

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 sent angels before him to his brother Esav (Bereishit 32:4)”

A Mitzva performed without focus, when done for a good intention, completes the Mitzva.

Before the momentous meeting of Yaakov and Esav after so many years, Yaakov felt anxious because of unique merits which Esav held: the Mitzva of honoring one's parents (which Esav was known for) and the Mitzva of dwelling in the Land of Israel. Yaakov had not performed these two Mitzvot during the many years he had been away building his family. Nonetheless, Yaakov found a way to divert the merit of these Mitzvot for himself.

The Talmud in Kiddushin 40a teaches that “Hashem combines a good intention to a deed,” which the Noam Elimelech explains to mean that Hashem combines the acts of two people to add up to one perfect Mitzva. A person may have the intense desire to perform a specific Mitzva and understand its true depth and meaning. However, it can happen that for whatever reason they cannot perform it or don't have the opportunity to fulfill the Mitzva. Then again, there is another person who accomplishes that very Mitzva, but is ignorant of its true significance. In His great Mercy, Hashem combines the elements of these two people to create a complete and perfect Mitzva.

The practical component of the Mitzva is the metaphorical body of the Mitzva, while the intention and understanding with which it is performed constitutes its metaphorical soul.

In the context of the two Mitzvot that Esav had accomplished, Esav can be said to have accomplished the practical elements of those Mitzvot, but without the proper intention. On the other hand, Yaakov did not actually perform these Mitzvot, but he certainly accomplished them, to some extent, on a spiritual/ intellectual level. Yaakov was away from his parents in the house of Lavan, but the entire undertaking was because of a directive of his parents.

When Yaakov was nearing Esav, he sent Esav presents with the intent of “buying” the practical aspect of the Mitzvot from him. By accepting the presents, Esav would be revealing that his intentions in performing the Mitzvot were insincere and not for a spiritual objective.

Yaakov thus combined the angels created from the intentions and those from the act into a single group, thereby completing the Mitzva. This act is alluded to in the verse at the end of Vayetze, which says that “Yaakov called the place (where he met the angels) Machanayim” - camps. He referred to multiple camps as he saw two camps, one formed by the intentions for the Mitzva and the other formed by the actual performance of it. In light of this, Yaakov was now complete in all the Mitzvot.

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Soul Of the Rif

Many times a person tries to do something good for other people, but the other people recompense a person in a different manner to how they gave to them. This causes a person to feel great pain, to have second thoughts, as well as sadness, leaving them in a bad situation. We need to work on ourselves with a key concept in mind, we need to do good things, for Hashem commanded us about the character trait of kindness, as it says “And you shall love your fellow as you love yourself (Vayikra 19:8).” We need to provide positively and conduct ourselves well, a person should not be concerned or interested in how other people act. If a person weighs out their conduct to others based on calculation, along the lines of ‘You did this for me, so I will give you this in return,’ and ‘You gave me, so I will give you,’ the world would not go in a good direction. This approach is one of politics, it is not the path of Hashem.



2nd Shabbat Meal

**"And Yaakov sent angels ahead of him (Bereishit 32:4)."
The Angel which guards a person when they depart on a journey**

If a person is traveling on a journey and they want Hashem to help them be saved from incidents on their way, they should have the Divine Name spelt: Yud, Vav, Hei, Kaf, in mind. The Zohar (Vayishlach 165b) explains that the letters of the name of this angel are a mnemonic for the Sofei Teivot (the last letters of the words) of "ki malachav yetzve lach" - "for His angels, He will command for you (Tehillim 91:11)." This name is the name of the angel, who is appointed to guard over people traveling on the road. This angel wants it to be the case that Hashem will guard a person from bad things, and damage the wicked people who look to damage a person. It is said that when a person takes leave of a friend, they should do so by concluding by mentioning a matter of halacha, namely the law that if there is a dispute between an individual view in Halacha and a contending majority, the Halacha follows the majority.

