

# The Path To Follow

Ke Tetzei

507

A Hevrat Pinto Publication

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Elul 11<sup>th</sup>, 5773

August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013

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## When You Go Out to War – Man and the Fight Against the Evil Inclination

It is written, “When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand and you take captives...” (Devarim 21:10).

The commentators, such as the Alsheich Zatzal in his book *Torat Moshe*, have already explained this passage as referring to a Jew’s war against his constant and eternal enemy, the evil inclination. In this week’s parsha, we are given a great deal of advice on how to fight and defeat it, a subject that I will explain by following the order of the verses.

The words, “Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand” relate to what the Sages have said: “Man’s evil inclination gathers strength against him each day and seeks to kill him...and were the Holy One, blessed be He, not to help him, he would be unable to prevail against it” (Kiddushin 30b). This means that with his own minor strength, man cannot defeat the evil inclination. On the other hand, he has the duty to start fighting it, in which case the Holy One, blessed be He, will help him to defeat it, as the Sages have said: “If one comes to purify himself, he is helped” (Yoma 38b). At that point the Holy One, blessed be He, will certainly deliver it into his hand.

In general, we know that whoever goes to war will try to uncover the details and secrets of his enemy’s forces, doing so in order to determine how he can defeat his enemy, such as by using a sophisticated weapon for example. The same applies to man’s fight against the evil inclination, which possesses considerable strength and employs all the tricks of warfare. He must therefore attack it using the most sophisticated weapon possible, namely the Torah, as the Sages have said: “I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote” (Kiddushin 30b). It is the Torah which can defeat the evil inclination and make it fall.

This idea is alluded to in the expression, “When you go out to war,” for the term *milchama* (“war”) can be divided into *lechem ma*. This designates the Torah, which is called *lechem* (“bread” – *Yalkut Shimoni*), as it is written: “Come, eat of my bread” (Mishlei 9:5). As for the term *ma*, it has the same numerical value as *adam* (“man”). As we have said, this means that when a person decides to fight his evil inclination, he will only be able to defeat it through Torah. In such a case, it will dissolve if made of stone, and it will shatter if made of iron (Kiddushin 30b).

In this regard, we must add that there exists another way to defeat the evil inclination, a *segula* to conquer and prevent it from bringing man down to the abyss. This consists of guarding the sanctity of the *milah*. Sanctity must be absolute in this area, in which case we will be able to conquer the evil inclination. This is also alluded to in the expression *ki tetzei la’ milchama*, which is formed by the letters of *lechem milah*, meaning that when a man guards his *milah* as he should, and he strengthens himself in *lechem* (i.e., Torah), he will defeat the evil inclination.

In that case, he will fulfill the next part of the verse: “and you take captives.” This means that all the drops of semen which he emitted in vain, and which were held captive by the forces of impurity, will also be saved and purified. This occurs when a person controls his evil inclination, as it is written: “He devoured wealth, but will disgorge it” (Job 20:15), and they will return to their source.

As we know, “He devoured wealth, but will disgorge it” represents the initials of one of Hashem’s sacred Names. This is the Name that we focus on when immersing ourselves in a *mikveh*, doing so in order to retrieve the sparks of holiness that we have damaged, and to no longer lose them. This is the meaning of “and you take prisoners.” By dividing the term *shivyo* (“prisoners”), we get *shav* and the letters *yud vav*. These letters are part of the sacred Name in question, one by which a person retrieves all that was taken from him by the evil inclination, all the sparks of holiness that were lost.

The passage continues: “And you see among the captives a woman of beautiful appearance” (Devarim 21:11). In other words, once you defeat the evil inclination, you will perceive the sweetness of the Torah, which enabled you to fight the evil inclination. How so? By the brilliance of its glory and by its secrets. It will be beautiful to you, making you desire it even more, as it is written: “Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its pathways are peace” (Mishlei 3:17). This is also alluded to in the term *to’ar* (“appearance”), the numerical value of which (when adding its four letters to the total) is equal to that of Torah.

