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## U'Sfartem Lachem: Sefiras HaOmer - Section III

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

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The Additions of The Tzemach Tzedek

**והנה** All the above reflects the thrust of *ratzo*, [leading to a personal] exodus from Egypt. It, however, relates only to the G-dly soul

*I.e., and not the animal soul.*

which is in exile in the boundaries

*The Alter Rebbe uses the term meitzarim, which relates to the Hebrew term for Egypt, Mitzrayim*

and limitations that cover [G-dliness], as reflected in Pharaoh's statement:<sup>1</sup> "I do not know G-d."

**ש"ו** [This is alluded to in G-d's promise] to Yaakov:<sup>2</sup> "I will descend with you to Egypt and I will bring you up."

*I.e., the descent of the Jewish people into Egypt and their eventual redemption is reflected in the soul's descent into the body and the experience of redemption in the recitation of the Shema. It is, however, the G-dly soul — and not the animal soul — that undergoes this experience.*

Yaakov refers to the G-dly soul alone. [His name] Yaakov (יעקב) [can be divided as] עקב י, [which refers to drawing down the י, identified with G-d's name י-ה-ו-ה, into ekev (עקב), the heel].<sup>3</sup> And of him, it is said:<sup>4</sup> "Yaakov is the cord of His inheritance, for His nation is a portion of G-d."

*The analogy of a cord implies a connective process in which one end is bound up above and the other, anchored below (see Tanya, ch. 45, et al.).*

**כ"ט** Similarly, it is written:<sup>5</sup> "And Israel saw the great hand that G-d had used against Egypt." Israel refers to the G-dly soul alone, for it is said:<sup>6</sup> "Israel arose in [G-d's] thought,"

*In contrast to speech, which becomes a separate entity, thought remains one with the person thinking. Thus Israel as a whole — and every individual Jewish soul — is at one with G-dliness.*

as reflected in the division of the name Israel (ישראל) into the words לי ראש, "a head for Me."

*Thought is lodged in the head. This reinforces the concept that the souls have their source in G-d's thought. See Tanya, ch. 2, which uses similar concepts to describe the soul's essential G-dly nature.*

Thus it was Israel

*I.e., the G-dly soul.*

alone who saw [the miracles] G-d wrought.

*Implied is that the G-dly souls of the Jewish people are, like miracles, above the natural order.*

**וכמ"כ** In like manner, the state of *ratzo*, [a person's yearning for G-d, his personal experience of an] exodus from Egypt, and his expression of love [for Him] involves only the G-dly soul.

*I.e., the G-dly soul seeks to unite with its source, above the limits of material existence.*

[In order for the growth in our Divine service to be lasting, however, a change must also be brought about within the animal soul.] Now, the animal soul, [as its name implies,] desires to eat and carry out other material activities, as is the conduct of animals. In order to receive the Torah, which is the revelation of G-d's will on the material plane,

*It was explained at the conclusion of sec. 1 that Shavuot, the Giving of the Torah, represents the motif of *shov*, the revelation of G-d's will on the material plane. For such a revelation to be achieved, it is necessary for the animal soul, the aspect of the material world within man, to undergo a process of refinement.*

as it were, it is also necessary for there to be a nullification [of the *yeshus*] of the animal soul.<sup>v</sup>

*I.e., in addition to the yearning aroused within the G-dly soul, the *yeshus*, the self-concern of the animal soul, must be nullified.*

This is achieved through the waving of the *omer* offering and the Counting of the Omer,

*See the maamar entitled *VeHeinif Es HaOmer in Likkutei Torah, Vayikra, p. 36a ff.*, which was delivered as an explanation of the concepts in this maamar. As explained in this section and in that source in greater depth, the waving of the omer and the Counting of the Omer represent two different movements necessary for the refinement of the animal soul.*

*Waving the omer refers to the task of elevating the animal soul to its source in holiness and revealing the sublime G-dly energies invested in it. As implied by the term sefiras, the Counting of the Omer refers to drawing down G-dly light which transforms the expression of the qualities of the animal soul to holiness and enables them to radiate light.*

as it is written:<sup>7</sup> “And he shall wave the *omer* before G-d to gain favor for you. On the day following the Sabbath,

*I.e., Pesach, when the yearning of the G-dly soul is aroused.*

the priest shall wave it.” [This is indicated by the fact that] the *omer* offering was brought from barley which [our Sages refer to] as animal fodder.<sup>8</sup>

