 827.

This then, is the advantage of the month of Elul over and above the rest of the year. That is, its advantage is not just regarding prayer, (the first explanation of “He grazes amongst the roses”) but is also in regard to Torah, (the second explanation of “He grazes amongst the roses”). It therefore is necessary to increase in Torah study, this being the way of serving *HaShem*-יהו"ה, blessed is He, specifically in a way of peace and tranquility.

This is especially so of the study of the inner aspects (*Pnimiyyut*) of Torah, the secrets and the secrets of the secrets of the Torah, in which “there are no questions etc., and no disputes etc.”¹⁴⁸¹ This also includes spreading the wellsprings [of the teachings of Chassidus] to the outside (*Hafatzat HaMaayanot*) in a way of peace etc., by which we bring about the true and complete matter of “He redeemed my soul in peace etc.,” with the true and complete redemption through our righteous Moshiach, at which time there will be the fulfillment of the prophecy,¹⁴⁸² “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of *HaShem*-יהו"ה as the waters cover the ocean floor.”

¹⁴⁸¹ Zohar III 124b (Ra'aya Mehemna); See Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 26 *ibid.*, and elsewhere.

¹⁴⁸² Isaiah 11:9; Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Melachim 12:5