The question must be asked: There are so many Halachot, why should one specifically cite the Halacha that the majority is followed over the minority in conflicts of Halacha? It is possible to answer that Yaakov sent angels to Esav. There are two types of angels in the world, those which were created by the Creator of the Universe, these are Gavriel, Michael, Rafael, Uriel and all the other named angels. There is a second kind of angel, which is formed by the good deeds of people. If a person gives Tzedaka (charity), this creates an angel, if they do an act of kindness, they acquire another advocate for themselves. For every Mitzvah which a person performs, they acquire a good angel. It is necessary to be aware of a key concept. There are two angels which are with a person constantly, these are the Yetzer Tov (Good Inclination) and the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination). The time at which the Yetzer Hara enters into a person is subject to a debate, it either enters when they are still in their mother's womb, or at the moment when they depart from there, and it remains with them. The Yetzer Tov enters a person at the age of thirteen. When a person follows the path of Hashem, they take the Yetzer Hara and turn it into the Yetzer Tov to guard over them. Indeed, this is the idea behind the sages' interpretation of the verse: "And you shall love Hashem your G-d with all of your heart (Devarim 6:5)" - which is said to mean that one ought to love Hashem with both inclinations, the Yetzer Hatov and the Yetzer Hara.

It is necessary to know that the name of the angel who is appointed over guardian a person is called by the name spelt: Yud, Vav, Hei, Kaf. The beginning of its name is from the good angel, who comes to a person when they are Bar Mitzvah. The second half of the name comes from the bad angel which is found alongside a person from the time that they are born.

The holy Sefarim write that the the letter 'Yud' is like a hand with which one holds a sword, and the letter 'Vav' is the actual sword; these collectively represent the good angel which accompanies a person.

The letters 'Hei' and 'Kaf' are the root letters of the word 'Makkah,' which means to hit; these represent the evil angel which has been transformed to become good. This is the reason why we specifically say Yachid Verabim Halacha Kerabim (an individual and a majority, the Halacha follows the majority), because the combination of the first letters of each of these words spell out the name of the Malach. The individual is a person, and the majority are the Yetzer Tov and the Yetzer Hara, which have become friends and have become one, in order to guard a person, and therefore, the Halacha follows the majority.



Q & A with the Rif



Question:

Dear Rabbi, I wanted to ask the following question: Every Motzei Shabbat, I feel a lack of vitality, not being in the mood for anything. What causes this?

Answer:

On Shabbat, a person is in an elevated state. During Shabbat, a person's additional soul burns within them. On Motzei Shabbat, the extra soul departs and consequentially, a person descends and enters a feeling of sadness. A person needs to be strong in avoiding sadness.

One should know that there is still a taste of Shabbat on Sunday. Motzei Shabbat and Sunday are the time that people need to be strong in being familiar with the light of Shabbat, and to stretch it out and continue it in the right way.





3rd Shabbat meal

"And Yaakov was very afraid (Bereishit 32:7)."

A person must have great Emuna (faith) and Bitachon (trust) in Hashem, when a person has these, they will not worry or be afraid of anything.

In this week's portion, we are told "And Yaakov was very afraid and distressed him." The meaning of these words must be understood. Our holy rabbis say as follows: Yaakov was afraid because he had pain in his heart. This means that when a person lacks Emuna in Hashem, and there are things which cause one to have fear or pain in one's heart, this indicates that there is weakness in one's Bitachon in Hashem.

If a person believes and has strong Bitachon in Hashem, nothing in the world can cause them to be worried, nothing can cause them pain in their heart. A person who feels worry on account of something does not really have anything to worry about, because everything is in the Hands of Hashem. He runs his world, and therefore, there is nothing to be afraid of. If someone is causing a person pain, there is nothing to be afraid of, because everything that Hashem does is for the good. Yaakov was afraid, because he had pain in his heart, and he understood that this fear indicated a lack of Emunah in Hashem. There is a key concept which one must be aware of in life. A person needs to have great Bitachon in Hashem, and not be pained or angered by things, because everything that Hashem does is for the best. A person's fear of something is caused by a lack of Emuna, and similarly if something pains a person this too is because of a lack in Emuna.

A person needs to have the highest levels of Emuna and Bitachon, this is what the Torah terms "If war rises up against me, in this (the Torah) I trust (Tehillim 27:3)." If a person faces war or distress, in this - the holy Torah - they can trust, and have nothing to fear. Fear or internal pain shows a lack of Emuna and Bitachon in Hashem.

