

## Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

The teachings of the Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr and Likkutei Torah

# The swords and arrows of prayer

ד"ה ואני נתתי לך שכם אחד (הוספות)

פרשת ויחי  
Vayechi 5782

ואני נתתי לך שכם אחד על-אחירך אשר לקחתי מיד האמרי  
בחרבי ובקשתי

“And I have given you one portion (*Shchem Echad*) over your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword (*Becharbi*) and with my bow (*uBekashti*)”. Yaakov says these words to Yosef in their final meeting.

The verse is puzzling. Yaakov was not a man of war. Yaakov opposed his sons’ attack on *Shchem*. So what is the meaning of him taking *Shchem* through implements of war. Who is the Emorite that he took it from. And most importantly, what is the eternal lesson that the Torah is teaching us?

Unkelos translates the words *בחרבי ובקשתי* as *בצלותי ובבקעותי*, meaning my prayers and my requests. The sword and bow are euphemisms for prayer.

In the Tehillim recited as part of our daily Davening, we say *רוֹמְמוֹת אֵל בְּגִרוֹנָם וְחָרֵב פִּיפִיּוֹת בְּיָדָם לַעֲשׂוֹת נְקָמָה בְּגוֹיִם*

“The exaltations of G-d are in their throats and a double-edged sword in their hands, to take retribution upon the nations”.

The nations refer to the forces of negativity (Kelipah). The *Posuk* teaches that we take vengeance against them to remove their influence, with a double-edged sword. Two blades are necessary because the Kelipah receives its vitality and manifests in two ways.

The first way is through our desire for material pleasures. When we ‘lower’ ourselves in pursuit of physicality, we cause Hashem to bring down the Divine light to strengthen the Kelipos.

The other way is through arrogance. When we lift ourselves up, seeking honour, we cause the Kelipos to rise up with arrogance and *Chutzpah* to take more vitality than they are entitled to.

The double-edged sword are “the exaltations of Hashem in our throats”, a reference to prayer.

One slays their enemy with a sword by severing the head from the body. Through Davening, we separate the Kelipos from the side of holiness (the head), so that they are unable to receive their vitality in either of the two ways described above.

When we Daven, we are trying to arouse the desire and love of the *Neshama* for Hashem. This love is cultivated through our meditations during Davening, particularly in the lead-up to the *Shema* and in the *Shema* where we express the *Mitzvah* to love Hashem. These G-dly feelings of love cut away the desires of the animalistic soul for worldly pleasures.

A sword can only be used when the enemy is within reach and can be seen. When the enemy is hidden and distant, a bow and arrow is required, which can reach the enemy in hiding.

The Kelipah that is manifests within us in a revealed way is easy to identify. We sense its presence and influence. For this Kelipah, the sword of the *Shema* is sufficient. Like a sword, a spear is also used in close-combat. The word spear - *רֶמַח* has the Gematria of 248, the same number of words in the *Shema*.

But then there is the more subtle, hidden presence of the Kelipah within us. Like a hidden enemy, this dimension of Kelipah is more insidious and harder to remove.

For this, the sword of love generated in *Shema* is not enough. We need *בבקשתי*, “with my bow”. The word *בקשתי* also means “my requests”, referring to the requests that we make in the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

In contrast to *Shema* which is an expression of self, through feelings of love and closeness to Hashem, *Shemoneh Esrei* is about humility and surrender-of-self (*Bittul*) before Hashem. In *Shema* we sit, but in *Shemoneh Esrei* we stand with *Bittul*, like a servant in the presence of their master.

The humility and feelings of lowliness that we express in these requests reach the deepest levels of G-dliness and arouse Hashem’s infinite mercy upon us. With this mercy, Hashem removes the hidden Kelipah that we alone could not reach.

When shooting an arrow, the further back (down) you draw the bowstring, the greater power the arrow will have, enabling it to reach greater distances. So too in our spiritual service. Commensurate with how much we humble ourselves before Hashem, will be the Divine assistance from Above.

The Emorite (*אמורי*) comes from the word *אמר*, meaning to speak. The Kelipos are emboldened when we have foreign thoughts in Davening. These thoughts come from the idle chatter (*אמר*) we engage in.

Through the holy words of prayer and Torah study, we take away the portion (*Shchem*) of the Emorite and transform it to become *Shchem Echad*, that ultimately the Kelipah too will become united with the oneness of Hashem *Echad*.

Then we will have the fulfillment of the prophesy *אז אהפך אל עמים שפה ברורה לקרא כלם בשם ה' לעבדו שכם אחד* “Then I will transform the nations to have a pure speech, that they will all call in the name of Hashem as one load - *Shchem Echad*.”