

Derech Ha-Rif

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

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First Shabbat Meal

“These are the countings of the Mishkan, the Mishkan of Testimony, which were counted by Moshe.”

One who is pained by the absence of the Beth Hamikdash merits that Hashem reside within him and graces His Shechinah upon him.

In the first verse of the Parasha, the noun Mishkan is repeated twice, technically a grammatical error. The commentators on the Parasha explain that it is actually an allusion to the two Batei Hamikdash, which were destroyed. The word Mishkan is related to the word Mashkon, collateral. The connection is that the Batei Hamikdash were taken by Hashem as collateral for the Jewish people until they did Teshuva, repentance.

This comparison poses a significant question: the Torah allows a collateral to be taken but that collateral cannot be something which is critical to the day to day activities or basic survival of the borrower. How is it that the Batei Hamikdash were taken as collateral when they were so critical to the existence of the Jewish people?

In truth, as the commentators explain, the verse says “I (Hashem) will reside within them,” within each and every Jew. There is a physical space in which Hashem’s presence resides, the Beth Hamikdash, but it is also in each and every Jew. A person who is sincerely connected to the Beth Hamikdash, and longs for that connection with Hashem will merit that Hashem will make His presence felt within that person. For such a person, the loss of the Beth Hamikdash is not, relatively speaking, absolutely critical to their existence. For one who does not feel connected to the Beth Hamikdash and Hashem’s presence does not have the merit that Hashem should reside within them.



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Soul Of the Rif

Every person has a problem which they must overcome, each person in a different manner. Each person needs to place their problems on the table in order to solve them and to try to see how best to place the projector in order to know how to fix problems. This must be done, for if we do not do so, we end up bequeathing our problems to our children, who then pass them on to their children.

One third of the issues relate to genes in the body, a second third relate to the family atmosphere, and the final third is found in the genes of the society around us. If you have bad (spiritual) genes, you can break the genes of the family, and the genes which are around outside beyond your family. You can overcome everything in your body and in your soul.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"Moshe saw the entire work, and behold, they had done it as Hashem had commanded, so they had done, and Moshe blessed them (Shemot 39:43)."

The best blessing for a person is to do things with their heart and with love.

After all of Bnei Yisrael contributed towards the Mishkan, Moshe came and blessed them. Rashi comments there that he blessed them as follows: "May it be His [Hashem's] will that He rests the Shechina (Divine Presence) on your handiwork." What is the meaning of the blessing of Moshe, why did he say that it be His will that He rest his presence in their handiwork, it would seem that he should have said, "May it be His will that the Shechina rest?" We know that there are no extraneous words in the Torah. Therefore, why did he emphasize and specify "in your handiwork"?

In Birkat Hamazon (Grace After Meals), we say, "And please do not allow us to be needful, Hashem our G-d, of the gifts of flesh and blood [i.e., human beings]." We are asking Hashem to prevent us from being reliant on the gifts of human beings. The question can be asked, the yeshivot, charities and other Chessed organizations are supported by the donations of those who contribute. The organizations which support Avreichim (full-time Kollel students), Kimcha Depischa (which provide food for Pesach for the poor), and provide for the sick and the orphaned are all sustained by charities. If Hashem wants to support the Torah without the gifts of people, this could be done by means of Him gifting money directly. Therefore, what is the meaning of "And please do not allow us to be needful, Hashem our G-d, of the gifts of flesh and blood [i.e., human beings]"?

We can explain as follows: There are people who contribute to Tzedaka, but when they do so, they feel that their flesh and blood and blood have been diminished, they feel that part of themselves has been taken away. It is precisely this form of charity, which we ask not to need. We ask not to be given contributions of this kind, but rather that the Tzedaka should come from the heart, not the flesh or blood of people.

Based on this, it can be explained that Moshe blessed Bnei Yisrael after they had contributed to the Mishkan that the Shechina rest in their handiwork, meaning, that there should be blessing in what they had done, such that it not be perceived like a donation of flesh and blood, but rather as something spiritual and holy. Rather than being a physical gift from the hands, it should be beyond the physical. People need to perform actions rooted in the heart, not the hands.