At that point, “you will have a desire for her” (Devarim 21:11), meaning that your desire for Torah will make you cleave to it, and you will truly acquire it in your soul as if it were your wife. As the Sages have said on the verse, “Moshe commanded us a Torah, a heritage [morasha] of the congregation of Jacob” (Devarim 33:4): “Do not read *morasha* [heritage], but *me’orasa* [betrothed]” (Sifre ad loc.). They also compare a good wife to the Torah (see *Yebamot* 63b). This is “you will take her to yourself for a wife” (Devarim 21:11).

We then come to the following idea: “You shall bring her into the midst of your house” (v.12), meaning that the Torah must truly be within you, as it is written: “Your Torah is in my innards” (Tehillim 40:9). In that case, you will have completely acquired and internalized it, and it will never leave you.

You will then fulfill: “She shall shave her head” (Devarim 21:12) – the shaving of the head being an allusion to the fact that everything which hinders and prevents you from learning Torah will be “shaved” and removed. You will be able to study Torah with even greater strength, all evil will disappear, and only good fruit will remain.

The verse continues: “and [she shall] make her nails” (ibid.), which means that she will let them grow. The Holy One, blessed be He, “made for Adam and his wife garments of skin [ohr: *ayin-vav-resh*]” (Bereshith 3:21). This signifies the exclusive development of good things for man, especially since the Sages tell us that in the Torah of Rabbi Meir it is written: “garments of light [ohr: *aleph-vav-resh*]” (Bereshith Rabba 20:12). This is the light of the Torah, as the Sages have said: “Light means the Torah, as it says. ‘For a *mitzvah* is a lamp and the Torah is light’ [Mishlei 6:23]” (Megillah 16b). It is to man’s greatness to “let his nails grow,” for the nail is smooth and shiny, an allusion to the light of Torah.

This fully corresponds to what we have said. It consists of growing and donning them [i.e., words of Torah] like a garment, for the Torah itself wears garments of glory and honor. The honor of the Torah will also grow in our

eyes, for this is what the Torah “makes.” All this happens the more that we put an effort into learning. In that case, the reward comes next:

“She shall remove the garment of her captivity” (Devarim 21:13) – the Holy One, blessed be He, will remove all the kelipot of the Satan, which surrounds us and lies in wait, as it is written: “My heart is wounded within me” (Tehillim 109:22). As the Sages have said (Yerushalmi, Berachot 9:5), this teaches that David killed the evil inclination in such a way that it could no longer tempt or wrong him. As a result, we attain a true connection to G-d by our study of Torah, without any self-interest coming into play. We will be purified by one cleansing after another, and its sanctity will make us so holy that we will never again become prisoners of the evil inclination. Instead, we will remain the “prisoners” of the Torah.

In fact we will reach a point at which we “shall go to her and be her

husband” (Devarim 21:13). We will be completely connected to Torah, and we will find new explanations in it, as the Sages have said: “Happy is he who comes here in full possession of his learning” (Bava Batra 10b). This refers to new Torah explanations, and it represents fertility in Torah. It signifies that we feel like a part of the Torah itself, truly as if it was our wife – that it is part of us – part of our very essence.

It is not by chance that Parsha Ki-Teitzei is read every year precisely during the month of Elul, the parsha which conceals the best instructions for the days of judgment. These instructions remain concealed, awaiting anyone who reflects upon the best way to fight the extremely difficult battle against the evil inclination and its legions. It is a battle for life, for the mission that we must fulfill on earth, and for our existence in this world and the World to Come.

## Real Life Stories

### The Story of the Tzitzit

It is written, “You shall make fringes on the four corners of your garment with which you cover yourself” (Devarim 22:12).

Rabbi Meisels was a bastion of faith and strength in the torment of the Nazi concentration camps. When he was summoned for transport to Auschwitz, he took only one possession: His tallit. This particular tallit had been passed down to him and carried a great deal of sentimental and spiritual value. He held on to it as a symbol of G-d’s protection during the war, and he resolved to never let the Nazis take it away.

