## The Cave of the Heart – TZADDIE צ and Ki Tetzei

The Cow in the Field

Once, I was in the Oakland Airport with my family, preparing to board a plane to Tucson. After checking our suitcases, we arrived at security to find an incredibly long line, winding around rope dividers and culminating with a tiny funnel into only two security gates. There were several more gates that could have been opened to move things along, but for whatever reason, they were not staffed and were closed.

Right in front of us, a middle-aged man started cursing angrily. “What the %$^$ is going on here? Why don’t they ^%&$\*# open the other gates??”

He started verbally abusing the security person looking at IDs and checking tickets. He demanded to speak to a supervisor. When the supervisor arrived, he cursed him out too. The supervisor said, “You just hold that thought, and I’ll go get someone for you to speak to.”

I was sorry that my then three-year-old girl had to hear that language. I was bracing myself for some police to come and wrestle this guy to the ground.

Strangely, no police showed up. Instead, he just kept on cursing and venting all the way through the line.

When it was time to remove our shoes and put our laptops in separate bins, I didn’t want to aggravate him more with our clumsy family choreography, so I offered to him that he go ahead of us.

“Nah, that’s okay,” he said, “I have plenty of time, I’m just mad about how they’re running this place.”

He had plenty of time!

I saw an interview once with an Indian spiritual teacher who had a novel way of explaining the spiritual path that I had never heard before.

He said that the “self” is like a cow in a pasture.

The cow always wants to wander outside the field and into the town or woods, but when she does, she gets attacked by wild animals, kids throw rocks, people shoot guns. Eventually, she figures out she’s better off to just stay in her own field.

The “field” is the inner heart. When the “self” dwells in the inner heart, according to this teacher, it enjoys union with the Divine. When it gets tempted and wanders outside the heart, it always ends up suffering. So, in this teaching, the aim is to learn to keep yourself in the cave of your heart. That’s it.

To me, this is a wonderful description of Presence, particularly the practice of keeping awareness anchored in the body and the heart. To be anchored in the body means that the mind is no longer wandering off into paths of thought, but is staying connected to the senses and hence to the present moment. To be “in the heart” means to have the attitude of offering your attention to the fulness of the moment from the heart, so that simply being is an acy of love.

To “wander outside the heart” means to lose this connection with the body and with heartfulness by wandering into the ever-blossoming pathways of the thinking mind, which in its continuous thinking can dream up something wonderful one moment, but then change to a nightmare in the next.

I thought of this teaching when I saw this guy in the airport. Even if he was going to miss his flight and his plans would be all disrupted, what is it that is really creating all his suffering, and hence the suffering of those around him?

Of course, nothing but his mind.

The mind creates all these stories and gets all excited about them. It was even more telling to learn that he wasn’t even going to be late; he was just out to make some enemies, to do some warfare.

Parshat Ki Tetzei

כִּֽי־תֵצֵ֥א לַמִּלְחָמָ֖ה עַל־אֹֽיְבֶ֑יךָ וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ וְשָׁבִ֥יתָ שִׁבְיֽוֹ

*When you go to battle your enemies, Hashem your Divinity gives them into your hand, and you capture their captivity…*

*- Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 21:10, *Parshat Ki Tetzei*

When we leave the sacred place of the heart, when we leave our connection with the present moment and travel the labyrinth of the mind and its necessarily self-centered stories, we create our enemies and battles.

וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ וְשָׁבִ֥יתָ שִׁבְיֽוֹ – *Hashem your Divinity gives them into your hand* *and you capture its captivity…*

It’s a strange construction – וְשָׁבִ֥יתָ שִׁבְיֽו *v’shavita shivyo –* “capture its captivity.”

But if we understand that it is *we who are captured* by seeing the world as our enemy “out there,” then we need to “capture our captivity” – meaning, we need to know that we are bigger than any of those ensnaring mental narratives.

How do we do it?

We can do it by understanding – וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ *untano Hashem Elohekha b’yadekha –* Existence, which is not separate from our own Divine nature, is giving this moment into our hands.