The teaching of Rav Chaim Volzhiner in the sefer, Nefesh Hachaim (Sha'ar 3, Perek 12) is known. He writes that a key concept and Segula (charm) to be saved from anything bad is for one to have complete faith in Hashem and accept upon oneself the yoke of Malchut Shamayim (the kingdom of Heaven). If they do the above, then all the difficulties and problems of this world will be released from upon them. The greater a person's Emunah and Bitachon in Hashem, the more they are enabled to handle problems and troubles that crop up. The moment one accepts the yoke of Malchut Shamayim in a stronger way, is the moment when one is saved from anything bad.

There was a story which took place with the Chatam Sofer, who was an exceptionally holy man. One night, he called his Gabbai (attendant) and told him to go and call the head of the Jewish community. When the head of the community came, the Chatam Sofer told him that the governor of the city had a sealed letter in his drawer, with a decree to do evil things to the Jews and cause them great suffering, to throw them out and treat them harshly.

He told him to hurry to the governor and speak to him in order to convince him to repeal the edict. The head of the Jewish community responded, "Going to the town's governor in the middle of the night is not an accepted thing to do, it would cause him to be angry with us and the result would only be worse. It is not fitting that we should go."

The Chatam Sofer then told him that he was instructing him in his capacity as the town's Rabbi, and he should listen and immediately go to speak to the leader of the city, in order to appease him to rescind the decree. Left with no choice, the head of the community went with

two other distinguished men, and started in the direction of the house of the governor. They reached the banks of a river and searched for a rowing boat in which they could cross the river, but could not find one.

They went and knocked on the door of one of the fishermen, requesting that he take them to the other side of the river. The fisherman arose in anger and began to shout at them, "You woke me from my sleep!" He began to curse them repeatedly. They asked if he would be willing to take them over the river for a large sum of money and he agreed. He took them into his rowing boat, and began to take them across. The boat smelled strongly of fish, and they tried to avoid having the foul smell cling to them before they arrived.

When they came out of the boat on the other side, they found police officers, who shouted at them, demanding to know what they were doing there. The head of the community said, "This is a communal area, I have the right to walk here." They began to scream and the governor woke up, asking who was shouting below. They told him, "Three Jews have arrived and they wish to meet you." The governor instructed that they be sent in. He then requested that his servants bring him some milk to drink, they brought milk for him and for those who came to meet him. They said that they could not drink the milk because it was Chalav Akum (milk of gentiles). The governor asked them, "Explain to me what Chalav Akum is." They explained that the Torah is concerned that they may accidentally come to drink the milk of a camel. "Therefore," they continued, "we can only drink milk of cows and goats, and for this reason, Chalav Akum is forbidden to us. The milk of a person who does not identify the milk of a cow could be a sin for us to drink." The governor said to them that there is no such thing, and summoned the servant who worked in the kitchen to prove his point, claiming that all his milk came only from cows. They asked the servant about the milk and he began to stutter and ask for forgiveness, explaining that the cow had been ill that day, so they did not take milk from it, instead they had brought milk from a camel. The governor immediately understood what had happened and saw the intervention of Hashem. He declared "Your Torah is true, and you are honest. Now tell me the real reason you came here." They told him that their teacher, the Chatam Sofer, had told them that there was a harsh decree against the Jews in the governor's draw. He said in wonderment, "How did you know?" and promptly rescinded it. Our holy rabbis say that one needs to learn and be aware of a tremendous concept. A person needs to have complete and wholesome faith in Hashem, without questioning thoughts. When a person walks through life with wholesomeness with Hashem, then every problem, even if it does not appear to be logical, is solved by Hashem. The Chatam Sofer called to them and told them to go at night, which was not logical, and it was not accepted to go in the middle of the night, nor understandable why it would be successful. It would have appeared more fitting to go at a comfortable time and find ways of how to solve the problem. However, if one walks completely with Hashem, one can also go at night, and as the Torah and the Rabbi said, "Go without asking questions, and Hashem will save."