When he and his family reached Auschwitz, they were stripped of their every earthly possession. The tallit was torn away from him and consigned to the Nazi’s treasure trove of stolen items. Yet Rabbi Meisels would not give up his precious tallit so easily.

### Not Long to Find

He asked to be given work in the warehouses, sorting out confiscated goods. Sure enough, as he sorted through the piles, he came across his special tallit. Overjoyed, he now needed to figure out how to smuggle it out of the warehouse. Such a large item would not be easy to conceal.

It took a lot of planning and daring, but finally Rabbi Meisels managed to cut down the large prayer shawl and make it into a pair of tzitzit, which he could wear beneath his inmate uniform. He wore his tzitzit faithfully every day, despite the threat of certain death were he to be discovered.

One fateful day, what he feared came true. After the inmates showered, a Russian capo who worked under the Nazis noticed that Rabbi Meisels’ uniform seemed bulkier than usual. He pulled up the hapless rabbi’s shirt and discovered the tzitzit! Enraged, he began beating and cursing the Jew, demanding to know what he was wearing.

Rabbi Meisels managed to stammer, “A Gutt-kleid” (Divine garment).

This admission drove the capo off the edge. He dragged the Jew to his bunker and proceeded to beat him relentlessly. “You swine!” he screamed. “You have the audacity to tell me that you’re wearing a Divine garment? Where is your G-d in this world? What has He done for you, leaving you at the mercy of death and destruction? How dare you tell me there is a G-d!”

The capo fell silent for a moment, and then he made the Jew an offer: “I’ll give you one chance. If you can prove to me that G-d exists, despite the hell that you’re now in, I’ll let you go. If not, I’ll finish you off right here and now!”

Rabbi Meisels was at a loss for words. What could he possibly say?

He prayed silently for Divine guidance, and then he said: “I will tell you a parable. Once there was a master surgeon who could perform miraculous surgeries that cured people of the most serious ailments. One day a woman with a grave disease came to see him, and he agreed to operate on her.

In the operating room with the surgeon was a shoemaker, who observed the surgeon’s every move. The shoemaker watched as the surgeon made incisions into perfectly healthy-looking skin, causing terrible damage – in his mind at least – to the patient. ‘It’s absurd to cut into healthy tissue,’ he thought. ‘I only cut into damaged leather when I need to repair it!’

“‘What a foolish, inept surgeon!’ he concluded.

“In this world, we are like that foolish shoemaker,” Rabbi Meisels concluded. “We haven’t the slightest notion of how G-d runs the world. Sometimes we see Him cutting into ‘healthy tissue,’ so to speak, and we are appalled. Yet He is a Master, and He knows infinitely more than we could possibly know.”

Days passed. As Allied forces advanced, the Nazis forced their Jewish prisoners on death marches and moved them around to different locations. Rabbi Meisels found himself being led to a cattle car that would transport him to another camp. As he was about to reach the train, a Nazi by the name of Willy suddenly grabbed him, searched him, and found his precious tzitzit. With great relish, the Nazi tore the tzitzit in half and threw them into a fire, destroying them forever.

Rabbi Meisels was crushed. He had looked to the tzitzit as a reminder of G-d’s protection, and yet now – so close to being liberated – they had been taken from him and destroyed. Rabbi Meisels’ son, who had also endured the concentration camps, tried to comfort his father, but to no avail. The two were shoved onto a cattle car and packed tightly together along with their fellow Jews, while their Nazi guards – Willy included – were sprawled out on the opposite side of the car.

Overcome with exhaustion and sadness, Rabbi Meisels laid his head on his son’s shoulder to sleep a little. His son suddenly felt extremely ill and weak, unable to bear the weight of his father’s head. “I’m sorry,” he told his father, “but I can’t bear the weight of your head on my shoulder. It’s just too painful for me.”

Rabbi Meisels was taken aback by his son’s uncharacteristic reluctance, but what could he say? He placed his head on the shoulder of the man to his right, while his son rested his head on the shoulder of the man to his left, leaving a space between them.

