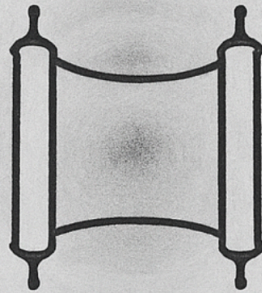


בס"ד

**Rebbe Elimelech
of Lizhensk
Parshas Ki Teitzei**



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The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

Noam Elimelech
Parshas Ki Teitzei

Introduction

Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk (1717–1787), one of the great students of the Maggid of Mezritch, was a central figure in shaping Polish Chassidus. Known affectionately as “Reb Elimelech,” his work *Noam Elimelech* remains one of the foundational Chassidic texts. He lived in Galicia and was revered for his piety, depth, and ability to awaken in others true humility and heartfelt service of Hashem. His teachings often focus on the inner struggle with the yetzer hara, the sanctification of each limb and action, and the refining of every aspect of human life until it becomes an instrument of holiness. In this discourse, Rabbi Elimelech interprets verses from *Ki Seitzei* and *Ki Savo* to explain the battle with the yetzer hara, the role of Torah as a protective “roof,” and the importance of humility in spiritual growth.

מאמר א

When you go out, etc., and you see among the captives, etc.

There are people who with their general bodily faculties devote themselves to Hashem with fasts and self-denials. But with each limb individually it is not proper, and sometimes they stumble, whether in sight, speech, or other matters a person tramples with his heel.

And this is hinted in our Sages’ words: “Limbs that fell off the altar.” Meaning, limbs fall and stumble in a person who sacrifices himself to Hashem. “They shall return,” meaning he must return and repair them, sanctifying each limb individually.

And this is: “If a matter is wondrous for you for judgment.” Idle words are not called speech at all. Only words that pertain to the word of Hashem and His Torah are called speech.

“If a matter is wondrous for you”—meaning, if speech is separated from you—“between blood and blood.” For the blood gives strength and desire to a person. If there are two kinds of blood, two forces: sometimes the good inclination prevails, and sometimes the opposite.

“Disputes in your gates.” Meaning, your limbs are not in equal balance, but contend with one another as above. “And you shall arise and go up to the place”—to the true judge in your days. “And you shall do according to the word which they tell you”—in its simple meaning.

פי תצא כו' וראית בשביה כו'. יש בני אדם אשר בכללות אבריהם מוסרים נפשם לה' בתעניות וסגופים, אבל בפרט כל אבר לפעמים נכשל, בין בראיה או דיבור או שאר דברים.

וזהו רמז בדברי חז"ל "אברים שפקעו מעל המזבח". פרוש שאברים פוקעים ונכשלים באדם הזוכה עצמו לה'. "יחזור" צריך לחזור ולתקן אותם, לקדש כל אבר בפני עצמו.

וזהו כי יפלא ממך דבר למשפט". דברים בטלים אינם נקראים בשם דיבור. רק דברים הנוגעים לדבר ה' ותורתו נקראים בשם דיבור.

כי יפלא ממך דבר" פרוש אם יופרש ממך" הדיבור, "בין דם לדם". דם הוא הנותן כח ותאנה לאדם. ואם יש בד שני מיני דמים, שני כחות: לפעמים היצר הטוב גובר ופעמים להיפך.

דברי ריבות בשעריך". שאיבריה אינם במזג השונה אלא מתרוצצים זה עם זה כנ"ל. "וקמת ועלית אל המקום" ר"ל אל הצדיק השופט אמת שבנימיה. "ועשית על פי הדבר אשר יגידו לך" כפשוטו.

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And this is: “And you shall make a guardrail for your roof, and you shall not place blood in your house.” The holy Torah is called a “roof,” for the roof protects the house, and Torah protects and saves a person. But this requires humility—that one’s learning not be for pride or to glorify oneself before others.

And this is “a guardrail” in the sense of depth and lowliness, that is, humility, you shall place for your roof, which is Torah. “And you shall not place blood in your house” means, as above, that there not be in you two kinds of bloods and forces, but rather all as one strength entirely for Hashem.

“Lest the one who falls should fall from it.” Meaning, even the good deed you do will fall from you, and not endure nor have effect. “The one who falls from it”—meaning, from that deed it was fitting that others should fall, that is, judgments and kelipos. But if a foreign force is mixed in, it will cause even that deed not to effect anything.

Therefore, a person must repair each and every limb until he realizes with his own understanding that he is lacking in his service, and that all his deeds are not properly corrected.

