

# Derech Ha-Rif

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

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## First Shabbat Meal

**“And Yaakov Settled in the Land of his father (Bereishit 37:1).”**  
 Bringing people closer to the Torah and Mitzvot also has reward in this world

The beginning of the Parashah reveals Yaakov's intent to settle down with his family after returning to his homeland. Yaakov desired comfort and serenity so that he could focus on Torah and Mitzvot. The nature of Yaakov's request begs the question: what right did Yaakov have to make such a demand when it was clearly established between himself and his brother, Esav, that the physical world would be the sole property of Esav, while he, Yaakov would have exclusive rights to the spiritual/Torah world?

To understand Yaakov's justification, we turn to Rashi's commentary on the verse in Bereshit 12:5, “And the people which they made in Haran.” Rashi explains that Avraham and Sarah dedicated themselves to bringing people closer to Hashem (These were the “souls” whom they brought with them when leaving Haran). After they passed away, Yitzhak continued his parents mission, and when Yaakov returned to his homeland, he too took on this sacred mission. As an allusion to this, the word “Megurei Aviv” in the verse, which translates as “father's homeland,” is the same word-root as Ger, a convert. Meaning that Yaakov applied himself in the field of converting people.

The significance of this in the context of Yaakov's desire to have comfortable living conditions and serenity is as follows. The Sages teach that Hashem does not give any material/physical reward for accomplishing His Mitzvot; their reward is reserved for Olam Haba. The only type of Mitzvot for which Hashem does grant material reward are those done to bring people closer to Hashem, the Torah and Mitzvot. Now, Yaakov's request can be understood. Given that he was then dedicating himself to bringing people closer to Hashem, he was justified in expecting an improvement in his living conditions, and to be granted the calm he sought.

It is related about the Satmar Rebbe, Reb Yoel Teitelbaum, that when his community was experiencing financial difficulties, he would instruct his Chassidim to mount Kiruv (outreach) campaigns. In the merit of such actions, he hoped that Hashem would ease their financial stress and grant them what they needed.

This is an important lesson to assimilate and practice. Aside from the immeasurable goodness of bringing people closer to Hashem, the Torah and the practice of Mitzvot, one is also granted material blessings from Hashem for involving oneself in such activities.



## Soul Of the Rif

Every person undergoes hardships and uncomfortable situations during their lifetime. However, a person must take these challenging times and use them as a ladder with which to ascend. It should not be the case that difficulties lead a person to breakdown or to fall without getting up, G-d forbid. Rather, every problem needs to be harnessed as a step with which to ascend to higher and great levels.



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## 2nd Shabbat Meal

**"And Yaakov dwelled in the land where his father had sojourned (Bereishit 37:1)."**

**Yaakov wanted to dwell in tranquility, but this request was denied, because Yosef needed to overcome his test.**

In our minds, we question this point. The Torah informs us that "Yaakov dwelled" and our Rabbis elucidate that precisely when Yaakov wished to dwell in tranquility, the trouble of Yosef sprang upon him. In Hebrew, the word for Yaakov's 'desire' is connected to the root word 'to request'; he wanted to live in peace, but Hashem did not grant his wish, and instead the episode of Yosef seized him.

The question must be asked, why did Hashem not accept Yaakov's prayer? It is known that the prayers of Tzaddikim do not return empty, i.e. they always attain some result. Avraham prayed that Sodom not be destroyed, and although Hashem did not grant his request, it remained potent for future generations. Wherever we find that a strong request is made, the prayer is not ignored; yet here, despite the general rule that Hashem acts in accordance with the will of those who fear Him, Yaakov's prayers were not answered. Why was this so?

A further question can be asked based on the case of Iyov (Job). Iyov endured great suffering, and withstood many of the challenges he faced, however, eventually he complained to Hashem. Our Rabbis teach that in our prayers we were meant to say "The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, the G-d of Yaakov and the G-d of Iyov," however, Iyov's name was removed as punishment for his complaint. It emerges that whoever withstands and overcomes a test merits to be eternalized in our prayers, with our mentioning the "G-d of So-and so," being a reference back to the tests that person overcame.