When a person walks with wholesomeness; "And Yaakov was greatly afraid and he was in pain;" He was afraid because of the pain in his heart, our father Yaakov saw his pain as a lack of Emuna and Bitachon in Hashem, therefore, it caused him great pain. When a person goes with Hashem with perfect faith and Bitachon, and a feeling of "Even when I walk in the valley of death, I will not fear evil, because you are with me (Tehillim 23:4)," then they have nothing to fear, as Hashem is with them.

Treasure charms from the Rif



Our holy Sefarim (books) record that our sages note a unique relationship between the way in which one stares at the Chanukah lights and one's power of memory. They explain that through one gazing at the Chanukah candles, and contemplating their holiness, this holiness and purity will penetrate their souls, and merit them Divine assistance in enhancing their memory.

Gazing at the candles with the single goal of cultivating thanks towards Hashem for His majestic miracles and awesome wonders, is the manner of gazing which will stimulate a boost in one's memory. This form of gazing will augment one's ability to understand and remember one's Torah and all of the miracles which G-d has performed for our holy nation.



The fourth Post Shabbat meal

Stories from the Rif

The Maggid of Mezeritch, was the chief disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, and was an exceptionally exalted person in his own right.

The Ba'al Shem Tov lived most of his life as a hidden Tzaddik and the story of how he was revealed to the world, is one from which we can glean many lessons.

Before the Ba'al Shem Tov revealed himself to the world, he sent a letter to his brother-in-law, Rav Gershon, who lived in the holy city of Tzfat. In the letter, the Ba'al Shem Tov wrote that he had received a letter from a great hidden Tzaddik, called Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem Tov. He explained that this Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem Tov had informed him that the time had come for the Ba'al Shem Tov to reveal himself and share his Torah with the world.

Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem Tov's letter stated that he had passed away in the same year as the Arizal. He continued to explain that he had lived a pure life, in which he had prayed three times a day, had conducted his business with integrity and had performed Tikkun Chatzot, whereby he had wept over the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash (temple) every night. The letter continued to explain that his soul had come from the same root as the great prophet Achiya HaShiloni, and crucially, he added that the Ba'al Shem Tov's soul also had this same unique root.

The letter continued as follow:

that one day the Heavenly ministers sent Eliyahu HaNavi (the prophet) to Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem Tov to teach him Torah. Eliyahu approached the man and said that he would teach him Torah but only on the condition that he tell Eliyahu which great Mitzvah he performed when he was thirteen years old.

The man turned to Eliyahu and informed him that the Mitzvot which he did were purely between Him and Hashem. He continued to explain that he performed the Mitzvot out of service of G-d, and not to flaunt them, and would not be willing to draw on them to merit learning from Eliyahu HaNavi. With this, the man concluded that he was unwilling to divulge the great Mitzvah which he had performed. Eliyahu responded that if this was so, he refused to teach the man Torah. The man contemplated Eliyahu's refusal, yet following some thought, he stuck with his decision, strong in the resolve that he had performed the Mitzvah solely for Hashem, rather than for the benefit of learning from Eliyahu HaNavi. Eliyahu left the man's home and at that moment there was a tremendous raucous in Heaven.

The ministering angels engaged in a vibrant discussion regarding the man's interaction with Eliyahu HaNavi. Following lengthy discussions, it was decided that Eliyahu would return to the man and teach the man Torah, even without him having divulged which Mitzvah he had performed when he was thirteen. Eliyahu descended once again and taught the man the entire Torah. The man basked in Eliyahu's presence, and internalized the entire Torah, however he didn't reveal any of it to anyone. In fact, he continued to live a simple life, continuing to go about his work, prayers, and regular life as beforehand. Not a soul knew about the Torah he had acquired, and when this man passed away, the Torah he had been taught, left the world with him.

The Ba'al Shem Tov began wrapping up his letter to his brother-in-law, saying that this Rabbi Adam Ba'al Shem Tov had told him that his soul had been implanted into the Ba'al Shem Tov, and the Ba'al Shem Tov was now charged with sharing this Torah with the world. The Ba'al Shem Tov concluded that it was now time for him to begin sharing his Torah and illuminate the world.

