

Derech Ha-rif

Excerpts from the Torah discourse delivered by The great Rabbi Yoshiyahu Yosef Pinto Shlita

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First Shabbat Meal

Shabbat HaGadol can elevate a person to spiritual levels which would otherwise take years of attain.

The Shabbat preceding Pessah is called 'Shabbat HaGadol,' the 'Great Shabbat' because of the great miracle that happened on that very Shabbat before the actual exodus from Egypt (Shulchan Aruch, O"H 430:1). On that Shabbat in Egypt, Hashem instructed each and every family to obtain a lamb and secure it to a bedpost, later to be sacrificed as the Pesach offering. "On the tenth of this month, a man should take a lamb for his family, for his household (Shemot 13:7)."

With great self sacrifice, the Jewish nation ignored the danger in taking their lambs and tinging their beds, as the lamb was regarded as a deity by the ancient Egyptians. A great miracle occurred and no Jew was assaulted by an Egyptian for having slaughtered and disgraced their diety.

The obvious question arises: just prior to the miracle of being able to secure a sheep without being assaulted were innumerable other miracles that Hashem had brought down onto his People- most evidently the Ten Plagues to avenge and redeem them. We have no Shabbat commemorated to any of these, however. Why was this particular miracle singled out to be commemorated for generations onward? What are we to assimilate as a lesson from this fact?

To gain an understanding of the matter, we refer to the Talmud's recount of Rabbi Akiva's last moments enduring the brutal tortures of the Romans (Berachot 61a). Witnessing their master leaving them before their very eyes, his disciples cried: "we can't bear to see you go under such conditions..." "My entire life," he replied, " I was looking forward to this moment of being able to accomplish the words of the verse 'You shall love Hashem', even if he takes your soul."

In fulfilling the commandments of the Torah, we have the obligation to accomplish each and every Mitzva in the most complete manner. Practically, that means subjugating our internal and external being, our mind and spirit - our entire being - to fulfill Hashem's will. Easier said than done: accomplishing Mitzvot in such a manner takes years of dedication and focus.

This is what Rabbi Akivah was referring to. He had toiled his entire life to attain that level of perfection of accomplishing a Mitzvah with absolute self-sacrifice of every element of his intellectual and physical being that he wasn't going to let it go. Each Mitzvah we accomplish must be with utter purity and sanctity, without blemish. This was a difficult task to accomplish for the Jewish people during the years of duress in Egypt. They distanced themselves from the Torah and practice of the Mitzvot till the point where they descended to the very lowest level of impurity, the 49th level of impurity. At that moment in time, at the most distant point from sanctity itself, each and every Jew attained the pinnacle level that Rabbi Akiva had attained without his lifetime of work. They attained this incredible, supreme level with a pure and wholesome act of self-sacrifice, that is by that immense act of preparing the lamb for the Pesach sacrifice. With complete dedication and self-sacrifice they accomplished the Mitzva in the best possible manner - all with no preparation or premeditation whatsoever. That they skipped the normal progression of attaining that supreme level was an absolute miracle; they reached the pinnacle of dedication in one brief moment.

With this in mind, the true miracle of Shabbat Hagadol was that they reached the highest level of performing the Mitzva of the Pesach offering - with utter subjugation of their internal and external being - in one single Shabbat, in one rapid and brief moment. What generally takes years to attain, a deepest understanding of a Mitzva and utter subjugation of oneself to accomplish it, was attained by each Jew miraculously, with heavenly assistance and minimal effort.

This Shabbat, thus, has the miraculous aspect of elevate us to the highest level of spiritual perfection without much effort.

A spiritual level which generally takes years of personal investment is attained rapidly in one Shabbat. Each one of us must make the necessary preparations, focusing and binding ourselves to Hashem so as to attain elevated spiritual levels which generally takes years of commitment. Hashem graced this Shabbat with a uniquely sacred spirit that can bring us to our objective and perfection.



Soul Of the Rif

A person should always remember that idle time that is left as unproductive idle time may lead to severe problems. A person should make every effort to ensure their day is full, as every moment that a person is unoccupied and doesn't do anything productive such as studying, working or doing some other productive matter creates an empty vacuum. An empty vacuum that is not filled by positive matters, ends up getting filled by bad matters.