And this is: “When you go out to war,” meaning the war with the evil inclination. “And Hashem will deliver him into your hand,” for if not for Hashem’s help a person could not overcome it. “And you shall see among the captivity a woman of beautiful form.” It is taught that the soul is called “a woman of beautiful form.” Meaning, then you will see and understand that the soul is in captivity, that it has not yet fulfilled its duty. “And you shall desire her.” And this is sufficient.

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech begins with the verse: “And you shall make a guardrail for your roof” (*Devarim* 22:8). He teaches that Torah is like a roof that shelters and protects. But for Torah study to protect a person, it must be approached with humility. The “guardrail” represents submission and self-lowliness; without it, Torah study can become a source of arrogance, which undermines its protective power.

He warns that if a person has “two kinds of bloods”—two forces within himself, one for Hashem and one for personal honor—then even good deeds will not endure. Instead of causing judgments and negative forces to fall

וזהו "ועשית מעקה לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך".
דתורה הקדושה נקראת בשם גג, דהגג הוא המגן על
הבית, והתורה מגינה ומצילה האדם. וצריך לנהל
שיהיה בהכנעה, שלא יהיה למודו להתפאר
ולהתגאות בפני בני אדם.

וזהו "מעקה" לשון עמק והשפלה, דהינו הכנעה
תשים לגגך היא התורה. "ולא תשים דמים בביתך"
פרוש פנ"ל שלא יהיה בך שני מיני דמים וכחות, רק
הכל כח אחד בלול לה.

כי יפל הנפל ממנו". פרוש, כי אף המעשה הטוב
אשר תעשה יפול ממך ולא יתקיים ולא יפעל כלל.
"הנפל ממנו" פרוש, אשר מן הראוי היה שיעל ידי
הדבר הזה יפלו ויושלכו אחרים, דהינו הדינים
והקליפות. וקלילה אם יהיה כח אחר מעורב בו,
תפיל גם אותו הדבר שלא יפעל כלל.

ולכן צריך האדם לתקן כל אבר ואבר עד אשר יבין
בשכלו בעצמו שהוא מחסר בעבודתו, וכל מעשיו
אינם מתוקנים על מכוונם.

וזהו "כי תצא למלחמה", דהינו מלחמת היצר הרע.
"ונתנו ה' בידך" פרוש, אז באשר יתן ה' אותו בידך,
דאילו הקדוש ברוך הוא לא היה יכול לו. "וראית
בשביה אשת יפת תואר". דאיתא דהנשמה נקראת
"יפת תואר". פרוש, אז תראה ותבין בעצמך
שהנשמה היא בשביה, שלא יצאה עדיו ידי חובתה
כלל. "וחשקת בה". וק"ל.

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away, the deed itself may “fall” and lose its effect. Thus, each limb and faculty must be sanctified and repaired until the person recognizes with his own mind that his service is incomplete and requires constant refinement.

He then turns to the verse “When you go out to war against your enemy” (*Devarim* 21:10). This refers to the battle against the yetzer hara. Victory in this war is only possible when Hashem delivers the enemy into one’s hands—without divine assistance, a person could not overcome his inclination. The verse continues: “And you see among the captivity a woman of beautiful form.” The sages interpret this as referring to the soul, which is a “woman of beautiful form.” The soul is in captivity, bound and unable to fulfill its mission fully. When a person wages the battle of self-refinement, he comes to recognize that his soul itself is imprisoned and in need of liberation. At that moment, he begins to truly “desire her”—to yearn for his soul’s release and fulfillment.

Practical Takeaway

Torah must be approached with humility and sincerity. Without a “guardrail” of submission, Torah can become misused for arrogance, which causes one’s deeds to lose their power. Every action, thought, and limb of the body must be purified and sanctified, so that all strength is directed solely toward Hashem. The struggle with the yetzer hara is not won through human strength but only with Hashem’s help. By acknowledging this, one awakens the yearning to free the soul from its captivity and let it shine in its true beauty.

Chassidic Story

Once, a wealthy man came to Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk and complained that despite his regular Torah learning and acts of charity, he felt no inner growth. Reb Elimelech listened quietly and then asked him: “When you learn Torah, do you pray that the words should protect you from arrogance as much as from ignorance?” The man admitted he had never considered this. Reb Elimelech told him: “Without a guardrail, even the highest roof is dangerous. Torah is the roof, but humility is the guardrail. Without it, one falls from the very height that was meant to protect.” From that day on, the man approached his Torah learning with humility, and he later testified that his prayers, learning, and mitzvos took on new vitality.