There is a critical concept which emerges. The Beit Hamikdash was built by all the rich people and in the end, it was destroyed. All that is left of the Beit Hamikdash is the Kotel HaMa'aravi (Western Wall), it was not destroyed and remains forever. Why did it survive and why is it eternal? The Sefarim teach that it was built by the donations of pennies given by the poor, with the simplicity of their hearts, with no arrogance or pride. Therefore, it remains forever. A person must perform their actions from the heart and from the depth of the heart. Whatever is done but not from the heart will not endure forever; on the contrary, it will fall. The best thing is when people perform their actions from the depth of the heart and with love.



Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rabbi, I observed Shabbat for fifteen years. I underwent a car accident after I stopped keeping Shabbat, and from then on, I have not succeeded in keeping Shabbat. For a year, I have been reading the Book of Devarim, and sharing it with others and causing merit to the masses.

Answer:

You are praiseworthy Tzaddik, you kept Shabbat for fifteen years, which is a mighty merit to carry. The Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) has disturbed you a little. Tzaddik, return to the observance of Shabbat, the light of the Shabbat guards over the Jewish people.

The power of the Book of Devarim and Moshe our teacher impacts and has influence on Shabbat. Tzaddik, you should be praised, Shabbat is a time to be free of crying out and the salvation is close by. Shabbat is a source of great light.





3rd Shabbat meal

"And they brought the Mishkan to Moshe, the tent and all of its vessels (Shemot 39:33)."

The More Spiritual and Close to Hashem a person is, the Easier Things will be for Them in Life

Rashi comments on this verse that they were unable to set up the Mishkan. Since Moshe had not performed any labor in the Mishkan, Hashem allowed him to set up the Mishkan. No person was able to erect the Mishkan because of the heaviness of its beams, no person had the strength to set them up, but Moshe set it up. Moshe asked Hashem how it was possible to set up the Mishkan through people (in light of the difficulty of the task), Hashem told him to do his part and that he would appear like he was truly setting it up, however, the reality was that the Mishkan became set up of its own accord, and that this is the meaning of the words of the verse, "It was set up" - i.e., it became set up of its own accord (Midrash Tanchuma 11).

It is necessary to understand the following issue. Throughout all of the forty years that Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, they would deconstruct the Mishkan at each and every encampment at which they stopped. Why were they unable to set it up now, yet every other time, they were able to do so? Why did they need Moshe to do it now?

It is possible to answer based on a tremendous concept. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 153:21) rules that one cannot purchase Me'ilim (covers) previously used for an ordinary purpose for a holy purpose. The Rema (147:1) rules that covers for a Sefer Torah should not be made from old things which were used for other, ordinary purposes. The Magen Avraham (61:5) asks, the Kiyor (wash-basin in the Mishkan) was made of the mirrors of the women, which had been used for regular, mundane purposes. The Eliya Rabba adds that this question can be applied to all of the parts of the Mishkan, as they were made from the vessels of Bnei Yisrael which had been used for ordinary purposes.

This is a very difficult point to take, the entire building of the Mishkan was made of the gold rings and ornaments of the nation, yet the Shulchan Aruch rules that foreign and regular matter cannot be used for purposes of sanctity. How could they build the Mishkan from these things?

It is possible to explain and suggest a tremendous concept, "In all of your ways, know Him, and He will smooth your paths (Mishlei 3:6)." This verse is cited in Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 231:1), in the context of the law that all of a person's thoughts and actions needs to be for the sake of Heaven and not for his own benefit, whether in regard to eating, sleeping, business activities, or anything else. One's actions need to be performed for the Tachlit (purpose) of increasing the honor of Hashem. King David says, "If I give sleep to my eyes and slumber to my eyelids (Tehillim 132:4)." He said that he would not give sleep to his eyes, the sleep would be for the sake of Heaven.

This is a key concept in life. When a person eats, they should eat and say that they are doing so in order that they will have strength to serve Hashem. When a person goes on a stroll, they should say that they are doing so in order to relax themselves in order to provide satisfaction to Hashem.

Within everything that a person does, they should connect Hashem with the thing that they are doing. If one does this, then within matters of this world which they carry out, they will receive merit and receive reward for it, as they have done these things for the sake of Heaven.