We must therefore ask a further question. In the case of Yosef the Tzaddik, we find that he overcame the challenge of the advances of Potifar's wife, yet, we don't mention the "G-d of Yosef" in our prayers. The Talmud tells us that in her attempts to seduce him, she changed clothing every morning and evening, never wearing the same garment more than once (Yoma 35b). The Talmud tells us that she threatened to imprison him, yet Yosef remained strong in his resistance for an entire twelve months. In light of this, how is it the case that we do not say "G-d of Yosef"?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 107a) relates that King David asked Hashem why the phrase "G-d of David" is not included in the prayers, and the answer he was given was that he did not succeed in overcoming a test. However, Yosef did succeed, but nonetheless, he did not merit this accolade. Why is this?

There is one answer which can resolve both questions. Yaakov wished to dwell in peace, he requested and prayed, and perhaps, Yaakov was worthy of his prayer being answered. However, it is necessary to know that Yosef was the continuation of Yaakov, as the Torah tells us "he (Yosef) was his (Yaakov's) child of old age (Bereishit 37:3)." This line is interpreted by our Rabbis to mean that he had a similar facial appearance to him and that Yaakov shared all of his Torah with Yosef. Similarly, the notion of the two of them being one is supported by the Navi (prophet), who says "And the house of Yaakov will be a fire and the house of Yosef will be a flame (Ovadya 1:18)."

Perhaps Yaakov deserved a peaceful life, but he still needed to endure the test of Yosef. Yosef the Tzaddik succeeded in overcoming the test from Potifar's wife because of the strength of Yaakov. Indeed, the moment before he was about to sin, he saw the likeness of his father, which gave him the strength to resist the sin.

Therefore, the victory of Yosef in not sinning and remaining strong in the face of the challenge truly belonged to the strength of Yaakov. Therefore, Yaakov could not be granted his request of a peaceful life, because if he would have been, Yosef would have been unable to succeed in overcoming his challenge.

The test of Yosef created an opening for all future generations that came after him in the arena of moral relationships. Therefore, the prayer of Yaakov did not return empty-handed. Yosef did not merit to be mentioned in the prayers, with the phrase "the G-d of Yosef" because he stood strong on account of the strength of Yaakov. When we pray and say "The G-d of Yaakov" one needs to have Yosef in mind also, as his test is buried within the phrase "G-d of Yaakov" which also contains the concept of "the G-d of Yosef."

## Q & A with the Rif



### Question:

**Dear Rabbi, I am tremendously jealous of my sister-in-law, who has married off all of her children, whilst I have not yet married off even one of my own. This causes my soul deep pain. I wanted to ask the Rabbi how to deal with this?**

### Answer:

**One needs to be careful to bar jealousy from one's psyche, as if it enters, it can trigger an Ayin Hara (Evil Eye) against the family. Everyone ends up doing things in their right time, and exactly what is defined as the right time is dependent on individuals. The more good-hearted you are and the more you desire good and pray to Hashem, the more good He will give.**

**Additionally, you should be careful not to be pulled in by this trying situation, because this can, G-d forbid, be very dangerous. One needs to remain in a good place, with wholesomeness, prayer, purity of heart, and with G-d's help there will be salvation and great success.**





## 3rd Shabbat meal

“And Yaakov dwelled in the land where his father had sojourned (Bereishit 37:1).”

Hashem puts those He loves through tests and difficulties in order to give strength to their future generations.

Our holy Rabbis (cited by Rashi 37:2) teach that Yaakov wanted to dwell in tranquility, at which point the trouble of Yosef sprang upon him. When Tzaddikim seek to live in peace, the Satan (Accusing Angel) says, “Is that which awaits them in the next world not enough for Tzaddikim, such that they seek to dwell with comfort in this world?” The meaning of these words, both on a basic and a deeper level, needs to be understood.

