

## Ani LeDodi VeDodi Li: The Month of Elul - Section II

From the teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi; adapted by Eli Touger

[« Previous](#)  
Section I

[Next »](#)  
Section III

**והנה** [The previous section focused on the analogy of a king in the field. In order to gain a deeper appreciation of that analogy, we must reflect on the parallels to] the concept of an inhabited city, a field, and a desert that exist within man.

**מדבר** A desert is “an unsown land”;<sup>1</sup> [its earth will not produce crops]. This refers to our deeds, words and thoughts which are not directed to G-d.<sup>2</sup>

*For these deeds will not produce fruit, which are an analogy for mitzvos (Sotah 46a).*

[The intent is] not only the blemishes of [forbidden] thought, speech, or action, but even permitted matters; [e.g., thoughts or actions] that are not necessary for the service of G-d and are thus “wasteful.”

*This concept represents one of the unique contributions to Jewish thought made by Chassidus: that it is not only sin that separates a person from G-d, but any behavior that is not directed to His service. See Tanya, ch. 6.*

For “it is not the manner of a king to involve himself in mundane affairs”;<sup>3</sup>

*In other words, the term “city” refers to an “inhabited land,” a place where G-dliness rests within a person’s deeds and actions. A “desert” is, as stated above, a place where G-d does not invest Himself. And a field is an intermediate state. In it, G-dliness is not apparent. On the other hand, the situation is not one in which the person is estranged from G-d.*

*The Alter Rebbe elaborates on the concept of a desert, because although G-d is never manifest in a desert per se, His coming to “the field,” i.e., granting the Jews the opportunity to approach Him while they are in the midst of their material involvements, arouses those in the “desert” and motivates them to “come to the field” to “greet the King” (the maamar entitled Ani LeDodi, 5726).*

[i.e., G-d will not manifest Himself in material activities that are not motivated by a spiritual intent].

**זהו** This is what is meant by [the description of the desert as a place] “where no man has dwelt.”<sup>4</sup> In this instance, “man” refers to “the image like the appearance of a man upon the image of the Throne,”<sup>5</sup> [which refers to the image of G-d formed by the Divine powers of the realm of *Atzilus*].<sup>6</sup>

*His throne alludes to the quality of Malchus, kingship, as it descends to bring into being the worlds of Beriah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah.*

[This level of “man”] “does not dwell” [in a desert, i.e., it will not manifest itself within the undesirable behaviors mentioned above]. Rather, “they shall make Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell within *them*.”<sup>7</sup>

*As explained in the maamar entitled Basi LeGani, 5710, et al., the intent is not only that G-d dwells within the Jewish people as a whole, but that He dwells within each individual Jew. When a Jew observes the Torah and its mitzvos, he creates a setting where G-d’s presence can be manifest.*

**ועצה** The proper advice [for a person whose spiritual state resembles a desert] is, “And you shall seek G-d, your L-rd,

*The terms ה' אלקיך, translated as “G-d, your L-rd,” apply to every person individually. As mentioned in sec. 1, in every Jew, there is an actual spark of G-d which is identified with His infinite potential, the name Havayah, ה-ו-ה. The possessive form of G-d’s name Elokim, i.e., Elokecha, translated as “your L-rd,” is associated in the above verse with the G-dly power and life-force that enclothes itself in every entity individually to endow it with vitality.*

*Building on this interpretation, “seek[ing] G-d, your L-rd,” can be understood to mean seeking to reestablish a connection with the G-dliness in one’s own being. For, as the Alter Rebbe proceeds to explain, there are times when this G-dly potential is hidden within the inner dimensions of one’s personality and is not given expression.*

from there.”<sup>8</sup> To explain: On the verse:<sup>9</sup> “And G-d saw the light and it was good,” our Sages comment:<sup>10</sup> “[He saw] that it would be good to conceal [the light].”

