

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Ki Seitzei – Vol. 21, Issue 44

Compiled by Ozer Alport

**כי תצא למלחמה על איביך ונתנו ד' אלקיך בידך ושביט שביו וראית בשביה אשת יפת תאר
וחשקת בה ולקחת לך לאשה והבאתה אל תוך ביתך ... וישבה בביתך ובכתה את אביה
(ואת אמה ירח ימים ואחר כן תבוא אליה ובעלתה והיתה לך לאשה) 21:10-13**

The mekubalim teach that the content of the weekly Torah portion is connected to the time of year when it is read. Parshas Ki Seitzei is read in the month of Elul, and it begins by discussing the yefas toar (woman of beautiful form), saying that when a soldier goes out to battle against the enemy, he is permitted to marry a non-Jewish woman that he sees and becomes infatuated with. Several commentators point out that the Torah refers to going out **למלחמה**, using a pasach to refer to “the” war rather than a sheva to indicate a generic conflict. They explain that this is an allusion to the ageless battle that we must constantly wage against the yetzer hara (evil inclination).

With this insight, Rav Shmuel Wolman suggests that we can now appreciate the link between Parshas Ki Seitzei and our avodah (mission) in the month of Elul, when we must examine our ways and engage in a relentless war against our greatest adversary, the yetzer hara. At the same time, the Chofetz Chaim notes that Hashem understands the difficulty in emerging victorious from this battle, so He encourages us by emphasizing that the key is **כי תצא למלחמה** – recognizing the yetzer hara’s existence and going out to fight against it, with the actual results in the hands of Heaven, as the verse concludes, “Hashem your G-d will deliver the enemy into your hand.”

Along these lines, Rav Moshe Aharon Friedman cites the Tur (Orach Chaim 417), who explains that each of the 12 months in the Jewish calendar corresponds to one of the 12 tribes. The month of Elul corresponds to the tribe of Gad, who was praised by Yaakov (Bereishis 49:19) for his military prowess. Similarly, the stone in the Choshen (Breastplate) worn by the Kohen Gadol that represents the tribe of Gad is called **אחלמה** (Shemos 28:19), which is related to the word **מלחמה** (war). Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that this stone strengthens a person’s heart, as the Torah stresses (Devarim 20:3) that when we go out to fight, our hearts must remain strong if we are to prevail.

As an even more explicit link between Parshas Ki Seitzei and Elul, the Torah stipulates (Ibid., 21:13) that before a soldier may marry a yefas toar, she must first spend **ירח ימים** – one full month – in his house weeping for her father and mother. The Arizal writes that **ירח ימים** alludes to the month of Elul. What is the connection between the tears of the yefas toar and Elul, and what can her crying teach us about the nature of the tears that we should shed during this month?

The Gemara (Yevamos 48a-b) records a dispute regarding the cause of the yefas toar’s crying. Rabbi Akiva posits that she is weeping over her prior idolatrous practices, while Rabbi Eliezer maintains that she is mourning her separation from her parents. According to Rabbi Akiva, her tears are an expression of remorse that helps her reject her sinful past and detach herself from it, while Rabbi Eliezer understands that her tears emanate from feelings of longing for her parents, whom she misses dearly.

With this dichotomy, Rav Wolman explains that the two interpretations of the captured woman’s weeping represent two distinct types of crying that we must engage in during the month of Elul: tears of regret and tears of yearning. When Elul arrives, the first step in the process of repentance is to take stock and evaluate our situations honestly.

Wherever we find areas in which we have come up short and succumbed to our temptations, we should feel contrite and strive to shed tears of sadness that disassociate us from our previous transgressions, just as Rabbi Akiva explains the crying of the yefas toar. At the same time, Rabbi Eliezer’s understanding teaches that we must also shed tears of pining for our Father in Heaven, from Whom we have allowed ourselves to become estranged.

This insight can also help us appreciate more deeply the Torah's use of the expression ירח ימים. The Baal HaTurim notes that this wording is unusual, for the more customary phrase would be חודש ימים. Why does the Torah use the term ירח to mean "month" instead of the more traditional חודש?

When writing a get (divorce document), the Shulchan Aruch (Even HaEzer 126:4) rules that the date should be recorded using the term ירח to indicate the month. As a source for this wording, the Beis Shmuel (Ibid., s.k. 7) cites the verse גרש ירחים (Devarim 33:14 – the moons' yield), which implies that there is a link between geirushin (divorce) and the term ירח. This fits well with Rabbi Akiva's opinion that the crying of the yefas toar is a sign of separation and regret. Similarly, our tears in Elul spiritually serve to divorce us from our prior sins.

Rav Wolman adds that the expression ירח ימים also alludes to the message of Rabbi Eliezer's view that our tears in Elul represent yearning to reunite, as Bnei Yisroel are compared (Sanhedrin 42a) to the ירח (moon) in that we also possess its ability to rejuvenate. Just when the moon appears to have waned to the point of oblivion, it begins its monthly cycle of renewal. Similarly, the Torah hints that even if we find ourselves struggling to shed tears of longing for our Father in Heaven, we can draw inspiration from the moon to which we are likened, as it constantly returns to its source of light.

As we strive to maximize the remaining days in Elul, let us internalize the lesson of the yefas toar's 30 days of weeping and embark on our own month of growth and change, as we disconnect from the past to reconnect to a brighter future.