It is necessary to understand that often in life, a person thinks that quiet and serenity are good and comfortable for them. However, a person is not aware of the fact that a small activity in this world has great power above. A person can do something and not see that it is effective. For example, they may blow Shofar or wave the Lulav. At first glance, it seems that a person could ask, what does this action help or achieve? I heard the sound which came out of the Shofar, but another item could have produced the exact same sound. Likewise, one can ask what results from a person shaking Lulav, as they do not perceive anything emerging from it. Therefore, let us delve into the concept and the depth of waving the Arba Minim (four species).

It is necessary to be aware of a key concept, every small action stimulates tremendous effects above. Even an activity which appears ordinary and seems not to contain much, carries tremendous power in Heaven. The same blowing of the Shofar which appears straightforward and unimpressive, has great power, it moves G-d from the Throne of Judgment to the Throne of Mercy. The waving of the Arba Minim is similarly powerful, it can stop bad winds, once again something small below can have major impacts above.

It is known that all of the events which took place with Tzaddikim are symbolic lessons for the future generations, including their children, grandchildren and beyond. In the case of Avraham and Sarah, who descended to Egypt, all that happened to them there, re-occurred to their descendents. Similarly, that which their children underwent was undergone by subsequent generations of the Jewish people. The experiences of Tzaddikim are allegorical actions for future generations. Yaakov wanted to dwell in peace not simply for his own sake, but for the future generations of the Jewish people. At this point, Hashem taught Yaakov a key concept and an important lesson which we must be aware of throughout our lives. Yosef’s brothers took him and threw him into the pit. Our Rabbis elucidate that the verse “And the pit was empty, there was no water in it (Bereishit 37:24)” means to say that although it lacked water, there were snakes and scorpions in it. Why do they specifically make mention of snakes?

The holy Torah says that Hashem cursed Adam when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, and at that time, He also cursed Chava and the snake. One of the curses placed on the snake was “And you shall eat dust all of the days of your life (Bereishit 3:14).” This meant that whatever the snake would eat would taste of dust. One could assume that this was a blessing and not a curse, as he would not need to find sustenance, since he would constantly have it. We must therefore ask the following question, what was the curse of the snake?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai answered this question, based on the following parable: There was a king who had two children, one of whom he loved greatly. He told him to come to the palace on a daily basis

to collect his sustenance, because he wanted to see him often. The second child, who he did not like, was told to come once a year to take his sustenance, as the king did not wish to see him.

Rabbi Shimon explained that the daily allocation of Man (manna), the heavenly food which the Jews ate while they were in the desert, symbolized how Hashem loves us. As the prophet says, “You went after Me with faith in the desert, in an unsown land (Yirmiya 2:2).” Hashem wanted it to be the case that we ask Him for sustenance every day. On the one hand, the snake marks sustenance, because it always has food available. As our Rabbis teach, if one sees a snake in their dream, it is a sign that their sustenance will be made available to them (Berachot 57a). On the other hand, a snake is symbolic of G-d not desiring closeness, for he is given everything, G-d only wants him not to request anything, because He too wants nothing from him.

Hashem had Yosef thrown into a pit, because this symbolized the beginning of his great test of descending down to Egypt. The pit contained snakes and scorpions which represented the test which he would need to overcome, in which he would have nothing, in contrast to the snake, who has all. G-d prefers the difficult test, where you are lacking and ask for things, over the test of the snake who has everything, but whose reality shows distance from Hashem.

Therefore, small things are indicative of bigger things. When a person overcomes a test, this shows them that Hashem desires that they be made great through these tests. Through this, a complete world, with bigger things, is built. This is what took place when Yaakov desired to live in tranquility, and not with things which would be faced by future generations. Hashem told him no, everything which will happen to you in this world will provide a lesson to your children in regard to the challenges that they will face. He told Yaakov that through the strength that they would gain through their tests, continuity would be provided for all generations.

The story is told of one Tzaddik who gathered his students and asked each of them how they thought that the world should appear. Each gave a suggestion of something extra which they thought should be added to the world. One wrote that the world needs more income; another who did not have children wrote that he wished that Hashem would create the world with more children. One who lacked a home wrote that he wished G-d would create a world in which everyone had a house.