The same is true in regard to building the Mishkan. People donated their valuables in this manner. Great Tzaddikim donated with pure hearts, as they were people whose entire lives entailed connection with Hashem. They were connected to Him even through their gold and silver. They donated to the Mishkan and with their wealth made important parts of the Mishkan. Things which people made without such purity of heart would not complete the building of the Mishkan. Therefore, when they finished building the Mishkan, there were things which were heavy, because if a person does not donate with sanctity and purity of heart, the matter is heavy with physical heaviness. However, when things are given with purity and sanctity, everything is light, just as Yaakov raised the stone from upon the well. Yaakov was able to do this because he saw everything with purity and sanctity, so for him, all was light.

The planks and the things which people donated wholeheartedly with holiness and sanctity were light, but things which were not given with purity of heart were heavy. Therefore, the first time they tried to build the Mishkan, they needed Moshe, for with his holiness and purity, he would cleanse and purify all those who had donated but had some incomplete aspect within their hearts. Therefore, the first building of the Mishkan had to be performed by Moshe, and only once he had done so, did it become possible to build the Mishkan with ease. Constructing and deconstructing the Mishkan became easier from then on, for Moshe had come first, with intent that anyone who donates would do so to purify and raise the Mishkan to the highest level. Therefore, they took the Mishkan to Moshe, for he would uplift it the first time. After this, they would all be able to become partners in the Mishkan.



Treasure charms from the Rif



The power of Shabbat is immense. Each Shabbat we receive the two crowns of the Jewish people from Moshe, corresponding to them having said 'Na'aseh v'nishma' ("We will do, and we will listen"). It is incumbent upon us to appreciate Moshe for he served as the guardian of the two crowns for us. We can express this appreciation through studying the Book of Devarim, which is the Torah of Moshe.

The Book of Devarim is an auspicious Book. It is a book of prayer and a book of morality. It can be seen as Moshe's final will and can sanctify and elevate people, raising them to lofty places.



Our great teacher, the Chida, explains that when Moshe ascended Mount Sinai to retrieve the Torah, the angels opposed his mission and wanted to prevent him from taking the Torah down. Before Moshe retrieved the Torah, it resided in an exceptionally holy place in Heaven called 'Marom' (the Heights). 'Marom' was so lofty that even the angels were unable to enter its realm, they simply existed in a different dimension to it, and lacked the wherewithal to reach it. When Moshe ascended the mountain, he didn't just climb physically, he also embarked upon a spiritual journey, in which he traversed from one spiritual dimension to the next. Before Moshe reached the realm of 'Marom,' the angels approached him and fiercely opposed his continued ascent, they were wholeheartedly intent on keeping the Torah in 'Marom.'

In response to their opposition, the verse states that "[Moshe] went up to the heights, having taken captives ("shevi"), having received tribute of men (Tehillim 19, 68)." Our rabbis note that the Hebrew word for 'captives,' "Shevi," is composed of the letters 'Shin,' 'Bet,' 'Yud,' they explain that these letters stand for 'Shimon Bar Yochai.' Thus, they explain that Moshe brought Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai up Mount Sinai, to help him retrieve the Torah from 'Marom.'

This passage demands an explanation. We know that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai contained a spark of Moshe within his psyche, and we need to understand why Moshe, the greatest leader of all time, needed to resort to tapping into his future spark (in the form of Rabbi Shimon) to bring down the Torah from 'Marom.'

Perhaps we can explain as follows, based on the teachings found in the Sefer 'Semichat Chachamim.' The Sefer explains that as outlined in the Torah, Moshe ascended Mount Sinai two times to receive the Torah. On both these occasions, when Moshe sought to traverse the angels on his way to 'Marom,' he was accompanied by Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. However the angels' response differed on each occasion. On Moshe's first trip, the angels perceived that Moshe wanted to bring the Torah down to the Jewish people and they agreed to this. They acknowledged that the Torah is comprised of Pshat (the simple understanding) and Sod (the deeper hidden meaning). They knew that Moshe was fitting for the Torah of Pshat, however, were initially uncertain as to whether Moshe would be able to grasp the Torah of Sod. They understood that the Torah of Sod is an overflowing spring of hidden wisdom which requires a tremendously elevated soul to understand it. However, for some reason, they acquiesced to Moshe and allowed him to retrieve both sections of Torah, without too much opposition.

