

Derech Ha-Rif

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

For the Torah portion Tetzaveh | Volume 64 | 14 adar



First Shabbat Meal

"And you shall command the Jewish people."

One who takes responsibility for the public has great merit to his name

All the Parashas of the Torah which speak of Moshe, from his birth until his passing, mentions Moshe's name in one context or another. There is one Parasha which is the exception to this rule and that is the Parasha of Tetzave. Even the typical "And Hashem spoke to Moshe" verse of numerous Parashas is omitted here. Rather, Moshe's name isn't mentioned at all but his presence is nonetheless acknowledged in the first verse.

The sages in the Talmud (Berachot 32a) explain that it was the result of Moshe's own doing. When the nation sinned with the Golden Calf and Hashem wished to severely punish the nation and recreate a nation from Moshe only, Moshe pleaded that Hashem forgive the nation or erase his own name from the Torah. And so it came to be that Moshe's name was omitted from one Parasha. Although this was not Moshe's intent and his plea was merely conditional, this omission was enacted. For as the Talmud in Makkot (11a) teaches: "a Sage's curse takes effect even if it was only conditional."

Interestingly, the extra ink that was meant for writing Moshe's name, in addition to the other ink that Moshe had when he refrained from writing a normal size letter Alef (rather a mini one, visible in every Sefer Torah) at the end of the word "Vayikra," was the source of Moshe's radiating face. Moshe completed to write the Torah and asked Hashem what to do with the extra ink. Hashem told Moshe that it was his to keep and so Moshe smeared it into his face and as a result, his face gave off a blinding illumination. In other words, Moshe's humility was the cause of his incredible glow.

Moshe's actions are a lesson in assuming responsibility. Oftentimes, individuals are faced with obstacles and situations and they fail to assume responsibility to deal with their issues. They place the responsibility or blame on others. When that happens all sort of issues arise. One may have issues in their home and they divert the responsibility into their wife, children, parents or whomever they believe is at fault- except themselves. Partners can have problems in their business but both retract for not wanting to assume the burden of responsibility. In such situations, the deterioration of the problem only worsens and bursts into a truly grave problem.

The Mishna in Avot (2:5) instructs us to "be a man when no one is present." When no one is present to assume responsibility for an issue which can turn into serious problems one should step up to the job. And surely one mustn't shrug off their own responsibility, because it'll affect not only them but at some point the greater public too. The Jewish people are all united and we must therefore take responsibility for one another.



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Soul Of the Rif

One of the key and foundational principles in a person's life is to be attached to Hashem. As the Torah tells us, "And you who have clung to Hashem your G-d, all of you are alive today (Devarim 4:4)." When a person is attached and connected to Hashem, then "all of you are alive today." A person has life-force in them, they see things in a lively manner, they feel alive in the soul because of the light which Hashem grants them. A second point is that a person needs to be aiming for a target - to where are you going? Where are you making efforts to reach? Where do you wish to get to? Diligence is a great secret in attaining success. A person who begins to learn Gemara (Talmud), often starts off learning well, and then suddenly encounters difficult content in his studies. When faced with these sorts of challenges, if a person leaves everything difficult aside and does not seek to overcome the challenges, they will lose their skills and not achieve anything.



2nd Shabbat Meal

"And you, command Bnei Yisrael, and they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination (Shemot 27:20)."

A person must recompense the good that another person does for them and thank them in order not to remain indebted to them forever.

It is possible to derive this point from this week's portion. Hashem said to Moshe, "And you, command Bnei Yisrael, and they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination," in order to light the Menorah. The Midrash (Shemot Rabba 36:2) brings that Hashem said, "It is not that I need them [i.e., the lights], rather, it is so that you should light up for Me as I lit up for you." Hashem told Moshe that Bnei Yisrael should bring oil in order to light the Menorah just as He had illuminated the world; they needed to reciprocate His kindness by lighting the Menorah. There is a difficulty which must be asked on this: Does Hashem need us to light a Menorah for Him in order that there will be light? G-d does not need our light, as all is His. Therefore, let us ask, what is the explanation of this notion that the Bnei Yisrael should light the Menorah for Hashem just as He illuminated the world for them?

There is a tremendous concept which can be suggested here. If one looks at the life of a person on a day to day basis, if after a time, one comes to a friend and asks for forgiveness, a person will say his friend, "You do not need to ask for forgiveness, what you did to me was not a problem, don't even ask me to forgive." Let us ask the question, why in such a case does a person not wish to accept the apology or even hear him ask to be forgiven? Why do people act in such a way? It can be suggested that a person does not wish to forgive, in order that his friend will always be indebted to him as a result of the offence which he once committed against him. He preserves the hurt which was done to him in his heart for the long term, in order that the problem will remain open so that his friend will always need to seek forgiveness from him.