2nd Shabbat Meal

Shabbat Hagadol.

It is brought in the Tur (O"Ch 430): "The Shabbat before Pesach is named Shabbat Hagadol (The great Shabbat), and the reason for this is that a great miracle happened on [this Shabbat]... Hashem commanded the Jewish people that they should each take a lamb for the Pesach offering and tie it to the legs of the bed. The Egyptians would ask the Jewish people 'Why do you do this?', and the Jewish people would answer 'For slaughtering for the sake of the Pesach offering as Hashem commanded.' [The Egyptians] teeth became blunt [from hearing that] their deity was being slaughtered and they were not able to tell the Jewish people anything [in reprimand], and because of that miracle it is called Shabbat Hagadol."

We find great difficulty understanding this- Why for such a matter is a Shabbat sanctified for generations and crowned as "The Great Shabbat", the most special Shabbat of the year? Does there need to be such a great commemoration for generations on account of one miracle that the Jewish people tied the Egyptian deity to their beds?

Kadesh, Urchatz, Karpas, Yachatz, Maggid, Rochtza, Motzi, Matza, Marror, Korech, Shulchan Orech, Tzafun, Barech, Hallel, Nirtza.

Many lessons can be tied to this memory aid. One of which is that our Holy Rabbis taught "Kadesh, Urchatz (sanctify, and wash)"- When a person wishes to rebuke their fellow friend or to lead a congregation in the way of Hashem, they must first sanctify themselves and wash themselves of their spiritual stains. If one wishes to be a spiritual guide to others, they must purify themselves first. "Karpas (type of plant)"- If on the contrary one thinks to oneself 'who am I to take the place of great people and mend the breach?' and compares oneself to the lowly and humble Karpas plant, they should know that "Yachatz (split)", it is

not good for one to always be humble, rather there should be a split- in matters concerning only oneself, one has the option to choose to be humble, but regarding matters concerning Hashem's honor, even a weak person should draw strength and not hold themselves back. "Maggid, Rochtza (telling, wash)"- A person must lead their household and instruct them to spiritually wash themselves by observing the following two pieces of advice.

Firstly, "Motzi, Matza (taking out, Matza (Matza is a homophone that also bears the meaning 'strife'))"- the principle of "Veahavta lereacha kamocho" -as the key cause of the diaspora is needless hate, we must take out of our hearts any matter which causes strife and argument.

Secondly, the principle of accepting afflictions with love- as all the apparent evil Hashem brings about is truly a hidden good. This is alluded to by "Marror, Korech (bitter herb, wrapping)" being juxtaposed to "Shulchan Orech (laid table)"- implying that whether there is bitter hardship 'wrapping' around us (as represented by the Marror), or whether we find wealth and success (represented by the laid table), we must thank Him and call His name. This is as the apparent evil is truly hidden good as represented by "Tzafun" (hidden), and "Barech" (bless)- We must bless Him for both His judgment and His kindness. If this is the case- "Hallel Nirtza" (Praise, Welcome)- the person's praise is welcome before Hashem.



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Q & A with the Rif



Dear Rav, I am a Baalat Teshuva with a daughter in Australia and a son in Israel. They are both unmarried and not yet observant, but I would like them to observe some Mitzva on Pesach. Can the Rav give me some advice- perhaps one or two Mitzvot that I can ask them to observe on Pesach, so they do not end up losing everything?

Answer:

First of all- All of a mother's prayers for her children have immense power to subdue her children's hearts to observe the Torah and Mitzvot. A mother's prayers have unfathomably incredible power. Secondly, beseech your children not to eat Chametz, for the verse states "Aall who eats Chametz, that soul will be cut off" (Shemot 12, 15). Eating Chametz is a very severe matter. A mother tearfully asking her children not to avoid eating Chametz at all costs should be the first priority.





3rd Shabbat meal

Shabbat Hagadol has the particular power to eradicate unhealthy traits that influence our lives.

Torah commentators are all compelled to explain the meaning behind the the name that was given to the Shabbat before Pesach, Shabbat Hagadol, "The Great Shabbat."

