

Tzemach Tzedek

Ohr HaTorah

Parshas Shemini

לוינתו זה יצרת לשחק בו

Leviathan—this You formed to play with it. Here is the concept of the subjugation of the exiles: its nature is only comparable to a kind of mock-battle staged by a ruler in his own royal chambers, where he places one beast against another to fight, one devouring the other, overpowering it. And sometimes, the other one overpowers the first and takes back even more than was taken from it.	לוינתו זה יצרת לשחק בו, הנה ענין שעבוד הגליות אין הענין אלא כמשל השחוק שעושה השור בהיכלותיו שמעמיד חיה פלוגית עם חיה פלוגית ללחם זה עם זה ויטרף האחד מהברו ויתגבר עליו, ופעמים שהשני מתגבר עליו ויטרף ממנו יותר כו
And after the spectacle concludes, the prince derives great delight and pleasure from the victory of one over the other. Similarly, by way of analogy, the seventy angelic princes (Sarim) are likened to beasts, as mentioned in Daniel (Daniel 7). And likewise, the tribes of Israel are also likened to animals: Judah as a lion, Benjamin as a wolf, etc.	ואחרי גמר המלאכה הנה יתענג ויתעדן מאד השור מהנצחון של האחד על חברו. וכן על דרך משל השבעים שרים נמשלים לחיות כמו שכתוב בדניאל, וגם שבטי ישראל נמשלים לחיות: יהודה - אריה, ויבנמין - זאב כו
And the subjugation of the exiles is like their mutual battles—each attempting to overpower the other, to pull prey from its mouth, to topple it. For we see that a physical ruler especially seeks and longs to place upon the Jews an increasingly burdensome taxation—far more than upon other nations that live off his land.	ושעבוד הגליות הוא כענין מלחמתם זה בזה להתגבר האחד על חברו להוציא בלעו מפיו ולהפיל אותו כו. כי הנה רואים אנו שהשור הגשמי יותר יחפץ וישתוקק ללעל המסים ברבוי אחר רבוי להכביד על ישראל כו
This is unlike the gentile who earns his living from the land; he does not desire to burden it. And the reason is this: as it is known (see Devarim 32:8), “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance... He set boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel.” Yaakov and Esav were apportioned separately. Esav has no part in holiness and was separated from Hashem’s unity.	מה שאין כן בנכרי שמתפרנס מאדמתו - אינו חפץ כלל להכביד עליו כו. והטעם הוא לפי שידוע "בהנחל עליון גוים כו" (דברים ל"ב:ח'), הפיל גורל הנלקה ליצקב ועשו, ואין לעשו חלק בקדושה כלל ויהפרידם מאחדותו כו
Therefore, his heart is bitter when a Jew earns sustenance in his place—this is not “his” portion. And when a Jew serves G-d and does mitzvos in their land, it pains the spiritual Sar (minister) of Esav.	על כן לבו המר ימר לו מאד כשהיהודי מתפרנס במקומו - שאין זה מחלק יצקב כלל. וכשעובד ה' ויעושה מצוה בארצם, זה מצר לצדי עשו כו