*In a simple sense, the Zohar is speaking about the light created on the first day of Creation. That light was infinite and unbounded, as our Sages state (Chagigah 12a): “[With it,] one could see from one end of the world to the other.” As such, this light was not fit for a limited world. Hence G-d saw “that it would be good to hide” this light.*

*The Alter Rebbe is emphasizing that parallels to these concepts exist within every individual’s*

*world of the soul. We each possess a Divine potential that is infinite and transcendent.*

*Nevertheless, as the Alter Rebbe proceeds to state, it is often hidden within the inner reaches of our souls.*

The aspect of light which is the illumination of His inner will exists within each and every Jew. However, it is, by nature, very well concealed and [effort is] necessary to reveal [this] “treasury of fear of G-d”<sup>11</sup> [which exists within each of us].<sup>viii</sup>

*The “treasury of fear of G-d” is identified with the inner, transcendent Divine potential possessed by every Jew which causes him to innately fear any influence that would disturb his bond with G-d. See Tanya, the conclusion of ch. 19.*

**ויש** There are those in whom this [potential to love G-d] is like a lost object or in exile, [as it were].

*For most, the inner Divine potential does not govern their operative consciousness. Nevertheless, it serves as a subconscious motivation, continually pushing them towards spiritual growth and development. For others, however, it is “lost” and in exile, in which instance it is unable to exert an influence on the person’s conduct.*

*In his kitzur (summary) of this section, the Tzemach Tzedek associates this concept with our Sages’ comment (Chagigah 4a): “Who is a fool? One who loses what (מה) he is given.” Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar, p. 76b, explains that מה is often interpreted as a person’s potential for bittul, giving himself over to G-d. A fool loses access to that potential.*

Concerning this, the Torah tells us, “You shall seek,” i.e., that it is necessary to search for [this potential within ourselves]. One only searches for a lost object [and not for something that is readily accessible. In this instance, the search is for] something that is lost [within] his [own self], as if in exile, i.e., the exiled spark of G-dliness described above.

**וזהו** This is what is meant by the phrase, “[And you shall seek] G-d, your L-rd”: i.e., [every person should search for the spark of] “G-d, your L-rd,” which is drawn down from the dimension of ל-א that rests within each person, giving life to his individual G-dly soul.

*This relates to the concept that the literal meaning of teshuvah, “return,” reflects the true nature of this spiritual service: a search to return to one’s essential self, the fundamental G-dly spark that lies at the core of our beings.*

**והנה** The verse states: “And you shall seek... from there.” The search must begin “from there.” It is only possible to search for and find a lost object in the place where it was lost. Similarly, it is only possible to

grasp the light of G-d's countenance, to direct one's love to Him, and to manifest fear of Him, by searching first in the place where it was lost.

*By and large, a person's Divine service should focus on the positive, illuminating the world through the light of the Torah and its mitzvos. There is no need to involve oneself with darkness, for the most effective way of banishing it is by shedding light. Nevertheless, when a person realizes that he is overcome by darkness to the extent that his G-dly potential cannot express itself, he must confront the darkness, making an account of the undesirable deeds which he performed and repenting for them. Otherwise, his Divine potential will continue to be prevented from expressing itself. See Tanya, chs. 29-31.*

In this spirit, it is written:<sup>12</sup> "Let us search our paths...." We must review our undesirable deeds, words and thoughts from their earliest beginning.<sup>ix</sup>

**וְעִי"ר** This will arouse feelings of contrite bitterness in one's heart, as implied by the verse:<sup>13</sup> "And he will return to G-d and He will have mercy upon him." [This is the plain meaning of the phrase on the level of *pshat*. On the non-literal level of *derush*, however, the concluding Hebrew word can be understood to mean, "...and *he* shall have mercy upon *Him*"; i.e., the individual] should arouse his own feelings of mercy for the spark of G-d that is in exile within him.<sup>14</sup>

*When a person contemplates the inherent G-dliness present within his soul and honestly surveys the activities in which he is involved, he will feel compassion for having compelled that G-dly spark to bear such involvement.*

**וְעַל** In this context, we can understand the phrase:<sup>15</sup> "to Yaakov who redeemed Avraham."

*According to this interpretation, the emphasis is not on Yaakov and Avraham as individuals, but rather on the spiritual attributes with which they are identified.*

Yaakov represents the attribute of mercy, which has the potential to redeem the attribute of love — exemplified by Avraham, our Patriarch — from exile.