They explain as follows:

The Jewish Nation was enslaved in Egypt for 210 years, many years less than the 400 that was originally decreed by Hashem and communicated to Avraham during the Covenant of Parts (Brit bein Habetarim). Hashem saw it that they had to be redeemed then, and it could not wait a moment longer. Over the course of time, the Jewish people had forgotten the laws of the Torah, assimilating, rather, the culture and influence of their oppressors. They attained a spiritual point so base- the 49th level of impurity- that they would have descended to the absolute lowest level, the 50th - which is the point of no return, had they waited a moment longer.

Our Sages teach that each month has a constellation or celestial body associated with it. These, in turn, have a symbol associated with them and their significance. The symbol of the month of Nisan is a lamb. Being that these month of Nisan is the most significant of months (and in some manner the month the world was created on), the Egyptians consecrated the lamb as their deity.

On the eve of the Shabbat preceding the Exodus, Hashem commanded Moshe to instruct the entire nation to set aside a lamb for the Pesach offering and to tie it to their bedpost. Doing so meant placing themselves at risk of violent revenge from their Egyptian masters, but each and every household with a united mindset of self-sacrifice, accomplished Hashem's command without hesitation.

Among the Egyptian population, the firstborn of the nation were most touched by that act. They were placed in charge of the idol worship associated with the lamb, given that they shared the common element of being 'the firstborn'. Thus, they were there first to arrive at the scene of the Jews tying their lamb to the bedpost. They demanded an explanation, to which the Jews confidently responded that they were commanded to do so in awaiting their imminent redemption. "Also," they concluded, "you, the firstborn will soon all perish."

This led the firstborn into a serious panic and they attempted to convince their parents and important people to release the Jews, but their voice was ignored. Desperately, they rose upon their parents and murdered them. This incident is referred to in the verse in Tehillim (136:10), "He who struck Egypt through their firstborn." That very Shabbat, the entire idolatrous system of the Egyptians collapsed; the lamb, their deity, was proven helpless, and so too their priests, the firstborn.

Several days later, Hashem struck the firstborn with the tenth plague, and the following morning He redeemed His nation, the Jewish People.

That Shabbat something very critical took place. The entire religious system of the Egyptians collapsed, and immediately after came the Redemption. Thus, Shabbat Hagadol has the power to eradicate our false beliefs and philosophies. In our contemporary society, imaginary ideals and false beliefs are abound. One person believes in the power of money, while another in sorcery, and yet another finds attachment and belief in something they've dedicated for themselves. This Shabbat has the power to erase all these false beliefs and bring us to the pure truth.

olatry is no longer only bowing to the sun or stars, but anything that a person places their trust and belief in. One who pursues wealth their entire life has, in fact, made an idol worship out of the belief in money. Likewise, one who pursues one pleasure or another, living, chasing and believing in it from day to day, can be said to be serving an idol of sorts, Heaven Forbid.

Our entire connection, belief and dedication must be to Hashem, to Him, one and only. This Shabbat gets us to that point by eradicating our false beliefs and dedications.

During the year, letting go of these beliefs and habits requires enormous willpower. Habits persist and are difficult to change; an imaginary yoke is placed on the person's spirit. After much investment of belief and time into an idea, a person finds it difficult to detach themselves from it. During the year, halting, changing a belief or habit is very difficult, even when one knows that it is false and vain, that its end its painful. It is the power of Shabbat Hagadol to eradicate all these beliefs in this one Shabbat.



Treasure charms from the Rif



The Shabbat that precedes Pesach is called Shabbat Hagadol (the great Shabbat). This Shabbat has great spiritual levels as the miracle of the redemption from Egypt provide spiritual abundance through that Shabbat. Therefore, one should be particular to sanctify this Shabbat and find ways of cleaving to Hashem. In every community the Rabbi should provide a Mussar (moral) teaching sermon based on the weekly Torah portion on the Shabbat evening, and following Shacharit speak about Mussar teachings and spiritual encouragement related to the days of Pesach, so that both the parents and the children will be aware of the high level of the auspicious time of Pesach.



Before the Mincha prayer, everyone should gather to hear the Shabbat Hagadol sermon concerning the relevant Halachot and Minhagim. One should be cognizant, that even one who is already learned, continuously studies and teaches others, should make every effort to attend the Shabbat Hagadol sermon, as it has great powers and Segulot, and there will always be a novelty to learn.