The Tzaddik told them no, in fact they were mistaken, and that Hashem made the world in a more complete form [than what you are asking for]. Our thought that something is incomplete is only because of a lack of Emuna (faith). In the Birkat Ha’ilanot (the blessing over trees), we say “Who did not leave anything out from His world.” He created the world with nothing lacking, it is only us who perceive the supposed lack. If we want to live quietly and in peace, with a view that nothing is missing provided that things are quiet, this will be easy for us in the short term, but in the longer term, it will not lead to the world being completed.

If a person thinks to transform the world into an easier world, with fewer problems and challenges, this is a mistake. If a person sits relaxed without doing anything, they will not have sustenance for the next day; in contrast when a person is under pressure and makes efforts and fights for something, they build their strength for the next day. It is only once a person has overcome challenges that they can understand their purpose. Ultimately, they complete the true picture and whatever has happened to them is shown to be very good.

## Treasure charms from the Rif



### A charm to merit children:

The final day of Chanukah is called ‘Zot Chanukah,’ and it is endowed with a unique power. It contains a unique charm for those who wish to have children. The charm is to look at the Chanukiah and meditate upon the following words:

‘Hashem, just like I merited to light the candles on the eight days of Chanukah, so too, allow me to merit having a son who I can circumcise on his eighth day of life.’



If we look, it appears that the root of the world comes from two exceptionally difficult tests: The generation of Sodom and Amora who breached boundaries in matters of immorality and the Dor Hapalaga (the generation of dispersion), who were brazen in their evil plans and denial of G-d. Both of these generations left their mark in the world. Their imprint is the need for Tikun (repair) in the later generations, in terms of immorality on the one hand and problems of faith on the other.

Yosef the Tzaddik was tested with two extremely difficult challenges and he overcame both of them. One was a test of immorality with the provocation of the wife of Potifar, who tried to entice him to sin, which conceptually aligned with Sedom. By overcoming his test, Yosef repaired the problems of Sodom in terms of matters of immorality. The second test Yosef faced was one of faith, this took place when he was in prison. When a person is imprisoned, they contemplate questions of faith, along the lines of why has Hashem done this to me and what have I done to deserve this? By way of his term in prison, Yosef repaired the damage of the Dor Hapalaga in matters of faith.

One who sees the pain that Yosef the Tzaddik underwent will likely ask difficult questions in Emunah. Why does a seventeen year old child need to undergo such difficult things? It seems hard, but great strength for future generations is buried deep within this episode. Through the wife of Potifar, Yosef strengthened future generations to deal with the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) for immoral relations. In prison, he prepared future generations to deal with questions of faith in Hashem.

Therefore, even when a person wishes to live comfortably, they must know that facing challenges and dealing with them give strength to future generations for another month or another year, to be strong and successful. For this reason, when a person faces tests and difficulties, they must know that these things are temporary difficulties which precede greater things. One needs to accept these hurdles so that down the road, in another year or two, or even for one's children, there will be support from the foundation which one builds through overcoming tests. These foundations are formed by overcoming the challenges and difficulties that one faces.

The following story concerns a chassid (follower) of one of the great disciples of the Baal Shem Tov.

The chassid of the Baal Shem Tov's disciple was exceptionally wealthy and renowned for his generosity. One day, he began to experience financial difficulties, until eventually his finances had dissipated to the point that he became an impoverished man. The man was distraught and approached his Rabbi for advice. He informed his Rabbi that he had an extraordinarily wealthy brother, and inquired as to whether it would be right to seek his help. The Rabbi responded that he should refrain from seeking his brother's help in all circumstances and should instead remain in his impoverished state.