*I.e., a person's potential to love G-d can be in exile, constrained and prevented from expressing itself.*

[Avraham] is called our Patriarch

*Literally, "father." Like a father, he endows his heirs with a legacy; in this instance, a spiritual one.*

because [he endows us with the potential] to act like sons, i.e., extensions

*Lit., “feet”; see sec. 1 above.*

of our Father [in Heaven], to nullify ourselves and to surrender our will to G-d's.<sup>ix</sup>

*I.e., the attribute of love referred to here is not the love that comes as a result of a person's thought and contemplation, but the innate, inherent love that every Jew possesses as a spiritual inheritance from our ancestors, beginning with Avraham.*

*In this way, by expressing the attribute of Yaakov — arousing mercy on our individual spark of G-dliness — we will “redeem Avraham,” i.e., we will enable and empower our innate love for G-d to be manifest.*

**א** When, however, a person reviews his deeds, and his feelings of compassion are still not aroused and he does not feel contrite bitterness despite contemplating how the spark of G-dliness has fallen into exile within his soul,

*He should not remain complacent, but instead should endeavor to spur his spiritual feelings through meditation.*

he should think about the following analogy: By nature, when [a person injures his body], even stubbing his toenail on a stone, he consciously feels pain and is aggrieved. When does this apply? As long as the affected limb is still attached to his body. If, however, the limb is severed, the brain no longer feels pain because the limb has been cut off from its source.

*Similarly, a person's insensitivity to his spiritual decadence should be seen as a danger warning indicating his soul's lack of health.*

**כ** We, the Jewish people, are similarly connected and attached to G-d. We should therefore feel the pain and the damage that we cause by drawing the spark of G-dliness [within us] into exile. [For, as stated above, not only do a person's undesirable behaviors cause he himself to descend, but they bring the G-dly spark within him into exile as well.] “Even if a Jew sins, [he remains a Jew],”<sup>16</sup> and still possesses this G-dly spark. It does not depart from him; it is merely exiled. Furthermore, he still retains the quality of **א-ל** — “**ישראל** is a ruler,” as explained above. And a ruler, even when subjugated, is on a different plane from a common person. It is obvious that he is a ruler and, with one movement, can transform his status from one extreme to another and return to his previous status.

*This highlights the positive potential the person possesses. Nevertheless, it is precisely the*

*awareness of that positive potential that should evoke feelings of mercy, because in the person's present state, he is incapable of expressing it.*

אך [One's awareness of this Divine potential that exists within him should arouse him to remorse and pain. For, as explained above, he should be sensitive to the pain of the Divine Presence that he has drawn into exile.] If, however, a person no longer feels the pain and blemish in his soul, [this is a sign] that he has caused such extensive damage that his soul has been separated and entirely cut off from its source. He should therefore arouse even greater compassion [upon his soul] due to the very fact that he does not feel that he is in need of it.

ש"כ In another source,<sup>17</sup> this concept is explained based on the words of our prayers:<sup>18</sup> "With Your great mercy, have mercy upon us." There it is explained [that we appeal to G-d's mercy] because our limited intellect does not appreciate just how much we truly need [His compassion]. The attribute of mercy, the [all-pervasive] attribute of Yaakov, "extends from one end to the other."<sup>19</sup> , xi

*The phrase cited refers to the middle bar which connected the beams of the Sanctuary. The upper and lower bars were not single units, but instead were each composed of two bars that covered half the Sanctuary's length. The middle bar, by contrast, ran along the entire length of the Sanctuary on each side.*

*The counterpart to this concept in the spiritual realms can be explained as follows: The Sefiros are arranged in three vectors: the right representing the attribute of Chesed (kindness) and its outgrowths and derivatives; the left, Gevurah (might) and its outgrowths and derivatives; and the middle, Tiferes (beauty) and its outgrowths and derivatives. The right and left vectors refer to revealed levels of G-dly light and follow the motif of revelation and contraction. Accordingly, they have a beginning — a point below G-d's Essence — and an end — and thus stop before reaching the lowest levels. The middle vector, by contrast, "extends from one end to the other"; it connects to G-d's Essence which is above limitation and simultaneously penetrates to the lowest realms and reveals G-dliness there (see the maamar entitled KeNesher Ya'ir Kino, 5678).*

*Mercy is identified with the attribute of Tiferes and thus also extends from the highest levels until the lowest, reaching from G-d's very Essence to a person so sunk in kelipah that he does not feel pain at his distance from G-d.*