This realization has both a passive and active aspect; it is both surrender and empowerment: surrender to the *truth* of what is, rather than fighting with our *idea* of what is, and also empowerment to dedicate ourselves to serve the Divine as this moment comes to us – to dwell in the cave of the heart, to respond not from ego, but from the Divinity that we are.

This is the path of צ *tzaddie*, the practice of dedicating our full selves to the One.

The Mitzvah of Destruction

It once happened that a large group of *hassidim* went to visit Reb Yitzhak of Vorki in a village near Warsaw. In their enthusiasm to get to their *rebbe* more quickly, they cut through a field of a wealthy land owner and damaged his crops with their trampling.

One of the employees of the land owner, by the name of Moshe, saw what the *hassidim* had done. He himself a *hassid*, so he followed them to the *rebbe.* When they all arrived, Moshe stormed into the *rebbe’s* room and cried, “You must hear what these idiots have done – they have trampled my master’s crops! They should be beaten for this! In fact, it would be a *mitzvah* to beat them!” – for this was the custom among wealthy land owners of that time.

Reb Yitzhak gave no answer. Assuming that the *rebbe* agreed with his view, the angry man strode out to have the *hassidim* beaten.

But the *tzaddik* called him back and said, “When you perform a *mitzvah,* you must articulate your holy intention by first contemplating and pronouncing the evocation that begins *‘l’shem yikhud-* for the sake of the Unification.’ Since you are a *hassid*, you should also purify yourself for the holy act by immersing yourself in the waters of a *mikveh* (ritual bath). So, after you go to the *mikveh,* then chant *l’shem yikhud* devoutly, then go ahead and perform your *mitzvah*…”

Moshe’s attitude shifted visibly, and he left without another word.

Never Give Up

Part of the function of a spiritual teacher is to wake up our *tzaddik* within, that level of our being beyond ego. But this can only help us in the long term if it leads to the commitment to try to live from our inner *tzaddik,* moment to moment*.* This is the most challenging work, but we must never give up, no matter how many times we may fail.

There’s a story of Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov, that once he travelled through many villages trying to collect funds so that he could liberate the poor Jews who were incarcerated in the Ukrainian debtor’s prison. Day after day, he went from door to door pleading the case of those poor souls rotting away in the dungeon, but no one would contribute anything.

After weeks of failure, feeling dejected and frustrated, he gave up and set out to return home, regretting having wasted all that time he could have spent learning and praying. But just as he approached his house, a woman ran up to him in a panic:

“Rabbi, my husband was caught stealing a piece of clothing and was viciously beaten by the police and thrown in jail!”

Without hesitation, the rabbi turned around and went to intercede with the judge. After much effort, he was able to get the prisoner released. When he went to fetch the prisoner from jail, he sternly warned him: “Remember the beating they gave you and don’t ever do anything like that again!”

“Why not?” replied the thief, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!”

Upon hearing his words, the rabbi resolved to return to his task of raising money to ransom prisoners, and eventually was highly successful in paying their debs and liberating many.

Only One Thing

There is a debt must be paid for our inner freedom as well.

We too must not give up “raising the funds” – meaning, we too must bring our attention fully to each moment, to each situation, to each feeling, to each reaction, to each thought. Again and again – we might get caught, absorbed and coopted by whatever is arising in our experience, but don’t give up! The real danger is never failure; it is allowing our failures to develop into the belief that inner freedom is impossible. It is true – our experiences have a certain gravity; we tend to be captured by them, but we can “capture” them instead – if we remember that we are far more vast than any impulse, than any experience. We are, in essence, the open space within which this moment unfolds. We must constantly remember this *one thing.*

כִּֽי־תֵצֵ֥א לַמִּלְחָמָ֖ה עַל־אֹֽיְבֶ֑יךָ וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ וְשָׁבִ֥יתָ שִׁבְיֽוֹ

*When you go to battle your enemies, Hashem your Divinity gives them into your hand, and you capture their captivity…*

Life is, in a sense, like a battle ground. If you want to liberate your heart and live from your inner *tzaddik,* you have to be one pointed and relentless, like a warrior.