Some time passed, and the man's fortunes turned even more sour, with him struggling to get by each day. In desperation, against his Rabbi's instructions, he sought help from his brother. His brother readily agreed, and sent him a large sum, and sure enough, the man almost immediately rebuilt his wealth. However, only a couple of days later, the man became deathly ill, with the doctors waiving all hope of his recovery. The chassid approached his Rabbi and explained that he was on death's door and pleaded for the Rabbi's guidance. The Rabbi turned to him, and asked whether he had sought help from his brother. The man guiltily explained that his situation had become so dire, that he had felt forced to do so. The Rabbi explained that by doing so, he had sealed his fate. He explained that Hashem had seen that the man had a death decree against him in Heaven, and Hashem had therefore struck him with this tremendous plight to serve as an atonement to tear up the decree. The Rabbi concluded that by seeking assistance from his brother, the man had lost his atonement and had thereby unwittingly sealed his fate. This story highlights the meaning behind King David's announcement that: "I extol You Hashem for You have lifted me up (Tehillim 30:2)." King David thanked Hashem for giving him challenges, understanding that the challenges were in fact atonements for far more severe hardships. In light of this, one who undergoes hardship

ought to thank Hashem, by appreciating that this hardship likely saved him from undergoing more severe hardships.

In this vein, during the days of Chanukah which are miraculous in nature, it is especially befitting to be joyful and thankful for any struggles we experience, rich in the knowledge that they are merely paving the way for incredible joy in the times of the Moshiach.

The Chanukah lights symbolize the protection of our souls:

The Torah informs us about an incident involving the wife of the great prophet, Obadiah, and the prophet Elisha. It relates that Obadiah was a tremendously righteous prophet who took responsibility for the welfare of his fellow prophets. The wicked Achav wished to kill the prophets and they therefore fled and hid in the caves. Obadiah took upon himself to support these prophets by any means. He would lend them money to sustain them, to the extent that he eventually ran out of money to lend them. Obadiah therefore resorted to borrowing money himself, to buy food for the prophets. Once he had used up the money he had borrowed, he began to set his possessions as collateral in return for further loans. His dedication to sustaining the prophets was such that eventually, he even made his own two children collateral for the loans to ensure the prophets had enough food to live.

After some time, Obadiah passed away, and sure enough the creditors approached his home and sought to claim the collateral, including his children. Obadiah's wife approached the prophet Elisha and said: "Your servant, my husband, has died, and you know that your servant revered G-d; and now the creditor is coming to seize my two children as slaves!" (Melachim II 4:1) She turned to Elisha and pleaded for assistance, willing to do anything to save her children. Elisha asked her what she had in her home. She responded that she only had a small bottle of oil. Upon hearing this, Elisha instructed her to borrow bowls and bottles from her neighbors, and the small amount of oil she had would multiply to fill the other vessels. Sure enough, she borrowed the vessels, they filled up with oil and she and her children became wealthy people.

The above story enails a startling miracle and therefore behooves us to ask the following question: Why don't we also commemorate this incredible miracle, in the same manner as we commemorate the conservation of the single jug of oil in the Chanukah story?

The answer to this question can be gleaned by understanding the nature of the Chanukah miracle. The jug of oil which lasted for eight days symbolized the fundamental battle between the Jews and the Greeks. The Greeks sought to seize the light of the Torah and remove its spiritual power. They sought to instead inject it with their Hellenistic values, such as their uncompromising adherence to cold intellectualism, devoid of any spiritual light and G-dliness.

It is for this reason that the Chanukah came to symbolize the salvation of our souls. This is alluded to in the verse: "The candlelight of Hashem is the soul of man" (Mishlei 20:27), which hints towards the Divine protective light which the Chanukah candles shed onto our souls.

In addition to the above, the holy Sefarim (books) explain that the Chanukah lights have a unique power to burn away all of man's negative thoughts, feelings and actions. Moreover, the sages explain that this unique power is only fully unlocked when one synthesizes the candles' light with one's prayers, Torah learning and good deeds.

Baruch Hashem, our sacred community of 'Shuva Yisrael', can serve to unlock this power, through our daily study of Sefer Devarim, alongside our other Torah studies, performance of Mitzvot and devotion to Minhagim (customs).

Additionally, it is virtuous for all to seek to study the verses concerning both Eliyahu the prophet and Elisha the prophet every Monday. The miracles which the Jewish people experienced through these two great prophets surpassed the miracles they experienced under any other prophets. The verses concerning them contain tremendously holy secrets, and studying them lends us the opportunity to tap into the sheer greatness of Eliyahu and the powerful prayers of Elisha. If one reads these verses each Monday, they will surely merit salvation from any hardships they undergo.

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