At that point, a huge explosion was heard coming from right outside the cattle car, and a piece of shrapnel flew through the wall of the train. It went right through the space between the heads of Rabbi Meisels and his son, and headed straight for Willy – the guard who had destroyed his tzitzit – cutting off both his hands.

Rabbi Meisels recounted that the Nazi guards themselves taunted Willy by saying, “Look at what happened to you because you destroyed the tzitzit of a Jew!”

– Arzei HaTorah

### Measure for Measure

It is written, “You shall surely lift them up with him” (Devarim 22:4).

The Sages have explained that a person who sees his friend’s animal collapsed beneath the weight of its load is obligated to help him reload it, as it is written: “You shall surely lift them up with him.” However if the owner of the animal says to him: “Since it’s a mitzvah for you, go ahead and load it if you want,” then he is exempt from loading.

In his book Sha’arei Yeshua, the gaon Rabbi Yeshua Attiya Zatzal explains that this teaching applies to all areas of life. If we sanctify ourselves below, we will be sanctified above. If we ask in prayer, “Guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully,” and we pay close attention to fulfilling what we have requested, then Heaven will help us to guard our tongue and lips. Yet if a person makes this request offhandedly, doing nothing on his end to stop speaking forbidden words, then how can Heaven help him?

### Hashem Supports

It is written, “You shall surely send the mother away” (Devarim 22:7).

The passage on sending away a mother bird from its nest begins with a kaf and ends with a mem, two letters that have a total numerical value (60) equal to that of the letter samech. Likewise, the passage on the guardrail & vineyard begins with a kaf and ends with a mem (again equal to samech). This evokes the verse, “Hashem supports [somech] all who fall” (Tehillim 145:14).

In regards to sending away the mother bird, the Gemara asks: “If a man says to his son, ‘Go up to the top of this building and bring me down some young birds,’ and he went up to the top of the building, let the mother bird go, and took the young ones – yet upon his return he fell and was killed – where is this person’s length of days?” (Chullin 142a). The Gemara responds that Hashem gives him length of days in a world that is wholly long. When we make a guardrail on our roof, we support (somech) whoever risks falling from it. A person only transgresses the verse, “You shall not sow your vineyard with a mixture” if “he sows wheat, barley and grape kernels mapolet yad [seeding by hand]” (Berachot 22a), in which case he causes it to be burned in fire (Kiddushin 56b). Yet when a person does not sow in this way, “Hashem supports [somech] all who fall” (mapolet yad).

– Kli Yakar

### You May Refrain

It is written, “If you refrain from vowing, there will be no sin in you” (Devarim 23:23).

The Rambam says the following in regards to this verse:

“Although it is a mitzvah to consecrate or make a vow to give something to the Temple, or to give its value to the Temple – and it befits man to do so in order to control his desires, not to be stingy, and to fulfill what the Sages have commanded: ‘Honor Hashem with your money’ – nevertheless, if he never does any of these things, it is not serious. The Torah testifies to this by saying, ‘If you refrain from vowing, there will be no sin in you’” (Hilchot Arachin 8:12).

### Ingratitude

It is written, “Because they did not meet you with bread and water” (Devarim 23:5).

In his book Midbar Kedmot, the Chida writes the following:

I once heard of someone who feared sin and fulfilled mitzvot, and

he was asked: “Where do we find the punishment for ingratitude in the Torah?” He replied that to Edom, Ammon, and Moab, Hashem gave the heritage of the Kenites, Kenazites, and Kadmonites. Edom said, “You shall not pass through me, lest I come against you with the sword,” even though we promised him: “Food shall I purchase for money.” He still refused, and yet Hashem did not hold it against him. However He did hold it against Ammon and Moab, as it is written: “Because they did not meet you with bread and water.” This demonstrated ingratitude, since Abraham had risked his life to save Lot. “Because they did not meet you” was enough to punish them for their ingratitude. Elsewhere we read, “They hired against you Balaam the son of Beor.” However the main reason was that “they did not meet you with bread and water,” which demonstrated ingratitude.

## In the Light of the Parsha

### The Role of the Guardrail in the Jewish Home

It is written, “When you build a new house, you shall make a guardrail for your roof, that you should not bring any blood upon your house if anyone falls” (Devarim 22:8).