In contrast, on Moshe's second trip up Mount Sinai, the angels fiercely opposed him taking the Torah. It was only when he unleashed the power of the "Shevi," namely of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, that he was able to humble the angels and successfully retrieve the Torah.

The Sefer continues to explain that on the second occasion, Moshe was able to enter 'Marom,' by revealing the concealed greatness of Rabbi Shimon. When Moshe displayed all the travails which Rabbi Shimon would undergo, twinned with his unwavering faith in Hashem and depth of thought, Moshe himself became elevated.

The Sefer further relates that when the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf, Hashem removed the two holy crowns (which the Jewish people had previously attained by prefacing 'na'aseh' ("we will do") to 'nishma' ("we will listen") from the Jewish people and gave them to Moshe. Additionally, Moshe was also given one thousand Orot (holy lights), and consequently reached an exceptionally high level. Thus, immediately after the sin, Moshe became elevated by encompassing both the holy two crowns and the thousand Orot.

Accordingly, when Moshe ascended the second time, after the sin, he encompassed both the thousand Orot and the two crowns. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai latched onto Moshe's unique power at that time and drew on it to refute the angels' opposition. The power of Rabbi Shimon was to latch onto the power of Moshe and suckle from his one thousand Orot and two holy crowns, and in so doing, he assisted Moshe in bringing down the Torah.

The first time the Torah was given, the angels addressed Moshe saying that he wished to take the entire Torah down, and only relate to it through the lens of Pshat. To this, Moshe showed Rabbi Shimon to the angels, and thus allayed their fears, assuring them that the Jewish people would also receive the Torah through the lens of Sod, as personified by Rabbi Shimon.

Conversely, on the second occasion that Moshe ascended the Mountain, he was unable to claim that he possessed the thousand Orot and the two crowns, for he was unable to bestow praise on himself. It is for this reason that Rabbi Shimon was needed to justify Moshe's right to the Torah. Rabbi Shimon informed the angels that Moshe did in fact possess the thousand Orot, as well as the two crowns, and thus had the ability to understand the Torah on the level of Sod. Rabbi Shimon was needed, for one (i.e., Moshe) is unable to relate one's credence by tooting one's own horn; rather someone's stature can only be appreciated if others (i.e., Rabbi Shimon) attest to it. Once Rabbi Shimon testified as to Moshe's greatness, the angels willingly granted him entry to 'Marom' and with that, the Torah. Additionally, each angel was so taken by Moshe, that each gifted him the unique Sod understandings that they had. Even the Malach HaMavet (Angel of Death) gifted Moshe his unique Sod understanding, namely that the method to stop a deathly plague is through Pitum HaKetoret (Fattening of the Incense).

The above teaches us numerous lofty ideas. One such idea is that the Torah is comprised of two tracks: Pshat, and Sod. There are times when one is able to glean understanding within the realm of Pshat, and other times when one can glean within the realm of Sod. That being said, in our generation, in which we feel distance from Hashem, it is especially difficult to glean an understanding of Torah within the realm of Sod.

Although it is difficult to comprehend the Torah on the lofty level of Sod, there are certain techniques which can help. One such technique is to cleave to Tzaddikim who were themselves enveloped in Sod, such as Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and the Ari HaKadosh. A way to cleave to them is through personifying the verse "and your eyes should see your teachers (Yeshaya 20:30)." One can personify this through imagining their presence before one's eyes. If one envisages their presence, and while doing so, recites a passage of Zohar which one is struggling to understand, then provided they make the following declaration they may be helped. The declaration is: 'Master of the Universe, although I am unable to understand by myself, let me soul become connected to that of the Tzaddik I am picturing, and to the lights which that Tzaddik comprehends, and through that let me comprehend this holy teaching.' Once completed, Hashem will surely give that person a free gift, namely the light which that Tzaddik can comprehend and by extension the Sod understandings of that Tzaddik.

To conclude, when one attaches oneself to a Tzaddik who has a deep understanding of Sod, then one's soul becomes elevated and able to comprehend Sod in the same way as that Tzaddik.