And yet, וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ – *Hashem your Divinity gives them into your hand* – the victory is a gift placed in our hands by the Divine; it is not something we win through effort. This is the paradox: on one hand, we’ve got to have unshakable will, and on the other, total surrender. In fact, there’s no contradiction, because the unconscious impulse is to struggle, to fight with Reality, to go out from the heart *lamilkhama al oyevekha– to battle your enemies.* If we wish to conquer this impulse to struggle, we must be relentless in our surrender.

אַחַ֤ת שָׁאַ֣לְתִּי מֵֽאֵת־יְהוָה֮ אֹותָ֪הּ אֲבַ֫קֵּ֥שׁ שִׁבְתִּ֣י בְּבֵית־יְ֭הוָה כָּל־יְמֵ֣י חַיַּ֑י לַחֲזֹ֥ות בְּנֹֽעַם־יְ֝הוָ֗ה וּלְבַקֵּ֥ר בְּהֵיכָלֹֽו

*Only One Thing I ask of the Divine, this I seek: to dwell in the House of the Divine all the days of my life and meditate in Its Sanctuary…*

These words from Psalm 27, traditionally recited this time of year, are an affirmation of this *kavanah,* this “ransoming” of our inner freedom through the “funds” of consciousness we must collect in every moment, every situation, every feeling, every thought: Above every goal, above every desire, there is *only one thing.*

קַוֵּ֗ה אֶל־יְה֫וָ֥ה חֲ֭זַק וְיַאֲמֵ֣ץ לִבֶּ֑ךָ וְ֝קַוֵּ֗ה אֶל־יְהוָֽה

*Kaveh el Hashem, hazak v’ya’ameitz libekha, v’kaveh el Hashem –*

*Hope to the Divine, be strong and your heart will be courageous, hope to the Divine!*

A disciple of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, the Seer of Lublin, had been fasting all week and was traveling to spend *Shabbos* with his master. On the way, he came upon a well, and was suddenly overcome with an uncontrollable thirst. He thought he might die if he didn’t drink some of that water!

Involuntarily, he drew some water from the well and brought the cup to his lips, when suddenly he realized – “If I drink now, I will have nullified my entire fast! Just a few more hours to go!”

And with that, he managed to overcome temptation and walk away from the well. But then he noticed within himself a bit of pride that he had withstood the test. “Better that I drink and nullify my entire fast than have this pride!”

He went back to the well and again began to draw some water, when to his astonishment, he realized that his thirst had completely disappeared. So, he returned to his journey without drinking any water. When he arrived at the home of his master, the Seer greeted him harshly, barking at him: “Patchwork!”

In Martin Buber’s short book, The Way of Man, he tells this story and talks about his own contemplation of its meaning. “Why was the Seer so harsh with the disciple?” he wondered. He eventually came to understand the meaning of the story by asking the question, “What is the opposite of ‘patchwork?’” The opposite of patchwork, he answers, is “of a piece.”

In other words, the Seer scolds the disciple because he was not *one within himself;* he was second guessing, going back and forth, not deciding on a path and walking it.

A common misconception on the spiritual path is that spiritual practices alone can produce a unity within ourselves.

While it is true that spiritual practices can help us *perceive* the unity that is already there, that is, the unity of consciousness itself, beneath all the conflicting forces of our various experiences, we still must *forge* that unity in how we *approach* the practices; we must *decide* on the spiritual path and walk it whole-heartedly. This self-unifying part of the work should be done *before* we fast, *before* we sit down to meditate, pray, study, or whatever. We must always unify ourselves in the decision to practice first; our practices will not accomplish this for us. And if we fail to do this, our practices won’t have any lasting endurance; we will give up. This is why the first path is *Keter,* the “Crown,” which is the act of unifying ourselves through the power of intention before we traverse any of the other paths.

But what goal is our unifying intention to be directed toward?

It is the dedication of our full selves to serving the Divine – the path of צ *tzaddie* – to bring forth and live from our Divine potential. This potential to devote ourselves to living from our highest selves is ever-present, but to do so we must recognize the ever-present choice to overcome the forces of inner “wishy-washy-ness” and become “of a piece.”