Fighting against the evil inclination is incumbent upon every man, in all places and at all times. Everyone must go out and wage war against his evil inclination – not to let it control him, but for him to control it. Once he has conquered it, he must build his house. Now every Jew resembles a “house,” which is where the holy Shechinah dwells, as the Sages have said: “Let them make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them [Shemot 25:8] – it does not say ‘in it,’ but ‘among them,’ among each of them” (Rabbeinu Ephraim).

Along these lines, I would like to explain the juxtaposition of the passage on the guardrail with the passage ki-teitzei. The Torah is saying: When you build your house, be careful to set up a guardrail on your entire roof in order to prevent the evil inclination from coming inside, making you fall, and placing blood in your house.

We also note that the roof is the highest place in a house. Now the Torah has said, “When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem your G-d will deliver him into your hand” (Devarim 21:10), meaning that we must not let this victory get to our heads and make us say: “Now that I’ve conquered my evil inclination and built a new house, a place where the Shechinah can dwell, why should I serve my Creator? I’ve already conquered my evil inclination!”

This is why the Torah commands, “You shall make a guardrail for your roof.” It is in order to protect us from the certainty that we have reached a state of perfection, since the Sages have said: “Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die” (Pirkei Avot 2:4). In order for a person not to fall from the level that he has reached, thereby placing blood in his house, the Torah states: “Remember what Amalek did.”

The name “Amalek” has the same numerical value as the term ram (“elevated”), which designates pride. This is the kelipah of Amalek, which makes Jews sin.

Furthermore, the term hama’akeh (“the guardrail”) has the same numerical value as rach (“soft”), alluding to a teaching of our Sages: “A man should always be as soft [i.e., pliable] as the reed, never unyielding as the cedar” (Taanith 20a). That is, his heart should never grow proud and he should never think: “There’s nothing left for me to do after I’ve defeated the evil inclination.” In fact the Sages have said, “He who increases [his knowledge through study] will have his life prolonged” (Taanith 31a). This means that all throughout his life, a person must fight against his evil inclination and defeat it.

## The Shamash is Knocking at the Door

We are already in the second week of Elul, the month of mercy and selichot. The atmosphere of Elul envelops us with generosity and compassion, and Sephardi Jews rise very early in the morning to recite selichot, as is the custom from the beginning of the month. Among our readers, there are definitely some who remember how Jews would awaken for selichot well before the invention of alarm clocks.

In Sephardi communities, the custom was for the shamash to awaken a little before sunrise, wash his hands, and get dressed with the enthusiasm that characterized him. He would then take an oil canister in hand and walk down the neighborhood streets as he began his sacred task. This task consisted of awakening the faithful to go to synagogue and recite selichot. The shamash would stand in front of people's windows and sing this poem:

Awaken, for each night  
Your soul ascends on high  
To answer for your deeds  
Before the Creator night and morning

Some woke up to the sound of this poem, and out of gratitude they would approach their window and themselves sing a poem to the shamash:

We will find her adorned  
With tallit and tefillin  
Like a betrothed woman  
Always every morning

Here is a literary description drawn from *Yaldut BeYerushalaim HaYeshana* ("Childhood in Old Jerusalem"), a book by Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua, on how people would awaken for selichot in the Nachlaot district of Jerusalem:

"There were three who would arise early, at dawn, to assemble the sacred flock of the faithful for selichot and supplications: The shamash, chacham Chaim, who opened the doors of the synagogue, lit the lamps, maintained the perpetual light, and prepared a coffee pot for those who came early. The chazan, chacham Meir, who would go from house to house awakening those who slept and encouraging them to come and serve the Creator. He called to some people by name – 'Shimon and Elia!' 'Israel and Ovadia!' – and they would answer the call. He would sing to others as he walked: 'Son of man, why are you sleeping? Get up and utter your supplications!' He would continue singing until his poetic words penetrated the most remote places and lingered in the ears of those who were asleep and those who were awake. Finally there was the oldest, the elderly rav Zatzal, whose house adjoined the synagogue. He was the one who wrapped himself in his outdoor coat, put on his hat, and went to sit on the couch next to the teva. There he would begin reciting bakashot until everyone had arrived.