Many times, we find that a person does a favour for a friend, the friend then comes and thanks the person for the good thing. In such a scenario, many people respond, "You don't even need to say 'thank you,' it was nothing." This response seems questionable, why do they respond in this way?

The answer is that they do not wish to be thanked for what they have done, they want what they have done to remain constantly open to be thanked, in order that the thanksgiving process never ends. This is human nature, to not forgive a person for the bad and to not apologise, while conversely, they will say that for the good, they do not need to be thanked. This is done in order that things will remain open, and the other person will always be indebted to a person.

Hashem teaches Bnei Yisrael the opposite, as He says, "And you, command Bnei Yisrael," just as I illuminate the world for you, they should light small Menorah for me. Hashem teaches the Jewish people proper conduct, He lit up the entire world, and as it were, we reciprocate to Him by lighting a small Menorah. If a person does not work on their character traits, this will lead to great and unparalleled destruction.

Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rabbi, thank G-d, I work and receive a regular salary in Israel. My wife works as a lawyer and earns twice as much as I do, and the feeling is not good, it is as if she supports the house. I wanted to ask the Rabbi's opinion about how to handle this?

Answer

First of all, many times, a person has the feeling that their wife earns more and does more. There is a beautiful story in the Gemara (Taanit 23b), of how Rav Mani came to Rav Yitzchak bar Elyashiv, telling him that his wife was called Chana, she was very ugly and it was impossible to live with her. Rav Yitzchak responded that he should pray that his wife become beautiful. He returned home to find that indeed his wife was beautiful. He then went back to Rav Yitzchak, telling him that his wife had become glorified in her beauty, he was told to pray that his wife return to her former state.

At present, your wife earns well, would you want her to return to her former state and earn less? Were this to happen, you would cry that she should earn as she used to. Build life in a wise manner. A person needs to know how to navigate life, and build the correct balance in life. It is better to not sit at home without work. A person needs to consider a problem when challenged by one, they must address it. Every problem has a solution, one just needs to find the balance in order to open one's eyes to find the solution. There is nothing which is not subject to balance and solutions, seek out balance and solutions.





3rd Shabbat meal

“You shall bring forward your brother Aharon, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as priests (Shemot 1:28).”

The Torah empowers us to reduce jealousy between people.

Let us express a certain idea about the above verse. It is possible that Moshe was troubled when Hashem instructed him to bring Aharon, his older brother, forth, and appoint him to be the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). The rationale for this was as follows: Moshe was the younger brother yet had been appointed to serve as the leader of the Jewish people, the most exalted position within the nation. When Hashem instructed him to appoint Aharon to serve as the Kohen Gadol, Moshe was concerned that jealousy would be injected into the world. He was concerned that Aharon would rationalise that his younger brother had been appointed to be leader of the Jewish people directly, yet he had merely been appointed to be the Kohen Gadol, indirectly via Moshe!

Hashem responded saying, ‘I had the Torah, and I gave it to you.’ Our sages (Shabbat 88a) relate that when Moshe ascended to Heaven to bring the Torah down, the angels sought to stop him. Moshe accordingly turned to the angels and declared: ‘The Torah contains commandments including Do not murder, do not be adulterous, do not steal. You angels are currently demonstrating your jealous tendencies, in which case surely you wouldn’t want this Torah. Surely, your jealous tendencies are at odds with the core mandates of the Torah, so if you take it, it will only jeopardise your lives!’ With that, Moshe grasped the Torah and brought it down to us on Earth. This Heavenly interaction clearly exhibits that jealousy is the antithesis to Torah, and indeed the Torah has the power to reduce jealousy between people.

When Moshe said to Hashem that Aharon would surely be jealous of him, Hashem responded that He had gifted Moshe the power of the Torah, through which he (Moshe) could withhold jealousy from Aharon. Indeed, the power of the Torah is such that it can sweeten any negative traits. The Talmud (Beitzah 25b) records that: ‘There are three impudent ones in the world: The Jewish people among the nations; the dog among the animals; and the rooster among the birds.’ Thus, we can appreciate the importance of cleaving to Torah, for when one taps into Torah, one will attain the strength to combat the natural challenges from the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) which haunt the Jewish people. Conversely, if one is negligent in pursuing their connection to Torah, they will be unable to withstand the Yetzer Hara’s pressure.