Paradoxically, the more we are able to become one in our devotion to the One, the more we are able to transcend the decision-making mind and know the deepest level of who and what we are, beyond all forms that come and go in experience – the open space of awareness itself. This is the fruit of the practice, and it comes to us by Grace; we cannot force it to happen, but it is given to us when we give ourselves completely to the Path.

כִּֽי־תֵצֵ֥א לַמִּלְחָמָ֖ה עַל־אֹֽיְבֶ֑יךָ – *Ki teitzei – When you go out…*

The word כִּי *ki* is usually translated as “when” but it can also mean “because.” Translated this way, it is *because* we make the effort to *go out* from our inertia and conditioning; it is *because* we engage the inner battle to forge a unity within and fully step onto the spiritual path with commitment; it is *because* we make that effort that:

וּנְתָנ֞וֹ יְהֹוָ֧ה אֱלֹהֶ֛יךָ בְּיָדֶ֖ךָ – *Hashem your Divinity gives them into your hand…*

Again, paradox: The fruit of the path is not something we control with our decisiveness, it is “put in our hand” by Grace. And yet, it is given to us כי *ki – because* we have made the effort to dedicate ourselves to the Divine. This is the path of צ *tzaddie*, to dedicate our full selves to the One. Then, through the meeting of effort with Grace:

וְשָׁבִ֥יתָ שִׁבְיֽוֹ – *and you capture their captivity…*

The more that the inner fruit ripens, the less effort is needed to unify ourselves, because the more we experience the goodness of this “fruit,” the less temptation there is to waver; the less distraction there is from the Goal. We experience the benefit for ourselves, and we *know*.

And yet, it is crucial to not think that we’ve “made it.” As numerous stories and teachings tell us, the true *tzaddik* does not think that they are a *tzaddik* at all*.* Knowing this protects us from the trap of thinking that we are exempt from continuing to walk the path; realization must always be accompanied by humility.

On the Integral Tree, this is depicted by the juxtaposition of *Netzakh,* which means “Victory,” with *Hod,* which is associated with humility. With humility, we can remain vigilant to the inner danger that ego can coopt even the most sublime spiritual attainment – as they say, the higher you climb, the harder you fall…

The Success of Failure

כִּ֤י תִבְנֶה֙ בַּ֣יִת חָדָ֔שׁ וְעָשִׂ֥יתָ מַעֲקֶ֖ה לְגַגֶּ֑ךָ וְלֹֽא־תָשִׂ֤ים דָּמִים֙ בְּבֵיתֶ֔ךָ כִּֽי־יִפֹּ֥ל הַנֹּפֵ֖ל מִמֶּֽנּוּ

*When you build a new house, make a parapet for the roof, and you won’t bring blood upon your house when one falls from it…*

*- Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 22:8, *Parshat Ki Tetzei*

The fact that the Torah talks about preventing a person from falling off the roof by building a protective barrier implies that, indeed, people must have fallen off of rooves; it was probably the failure to anticipate this danger that led to the law of making a *ma’akeh* (parapet).

Similarly, when we become aware of our own spiritual failures in the past, we too can build some kind of *ma’akeh,* some kind of protective fence to prevent the same thing from happening again.

There are two main types of spiritual failures: mistakes and temporary insanity. A mistake would be: you’re up on the roof and you’re goofing around, not paying attention, or maybe you just miscalculated your footsteps and you fall of the roof, God forbid. Temporary insanity would be: you’re up on the roof with someone, you get into a fight and push them off the roof, God forbid. You didn’t intend to hurt them; you just got angry and lost control.

The *ma’akeh* prevents both types of scenarios. Whether accidental or by temporary insanity, the parapet prevents a person from falling. There’s a hint in the wording of the *pasuk:* “one who falls” is יִפֹּל הַנֹּפֵל *yipol hanofel –* literally, “will fall, the falling.” The repeating of the verb “fall” is an idiom of emphasis, but also hints that the *ma’akeh* can prevent both the accidental and the impulsive falling crisis.