END NOTE]

מאמר ב

Or it may be said on the verse: “When you go out, etc.” The main service of a person to the Creator, blessed be He, is with love and awe. Love is in thought—namely, to think of the exaltedness of G-d, and through this to bring into his heart complete love. For in thought it is possible to picture even something one has never seen.

או יאמר "כי תצא כו'". דהנה העיקר עבודת האדם לבורא פרוץ הוא באהבה ויראה. ואהבה היא המושקה, דהינו לחשב רוממות האל, ועל ידי זה מכניס בלבו אהבה שלימה. כי במושקה אפשר לצייר אף דבר שלא ראה מעולם.

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And afterwards he must see his own lowliness, and this is awe. Awe is in speech and in deed, for sometimes a person speaks or performs a mitzvah out of fear—whether fear of people, lest they punish him for transgressing Jewish practice, or fear of Hashem.

ואחר כך צריך לראות שפלותו, והיא היראה.
והיראה היא הדבור והמעשה. שלפעמים האדם
מדבר או עושה איזו מצוה מחמת יראה, או מיראת
האדם שמתיירא שייענשו אותו על עברו על דת
ישראל, או מיראת הש"ת.

And this is why we arrange in the blessing of Shema: "All of them are beloved, etc."—this is the praise of the angels, meant to arouse love. And afterwards we say: "They respond with awe, etc., in fear"—to arouse awe. And afterwards, prayer in a whisper—this is complete love.

וזוהו שאנו מסדרים בברכת קריאת שמע "כלם
אהובים כו'" שהוא שבח המלאכים, זה הוא כדי
לעורר אהבה. ואחר כך אנו אומרים "עונים באימה
כו' ביראה" לעורר היראה. ואחר כך תפלה בלחש,
וזו היא אהבה שלימה.

However, there are people who have another kind of love, meaning they have foreign thoughts. Surely this is their love, for that which a person loves he gathers into his thoughts. A person who performs a mitzvah or prays out of fear of people—this prayer brings him to an external and foreign love.

אמנם יש בני אדם שיש להם אהבה אחרת, דהיינו
שיש להם מחשבות זרות. ובנדאי זו היא אהבתם,
שאיתו הדבר שהוא אוהב פוגם במחשבתו. והאדם
הזה שעושה מצוה או מתפלל מחמת יראת אדם,
התפלה הזאת מביאה אותו לאהבה החיצונית וזרה.

For his speech arouses his love, and all his thoughts come to mind during prayer more than after. After prayer, he has fewer foreign thoughts; but specifically during prayer, his thoughts multiply. Therefore, after prayer, this external love ceases.

כי דיבורו מעורר אהבתו, וכל מחשבותיו להרהר
בהם בעת תפלתו יותר מאחר התפלה. שאין
מחשבותיו מרובים ככה אחר התפלה, רק דווקא
בשעת התפלה. ונמצא אחר התפלה אהבתו החיצונית
בטלה.

This is what the Tanna said: "Any love that depends on a matter—when the matter ceases, the love ceases." "Matter" (*davar*) is from the term "speech." That is, the external love that depends on speech: specifically during prayer, his beloved foreign thoughts come. When "the matter ceases," i.e. after prayer, "the love ceases."

וזוהו דאמר התנא "כל אהבה שהיא תלויה בדבר,
בטל דבר בטלה אהבה". כי דבר מלשון דיבור, דהיינו
אהבה החיצונית שהיא תלויה בדיבור כנ"ל. שדווקא
בשעת התפלה באים לו כל מחשבותיו הזרים
הנאהבים לו. "בטל דבר", דהיינו אחר תפלתו,
"בטלה אהבה".

But not so the complete tzaddik, whose soul is always bound in love by constantly thinking of G-d's greatness. Such love is never nullified.

אבל לא כן הצדיק השלם אשר נפשו דבוקה תמיד
באהבה, בדחשבו תמיד רוממות אל. אהבה כזו אינה
בטלה לעולם.

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And this is the meaning of: “When you go out.” That is, when you go out from the path—when speaking in prayer but your thought goes outward. You bring upon yourself “to war,” meaning the war with the evil inclination. “Against your enemies”—for the external love becomes your enemy.

And Scripture says: “And Hashem will deliver him into your hand.” That is, through teshuvah, when you repair your deeds and thoughts so that your speech and love are one. Then: “And you shall capture its captivity”—the captivity which the kelipah had already seized for itself, you shall bring out to holiness.

And I give you advice: when you do teshuvah, think to bring out all your deeds and prayers that had been robbed by the kelipos, and return them to holiness. And this is sufficient.