*To connect this to the concepts explained in the first section: Because the Thirteen Attributes*

*of Mercy shine during the month of Elul, they are able to arouse even a Jew who is found in a desert, a place distant from G-dliness, and motivate him to turn to G-d in teshuvah (the maamar entitled Ani LeDodi, 5735).*

**ואם** If even reflecting on the above is not sufficient to arouse the attribute of mercy, the proper advice is found in the *Zohar*<sup>20</sup>,<sup>xii</sup> in explanation of the expression:<sup>21</sup> “a shepherd among the roses”: “Just as fire causes a rose to change color from red to white, similarly, ‘If your sins are as crimson, they will become as white as snow.’”<sup>22</sup> Sin, and similarly all thought, speech and deed that are concerned with worldly matters, are identified with the color red, for they are the thoughts and schemes of the [evil] inclination. These can be transformed and become as white as snow through the quality of fire.

**והנה** [In the sacrificial service in the *Beis HaMikdash*, there were two types of fire:] fire which descended from Above and fire brought from below.<sup>23</sup> Not every person merits the fire which descends from Above.

*The “fire from Above” refers to suffering which will be visited upon a person to cleanse him of his sins. Nevertheless, not everyone merits this purifying influence, as implied by the verse (Mishlei 3:12): “One whom G-d loves He chastises” (Tanya, Iggeres HaTeshuvah, ch. 1). If one does not merit to be chastised from Above, he may — as the Alter Rebbe proceeds to explain — seek to purify himself through penances and fasts.*

*It must be emphasized, however, that even in the Alter Rebbe’s time, fasting was not considered a desirable option because of people’s weakened physical condition (ibid., ch. 3). Certainly, this applies in the present era. Instead, atonement should be sought by giving to tzedekah (Sefer HaSichos 5749, Vol. p. 184ff.).*

[Bringing] the fire from below [is, however, within the potential of each individual] through self-affliction and fasts that reduce one’s fat and blood,<sup>24</sup> which have their source in *kelipas nogah*. Through this, “G-d will cause His countenance to shine,” revealing the radiant countenance spoken of above.

## Summary

[In order to gain a deeper appreciation of the analogy of the king in the field, we must reflect on the parallels to] an inhabited city, [a field, and a desert that exist within man].<sup>xiii</sup>

A desert is “an unsown land,”<sup>xiv</sup> a place “where no man has dwelt,” [i.e., a place where G-dliness is not manifest,] the direct opposite of [the *Beis HaMikdash*, of which] it is said:<sup>25</sup> “Would G-d truly dwell on earth?”

The proper advice [for a person whose spiritual state resembles a desert is]: “And you shall seek G-d, your L-rd, from there.” [Every person has an inherent G-dly potential. Often, however, it is hidden, as implied by our Sages’ interpretation of the verse]: “And G-d saw the light and it was good,” as “it would be good to hide [the light].” [This refers to the light that shines to every Jew, as it is written]: “ל-א-י ה-ו-ה-י, and He shines light to us,” direct from G-d,<sup>26</sup> [as it were]. For some, however, [not only is the light hidden,] it is lost, as intimated by our Sages’ statement:<sup>27</sup> “Who is a fool? One who loses what (מה) he is given.”<sup>28</sup> This reflects [the prophecy<sup>29</sup> which speaks of] “those lost in the land of Ashur” and [the lament]:<sup>30</sup> “I strayed like a lost sheep.”<sup>xv</sup>

[To repent,] it is necessary to search in the place where the loss took place, i.e., a person should examine his deeds, [following the advice of the verse:] “And you shall seek G-d, your L-rd, from there.” [The term “there” refers to the realm of *kelipah*, where G-d’s presence is not manifest.]