Similarly, we too can take measures to prevent ourselves from repeating our misdeeds, whether they be accidental or impulsive. To do that, we need to see our lives clearly, contemplate, and create our own “parapets.” This is the transformative part of *teshuvah,* the main practice of the month of *Elul* in which this *parshah* falls.

There is yet a third kind of spiritual failure, one that is far more difficult to prevent. This is the misdeed of habit, the misdeed that has become part of one’s personality and lifestyle – such as addiction, relationship dysfunction, abuse, and so on. The more emmeshed we become in the negative behavior, the less likely we are to change it. And yet, we absolutely can change it. This is the deepest and most transformative kind of *teshuvah.*

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev once came upon a wealthy man in the street who was known to be abusive with his money and power. “Oh, I envy you sir!” said Levi Yitzhak. The *rasha* (evil person) looked proudly at Levi Yitzhak, thinking that the rabbi wished he too could have all that money and power. But then Levi Yitzhak continued, “I envy you, because when you finally return, when you finally do *teshuvah,* all your sins will be transformed into magnificent lights, and what a brilliant spectacle that will be! Oh sir, I envy you that brilliance!”

These three types of misdeeds – accidental, impulsive and intentional, are three main types of “sins” mentioned in the liturgy: *het* means “missing the mark,” as in shooting an arrow and missing the target. This is the accident. An *aveira* is crossing over a boundary impulsively; you accept that there is a boundary, but you become possessed by strong feelings and you violate it. Lastly, an *avon* is a misdeed that is not a mistake and is not impulsive; it has become part of how you operate. The *avon* cannot be prevented by any kind of *ma’akeh;* you can’t “trick yourself” out of this kind of misdeed. For the *avon,* you actually have to choose differently; you have to turn completely from ego and bring forth your inner *tzaddik.*

These three kinds of “sin” are different from each other, but for a person who wants to become free from them, there is a single ingredient is needed.

Whether we are merely setting a boundary to prevent mistakes and impulsivity, or we are seeking to overcome a deeply ingrained behavior, the root of all transformation on any level is the application of *Presence*. The outer *teshuvah* of returning to intentional action is rooted in the inner *teshuvah* of bringing our awareness out from its compulsive preoccupation with thought (which ordinarily reinforces our patterns), and into our actual present experience, into our senses, into our bodies. In doing so, acceptance and forgiveness of the past is natural and spontaneous, as the pain we cause ourselves by holding on to the past becomes blatantly obvious. And not only that, but the more we bring our attention to this moment, the more we can see that *we are the awareness* of this moment. We are openness, we are free, and we are in no way trapped by the past or by habit. In Presence, the power to choose reveals itself.

Dedicating the Whole Self

Whenever I travel, I am always amazed that I can draw together the clothing, toiletries, books, computer equipment, etc., and pack them all into a single suitcase. It actually seems miraculous to me, that all the disparate items can come together into a single whole.

But miraculous as that is, it is nothing compared to the miracle of Presence: that through the simple shift of opening to the immediacy of actual experience, all the disparate chaos comes together into the “suitcase” of the present moment; in Presence, there is no longer “me” and “that” – there is only the fullness of the what is, in all its richness, arising within and falling back into the one field of awareness that we are. The *haftora* says:

בְּרֶ֥גַע קָטֹ֖ן עֲזַבְתִּ֑יךְ וּבְרַחֲמִ֥ים גְּדֹלִ֖ים אֲקַבְּצֵֽךְ

*For a tiny moment I forsook you, but with a vast compassion I will gather you together…*

*- Isaiah 54:7*

When we “gather together” our awareness into the fullness of the present, there is paradoxically a vastness and a benevolence – a *rakhamim gedolim* that is our own nature, revealing all past misdeeds for what they really are: tiny moments of forgetfulness arising and disappearing into the vastness of Being. From this vastness, from this awareness that leaves nothing out, we can (once again) dedicate all of it, in all of its disparate complexity, to the One Reality, and to remember (once again) the One Thing we seek – to dwell in the House of the Divine all of our days, day by day. This is the path of צ *tzaddie*, the gathering together of our full selves in dedication and devotion to the One.