וזהו "כי תצא". פרוש, פאָשר תצא חוץ לשיטה, דהינו שמדבר בתפלה ויוצא עם מחשבתו חוצה. תגרם לעצמך "למלחמה" זו מלחמת יצר הרע. "על איבך" ר"ל, שפשביל שאהבה זרה החיצונית נעשית לך לאויב.

ואמר הכתוב "ונתנו ה' בנך". דהינו על ידי תשובה שתתקן את מעשיך ומחשבותיך, שתהיה דיבורך ואהבתך אחד. אז "ושבית שביו", דהינו השבית ששבתה כבר וטרפה הקליפה לעצמה, תוציא את הכל אל הקדושה.

ואני נותן לך עצה, לחשב בעת תשובתך להוציא את כל העבודות והתפלות שלך העשוקות בקליפות, ותביאם אל הקדושה. וק"ל.

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech teaches that the essence of a Jew's avodah is in the balance of love and awe of Hashem. Love is rooted in thought—by contemplating the greatness of Hashem, one awakens deep love in the heart. Awe, by contrast, expresses itself in speech and deed, as one refrains from sin or fulfills mitzvos either from fear of people or true fear of Hashem. This is reflected in the order of the Shema: first the angels are described as “beloved,” awakening love, then as “answering in fear,” awakening awe, and finally the silent Amidah—complete love that integrates both.

Yet there are those whose “love” is misdirected. When they pray out of fear of others rather than Hashem, their speech awakens worldly or foreign loves. Paradoxically, their foreign thoughts are strongest **during prayer**, for “any love that depends on a matter—when the matter ceases, the love ceases.” Once prayer ends, their foreign love fades, revealing its emptiness. The complete tzaddik, however, constantly contemplates Hashem's greatness, and his love never ceases.

This leads to the verse, “When you go out to war against your enemies.” Leaving the proper path—speaking words of prayer but letting one's thoughts wander—provokes a war with the yetzer hara. The false love becomes an enemy. Victory comes only when Hashem delivers the enemy into one's hand through teshuvah. By repairing thoughts, speech, and deeds, one unites love and speech, and then even what the kelipah had captured—the prayers and mitzvos performed with foreign intent—can be redeemed and restored to holiness.

Practical Takeaway:

Every Jew must sanctify not just his actions but also his thoughts and intentions. Prayer without focus allows the yetzer hara to hijack even holy words, dragging them into captivity. But sincere teshuvah can rescue those very prayers and elevate them. The key is to bind thought, speech, and deed together in humility and truth,

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ensuring that love of Hashem is constant, not conditional or foreign. By doing this, one transforms past failings into present victories and restores lost sparks to holiness.

Chassidic Story:

It is told that once a disciple came to Rabbi Elimelech distressed that foreign thoughts plagued him most during prayer. He asked: "Why, when I stand before Hashem, do all my unwanted loves and desires rise up and distract me?" Rabbi Elimelech answered: "When a king sits in judgment, even those with small claims hurry to be heard. So too, when you stand before the King of Kings in prayer, every thought you ever gave power to rushes to present itself. Do not despair—if you pray with teshuvah and yearning, those very thoughts will be redeemed and turned into holiness."

END NOTE]

מאמר ג

"If a man has two wives... and the firstborn son is of the hated one." At first glance, the word **"and it shall be"** (*vehayah*) is imprecise, for it is an expression of certainty. It should have said, **"And if the firstborn son will be..."**

פי תהיין לאיש שתי נשים כו' והיה הבן הבכור לשנואה". לכאורה מלת "והיה" אינו מדויק, שהוא לשון ודאי, והכי הו' "ליה למימר" ואם יהיה הבן הבכור כו'.

It seems we may explain: thought is called "a wife," for thought gives birth to action. There are two kinds of thoughts—one holy and one foreign. Thus: "If a man has two wives"—his mind is mixed with good and evil, holy thought and foreign thought. This is "one beloved and one hated."

ונראה לפרש, דהנה המושבה נקראת "אשה", שהמושבה מולידה את המעשה. והנה יש שתי מושבות, אחת היא מושבה הקדושה ואחת היא מושבה זרה. ואמר הפתוב "פי יהיה לאיש שתי נשים" שיש מערב בטוב ורע, מושבה קדושה ומושבה זרה. וזהו "אחת אהובה ואחת שנואה".

Scripture says: "And the firstborn son is of the hated one"—this is certain. The "son" born of the hated, that is, an action arising from a foreign thought, is the firstborn, meaning it holds the upper hand.