"The Jewish district of Jerusalem, as soon as the month of Elul began, took on an appearance that differed from the rest of the year. At two o'clock in the morning, everyone would start getting up. The shamashim would use their canes to knock on the doors of the chatzerot, addressing those who were asleep with encouraging and friendly words so they would get up for selichot. Some shamashim stood in the corners of the old city's alleys and called out in a loud voice, 'Se-li-chot!'

"From numerous synagogues emanated the voices of well-known chazanim, men who recited selichot with a sweet melody that rejoiced the hearts of the faithful. Learning in schools, batei midrash, and talmudei Torah ended on Elul 15, and from then until after Sukkot, we were free. For us, the greatest thrill was to get up for selichot. Anyone who didn't get up for selichot was considered a mere child, still too young. Many children begged their parents to wake them up for selichot, so as not to lag behind their friends.

"Although selichot lasted a long time, there was absolutely no reason to get bored. Each poem had special appeal, though some were sad and melancholy. Sometimes one among us was allowed to recite these poems because he had a nice voice. As dawn approached, the selichot drew to an end. The selichot prayers then concluded, and after a short break everyone returned to synagogue for Shacharit."

## Pulling on the Rope

In the Jewish community of Yemen, those who awoke others acted in a completely different way. There, those who had to rise early attached one end of a rope to their leg, while placing the other end outside their window ledge. When the shamash came to awaken the faithful for selichot, he would pull on the end of the cord by the window, thereby waking the sleeper inside.

A similar idea was later adapted in the Mea Shearim neighborhood of Jerusalem, as Rav Israel Guelis explained to a local resident: "A person would attach one end of a rope to his leg, and I would pass beneath the window of his home and pull on the other end until he woke up."

In the Jewish community of Tunis, children would accompany the shamash as he went to awaken people for selichot. Each of them held a hollowed-out watermelon with a candle inside.

## Shteit Auf Zu Slichos!

Belzer chassidim living in the Kiryat Belz neighborhood of Jerusalem get up for selichot at the sound of a loudspeaker that awakes them very early in the morning. This custom was adopted in memory of a custom that existed in the old city of Belz. There an elderly Jew, whose role was to awaken Jews in the city for selichot, would knock at the door or window of each Jewish home and say in Yiddish: Shteit auf zu slichos! Shteit auf zu avoidas haBoireh! ("Wake up for selichot! Wake up to serve the Creator!") He would go from house to house doing this to awaken everyone. The last house he reached was the Rebbe's.

The one responsible for waking people up would walk between houses holding a lantern, which he used to light the way before him. In the final year of Rabbi Issachar Dov Zatzal, the Belzer Rebbe, when he was already very weak, he would recite selichot later on, during the daytime. It is interesting to note that at the time, the person who woke the Rebbe up still carried a lantern so as not to modify the ancient custom.

It is said that in Belz, there were Jews who stood in the middle of the street and cried out: Shteit auf zu slichos! Shteit auf zu avoidas haBoireh! Others made their way between houses and woke up the entire community for selichot.

In Israel, after the arrival of the Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Aharon (may his merit protect us), the shamash would knock on people's doors. Today Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik Fried, on the orders of the Rebbe Shlita, drives his car through the streets of Kiryat Belz in Jerusalem proclaiming the ancient formula on a loudspeaker. In this way, the entire kirya [district] wakes up within half an hour to recite selichot.

## Guard Your Tongue

### Even for a Significant Loss

Even if not speaking Rechilut will result in a significant financial loss, it is still forbidden. For example, suppose that a person works for a boss who is trying to get him to reveal what someone else has said about him. If that person will be fired from his position – and have no way to provide for his family – because he refuses to tell his boss what he wants to hear, he is still forbidden from speaking Rechilut. This is because it is included among all negative prohibitions, for which one must lose all his possessions in order not to violate them. – Chafetz Chaim