“You shall bring forward your brother Aharon, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as priests (Shemot 1:28).”

It was Moshe’s Torah which gave him piece of mind when Aharon was appointed Kohen Gadol.

This week’s Parasha illustrates a perplexing phenomenon. Moshe was instructed to appoint Aharon, his brother, to be Kohen Gadol. The Midrash (Shemot Rabba 34:4) informs us that when Moshe was instructed to do as such, it pained him. Upon seeing Moshe’s sorrow, Hashem cryptically told him that previously He had had sole possession over His Torah, and had now shared it with him (Moshe).

The Midrash highlights that although Moshe was initially disheartened at having to appoint Aharon Kohen Gadol, Hashem comforted him. Moshe was comforted through being informed that he had been given the Torah. This Midrash is deeply troubling for the following reason: Moshe was the humblest of all men, yet his initial reluctance to appoint Aharon to be Kohen Gadol seems to be a display of arrogance! It seems that only upon being comforted by Hashem, was Moshe able to bring himself to appoint Aharon. What is the explanation of this Midrash?

We can suggest the following: Moshe was indeed the humblest of all men, and for this reason, he viewed Aharon as the greatest Tzadik there was, far superior to him in stature. For Moshe, Aharon was the paradigm of human greatness; whilst he was a relative simpleton, devoid of special qualities. When Hashem suddenly requested that Moshe appoint Aharon to be the Kohen Gadol, this greatly disturbed Moshe. Moshe saw Aharon as his role model, and as such, he felt that Aharon being appointed to his position by a mere simpleton was far below his dignity. Moshe therefore turned to Hashem and questioned how his holy brother could be demeaned in such a way?! Hashem responded, ‘I had the Torah, and I gave it to you.’ Let us ask, how did these words answer Moshe’s question?

There is a key concept which can be suggested based on the words of the Chatam Sofer. The Chatam Sofer teaches that when Hashem created the world, He made a condition that if Bnei Yisrael would observe the Torah, the world would endure; if they do not, the world would be destroyed. However, the Torah had not yet been given, Hashem therefore made a condition that if they keep the Torah from the time that it is given, this will sustain the world from that point onwards. However, if they were not to keep it from when it was given, then the world would come to ruin, and it would have no foundation to stand upon, neither from then, nor from before the Torah was given. Let us ask, when the Torah was given and Moshe came down carrying the Luchot (Tablets), he smashed them, and given that they were broken, how could they observe the Torah, there was no Torah?!

Rather, the answer is that Moshe alone fulfilled the Torah, and in the merit of his fulfilment of the Torah, he empowered the entire world to endure. Therefore, the whole universe exists as a result of the strength and action of Moshe, who alone fulfilled the Torah in the world. This is the meaning of Hashem’s statement “I had the Torah and I gave it to you,” meaning to you alone, as Moshe fulfilled it. Through this, Moshe was calmed, for his strength was greater than that of Aharon, as he sustained the entire world through Torah at that point in time after the Torah was given, when they did not fulfil the Torah. Therefore, Moshe’s strength was the greatest, as a result of his lone fulfilment of it at that time, when he was the only one in the world who did so.



Treasure charms from the Rif



There is a certain powerful Segulah (charm) to perform when seeing Jews who are undergoing hardship. The Segulah is well supported, with many attesting to the remarkable miracles it has triggered.

The Segulah is for one to dedicate a sum to Tzedaka. When dedicating the sum, one should declare that the Tzedaka is dedicated towards the elevation of a certain someone’s soul, with this ideally being a soul which does not have other deeds being performed for it. One should state that this soul should serve as a heavenly advocate to resolve the suffering Jew’s hardship.

Hashem should bring us all salvation, success, joy, and Heavenly assistance. We should merit to experience Hashem’s light and have Him fulfil all our desires.



