



***Authentic Kabbalah - Sephardic Studies
Benei Noah Studies -- Anti-Missionary/Anti-Cult Materials***

The Yefet Toar The Beautiful Captive Woman Commentary to Parashat Ki Tetze

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***“When you go out to war against your enemies
and HaShem your G-d gives them into your hands
and you capture the spoil.
And you see among the captives a woman Yefet Toar
(of beautiful appearance) and you desire her,
you may take her for yourself as a wife.”
(Dev. 21:10-11).***

The matter of the Yefet Toar (beautiful captive) is a most peculiar one. How is it on one hand that the Torah calls for us to live the highest level of moral standards and on the other hand, apparently permits the act of rape during wartime? This apparent contradiction needs to be understood.

The Halakha in this parasha states that when a soldier goes off to war, if he were to find a beautiful woman among those conquered, he may take her back to his home. After a thirty-day period of mourning and transformation for the woman, the soldier may have intercourse with her. The type of war referred to here is clearly a Milkhemet Rishut (an optional war) and not a Milkhemet Mitzvah (holy war to conquer Eretz Yisrael). For in a Milkhemet Mitzvah prisoners and captives were not taken. Being that the text is speaking about captives, the context is clear.

Our Sages (Kidushin 21b) have understood this passage to be addressed to a man's Yetzer HaRa (evil inclination). For it is known that in times of war the pressure and anxiety of the moment causes even the most rational and kind of men to act in a most

desperate fashion. With regards to the Yefet Toar (beautiful captive), she may be taken from among any women found, regardless of her marital status. In other words, the Torah is allowing the Jewish soldier on foreign soil to force himself upon a Gentile woman, even if she is married. RaMBaM and others are of the opinion that he may have relations with her a first time right there and then once he finds her. Rashi and RaMBaN insist that the first time of intercourse can only be after the thirty-day period.

What boggles the mind is how the Torah, the revealed Will of G-d can condone such behavior as an appeasement to man's evil inclination. After all, the Jewish soldier going to fight a Milkhemet Rishut had to fulfill very specific requirements. He had to be married and have a child. He had to have a house and a vineyard. In other words, the Jewish soldier going off to fight an optional war was an older and more settled kind of fellow. He was no young hot-blooded kid who sought glory in the blood of conquest.

The Jewish soldier most likely wanted to do his duty to HaShem and the King and then return to his family and to his normal life. Indeed, we learn that in order to merit going to a Milkhemet Rishut, the Jewish soldier had to be a tzadik (righteous). Otherwise, he may not have the merit for HaShem to go before him to vanquish the enemy. Thus, if the Jewish soldier was a tzadik, a married and settled man, how is it that a man of such high moral caliber would all of a sudden fall victim to such a lustful urge to rape a woman?

More than this, if the Torah is simply allowing the man to succumb, under the circumstances, to his Yetzer HaRa, why then can he not just leave the Yefet Toar after he fulfills his "evil" desire? Why must he take her into his home and put her through an entire process of change, which must be as traumatic upon the other members of his family as it is on the woman?

In order to understand this entire scenario, we must delve into an understanding of the spiritual side of human nature. Rabbi Mordechai Yosef, the Isbitzer Rebbe writes in his Mei Shiluah (Vol. 1, Pinhas, page 165) an interesting revelation that is the basis for understanding this parasha. He writes "that one who distances himself from the Yetzer HaRa and guards himself from sin with all his might until he cannot guard himself any further, then if his Yetzer overcomes him and he does an action, it is certain that this is the Will of HaShem."

In other words, when a tzadik is tempted by a sin, one for which he has no normal desire, and as much as he tries to overcome the temptation, he cannot, thus he commits a forbidden act, almost by unconscious compulsion, then we should know that it was HaShem's design that such an act occurred. The Mei Shiluah writes (ibid.) that this is what happened to Zimri to cause him to take the Midianite woman Cozbi.