ואמר הפתוב "והיה הבן הבכור לשנואה", ר"ל זה הוא בודאי, שהבן הנולד מן השנואה, דהינו המעשה הבא מן המושבה זרה, זה נקרא "בן", הוא יהיה הבכור, שידו על העליונה.

"And it shall be on the day he bequeaths to his sons"—meaning, when the time comes to raise up his deeds to Hashem. "He may not give precedence to the son of the beloved over the son of the hated, the firstborn."

והיה ביום הנחילו את בניו פרוש, כשיגיע יום שינחיל את בניו, הם המעשים טובים להעלותם לה'. לא יוכל לבכר את בן האהובה על פני בן השנואה "הבכור".

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“To give precedence” (*levaker*) is from the root *bikkurim* (first fruits)—that is, he cannot complete a mitzvah in wholeness, “over the son of the hated, the firstborn.” For since the son of the hated is the firstborn, it blocks the mitzvah’s perfection. Therefore guard yourself very much, sanctify and purify your thought, so that your mitzvos can be performed in completeness. And this is sufficient.

לְבַכֵּר "הוא מְלִשּׁוֹן בְּכוֹרִים, דִּהְיִנוּ שְׁלֹא יוּכַל"
לַעֲשׂוֹת שׁוּם מִצְוָה בְּשִׁלְיֻמוֹת, "עַל פְּנֵי בֶן הַשְּׂנוּאָה
הַבְּכוֹר". מִחֲמַת שֶׁבֶן הַשְּׂנוּאָה הוּא הַבְּכוֹר. לָכֵן שְׂמֹר
עֲצֻמָּה מְאֹד מְאֹד, וְקַדֵּשׁ וְטַהַר עֲצֻמָּה לְיִכְפֹּךְ אֶת
מַחֲשַׁבְתְּךָ, כְּדֵי שֶׁתּוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת מִצְוָה בְּשִׁלְיֻמוֹת.
וְק"ל

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech teaches that true service of Hashem requires both love and awe. Love begins in thought, through contemplating Hashem’s greatness, and awe is expressed in speech and deed, when one restrains himself from sin or fulfills mitzvos out of reverence. Prayer is designed to awaken this: first the angels are described as “beloved,” stirring love; then they “answer in awe,” awakening fear; finally the silent Amidah, a union of both, embodies complete love.

Yet a danger exists: if one prays out of fear of people instead of fear of Hashem, his words awaken foreign loves, distractions that become strongest specifically during prayer. This is the meaning of “any love dependent on a matter—when the matter ceases, the love ceases.” Foreign love tied to speech fades after prayer, revealing its emptiness. In contrast, the tzaddik cleaves constantly to Hashem in love, which never ceases.

This struggle is the “war against your enemies.” When one’s thoughts stray in prayer, the foreign love becomes an enemy. But Hashem gives victory when a person does teshuvah—repairing thoughts, words, and actions so that love and speech are one. Then even prayers and mitzvos that were captured by the kelipah can be reclaimed and elevated to holiness.

Rabbi Elimelech further explains the verse about “a man with two wives, one beloved and one hated.” The “wives” represent thoughts: holy and foreign. Actions are the “sons” born of thought. Inevitably, the firstborn—the most powerful influence—comes from the foreign thought, and it overshadows the mitzvah born of the holy thought. Therefore, one must purify and sanctify his mind, lest the mitzvah itself be prevented from reaching wholeness. Only when the root—the thought—is cleansed, can the fruit—the action—be whole.

Practical Takeaway:

Holiness begins in thought. If thoughts are pure, deeds can reach perfection; if thoughts are foreign, they taint even mitzvos. Prayer and mitzvah performance must unite thought, speech, and deed in humility, directing all love solely toward Hashem. Through teshuvah, one can reclaim even past prayers and mitzvos that were blemished and return them to holiness. The task of avodah is therefore constant vigilance over the mind, ensuring that what is born of thought is fit to be offered as a complete service.

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

**Noam Elimelech
Parshas Ki Teitzei**

Chassidic Story:

A man once came to Rabbi Elimelech, weeping that he could not control his distracting thoughts in prayer. "Sometimes," he said, "I feel my mitzvos are worthless because my mind is soiled with other desires." Reb Elimelech told him: "Do not despair. Even if the firstborn is of the hated, even if your first thought is foreign, sanctify your mind anew. When you do teshuvah, you can inherit again, and the holy thought will be raised above. Know this: the very prayers that were taken captive can be redeemed and restored." The man later said that these words gave him courage to fight anew in his avodah, with the faith that even his fallen prayers could be lifted.

END NOTE]