*And thus refers to the refinement of the animal soul.*

**וכמ"כ** Similarly, in the spiritual realms, there is a dimension identified with animals (*beheimos*), [for] the Divine chariot included<sup>9</sup> “a lion’s face to the right... and an ox’s face to the left,”

*In Yechezkel’s vision, the Divine throne was carried by four spiritual beings: one with the face of a man; another with the face of a lion; a third, with the face of an ox; and a fourth, with the face of an eagle. Obviously, Yechezkel was referring to angels. Nevertheless, in his vision, they appear as wild beasts (*chayos*) and animals (*beheimos*) because: a) they are the spiritual source for the animals on the physical plane; and b) their desire for G-dliness is bestial, i.e., impulsive and emotionally charged, rather than intellectual.*

for a wild beast (*chayah*) is also considered an animal (*beheimah*).<sup>10</sup>

*The term *chayah*, “beast,” generally refers to an untamed animal, while the term *beheimah*, translated as “animal,” refers to a domesticated animal. Nevertheless, in a larger sense, the term *beheimah* can be used for both. Hence, the lion can also be considered a *beheimah*.*

Similarly, with regard to the “sea” made by [King] Shlomo, it is written:<sup>11</sup> “It stood upon twelve oxen, three facing north....” [The oxen] represent the Divine chariot.

*The “sea” refers to a copper tub that served as a mikveh used for immersion of articles in the Beis HaMikdash.*

*The Beis HaMikdash reflects the spiritual reality above. The sea refers to the Sefirah of Malchus, the source of all created existence. The twelve oxen refer to those angels who represent the highest levels of created existence.*

“The sea [rested] upon them from above.” This refers to the sublime sea, the level described as “the sublime animal.”<sup>12</sup>

*This phrase, borrowed from Yonah 4:11, is used as a reference to the Sefirah of Malchus because it serves as the celestial source for the animal kingdom and the “animals” in the Divine chariot. The term rabbah, translated as “sublime,” also has the meaning of “inclusive” and “encompassing.” Malchus includes the sources for all the different types of existence in this world. Therefore it is described with the term “sublime animal” (the maamar entitled VeHeinif Es HaOmer cited above).*

It is identified [with the *milui* of G-d’s name *Havayah* that is numerically equivalent to] 52 (ב"ן).

*The term milui refers to a pattern in numerology in which the name of each letter of a word is spelled out, and the numerical values of all the letters in these spellings are added together. G-d’s name Havayah is made up of four letters Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei (י-ה-ו-ה). These letters may be spelled in four different ways, with each spelling yielding a different numerical value. The numerical value of Havayah when the names of its letters are spelled out with the letters יוּד הֵי הֵי וָו is 52.*

[That number is] also the numerical equivalent of the word בהמה (meaning “animal”).

*The fact that two terms share the same numerical equivalent can imply that they relate to the same spiritual quality.*

[This represents] the spiritual source of the Divine chariot [carried by] “the face of a lion....” The chariot itself is the root and the source for all the animals on this earthly plane and the animal soul [of a Jew] which are drawn down from it.

**ושעורה** [The nurture for the animal kingdom is] barley, שעורה, [in Hebrew. That term] can be divided as **שעור ה**, “the measure, five.”

*Were the Divine creative energy vested in the Sefirah of Malchus to be revealed as it is, it would be impossible for our material world — or even the lower spiritual worlds — to exist in their present form. Instead, a process of contraction and concealment is necessary. That process involves “measure,” i.e., that the infinite Divine energy be conveyed in a form that can relate to a limited world. More particularly, it is associated with the number five, for according to Kabbalah, this process of contraction and concealment is associated with the five Gevuros, attributes of might.*

*This is reflected by the fact that G-d's creative energy is described by the analogy of speech. Thus the Torah refers to Creation as coming about through G-d declaring: "Let there be...." In like vein, Malchus, the source of G-d's creative energy, is described with the analogy of the mouth (the passage Pasach Eliyahu, Tikkunei Zohar, p. 17a). Now the mouth has five organs of speech, i.e., there are five organs that limit and restrain a person's breath so that he is able to communicate to another person. Similarly, there are five Gevuros that constrict and contract G-d's creative energy so that a limited framework of existence can be brought into being.*