It is well known that on the Seder night great spiritual and material achievements may be attained. There is a great Segula to tell over the following story of the 'Ohev Yisrael' of Apta (Student of the 'Noam Elimelech').

There was a Jewish person who would rent a tavern from the city's Poritz (wealthy aristocratic landowner). In those times, there was no fair judicial system, and the Poritz wouldn't hesitate to arrange that those who wouldn't pay the rent would be executed, to deter others from not paying the Poritz in a timely manner.

The Jewish renter of the tavern was extremely anxious as he had not paid his rent for a whole year, and he knew that if he would not be able to pay his outstanding rent in full by the day following Pesach, he would be put to death, and his family subjected to the Poritz's continued oppression. He decided to go to the Ohev Yisrael of Apta to receive a blessing and some advice, and so, with the few coins he had left, he set off to spend the Shabbat Hagadol in the Ohev Yisrael's court.

The Jew arrived at the Ohev Yisrael's court, and heard the Ohev Yisrael pronounce during his Shabbat Hagadol sermon that in the recital of the Haggaddah the words "We shouted out to Hashem and He heard our voice" (Bamidbar 20, 16) should be said loudly and with strong intention, and one should request salvation from Hashem from all of one's personal problems.

Upon hearing this, the Jew had resolved to do as the Ohev Yisrael had instructed and say the words "We shouted out to Hashem and He heard our voice" with great intent and pray to Hashem for salvation when he will recite the Haggaddah on the Seder night. The Jew attempted to personally meet the Ohev Yisrael on Motzei Shabbat, but wasn't able to, as the Ohev Yisrael was occupied with his spiritual preparation for the Seder night.

He returned home without having had a chance to speak with the Ohev Yisrael, and only his resolution from the Ohev Yisrael's sermon. When his wife inquired of him what the Ohev Yisrael had advised him, he told her that he did not get a chance to speak with the Ohev Yisrael, but recounted to her what the Ohev Yisrael had instructed in his sermon. His wife had full faith in him.

At the recital of the Pesach Haggaddah, the Jew was filled with joy and serenity- all of his worries were set aside as he had faith that Hashem would deliver him salvation. When he came to the words "We shouted out to Hashem" he let out a great cry, and said the words with great concentration and intent, praying to

Hashem that He save him from the Poritz, as the Ohev Yisrael had instructed to do. He performed this action with great sanctity, purity and simplicity.

As soon as he finished saying the words "We shouted out to Hashem and He heard our voice", he heard hurried knocking on the door. Upon opening the door, he saw a Gentile spattered with blood, holding two large barrels. The Gentile recounted that in his anger he had killed his wife, and was now on the run from the authorities. One barrel was full of gemstones he requested the Jew guard for him, and the other was full of gold coins as compensation if the Jew would acquiesce to guard the barrel of gemstones.

This Gentile was searching for a lit house, whose inhabitant he could quickly agree the above deal with. It was the Jew's loud cry of "We shouted out to Hashem" that prompted the Gentile to approach this particular home.

The day after Pesach the Jew headed over to the Poritz's home, and not only paid all of his outstanding rent, but also purchased the freehold of the tavern from the Poritz, using the gold coins from the barrel he was given. He eventually became very wealthy and never had any further financial troubles.

He then returned to the Ohev Yisrael and recounted the miracle he had experienced, and the Ohev Yisrael praised Hashem and emphasized once more the great powers of the words "We shouted out to Hashem and He heard our voice" that we recite on Pesach.

This story has great powers and Segulot and many great Tzadikim would tell this story over on Shabbat Hagadol and on Pesach evening, emphasizing the great Segulot of this story.

Every Jew should be cognizant that there are many small details in the Pesach Haggadah that have immense power. Each of these seemingly minor details have the power to change a person's entire essence from end to end.

One should remember Chazal's teaching that "There is no person who doesn't have their hour" (Avot 4, 3)- Every person has their hour- their moment, that if they are able to seize themselves in that moment and channel their intent appropriately, they may reach very great and special attainments.

In this generation, which is by no means a straightforward generation, Hashem has given us great powers. On the one hand, in this generation we have nothing. On the other hand, there is no generation like this generation- for in this generation a person can easily attain very lofty achievements in a very short space of time.