כי יקח איש אשה חדשה לא יצא בצבא ולא יעבר עליו לכל דבר (נקי יהיה לביתו שנה אחת ושמח את אשתו אשר לקח 24:5)

The Torah exempts a newlywed man from the army during the first year of his marriage so that he can focus on gladdening his new wife. The Yerushalmi (Bikkurim 3:3) adds that as a chosson (groom) begins the next chapter in his life, all of his prior sins are forgiven. Rav Yisroel Reisman points out that this is difficult to reconcile with the ruling of the Bavli (Kiddushin 49b) that if a completely wicked man betroths a woman on the condition that he is righteous, they are legally betrothed because he may have had thoughts of repentance. According to the Yerushalmi, there should be no need to deem him righteous because of the chance that he did teshuvah, as a groom is forgiven for all his transgressions, in which case the condition was automatically fulfilled without any action on his part.

Citing the commentary of Rav Yoshiyahu Pinto on Ein Yaakov (Yevamos 63b), Rav Reisman resolves the apparent contradiction by explaining that there are no free gifts in the world of spirituality, and anything worthwhile must be earned through our own efforts and exertion. A chosson is not magically forgiven simply because he gets married. Rather, his forgiveness is placed in a box, where it remains suspended pending the choices he will make as he commences life with his new bride.

If he views marriage as an opportunity to welcome the Shechinah (Divine Presence) into his new home and resolves to leave the immature follies of his single days behind, then he has earned the right to be forgiven for all of his misdeeds. If, on the other hand, he does not appreciate the fresh start he has been given and opts to begin his marriage by continuing all his juvenile practices, it is illogical that such a groom would merit forgiveness, and his potential atonement will remain locked inside the box.

By stipulating that a newlywed couple is not to be distracted for a full year, the Torah is instructing us to adopt the first approach. We are supposed to see shana rishona (the first year of marriage) as a new beginning, which, when used properly to build a new home of spiritual growth and kedusha (holiness), is deemed even more valuable than joining the national army at battle.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources that discuss them):

- 1) The Gemara in Sanhedrin (71a) rules that a child may only be punished as a rebellious son if his parents are identical in appearance, voice, and height. How can the parents have identical voices, as having the voice of the opposite gender is one of the signs of being unable to bear children

- (Yevamos 80b), in which case such a couple would be biologically unable to have children? (Hagahos HaBach Sanhedrin 71a, Tiferes Yisroel Sanhedrin 8:28, Ayeles HaShachar)
- 2) Why is no beracha (blessing) recited before performing the mitzvah (Devarim 22:3) of hashavas aveida (returning a lost object)? (Har Tzvi)
 - 3) The Vilna Gaon explains that a divorce document is called a טל because these two letters are not found next to each other in any other word in the Hebrew language and therefore symbolize separation. There are four other two-letter combinations that also do not appear together in any Hebrew word. How many can you identify, and why is a divorce document called a טל instead of one of the other combinations? (Taima D’Kra)
 - 4) The Torah mentions spitting in three places, one of which is found in Parshas Ki Seitzei. How many of them can you identify? (Torah Teasers)

Answers to Points to Ponder:

- 1) One opinion in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 71a) maintains that there never was and never will be a child punished for being wayward and rebellious. The **Bach** explains that the basis for this position is the condition that the voices of such a child's parents must be identical, and if that were the case, one of them would be sterile and the couple would be unable to have a child. As for the opinion that argues this law is not merely theoretical and has in fact been applied in practice, **Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman** suggests that the parents' voices need not be exactly the same. It is sufficient if the voice of the father is somewhat similar to that of his wife and vice versa, a scenario in which they would still be able to bear children. Similarly, the **Tiferes Yisroel** explains that the requirement that their voices be the same is only meant to exclude a case in which one parent's voice is quiet while the other's is loud.
- 2) **Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank** strengthens this question by noting that the Shu”t Rashba (1:18) explains that no beracha is made before performing the mitzvah of giving tzedakah because of a concern that the poor person may refuse to accept it. In the case of returning a lost object, this logic would not apply since the item already belongs to the individual to whom it is being returned, and he will surely accept it. Nevertheless, Rav Frank points out that it is possible that the owner of the object already had **שוא** – despair – that he would ever recover it, in which case there is no obligation to return it to him, and due to this concern, we do not make a beracha. Alternatively, he cites Rabbeinu Bechaye, who maintains that blessings were not established for the performance of logical mitzvos, a category that includes returning lost objects.
- 3) Demonstrating the encyclopedic mind for which he is renowned, **Rav Chaim Kanievsky** points out that the letter combinations **קל**, **טז**, **זז**, and **ץו** never appear together in any word in the Hebrew language. To explain why a divorce document is called a טל as opposed to one of these other combinations, he cites Tosefos (Gittin 2a), who explain that a divorce document contains 12 lines, which is the numerical value of the word טל, something that is not true of any of the other letter combinations.
- 4) In Parshas Metzora (Vayikra 15:8), the Torah says that if an impure zav spits on someone, the other person and his clothes become tamei (impure). When Miriam was punished with tzara’as at the end of Parshas Behaaloscha (Bamidbar 12:14), she was stricken for seven days, the same period for which she would be ashamed if her father spat in her face. In Parshas Ki Seitzei (Devarim 25:9), the Torah says if a man dies without children, his brother should marry the widow to fulfill the mitzvah of yibum. If the brother refuses to do so, he must instead perform a ritual called chalitzah, in which his sister-in-law spits before him.