We must understand that HaShem created both the Yetzer HaTov and the Yetzer HaRa (Isaiah 45:7). The Yetzer HaTov is an individual's striving for spiritual things. The Yetzer HaRa is one's striving for physical things (reference Rabbi Haim Vital's Sefer Sha'arei Kedusha, Helek Alef). Both Yetzers serve HaShem with equal vigor. Our holy

Rabbanim have taught us that there is a good side (tzad hatov) to the Yetzer HaRa. If not for it, then no tzadik would ever eat, drink or procreate; he would only be interested in spiritual things. Thus, the tzadik uses his Yetzer HaRa to serve HaShem, to bring tikkun (rectification) to this physical world. Yet, a tzadik is never controlled by his Yetzer HaRa. On the contrary he controls it and submits it to the service of HaShem.

So, what happened with the tzadik Jewish soldier at time of war? Granted, the Torah allows him to submit to his Yetzer HaRa, but for what purpose? According to the simple view of things (ref. Sefer HaHinukh, Ki Tetze), the fear was that if the Jewish soldier was not given this allowance then he would rise up and marry the girl anyway, in violation of Halakha.

But this is what is so mind-boggling! The Jewish soldier is a tzadik; he lives and breathes for HaShem. Would the mere desire for a woman, an idolater yet, cause him to compromise everything that he has held dear all his life? Is the tzadik Jewish soldier a man of such weak character that he cannot control himself? Is every tzadik Jewish soldier so incapable of controlling his Yetzer HaRa that a special dispensation in Halakha has to be given him? G-d forbid that we should think any of these things to be true!

For the tzadik Jewish soldier to be attracted to a Yefet Toar there would have to be a very good spiritual reason. After all, the tzadik Jewish soldier is in full control of his Yetzer HaRa. It will not overcome him, to cause him to sin with a Gentile woman, even in times of war. No! If the tzadik Jewish soldier is attracted to a Yefet Toar, then he knows deep within his soul, as the Mei Shiluah said above, that this is from HaShem and that there is a spiritual purpose for this to happen. The tzadik Jewish soldier thus serves HaShem at that moment with his Yetzer HaRa. Then he must serve HaShem with his Yetzer HaTov, by taking the woman back to his home and to his family (which includes his wife) where he instructs the Yefet Toar in the thirty day period of mourning, i.e., the shaving of the head, the growing of the nails etc...

At the end of this period if he wishes to be with her again, he must marry her with a huppah and kidushin. Yet, she must first convert and become a righteous convert (Giyoret Tzedek). If she chooses not to convert, she is given up to twelve months to choose her course in life. If after the twelve months, she is willing to renounce idolatry, but still not willing to become a Jewess, then the man must release her from his house and she goes forth a Bat Noah, a Giyoret Toshav (righteous Gentile). If she chooses to continue her embrace of idolatry then the Halakha demands for her the death penalty. All these laws can be found in RaMBaM's Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Melakhim, Perek 8. The outcome usually expected was that the woman would convert, becoming a Jewess, thus allowing the man to marry her making her his second wife.

What we learn from this is a most profound message – we are commanded to serve G-d with both our Yetzer HaTov and our Yetzer HaRa. In other words, even the bad things that we do should be “for the sake of Heaven.” Yet, this sounds like a complete

contradiction of terms, how can one be overcome by the Yetzer HaRa and it still be “for the sake of Heaven”?

In order to answer this we must first rule out a misunderstanding. We are not being told that it is OK to sin as long as we mean it for good. If one were to do this, that one would be fully punished, regardless of one’s intentions.

What we are being taught is that the wisdom of HaShem is more profound than what we can imagine. HaShem has allowed us to do certain things, like the taking of a Yefet Toar, knowing full well it would not be abused or misused. HaShem knows the hearts of the tzadikim (righteous). He knows a tzadik would never, ever allow his Yetzer HaRa to so totally overwhelm him to commit a serious crime in the Eyes of HaShem.