[Now, as mentioned above, barley is animal fodder. Similarly,] from the refinement of entities on the material plane, [nurture is generated for "the sublime animal," the Sefirah of Malchus, when the sparks of G-dliness invested in material entities] are refined and included in the level of "the sublime animal" mentioned previously.<sup>vi</sup>

*To continue the analogy: We also eat with our mouths. Similarly, Malchus is involved in the spiritual motif of refinement. To explain: Eating involves a process in which food is digested and its energy included in the soul. Similarly, through a person's refinement of the material world (through eating or performing other material activities for a spiritual purpose), the sparks of G-dliness encloded in that food ascend and are included in their source, the Sefirah of Malchus.*

**כמאמר** [This is alluded to by the phrase:]<sup>13</sup> "...Who forms ministering angels," i.e., there are angels that become nullified every day, for they are absorbed and included in their source, "the sublime animal," just as barley is eaten by an animal on the material plane.

*These angels are the source of the material entities in this world. When those material entities are used for a spiritual purpose, the angels ascend and are included in Malchus. In this process of ascent, they lose their individual identity and become batel.*

[Then the angels] are renewed, continually every day.

*The renewal of the angels makes the continuation of this process of refinement possible.*

**וזוהו** This is the implication of the phrase: "The priest shall wave it." [The priest] is identified with the attribute of sublime kindness.<sup>14</sup> He elevates the sublime animal through the omer of barley, the quality of "the measure, five" mentioned above, [lifting it] above the name Havayah.

*The verse states that the omer offering should be waved "before G-d," לפני י-ה-ו-ה. Lifnei, translated as "before," also has the connotation "on a higher level than." In this context, the*

*name Havayah refers to the six middos of Atzilus. The process of refinement elevates Malchus and the sparks of G-dliness that ascend to it to the Sefirah of Binah, a higher level than these middos (the maamar entitled VeHeinif Es HaOmer cited above).*

[For this reason, the verse] states [that the waving is performed]: “On the day following the Sabbath,” i.e., on a level higher than the Sabbath.

*The Sabbath reflects two levels: one associated with the Sefirah of Malchus and one associated with the middos of Atzilus. The offering of the omer has its source in the Sefirah of Binah which is above both these levels (ibid.).*

This is sufficient for a person of understanding.

**ועי"ז** As a result of [the spiritual activity accompanying the waving of the omer], the sublime encompassing lights can then be drawn down from Above to the omer through [the process of] the Counting of the Omer.

*Through man's efforts in using material entities for a spiritual purpose, he elevates them, but does not transform them entirely. That is possible only by drawing down higher spiritual energies referred to as encompassing lights. The term “encompassing” is used because it refers to a light that is too high and powerful to be internalized within a limited framework. Drawing down these encompassing lights must, however, be preceded by a process of refinement. Without such efforts, the material realm will not be an appropriate vessel for these sublime lights.*

[This is reflected in the wording used for the Counting of the Omer, e.g.:] “Today is the first day of the omer.” “Day” refers to the attribute of kindness, as it is written:<sup>15</sup> “By day, G-d ordains His kindness.” This refers to the sublime kindness which is drawn down to the omer to bring about the negation of the will of the animal soul. This is implied by the use of the term לרצונכם, [literally meaning,] “for your will,”

*Within the context of the proof-text, Vayikra 23:11, the verse would be translated as “for your favor.”*

i.e., in order to bring about the nullification of your will through drawing down the encompassing lights through the Counting of the Omer.

**וזרה** This is the implication of the command: “And you shall count for yourselves,” to draw down the ray of the encompassing lights which is “from the day following the Sabbath.” [The counting] is “for yourselves,” [implying that there is an effect on] the lower realms, transforming the animal soul so that its will should also be nullified, [thus “making yourselves luminous,” as mentioned in sec. 1].

*I.e., not only does the Counting of the Omer produce effects in the spiritual realms, it also draws light from those spiritual realms into this world.*

**וזהו** [For this reason, counting is begun] “from the day on which you bring the *omer*” — the day on which the *omer* is waved before G-d.

*I.e., elevated to its source, the Sefirah of Binah which is “before G-d,” above the name Havayah as mentioned above.*

Then, “And you shall count for yourselves,” [i.e.,] through the Counting of the *Omer*, [you shall] draw down to yourself the seven weeks, i.e., the seven Divine emotional qualities.