The Ba'al Shem Tov passed away during the festival of Shavuot, and left behind a son, Rav Zvi. During the year after the Ba'al Shem Tov's passing, Rav Zvi began to wear the regal clothing of his father, however he did not deliver shiurim; all waited in anticipation and hope that someone would take the mantle and begin to relay the Torah of their revered teacher. After a year had passed, on the festival of Shavuot, Rav Zvi rose before his late father's students and removed his regal cloak and said that his father wished for Rav Dov Ber (the Maggid of Mezeritch) to be his successful and begin to relate his father's Torah. Rav Zvi took his regal clothing and placed them on Rav Dov Ber, and the Maggid began to share the Torah of his illustrious teacher, the Ba'al Shem Tov.

It is important to note that all the esteemed students of the Ba'al Shem Tov, individuals that we are all familiar with, were in fact recipients of the Ba'al Shem Tov's Torah through his successor, the Maggid. These students of the Maggid included giants such as Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi (the Ba'al HaTanya, author of the Tanya), Rav Zusha of Anipoli, Rav Shmelke of Nikolsburg, Rav Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz (author of the Talmudic commentary, the 'Hafla'ah) and many more. Although they are referred to as students of the Ba'al Shem Tov, this was only indirectly so, their direct teacher, was in fact the great Maggid of Mezeritch.

As for the Maggid himself, he studied under the Ba'al Shem Tov for a relatively brief three years. It is said that three years prior to the Ba'al Shem Tov's passing, the Maggid approached him with a note containing his name (Dov Ber) and some money. He handed the note and money to the Ba'al Shem Tov and requested a blessing from the Ba'al Shem Tov. The Ba'al Shem Tov accepted the money, however before the Maggid could leave, the Ba'al Shem Tov retrieved some of his own money, handed it to the Maggid and requested that he too give the Ba'al Shem Tov a blessing. The Ba'al Shem Tov grasped the Maggid's hands, placed them on his head, and requested that the Maggid bless him.

It is attested that aside from the concealed areas of the Torah, the Maggid of Mezeritch was similarly renowned for his greatness in the more revealed areas. In fact, his Chavruta (study partner) in Talmud, was none other than Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk, the author of the Pnei Yehoshua, an exquisite work on the Talmud.

An incident involving the Ba'al HaTanya further illustrates the Maggid's greatness. The Ba'al HaTanya was imprisoned in Russia on trumped up charges. The state had sentenced the Ba'al HaTanya to death, and all hope for his release seemed all but lost. However, miraculously, he was released on the 19th of Kislev. The Ba'al HaTanya later wrote in a letter that it was the unique power of this day which had caused his release. He explained that this was the day of the Maggid's passing, and his release had been instigated in the Maggid's merit.

Following the Maggid's passing, his successor was Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, known as the 'Noam Elimelech,' after his Sefer on the Torah.

It is recounted that after the Noam Elimelech was appointed in the Maggid's place, the disciples made a large feast to celebrate his appointment. After the feast, the Noam Elimelech went to rest, and was still asleep after four hours.

The students were distressed, aware that their former teacher, the Maggid had never slept for four consecutive hours. The students approached Rav Zusha of Anipoli, the Noam Elimelech's brother, and voiced their concerns. They explained that the Maggid only ever slept for an hour or so at a time and would never have slept for four consecutive hours; how could it be that their new Rabbi could indulge in such lengthy sleep?!

Rabbi Zusha listened to the students and instructed them to follow him. He proceeded to the room in which the Noam Elimelech was sleeping and placed his hand over the Mezuzah. The moment his hand touched the Mezuzah, the Noam Elimelech rose in fright from his bed. The students were alarmed, unable to comprehend what they were witnessing; they asked Rav Zusha to explain. He explained that the Noam Elimelech was so attached to G-d, that even when he slept, his thoughts totally surrounded Hashem - personifying the mantra "I set Hashem before me constantly (Tehillim 16:8)." As such, when the Mezuzah, representing G-d's presence, was covered, the Noam Elimelech was startled, unable to bear being in a room in which G-d's presence was covered for even a moment.

The Maggid of Mezeritch was a powerful disseminator of Torah and remains a powerful source of spirituality in the world. Indeed, merely mentioning his name around the time of his Yom Hillula (death anniversary) is a compelling means to bring holiness in the world. Please G-d we will be able to tap into this holiness, and latch onto Hashem's Divine assistance to illuminate our lives and the lives of those around us.

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