[When one “seek{s}... from there,” reviewing his undesirable conduct, this will arouse feelings of contrite bitterness in his heart.] “And he will return to G-d and He will have mercy upon him.”<sup>xvi</sup>

[On the non-literal level of *derush*, the latter verse can be interpreted as meaning that the person will have mercy on the spark of G-dliness in his soul and bring it into expression. When this is accomplished, it is possible to reach a positive connotation] of a desert, as implied by the phrase:<sup>31</sup> “Your speech is attractive.” For through *teshuvah*, [the concept that] a desert is a place “where no man has dwelt,”<sup>xvii</sup> [can be seen in a positive light, referring to] a rung above the level of “man.”<sup>32</sup> [This level can be referred to as] “the great and awesome desert.”<sup>33</sup>

[When, however,] a person [does not feel contrite bitterness and] mercy for his soul [after reviewing his deeds], he should realize that [this lack of sensitivity comes because his soul] has become so blemished that it has become separated and cut off from its source.<sup>xviii</sup> [The awareness of this separation] should arouse even greater feelings of mercy. This generates hope.

[If even meditation on the above does not arouse a desire for *teshuvah*, the person should follow the advice implied by the phrase,] “a shepherd among the roses.” A rose [has thirteen petals, alluding to] the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. An additional allusion suggested by roses is [reflected by the verse]: “If your sins are as crimson, they will become as white as snow.” [Now,] a rose changes color from red to white through fire.<sup>xix</sup> [Similarly, through the fire of self-affliction, a person can redeem his inner G-dly nature.] This will cause G-d to shine His countenance upon [the Jewish people].<sup>xx</sup>



## FOOTNOTES

1. *Yirmeyahu* 2:2.
2. See *Tanya*, ch. 6.
3. *Zohar*, Vol. III, p.149b.
4. *Yirmeyahu* 2:6.
5. *Yechezkel* 1:26.
6. *Torah Or, Mishpatim*, p. 77b.
7. *Shmos* 25:8.
8. *Devarim* 4:29.
9. *Bereishis* 1:4.
10. See *Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 45b; II, p. 202b.
11. Cf. *Berachos* 33b; see *Yeshayahu* 33:6.
12. *Eichah* 3:40.
13. *Yeshayahu* 55:7.
14. See *Tanya*, ch. 45.
15. Cf. *Yeshayahu* 29:22. See also the explanation in *Likkutei Torah, Emor*, p. 35c.
16. *Sanhedrin* 44a.
17. See the *maamar* entitled *U'Sfartem Lachem* (*Likkutei Torah, Emor*, p. 35c, also translated in this series) that explains similar concepts.
18. The blessing *Yotzer Or*, in the daily liturgy.
19. Cf. *Shmos* 26:28.
20. *Zohar*, Vol. II, p. 20a-b.
21. *Shir HaShirim* 6:3, the continuation of the opening verse of the *maamar*.
22. *Yeshayahu* 1:18.
23. See *Yoma* 21b; *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* to *Shir HaShirim* 2:5.
24. See *Berachos* 17a; *Zohar*, Vol. II, pp. 20b, 119b.
25. *I Melachim* 8:27, referring to the indwelling of the Divine Presence in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Significantly, this verse — and some of the concepts to follow in this summary — are not mentioned in the original text of the *maamar* and were added in the summary by the *Tzemach Tzedek*. For that reason, we have added commentary to this summary.
26. The *Tzemach Tzedek* is alluding to the concept that the name Israel (ישראל) can be divided as ישר אל, "direct from G-d."
27. See *Chagigah* 4a.
28. As explained in *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, p. 91c, the term *mah* refers to the potential for *bittul* that exists within every Jew. Through following the foolishness of the *yetzer hara*, a person can lose the potential to access this *bittul*.
29. *Yeshayahu* 27:13.
30. *Tehillim* 119:176.
31. *Shir HaShirim* 4:3. As explained in the *maamar* entitled *BaChodesh HaShelishi* (*Torah Or*, p.67d, translated in this series), *et al.*, מדבר, "desert," shares the same root as דיבור, "speech."
32. For the term "man" refers to G-dliness as it has confined itself within the Ten *Sefiros* and thus adapted itself to the limits of mortal existence. Thus, the desert would refer to a level of G-dliness that transcends that frame of reference.
33. *Devarim* 1:19. Implied is that the desert is "awesome" because it refers to a level of G-dliness above man's comprehension.

**FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI SCHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI; ADAPTED BY ELI TOUGER**

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (18 Elul 1745-24 Tevet 1812), known as "the Alter Rebbe," was one of the main disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, and the founder of the Chabad Chassidism. He is the author of *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and *Tanya* as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

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