*Drawing down these sublime lights changes the nature of the lower realms.*

**ואי** [Every year, this twofold process] makes it possible for there to be [a renewal of] the Giving of the Torah on the holiday of Shavuot,

*I.e., just as it was explained that there is a spiritual parallel to the exodus from Egypt in our own Divine service, so too, as the Alter Rebbe proceeds to explain, there is a parallel in our Divine service to the Giving of the Torah.*

the revelation of His actual will from above on this lower plane. This reflects a higher level than [that reached through] prayer, [the personal experience of an] exodus from Egypt, which is identified with a state of *ratzo*, as mentioned above, loving [G-d] “with all your heart.” This does not represent a complete level of *bittul*, because [in a love relationship], the one who loves always retains his identity.<sup>16</sup>

*The experience of self-transcendence in prayer can involve a person in an all-encompassing desire for G-dliness. Nevertheless, it is his desire. He appreciates that his own self-fulfillment comes in going beyond himself and devoting himself to the love of G-d. Thus his own identity is not entirely effaced.*

*In Torah study, by contrast, the person’s “I” is nullified entirely. His entire thrust is to align his mind with G-d’s thoughts and to utter G-d’s word. There is no sense of who I am and what I want. His own “I” has become identified with the Torah.*

**משא"כ** With regard to Torah study, by contrast, the actual words of G-d are [uttered] by the person’s mouth, as it is written:<sup>17</sup> “And I will place My words in your mouth,” i.e., [the Torah is] actually “My words.” Similarly, it is said:<sup>18</sup> “I am the *mishnah* that is being spoken by your mouth.”

*R. Yosef Caro was tutored by an angel and the angel made this statement to him.*

And our Sages said:<sup>19</sup> “These and these are the words of the living G-d,”

*Our Sages made this statement to explain the fact that, at times, Torah Sages would differ and indeed, offer contradictory opinions. Both of the perspectives are valid, each one expressing a spiritual motif that reflects a pattern in the higher realms.*

the actual words of G-d, the revelation of His will on this physical plane. This is the implication of the charge:<sup>20</sup> “And you shall speak of them,” actually “of them.”

*I.e., when a person is reciting words of Torah, he is stepping beyond the human realm and attaching himself to G-d's words.*

[Speaking words of Torah] thus represents [loving G-d] “with all your soul,”<sup>21</sup>

*This is a more encompassing love than loving Him “with all your heart.”*

connecting your thought to G-d's thought.<sup>vii</sup>

*See Tanya, ch. 5, which explains that when a person studies Torah, his thought and the Torah, G-d's thought, become united in a wondrous bond.*

א Although [the strivings towards *ratzo* in prayer are only a preliminary step, and consummate fulfillment comes through Torah study, they are, however, a necessary prerequisite. As] our Sages say:<sup>22</sup> “Anyone who says: ‘The only thing that I possess is the Torah’ does not even possess the Torah,”

*There our Sages state that Torah study must be complemented by the observance of deeds of kindness. Without minimizing the simple meaning of that counsel, the Alter Rebbe (Likkutei Torah, Vayikra, p. 5a) explains that it also relates to prayer, as stated by Rashi (Shabbos 127b). The implication is that unless a person undergoes an experience of personal refinement through which his will becomes directed to the love of G-d, he will not be able to unite with and express the G-dliness of the Torah. Instead, he will regard the Torah as a mere intellectual exercise.*

for he is a self-conscious and independent entity (a *yesh*). Even when he speaks words of Torah, they are not the words of G-d at all, nor do they reveal G-d's will at all. For one must first experience the aspect of *ratzo*, a [personal] exodus from Egypt, that elevates him from a lower level, as explained previously.