Thus, HaShem has to send His spirit into the tzadik, to arouse his Yetzer HaRa, in order to do good, not evil. The tzadik who knows his Creator will recognize that something is amiss with his Yetzer HaRa. In this unique circumstance, he would feel his Yetzer being much stronger than what he normally is able to repress. The tzadik is overwhelmed in thought and feeling to commit a certain action. Finally, he commits the action, almost unaware that he is doing it. And why? Because a tzadik would never consciously go against HaShem and what he thought HaShem’s Torah commanded. Nonetheless, HaShem guides the tzadik to fulfill the Higher Will.

An example of this is Yehudah. We know that Yehudah was a great tzadik. Why then was he drawn to Tamar when she was disguised as a prostitute? Nowhere in Torah (or in Midrash) is Yehudah portrayed as being promiscuous or as being attracted to prostitutes. Why then was there this one exception in his life, the one exception that made all the difference in world history? The answer is that HaShem led him to do it, period. There is no other answer. (Mei Shiluah, Vol. 1, Ki Tetze, page 188).

This reveals to us a most profound aspect about how HaShem rules His world and how we are to serve Him. The false religions of the world claim that there are two equal and opposing forces of good and evil vying to control the world. According to Torah, this idolatry of duality violates the inherent unity of G-d. Torah teaches us that G-d alone rules the universe and that both good and evil are his agents. HaShem uses both good and evil to get accomplished His Divine plan. While we might not understand how or why HaShem does what He does, we are nonetheless playing our parts in the Divine play. Every one of us, even those who deny HaShem and violate all His mitzvot are still being guided by The Higher Hand to bring about the accomplishment of the Divine Will.

While the nations of the world create duality between what they view as an evil physical and good spiritual, Torah has revealed to us what our Sages call, “the good side of the Yetzer HaRa.” This is to teach us that even that force which is normally called evil can be brought into the service of the Divine when used according to HaShem’s Will. There is no duality. All is one. All is under the One True HaShem. Even evil serves Him. Even evil happenings such as the Holocaust serve to fulfill a part of the Divine plan, however unfathomable to us this might be.

The Yefet Toar also has her role to play. For like Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, the Yefet Toar must have had a spark of holiness in her soul. Without that spark, the tzadik Jewish soldier would never be attracted to her. Again the Halakha is clear, the tzadik Jewish soldier can only take one woman from the captives, only one Yefet Toar. The Jewish soldier is not permitted to take numerous Yefet Toars. Such behavior would clearly be from the evil side of the Yetzer HaRa and thus not from HaShem.

As a tzadik, the holy Neshama (soul) of the Jewish soldier would guide his heart to the one right Yefet Toar who had a spark of kedusha (holiness) in her Neshama and was waiting to be spiritually redeemed. This is why HaShem allowed the taking of the Yefet Toar. Of course, it was an allowance to the Yetzer HaRa, but not to its bad side, but rather to its good side. HaShem knew that He could rely on the tzadik Jewish soldier to reel in the fallen spark of holiness entrapped in the Yefet Toar.

Each of us must be fully dedicated to the war against evil, especially against our own Yetzer HaRa. Yet, try as we do, we are never fully victorious. There is the good side of the Yetzer HaRa that we need in order to live every day. Try as we do, we never seem to completely separate the good side of the Yetzer HaRa from its bad side. As the pasuk says, "For there is no man who is a tzadik who does good and does not sin." (Kohelet 7:20).

Barukh HaShem that He is a G-d of mercy and that He forgives us when we sin. We are not like the foolish idolaters who believe in something called "karma" where you get what you deserve without any concept of Divine mercy or intervention. The act of taking the Yefet Toar was such an act of HaShem's intervention and mercy, although such mercy was most likely not apparent to the Yefet Toar at the moment.

We also must learn a lesson from this. As Nahum Ish Gamzu would say, "Gam Zu L'tova." (This too is for good). When one keeps his eyes on HaShem and lives faithfully according to His Torah, serving HaShem with both the Yetzer HaTov and the Yetzer HaRa, one can rest assured that whatever happens, however bad at the moment things might appear, in the end HaShem will make all good. As the pasuk says, "Many evils befall a tzadik, and HaShem saves him from them all." (Tehilim 34:20).