Tzemach Tzedek

Ohr HaTorah

Parshas Shemini

לוינתו זה יצרת לשחק בו

And their “compromise” or reconciliation is in the burden of taxes—through money. But this only satisfies the <i>physical</i> prince, not the <i>spiritual</i> one. He is not appeased by wealth; he takes a different kind of bribe: namely, sins that arise due to financial burdens—such as neglect of Torah, jealousy, hatred, lies, etc.	והפיוס הוא בעול המסים – בממון. אבל לשור הרוחני אין זה שוחד ופיוס שיניחנו בשביל ממון כו', הנה הוא לוקח שוחד ופיוס אחר – דהינו מכמה עבירות הנמצאות מסבת עול המס: בטול תורה, קנאה, שנאה, 'שקר וכו'.
He delights in the <i>spiritual nourishment</i> that comes from those sins, and it appears to him that he is victorious—that he snatched prey and sustenance. But the opposite is true. When the mitzvah is performed in that setting, the spiritual elevation and reward strip away far more from him than what he thought he gained.	ונהנה מהרוחניות של העבירות כו'. והנה נראה ונדמה לו שהוא הגבור וחסף טרף ומזון כו'. ונהפך הוא – כשנחשב שבר מצוה כנגד זה, והוא עשית המצוה כו' – הרי הרבה חיות נחלקו ממנו על ידי זה, יותר ממה 'שלקח הוא כו'.
This is like the concept of “for you are heaping coals upon his head” (Mishlei 25:22). And in the future, the true nature of this cosmic battle will be revealed. This is what is meant by: “ <i>This Leviathan You created to play with it.</i> ” These are the souls of Israel whom You formed to endure exile and its battles among many spiritual beasts—for the sake of the divine play and delight that will arise at the end.	וכענין "כי גחלים אתה חותה על ראשו" (משלי כ"ה:כ"ב) כו'. ולעתיד יתגלה כל ענין מלחמה זו. וזהו "לוינתו – אלו כנסת ישראל – זה יצרתם לשעבדם בגלות במלחמות חיות רבות כנ"ל, בשביל השחוק "והענג האלקי שיהיה בגמרו – וזהו 'לשחק בו'.
As explained elsewhere (see Midrash Shocher Tov on Psalms), that in the final generations, Hashem will be found laughing. This is like the concept of: “In the future, Hashem will make a <i>Kenegiyah</i> (gladiatorial display) for the righteous” (see Midrash Tehillim 104:26).	וכמו שכתוב במקום אחר (מדרש שוחר טוב על תהלים): "גשרון אחרון יושב ומשחק כו'", והוא כענין "עתיד לעשות קניגיא לצדיקים" כו' ע"ש (תהלים ק"ד:כ"ו).

[NOTE: Summary]

This discourse presents a powerful mystical interpretation of exile and spiritual struggle through the lens of a **cosmic drama**, based on the verse "*Leviathan—this You formed to play with it*" (Tehillim 104:26).

It draws a parallel between the divine orchestration of history and a **king's staged battle**, where animals are placed to fight one another for his entertainment. Similarly, Hashem orchestrates the rise and fall of nations—especially the **battle between the seventy nations (represented by angelic “animal” forces)** and the **twelve tribes of Israel**, also symbolized by animals (e.g., lion, wolf).

The **subjugation of Israel in exile** is explained as a kind of **spiritual warfare**, where the nations (and their spiritual Sarim—angelic ministers) extract both physical burdens (through taxes) and spiritual “nourishment” (through sins like jealousy, hatred, and neglect of Torah).

Tzemach Tzedek

Ohr HaTorah

Parshas Shemini

לוינתו זה יצרת לשחק בו

Yet ultimately, the **performance of mitzvos under duress and exile** turns the tide. While it may seem the enemy has “won,” in truth, **each mitzvah reclaims divine sparks** and weakens the spiritual grasp of these forces. At the end of history, Hashem will reveal this entire saga was “a divine play”—not in the trivial sense of mockery, but in the higher sense of **orchestrated joy and revelation of truth**, culminating in divine delight and vindication for the Jewish people.

✓ Practical Takeaway

Even the chaos and struggle of exile is part of a divine plan. When you feel weighed down—whether by spiritual distractions, worldly pressures, or communal struggles—remember: every mitzvah done in exile is exponentially more powerful. It weakens negative spiritual forces and contributes to the final revelation of Hashem’s unity and justice.

Rather than being discouraged by the weight of exile, we are called to realize that **Hashem Himself is watching—and delighting—in our victories**, especially when we perform mitzvos in challenging circumstances. Your spiritual perseverance is **not lost**, it is treasured as part of the ultimate divine purpose.

📖 True Chassidic Story

The Baal Shem Tov’s Vision of the Beasts

The Baal Shem Tov once described a vision he saw during his *aliyas haneshamah* (ascent of the soul). In Heaven, he saw **spiritual beasts**—some dark and terrifying, some radiant and glowing. These beasts, he was told, were **formed by the actions of people below**.

The dark ones came from anger, jealousy, slander, and dishonesty. The glowing beasts were created from mitzvos, charity, kindness, and Torah learning.

“What happens to them?” the Baal Shem asked.

The Heavenly reply: *“They battle. Every mitzvah you do creates a beast of light that challenges and conquers the dark. The greater the challenge, the more powerful the beast you create.”*

This reflects the message of the discourse: **every Jew, especially in exile, is a warrior in Hashem’s arena**, and every action sends shockwaves in the higher realms. We are not passive victims of exile—we are champions, even if we don’t always see the scoreboard. **END NOTE]**