*This takes the person out of his self-consciousness and makes him a medium to reveal G-d's word.*

**וע"י** Through this, “the spirit [generated by man] brings about and draws down a Spirit [from Above],”<sup>23</sup> for an arousal from below brings about an arousal from Above. [Man’s efforts] awaken [G-d’s] will above, as it were, and draw it downward, even though it becomes en clothed in material matters like *terumah*, the tithes, and the sacrifices, [although] it is not the manner of a king to be involved with ordinary matters.<sup>24</sup>

*In the analogue, G-d, the King of kings, would not involve Himself in matters of this material world, like terumah for example, unless that involvement was called forth by man’s spiritual service. The commitment man makes to go beyond himself and his material concerns and devote himself to the Torah evokes a commitment from G-d to “go beyond Himself” as it were and invest Himself in the Torah even though it concerns matters of this material world.*

**וע"ז** Accordingly, the priest must first wave the *omer* offering of barley — which, as explained above, [refers to] **שעור ה**, “the measure, five,” the fodder for the sublime animal — and [elevate it] “before G-d,” above the level of the name *Havayah*, as explained above.

**וע"ז** Through this, it is possible that afterwards, through the Counting of the *Omer*, the encompassing lights can be drawn down to the *omer*,

*And the animal soul associated with it.*

as [implied by the verse]: “And you shall count for yourselves... seven weeks.” This makes it possible for there to be [a renewal of] the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot, [causing] the revelation of [G-d’s] will on this lowly plane within the letters of the Torah.<sup>viii</sup>

*Shavuot represents a renewal of the Giving of the Torah, a level above man’s spiritual reach. The Divine service of Counting the Omer refines mankind and the material realm in which he lives, enabling the Torah to be internalized within man.*

## Summary

In a personal sense, the exodus from Egypt refers to awakening yearning within the G-dly soul. Nevertheless, in order for the growth in our Divine service to be lasting, a change must also be brought about within the animal soul which is, by nature, concerned with material things. The refinement of the animal soul is alluded to by the *omer* offering, for that offering involves barley, described by our Sages as “animal fodder.” Waving the *omer* refers to the task of elevating the animal soul to its source in holiness and revealing the sublime G-dly energies invested in it. Counting the *Omer* refers to drawing down G-dly light that transforms the expression of the qualities of the animal soul to holiness.

Every year, this twofold process makes it possible for there to be a renewal of the Giving of the Torah on the holiday of Shavuot, enabling G-d's will to be revealed on this lower plane. Torah study involves a deeper relationship with G-d than the love and yearning associated with an individual's personal exodus from Egypt achieved through prayer. In a love relationship, the lover always retains his identity. Through Torah study, by contrast, a person's "I" is nullified entirely. His mind becomes aligned with G-d's thoughts.

Although the ultimate goal is the identification with G-d through Torah study, for that study to connect him with G-d, a person must first experience a yearning for G-d (the spiritual parallel to the Exodus) and refine his personal characteristics (the parallel to the Counting of the *Omer*). This individual spiritual endeavor awakens spiritual influences Above and draws down G-d's will into the material dimensions of our world.

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## FOOTNOTES

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|--|---|--|
| 1. <i>Shmos</i> 5:3. See the explanation of this concept in sec. 1.  | 7. <i>Vayikra</i> 23:11.                                    | 16. See <i>Tanya</i> , ch. 35.                       |
| 2. <i>Bereishis</i> 46:4.  | 8. <i>Sotah</i> 14a.  | 17. <i>Yeshayahu</i> 51:16.                          |
| 3. <i>Pardes, Shaar Arachei HaKinuiim</i> , as explained in <i>Torah Or, Bereishis</i> , p. 21c, and <i>Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar</i> , p. 73a. | 9. <i>Yechezkel</i> 1:10.                                   | 18. <i>Maggid Meisharim, Parshas Vayikra, et al.</i> |
| 4. Cf. <i>Devarim</i> 32:9.  | 10. <i>Bava Kama</i> 17a.                                   | 19. <i>Eruvin</i> 13b.                               |
| 5. <i>Shmos</i> 14:31.   | 11. <i>I Melachim</i> 7:25.                                 | 20. <i>Devarim</i> 6:7.                              |
| 6. <i>Bereishis Rabbah</i> 1:4.  | 12. Cf. <i>Yonah</i> 4:11.                                  | 21. <i>Ibid.</i> :5.                                 |
|  | 13. The blessing <i>Yotzer Or</i> from the Morning Prayers. | 22. <i>Yevamos</i> 109b.                             |
|  | 14. See <i>Zohar</i> , Vol. I, p. 256a.                     | 23. See <i>Zohar</i> , Vol. II, p. 162b.             |
|  | 15. <i>Tehillim</i> 42:9.                                   | 24. <i>Ibid.</i> , Vol. III, p. 149b.                |

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

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