The fourth Post Shabbat meal

Storys from the Rif

The Chatam Sofer was one of the leading European Rabbis of his day. The Chatam Sofer was married to a righteous woman for twenty-four years, after which she passed away. They had had a beautiful marriage, however had not been blessed with children. After she passed, the Chatam Sofer remarried the daughter of the great Rav Akiva Eiger. During his second marriage, the Chatam Sofer was blessed to many children and a multitude of descendants to this day. His children were exceptionally righteous and included the likes of the Ktav Sofer and Rabbi Shimon Sofer, who were themselves exceptionally great people. Rabbi Shimon Sofer, one of the Chatam Sofer's sons, was a tremendous Talmid Chacham (scholar), and was appointed to be the Rabbi of the city of Krakow in Poland. Historically, Krakow had been home to one of the most prestigious Rabbinic seats in Europe. Its Rabbis had included the 'Rama,' the 'Bach,' and other giants. In this light, when Rabbi Shimon Sofer was appointed to his position, it was considered an auspicious position indeed. Although certain members of the community felt that Rav Shimon was aptly qualified for the prestigious position, others felt that he was not a suitable choice. And thus began the great 'Debate of Krakow.'

To settle the debate, Rav Shimon announced that he was going to deliver a shiur (Torah class) the next day and pasted a notice to this effect on the city's bulletin board. Rav Shimon dutifully prepared the Shiur, incorporating a riveting analysis of pieces from the Talmud, Rambam, Shulchan Aruch and others. The next day arrived, and Rav Shimon rose to the lectern to deliver his shiur. The crowd was mixed, with some eagerly awaiting his words, and others cunningly waiting for any opportunity to trip him up and discredit his Rabbinic credence.

Rav Shimon was aware of the antagonism and accordingly began his shiur as follows. He explained that before the shiur, he wanted to share a story. He recalled that when he had been a young boy, his father, the Chatam Sofer, had heard about a certain Jew, a shoe seller, who had begun to open his shoe store on Shabbat. This had deeply troubled the Chatam Sofer, especially seeing as this was the first time that a Jew had publicly desecrated Shabbat in Frankfurt in such a manner. Rav Shimon related that his father had sent him, and his brother, the Ktav Sofer, to the shoe seller to request that he close his store on Shabbat. The Chatam Sofer instructed them to warn him to refrain from being the first to publicly profane Shabbat, seeing as "the one who is (first) to breach the fence (Halacha), will surely be bitten by a snake (Kohelet 10:8)." The shoe seller listened in disgust and expelled them from his property. They informed the Chatam Sofer of this, and he instructed them to try again. They did so but were met by the same response. They returned to their father, and he asked them to go one last time. They did so, and the shoe seller slapped the young Rav Shimon on the face. At that moment, Rav Shimon related that he had uttered a holy mystical name, which his father had taught him to use in such a situation, and upon reciting it, the shoe seller had died.

Upon concluding the story, Rav Shimon turned to the antagonists and stated that if any of them wished to ask him a genuine question for the sake of furthering their understanding, he would be delighted to answer them. However, if they asked him questions in a bid to undermine his standing, then they should bear in mind that he still remembered the holy mystical name to this day. With that, Rav Shimon delivered an excellent shiur, without interruption, which marked the start of his tremendously successful tenure as Rav of Krakow.

Everyone in the world is needed.

In this world, Hashem didn't arbitrarily create extremists and compromisers, nor did He arbitrarily create all different species. Rather everything was created to create a healthy equilibrium in the world, with each extreme being balanced out by its opposing force. Therefore, it is forbidden to harbour hate towards anyone, or point out their shortcomings. Indeed, it is incumbent upon us to appreciate that even those groupings which seem extreme to us, may well be required to ensure a semblance of balance within the world.

Phrased differently, if the entire world was composed of a single type of person, then the world would be lacking in richness, and healthy equilibrium. Each Jew is compared to a letter in the Sefer Torah: Just like a Sefer Torah becomes invalidate if missing even a single letter, so too the entire world becomes lopsided if missing even a single Jew. Understanding that every Jew is needed, can instil the beauty of everyone into us, and thereby incentivise us to accord each respect and love. Any baseless hatred indicates that we lack this understanding, and we should strive to counter this with unconditional love to our brothers and sisters. Even if one hates us, we should seek to love them as much as we can.

Rabbi Chaim Yosef Sonnenfeld, lived over one hundred years ago in the Meah Shearim neighbourhood of Jerusalem. One Erev Shabbat, Arabs entered his home, brandishing knives, ready to slaughter all those present. When Rav Sonnenfeld saw them, he jumped onto the Shabbat table and opened his shirt. The Arabs saw him and instinctively bowed towards him and left the house. Those present were awestruck and asked the Rabbi what he had done? He responded that at that moment he had thought about how much he loved the Arabs holding the knives. He explained that the Arabs had been able to perceive this, and had retracted, unable to bring themselves to harm someone who harboured so much love towards them.

Thus, we see that whilst hatred causes discord and destruction, unconditional love breeds warmth and harmony in the world.

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